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WHO KNEW?



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FEBRUARY 2018

VOL.21/7

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Great Indians



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Will India walk her tough talk?

Countries like India and China are in a unique position today with regard to their development, and parallel environmental responsibility. While China is going about bolstering its renewable energy resources, India should also surge ahead and take the lead in fostering an equitable world order on environmental issues, says Gajanan Khergamker.

WHEN at United Nation's Climate Change Conference held at Lima, Peru, in December 2014, Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change Prakash Javadekar said, the Government was "committed to protecting the interests of the poor," and declared India was "at the frontline of facing the impact of climate change, where shifting rainfall patterns, recurring floods, stronger cyclones and droughts or soil erosion are exacerbating the challenge of poverty eradication and necessitate the allocation of scarce national resources for preventing loss of human life," he was stating the obvious.

Javadekar had firmly maintained then that India's measures to combat climate change through scaled-up solar mission, clean

energy cess on coal, and afforestation efforts had been sidelined for years, even as a huge chunk of the global carbon space was occupied by industrialised countries. That apart, the minister also drew attention to the fact that of the \$110 billion promised annually to fight climate change, only \$10 billion was in place.

The needs for mitigation and adaptation as felt by "Developing countries were estimated in the range of \$600 to \$1,500 billion a year," he pointed out before adding, "If there is no clear roadmap in the provision of public resources by developed countries to provide new and additional financial resources

approaching \$100 billion annually by 2020, and rising thereafter, then outcomes will be sub-optimal for a safer world."

More important, he stressed the Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) were to be 'nationally determined', and that there was no role for any ex-ante review in the process.

'Convenient' action to tackle 'inconvenient' truth

So, it was only inevitable for India to submit its INDC on

Gandhi Jayanti- (birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi) the very next year, October 2, 2015, modelled on the vision of equity inspired by Gandhi's famous exhortation: Earth has enough resources to



Will India invest in alternate energy sources like solar energy? (solar panels, above)

meet people's needs, but will never have enough to satisfy people's greed. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has called for 'convenient action' in order to deal with the 'inconvenient truth' of climate change.

Cut to today, and the United State's regression from climate action in which President Donald Trump did a predictable repeat of predecessor George W. Bush by ensuring US withdraws from yet another international treaty that commits parties to reduce carbon emissions to tackle global warming.

And, if you felt that the United States was the only 'developed economy,' to withdraw, think again. A string of

developed economies like Australia and Russia too have been faltering on climate action. So, it isn't of any surprise to have the world look eastwards to fill the leadership vacuum in climate governance and push for collective efforts to combat climate change.

China, the new leader?

This has paved the way to global climate leadership for China and India, who have demonstrated huge credentials, commitment and leadership potential by taking positive action in significantly reducing carbon emissions.

Following the 'airpocalypse' at Beijing triggered by coal smokes and power plants and a rise in air pollution killing an estimated 1.1 million people every year, at Communist Party's annual congress, Premier Li Keqiang declared war on air pollution in China. At a party congress, he renewed his vow "to make our skies blue again." This, China intends doing by reducing the production of steel and coal-fired electricity. And, to replace coal, China is creating the world's biggest investment in wind and solar power.

The benefits will be phenomenal considering China is the world's largest emitter of climate-warming greenhouse gases.

With India surging ahead, internationally, it was only inevitable for China to make its shift in the matter of climate governance, from an insular foreign policy, towards a more internationalist stance.

China, however, is in no principled position to push other nations take up more ambitious climate targets. A huge sense of climate scepticism dominated the national discourse in China where climate change is seen as a "western conspiracy to constrain the development of China and other developing nations". This raises doubts about China's commitment to active climate leadership. In this context, China's sentiments bear similarity to President Donald Trump's views on climate change.

So, with the US withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, and China failing to inspire confidence among world players, India could effectively counterbalance the existing climate leadership equilibrium. Even India's Energy Minister Piyush Goyal maintained India would stand committed to its climate goals laid out in the Paris Agreement irrespective of "what happens to the rest of the world."

'Above and beyond' the Paris Agreement

India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi has vowed to go

The advertisement features a blue and white checkered border. In the center is the Blue Cross logo, which consists of a blue square with a white cross inside, and the words "BLUE" above and "CROSS" below it. Below the logo, the text "WORLD CLASS QUALITY MEDICINES AT AFFORDABLE PRICES" is written in blue capital letters. At the bottom, the text "BLUE CROSS LABORATORIES PVT LTD." is written in blue capital letters, followed by "PENINSULA CHAMBERS, LOWER PAREL, MUMBAI - 400 013, INDIA." in smaller blue capital letters.

“above and beyond” the Paris Agreement on climate change. This is indicative of India’s decisive leadership on climate change on a global scale.

Firmly on the path of a clean energy revolution, and making pertinent accomplishments, as a strategy to reduce its emission, India has embarked on a massive renewable energy programme. Augmenting the National Solar Mission, India has set a lofty target of 100 gigawatts (GW) of installed solar energy capacity by 2022 – five times more than the original 20 GW target. And in keeping with plans, India has recently become the world’s fourth largest producer of wind energy in the world, and cancelled 14 GW of coal plants last year.

However, a section of the civil society feels a major constraint that plagues pollution control in India is its weak capacity to administer, design and implement rules or policies. Despite pushing through certain legislations and adopting the principles needed for sustainability, implementation needs to be ensured.

As per a study by IIT, Kanpur, road dust accounts for 38 per cent of Delhi’s pollution. Now, in order to reduce the dust, municipal corporations will have to manage construction activities better. Contractors need to spray water to eliminate dust, cordon off construction areas, complete projects in a time-bound manner, use drilling instead of digging, among other things.

A section of the civil society feels, that can be possible only if the Public Works Department (PWD) regulating this be less corrupt and a lot more competent. The government would have to start by imposing regulations and raising penalties for non-compliance and disciplining engineers who did not enforce the rules.

Also, Pollution Control Boards (PCBs) don’t have the features of a modern regulator apart from some legislative powers. There is no mechanism to ensure accountability or transparency too, feel some.

Looking at the global scenario, it may be recalled that India signed and ratified the 1997 Kyoto Protocol in August 2002. India, China and other developing countries were exempt from the requirements of the Kyoto Protocol because their contribution to the emission of greenhouse gases during the industrialisation period was not significant. With time, it was perceived that both India and China would be among the leading contributors to greenhouse gas emissions.

But then, at the G-8 meeting in June 2005, India pointed out the per capita emission rates of the developing countries are a tiny fraction of those in the developed world.

The major responsibility of curbing emission rests with the developed countries, which have accumulated emissions over a long period of time, and that is conveniently ignored by the developed world at large.

Legislation and policies to ensure compliance

Where India is concerned, it has, of its own accord passed a string of legislations, even introduced policies in this regard.

For one, India’s National Auto-Fuel Policy mandates cleaner fuels for vehicles. Also, the Energy Conservation Act, passed in 2001 puts out initiatives to improve energy efficiency. The Electricity Act of 2003 encourages the use of renewable energy.

India, following an amendment to its Constitution in 1976 included in Article 48(A) of Part IV: “The State shall endeavour to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard the forests and wildlife of the country.” Article 51 A(g) imposed additional environmental mandates on the Indian state.

Other Indian laws include the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act of 1974, the Forest (Conservation) Act of 1980, and the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act of 1981. The Bhopal gas tragedy triggered the Government of India to enact the Environment (Protection) Act of 1986. India has also enacted a set of Noise Pollution (Regulation & Control) Rules in 2000. In 1985, the Indian government created the Ministry of Environment and Forests which regulates and ensures environmental protection.

Starting in the 1990s, extensive reforms were introduced, and for the first time in Indian history, major air pollutant concentrations dropped in every five-year period. Between 1992 and 2010, satellite data confirms, India’s forest coverage has increased for the first time by over four million hectares, a seven per cent increase.

Braced to be among the worst hit by adverse effects of climate change, India has been bolstering its resources – both legislatively within, and through firm policies across borders, to overcome the problem. India has, for once, begun to talk tough on environment, but will have to walk the talk too! ■



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

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This one planet

*Should our development be at the cost of the environment and the poor? Most of us would say an emphatic 'No.' Yet, very few among us walk the talk about sustainable development. **Rishi Aggarwal** holds a mirror up to reflect the Janus-faced human race.*

FOR as long as industrial society has existed, the debate has existed about whether it is okay to foul the environment in the process of carrying out development. This debate did not largely exist before the industrial revolution and the modern way of living because the industrial revolution introduced processes and abilities to handle materials, which produced exceptionally high levels of pollution.

New chemicals, which had never been a part of human existence found their way into mainstream use, and their production generated dangerous by-products which had to be disposed, new forms of fossil fuel were discovered, and their large-scale use became prevalent, leading to higher emissions of poisonous gases. The use of machinery enabled greater exploration and exploitation of natural resources, at a scale and speed which was hitherto unknown.

In the process, nature and environment have faced a painful and scorching brunt. There are some who feel pained by what has been done, and then there are others (what seems to be a large majority), who seem either okay with paying this price, or are unquestioning or lack the ability to question. A nuanced understanding is limited to the very few. And ignorance or limited knowledge is what dominates, allowing for easy manipulation of public opinion.

Is sustainable development possible?

The sheer high number of people who inhabit the earth is astounding, and providing for their material needs in a manner which does not impact the environment, is truly a challenge though there is enough research to suggest that a sustainable pathway is possible, which would provide for the material needs while minimising the impact on the environment. Those who speak for the environment are not providing any finished product, though the entity they speak for – nature – is the backbone for all finished products. They hope that there would be innate wisdom in everybody to understand that. But there is no such wisdom. The other side relies on marketing techniques, which play on the gaps in human psychology, and it works really well.

The industrial economy has enough to keep everybody engaged over the short span they spend on the planet – 60-80 years. It can keep them worried, busy earning a living,



Metro Rail work in Mumbai's Aarey Milk Colony: Can a city survive without its green cover?

entertained, lavishly served with comforts, or the right kind of insecurity and allure that a lavish spread will follow if they just follow the right impetus. The development versus environment debate is an extension. The environment can only be cared about when everybody has taken enough care of themselves is the message, you have a short time on the planet, make the most of it.

What follows is a lifetime which goes quite effortlessly from one stage to another, almost like an industrial processing plant moving on its various tanks and conveyor belts. For the bulk of humanity there is no inbuilt process in this plant called self-actualisation or heightened conscience, which will allow us to look beyond the needs of the self and to investigate from where and how their material needs are being fulfilled.

To me this has always been a false dichotomy in some degree. It is not possible to not damage the environment in the process of modern development. But the impact can be considerably minimised if a feeling of gratitude and responsibility towards the planet exists. There are just so many things which can be done at the individual and community level to mitigate the impact on the environment, which do not get done.

Who benefits?

The waters have been muddied by those who have a vested interest, and whose immediate material benefit cannot be achieved without causing some damage to the environment. Emotional messages emanate from these groups posing seemingly difficult questions about how poverty will be reduced and millions will be saved from starvation if we do not have development. The fact remains that poverty in one form or the other continues to remain steady, and has only become worse for those who are ecological refugees. These people were once sustained by highly productive ecological lands, and now find themselves struggling to eke a living in industrialised society. The development enjoyed by those who shape the paradigm is not the development enjoyed by the victims of the paradigm.

The crisis would not have become so big were it only human needs that were being addressed. Vanity has ensured that subliminal desires and wants which can never be fulfilled, are promised fulfilment in the development paradigm.

There are others who have resorted to Maslow's hierarchy of needs to suggest that we need more, not less form of what is currently understood as development, if we are to move to a stage where we can care for the environment. Maslow's hierarchy of needs was a dominant argument in the 20th century. If anything, the 21st century has completely invalidated Maslow's theory. One suspects that Maslow may have been co-opted by the industry to propound this theory since it served the industries interests very well.

Why is it that the need for self-actualisation exists strongly in only a few individuals, and they lead happy and contented lives at lower levels of Maslow's hierarchy, and then on the other side it is very evident that many who are on the higher side of Maslow's hierarchy are never able to lead contented happy lives, far less think of serving society?

There are environmental issues which are full blown in the crossfire of the fight between environment and development, and then those where no contention exists.

Dams remain an important testimonial to the fallacy of this debate. In Maharashtra (as elsewhere in the country), the irrigation scam has highlighted how public funds get mis-utilised by those claiming to work for public benefit. The dam making agenda being handled by the relevant government departments, it turns out was more of a front for private companies linked with politicians to get beneficial contracts. Even with such large sums of public money spent to build irrigation infrastructure, benefits continue to elude farmers. The success of traditional water conservation methods continues to be showcased year after year in different geographies. They bring more development at lower or negligible cost to the environment, and yet the overall discourse

is that those who oppose the construction of big dams are against development.

Ecologists and conservationists keep highlighting how forests are the best dams (water storage infrastructure) available on the planet, and come free of cost. But in the developmental model we follow, anything free of cost is of no value. Everything must have a price tag and an engineer or two on payroll.

Water conservation measures can considerably reduce the need for water storage by dams like in the case of Mumbai. But if you make a noise about excessive dam construction (which stand to destroy pristine forests), then you are seen as being against development and the interests of India's financial capital. The talent of those who build dams is valued, the talent of those who can help recycle water through environmental technologies is of no consequence!

