

ONE INDIA ONE PEOPLE

Patriotism Redefined

Child trafficking racket busted in Lucknow, 34 rescued

30 CHILDREN FROM AHMEDABAD RESCUED

Express News Service
Lucknow, August 11

THIRTY children, who were brought here from various districts in Ahmedabad for the Tarnakieli Bazaar, were rescued by the Child Welfare Committee on Sunday. According to the Child Welfare Committee, the children were brought to the bazaar under the guise of a commercial transaction without any legal documents.

The children were rescued from the bazaar by the Child Welfare Committee. The children were brought to the bazaar under the guise of a commercial transaction without any legal documents. The children were rescued from the bazaar by the Child Welfare Committee.

The group included 22 girls and 8 boys between the age group of 5 and 15. Following a report received by the volunteers of the Childline, the volunteers traced the kids at the railway station around 10:30 am on Sunday.

Child trafficking continues to be a lucrative trade in Capital

Fazal Haidar
Hindustan Times, New Delhi

NEW DELHI: Around this time in 2012, the issue of child trafficking was highlighted due to the case of the battered child and her 14-year-old 'guardian'. The

Following the incident, the Delhi Police launched a massive crackdown on placement agencies and trafficking gangs. Over 1,000 children were rescued in 2012 and action was taken against more than 150 placement agencies. The rescue

hands. Children below eight years are forced into begging. The older ones are pushed into child labour. Organised gangs kidnap minors and transport them to other cities," said

The children were rescued from the bazaar by the Child Welfare Committee. The children were brought to the bazaar under the guise of a commercial transaction without any legal documents. The children were rescued from the bazaar by the Child Welfare Committee.

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KNOW INDIA BETTER

SIKKIM

A JEWEL IN THE HIMALAYAS

FOR GENDER NEUTRAL LAWS
ABUSE IS NEVER MINOR
TRAFFICKING OUR FUTURE

30 children sent to juvenile home

Allegedly destined for an orphanage

Staff Reporter

Vellimadukunnu

FACE TO FACE

TEENAA KAUR PASRICHA

The right to be a child



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For gender neutral laws

While there are enough laws and constitutional amendments to protect child rights, is it skewed more towards protecting the girl child? Gajanan Khergamker asserts that minor boys are equally susceptible to abuse, and hence need equal protection of the law.

Intiguently, among all offences, it's the crime of rape that fires public sentiment the most, eliciting an outrage that exceeds the seemingly worst felony of all – murder, too. And, if that crime is perpetrated against a child, nothing can be graver.

Child rights, in India more than elsewhere, is unique in that the treatment of children and social perception is different from that of other nations. With consent completely being out of question when it comes to the age of the child, offences are made out often even when there's no complaint, but solely on the premise and persistence of an angry father, or a trigger-happy law enforcer.

Public perception plays a vital role

Perception plays a huge role in society and, concurrently, with a hugely subjective section of the media playing up offences and associated gory details, they get replayed ruthlessly in public memory, with continual mention and recall that compound its severity. It's this outrage that offsets any chance of the very objectivity needed to tackle the issue. The Kathua crime followed by a swift ordinance on child rape and a law on the same, is a case in point.

The fulfilment of retribution, a vital outcome of legal punishment, is at the core of the populist support for death as a sentence. The national outcry for death for rapists was first initiated in the recent past following the December 2012 gang rape in Delhi. This was followed by the Justice Verma committee constituted in its aftermath to recommend legal reforms to curb sexual assault crimes. Incidentally, in its report, the committee said the introduction of death penalty for rape “may not have a deterrent effect”, and recommended enhanced sentence of jail for the remainder of life.

And, that led to the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act in which the very definition of rape was expanded to include various acts in addition to vaginal penetration, and a new Section 376 (A), which states that if a person committing the offence of sexual assault, “inflicts an injury which causes the death of the person or causes the person to be in a persistent vegetative state, (that person) shall be punished with rigorous imprisonment for a term which shall not be less than twenty years, but which may extend to imprisonment for life, which shall mean the remainder of that person's natural life, or with death.” Death was included as a punishment for rape for the first time in India's penal

history, although only when the act caused the victim's death, or caused the victim to be in ‘a persistent vegetative state’.

Also, in the case of “gang rape”, persons involved regardless of their gender shall be punished with rigorous imprisonment for a term which shall not be less than twenty years, but may extend to life and shall pay compensation to the victim which shall be reasonable to meet the medical expenses and rehabilitation of the victim. That ‘regardless of their gender’ insertion to the section was initiated to include women perpetrators involved in rape by dint of their support, connivance, or abetment to the act of rape.

However, highly-progressive suggestions recommended by the committee that included reduction of age of consent, a section on marital rape and amendments in the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act so no sanction is needed to prosecute an armed force personnel accused of a crime against a woman, were disregarded by the government while framing the Criminal Law (Amendment) Ordinance, 2013. This was a given, considering the executive action though democratic in letter, is often populist in spirit.

Cut to Kathua, five years later in 2018, when following the abduction, rape and murder of an eight-year-old girl near this town in Jammu and Kashmir in January, the opposition and the media made another national outcry for death – this time around for the rapists of the girl child – flaying the state and the legal machinery for failing to protect the girl child. On April 21, the union cabinet approved a criminal law amendment ordinance seeking to amend the IPC, the Evidence Act, CrPC and the POCSO Act. The Criminal Law (Amendment) Ordinance provides for stringent punishment of a jail term of minimum 20 years or life imprisonment or death for rape of a girl under 12 years. Amendments to the Indian Penal Code, the Criminal Procedure Code, the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act and the Indian Evidence Act were made to underline the same. The President the very next day gave his assent to the ordinance, which has now become law, albeit temporary.

Accordingly, the minimum punishment for rape has been increased from seven years to ten years; the maximum punishment remains the same – life imprisonment. A new clause (3) has been added to Section 376

prescribing the minimum punishment of 20 years to a person committing rape on a woman under 16 years of age, and a new Section 376AB has been inserted which prescribes the minimum punishment of 20 years rigorous imprisonment to a person committing rape on a woman less than 12 years of age. Such a person can be awarded capital sentence as well. Sections 376DA and 376DB provide minimum punishment of life imprisonment for persons involved in gang rape of woman aged less than 16 years and 12 years, respectively.

A kneejerk reaction, and a bias

The ordinance, once again a kneejerk reaction from the executive, provided a half-baked solution, but risks being overwhelmed this time, for being bad in law. It was in direct violation of Articles 14 and 16 of the Indian Constitution that guarantees equality before law. According to Article 14, the state shall not deny to any person equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India. It also prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth. The ordinance, now with force of temporary law, discriminates between a male child and a female child. All the amendments pertain to the girl child only, thus are violative of the right to equality and can be questioned for their constitutionality.

So, the Union Women and Child Development ministry, less than a week after the ordinance was promulgated, was all set to move the cabinet seeking approval for the same punishment for those guilty of sexually abusing young boys of the same age. While POCSO was gender neutral, the amended Section 376 mentions the word “woman”, meaning that those guilty of raping boys below the age of 12 years old would not be subject to the death penalty provision. It has created an anomaly where the same crime committed against a girl and a boy is treated differently, and contradicts the spirit of a gender-neutral POCSO.

A proposal to amend Sections 4, 5 and 6 of the POCSO Act, which will make rape committed against “any child” below 12 punishable with the death penalty was prepared and sent to all stakeholder ministries after which the cabinet was to be approached. At present, Sections 4, 5 and 6 deal with aggravated penetrative sexual assault on children under 18 years; currently punishable with up to 10 years in jail, extendable to life imprisonment, under the POCSO Act. The ordinance promulgated on April 22 was approved by the Parliament and made into a law. Now, till an amendment to the POCSO Act takes places and concurrently rectifies the anomaly in gender, the discrepancy will, sadly, persist.

The sexual abuse of minors at Apna Ghar, a



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Alleged paedophiles Grant and Walters, the accused in The Anchorage Shelter Home case

children's home in Rohtak, Haryana, is a case in point, where it was revealed that several minor boys were sexually abused by the accused who ran the children's home. The trauma suffered by minor boys could in no way be considered any lesser to that suffered by girls in their place. Treating them differently makes little legal sense. It may be also pertinent to recall the case of a 13-year-old Mumbai boy who consumed rat poison to commit suicide in 2017, and made a declaration of being ‘raped’ multiple times by four men who had threatened to kill his entire family, before succumbing to multiple organ failure. His 10-year-old friend had died earlier allegedly due to ‘dehydration’, and his parents refused a post-mortem and instead buried his body swiftly. The body was exhumed but investigators felt that extracting evidence of any sexual assault would be difficult as it had decomposed badly. The rape of minor boys is a reality that is mired in secrecy owing to the stigma attached to the offence. Even families of the victims are reluctant to initiate investigations.

The differential treatment of the law is triggered by a swiftly drafted ordinance flawed with a lapse that will have to be corrected soon. Compounding the bias in the perception have been sections of an apathetic media, and a trigger-happy opposition set on coercing the present government into conceding to errors and in public domain. In the absence of motivated support for the ‘boy’ child as is the case with the ‘girl’ child in India, it will rest upon the government to set the law right. Or, someone moves the Supreme Court to examine the very constitutionality of the amendment in question.

Abuse is never minor

India has come a long way in protecting minors, though it's almost always that isolated incident of brutal rape or gruesome murder that shakes up the society and the government into strengthening legal and societal frameworks for children, says **Manu Shrivastava.**



Child abuse in shelter homes is rampant

The case that brought to light the child rights debate in India recently was the rape of a minor girl, in Kathua, in January 2018. The medical reports that came out in September 2018 confirmed that the eight-year-old girl was sexually assaulted, and died of asphyxia. The brutal gang rape and murder of the girl shook the country to its core. The rape occurred in Rasana village in Kathua, in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir.

Too many victims

The victim, an eight-year-old girl from the nomadic Bakarwal community, had disappeared while she was out grazing the horses. She was abducted, and a week later her body was found, and investigations revealed that she was raped by eight men, including four police officers and a juvenile. Two of the police officers had even attempted to destroy evidence.

The main accused, Sanji Ram, the priest of the family temple where the girl was held captive and raped, had devised the plan to kidnap and kill the victim. Amid country-wide protests, the accused were arrested and put on trial, which began in April 2018. The anger also led to

the government introducing an ordinance to strengthen the POCSO Act, particularly introducing the death penalty for rapists of girls below 12 years of age.

Kathua was only beginning to fade from people's memories when another incident came to light in September 2018, in Kathua district. A 62-year-old pastor, Antony Thomas, was arrested and booked from the unregistered orphanage where he was keeping the children. The arrest was made following allegations from the orphanage children that they were being sexually abused by the pastor. Among the 19 children were eight girls who had complained of being sexually abused, harassed, tortured and physically assaulted at the orphanage run by the pastor from Kerala. Upon arrest and further investigation, Thomas failed to produce proper documentation for running the facility.

When it comes to landmark cases of child abuse in India, the infamous Anchorage case cannot be left behind. Dating back to 2001 when the offence took place, the case has played a significant role in the development of child abuse laws in India. The Anchorage Shelter Home set up in 1995 in Colaba, Mumbai, by Duncan Grant and Allan John Walters came in the news in 2001, when both the English founders were accused of sexually abusing children of the orphanage for years. The abuse came to light when a volunteer from the orphanage called up the NGO, CHILDLINE, Mumbai, revealing the ongoing abuse. Further investigations by a committee, and later by the police, confirmed the allegations. Victims of abuse came forward to give testimonies of their personal experience of abuse and trauma. The accused first absconded but after much diplomatic deliberations were brought back to India for trial. The case also brought to light the condition of street children and atrocities on children in shelter homes, the very place that is supposed to protect them.

Grant and Walters not only sexually abused the children from their shelter home, but even invited foreign paedophiles regularly, who would take the children to Goa, and sexually abuse them. Further investigation and legal action led to stronger laws against child sex abuse.

A similar case occurred in Bihar in July 2018, where about 40 girls of an orphanage, some minors aged between 7–18, were sexually abused and tormented. The shelter home called Balika Grah housed many girls over the years, mainly suffering from speech disabilities. The girls were force-fed food mixed with sedatives to ensure compliance for abuse and assault.



The rape and murder of a minor in Kathua, touched the country's conscience

Further investigation and accounts of survivors revealed horrific details of years of abuse and torture. Medical tests of the girls confirmed that girls as young as seven years old, were sexually abused. There were marks of burns and torture all over their bodies, and injection marks which strengthened allegations of girls being drugged. The shelter home was being run as a brothel, and many girls were made to forcefully abort there itself, if they got pregnant. The case is going on in a POCSO (Protection of Children from Sexual Offences) Court now.

When abuse happens at home

There is always a risk to a child from strangers, but the fragile existence of children and their vulnerability to predators stares us in the eye when parents and relatives abuse their own children. There have been thousands of incidents around the world when a parent or a relative or member of the extended family, i.e., someone known, exploits and abuses a child. One of the main reasons for the introduction of the POCSO Act was the fact that more and more children were being subjected to sexual abuse and harassment from their own family members. Another such case that shocked the country was the Mira Road *tantrik*

case of Mumbai. The victims in this case were a minor girl and her sister, and the perpetrator was none other than the father of the sisters, and a *tantrik* who visited the family often. The abuse started when the elder sister was a 11-year-old child. Her father started raping her along with the *tantrik*. All this with the knowledge of her mother who told her not to disobey the *tantrik* who had convinced the family that establishing sexual relations with the daughter will alleviate the family's financial woes and bring prosperity. The girl was kept under close surveillance to prevent her from escaping or confiding in someone else. The shocking part was that the mother kept quiet, in fact threatened the daughter with dire consequences if she spoke to anyone about it. The girl finally mustered courage to complain to her maternal uncle about the abuse when she learnt that her father had started raping her younger sister, and the uncle approached the police. The father and the *tantrik* were arrested along with the mother for abetment. Shockingly, all three were acquitted of their charges because of lack of evidence. The case is important as it raises questions on the safety of children in their own homes, and how the legal position of 'minors' is unclear and can be manipulated when their guardians are the perpetrators of heinous crimes.



Manu Shrivastava is a Media Legal Researcher with Draft Craft International, and co-convener of 'The Woman Survivor' initiative that documents abuse of women and children within families.

Trafficking our future

One of the most horrific crimes today is the trafficking of children for purposes of child labour and sexual exploitation. India, with its high levels of poverty, has the dubious distinction of being one of the most conducive countries for this crime, says Gayatri Ayyer. What is the solution?



The worst crimes are committed against the most vulnerable, our children

The loss of a child, no matter the age, is devastating – not only to the family, but also the community. Imagine hearing that a child isn't lost, but was sold for a meagre sum to alleviate the family's poverty. That is what people involved in child trafficking do – take advantage of a family's poverty or debts and trick the family into selling their child. The family is shown false dreams of employment. The reality is that the child never sees his or her family ever again, and is mostly sold for child labour, begging, or sexual exploitation.

India, a dubious reputation

According to a report by the U.S. Department of State, "India is a source, destination and transit country for men, women and children subjected to forced labour and sex trafficking." From 2005 onwards, this problem has been escalating and has become of utmost importance. In 2016, the number of women and children trafficked was approximately 20,000 reported cases. This figure has been steadily rising every year. There are too many unreported cases of trafficking due to lack of information, resources, ignorance of legal remedies, and even reporting missing children. The National Crime Records Bureau statistics for children disappearing is one child per eight

minutes, which is an alarming number. The states most affected are the high poverty areas of Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Orissa and West Bengal. Thirty eight percent of the nation's cases of child trafficking have been seen in Assam. The human trafficking nexus in India is internal – that is, the people trafficked belong to the most disadvantaged social strata – Dalits, the poor, the slum dwellers, members of tribal communities, and religious minorities. These groups are the most vulnerable as they get the least support from local law enforcement agencies. Since the trafficking happens from one part of India to another, lack of support from law enforcement personnel, and the lack of reporting of the crime, it's difficult to get exact figures of the enormity of the crime. In recent times, there has been an upward trend of children from India, Bangladesh and Nepal being trafficked to Middle East countries for sexual exploitation.

Parents of these children are tricked by the traffickers who take advantage of the family's poverty and ignorance of legal laws into sending or selling their children for better opportunities or jobs. Many families in India have more than one child, with even lesser financial resources to take care of them.

In most cases of trafficking, the traffickers are known to the families of the children, i.e., the traffickers present themselves as local employment agents and lure the families with the promise of higher wages for their children. The families think that the child will now be able to improve the family's financial condition. Families having many daughters think that selling off the daughters will be a practical solution compared to paying dowries to get them married. The reality is that these children are transported to big cities where they are sold for various nefarious reasons. The types of child trafficking seen in India include involuntary domestic servitude, forced child labour, bonded labour, slavery, illegal organ trade, begging, child soldiers, and children exploited for commercial sex and child pornography. In recent times there has been an upward trend of children from India, Bangladesh and Nepal being trafficked to Middle East countries for sexual exploitation. Another disturbing trend being seen in India is the rise of foreigners who come to India for pedophilia.

The children don't think of escaping or reporting this exploitation or seek help as they don't know their rights or laws that protect them. The children are not even aware of local organisations that can help them go back to their families or provide them vocational training to improve their lives. Many children don't remember their family locations or details of family members, as they were abducted or trafficked at a very young age.

The rescued children who return home after being trafficked often face a lot of problems including shame from their communities, emotional trauma, and have medical and sexual health concerns due to working in dangerous conditions in factories or brothels. Some families may reject these children as their financial burden has again increased. The children need counseling sessions to deal with their trauma about the physical, mental, emotional and sexual abuse from the traffickers or work place; feelings of abandonment, shame and rejection from their families, and loss of identity and self-esteem. The children also need access to educational and vocational services to develop skills to be gainfully employed in the future as adults.

Stopping child trafficking

Children are the future of any country, and if we don't bring an end to child trafficking, we can't look forward to a productive future for India. There are many ways in which we can help children who have been trafficked. Social media, if used properly, can be a powerful tool to bring awareness about child trafficking and help rehabilitate children. Students, youth and adults can work together to bring an end to this menace to Indian society. Some suggestions to reduce and ultimately end trafficking are:



- Shops and businesses can display stickers and posters displaying that they are against child labour and that they don't employ children less than 18 years of age.
- Avoid and report businesses and shops that don't display "Against Child Labour" stickers.
- Be aware of your surroundings – Cooperative Housing Societies (CHS), residential areas, businesses/offices, canteens and other places where there could be child labourers.
- Talk to family or friends who employ children less than 18 years of age about child labour being illegal and punishable by law. Report the family if the family refuses to release the child.
- Talk to the Chairman and Secretaries of CHS of laws to protect children and laws against child labour.
- Research and make a list of local agencies working to protect and rehabilitate rescued trafficked children. These agencies provide educational and vocational training to improve the children's future, and give them a new lease of life.
- If you see a child working as a child labourer, the child can be made aware of the laws and directed to seek help from the agencies.
- Use social media to create awareness campaigns. and educate people of the rights of children and laws to protect children.



Gayatri Ayer is a Doctoral student in Counselling at University of North Texas, USA. She has worked as a school counsellor and psychology teacher in schools in India before going back to life as a student, to get further trained as a Counsellor. She hopes to specialise in Play Therapy and Animal Assisted Therapy, to help children and adults.

The rights of the child

In India, children's rights have been under the scanner for various reasons. While the government has passed laws to help kids in schools, or defend their right to education, it's the parents too who need support in formulating the right strategies for our children today. Dr. Harish Shetty diagnoses the problem.



Children are too addicted to gadgets nowadays

A few weeks ago, four students below the age of 13 were forced to quit school. The Principal threatened them with a harsh school leaving certificate that she said would mar their future if they did not leave the school on their own. The crime the kids committed was to smoke a cigarette inside the school lavatory. Forcible and coercive expulsion is a norm in many schools in Mumbai, the financial capital of the country. Fully aware that RTE (Right to Education) does not allow schools to expel kids, the coercive mode where threats flow like water, are used by Principals.

The magic word of 'discipline'

Schools ideally look at the two words, 'discipline' and 'indiscipline'. Nothing wrong with that, as basic values and discipline should be inculcated early in life. Viewing discipline as appropriate, and indiscipline as inappropriate behaviour aids correction. This provides space to format the mental software of the child. I see schools and families as structures that mould children, and not ones that reject the little ones. The four cardinal needs of children in both these 'spaces' are, emotional safety, trust, respect, and love. As a kid enters a school s/he should believe that they will be

moulded, nurtured, corrected and inspired to be wholesome human beings. Well this may appear utopian, but we need to strive to do the same.

It's a widely held opinion that kids of today are worse than those of yesteryears'. I disagree and believe that every era has its own issues and the answers to the same are different in every generation. Viewing the kids of today with the glasses of an earlier generation will give a skewed idea of our present generation. Single kid families, long working hours of parents, small match box homes in nuclear families, long study hours in schools and tuitions, pose different challenges. Not to mention the global village we are living in where kids view the world and are influenced by happenings across, through gadgets and the different screens they have easy access to. In spite of all the issues Indian kids are facing, let me add that our kids are inspiring, and a large majority are doing well in India and across the globe. Following are some issues children face, and I propose some solutions.

Maintain 'gadget hygiene'

The sleep time of kids has fallen. Surveys show that right from the early age of six, the hours of sleep has gone down. In poorer communities it could be due to early morning water supply that causes the problem. Parents coming late from offices is a big issue, where kids wait up for them. Long tuition and study hours coupled with anxious parents, leads to shorter sleep cycles. But the emperor of sleep deprivation is addiction to gadgets. There is no control on the screen time, and kids spend long hours with screen, thus destroying their sleep patterns. Few are aware that this leads to distortion of the mind body orchestra, causing both physical and psychological problems. Early hypertension, diabetes, anxiety, depression, issues with eye sight and others are common. My prediction is that many will suffer from burn out early. This can be resolved firstly by parents observing 'gadget hygiene'. No gadget activities at home, no screens while conversing and eating, and keeping gadgets in closed drawers rather than the tables, as visibility of the same leads to excessive use. Gadget hygiene if practised diligently by parents is the first step. The second step is encouraging kids to be involved in physical activities and cutting meaningless tuitions. Schools are temples where kids learn to intermingle, learn the rules of friendship, arbitration, discover compassion, and basics of learning different streams. Show me one school Principal who has pasted her 10th marksheet on the wall behind her chair.

IF A CHILD.....

CRIES / CLINGS/ EXCESSIVELY

**IS SAD/ GLOOMY/ QUIET/WITHDRAWN/ SLEEPY/ UNCLEAN/
SPEAKS ABOUT DEATH,DYING**

IS RESTLESS/ DISTRACTIBLE/ FIDGETY

STEALS/ TELLS LIES

AGGRESSIVE/ VIOLENT/ BULLIES KIDS

HAS PROBLEMS IN READING / WRITING/ SPELLING/ ARITHMETIC

HAS FALLING GRADES

CONSUMES ADDICTIVE SUBSTANCES

**SPEAKS IRRELEVANTLY/ HEARS IMAGINARY VOICES/ TALKS TO SELF/
DISPLAYS STRANGE BEHAVIOUR/ WASHES HANDS EXCESSIVELY**

EATS LESS/ EXCESSIVELY

FEELS GIDDY/ APPEARS BLANK/ FALLS UNCONSCIOUS

REFER TO THE COUNSELOR IMMEDIATELY

There will be none. Yet, love for studies needs to be inculcated early. Schools should discuss the perils of gadget addiction and formulate strategies in consultation with kids. Those schools that are involved in participatory learning do much better than those who impose and bulldoze. Needless to say that kids who stay inside their rooms, slowly stop taking part in family activities, and are getting addicted to gadgets, need to be seen by a counsellor immediately. Addiction to these instruments is worse than that to drugs and alcohol. Indian parenting need not be so liberal as that of the West. Certain few rules have to be in place along with many guidelines that may be flexible. Gadgets cannot be 'instruments' to keep kids calm. If a child has to wait outside a doctor's chamber or in a function, parents need not give a gadget as an appeasing toy. Let them be. Sitting in silence without doing anything is a very powerful software that needs to be inculcated in children. 'Doing nothing' in short spurts in a day is a powerful mental health tool in adulthood.

What causes distress and depression?

In recent years, the age of onset of depression, suicide, first sexual intercourse, first act of violence and intake of drugs, have gone down. Well, the brain has not changed in its structure, nor has the earth in its behaviour. The rotations and the revolutions are not faster. Man has been forced to run with the pace of the industrial revolution, attempting to live a century in a decade. India is worst, as apart from reckless globalisation, our systems both in the realm of infrastructure and efficacy are still developing. Rampant corruption and marginalisation of certain sections is a norm.