In another Mumbai example, the development versus environment debate comes up when we speak of saving its last remaining large urban green – the Aarey Milk Colony. In the most immediate threat, a car shed for Line 3 of the Metro is being constructed on 70 acres of Aarey land which will entail destruction of beautiful grassland, and cutting of more than 2,500 trees. Those opposing this are labelled anti-development. The fact remains that there are more than enough choices for situating the car shed at other locations. Those applying the label of anti-development have either not studied the matter enough, or are on the vested side which is running an insidious game plan of converting Aarey into real estate of which the car shed is only one part.

The last two decades of the 20th century saw heightened consciousness and debate on the state of our environment and the required interventions. The first decade of the 21st century went with the financial markets and the global economy on steroids leaving little room for shaping the paradigm of development. Now possibly is the time for people to start thinking of making the required changes if the planet has to have any chance.

The environment versus development debate cannot be carried out when the bulk of humanity has no interest in it. Most people live their life concerned with either serving basic existential needs, or are too much caught up in serving their hedonistic pleasures. An inherent interest in the state of the planet and its wellbeing arising out of the feeling of being a custodian, is important if the health of the planet is to be achieved. ■



Rishi Aggarwal is Director, Mumbai Sustainability Centre.

How to revive a lake

*In the gloomy and dismal scenario of the utter environmental degradation of India's water bodies, comes a ray of hope in Bangalore – a citizens' initiative to clean up the Puttenahalli Lake, with outstanding results. Will this serve as a beacon for more such initiatives, asks a hopeful **Usha Hariprasad**.*

A couple of years back, I was witness to the disappearance of a lake. Enroute my work, in Bangalore, there used to be a small puddle of water surrounded by weeds. Drain water was let into this pool, making it a stinking mess. It was a common scene to see passers-by cover their nose while passing this site. However, things suddenly took a turn for the better, or so I thought. The drainage was diverted, the site levelled off. Soon, a plan for the layout began to develop. And just like that, the water body vanished, making way perhaps for a layout or an apartment complex.

This should not have come as a surprise to me. After all, the Garden City once boasted of 262 water bodies, and more than half of it has already disappeared today. Our city bus terminus is built upon the lake Dharmambudi, the Kanteerava stadium was once Sampangi Lake, our National Dairy Research Institute stands on the Kormangala Lake, and so on and so forth.

An inspiring initiative

But what surprised me was this. Last month I met one of the members of a citizen group – PNLIT. PNLIT stands for Puttenahalli Neighbourhood Lake Improvement Trust. And their story is an inspiring one. They are one of the first citizens



The revived Puttenahalli Lake; there's hope when citizens get involved

group in the city nurturing, maintaining and caring for a lake. And the results are amazing. The Puttenahalli Lake at J.P. Nagar, Bangalore, has integrated with the community very well. Apart from a walking and jogging track, the lake is a hub for various activities such as bird watching, nature walks, tree planting, community gardening, school educational walks etc. Isn't that wonderful?

A once dying lake converted so beautifully. How was this even possible? These were some of the questions running through my mind.

Ten years ago the lake was a mess. There was an inflow of sewage, dumping of garbage and debris – the lake was disappearing, and the land was slowly getting encroached upon. In short, the lake was soon going to vanish, thanks to

pollution and encroachment – a fate shared by 90 percent of city's lakes.

Fast forward to today, the same Puttenahalli Lake in South Bangalore is teeming with water, and is full of life. There are more than 300 trees growing in its vicinity; birds and butterflies have made it their home. The swamplands have become a nesting ground for many visiting birds. And this is all thanks to the citizens' efforts and initiatives.

Late in 2008, concerned residents wrote to Lake Development Authorities, led signature campaigns, met the local MLA, and their collective and consistent efforts started yielding results. The lake was brought into the notice of BBMP lake revival list, and the rejuvenation of the lake began in 2009-2010.

In 2011, the BBMP (Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike) handed it back to the Puttenahalli Neighbourhood Lake Improvement Trust for maintenance. Since then, with the help of volunteers and donations, the PNLIT has ensured its cleanliness. It holds various events like nature workshops, photography sessions, storytelling sessions, cultural concerts etc. During these events it also shares knowledge about waste segregation, composting, rain water harvesting etc. 'It is all about building awareness and making the community responsible,' said one of the trustees of PNLIT.

Here are some of the steps taken by the alert residents.

Initially the litter was cleared, a fence was put up, the lake was desilted, and sides around the lake were raised for a walkway. In 2010, saplings were planted by PNLIT and BBMP to lure the birds back to the lake. The water level of the lake slowly rose due to rains and with the clearing of some of the water inlets. Gradually, grills were added to separate the walkers' track and the lake; a security guard, gardener and sweepers were employed to keep the area clean and to prevent the dumping of garbage. Apart from several such initiatives, two unique strategies were employed at this South Bangalore Lake:

Artificial floating islands

These work similar to wetlands. The lightweight structures have a variety of plants growing on them. These plants help clean up the lake. Plants such as canna, water spinach, and

vetiver grow deep into the water and absorb harmful chemicals. These chemicals could be the result of sewage

entering the lake. By absorbing excess nutrients these ensure that oxygen dissolved in the water does not decrease. Thus it helps in reviving aquatic life. Not only that, the islands also turn into a habitat for the birds as well as fish. The lightweight structure is built using PVC pipes, plastic bottles, and a mesh of nylon material.

Volunteers build such islands with nets and release them in water. Plants are grown on these fishing nets. Such structures also make use of trash – used plastic bottles. After releasing these structures, the water quality of Puttenahalli was tested. It was found that the dissolved oxygen had gone up.

Using treated water

Puttenahalli Lake was mainly rainfed. This meant the lake would soon dry up once the monsoons left the city. So to prevent this and to raise the lake levels, the treated water from L & T South City apartment complex was released into the lake after bio filtration. The South City STP treated water was used within the community, gardens and for flushing toilets. The excess water was released to the lake. Thus the lake, and the neighbourhood both benefited from this approach.

The initiatives taken by PNLIT has been an inspiration in the city. Other lake groups too are taking a leaf out of them and coming forward to nurture the lakes. With the success of the revival of Puttenahalli Lake that has become home to aquatic life, migratory birds,

butterflies, people are slowly realising the importance of a well-cared lake.

Lakes are not to be seen as just drinking water sources or for city beautification. They do a lot more. They recharge the water table, prevent flooding, and act as a habitat for a variety of birds and animals. So let us act to preserve them. ■



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

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India's mining story

It all comes down to sustainability. An activity like mining in a mineral-rich country like India is a given, but it must be done with enough enforceable safeguards.

Manu Shrivastava narrates India's confusing mining story.

MINING has always been controversy's child all over the world, and in India too. The stories we see and read in mainstream media are mostly those related to environmental damage, human rights violations, and health issues caused by mining activities. However, the significance of mining for development of a nation, industries and employment opportunities is hardly talked about. Mining industry provides employment to 0.7 million individuals in India.

Out of 2,842 mining projects proposed for forest clearances in the last 17 years, only 1,723 projects have been issued forest clearance from the Indian government. The remaining are pending or have been rejected/closed on grounds of lack of sustainability.

Mining is core

India is a mineral-rich nation, and mining is one of the core sectors of the Indian economy. As per official data of the Ministry of Statistics and Programme implementation, the mining sector (including fuel, atomic, major and minor minerals) in India contributed about 2.4 per cent to the GDP of the nation in 2014-15. However, in terms of GDP of the total industrial sector, it contributes around 10-11 per cent to the economy, a number impossible to ignore. Mining also provides basic raw materials to many important industries such as power, steel, cement, etc., which in turn, are drivers to overall economic development of the country.

Historical accounts of mining

By some accounts, mining is more than 6,000 years old. The Indus Valley Civilisation explored and used flint. Harrapan quarries excavated by archaeologists also show evidence of prehistoric mining activities. The first recorded account of mining in India was in 1774, when the East India Company



Mining (above) is an important economic activity for a developing country like India

granted permission to a British entity, M/s Sumner and Heat, for mining coal in Raniganj Coal Field along the river Damodar in West Bengal. In 1866, seven years after the first oil well was drilled in human history in Pennsylvania, USA, the first oil well in India was drilled in Digboi. Later in 1880, gold mining was initiated in Kolar Gold Fields in Karnataka by another British company.

State of mining in independent India

In the years before independence, mining activities in India remained moderate in scale and primitive in technology. The Industrial Revolution in the 18th and 19th centuries when predominantly agrarian, rural societies in Europe and America became industrial and urban, the demand for production of various minerals increased as well.

After Independence, however, the mining industry witnessed modernisation and grew at a much faster rate because of the ambitious Five-Year Plans for coal, metalliferous and oil sectors, and increase in production of minerals, the economic reforms in 1991, and the National Mining Policy (NMP) in 1993. The NMP that followed fiscal, industrial and trade reforms by the

government “recognised the need for encouraging private investment including Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), and for attracting state-of-art technology in the mineral sector.

The Indian coal mining industry, which has garnered maximum attention and flak, has always tailed the domestic consumption requirements, particularly the railways. Many companies took up mining leases granted by erstwhile *zamindar*-s and kings, for durations ranging from perpetuity to 999 years, to shorter durations. After Independence, to meet the growing needs of the steel industry, ‘systematic exploitation’ of coking coal reserves was reportedly encouraged in Jharia Coalfield in Jharkhand. However, private coal mine owners in their greed to maximise profits, resorted to unscientific mining practices, poor labour conditions, and insufficient capital investment. Consequently, the government initiated nationalisation of private coal mines undertaken in the years 1971-73 by enactment of several legislations, including the Coal Mines (Nationalisation) Act, 1973.

India currently produces 87 minerals, and the country’s strategic location provides vantage point for exports to fast developing Asian markets. There are about 3,000 mines in the country. The low cost of production and conversion in steel and alumina sectors also helps. Globally, India is the 3rd largest producer of coal and steel, and 4th largest producer of iron ore.

Investment not in sync with potential

There is significant mining potential that still lies untapped. The mining industry has failed to exploit the resources sensibly due to lack of infrastructure facilities, regulatory challenges, and no promise of sustainable mining activities. Given the size of resource potential, for example, India has the 5th largest estimated coal reserves in the world, corresponding investment is very low that is evident from the very low FDI in the sector, despite allowance of 100% FDI. The government is targeting to increase the GDP share of mining from 2% to 5% over the next 20 years.

Mining is known to impact the environment immensely. So, in order to minimise the adverse effects of mining and optimise the benefits from mining to the community impacted, it’s imperative for mining to be carried out in a sustainable manner.

A sizeable percentage of mining proposals have failed to obtain environmental/forest clearance from the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India.

The string of scams, frauds, issues of environmental degradation affect mining drastically. The Indian Bureau of Mines initiated on March 1, 1948, functioned initially as an advisory body. It helped the government in framing rules like the Mines and Minerals (Regulation and Development) Act

1948; Mineral Concession Rules, 1949, and Petroleum Concession Rules, 1949. The multi-disciplinary government organisation engaged in the promotion of conservation, scientific development of mineral resources and protection of environment in mines other than coal, petroleum and natural gas, atomic minerals and minor minerals.

The Indian Bureau of Mines and State Pollution Control Boards (SPCB) are responsible for monitoring environmental snags and issues. The Indian Bureau of Mines clears mine plans and mine closure plans. The Ministry of Environments and Forest clears environment impact assessments. However, with jurisdictions overlapping each others’, the entities do not have manpower to monitor large-scale mines, leave alone small, medium and illegal ones.

For instance, members of the civil society maintain, in Orissa, of the 300-odd officially operating mines, the SPCB has only 172 under its regulatory net. And, the situation isn’t any different in Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh. NGOs reportedly maintain that State Pollution Control Boards desist from “acting against violators, because procedures are time-consuming, they don’t have legal capacity, and violators usually walk”.

Mine closures remain huge issue

Another issue of contention is that of mine closures. It was only in 2003 that closure plans were made integral to the clearance process in India. Activists maintain that closure plans are pits disguised as water bodies and waste dumps as plantations. The environmental and social costs of closing and rehabilitating old and abandoned mines in the developed world are estimated to cost a fortune, that goes far beyond the capability of mining companies. With the governments having to foot the bill instead, regulators ask companies for comprehensive financial assurances.

The financial assurance under the law is ₹ 15,000-20,000 per hectare, which is barely enough to cover proper earthwork. Environmental, social, and economic rehabilitation will cost a lot more than that, maintain activists.

While the state is responsible for mining of its land, minerals being property of the state and the government holding mines in trust, it’s the people who are the real owners of mines, and have a right to raise questions. Illegal mining in India is a menace not just to people, but also the government. It robs the country of minerals, causes severe pollution, and neither is the profit accrued shared with the government and locals.■



Manu Shrivastava is a Media Legal Researcher with DraftCraft International, and co-convenor of ‘The Woman Survivor’ initiative that documents abuse of women and children within families.

Compost now!

The garbage we generate daily ends up in landfills, polluting the environment. Instead, if we could compost at least the organic part of our garbage, we would be doing a huge service to our environment, as also our plants. Start composting today, urges Usha Hariprasad.

FOUR flower pots in a row, all covered with a metal lid. This was the scene that caught my attention on the terrace. And I wondered what was going on. Then my neighbour Aparna strolled in, opened the lid of the last flower pot, dumped what looked like waste, piled soil on top of it and walked away. I was intrigued. Later I found out she was composting.

For the uninitiated, composting is a process of decomposition of organic substances in the presence of air, water and with the help of microbes. All organic matter from your kitchen can be decomposed, turned to rich soil and added to your garden. Composting is nature's way of recycling organic matter. The end result is a soil, earthy in smell, and is nutrient dense that can be added to your plants. What a wonderful way to reduce our waste and give back to earth isn't it?

So is the process complicated? I set about finding this with Aparna.

'Once you understand the process, it is pretty simple,' said Aparna by way of explanation. She uses flower pots that have adequate holes in them for composting. At the bottom of the pot she puts coconut husk and tops it with a layer of old soil. 'I collect kitchen waste every day and bring them up to the terrace and dump them in the pot. I cover the waste with a layer of soil and close the pot. I do this every day. Twice a week I stir the waste and soil mix present in the pot,

to ensure adequate aeration,' she explains. Once the pot gets filled she uses a second pot, then a third and so on. 'I generally need around three or four pots for my family of three', she says.

Do remember to keep checking the contents of the pot regularly. If the compost is very dry then add in green waste like peels or vegetable scraps. If the compost is wet then make sure to add dry leaves or straw. A dish or a plate needs

to be kept beneath each pot as well. Water from organic matter gets released during decomposition, and a dish is helpful to collect this water.

As the generation of compost takes around two months, this system works well for her. After about two months the compost is ready to use in the first pot. 'The compost is neither too dry nor

wet. It smells earthy and you feel wonderful handling it,' she says quite contently. Her plants love this and her balcony boasts a number of veggies, not to mention seasonal flowers.

'Composting has changed my life. Not only do I feel better that I do not contribute waste to landfills, but I am more connected to nature now,' she says happily. Once she started generating compost it was easy for her to start growing vegetables and herbs. Today she is a happy gardener.

The process of composting

So what all can be composted?

- Vegetable peels, fruit scraps, coffee grounds, tea bags,



Composting at home is highly recommended

egg shells, leaves, newspaper etc., can be safely put for composting.

- Tea or coffee bags should only be put if they are made from natural materials like cotton. If made from synthetic materials then do not put in the compost pile as they will not breakdown easily. Similarly, avoid glossy magazines as they contain chemicals and will not decompose well.
- Avoid putting meat or fish scraps. These can raise a stink and can also attract rats.
- Pet poops should also be avoided. If the compost is meant for edible crops then refrain from putting pet poops in the compost bin. The reason for this is simple. Pets like cats and dogs are carnivores consuming meat in some form or the other. So parasites present in their waste do not get killed in a home composting environment.

The process followed above is a form of aerobic decomposition. This means composting happens in the presence of oxygen, and this method relies on adequate nitrogen, carbon, moisture and oxygen. If any of them is not in balance, the composting suffers. So let us see these things in detail.

Breaking down of organic matter which is a natural process, happens with the help of microbes. It requires carbon and nitrogen to compost. The carbon called as the browns is the dry leaves, straw, cardboard that we need to put in, and the nitrogen or the greens is the kitchen waste. The greens act as a protein source for the growth of the microbes while the browns are a source of energy. A good compost is formed when there is an equal mix of browns and greens. Less of greens implies the compost is too dry as the greens are the one with moisture in them, while less of browns indicates that the mixture is too wet.

To make composting easier several organisations have come up with products for home and garden composting. In Bangalore for example, the Daily Dump organisation offers products that comes with various kits like Small Khamba, Nano Khamba, Prithvi etc. Their Starter Kit comes with three pot units, small, large or nano size and a host of other things like a rake, microbes, remix powder, manual on composting etc., for easy composting. The tutorials on the website explain how to use the units. The remix powder that comes with the starter kits is mainly coco peat based and it is used to layer the kitchen waste. The addition of this powder ensures that the moisture content in the pile is just right, there is adequate aeration and there is no smell to attract fruit flies.

The trekking organisation that I worked with last year used another type of product called as Smart Bin from Green Tech Life. Here the composting was done anaerobically without the presence of air. Anaerobic composting releases gases like methane and hydrogen sulphide while the organic waste ferments. The advantage of the Smart Bin method is that you can dump food waste like meat. The liquid from the waste called the 'smart brew' can be collected as well.

The product comes with two bins, taps, strainers and a Bio Bloom powder that ensures no smell of the waste. It works in two stages. The organic waste is mixed with the microbial powder and added to the bin fitted with the strainer and taps. The powder ensures that the waste ferments without smell. The waste needs to be pressed thoroughly to cut off air. This is the first stage. Every two weeks the liquid from the waste can be collected from the taps. It can be diluted and added to plants or it can be used to unclog sinks. Once the bin is full it needs to be kept aside for sometime. In the second stage the pickled waste in the first bin is converted into compost. For detailed instructions on how to do this one can refer the videos on their

website.

There is another type of composting using worms – red worms, earthworms etc. This is called vermicomposting. The nutrient content in vermin compost is dense as the worms consume the organic waste, enhance bacterial activity, and their excreta is rich in nitrate, making the soil very fertile. But this type of composting requires a bit of guidance as they require a conducive environment for their growth. Worms cannot tolerate a citric environment. Also, temperature needs to be moderated as they cannot tolerate warmer temperatures.

In India, 35 to 40 percent of the solid waste comprises organic matter. All this ends up in landfills along with dry waste like plastic, glass, metal etc. The organic matter decomposes anaerobically releasing greenhouse gases like methane. It also contaminates water and soil. By composting, you reduce your contribution to landfills. So act today. Go get a composter and start participating in building a greener earth. ■



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

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Silent Valley yesterday, today and tomorrow

*The campaign to protect Silent Valley in Kerala from the envisaged dam which would have completely submerged this rich forest, was truly an inspiring one. Yet, similar projects are being planned, leading to a sense of déjà vu, says **Bittu Sahgal**.*

THE elephants will probably still be there if I return after breakfast," I consoled myself as I began the long trudge down... camera, tripod and long lens precariously clutched in one hand and the metal hand-rail in the other. When I returned an hour later, however, the pachyderms were well and truly swallowed by their jungle.

Try as I might, I could not see the elephants. I had a great vantage point on the upper-most level of the tall Sairandhri watch tower. I could hear the elephants feeding as they snapped off branches and bamboo stalks. The hill range across from me was visible in clear light. And I had a very good pair of binoculars in my hand. But the canopy under which the elephants stood was just too thick, and I could see neither hide nor hair of them. 10... 15... 20 minutes went by, which I spent watching birds, contemplating the snake-like Kunthi river and thanking my stars for placing me here in one of the finest forests in the world.

I was on a pilgrimage. Having worked with colleagues to protect Silent Valley for over three decades, I had never once set foot on its living soil until the end of 2012. Driving in from Coimbatore, after a short night halt at Mukkali, I took off

from Sairandhri in the company of the peerless M.K. Gopi, a driver with the Kerala Forest Department. Within five minutes of hitting the road, a sounder of wild pigs stared curiously at us for a moment before scampering back into the coffee

plantation. Minutes later, right in the middle of the road sat two, exquisite Emerald Doves, undaunted by our presence 20 m. away. Bumping along the 23 km-long, stony road, we stopped frequently to walk a bit and to listen to the sounds of silence...bird calls, chirps and whistles, the rustling of dry leaves, and the familiar chatter of quarrelling Malabar



Forest in mist – Silent Valley (Photo courtesy: Kalyan Varma)

giant squirrels. The coffee, eucalyptus and teak plantations that had so unwisely replaced the miraculous rainforest were now behind us.

We were soon in Sairandhri, the very heart of Silent Valley. From here on, exploration of the park, all 237.52 sq. km. of it, would be on foot. The very first thing I did was to orient myself by climbing to the top of the watch tower to spend some time alone. "May you be blessed Dr.Sálím Ali," I whispered under my breath as I took in the vista, turning 3600 to savour the uninterrupted rainforest that the people of Kerala, represented by a whole phalanx of social workers, poets, scientists and conservationists, had doggedly saved from death by drowning.

Not-so-silent battle

I first came to hear about the Save Silent Valley Campaign in early 1979 after reading a newspaper report about a man called Sathish Chandran Nair who was fighting against the dam of the same name. The Kerala Sasthra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP) and its President, M. K. Prasad were spearheading the battle, I learned from Dr. V. S. Vijayan. Dr. Vijayan, having fallen foul of the Kerala Forest Research Institute (his former employers) for publicly opposing Silent Valley, joined the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS). Others such as Dilnavaz Variava, Coordinator, Save Silent Valley Committee, Mumbai, were vociferous about the manner in which science was being held hostage by determined Kerala politicians. Back in those days, however, India, under the tutelage of the World Bank, was infatuated with large dams and nothing, it seemed, could prevent the project from going through. Even the Kerala High Court had refused to stay the project. Around then I recall meeting one of India's finest poets, Sugatha Kumari with Sundarlal Bahuguna, Medha Patkar and Baba Amte. Sugatha Kumari spoke quietly, with deep feeling for Silent Valley, as though it were a living being. I was by then a part and parcel of the BNHS and used to spend hours pouring over reports to figure out strategies against destructive large dams, with compatriots such as Ashish Kothari of Kalpavriksh and his late brother, Smitu Kothari of Lokayan.

I cannot quite put my finger on just what the tipping point was, but with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) taking a strong position against the dam, and most nationally-respected scientists rejecting the facile opinions of the coterie of scientists trotted out by the Kerala State Electricity Board (KSEB), something turned the tide.

Dr. Sálím Ali, and the BNHS led by Dilnavaz Variava directly approached Mrs. Indira Gandhi, asking her to prevent a biodiversity tragedy from taking place. Papers and magazines from Kerala too, had begun to editorialise against the dam, offering space to the likes of M. K. Prasad, Dr. Madhav Gadgil, Romulus Whitaker, Dr. M.S. Swaminathan, M.G.K. Menon, and the legendary M. Krishnan.

The empire fought back, but Mrs. Gandhi prevailed. The combination of Dr. Sálím Ali, national and international public opinion and, the intelligentsia of Kerala was just too much for

Kerala's politicians, who nevertheless swore then that they would "drown the adjacent valleys." This is what motivated yet another hydroelectric project, which threatened to obliterate the forests of Pooyamkutti.

Magnificent isolation

I woke each morning to the fluty whistle of a Malabar Whistling Thrush outside my window, long before the sun rose. In the absence of electricity, it was possible to experience that magical transition when creatures of the night give way to those that take over day. As I trekked the leafy trails of Silent Valley over the next few days, drowning valleys were the farthest thing on my mind and, instead, I celebrated what had been saved. Wading through crystal rivers, watching hornbills fly over green canopies, tracking Nilgiri langurs and lion-tailed macaques eating forest fruit and watching ants scour the forest floor for food... it was easy to forget the aggression of the world beyond Silent Valley.

Silent Valley had been saved.

Yet the battle rages

On the way back to Coimbatore, reality hit me. Hard. Outside Silent Valley, deforestation continued apace. And the old promise, "we will drown the adjacent valleys" has been resurrected in Kerala. Literally 500m.

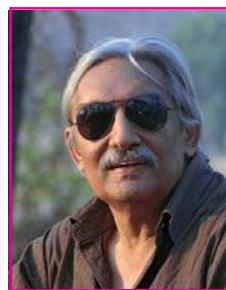
from the boundary of Silent Valley, across the very same Kunthi River, the KSEB has asked for clearance to construct the Pathrakadavu dam. So Silent Valley reverberates once more to the empty promises of myopic developers: "We will take care of all damage. We will plant more trees. No wildlife will be harmed."

The battle still rages, and no one really knows what tomorrow will bring. ■

Bittu Sahgal is the editor of Sanctuary Asia magazine.

This article was first published in Sanctuary Asia.

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BENGALURU

The garden city



Text & photos: Usha Hariprasad

Bengaluru or erstwhile Bangalore city, has always been known for its chequered history, gentle people, refined culture, and salubrious climate. Yet, the destiny of the city was not just to be a pleasant stopover for tourists, but a place bustling with trade, and today, IT and other professionals thronging here to make the best of its opportunities. Bengaluru has evolved over the years to become a modern version of itself.

AT the entrance of the government museum in the city, there stands a six feet high memorial stone retrieved from the premises of a temple in Begur, south of Bangalore. This hero stone describes the battle that took place in an area called Bengaluru. The surprising factor – the inscription mentions 890 AD. The old Kannada epigraph talks about the death of a person named Buttanachetty in the battle.

Bangalore, Bengaluru, whichever name you call it, the city is as old as this, or perhaps even older. Roman coins, Stone Age weapons have been discovered in this area. Quite a number of dynasties have ruled Bangalore – the Gangas, Cholas, Hoysalas, Vijayanagara empire, to name a few.

The origin of the name Bengaluru

There is a fancy story of how the city got its name Bengaluru. A Hoysala King Veera Ballala II got lost in a forest during a hunt. Tired and hungry he reached the hut of an old woman with his horse. She served him boiled beans. In gratitude, the king named the area as *Benda-kalu-ooru*. This means the *ooru* or village of boiled beans (*benda-kalu*). And this happened sometime in 1100 AD. Overtime it became Bengaluru from Bendakalooru. However, there are other explanations too. The name might have come due to the presence of Benga trees (*Pterocarpus marsupium*) that grew in abundance in this place.