In one of our studies, we found that in a school, about 27% of the parents were depressed. A few were even

suicidal. India is slowly becoming the diabetes and the suicide capital of the world. So reversing alienation is important, both at school as well as home. Children need to experience play, friendships, learning, along with unconditional acceptance in school. Needless to say that this can be achieved if the teachers are healthy.

They too come from the same universe, and our studies found that 'balancing school and home responsibilities' is the biggest stressor. Schools that spend their money on the health of their teachers will contribute to the well-being of their kids. Any change in behaviour of the child should alert the school teacher. If one is excessively quiet or is irritable, sleeps less or more, eats less or more, drops grades, refuses to play, one needs to knock the doors of the counsellor. Delay in seeking an opinion may cause the death of the child. Long sermons to kids should be avoided.

Drop in grades, drop in self-esteem

This is a big issue for families. Mental health science is not a philosophy, but is close to mathematics. No kid likes low marks or wants to abstain from school. There is always an issue that needs to be corrected. My constant line is, 'Fever or failure, diagnosis is the key.' When kids score less than expected or score low grades, there are reasons that need to be examined, which are mainly three:

D for disabilities: This stands for a learning disability or ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder), or others.

I for interest: A loss of interest can have many reasons. Poverty, problems in the family, disabilities, uninspiring teachers, poor stimulation at home, etc.

E for emotional distress, disorder, or depression: This may not be visible to even the most inspired teacher, or the most aware family.

This is a child right emergency that needs to be addressed at the earliest. The new Disability Act mandates states to adhere, and has given them two years to do the same. This intervention will help child mental health in a big way. Lakhs of kids are humiliated across the country for not doing well by families and parents, not knowing that it is not the child's fault. This causes agony and most of them get depressed, or resort to meaningless violence.

The North-East problem

Can you believe that in the entire North-East region comprising eight states, only three students registered as having Learning Disability in the 2016 10th exams of the CBSE board? Successive governments in the past have neglected the North-East for decades, and that is true also for the educational sector. As we all know Learning Disability is an issue where a child can have a difficulty in reading, writing, comprehension or mathematics...

(continued on page 16...)

When the victim is a child

Child abuse is today defined as anything from hitting a child, to sexual and psychological abuse. And sadly, child abuse in all its forms, is very rampant in Indian society. Gayatri Ayyer examines the issue.

When I was a child, spanking or physical punishments were the norm to discipline children, and no one complained. Now parents and teachers are told to use other forms of disciplinary actions as physical punishment can be termed 'abuse.' Let's understand what 'abuse' is when we question the laws, and why abuse can be traumatic to children.

Defining child abuse

Child abuse or child maltreatment is physical, sexual or psychological maltreatment or neglect of a child, especially by a parent or other caregiver. It includes any act or failure to act by a parent or a caregiver that results in actual or potential harm to the child. Maltreatment is a broad term that includes neglect, exploitation and trafficking. According to UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund), violence against children can be "physical and mental abuse and injury, neglect or negligent treatment, exploitation, and sexual abuse. Violence may take place in homes, schools, orphanages, residential care facilities, on the streets, in the workplace, in prisons and in places of detention."

This abuse can be of several kinds according to the World Health Organisation (WHO) – physical, mental, emotional, psychological or in the form of neglect or exploitation. It brings about circumstances causing harm to a child's health, development, dignity, welfare, and safety. In some cases, the results of the abuse have caused serious injury or even death.

Physical abuse involves non-accidental harming of a child by, for example, burning, beating, spanking, burning, whipping, or breaking bones.

Verbal and emotional abuse involves harming a child by, for example, belittling (ridiculing) them or threatening physical or sexual acts, restricting movement, scaring, discriminating, etc. In India, family members and teachers put pressure on children to perform well in school and college examinations, which can be seen as a form of emotional stress and abuse.

Sexual abuse is engaging a child in any sexual activity that he/she does not understand or cannot give informed consent for, or is not physically, mentally or emotionally prepared for. Abuse can be conducted by an adult or another child who is developmentally superior to the victim. This includes using a child for pornography, sexual materials, prostitution, unlawful sexual practices, and trafficking. Child neglect occurs when someone does not provide the necessities of life to a child, either intentionally or

with reckless disregard for the child's well-being. This can include physical neglect, such as withholding food, clothing, shelter, or other necessities. Emotional neglect includes withholding love or comfort or affection. Medical neglect occurs when medical care is withheld due to sociocultural or religious beliefs. In India, in many families neglect also happens towards the female child. She is deprived of access to good nutrition, health, educational opportunities, as she is considered 'paraya dhan' (alien property). The female child is considered a burden as the family has to pay dowry for her marriage, and hence don't want to waste resources on her. In many urban and rural areas, the female foetus or child is killed to avoid the burden.

Child abuse is widespread and can occur in any cultural, ethnic, or income group. Statistics about child abuse happening in homes are hard to obtain as most of these crimes go unreported or are not considered abuse by families and caregivers. Societal abuses that are a result of poverty such as malnutrition, lack of education, poor health, neglect, etc., are recognised in various forms by the Indian legal system, but aren't considered important.

The grim statistics

According to the report on crimes in India for 2016, released by Indian Home Minister Rajnath Singh in Delhi, 106,958 cases of crimes against children were recorded in 2016. Of these, 36,022 cases were recorded under POCSO (Protection of Children from Sexual Offences) Act. Sexual abuse of a child is difficult to define due to varied forms of the abuse, and the one that is least reported due to family honour and stigma. The majority of sexual offenders are family members or people known to the child. Sexual abuse by strangers is not as common as sexual abuse by family members. Research shows that there are more cases of men being sexual offenders, compared to women.

There are numerous reasons why child abuse occurs. Some examples of risk factors that can contribute to abuse:

- Parents' lack of understanding of children's needs and child development
- Poor parenting styles and unhealthy communication patterns in the family
- Parents' history of domestic abuse
- Poverty and unemployment of parents
- Parental separation and divorce
- Substance abuse in the family
- Parental stress or mental health issues
- Child having a disability

One of the worst things to happen to a child is abuse – whether physical, emotional, sexual, and educational or health neglect by parents/guardians. In case of sexual abuse, many children tend to suppress the abuse due to the trauma and guilt feelings and may understand and reveal it years after the abuse happened, in adulthood. It's not always easy to recognise when a child has been abused. Children who are abused are often afraid to complain because they are fearful that they will be blamed or that no one will believe them. Additionally, the person who abused them may be someone they love very much and want to protect – a family member, a caregiver, school personnel, neighbour, etc.

Parents, caregivers and teachers should watch for sudden or unexplained changes in the child's body or behaviour. Ask for medical examination to be conducted if there is reason to suspect some form of abuse has occurred. The following is not an exhaustive list, but parents and caregivers must look for the following signs:

- **Signs of physical abuse:** Any injury (bruise, burn, fracture, abdominal or head injury) that cannot be explained. The child may start wearing weather inappropriate clothes to hide injuries (e.g., long sleeved shirts or t-shirts in summer).
- **Signs of sexual abuse:** Fearful behaviour (nightmares, depression, unusual fears, attempts to run away), abdominal pain, bedwetting, urinary tract infection, genital pain or bleeding, sexually transmitted disease, extreme sexual behaviour that seems inappropriate for the child's developmental age. The child tends to avoid or fear an adult or peer or any older child. Suddenly the child shows obsessive or

compulsive behaviours like bathing or hand washing 10 to 15 times a day. There could also be a change in dressing style, with the child donning oversized or provocative clothes.

- **Signs of emotional abuse:** Sudden change in self-confidence, headaches or stomachaches with no medical cause, abnormal fears, increased nightmares or attempts to run away.

- **Signs of emotional neglect:** Failure to gain weight (especially in infants), desperately affectionate behaviour, voracious appetite, and stealing of food.

Emotional trauma can result from several forms of abuse. Research has indicated direct neural impact from abuse – as seen in the emotional lobe, memory centre, decision-making centre, and other brain functioning areas. Any form of abuse robs the child of his/her childhood, innocence and their faith/trust in the world. Childhood abuse and trauma can have long term effects not only on the child, but also in the child's future relationships with people. An older child may use drugs or alcohol, try to run away, or abuse others. The younger the child is and the closer the child's relationship to the abuser, the more serious the emotional damage will be. They develop lack of trust in people, can become loners, emotionally closed, or clingy. Research also connects early childhood trauma and behaviour patterns to later development of psychological disorders. As adults, they may develop marital and sexual difficulties, depression or suicidal behaviour. With early detection and counselling, the psychosocial impact may be reduced.



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WHO AM I?



No child's play, this

Children's cinema is a rather neglected area in India, so we should be grateful for the handful of really good ones which have been made in the past, as well as in recent times. Shoma A. Chatterji reviews the scene.

“Children's cinema” is a dicey term. Does it mean cinema targeted at a child audience? Or, does it indicate films where children are central characters, but it is aimed at both parents and children? Let us take a look at these two kinds of films. The genre called ‘children's films’ or ‘films for children’ is too broad a label to understand what these films stand for. Featuring a child as the protagonist does not necessarily imply attracting a child audience. In fact, most of these films raise questions about the adult world's understanding and mistaken perceptions about the needs, desires and problems of children.

Children's films and films on children occupy very little space within the larger world of feature films in India, which produces around 1,000 feature films per annum. Why? Because a film for children or about children demands special directorial skills and effort, as it is not very easy to place the child's mind in proper perspective on celluloid. This does not mean that films for children and about children are not being made. If quantity has been a drawback, it is perhaps more than made up by quality.

Children's films of the past

Shyamchi Aai, in Marathi made in 1953 is one of the most memorable films in the history of children's cinema in the country. The film is a fictionalised account of the childhood years of Sane Guruji (1899-1950), narrated in a long flashback. A nationalist, influenced by Vinoba Bhave and Gandhiji, he was imprisoned repeatedly for his work among the peasantry, and participation in the Quit India movement. *Shyamchi Aai*, written in jail, has 45 episodes in which Shyam, a youth living in poverty in Konkan, recalls the teachings of his mother, a devoutly religious person with an earthy and practical philosophy. It is a literary classic in Marathi authored by Pandurang Sadashiv Sane, better known as Sane Guruji (1899-1950). He wrote this book in five days while he was detained in jail for participation in the Civil Disobedience Movement. He was a sensitive man with a creative imagination, and a prolific writer. Several generations of Maharashtrians have grown up with this book and the landmark film based on the book.

Jaldeep (1956) directed by the late Kedar Sharma and produced by the Children's Film Society of India, is said to be the first Indian film for children and about children to have won the first international award at the Venice International Film Festival in 1957. On hindsight, it appears to have been quite an amateurish direction from a stalwart filmmaker like Kedar Sharma, but it also won an All-India

Certificate of Merit at the State Awards for films, in 1960. It was an adventure film in which a teenage boy takes two friends on a boat ride to reach his father, who is the keeper of the lighthouse into the sea. Schools in India organised special screenings for students, and the theatres spilled over with kids who enjoyed the film.

Since Raj Kapoor's *Boot Polish* (1954) became a box office hit, films featuring children in central roles have addressed the adults in the audience. They are for the entertainment of the children while for parents, teachers, social workers etc., they offer education and information. *Boot Polish* treated the plight of children as social problems. The two orphaned kids are forced to confront the harsh realities of poverty within the slum environment in a merciless city like Bombay. The film closes on a note of empathy and a positive resolution for the two orphans. *Boot Polish*, (Visual Anthropology, 23, 44-59, 2010) represents social realism, in a society that still holds on to some ideals and, instead of taking the agency away from the children, the film strongly emphasises that children should move away from begging or other crimes, and start earning their livelihood through honest hard work. The entertainment factor, like any RK film, was sustained through brilliant songs and a prize-winning musical score.

Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne is one of Satyajit Ray's few films with an abundance of musical numbers. According to Ray, the film was made as a request from his son who had encouraged him to make a film specifically for a younger audience. Adapting the story ‘Goopy Bagha’, which was written by his grandfather Upendra Kishore Roychowdhury, Ray wrote the screenplay and also composed the songs and music for the film. Working with source material already familiar to audiences, especially in Bengal, *Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne* has become one of Ray's most well-known and successful films in India, but remains one of his least-seen or known films elsewhere in the world. The hall of Nandan II did not draw a packed house filled with children mainly due to a lack of pre-publicity about the festival.

The films of today

Gul Bahar Singh's *Goal* (1999) is about a football match between two rival teams to gain the much venerated challenge trophy, *Goal* is a multi-layered film which has several strands of meaning interwoven into the main script. With Gul Bahar's gift for the subtle and the understated, the super-sized egos of small town sports clubs for whom, the trophy is more important than the game, the film goes on to underscore how winning becomes a metaphor for the adult

ego, rather than a reward for excellence. The snobbery of the rich and the highly born of a small town comes across, when the parents object to the entry of a slum boy into the team on the flimsy ground that his father is a thief.