The story of modern Bangalore

Though more than 1,000 years of history of Bengaluru is known, the credit for modern Bangalore goes to a person named Kempe Gowda. He was a chieftain reporting to the Vijayanagara kings, who dominated the South between 1336 and 1565 AD. Their capital was at Hampi, which was a well-planned city bustling with trade. And Kempe Gowda wished to create a capital on similar lines. He set about doing this in Bangalore, near the present Avenue Road-KR Market. Sometime in 1537, he built a mud fort, created a settlement at Bangalore Pete. The Pete community was a community of traders that traded in everything from silk, pearls to grains and vegetables. So way back in the 16th century itself, Bengaluru was cosmopolitan, with different communities and traders conducting business here. Kempe Gowda's sons were as able as him. His successors built water bodies and

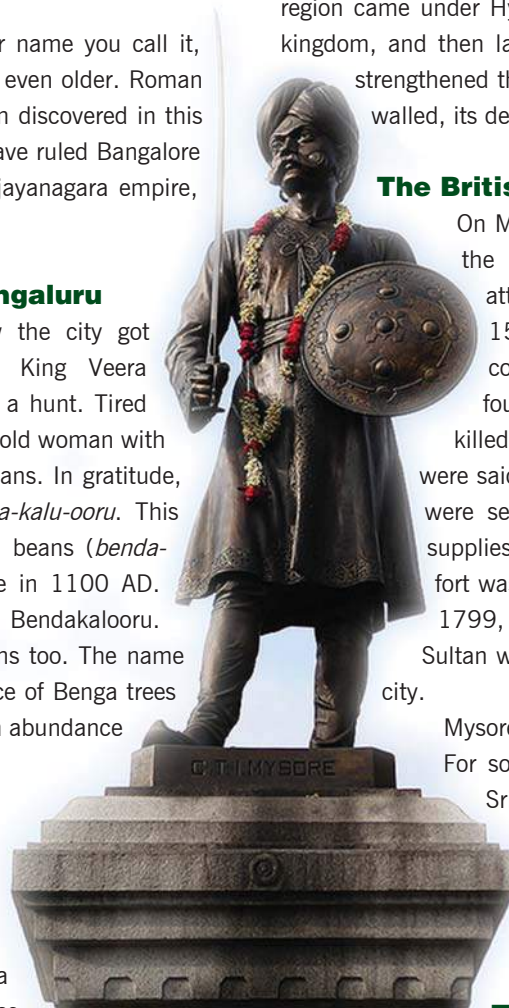
watch towers that defined the boundaries of the city.

In 1638, Bangalore came under the control of Bijapur. For a short while until 1687, it was in the hands of the Marathas, after which it came under the control of the Mughals. The Mughals sold Bangalore to a Mysore king named Chikkadeva Raya Wodeyar for three lakh rupees. He built an oval fort south of the existing Pete Fort. In 1759 the region came under Hyder Ali, a foot soldier in the Mysore kingdom, and then later under his son Tipu Sultan. They strengthened the forts – the mud fort became stone-walled, its defences were strengthened.

The British invasion

On March 7 1791, the British army under the command of Charles Cornwallis attacked the Pete Fort and captured it, 15 days later the oval fort fell too. The commander of the fort Bahadur Khan fought bravely, yet was defeated and killed. Some 300-2000 Mysore army men were said to have died in this battle. The forts were seized by the English army and their supplies got replenished. Yet, after a year, the fort was returned to Tipu Sultan. But then in 1799, in the final Anglo-Mysore war, Tipu Sultan was killed and the British captured the city.

Mysore was given back to the Wodeyar kings. For some time the English army stayed at Srirangapatna. But the damp conditions, the mosquitoes did not go well with them, and they decided to shift their garrison. Bangalore was chosen; also because of its cool climate.



Kempe Gowda, the founder of modern Bengaluru

The Cantonment

A British Cantonment was set up north east of the Pete, and slowly around 1809, the Bangalore Civil and Military Station came up. The cantonment streets had military nomenclature – Brigade Road, Infantry Road, Parade Road etc. When the railway link between Bangalore East and Madras was established, new settlers especially from Tamil Nadu, arrived in the cantonment. The area now boasted of various communities – Tamils, Muslims, Anglo-Indians. Newer layouts were developed – Benson Town, Fraser Town, Malleshwaram, and Basavangudi.

When the plague struck Bangalore in 1898, sanitation was given priority. Layouts developed with wider roads. At the beginning of the 20th century, between the time period 1881



The Lalbagh park was built by Hyder Ali in 1760

and 1950, the city boasted of two administrative units – the Pete reporting to the Mysore Maharajas, and the Cantonment reporting to the British. With the coming of Independence and with the departing of English, both cantonment and the native Pete were merged. Bangalore was the capital of Mysore State then, and continued to remain the capital after the States Reorganisation Act of 1956. Newer layouts like Jayanagara, Sadhashivnagar came up in the city.

The boom of industrialisation

The 1940-50's saw the boom of public sector companies. Defence land, climate, and the fact that there were premier technical institutes like the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), triggered this growth. IISc was established in 1909, brought about by Jamsetji Tata and support of Mysore Maharaja. Hindustan Aircraft, HMT, BEL, ISRO, DRDO set up bases here during the 1950s. The city already had an airbase way back in 1940 during World War II. So engineering was not something new to Bengaluru.

1980s saw the setting up of companies like Texas Instruments and other IT companies. The IT boom began, and with it the expansion of Bangalore and the growth of real estate. Today Bangalore has a population of 10 million accommodated in a space of 709 square km. The city got renamed to Bengaluru in 2014.

The city has many names – Garden city, Pensioner's



The prestigious Indian Institute of Science (IISc)



Tipu's Summer Palace served as the summer residence of the Sultan

Paradise, Silicon City, Pub City, to name a few. There is plenty to see with the old and traditional mixing with the new and the modern. So for a new comer visiting the city for the first time, here are a few attractions:

The parks

There are two lovely parks that are not to be missed in the city. Lalbagh – a 240-acre park was built by Hyder Ali in 1760. Though it started out as a Mughal garden and was a 40-acre park, today it has expanded to its current size boasting of 1,845 plant species. The park was expanded by Hyder Ali's son Tipu Sultan, and after that by British and Indian horticulturists.

Cubbon Park on the other hand is a larger park of around 300 acres, and was constructed during the time of a British commissioner John Meade, in 1864. Today it houses colonial buildings, band stand, and museums. There are more than 6,000 plants in this area boasting of both indigenous species like Ficus and Cassia, and exotic species like Tabebuia and Araucaria.

The palaces

The city boasts of Tipu's Summer Palace and the

Bangalore Palace. Tipu's Summer Palace is an Indo-Islamic building that served as the summer residence of the Sultan. The building that is made mostly of wood and boasting of ground and upper floors, is a beautiful palace with fluted pillars, cantilever balconies, and floral motifs on the walls. The upper floor served as the *darbar* too. Today the ground floor has a small museum related to Tipu Sultan.

Bangalore Palace is a Tudor style palace complete with turrets, battlements and gothic elements. It was purchased for Chamaraja Wadiyar X, and today boasts of beautiful gardens, ballrooms, moorish courtyards, *darbar* hall and Raja Ravi Varma's paintings.

The markets

The K.R Market known as the Krishna Rajendra Market has an interesting past. The venue was once a water tank which then served as a battle field between the British and Mysore army. After the city came into the hands of the British it served as a platform to sell produce. Soon it became a bigger market place – a bustling vegetable and fruit market of today. The red and white structure of yesteryears – 1921 to be precise, still stands today.

Russel Market is another heritage market that came up



The colourful Russel Market

in 1927. It was named after the Municipal Commissioner T.B. Russel and served the European settlement in the Cantonment areas. Today, it is the venue to head to if you need dates, exotic fruits and meat. The traditional markets of Malleshwaram and Basavangudi are also other markets to explore in the city.

Bangalore's buildings

Lovely colonial Greco-Roman style buildings dot the city. To name a few – the Attara Kacheri or the High Court, Sheshadri Memorial, Raj Bhavan, Victoria and Bowring Hospital etc. The Attara Kacheri – the present High Court – is located inside the Cubbon Park premises, and was functional in 1868. It housed the State Secretariat until Vidhan Soudha was formed, after which it became the High



The traditional market of Malleshwaram

Court. It is a beautiful building painted in Pompeian red, and was constructed by the engineer Richard Sankey.

Just opposite to this building is the Vidhan Soudha constructed by the then chief minister of Karnataka, Kengal Hanumanthaiah. The foundation stone was laid by Jawaharlal Nehru in 1951. The building in Neo-Dravidian style is the seat of legislature. It is a grand building dwarfing the Attara Kacheri built by the British. The labourers used for building this structure were mostly convicts who were freed once the building was completed in 1956.

Quite a few bungalows have been taken over as heritage hotels or boutiques. Raintree, an Irish bungalow more than 60 years old, is a boutique that combines old world charm of a bungalow with upmarket lifestyle brands. Casa Cottage is a colourful place turned into a hotel. It is more than 100



The Sheshadri Iyer Memorial Library is a beautiful colonial building



The Vidhan Soudha, the seat of the legislature

Religious institutions

Ancient temples, *dargah*-s and churches abound in Bengaluru. Some of the oldest temples in the city are Gavi Gangadhareshwara, Bull Temple, Kadu Malleshwaram, etc. While the Gavi Gangadhareshwara and the Bull Temple at Basavangudi can be attributed to Kempe Gowda's period, the Kadu Malleshwaram temple at Malleshwaram is ancient, and is not dated. However, an inscription beside it mentions that Venkoji, Shivaji's step-brother, gave a grant to this temple in the 17th century.



The Gavi Gangadhareshwara Temple is one of the oldest temples in the city

Apart from temples, there are quite a number of old churches in the city. To name a few – Francis Xavier, St. Mark's Cathedral, Holy Trinity, St. Mary's Basilica etc. Old mosques like Jamia Masjid, Jumma Masjid, and *dargah*-s like Tawakkal Mastan reflect the city's multi-cultural spirit.

Art galleries and museums

For art enthusiasts, the city can be heaven. There are a number of galleries like National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA), Karnataka Chitrakala Parishat (KCP), Sublime,



Paintings displayed at one of the city's many art galleries



The Francis Xavier Church

Venkatappa gallery, etc. Along with paintings, pottery and sculptures also are on display. NGMA that is actually a palace – Manikyavelu Mansion – also includes an art library for the public. Quite a number of these galleries also conduct regular art walks. KCP along with being an art space, is also a centre for the College of Fine and Visual Arts. It also serves as a venue for various exhibitions like handicraft, handlooms and paintings.

A science planetarium – the Jawaharlal Nehru Planetarium, and a science museum – the Visvesvaraya Industrial & Technological Museum – also grace the city, and is a must-visit for kids. The government museum in the premises of Cubbon Park – a heritage building constructed sometime around 1866 and moved here in 1877, is an archaeological museum boasting of sculpture,

inscriptions, pottery from various periods like Ganga, Hoysala, Vijayanagara, etc. Mayo Hall located at MG Road is another worthy museum. It displays exhibits that talk about Kempe Gowda, his lineage, and his achievements.



Heritage buildings like this dot the city



Vidyarthi Bhavan in Basavangudi serves the best *masala dosa* (inset)

Bangalore's food haunts

There are some lovely old restaurants that serve out the best *dosa*-s in the city. CTR that stands for Central Tiffin Room in Malleshwaram started sometime in the early 20th century, serves one of the best butter *masala dosa*-s in town. Vidyarthi Bhavan in Basavangudi, MTR near Lalbagh, are other contenders for dishing out the best *masala dosa*-s. Bangalore also has its own food *gali* – the V.V. Puram food street.

This *gali* is mainly active during night. *Dal holige*, *Gulkand* ice cream, *dosa*-s, fried snacks of hyacinth beans, congress buns, are some not to be missed items. So venture into this street with an empty stomach, or rather, skip a meal or two, and then stroll through this lane. For the best *idli*-s head to Veena Stores and Brahmin's Coffee Bar. For *chaat*-s and sandwiches, Sri Sairam at Malleshwaram, Hari's Sandwich Zone in Jayanagar, are some favourite haunts.

Guided walks and tours

One of the best ways to explore a city is not through



Dal holige is a delicacy found in V. V. Puram food street

guide books, but rather through guided walks. Generally conducted by history buffs or heritage enthusiasts, it is a beautiful way to travel the city like a local.

There are a number of organisations that conduct heritage walks in the city. A couple of them worth mentioning are Bangalore Walks, Unhurried, Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage or INTACH. These walks showcase different parts of the city, and engage people through stories. Apart from heritage walks, there are walks dedicated solely to food in the city like the Oota Walks that take you on a gastronomic tour. Day tours, half a day tours are also conducted by some of these organisations. For day tours outside the city you can book yourself a tour at Karnataka State Tourism Development Corporation (KSDTC). Heritage sites like Belur, Halebidu, Hampi, and

Shravanabelagola get covered under these bus packages. ■



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

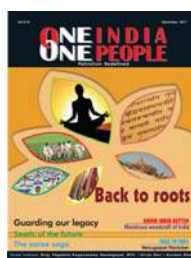
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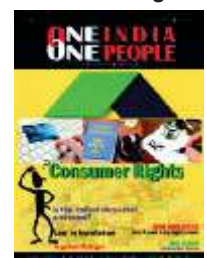
Senior Citizens



Religion



Consumer Rights



A pilgrim's awakening

Temples in India come with their own folklore and legends, sometimes bloodcurdling, sometimes elevating, but always interesting. Ketaki Nair visits her ancestral temple in South India and comes away fascinated with its chequered past. She narrates her experience of this small temple, which she sees with new eyes.

WALKING into the Melamcode Devi temple, I felt my stomach twist with excitement. I wasn't religious in the least, but the stories I'd heard about this set of temples had turned it from a place that gave my grandmother as much joy as it gave me a sense of boredom (I had been dragged to far too many temples on this trip to Kerala), then into one that was drenched in magic.

This was my family temple, my 'kudumbakshetram', maintained by my ancestors from my mother's bloodline until four generations ago, when it had to be handed over to the Devaswom Board.

They sit nestled in the hills, surrounded by trees. It had taken two hours to drive from Trivandrum to Thuckalay, and the scenery had just grown more picturesque as we left the outskirts of the city. Its beauty had pretty much hit its peak near the temples, with tall trees casting a gorgeously cool shade over us. The first temple had the typical whitewashed look of Kerala temples, but the second temple sat like a little blue jewel in the earth, true to Tamil temple design, Thuckalay now being a part of Tamil Nadu.

The legend

It looked like an innocuous little building, but to me it had a slightly

eerie atmosphere. The history of this temple made the idol of the Devi, with her rebellious expression and her dagger, truly rather frightening. She was supposed to be Ummini Thanka, a princess from times past. As descendants of the Devicode Tharavad,

wanted to murder their cousin, and there were those who was willing to assist them; the Ettuveetil Pillamar, a cruel group of aristocrats who were accustomed to wielding more power than the king.

Marthanda Varma, determined to be a stronger ruler than his uncle, threatened to take this power away from them and they were just as eager as his cousins to kill him. They conspired with the Thampis, and consequently, the two brothers slipped away to Nagercoil Palace to kill their cousin. Raman was slain by the sentries guarding Marthanda Varma's bedchamber, but Padmanabhan managed to sneak inside. Bloodthirsty, he pounced on his sleeping



The Melamcode Devi Temple; a fascinating history

we are supposed to be connected in some way to the Melamcode Amman temple, a link that is frustratingly hard to pinpoint thanks to our spottily recorded family history, but her story is fascinating either way. Centuries ago in Travancore, now Kerala, her father, the king Rama Varma, had promised her mother (supposedly a princess from Ayodhya), that their children would be his heirs, ignoring the matrilineal (*Marumakkathayam*) system that specified that his sister's eldest son was actually the rightful heir. Thus, when his nephew, Marthanda Varma, ascended the throne, Ummini's brothers – Padmanabhan Thampi and Raman Thampi – were purple with rage. They

cousin, only to have his sword wedged in the low ceiling of the room. This gave Marthanda Varma enough time to recover from his shock, and kill his cousin before he had a chance to murder him. Outraged, he then proceeded to imprison his aunt and kill her too. However, he wanted to marry Ummini Thanka. Unfortunately for him though, Ummini, overwhelmed by grief and rage, cursed her cousin, declaring that he would never have any daughters – which of course, amounted to the death of his bloodline. She then, very gruesomely, is said to have killed herself by wrenching out her own tongue. Alternative stories say that she stabbed herself or that Marthanda Varma added

her to his list of victims. Her spirit then roamed the earth as a 'yekshi', a minor goddess, before this temple was made to appease her spirit, along with one for her mother.

Just superstition?

I stared at the striking, golden face of her statue, feeling an odd mix of fascination and fear — a kind of 'horror movie' fear. Fear of the supernatural that grips you quite powerfully, but yet doesn't fully take hold of you as you keep telling yourself it's not real. It's fiction, born from the mind of just another human, and so how can you really be afraid of it?

That's what this could well be; fiction. Ummini Thanka may have had an untimely death, but there's no way to verify such folklore. It was only when my mother and grandmother shared a story with me, narrated to them by my own great grandmother, that I began to believe the legend. Tradition demands that the women of the Devicade Tharavad visit the temple when we marry, and then with our infants. In the old days, statues of mother and child were made and placed in the complex, life size terracotta figures, the mothers cradling a baby in one arm, carrying a dagger in the other hand. A few decades ago, my great-grandmother's cousin's daughter-in-law didn't make the customary visit to the temple as a bride, going instead, along with her mother in law, when she was expecting her first child. She carried with her a piece of silk as an offering for the Devi, instead of the traditional nine-yard silk sari. However, she had forgotten the cloth in the car and the two of them entered the temple empty handed. As they walked into the little building, a woman bent over in prayer suddenly stood up. She made her way to my relatives, much to their surprise for they had never seen her before in their life. She looked fierce, this strange young woman, and



The temple invokes both fear and fascination in the writer, and at the same time tugs at her emotional side

she proceeded to berate the two of them. She spoke to them in Malayalam, chiding my grandmother's cousin for coming to visit her so late, and for only bringing her a piece of silk. No, that wouldn't do at all. She demanded to be offered the traditional chela. Seeing their terrified faces, she quickly assured them that despite this no harm would come to the unborn baby. The two of them nodded, white-faced but relieved, and rushed to Nagarcoil – the closest large town – to buy the Devi her sari. They returned to the temple and reverently placed the offering at the idol's feet. The young woman who had been in the trance had no recollection of the incident whatsoever.

There have reportedly been several other instances of young women falling into a trance at the temple, and speaking the words of the Devi in tongues that they themselves don't understand. Of course, it's all quite difficult to believe. I myself was incredulous, and I still am. But the stories stirred something up in me, and I was bursting with anticipation as I walked into the temple and up to the idol of the Devi. Mother

and baby statues were lined up beside her, representing various women of my extended family. I stood alongside them, praying to the Devi, and silently hoping that someone would fall into a trance.

However, my visit to the temple ended without a single stranger rolling back her eyes and scolding me. I was really rather let down, and frankly felt a bit cheated. Nevertheless, the stories surrounding these gorgeous little temples had still made it worth the visit, even for me. And I wasn't completely disappointed. I was determined to go again, to experience one of these trances myself. Certainly, it might never happen – I had to admit that – but the excitement of knowing it could, has ensured that there is at least one temple I will never complain about visiting! ■

Ketaki Nair is a student in the 11th grade at the Cathedral and John Connon School,



Mumbai. Words are her weapon of choice, and she enjoys writing on subjects varying from socio-political and cultural behaviour, to fashion and make up.

“If organic practices are followed, a farmer becomes self-reliant and we could avoid farmer suicides.”

Come December, Vallabh Vidyanagar, a small town in Anand district of Gujarat turns into a pilgrim destination for farmers. Aspiring farmers from different parts of India congregate at the Bhaikaka Krishi Kendra to attend a workshop on organic/biodynamic farming. Long before the sun rises, the enthusiastic participants set out with their tools to toil on a vibrant 40-acre farm belonging to well-known agronomist **Sarvadaman Patel**, and one of the pioneers of the Organic and Biodynamic movement in India. Here they are taught to prepare the land, sow seeds, manage the beds and pick vegetables and fruits.

Sarvadaman Patel, 69, forayed into organic farming 17 years ago, and his greatest achievement has been to show the farming community that it is possible to get good yields by adopting good farming practices. A passionate farmer, Patel is also a gifted story teller, who has chronicled amusing tales and delightful anecdotes from his farm into a book *Chased by A Bull and Other Cock and Bull Stories*. He spoke to **Anuradha Dhareshwar** about his successful journey as a farmer.

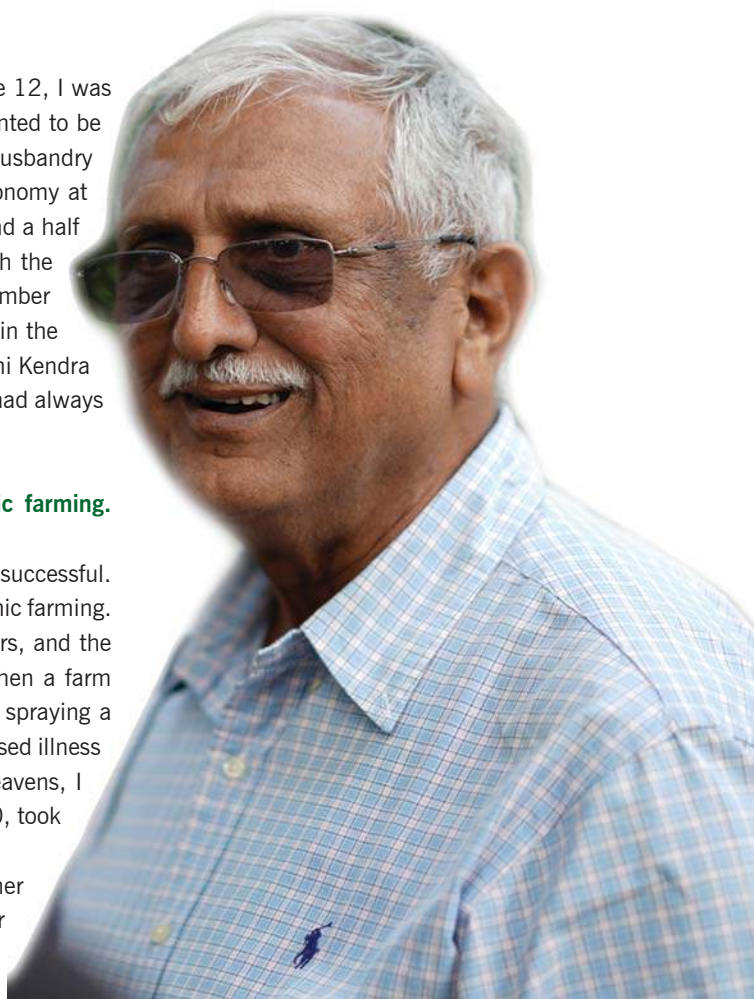
What made you take to farming?

I loved to be amidst trees and even as I studied in school, at age 12, I was a good gardener. By the time I was 18, I had decided that I wanted to be a farmer. After doing my Bachelors in Agriculture and Animal Husbandry from Pant University, I left for the US to do my Masters in Agronomy at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. After working for a year and a half in three different dairy farms in America, I returned to India with the dream of having my own farm. For a few years, I worked on a number of projects in dairy and forestry for clients on turnkey basis, and in the year 1975 started my own farming enterprise, the Bhaikaka Krishi Kendra on our 40-acre farm, named after my paternal grandfather, who had always encouraged me to follow my dream.

You started off as a conventional farmer, practicing inorganic farming. What made you completely switch over to organic farming?

My initial attempts at organic farming in the mid-90s were not successful. Three things that happened on this farm made me foray into organic farming. First was the gradual depletion of yields inspite of using fertilisers, and the diminishing health of the soil and animals. The second was when a farm worker got poisoned (luckily, he survived to tell his tale), when spraying a pesticide. The third was when pesticide residue on the fodder caused illness in a large number of cows. Taking these as signals from the heavens, I started reading a lot about organic farming, and in the year 2000, took a whole hearted plunge into organic farming.

During that time, I also met Peter Proctor, considered as the father of modern Biodynamics, and was hugely inspired by him. Peter visited my farm a few times and saw my passion for organic farming. In 2005, he offered to stay at my farm for almost a year





The farm has become a beacon for those wanting to adopt organic farming

and helped turn it biodynamic. He was a tough task master and I learned a lot about biodynamic farming from him.

Can you please explain the term biodynamic farming?

It is a method of farming that aims to treat the farm as a living system which interacts with the environment to build healthy living soil, and to produce food that nourishes, vitalises and helps to develop humanity.

What do you grow on your farm? How many farm hands work on it?

We grow over 40 different vegetables mostly in the winter months, and also a variety of fruits like *chikoo*, mango, custard apple, litchi, papaya, sweet lime, lime, etc. A variety of cereals and pulses like oats, bajra, barley, wheat too are grown on the farm in addition to wood for timber. Fodder for the animal makes up 30 per cent of my farm, which employs about 20 regular workers and more on need basis when there are spikes of tasks.

How many small and marginal farmers train on your farm each year? What do they get to learn?

Annually, about 250 farmers are trained at the farm. We have been doing this since 2001. There is a December workshop – five days of biodynamic training and four days of vegetable training, every year. There are many resource people from different parts of India who come down for the workshop and it is more hands on, practical training. The trainees are asked

to plant eight different kinds of seeds and transplant eight. They are trained on how to raise a nursery and manage it. They get to learn cropping pattern in different seasons, understand soil fertility and are trained to pick vegetables, maintain quality and hygiene. We also guide the trainees to market their produce.

You also run a Gurukul for those who want to learn organic farming?

Yes. Ravi Koushik, an IITian, who is a close friend and associate, and practices biodynamic farming in Bengaluru, suggested that I should start a Gurukul at the

Bhaikaka Krishi Kendra for sharing my practical knowledge on organic/biodynamic farming with fellow farmers from all over India and also farming enthusiasts who want to seriously take up organic farming. So we started the Bhaikaka Krishi Gurukul at the Krishi Kendra in 2011. It is a one-of-its kind institute in India which offers short term (3 months) and long term (6 months) apprenticeship programmes, where participants get hands-on experience in organic farming.

The Gurukul facilities are also available for small families, school groups and like-minded groups wanting to experience the joys of a rustic farm life. The farm stays are ideal for families who want their children to renew and rediscover their connection to the good earth and experience the joys of a simple yet enriching life on a farm. Adults and children are encouraged to participate in any ongoing farm activities such as milking a cow, observing a calving, feeding a calf, putting a new okra seed into the soil, transplanting a tomato seedling, harvesting a carrot, making a compost, tree pasting, riding on top of the fodder as it is transported on a bullock cart across the farm etc.