Ranu (2001) in Bengali is directed by Shyamal Karmakar. *Ranu* is set against the backdrop of a fictitious village in the dry and arid Birbhum district in West Bengal. *Ranu* is a beautiful girl who tops the district at the school final examinations. But her father, Ram Chatterjee, does not send her for higher education because he cannot afford to. The film explores, through a straightforward narrative simply told, how *Ranu* overcomes the handicaps of her birth and her family background to educate herself. Raja Sen's *Damu* (1996) bagged the Best Children's Film Award at the National Awards. It is about the little orphan *Damu* whose sole dream is to ride on the back of an elephant to his adoptive parent Panchanan's house, to fulfill a reckless promise he made to *Runku*, Panchanan's granddaughter. How he realises this impossible dream makes the story of the film.

In the recent past, children as major characters really aimed at adults came across in *Taare Zameen Par*, an incisive comment on ignorance among parents about little-known disabilities their children suffer from. *Taare Zameen Par* was a no-holds barred commercial film designed to tug at the hearts of the audience and rake in the big bucks. But the film introduced the Indian masses to a new term adding to their limited vocabulary of learning disabilities – dyslexia. The nation woke up to Ishaan Asthana's pain that began with the basic ignorance of his parents and teachers about this little-known learning disorder called dyslexia.

I Am Kalam is optimistic, happy and full of cheer. Chhotu is a spirited, cheerful boy, who has a spring in his walk and has the ability to bond equally with Bhatti Mama's female camel Lakshmi, and the French tourist Lucie Aunty, who wants to take him to Delhi and put him in a school. The cheerful smile on Chhotu's face touches the hearts of the audience. The little boy who played *Kalam* walked away with the National Award for Best Child Actor. It was a lesson to adults that children, if left free to make their choices, can bond with other children and the socio-economic background does not matter.

Chillar Party (2011), directed by Nitesh Tiwari and Vikas Behl, takes the same argument a bit further. It is about a batch of boys who are brats in different guises. They unite to teach a lesson to adults about equality between and among children, never mind if one is poor and illiterate, and the other is not. It won the National Award for the Best Children's Film and the batch of boys bagged the Best Child Actor Award in a group! It was hilarious, entertaining and with meaningful messages directed at adults. There is a wonderful scene of a procession by the boys of a housing complex clad in chaddis to protest the giving away of a stray dog owned by their 'friend' *Fatka* to the dog pound, because the dog is considered a menace to the residents and *Fatka* is a very poor boy who cleans their parents' cars! *Sheila Ki Jawani* directed by Zoya Akhtar in Bombay Talkies comes across as a sharp indictment on parents who seek vicarious satisfaction through their children by forcing them to pick things that are against the children's nature and desires. The little boy loves to dance. His dream is to perform *Sheila Ki Jawani*, while his dominating father wants him to excel in team sports.



A still from the film *Chillar Party*

Vishal Bharadwaj's *Blue Umbrella* is yet another film that adds to the bank of recent meaningful and entertaining films for children.

Stanley Ka Dabba was written, directed and produced by Amol Gupte. His son Partha Gupte plays Stanley, the protagonist. It takes one back to one's school days where the daily *dabba* the boys bring from home becomes a focal point in childhood gluttony during tiffin time. Stanley is the only boy who does not bring his *dabba* and is roundly rebuked by the Hindi teacher who himself laps up the children's dabbas. Why does this loveable, friendly and cheerful boy come to school everyday without his *dabba*? There lies the interesting twist in the tale that unveils a positive message.

Amol Gupte's *Hawa Hawai* with his son Partho Gupte playing Arjun, the central character will release any time now. It is a story of the triumph of the human spirit, of friendship and about enjoying the journey of making one's dream come true. Arjun moves to the big city along with his mother and little sister. He discovers a hidden world of in-line skating through coach Lucky, who mentors kids to become skating champions. While Arjun nurtures his dream to learn skating, his four friends get together to make this dream come true. In this endearing story of hope and aspirations, will Arjun's dreams take flight?

Vishal Bharadwaj's *Blue Umbrella* is yet another film that adds to the bank of recent meaningful and entertaining films for children. Based on Ruskin Bond's famous novel of the same name, the film presents the constant conflict between a young girl named Biniya and Khatri, a shopkeeper

over a blue umbrella she got from a Japanese tourist in exchange for her lucky charm; two bear claws necklace. The mesmerising and entertaining storyline gives it the surrealistic aura of a fairy tale. Bharadwaj also made *Makdee*, which unfolds a rather unusual story with twin sisters, Chunni and Munni, who take it upon themselves to wipe out the myth of a witch who, according to the village community, can transform humans to animals. This was his personal agenda to fight the superstition of witchcraft.

Rajan Khosa's *Gattu* is a delightful film. Gattu is a growing boy who is irritated by the way a black kite dominates the skies. He christens the kite Kali, and focusses his entire attention to overtake it in the sky with his own kites. He pretends to be a student of a school which he does not go to, only to occupy the school terrace as a vantage point to cut down Kali to size.

Good children's films, even when they reach the big screen, have a rather short life, because adults are not interested in taking their children to watch these films. They prefer that their kids of the digital age keep hooked to their tabs and mobiles and other technical gizmos, rather than go to a multiplex that would make a generous dent in their pocket expenses. In this rather grim scenario, where blood, sex and violence, loud music and sizzling item songs fill the theatres, a festival of films for children is like that bright rainbow at the end of a dark tunnel.



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

(...continued from page 11)

A child can have either or one and more disability. Here the child has a normal intelligence or average and above average intelligence. CBSE and other boards grant provisions of extra time, a scribe, ignoring spelling errors and others.

This Disability Act mandates states to adhere, and has given them two years to do the same. This intervention will help child mental health in a big way. Lakhs of kids are humiliated across the country for not doing well, by families

and parents not knowing that it is not the child's fault. This causes agony, and most of them get depressed or resort to meaningless violence.

Child mental health is an important issue for the country. This is also linked to maternal health, family wellbeing, and financial nourishment of the community. While we rejoice over fellow Indians' accomplishments, we also tend to romanticise their struggle and the victory over difficult circumstances. While that's fine, it's also our duty to give our children the right environment and infrastructure for wholesome growth. The country has to unite to help children thrive, flourish, and shine.



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Sikkim

A jewel in the Himalayas

There is so much to love about this tiny state nestled in India's Eastern Himalayas. The mountainous landscape, the waterfalls, the stupas with their gongs and Buddhist chants, the blooming rhododendrons, the hot springs, and the magic of prayer wheels, all enchant and bewitch visitors. Catch a glimpse of this little jewel in the Himalayas, where life is lived in peace and tranquility with the elements.

Text & Photos: Usha Hariprasad



Sikkim is a bountiful, magical land

I have been to a number of places in India. But Sikkim is a land that I instantly fell in love with. The landscape, the stupas with their gongs, the faith of the Bhutias and Nepali community – it is easy to slip into being spiritual in this place. There were many firsts I encountered here. The blooming rhododendrons in the month of May, hot springs, snow at Zero Point, high altitude sickness at 17,000 feet, the magic of prayer wheels, the warmth of Angeti. Here are a few glimpses of the state.

A glimpse of Sikkim

Sikkim is a bountiful land. In just 7,096 square km, nature has packed the best of peaks, glaciers and waterfalls. Situated in the Eastern Himalayas, the state shares its borders with China, Nepal and Bhutan. There are mighty peaks like Khangchendzonga, Pandim, Tibetan Plateau to the north and Singalia range to the west. The entry to this state is through south Sikkim. The state with a population of 6.1 lakhs as per 2011 Census, has four districts – North, South, East and West, and nine subdivisions. Ethnic communities like Lepchas, Shimbis, Bhutias and Nepalese populate this place. The Lepchas are believed to be the original inhabitants of this place, who arrived from

a land east of River Teesta. The Bhutias who came to the land around the 17th Century, are basically Tibetans. The Nepalese arrived late, yet today they constitute 70 percent of the population.

The altitude of the place varies drastically from sea-level to as high as 28,208 feet. Thus it supports diverse climate zones like subtropical, humid, semi-temperate, temperate, tundra, etc.

Economy of Sikkim

Sikkim is predominantly an agro-based economy. The harsh terrain does not encourage mining industries or hydroelectric stations. The result – household industries and cottage industries are the major types of industries thriving here. Knitting, carpets, bamboo, basketry, spices, noodles, jams, and fruit preservation are some of the activities that the locals indulge in. The state has a single tea factory – the Temi Tea Estate that serves two varieties of tea – the Orange Pekoe and Orthodox. The processing happens at the plant itself. The site is worth a visit, especially in September, when cherry blossoms dot the estate.

Exploring Sikkim

Sikkim is divided into four districts, North, South, East and West. Gangtok in the East district serves as the ideal base to start the Sikkim exploration. Located at 5,480 feet, it has the ideal climate, great food options, funky bazaars, and friendly locals. Gangtok is well connected by roads to various places too. Buses and taxis are available from Gangtok to Siliguri, Darjeeling, Kalimpong etc.

Visiting Gangtok

There are numerous places to visit in Gangtok. Monasteries, stupa, viewpoints, waterfalls, and exhibitions are some of the common attractions. You can spend a whole day touring these sites or customise for a 3 point, 5 point, 7 or 10 point tour. The point is an indicator of the number of places that you can visit in the given tour. Here are a few attractions worth checking out.

The Rumtek Monastery

The drive to Rumtek that took us almost an hour

from our place of stay at Gangtok, was filled with conversations about Karmapa, the Dalai Lama and the burgeoning faith in the land of Sikkim. Our driver Binay mentioned that Karmapa is very much integral for the success and prosperity of Sikkim. Karmapa is a master or teacher born in the world to propagate Buddha's teaching. They have an interesting lineage of incarnation. The Karmapa lineage believes that Karmapa gets incarnated in the body to carry out activities. So far there have been 16 Karmapas and the 17th Karmapa Ogyen Trinley Dorje is at present in India. He escaped Tibet in 2000, met the Dalai Lama at Dharamsala, and has been residing there. People in Sikkim hope that he returns to Rumtek, and believe that prosperity follows him.

The Rumtek Monastery was built by the 16th Karmapa Rangjung Rigpe Dorje to propagate the teachings of Buddha. However there was a 17th Century monastery existing here earlier that had been built by the 12th Karmapa Lama-Changchub Dorje. When Rangjung Rigpe fled from Tibet and arrived at this place, he saw only ruins of the ancient monastery. Thus he decided to rebuild the place, and with generous help from the Sikkim king and the locals, he rebuilt the place. The monastery was named as Dharma Chakra Centre, and it contains the sacred relics brought from Tsurphu Monastery, Tibet.



The Rumtek Monastery contains sacred relics brought from Tsurphu Monastery, Tibet



The Tsongmo Lake is an oval shaped, glacial lake

The monastery is a traditional structure, and has a golden sculpture on its rooftop holding a lotus, wheel, bell, a vase, and the jewel *ratnasambhava* – all Bodhisattva symbols. The entrance has the four guardians of universe depicted, who are responsible for protecting monasteries all over the world. Trudging inside, the main hall has the statue of Buddha, and 1,000 smaller Buddha statues all over it. There are also texts of translation works of Buddhist scriptures displayed, not to mention the colourful *thangkas* on the walls.

Nearby is the Nalanda Institute and the Golden Stupa. The Nalanda Institute teaches Buddhist doctrines and is affiliated to the Sampurnanand Sanskrit University of U.P, India. Students from all over the world, especially from Nepal and Tibet come to study here. Along with Buddhist philosophy, subjects like Sanskrit and English are also taught here. At the back of this institute lies the Golden Stupa that has relics of the 16th Karmapa. The shrine is pretty, decked up in turquoise and coral. Chants, candles, a picture of Karmapa, create a mystical atmosphere. However, the pack of chips, chocolates and other goodies kept as offerings to the Karmapa makes you aware of the world outside.

The Tibetology Museum

It is called as the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology after the king of Sikkim, Tashi Namgyal, who donated land towards the institute. The institute was established in 1958, and is a center for Buddhist and Tibetan studies. But what makes this place interesting is the museum on the ground floor. Unique statues, palm leaf manuscripts of the 11th Century, a statue from Tibet of Manjushree – who stands for knowledge – beautiful, embroidered *thangkas*... a worthy place to visit if you wish a glimpse into Buddhist and Tibetan faiths and religions.

A couple of minutes' walk from the institute on an uphill road leads you to Do-drul Chorten Stupa. The stupa is huge and as you go nearer you can see prayer wheels, some 108 in number, surrounding the stupa. The stupa was believed to be built by a lama Trulshig Rinpoche in 1946 to ward off evil spirits residing in this area. You can rotate the wheels - the Tibetan prayers inscribed on them are sure to float in wind and bring peace and prosperity to all. As you go around the stupa you can see another stupa – Jhang Chub Chorten, built in the memory of the Rinpoche after his death.



Zero Point is the best place to see snow peaks in the month of May in Sikkim

The Flower Exhibition Centre

Orchids grow wild in this land! No wonder it is the state flower as well. Three hundred varieties of orchids grow in the wild, some in between trees, ferns and mosses. Another 1,200 varieties are grown as well. Sikkim gives a lot of importance to its floriculture. The land of Sikkim, dominated by dense forests, waterfalls, glaciers, has only 10-11 percent available for cultivation. So commercially viable cash crops are given priority.

For a glimpse of these beauties one must head to the Flower Exhibition Centre in Gangtok. In May, apart from orchids there are sunflowers, primulas, bromeliads, ilium, as well.

Temples

Located at 7,200 feet, Hanuman Tok offers splendid views of Kanchenjunga on a clear day. Hanuman Tok is believed to be a brief stopover point of Hanuman, when he went in search of the miracle herb, Sanjeevani, to revive Rama's brother Lakshmana in Ramayana. After he found the herb in the Himalayas and was flying down to Lanka, he stopped for a moment here. As of now the temple is maintained by the army mountain division.

Eight kilometers from Gangtok lies the Tashi viewpoint that offers a panoramic view of the nearby hills and monasteries. Close to the viewpoint lies the temple of Ganesh, known as Ganesh Tok. It is a small temple on a hill.

The Banjhakri Falls

The name of the Falls is derived from the word Banjhakri. 'Ban' means forest or wildness, and 'jhakri' means healer, a Shaman deity who has the power to heal anybody possessed by evil spirits. The 100-feet Fall that is located in two acres of land, shows off the Shaman culture. There are images of *jhakris*, ancestors, and figures of indigenous people of Sikkim – the Lepchas. Gazebos, paved pathways, man-made lakes, foot-bridges and falls create a picturesque landscape, making it an ideal one-hour getaway. The park also utilises renewable sources of energy, and has solar powered lamps and heaters – hence, it is also known as the Energy Park.



The statue of Padmasambhava, the 8th Century Buddhist master



The Teesta River flows through the Yumthung Valley, which reminds one of an English countryside

Day excursions

The Tsongmo Lake

This lake is 40 km from Gangtok on the way to Nathula Pass. As it comes under a restrictive area, permits are required to visit the lake. The lake is situated at an altitude of 12,320 feet. It is an oval shaped, glacial lake, frozen in winters. The colours of the lake change in different seasons. The surrounding peaks are covered with snow during winters, and during summer months, especially during May, the snow gradually melts, adding to the waters of the lake. Flowers like rhododendrons, blue and red poppies sometimes dot the landscape and make a lovely picture. There is a small Shiva temple near the lake as well. It is also a venue for faith healers who assemble here to absorb the healing qualities of the lake.

Joy rides on yaks is allowed here. Yaks survive in harsh terrain and are mighty useful for the locals. The wool of the yak is used to make coats, while its milk is used to make churpi and cheese. The meat is also dried and cooked.

The Baba Harbhajan Shrine

A lot of stories abound about this shrine. Baba Harbhajan was a part of Punjab Regiment of the Indian Army. He died in 1968 from a fall, and it is believed that he appeared in a colleague's dream asking him to construct a

samadhi/monument in his name. It is believed that the Baba protects Indian soldiers fighting in Nathula Pass and in Sino-Indian border encompassing Sikkim and Tibet. It is also believed that the Baba warns them of an impending attack, days before, giving a fair warning to the army. The site is a popular destination with army men.

Nearby is a 12-feet idol of Shiva. The sitting idol is at a height of 3,000 feet, with the Namnang Chho waterfalls behind the idol. However, to get to the idol, a 10-minute trek uphill is required.

Lachung and Lachen – North Sikkim

Lachen is the base to check out Gurudongmar Lake. At 17,800 feet, it is one of the highest lakes in the world. Lachen is located at 8,838 feet, and is 121 km from Gangtok. It is a six to seven hour journey cutting across Mangan, Chungthang, to reach Lachen. Chungthang is the point where the two streams Lachen Chuu and Lachung Chuu meet. A left from Chungthang takes you to Lachen, and a right, towards Lachung.

Lachen is remote and is a complete surprise. There are not more than 200 houses here. The homes are bare, simple Bhutia styled homes in some cases, with basic amenities. But they are warm. It can get very cold here even in May. So thermals, woollens, play a very important role here.



Lachen Village is remotely located, and has Bhutia-style houses

The Gurudongmar Lake

To get to Gurudongmar Lake one has to start early from Lachen, as early as 4 am. En-route, Thangu is the point recommended for breakfast, and the breakfast served is generally Maggi with hot drinks. Our driver Krishna mentioned that the Lepchas move out from Lachen and shift to Thangu during winter.

After Thangu it is a four kilometre drive to the lake. The landscape is astonishing after this. There is barely any vegetation here, the mountains are bare, and you can see the distant snow gleaming. It is an alpine desert, and as you move up, you can see the gleaming glacial lake of Gurudongmar. It is special, and why wouldn't it be? This lake has been blessed by Guru Rinpoche, and is considered very sacred by the Sikkimese. The Lepchas especially gather around this lake annually. The Lake Tso Lhamo, some five kilometres away from Gurudongmar, is one of the sources of River Teesta as well. And requires special permission to trek.

The Chopta Valley

Another interesting place to visit is the Chopta Valley, i.e., two kilometres from Thangu. The vast valley is filled with flowers in spring, and during winters it is full of snow.

Lachung

Lachung is 22 kms from Chungthang. Lachung means small pass, and is located at 8,610 feet. It serves as a base point to reach Yumthung and Zero Point. It is a beautiful place, less remote, and more commercialised than Lachen.

Yumthung

Yumthung Valley is 25 kms from Lachung, located at a higher altitude of 11,800 feet. The valley is beautiful with River Teesta at her best, flowing through the mountain peaks. The surrounding green landscape, the distant yaks grazing, remind you of a remote English countryside. Yumthung is famous for its hot springs full of sulphur, and is considered medicinal. Also it is popular for rhododendrons. The valley in April-May is full of rhododendrons in various colours such as purple, blue, red and pink.

The Shingba Rhododendron Sanctuary spread over 43 sq kms is full of blooms, especially between March to May. Located eight kilometres from Lachung, the area flowers with different varieties of rhododendrons like Barbatum, Wightii, Glaucophyllum, Lepidotum etc.



The Gurudongmar Lake is said to have been blessed by Guru Rinpoche, hence, very sacred

The Zero Point

One of the attractions of Sikkim is that it has snow peaks in the month of May as well. The best place to see this is at Zero Point, 23 kms from Yumthung, at an altitude of 15,000 feet. The peaks are full of snow, the icy cold stream running here are a welcome sight. The vegetation, however, is bare, and some distance away is the border across China.

Namchi – South Sikkim

The South district headquarters is Namchi. Namchi has many religious institutions.

Samdruptse Monastery

This monastery is dedicated to Guru Padmasambhava – an 8th Century Buddhist master. It has the statue of Guru Padmasambhava atop a hill, 135 feet high. There is a path to circumambulate the statue. There is a prayer hall too at the monastery with the statue of the Guru.

Chardham

The Chardham as the name suggests, houses the four *dhams* - Rameshwara, Badrinath, Jaganath and Dwarka. It has the imposing statue of Shiva along with 12 *vyotirlingas*. On a clear day, the gigantic statue of Shiva and the Guru Padmasambhava on the opposite hill can be seen clearly. Thirty kilometers from Namchi is Ravangla. It has a lovely 23-acre Buddha Park, having one of the tallest statues of Buddha, and is a place worth visiting.

Getting To Sikkim

Gangtok is around 123 kms from Bagdogra, West Bengal. Bagdogra is well connected by flights from cities like Delhi, Kolkata etc. From Bagdogra, you can hire a shared taxi or a

private one to get to Gangtok. Helicopter rides are also available from Bagdogra to Gangtok, and it takes a mere 30 minutes to reach the town. If you opt for the train then New Jalpaiguri is the nearest point. From here, either board a taxi or take the public transport to Gangtok from Siliguri. Siliguri is just eight kilometres from New Jalpaiguri.



Namchi Chardham, is a favourite of pilgrims



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.

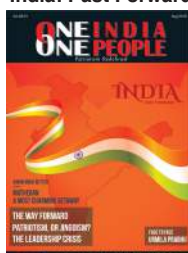
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“The survivors of the 1984 Sikh massacre were resettled and given monetary compensation, but the culprits were not punished. There have been no efforts made to reintegrate the displaced families into mainstream society.”

Teena Kaur Pasricha is an independent director and screenwriter, who has a wide range of experience in documentary film making, ranging from social justice to environment conservation. Her film ‘1984, When the Sun didn’t Rise’ won the President’s national award in 2018, for ‘Best Investigative Film’. In conversation with **A. Radhakrishnan.**



What according to you are the essentials and backbone of a good documentary?

Documentary is a more realistic art form of storytelling which may or may not be as dramatic as a fictional form of storytelling. A gripping documentary would condense the drama differently from real life, and would have a beginning, middle and end, just like its fictional counterpart.

How did you get into documentary making?

As a youngster, watching a documentary on mining which encapsulated how mining affects the lives of workers as well as the children who are growing up in the nearby areas, before a feature film in a cinema hall in my home town Ajmer, left me so moved that those memories remained alive in me. I wanted to do something on those lines when growing up.

What made you make this documentary ‘When the Sun didn’t Rise’?

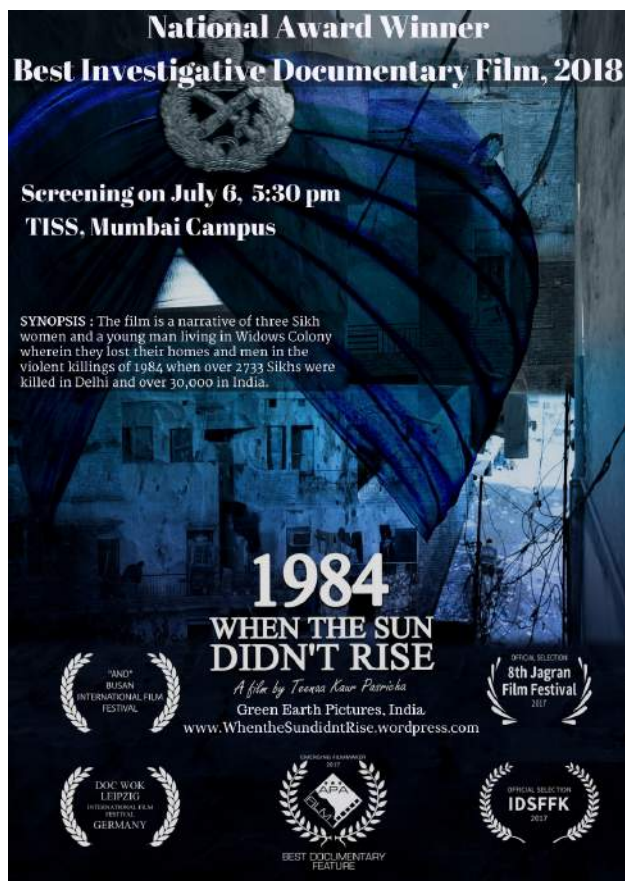
I was researching the 1984 pogrom where thousands of Sikhs were massacred in violent attacks by frenzied crowds in Delhi, Kanpur, Jamshedpur, Haryana and many other

parts of India, after the death of Indira Gandhi. Growing up, I had heard these stories from my mother, and as a child, I was confused, as I never saw anything written about such violence in our history books. My own uncle had suffered in the massacre. Later on in life, I revisited the events of 1984, and realised the insurmountable challenges faced by the women who had survived. I asked myself, how must have those women managed to make a living without being educated? How would they have dealt with their memories and continued to live after suffering so much? What must life be like for them now?

Thinking about the courage of these women gave me hope in my life, and also the impetus to investigate the aftermath of the violence. I knew these stories needed to be told, but little did I know that the journey ahead was going to be full of obstacles.