Are Indian farmers convinced that productivity need not be compromised by switching over to organic farming?

Farmers are convinced only by what they see. Lectures don't mean much to them. In my farm each part of the field is meticulously planned. Companion crops which help each other both in productivity and pest management are planted. Farmers get to learn a lot on cropping patterns, ethical farming and can see the yields without using pesticides and chemicals.

Hence a lot of impetus is given to practically showing the productivity.

Is there a way we can prevent farmer suicides in our country?

The Green Revolution in India has not really helped. There is a big gap between the agricultural extension services and farmer. Generally small farmers take the extreme step of ending their life mainly under the pressure of debt, thanks to investments made in purchasing chemicals and pesticides. Crop failure adds to this misery. The government is also not helping much. When a farmer commits suicide the government gives compensation to the family, which also becomes a motivation. I feel saddened about this. If organic practices are followed, a farmer becomes self-reliant and we could avoid farmer suicides.

Agriculture has been in a state of crisis since long. Is it wrong policies that are responsible for the crisis or it the unpredictability of nature? Are we doing anything to set it right?

Unpredictability of nature has been there for centuries, but nature is benevolent and if we adopt the right practices, it could still give us good yields. It is the infertility of the soil which is causing problems. Soil has become so infertile that it does not respond when a calamity occurs. It is wrong farming practices coupled with lack of education that add to the problems. Agricultural universities should take the lead in educating farmers. Their extension services are not effective. This must change. Organic farming forms a small part of the agriculture policy. In 2015, the Gujarat government formulated a detailed organic policy and had taken help from me and Mr. Kapil Shah from Jatan (an NGO in Vadodara empowering farmers to take up organic farming), to draft the policy. It was planning to develop 5 to 6 model farms. But nothing much has moved forward on this front.

GM mustard is considered unsafe and yet it will soon be allowed to be cultivated in our country despite protests from activists. What is your view regarding GM (Genetically Modified) crops?

The diversity of any crop is immense in India. This will be lost once the GM crop comes in. As of today a lot of seeds are saved by the farmer which can be used again and again, and there is a selection which is done by the farmer himself. GM is transgenic, which means it will transfer its genes by itself. There are cases in Canada where companies have gone behind farmers claiming copyright violations. Most important, the diversity of the whole mustard will be lost. It will be more like cloning one type of seed. We will lose the whole gene diversity. There must be 50 different kinds of mustard as of

today, but with GM we will have one standard type across. These mustards are for different regions. To have one seed for the entire region may not be something good. It is not going to be easy though. There is a moratorium on it. The organic lobby should make the government understand that GM is very harmful. Repeatedly it has been shown that native seeds that have been grown are as productive as any, and even the pest attacks are minimal.

Who are the people that enroll for your workshop? Do women and students attend? Do they have an agricultural background?

Many young enthusiasts enroll. Less of farmers and more farming enthusiasts. They are people planning either to get into farming themselves or manage their land. Some want to learn more about organic farming. Yes, women make a good part of the group. Students not many. A majority do not have a background of agriculture. About 20 to 25 percent of those who attend the workshop take to farming after the course.

Can you narrate a couple of success stories?

There are many success stories which keep us motivated to do the workshop regularly. In Bangalore, a participant Girish Krishnamurthy with a corporate background has taken up serious vegetable farming. He is growing and marketing his produce by direct marketing. In Uttarakhand, in the Corbett Park area, another serious participant Ram Gopalan is growing all crops including vegetables, cereals, pulses and is managing a dairy with Sahiwal cows, a breed native to India for a Closed User Community. He has created a model for training the worker class and deploying them at various farms to manage them using IT platform with remote management tools. He has been successful in implementing the practices followed by us at a couple of places in a very short span of time. He has also created a demo model farm and designed a farm tour concept which is unique.

Jaideep Solanki a young farmer from Kuch, Gujarat has adopted these techniques in his fields and has improved his soil. Varun Sharma, a hotelier from Gandhidham has attended the course along with his family and workers, and is now growing many vegetables for consumption in his restaurant.



He has started a dairy with Indian breed Gir cows and has dedicated a large parcel of land for fodder research. Arifa from Hyderabad has successfully converted her mango orchard into Biodynamic, and is reaping the fruits of change. ■

Anuradha Dhareshwar is Editor, One India One People.

Whose war?

The flash riots that occurred in Pune and Mumbai last month at the anniversary of a 200-year-old battle, severely disrupted life in the two cities. Lt. Gen. Vijay Oberoi laments the political collusion behind such incidents, and says our politicians have to clean up their act.

TWO hundred years ago, the Battle of Koregaon was fought on 1 January 1818, between the British East India Company troops and forces of the Peshwa faction of the Maratha Confederacy, at Koregaon Bhima, Pune. Two centuries later, another war of sorts took the Government of Maharashtra by surprise. On 1 January, 2018, clashes erupted between right-wing Hindu groups and Dalit groups during the commemoration of this battle, a commemoration dating back to 1927, when the Dalit leader and architect of India's Constitution B.R. Ambedkar had visited the site. To commemorate his visit, now thousands of his followers visit the site every new year's day.

Caught by surprise

On account of the unpreparedness of the Maharashtra Government's political leadership and its police hierarchy, a minor incident between Mahars and Marathas of the same village escalated into what can be termed a modern war of sorts. This was not confined to Koregaon Bhima, but encompassed practically the whole of Maharashtra, as well as some adjoining parts of Madhya Pradesh.

This modern war was not led by military leaders as in 1818, and was not fought with weapons and ammunition. Instead, the leaders were politicians and the led were poor citizens of India. It is typical of modern internal riots, bordering on wars of our country, where political leaders, both



The Bhima Koregaon anniversary has been observed since the last 200 years: Why did it become a riot flashpoint this year?

local and provincial and at times even national, sway the masses by targeting their emotions and the poor citizens in turn vent their anger by attacking public property, sitting on *bandh*-s, disrupting road and rail traffic; inconveniencing the public and so on. They do not realise that it is the common men and

women like themselves who will be the eventual losers, while those politicians who had instigated them would merrily melt away to their safe locations, by road in limousines, and by flights in the business class, if not the first!

That is the system that prevails in our country today and has been escalating since Independence in 1947. No political leader or party wants to change it, for all think that this 'divide and rule' policy (originally created by the colonial masters of yore) is the best to garner votes, as we are after all the world's biggest democracy. They have no compunction about anything else. This is unfortunately inspired and used by all political parties, including by the party in power in a state or in the Centre.

At least two lives were lost in the two-day mayhem, and since our politicians believe that cash is the ultimate panacea for quietening and shutting up the people, along with false promises, the government announced

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I like the sound of ‘*Insha'allah*’

In this polarised society of ours, what role can movies, and indeed, celebrities, play in smashing schisms and reinforcing secular ideals? Religion is never bad, religionists are, says G. Venkatesh, as he tries to make sense of Indian society.

I do not wish to make a pretentious show of secularism. It is not possible to push this bitter medicine down the throats of people, who are addicted to sugar-coated remedies. Art, literature, music, film and drama have fallen woefully short of the noble goal of preaching universal brotherhood. Exaggeration often defeats the very purpose of the medium chosen to convey the message; just as an unnecessary single attempted by well-set batsmen en route to winning a cricket match for their team, sparks a collapse and turns the tables. Using imagination to drive home messages may work well when one wishes to brainwash sane individuals to fanaticism, but it rarely works well the other way. Bombing a temple or a mosque to smithereens may take a few minutes, while building them would have entailed painstaking months-long labour. The Manichean tussle between ‘light’ and ‘dark’ is ageless and timeless. The light which the said media shine from time to time serves to dispel darkness momentarily, but sadly, can never really be a panacea or an elixir to the ills that have come to characterise the modern-day hate and fear-ridden society.

As far as films go, a film which depicts strong, undying friendship between a Hindu and a Muslim (there have been many such films in Bollywood), is often counterbalanced by one which showcases terrorist acts, and portrays Islam as a violent and aggressive religion out to spread havoc in the world. Introducing a duty-bound Muslim policeman, who puts duty above religion and plays a key role

(often as a martyr) in vanquishing his co-religionist terrorists, helps, but only as an exception to the rule. The Rule still rules the non-Muslim minds and hearts. Three hours of exhilaration and perhaps an inclination towards fellow-feeling with the maligned religion, is like a dream, which ends when one steps out of the cinema theatre, picks up a tabloid in the stands, and reads about suicide bombings in some other part of the world. It is quite like kids believing in Santa Claus for three years, and then rubbishing him as an object of fantasy. This applies, it goes without saying, to anyone. It is not just the Hindu point of view towards Muslims, but also the Muslim point of view against everyone else in the world.

My name is Khan!

This piece is inspired by the movie – *My Name is Khan* (MNIK). Notwithstanding the hysterical ‘nonsense’ (and the limitations referred to in the previous paragraphs), which sometimes characterises Hindi commercial cinema to woo the audience and rake in more *moolah* – a must-be in order to recover the investments made in producing the movie in the first place – it must be said that Shah Rukh Khan has done a good job in representing the peace-loving and cultured Muslim community around the world (which excludes the groundswell of terrorists, it goes without saying) as a goodwill ambassador. At a time and juncture when Muslims are all being tarred with the same terrorist brush, this film, which can very well be considered as a kind of a sequel to *Chak De* (quite like

Khaled Hossani’s *A Thousand Splendid Suns* can be said to be a sequel to *The Kite Runner*) – both serving the same purpose, of dissociating terrorism which unfortunately has become synonymous with Islam, with the religion and its pristine tenets per se. Rizwan Khan of *MNIK* may well be Kabir Khan of *Chak De* reborn, or a like-minded twin brother of Kabir Khan. In other words, the war against terrorism is not war against a religion. And thinking thus would be a very inhuman and cruel thing to do, especially if one has tried to read and understand the Quran. It is a religious text, not a ‘How Stuff Works’ for terrorists.

There are some nuggets in the movie which could possibly be played again and again to ‘reverse-brainwash’ if the Gandhian ideal (advocated in *Lage Raho Munnabhai*) is adopted as one of the battle-arrows in the quiver. The most striking one is the scene in which Zarina Wahab (who plays the protagonist’s mother) sketches two pictures – one of a person giving a lollipop to a boy, and the other pointing a gun to his temple – and asks her son which one is the Muslim and which one is the Hindu. He responds innocently that both men look alike and it is hard to say. Religions are always good. The basic purpose was not to divide, kill, hate and conquer.

The scriptures and religious texts are, as well. The purpose here was not to incite or intimidate, but inspire and spread goodness and peace. It is the religionists who are either good or bad. A bad apple would obviously make the other apples in the basket bad, over time. But as long as the other apples

do not turn bad, they are not to be bracketed along with the bad one in the basket. Separate, and handle each apple on merit. Handle each person on merit, as an individual, a unique one with his own strengths and weaknesses. Identify the strengths (interpreted as Good), strengthen them further, so that the weaknesses (interpreted as Bad) are automatically upended.

Whether the ruckus caused by the Sainiks at that time, was stage-managed or pre-programmed as a publicity stunt is not known, but SRK surely made a major *lapsuslinguae* – too bold and indiscreet at that – when

he labelled the Pakistanis as good neighbours. Given the history of the past and the issues being tackled on the political front between the two countries and the mayhem caused by terrorists trained in the country in November 2008 in Mumbai, that was foolish. To some extent, what Bal Thackeray said about non-politician celebrities being discreet about what they say in the media, holds water. Not in the case of Sachin Tendulkar though, but surely in the case of SRK. This observation is not being made by a Hindu who happens to be an Indian, but by an Indian who perchance is a Hindu. For that matter,

yours sincerely, in mails sent out from his Yahoo e-mail signs with 'God's Will Be Done / Insha'allah'. I like the sound of the word 'Insha'allah'. It just means the same as the four words to the left of the front-slash, within quotes. ■

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



Whose war?

(Continued from page 30)

cash awards (*muawza* in vernacular) immediately, without going into even the rudimentary details of the incident, like who did what to whom; as also when and how? As time passes and the announced *muawza* does not reach the right quarters, another bout of destroying public property will be staged! Mind you, it will all be in the name of protests, which everyone in India thinks is legitimate and one's right, for that is what political leaders of all hues constantly tell the public!

The police has long since decided that their role is not to interfere in such incidents taking place; or nab the culprits, especially those inciting the mobs, but to do only what their political bosses want to be done. The political bosses take a great deal of time to decide what would be in their own or their party's interest, and then order the police to act or let the carnage continue. That is the only reason why an annual peaceful pilgrimage that is conducted every year by a large number of Dalits since 1927, should have been permitted to become so nasty!

The historical reason

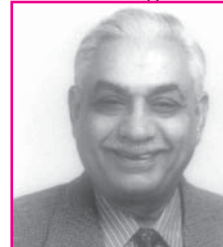
Let me go back in time and revert

to the battle of 1818 and the so-called *causes belli* of the violence of 2018. Without going into too many details of the 1818 battle, which are unimportant now, the battle was a stalemate as both sides retreated leaving behind their dead. However, the English claimed victory and built a "victory pillar" (obelisk) at the village. The Koregaon pillar inscription features the names of the 49 Company soldiers killed in the battle. The dead soldiers of Indian origin (natives in English parlance) included 22 Mahars, 16 Marathas, 8 Rajputs, 2 Muslims, and 1-2 Jews. It needs to be noted that the soldiers were from various ethnic and religious groups. On the Peshwa side too, soldiers as well as commanders belonged to varied classes, religions and castes.

In the 1800s, the Mahars were considered untouchables in the caste-based society which was then prevalent. Yet, when it came to military service, soldiers from all castes, creeds and religions were recruited; they served loyally, fought together, and spilled blood for their masters. Even the Peshwas, who were high-caste Brahmins, had soldiers from all castes and creeds, and their elite soldiers were Arabs. Even in the post-Independence

Indian Army of today, there is no discrimination relating to castes and so on. For example, my own regiment, the Maratha Light Infantry, which draws its inspiration from the great Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, has officers and soldiers of all categories serving in it, including Mahars, Coorgs, Muslims from South, Kannadigas and others.

Similarly, in the movement for Independence in the late 19th and 20th centuries, all Indians participated against the British rule, without any caste or religious considerations. Since 1927, after the visit of Dr. Ambedkar to Koregaon Bhima, the Dalits began seeing the Koregaon obelisk as a symbol of their victory over high-caste oppression. A number of Mahar gatherings have also been held there in intervening years. Knowing all this, it is a matter of great concern that the political and police leadership of Maharashtra were in a somnambulist state on 1 January 2018, which was the 200th anniversary of the Battle of Koregaon. It is nothing but lack



of governance and lack of anticipation. ■

Lt. Gen. Vijay Oberoi is a former Vice Chief of Army Staff.

The Shakespearwallahs!

An Indian adaptation of the Bard's highly popular Twelfth Night called Piya Behrupiya, was an outstanding piece of theatre. Prof. Avinash Kolhe lauds the adaptation.

THE Bard holds eternal attraction for theatre-professionals as well as lovers all over the world. Shakespeare's work must have been adapted in almost all known languages of the world. Atul Kumar, founder of The Company Theatre (established in 1997) is one such Shakespeare aficionado, who cannot keep away from him. Kumar's theatre group keeps bringing adaptations of Shakespeare's play regularly, the latest being *Piya Behrupiya* based on Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, a well-known comedy.

Piya Behrupiya is a musical adaptation in Hindi of *Twelfth Night*, one of William Shakespeare's best known romantic comedies ('romedy' in today's language!). This play was commissioned for The Globe of The Globe Festival, which took place at the Globe Theatre in London. *Twelfth Night* has been adeptly translated by Amitosh Nagpal, who also plays Sebastian. *Piya Behrupiya* is loosely based on the *Nautanki* form of theatre, highly popular in North India. Thanks to this form, it has a lovable, freewheeling quality to it, which gets the audience completely engrossed in the performance.

Original, yet not

Despite its adaptation in Hindi, it retains the original names of Shakespeare's play. This adaptation liberally uses various dialects of Hindi, and at times Marathi too, to devastating effect. The play kick-starts with Viola (Geetanjali Kulkarni) shipwrecked on the shores of Illyria. She feels that her twin, look-alike brother, Sebastian, is dead. Viola decides to masquerade as Cesario and gets employed with Duke



A still from the play *Piya Behrupiya*

Orsanio (Sagar Deshmukh). Viola falls in love with Orsanio, who in turn is in love with Lady Olivia, who is in mourning as she has lost her father and brother. She

keeps spurning suitor after suitor.

In due course, romantic interests and mistaken identities converge and comedy gets underway. The comedy also involves Olivia's uncle Sir Toby (Gagan Riar) and their aides who plot to make Olivia's steward, Malviola (Saurabh Nayyar) feel that his lady Olivia is desirous of marrying him. To further the fun, Lady Olivia falls in love with Cesario. As is expected in any comedy, all is well that ends well, and Viola's brother Sebastian turns up in the end.

Theatre veteran Atul Kumar has rendered a highly entertaining show. This 17th century Shakespeare's play has been brilliantly given an Indian touch, that keeps the audience captive in their chairs! Though Nagpal has adapted the play to Indian conditions, he has kept the original names. The purpose is to keep the basic flavour of the play alive without corrupting it. The

***Piya Behrupiya* is a musical adaptation in Hindi of *Twelfth Night*, one of William Shakespeare's best known romantic comedies ('romedy' in today's language!). This play was commissioned for The Globe of The Globe Festival, which took place at the Globe Theatre in London.**

play is full of clever writing. Sample these gems: Olivia's *Bas use kiya reject* or *Aap kahaan ko belong karte ho?*, take the play to new heights. The translator Amitosh Nagpal walks on the stage and tells the audiences what a thankless job he was called upon to do. Then he goes on to blame Shakespeare, who has given very little space to the character of Sebastian. Amitosh Nagpal steals some scenes with his sheer dialogue delivery and sense of timing.

It's also a musical

One of the reasons why this performance stands out, is its songs. Almost all actors are gifted singers. There are enough dollops of folk music, which includes Kabir's *dohe* sung by Phool Singh (Neha Saraf). Then there is *Mata ka jagrata* where Gagan Riar, who plays perpetually inebriated Uncle Toby, suddenly takes stage as Billu Dangerous, and the rest of the cast doubles up as his Jagrata Mandali!

In terms of stage design, the play is extremely colourful to watch with a mix of orange, purple and red. A giant portrait of Shakespeare loomed large in the background, as if a Hindu deity had emerged from chaos.



The actors did an outstanding job, most of them being gifted singers too

All the actors are on the stage for the entire play. When not featured in action downstage, they are seated on a platform upstage. There are three musicians who also function as chorus, often interjecting, commenting, and also joining in the singing. There was an excellent blend of dance and music.

Superlative performances

All performances are phenomenal.

Their facial expressions and change in tone of voice add value. One must specifically mention Viola (Geetanjali Kulkarni) who fluidly switches from boy-servant to love-struck girl. She brings to her performance ease and flair, the hallmarks of a senior actor. Sagar Deshmukh who plays Duke Orsino, complements her well. The chemistry between Uncle Toby (Gagan Riar) and Maria (Trupti Khamkar) must be seen to be believed. Look out for actress Mansi Multani who plays Olivia with a Punjabi accent. Her performance is mind-blowing. Neha Saraf who plays the clown Feste is outstanding. She gets some of the best lines and delivers them to full effect. Amitosh Nagpal's Sebastian appears on and off, but generates a lot of laughter. The direction of this play is outstanding. Atul Kumar shows a tight grip on the script as well as its stage rendition. ■



This was a well-adapted and very enjoyable play



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

A toast to hope!

*Gender equality is still a pipe dream in India. Yet, we can certainly hope that this year will be an improvement where women's empowerment is concerned. Hope is everything, muses **Rashmi Oberoi**.*

HOPE... We use this word so often in our everyday language. It is a feeling of trust, security, and a reason to keep going. It's only hope that has got us through 2017, and now makes us look forward to 2018. Most of my writings last year have been centred on gender issues and gender-based discrimination. The root cause of gender inequality in our society lies in its patriarchal system - a system of social structure and practices, in which men dominate, oppress, and exploit women. Gender inequality is therefore a form of inequality which is distinct from other forms of economic and social inequalities. It dwells not only outside the household, but also centrally within it. It stems also from pre-existing gendered social norms and social perceptions.

Political participation is often perceived as a key factor to rectify this situation. However, gender bias extends to electoral politics and representative governance as well. Gender inequality, in simple words, may be defined as discrimination against women based on their sex. This peculiar type of discrimination against women is prevalent everywhere in the world, and more so in Indian society.

It starts at birth

Gender is seen closely related to the roles and behaviours assigned to women and men based on their sexual differences. As soon as a child is born, families and the society begin the process of gendering. The birth of the son is celebrated, the birth of a daughter filled with pain; sons are showered with love, respect, better food and health care. Boys are encouraged to be tough

and outgoing; girls are encouraged to be homebound and shy.

Not just in India, but since time immemorial, women have been looked down upon as inanimate objects all over the world. To fight for the equal rights for women, there have been feminist movements around the globe. Indian feminists had to fight against culture-specific issues within India's patriarchal society. The patriarchal attributes include demanding dowry, siring sons, among others. The adverse sex ratio, poor educational and nutritional status, inequality in wages, and violence against women are prevalent in our society, even today.

There is a change now; the voices against gender inequality and violence have never been louder. The horrific rise in crimes against women, especially post the December-2012 gang-rape in New Delhi, has led to widespread protests and demands for change across the nation. The incident, which is often considered a landmark in the fight for women's rights in India, has also led to a few reformative changes in the criminal justice system with provisions for stricter laws and speedier convictions.

However, legislative changes alone cannot reverse the current epidemic of violence and injustice against women. The conversation today, therefore, is no longer just about law and order; it also highlights a woman's right to dignity, respect, and equality across all spheres of public and personal life. While increasing representation of women in the public spheres is important and can potentially be attained through some form of affirmative action, an attitudinal shift is essential for women to be

considered as equal within their homes and in broader society.

Of course, for this to succeed, parents and teachers have to take on a hands-on approach even outside such workshops, by encouraging questions and highlighting positive examples and role models for both girls and boys. Parents should focus less on protecting girls, and more on empowering them to be able to communicate their 'no' and 'yes', clearly and frankly.

As societies progress, the conversation around gender stereotypes will also evolve with the needs and demands of the day. India's current spate of crimes against women along with the age-old grip of patriarchal laws and customs dictate an urgent need for gender-sensitive education and upbringing. The fight must continue for security and equality of women... for their safety...for their rights to live and do as they please. A new year... A new beginning... New hopes and new dreams... May we find it within us to continue hoping! ■

Rashmi Oberoi an army officer's daughter, who was lucky to travel and live all over India, as also a few years in Malaysia and U.S.A. Keenly interested in writing for children, she wrote two story books - *My Friends At Sonnenshine*, which was published in 1999 by Writer's Workshop, Kolkata, India and *Cherie: The Cocker Spaniel*, which was published in 2009 by the same publishers. For a few years she moved into the corporate world of HR, but her love for writing took precedence, and she pursued her passion by writing articles and middles for newspapers, print and online magazines, including a children's magazine abroad.



JUSTICE P.N. BHAGWATI

A stalwart jurist (1921-2017)

ONE of India's most celebrated jurists, Justice P.N. Bhagwati was born in Gujarat on 21 December 1921. His father Natwarlal H. Bhagwati was a Judge of the Supreme Court of India. Justice Bhagwati passed out with an Honours in Mathematics, and later graduated in Law from the Government Law College affiliated to Bombay University. He courted arrest during the freedom struggle and remained underground for four months. He practiced law in the Bombay High Court for several years before his appointment as a judge of the Gujarat High Court in 1960. Later he was elevated to the post of Chief Justice of the Gujarat High Court. Justice Bhagwati took over as a judge of the Supreme Court of India in July 1973, and became the Chief Justice of India in July 1985, and served till his retirement in December 1986. During his tenure in the apex court he was responsible for several rulings on issues related to fundamental rights, and also on matters regarding right to life and the rights of prisoners. Along with a brother judge Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer, Bhagwati was instrumental in the introduction of the Public Interest Litigation (PIL) and Absolute Responsibility, a reform that made him a pioneer of judicial activism in the country.

The one blot on an otherwise long and illustrious career was the majority judgment delivered by a Supreme Court bench including Justice Bhagwati in ADM, Jabalpur vs Shrikant Shukla case heard during the emergency, where the judiciary sublimated to an absolutist regime by holding in its decree that during the emergency a person's right to not be unlawfully detained stood suspended. The judgment was a clear contravention of the right of *habeas corpus* enshrined in the fundamental rights guaranteed under the Constitution. The lone dissenting judge Hans Raj Khanna, who was lauded for his brave act of defending human rights, however paid the price for his stand and was not considered for elevation as the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. In a dramatic twist more than three decades later, Justice Bhagwati apologised for his role in

the judgment and deemed it as 'short sighted'. An admirer of Prime Minister (PM) Indira Gandhi during the emergency days, Justice Bhagwati turned critical of her functioning after the Janata Party coalition came to power, and later did another flip flop after Mrs. Gandhi became PM once again, lauding her achievements.

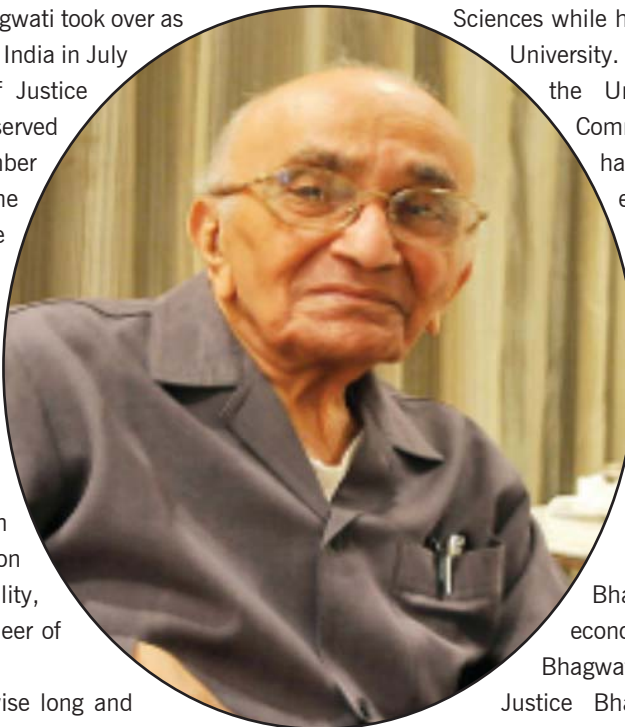
After his retirement Justice Bhagwati held several key offices on judicial reforms and legal aid in Gujarat, and was in charge of the pilot project for free legal aid, and was also an adviser to the state on judicial issues. In 1982 he was elected as a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences while he was affiliated to the Columbia

University. He was also a Member of the United Nations Human Rights Committee from 1995 to 2009, and had the distinction of being re-elected every two years on expiry of his term. Justice Bhagwati was also a member of the high profile Committee of Experts of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) for over 27 years. The Justice also served as the Chancellor of the Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning.