What are the sentiments behind working on this story?

I have had a difficult personal life when I started looking within to search for life’s purpose. I knew I wanted to do work that was meaningful, to do something to help others, to help the community so that I feel fulfilled on an individual, spiritual level.



What was the feedback after it was shown at the 2018 MIFF (Mumbai International Film Festival)?

People were moved to tears after watching the film at MIFF and in fact in most of the screenings, this was the case. But screening in a festival as big as MIFF and in one's town, is a very warm feeling altogether. Many people shared their experiences of 1984 of Sikh friends that they knew of. It is heart wrenching to hear these stories.

Was getting the national award expected? Do awards mean much to you?

I was both happy and surprised to receive the President's national award for 'Best Investigative Film' for 1984, *When the Sun didn't Rise*. It is definitely a great honour, but more important, it is a recognition for a subject and a community that has been denied justice. The survivors of the 1984 Sikh massacre were resettled and given monetary compensation, but the culprits were not punished. There have been no efforts made to reintegrate the displaced families into mainstream society. Their traumas have not been dealt with. As a part of this society, recognition definitely means a lot to me especially because I work on only those subjects that I am convinced about.

Would you abandon scripted commentary to explain what's going on?

Yes, I tried doing that in my earlier cuts, but then the history

of the subject is layered and without a VO (voiceover), it was not getting conveyed. With a personal VO, it became more powerful, and the context was conveyed as well.

Which are the other documentaries you have directed?

I believe in giving voices to the voiceless, whether it is plants, trees, endangered birds and animals or women and minorities. *The Deer, Tree and Me*, produced by Films Division, is the story of a chinkara and a man who fights the hunters to save them. The film has received critical acclaim, honour and media mention.

The Woods are Calling, produced by PSBT, is about an endangered bird called Blyth's Tragopan, and how a community of hunters in Nagaland have conserved the Tragopan and their forest. *In Symphony with Earth*, produced by Siddhartha Kak Productions, is a documentary based on the communities in India growing natural fibre and living a sustainable life in tune with nature. It was broadcast on National Geographic and Fox History.

How do you face good and bad criticism of your films?

I take criticism in my stride right from the time my film is in the making, as I know there are few things that I need to work on, due to my proximity to the subject. But once the film is complete, then I think it makes little difference what people say. I try and see things objectively and take a long time to make a film.

How much of publicity do you have to do for your films?

Documentary films are essentially self publicised. *1984, When the Sun didn't Rise* did some one and half years of festival rounds, screening and got what you may call publicity.

When you take up a controversial subject are you apprehensive about how it will be received or the reaction?

I am never afraid of tackling controversial subjects in documentary films. But when it comes to feature films, apprehensions do come up, since there are monies riding on the film.

What's harder? Getting started, or being able to keep going?

Maybe being able to keep going is tougher.

When inspiration is waning, when you feel creatively sapped, what do you do? How do you stay fresh?

I like meeting friends and talking my heart out. Nature heals me and I draw a lot of my strength from it. I also love reading literature.

Do you believe in taking risks to grow?

Yes, risk is essential in life especially when converting any story into a film.

Has it been easy to get finance?

In my case, I wanted to tell the story and didn't really wait for a big breakthrough to happen. But of course, little by little, efforts got reaped, when people showed interest in the project. I did everything like crowd funding, working with NGOs, etc., to start filming. Later on of course, I was honoured to get a post-production grant from BUSAN Film Festival.

Do you accept that filmmaking is as much about your ideas and skill as a storyteller, as it is about managing your resources and business?

Yes, of course. Art, commerce and science of filmmaking goes hand in hand. If one scale tips, the balance would be disturbed.

What is the one mistake most filmmakers make, regardless of experience?

I can't really say for others. But in the case of feature films, I have observed many promising directors fizzle out after their first film and give in to the demands of meaningless song and dance.

As a filmmaker, you live in the art of observation. Do you, through your films attempt to change behaviour?

I believe in telling stories that bring about social change in society. It is not that a revolution will start overnight after one film is watched, but certainly there is a collective consciousness that awakens, and I attempt to do so. I am grateful to the Universe for bringing me closer to such stories.

Why do you think there are so few women in filmmaking?

I think now there are many women filmmakers, making their mark in the industry. There are equal opportunities for men and women I think, it's the story that is the ultimate winner. But yes, the mindset of parents and family members have to change to let daughters choose their careers, and not blackmail them into marriage using age or childbirth deadline as a criteria to get settled. And girls also need to strongly believe in themselves and pursue their own life path.

How do you know when your story's finished, when to walk away?

There is an instinct that guides me. And of course there is a story arc that closes the story.

Jealousy, anger, love, hate, grief are the fundamentals of any story. Do you think there is a lack of original stories in the world? How do you think one can stay fresh in the face of an idea like that?

There are many beautiful movies around the world, but of course access to all is difficult as many sensible films may not get distribution or a pan-India release like many other mainstream films, which are full of dance and drama. But with the digital space opening up, I am more hopeful for good cinema, even if it is for the niche audience.

Will you venture into commercial films?

I am already working on a feature film script. The narrative takes a middle path and that's what I believe in, inspired by Buddha.

Your message to young budding documentary makers?

Stories come only by living life fully and accepting each challenge that comes with it. Playing each role efficiently brings one closer to the story that one wants to say to the world. Reading and writing are crucial.

The form of documentary films can be layered and complex, but it is again in the hands of the maker. It's like a blank canvas, and one can paint any colour one wants on it.

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A. Radhakrishnan is a Pune based freelance writer, who indulges in poetry and short story writing.



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A coalition like no other

A coalition government is a double-edged sword, and has been used by the Congress Party in India for years to cobble together even the most unlikely alliance, says Prof. P.M. Kamath. What does year 2019 have in store for us?

It can be said that the United Front (UF) strategy originated in the states after the Congress lost working majority in many states after the 1967 elections. A report of the Ministry of Home Affairs on the Political Defections in 1968, spoke of 'Aaya Rams' and 'Gaya Rams' who formed UF governments in some of the states where the Congressmen defected to opposition-led UF governments or UF governments were formed by the Congress by inviting opposition leaders to join and support them!

In a parliamentary system, the government can deliver good governance if the government is led by a single political party. Next best is, whenever no party has a working majority, a coalition government of a few like-minded political parties, with one dominant party providing requisite leadership. But the UF was not a coalition, as it was neither a group of likeminded parties, nor led by a dominant party. It has been always led by a minority party or parties, with external support of the Congress. The Congress Party has used the UF as a strategy to encourage its detractors to form the government, knowing fully well that the political climate is not in its favour to form the government by itself, and permit its opponents to form the government with its support. However, it has withdrawn its support on flimsy reasons when its supreme leader considered time is ripe to hold fresh elections to come back to power!

Strategy in practice

The first ever experiment of UF government at the national level, was that of Charan Singh breaking from the Janata government — the first-ever non-Congress government at the national level, led by the then Prime Minister (PM), Morarji Desai — with his 76 supporters, to form a



The Congress has often cobbled together a 'gatbandhan'

government with the external support from the discredited and defeated Congress Party in the post-Emergency period in 1979. Charan Singh was only interested in dislodging Desai and becoming the PM with the Congress support — to go down in the history books as a PM of India. He had to resign without even facing the Lok Sabha. Since then this has been the Congress strategy to extend unconditional support to any non-Congress-led UF or its variants like National Front (NF) or Federal Front (FF) governments, and withdraw support whenever the party thinks time is ripe for an election for it to come back into power.

The next opportunity for the Congress to promote and kill the NF experiment came when Rajiv Gandhi was at the helm of the party in 1989-1991. How a leader installed by popular support can be thrown out with equal ease was provided in this phase. Post-Mrs. Gandhi assassination in 1984, the Congress won under Rajiv, 414 seats, which even Jawaharlal Nehru could not win during his prime days. But in 1989, the Congress under Rajiv won only 193 seats, without a working majority. Since popular mood was one of anti-Congress, his friend turned political foe V. P. Singh's Janata Dal (JD)

with 143 members, formed a minority NF government, with the BJP support on the right and Marxists on the left! The government fell because of the ambition of socialistic Chandra Shekhar to become the PM! Rajiv was generous in extending support to Chandra Shekhar, only to withdraw, triggering the general election in 1991.

On the other hand, Narasimha Rao was able to run a Congress government — where he was able to turn a minority government to a majority government, by 'purchasing' MPs through monetary inducements and promotion of splits and mergers. But post-Rao era again saw frequent elections, UF formations, and musical chair sessions to occupy the PM's chair between Deve Gowda and I.K. Gujral! These two accidental PMs were also shown the door within a period of about ten months rule by each, by the manipulative actions of the Congress Party from outside. It is the failure of all UF governments in the 1990s based on anti-Congress-ism initially and anti-BJP-ism later that led the BJP under Atal Behari Vajpayee to experiment with a genuine coalition government when the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) was formed in 1998, wherein the BJP was the largest lead party,

with others providing support in small numbers. That was also repeated by the Congress when it formed United Progressive Alliance with itself as the lead party, and was able to remain in power for ten years (2004 to 2014).

Re-emergence of UF

In the beginning, anti-Congress-ism was slow to emerge. But in the late 1990s, the Congress was in the lead in promoting anti-BJP-ism instead of accepting the need for an alternative party to rule in a democracy. However, NDA's getting into power under Narendra Modi in 2014 has accelerated the process of creating a UF against the BJP for 2019.

The immediate causes for the same can be identified. First, the BJP under Modi had to face a few defeats despite Modi leaving no stone unturned to win in Bihar in 2015, with a short divorce between BJP and JD (U). He had to face the opposition led 'gatbandhan' (a new name in Hindi heartland) for the UF! Gatbandhan won hands-down. Second, there were similar losses inflicted on the Modi-led BJP in three Lok Sabha constituencies – Gorakhpur and Phulpur in the UP, and it could not wrest Araria Lok Sabha seat from the RJD despite the renewal of the BJP-JDU alliance. This has strengthened the NDA's vulnerability in the opponents' calculations.

Third, the BJP top leadership led by PM and Party President Amit Shah suffered a stunning defeat in the Karnataka state elections in May 2018; a defeat magnified in my opinion because the leadership made haste to get into power, despite the lack of a clear majority. While the Governor was constitutionally right in giving the opportunity to the BJP as the largest single party, asking it to demonstrate its majority in 15 days was seen as a magnanimous gesture. But the Supreme Court stepped in as the ultimate

decider of who is the winner in a court drama initiated by the Congress. Is it right, in a democracy?

All those who spoke of a revival of the discredited UF, are not clear: Who will be the leader to face Narendra Modi? A reluctant leader of the party — Rahul Gandhi has offered himself as the leader, if the Congress emerges as the largest party.

Be that as it may, the success of the Congress, as the second largest party to join hands with JD (S) as a junior partner, in post-election period is not a legitimate alliance in democratic practice, as their campaign in Karnataka, was far more vicious against each other, than against the BJP. Chief Minister Kumaraswamy has called it a coalition. In coalition he may have tensions, but not tears! It is a state level revival of the last century's discredited UF, in pursuit of anti-BJP-ism, which might not last beyond a few months!

Conclusion

After the government formation in the state, all hitherto rivals and bitter critics of each other, like the SP and the BSP in the UP, or the CPI (M) and TMC in the West Bengal and other CMS and leaders critical of the BJP were present at the Kumaras-

wamy swearing-in. Since then, almost everyone who was there, has spoken of repeating the Karnataka model of UF at the national level, to keep the BJP out of power next year.

But will they be able to do so? I do not think so; they have shown their inability to get elected opposition candidate recently as the Deputy Chairman of the Rajya Sabha. If the motley group under Congress leadership can't secure enough support to get its candidate B.K. Hariprasad as the Deputy Chairman, will they be able to get the leader of the coalition elected in 2019? That is their main problem. All those who spoke of a revival of the discredited UF, are not clear: Who will be the leader to face Narendra Modi? A reluctant leader of the party — Rahul Gandhi has offered himself as the leader, if the Congress emerges as the largest party.

The idea is coined purely on negative unity of aiming to keep the BJP out, without seriously understanding internal contradictions. Thus, Mayavati said that her party will enter into alliance only if it was given a respectable number of seats; otherwise it will go alone! But others had different ideas: Bihar's leader, Tejashwi Yadav said Congress Party had PM's post for many years; now they should offer it to others!