One of his brothers Jagdish Bhagwati was a renowned economist, and another brother S.N. Bhagwati was a reputed neuro-surgeon.

Justice Bhagwati's book *My tryst with justice*, which also carried his selected speeches and writings, was a best seller. A compassionate judge who believed in justice for all, earned encomiums from several quarters, and perhaps one of the best tributes came from Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer who opined that he was a jewel among judges, lucid and excellent. Justice Bhagwati passed away on 15 June 2017 at the ripe old age of 95. Among the laurels that this eminent jurist received was India's second highest civil honour next only to Bharat Ratna, the Padma Vibhushan. His invaluable contribution to the judiciary and his role in ushering in judicial reform was lauded by several dignitaries, with the Prime Minister Narendra Modi hailing him as a stalwart of India's legal fraternity. ■

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



COLONEL SANTOSH YASHWANT MAHADIK, SC, SM

Unparalleled patriotism and valour (1977-2015)

COL. Santosh Mahadik, SC, SM, was born on 15 January 1977 in Pogawadi, Satara, and studied at Sainik School, Satara. His father was a dairy owner and still supplies milk to the Sainik School at Satara. Santosh was proud of his roots and often referred to himself as a milkman's son. He was commissioned into the elite 21st Battalion of the Parachute Regiment in December 1998, and became an accomplished paratrooper and combat underwater diver. He was an all-rounder, a keen footballer, an expert horse rider, and a passionate boxer. He was awarded the Sena Medal in 2003 for gallantry in Operation Rhino against extremists in the Northeast. He did not rest on his laurels and volunteered to command 41 Rashtriya Rifles (RR) Battalion in Jammu and Kashmir. He took over command of this unit in July 2014. He had considerable experience in conducting counter-insurgency and counter-terrorist operations. He had a humane approach, and created goodwill and peace in Kupwara town through Operation Sadbhavana by organising sports, education and healthcare initiatives.

Information was received that a few heavily armed militants having infiltrated across the LOC (Line of Control) on 31 October 2015, were trapped in the Manigah forest near Kupwara in North Kashmir. Col. Mahadik was leading a search operation by the Quick Reaction Team (QRT) on the morning of 17 November 2015. The terrain was difficult and the militants had managed to slip away. The team came under heavy and effective fire from the militants hiding in the forest. Col Mahadik tried to outflank the terrorists in order to provide an opportunity to the team to take cover. He was in the open ground and suffered multiple injuries due to gun shots. Unmindful of his safety, he continued to keep the terrorists pinned down. The bullet that killed him stuck his neck, which was not protected by his bullet proof jacket. Two security personnel including one police officer were seriously injured. The fight

continued and the body of one militant was recovered by the unit.

Col Mahadik was evacuated to the Durgmulla military hospital, but succumbed to his injuries. He had acted in accordance with the highest traditions of the Indian Army by leading from the front and ensuring the safety of his men. For this act of outstanding leadership, exceptional gallantry and commitment to his task at the peril of his own life, he was awarded the Shaurya Chakra (SC) (posthumous).

Colonel S.S. Shekhawat under whom Mahadik had served earlier, said that it was a great loss, but Santosh went in style. To go with a bullet in his chest was the way to go for a soldier.

Lt. General D.S. Hooda, Commander, Northern Command, expressed deep condolence and appreciated his commitment to the task. The slain hero's body was brought in an army cortege to his native village Pogawadi. Thousands of grieving people gathered at the site to pay respects to Santosh Mahadik. Chants of *Bharat Mata ki Jai* and *Santosh amar rahe* were raised by the villagers. He was accorded a funeral with full military honours, including a 21-gun salute. He is survived by wife Savitri, a daughter and a son.

Savitri Mahadik displayed rare quality of moral courage and expressed her resolve to join the Army and pursue the ideal of her late husband. She, like her husband, believed in the noble task of integrating the militants into the mainstream. A month after her husband's death, she shifted to Pune and started preparing for the Services Selection Board. She admitted her two children in boarding schools, and the family supported her. She was 32, and on the recommendation of the Army Chief, a relaxation of age was granted by the Defence Minister. A graduate from the Pune University, she qualified at the written examination and the Services Selection Board. She joined the Officers Training Academy at Chennai, and is looking forward to a career in the Army. ■

– Brigadier Suresh Chandra Sharma (retd.)



Ashwini Ekbote

Actress-danseuse par excellence (1972-2016)

"TRANSITION into a scene after a break is the most important phase for an artiste", opined Ashwini Ekbote, Marathi danseuse-actor.

True to her love, while performing brilliantly, during the closing act of her programme, *Natya Trividha*, at Bharat Natya Mandir in Sadashiv Peth, Pune, she suffered a cardiac arrest and died within minutes on 22 October 2016, aged just 44, leaving people shocked. As it was the premiere show, not only close friends and relatives, but also her parents saw her collapse. Initially, the audience thought it was part of the act, but unfortunately it wasn't. This memory of her performing will be etched forever in the minds of upcoming Marathi artistes and performers.

Ashwini Ekbote, a known popular face in Marathi world, remembered for her splendid performances, be it theatre, TV or films, preferred to keep a low profile as an actress, her strength being entering the skin of the character. An actress par excellence, she was so involved with work that she had to be sometimes reminded to take it easy, reminisced her fellow artistes.

After completing education in Pune, Ashwini whose surname before marriage was Katkar, was active in cultural activities particularly dance and plays, and also a trained Bharatnatyam dancer, (she had also performed in Sydney, Australia to a houseful audience), which helped to shape her career in the creative field and thus landed up in the acting world. It all started with her theatre performance in two different plays, *Ekakshanaat*, *Nandi* and *Tya Tighanchi Gosht*.

She then headed to the TV world to a couple of TV shows including *Durva*, which was aired on the Marathi TV channel Star Pravah. This was then followed by others like *Radha Hi Bavari*, *Tu Bhetashi Navyane* and *Kashyala Udyachi Baatand* then currently on air serial *Duheri*, *Ganpati Bappa Morya*, and *Aaisaheb*.

Soon she got the chance to do Marathi films, which started with *High Command*, *Kshan Ha Mohacha*, *Aarambh*

(2011), *Dankyavar Danka*, *Debu*, *Baavare Prem He*, *Taptapadi*, *Mahaguru*, *Akleche Kande* (2001), *Dumkata* (2007), to name a few. Besides, she also got the chance to do a Hindi film called *Ek Pal Pyar Ka*. *Bho Bho* was her last movie co-starring actor Prashant Damle.

Sharad Ponkshe, an actor with whom she had chemistry, being associated for 15 years in several films, TV serials and plays, who had also directed her in the play, *Eka Kshannat*, recalled that Ashwini had insisted on him being present for the premiere, saying, "Maybe she had an intuition of things to come". He reminisced about

the day fifteen years back when he had first met her during an advertisement shoot in Pune, and how she climbed the ladder of success patiently without opting for shortcuts. "Though she was not interested, in August 2001, I got her, her first break in a television serial opposite Girish Oak. Later, she bagged several good roles on various platforms."

In an interview to a Marathi magazine, Ashwini, during the rehearsal of her play *Ekakshanaat*, when asked to comment on the requirement of a button artist in the acting field, said, "It is very easy to break a scene, after the director calls 'cut'.

Sometimes, you are disappointed. But, the transition into a scene after a break, is the most important phase for an artist and I pay more attention to this aspect".

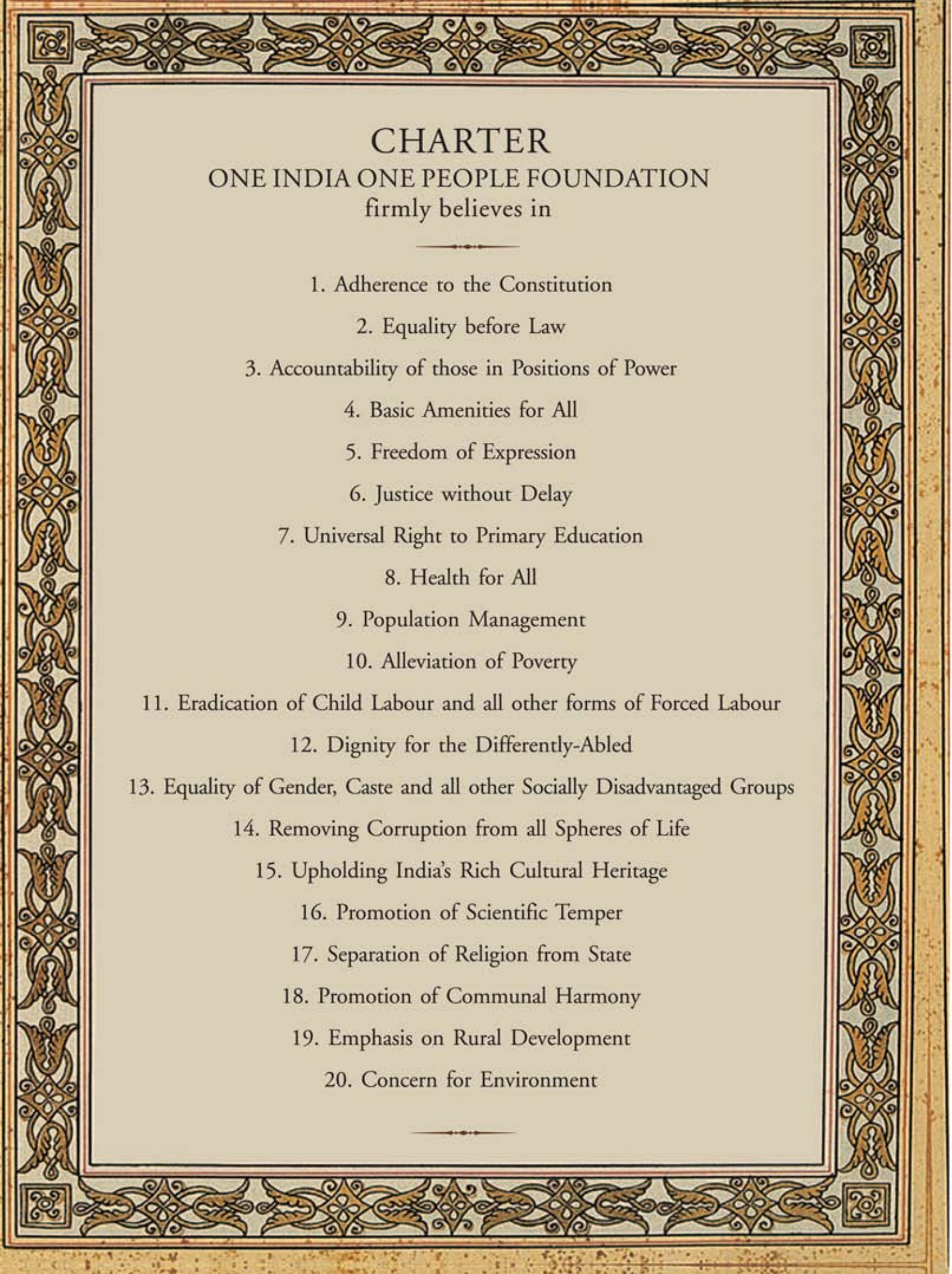
Vishwas Pangarkar, an actor, said her performance that night had been one of her best. He lamented that Ashwini didn't have any history of heart-related disorders.

Another colleague, Bhagyesh Desai, remembered her as an artiste with a social conscience, actively involved in women's empowerment and environmental issues. Apart from running a dance training class, she often conducted shows without charging any fee.

She is survived by her husband Pramod Ekbote, and son Shubhankar. ■

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





CHARTER

ONE INDIA ONE PEOPLE FOUNDATION

firmly believes in

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

WHO AM I?

Am I a Hindu first or an Indian first?

Am I a Muslim first or an Indian first?

Am I a Christian first or an Indian first?

Am I a Buddhist first or an Indian first?

Am I a Brahmin first or an Indian first?

Am I a Dalit first or an Indian first?

Am I a South Indian first or an Indian first?

Am I a North Indian first or an Indian first?

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

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

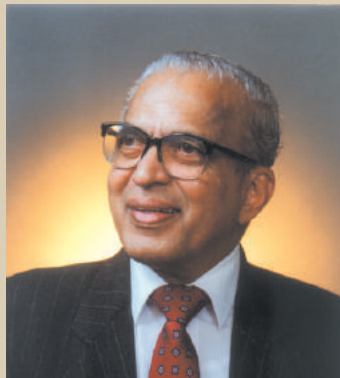
Am I the Commander-in-Chief first or an Indian first?

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

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

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

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



Sadanand A. Shetty, Founder Editor

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

ONE INDIA ONE PEOPLE