Then, women's right advocates put forward names of Mamata and Mayavati! Then the Congress Party came with numerical solution; the leader of the party getting largest number of seats in the Lok Sabha in 2019 General Elections will win the lottery. Will it be a repeat of 1996 when Deve Gowda with 17 MPs – then largest, became the PM? Now parties and factions forming the UF is larger than in 1997; it is likely to be an annual musical chair for selecting the PM! Does the nation want to live through such a scenario, once again?



Dr. P. M. Kamath, formerly Professor of Politics in Department of Civics & Politics, University of Mumbai, currently, Hon. Director, VPM's Centre for International Studies (Regd), and Adjunct Professor, Department of Geopolitics and International Relations, Manipal University, Manipal. His most recent edited book is, India-China Relations: An Agenda for Asian Century (New Delhi: Gyan Publishers, 2011)

Morality comes in different shades

The Indian society has been faced with increasing moral dilemmas in the last few years, especially to do with religion, caste, and the choices that are made by individuals, and the state. What is right, and what is wrong? Is it all black and white, or are there shades of grey? Nikhil Katara introspects.

Morality is complex. The moral choices that one makes cannot be easily divided into right and wrong, because right and wrong, good and bad, and correct and incorrect ideas are choices that human beings make, depending on the circumstances they are in. The discussion on what is the right choice is an ancient one. Myths, logic, and a lot of thought have gone into making a discourse on the right moral choice. Where do we stand now? Where is India in this framework? What are the moral choices that are in front of our country, in this day and age?

The philosophical take on morality

The morality question is raised right from religious doctrines like the Gita, to philosophical texts like the critique of practical reason, and even though centuries separate these thoughts, some of them coincidentally are similar. If one looks to the Greeks and particularly to Plato's dialogues, a general overview might suggest that 'Happiness' or well-being (Eudaimonia) is the highest aim of moral conduct, and virtues (aretê) are the necessary skills to attain them. Aristotle, like Plato, regarded ethical virtues like justice, courage, as complex rational, emotional and social skills. But differs from Plato, in what Plato suggests that to be completely virtuous one needs a training in sciences, mathematics and philosophy. According to Aristotle, 'What we need, in order to live well, is a proper appreciation of the way in which such goods as friendship, pleasure, virtue, honor and wealth fit together as a whole.'

If one travels in time and

through countries, one might reach Germany in their quest to make the right moral choice. Philosopher Immanuel Kant, in his *Critique of practical reason* and *The groundwork of metaphysics of morals*, discussed moral choices at length and had a

The morality question is raised right from religious doctrines like the Gita, to philosophical texts like the critique of practical reason, and even though centuries separate these thoughts, some of them coincidentally are similar.

more reason centric deduction in his analysis. In his work, he put forth the 'categorical imperative', which is the central philosophical concept attuning to the morality principle. He states in three formulations what he means by categorical imperative.

In the first formulation he states: 'Act only according to that maxim whereby you can, at the same time, will that it should become a universal law'.

In what is an interesting analysis, many theorists have posited a similarity between Kant's postulations and the Bhagavad Gita. In the Gita, Krishna quotes, 'He who performs a duty as a thing that ought to be done, renouncing all attachment and also the fruit – his relinquishment is regarded as one of 'goodness'.' In a similar vein, Kant posits in the first proposition of morality, that to have genuine moral worth, an action must be done from duty. So for both, a duty is to be performed for duty's sake, no other emotions, feelings or outcomes should be in consideration while performing one's duty. While the two can be thought to be similar, but the source of where one understands one's duties are different when comparing the Gita and Kant's seminal work. For Kant duty stems from reason and is autonomous, but in the Gita, duty is in relation to the *varna* one is born in, for example the kshatriya is born to fight in war and govern in peace. While there is some argument that the Gita refers to these duties as they stem from one's own self (Gauchhwal, 1964, moral religion of Kant and karmayoga of the Gita), some theorists like Keya Mitra (In her paper comparing Bhagvad Gita and Kant, *A lesson in comparative philosophy*) posit that if we unpack the idea of autonomy in Kant, it cannot be applied in the same sense to the Gita.

The moral dilemma

Another aspect when one considers morality and the question of right and wrong, one has to consider 'moral dilemmas'. A moral dilemma is a conflict in which you have to choose between two or more actions and have moral reasons for choosing each



The Bhagvad Geeta raises many moral questions

action. The entire discussion of morality and the right thing to do leads to a final discussion of moral dilemmas, which is a point of choice. As we know, morality is an ethical position, and is a matter of choice. Most moral choices that people make have immediate and long term consequences, and that is where morality becomes complex. A soldier who has to make a choice, as to whether he has to go to war to save the country to be invaded, or to stay back and save his bed ridden mother, who has no one to take care of her, is a complex dilemma. Each choice has an immediate and definitive consequence when compared to the other. Which one should the soldier choose? Is there a right choice? What categorises as his duty? Is it reasonable and universal, and undeniably autonomous?

India today is in the middle of many moral choices, the most complex one is the question of devel-

opment. The commitment to create new infrastructure, new technologies, new ways to subsist economy, and to feed the needs of one of the most populous countries in the world is a monumental task, the morally right development plan for such a large population is a dilemma itself, especially when the definition of development is so fluid. The meaning of development for the adivasi population is markedly different compared to the urban metropolises like Mumbai, Delhi or Chennai. The question of equality is also a dilemma, especially in state as diverse as India. The varna system does divide and casteism has been a part of the Indian ways for eternity. Every other day, one reads about violent episodes associated with caste. In a country with many languages, Gods, and ideologies, the judiciary faces a dilemma to bring about equality. According to Kant, each member of the state is equal in front of the law, that is he or she has

the right to invoke the power of the state to enforce the laws on one's behalf, and this is compatible to the inequality of the members of the state in income, physical power, and possessions. But if the inequality of income and other parameters infringes into the space of one's ability to invoke the laws on one's behalf, then how does one exercise one's right? The state and its complex machinery of law have to answer this question. The right to execute one's power to be treated equally is an important tenet in the machinery of the state.

The morality discourse is a very complex one, but is a very important one. In a country which has millions of people, who are in the midst of making moral choices and decisions that affect the lives of others and of themselves, one should consider a bit of contemplation on what is right; and what is right, is not necessarily what is good.



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

Tackling sea waste

A fishing community in Kollam, Kerala, is showing the way in managing plastic waste they regularly haul in from the sea, says Rashmi Oberoi.

Unknown to most, a fishing town on the southwest tip of India is showing what a community can achieve when it decides to face an existing environmental threat and turn it into a solution, using ocean plastics to empower women, and literally build roads to a better future. The town of Kollam, in the southern most Indian state of Kerala has been in the news for all the right reasons.

An inspiring story

Fishermen here, along the Neendakara harbour in Kollam, have been harvesting fish and shrimp for decades, but with time, pollution in the form of plastic has become a humongous problem. The fishermen end up pulling out more plastic than fish in their nets, and spend a tedious amount of time just separating the filth, from their catch. The nets get tangled with copious amounts of plastic that gets swept into the sea.

With no recycling facilities available, and no proper methods of waste collection, the fishermen spent years just complaining, and throwing the plastic back into the water. Then Peter Mathias, a leader of a union for fishing boat owners in the region, decided to do something about it. He realised a 'clean sea' was the way ahead, and a necessity for the community's survival. In the summer of 2017, he asked state minister of fisheries J. Mercykutty Amma if she could set up a way to recycle the plastic that the fisherman hauled in. Since Kerala is a state that consumes

a lot of fish, the increase in the amount of plastic in the ocean, would soon have plastic slowly seep into the human food chain. Finally, 'Suchitwa Sagaram' (Clean Sea) Mission was flagged off and the department of civil engineers agreed to build a recycling plant. Female workers were offered a chance to run the plant, empowering them to earn money in an economic landscape where most jobs, like fishing, are seen as a male bastion.

Now, thousands of fishermen collect all the plastic caught in their nets and, instead of tossing it back, bring it to shore to be recycled. Since August 2017, they have collected 65 metric tons. Thirty women then work to clean and sort the plastic. Since much of it is too degraded to be traditionally recycled, it is shredded and sold to road crews to strengthen their asphalt. The programme has already had a positive impact. The fishermen said they have noticed a decline in the amount of plastic in their nets. And the programme is spreading around the region. The organisers have helped other fishing communities raise funds to build their own recycling plants, including a clam diving community who had tried to collect plastic previously only to give up when they had no way to dispose of it. There is an urgent need and an effort to raise awareness about the global plastic waste crisis. Since a large part of India is surrounded by water, the people living in these areas depend on the ocean for their livelihood. Not only do these people revere the oceans, they also depend on it for their survival. Unfortunately,

the ocean is filled with plastic. In 2010, there were an estimated eight million tonnes of plastic in the oceans across the world. This is a growing concern as it poses a serious threat to marine lives. Pictures of sea creatures stranded in plastic are surfacing on a daily basis. Kerala's coastline stretches to nearly 600 km, and the state is one of India's top fish producers; over a million households are entirely dependent on the fishing industry. However, due to the rampant marine pollution, not only is the aquatic ecosystem under serious threat, the impact will eventually trickle down to the plate as well! The successfully implemented project in Kollam will now be extended to Kochi. Other state governments need to take notice of this initiative, get inspired, and adopt such plans.

It is high time that we realised that water bodies are not meant for waste dumping. This Indian programme is being talked about the world over, and has also been featured in the National Geographic. The fact it has such great potential is because it is the stakeholders, the fishing community, who have taken the initiative. The most effective environmental initiatives are often community-led and intrinsically motivated by altruism, and a love for nature and wildlife. Literacy also plays a key role in mobilising effective solutions to problems like this. Such a revolution is powerful as the local fishermen are bringing about this change with the help of women in their villages, who are also in the best position to communicate to and convince the rest of the community.



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.

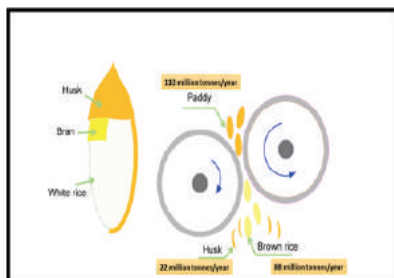
Soil to soil

Converting rice husk to biochar and returning it to the soil will provide a wide range of benefits for the environment, as a research project in Vietnam, the fifth largest rice producer in the world, shows. Can India adopt this too? A report by G. Venkatesh and Ali Mohammadi.

Rice. The staple food of millions in the world. A crop of which India is the second largest producer. Rice also fetches India useful foreign exchange as it has demand in foreign markets. It sustains the livelihoods of numerous farmers and their families in several Indian states. Currently, well over 110 million tonnes of rice paddy are cultivated in India annually, over 20% of global production of this cereal. The states of West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and Punjab account for nearly 40% of the cultivation. Now, if there is edible rice crop from the fields, there will be some organic inedible wastes as well – rice husk, in other words. As a percentage of the total production of rice crop (including the husk that is), husk accounts for around 20%. So, if one has 110 million tonnes of harvested crop, 22 million tonnes of rice husk will have to be dealt with

Dealing with the husk

As gathered from articles, rice husk is used for a plethora of applications in India. Cattle feeding, partition-board manufacturing, as fuel in brick kilns and furnaces, in rice mills themselves for the parboiling process (again as a source of heat energy), as a raw material for the production of chemicals like xylitol, furfural, ethanol, acetic acid and lignosulphonic acids, as a cleaning or polishing agent in the metalworking sector, and also in the manufacture of building materials. Husk is often also landfilled or just burnt in open piles (the latter being the most common mode of handling rice husk in Vietnam, the country in which the project referred to in the introduction, was carried out). Landfilling organic waste is simply not advisable. Just burning it and releasing carbon dioxide (and perhaps other gases



The 'ins and outs' of rice

which are noxious to living creatures), again, is simply an irresponsible attitude towards handling wastes which can and must be looked upon as resources – increasingly so in the 21st Century, when depletion of several resources is staring us all in the face. Looking upon cattle as scavengers and feeding them the rice husk may well be a 'sin', as not only does husk have low nutrition value, but being fibrous, it may also be harmful to the cattle. You may say, well, not as bad as the waste plastics which cattle eat and choke to death often...maybe, but yet, it simply is not right on man's part to subject cattle to risks.

Using husk as a source of energy whereby most of the solid mass is converted to gaseous form, and about 20% of the mass is converted to ash which can find use as a concrete additive, a turn-dish powder for steel-casting because of its insulating properties, in the manufacture of refractory bricks, in industrial wastewater treatment as an adsorbent of oil, acids, mercury etc., in vulcanising rubber as a substitute for silica, and also in gas cleaning equipment to adsorb sulphur dioxide in coal power plants for example. Very well, as husk then is a source of bio-energy – clean and green. At 13.33 GJ/tonne, if combusted in a boiler, and then sent through a turbine to generate electricity at an efficiency of say 30%, the 22



The traditional 3S-cookstove, and the biochar cook-stove

million tonnes of rice husk, can theoretically provide an electricity output of 25 TWh per year. This would be about 2% of the total electricity generated in India, on date. If this would result in a reduction of coal power production equal to 25 TWh per year, then well, one can claim to have cut back greenhouse gas emissions, a wee bit. But, of that, one cannot really be sure!

Back to soil option

That brings us to the 'back-to-the-soil' option via the production of bio-char, which has been demonstrated in the said project recently. Biochar is a carbon-rich material which is commonly produced by low-temperature (300-600 °C) pyrolysis of uncontaminated biomass sources such as wood, crop residues, livestock manure or other organic wastes in an oxygen-limited environment. It has a high percentage of stable carbon, stable carbon, which resists decay, and remains in soil for long periods of time. Research shows that biochar can also improve soil functions, reduce the need for fertiliser and water, and increase crop productivity. However, the agronomic benefits of biochar application vary with the type of soil and biomass feedstock, climate, crop species, farmland management and pyrolysis conditions (temperature, residence time and heating rate).

Biochar can be produced at different scales – from small household cook-stoves to large modern pyrolysis facilities, which can also recover energy in addition to solid biochar. Using pyrolytic cook-stoves will enable small-scale (i.e., household) pyrolysis of biomass to produce biochar, in addition to heat energy for cooking. These improved cook-stoves will also contribute to the reduction of indoor air pollution by displacing the traditional three-stone (referred to as '3S') cook-stoves (see Figure 2). Biochar cook-stoves will also decrease the time spent by families, in gathering fuel, while improving fuel efficiency by widening the variety of feedstock which could be used. Use of liquefied petroleum gas can be decreased (thereby contributing to a truncation of the greenhouse-gas-footprint) and deforestation can also be controlled to a significant extent. From a social sustainability point of view, results from the research conducted in Vietnam show that a reduction of cooking time by 25% enables mothers and womenfolk of households to spend more time with family members or with the rural community in general, and on educational or other income-generating activities.

The mechanisms through which biochar amendment affects methane (CH₄) emissions in rice-cropping systems have been investigated in some studies. Biochar amendment is likely to make soil conditions unfavourable for methanogenic bacteria (methane-producing microbes, which are active in oxygen-starved soils) due to improved aeration. Enhancing soil aeration may also increase the degree of oxidation of methane which may still be produced in some quantities.



Rice husk biochar produced in Vietnam by Pacific Biochar Company.

The carbon dioxide which is emitted after methane is oxidised is considered as biogenic, and thereby not contributing to global warming, unlike methane gas. Recent studies also show that biochar can enhance the composting process by improving aeration, retaining nutrients in the soil (nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, etc.) and improving the quality of the end-product. A significant reduction in N losses has been achieved by mixing biochar and poultry litter compost in a 1:4 ratio; indicating that biochar can be a suitable amendment for the composting of N-rich waste materials.

On the other hand, the high rates of application of biochar – 10 tons or more per hectare – can increase expenditure. The development of enriched biochar, having higher mineral content, and co-composting of biochar with organic residues can overcome this economic constraint. Research studies in Vietnam have shown that biochar can be beneficial at lower rates if treated with minerals or mixed with composted manure and applied to soil as biochar-compost amendment.

The adoption of biochar technologies entails the addressing of the social and economic context, in addition to the environmental and

health aspects. At a farm level, the economic benefits are the most important attributes impelling producers towards the adoption of this new technology. In a related research, the total cost for biochar production in the research area (North Vietnam) was estimated at US\$ 118 per ton (equivalent to about US\$ 29.5 per ton of rice residue feedstock processed). Using crop residues rather than forestry residues for biochar production is a more likely approach to reduce biochar costs as much as practically possible for smallholder farmers to gain an overall benefit from the investment in producing and using biochar. The findings of the economic analysis indicate that biochar addition can improve the net present value of rice production, vis-à-vis producing rice with the current residue management practice adopted in Vietnam – open-burning in the fields.

New and promising

Based on the research studies that recently have been done in Vietnam, in comparison with open burning of residues, producing biochar from rice residues (Figure 3) ensures controlled and cleaner combustion, generation of renewable energy (heat energy which can be recovered from the off-gases and bio-oil), reduction in net greenhouse gas emissions, decrease in synthetic fertiliser consumption, and enhanced crop productivity. The last two benefits indicate agronomic benefits for the farmers. It is worth introducing this technology in India, if it is not already being practised. (The second author would be keen on interacting with scientists and entrepreneurs in India, who may find this of interest.)



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Raja Ravi Varma

Artist par excellence (1848-1906)

Raja Ravi Varma's paintings cannot be forgotten. Be it the gracious Saraswati, mesmerising Shakuntala, beautiful Sita - his paintings adorned prayer and living rooms of the common man and royalty alike. With the coming of Varma's lithographs, it became accessible to all, thus gracing shops and other commercial establishments as photo frames and calendars. Recently, one of his paintings 'Damayanti' was sold for ₹11 crore, and even today his artworks are priced in millions. Yet, for such a prolific painter, his artistic journey was fraught with troubles.

Born in 1848 in Killimanoor in Travancore, he was the son of a well-known Namboodri Brahmin, Ezhumavil Neelakanthan Bhattatiripad. He and his siblings – Goda Varma, Raja Raja Varma, and Mangala Bayi, were tutored in a wide array of subjects from Sanskrit, astrology, to drawing and music. In fact, the knowledge of Sanskrit literature was of great help to Ravi Varma in painting Puranic scenes so vividly.

His family was connected with the royal family of Travancore, who were great supporters of art. Ravi Varma first visited the court when he was just 13, and during one of his subsequent visits he gifted the king, Ayilyam Thirunal, paintings of goddesses that he had drawn. This impressed the Maharaja so much that he allowed Ravi Varma to stay at the palace, studying and observing artists, art books and pictures. Ravi Varma's earlier paintings were done in charcoal and chalk as he did not have access to European paints and brushes. He used to make his own colours as well. His uncle Raja Raja Varma who was an amateur painter was his initial teacher. Though the palace had a famous European portrait painter Ramaswamy Naicher, he refused to teach Ravi Varma. Similarly Varma did not have any luck with a visiting British painter Theodore Jenson, who refused to take in an Indian disciple. Yet, Varma did not give up. He watched, observed and learnt. It was at the palace he learnt the techniques of Tanjore paintings from a Madurai painter, Alagiri Naidu. Someone gifted him a box of oil colors and he started experimenting, perfecting his art form. At the age of 18, he married Pururuttathi Nal Bhageerathi from the royal family of Mavelikara, and had five children.



In 1870 he got his first commission of painting a family portrait of a sub-judge of Calicut. He also participated in the 1873 'Madras Fine Arts Exhibition', competing against other European painters and against Ramaswamy Naicher. His painting 'Nair Lady at Toilette' won the first prize. His subsequent paintings 'Tamil Lady playing Sarabat' won the gold medal in the 1874 'Madras Exhibition', and some of his paintings were gifted to the Prince of Wales. During this period he immersed himself in Portraiture and was also the palace artist of Travancore. After the passing away of the Maharaja of Travancore in 1880, his ties with the Travancore royal family decreased.

He travelled throughout India with his brother Raja Raja Varma, 12 years his junior. In 1885 he was invited by the Mysore King Chamarajendra Wodeyar, and he spent some months at the palace painting the royal family. He also painted a series of 14 paintings depicting Puranic episodes for the new palace of Baroda. What made his paintings dazzling was that he fused European techniques with Indian art. In 1894 he started the Lithographic Press in partnership with an industrialist Govardhan Das Khatau Makhanji in Mumbai. The machinery was ordered from Germany. His friends and supporters pitched in with the necessary funds, and the press was started. Five years later the press was shifted to Lonavala. However, in 1901, the press got sold to a German technician. Some of his famous paintings are scenes from mythological tales depicting Damayanti, Shakuntala, Sita and Draupadi. Village scenes like 'Lady giving alms', 'Nair woman', 'Woman holding a fan', 'Village belle' etc., were also prominent. He won quite a number of awards, and in 1904 he was awarded the Kaisar-i-Hind gold medal. Raja Raja Varma, his brother, died in 1905, and Ravi Varma died soon after.

Usha Hariprasad is a freelance writer.

DILIP KOLHATKAR

An experimental and influential theatre artiste (1946-2018)

Dilip Kolhatkar, born in 1946, was a noted veteran Marathi theatre and film director, known for his commercially and critically acclaimed plays. He passed away in Pune in 2018, aged 71, after a prolonged illness. A master of pun, he was born into an illustrious theatrical family based in Sangli, and was a pivotal figure in the Marathi theatre renaissance of the late 1970s and 80s. Kolhatkar, who began with experimental theatre, left an indelible mark as director, and as a skilled aesthetic lighting arranger of Marathi theatre, and successfully carved out a niche in professional theatre. He coordinated the light setting for over 30 plays, including *Barrister*, *Hami-dabaichi Kothi* and *Char Choughi*.

Actively involved in the 'Chhabildas' theatre movement with noted film and theatre director Vijaya Mehta, he acted in her play *Jaswand*. Besides, he also worked with Mohan Wagh and directed plays including *God Gulabi* and *Gosht Janmantarichi*. He directed over 65 Marathi commercial plays and some films. As many as 20 of these plays went on to remain on stage for over 100 shows. Kolhatkar did some of his best work in helming plays penned by renowned Marathi litterateur Acharya Prahlad Keshav Atre.

His plays included the blockbuster, evergreen comedy, *Moruchi Mavshi* (Moru's Aunt), a laugh riot based on *Charley's Aunt* (1892), the classic late Victorian farce by Brandon Thomas, which proved a smash hit on the London stage and Broadway. *Moruchi Mavshi* has completed 2000 shows. Other plays include *Kavadi Chumbak*, an adaptation of Moliere's classic, *The Miser*, and *Ughadale Swargache Daar* (which completed 500 shows), *Chiranjiv Aais*, *Hayavadana*, *Rajacha Khel* and *Tumche Amche Gaane*, a lively musical, apart from Ashok Patole's *Aai Retire Hotey* (A Mother Retires), which celebrated womanhood and did 700 shows. Penned around 30 years ago, its relevance remains the same even today. From the time a woman takes a birth till she dies, she is saddled with many roles and responsibilities. As a girl, she has to behave in a certain way in the society, as a wife she has taken care of her husband, child and in-laws and when she grows old, she has to take care of her grandchildren. Basically, the society exploits her.

When the protagonist, an old woman, realises that her existence and importance in her family is ratio-proportionate to her usefulness, she decides to retire from her responsibilities.

The play's popularity was so much that it attracted theatre artistes associated with other languages too. Shafi Inamdar staged a Gujarati version, *Baa Retire Thai Che* and Ramesh Talwar did a Hindi version, *Maa Retire Hoti Hai* with Jaya Bachchan playing the lead. Kolhatkar also acted in the popular Marathi play *Chimanrao Gundayabhau*, as also *Partner*, and *Makarand Rajyadhyaksha*. He also had a small stint in the Marathi film industry directing films like *Shejari Shejari* (1991), and *Taichya Bangdya*.



A 12-time recipient of the Natya Darpan award, he also received the Gopinath Savarkar award presented by the Marathi Natya Parishad. During his days of struggle in parallel theatre movement, if he missed the train home, he used to sleep over at a friends' place. During inter-bank theatre competitions, when any team was given just two days to prepare and present a play, Kolhatkar, though a competitor, used to step forward and help. He would always regale his colleagues with jokes. He was also an uncrowned king of 'one act plays' during inter-bank drama contests.

Primarily a denizen of Mumbai, he had been living in Pune since 2002. In February 2018, he suffered a personal tragedy after his wife, Deepali (65), was found murdered at their Kothrud flat. He is survived by a son and daughter. With his demise, Marathi theatre has lost a seasoned artiste who tried hard to reduce the gap between experimental and professional theatre and was also a good guide for new generation artistes. He has left a void in the theatre fraternity. The plays he directed will remain in our memory forever.

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

CAPTAIN PAWAN KUMAR, SC

A brave and patriotic soldier (1993-2016)

Pawan Kumar hailed from village Badhana in Jind in Haryana state. He was born on 15 January 1993, and graduated from JNU (Jawaharlal Nehru University), New Delhi. His father, Rajbir Singh is a school headmaster of a school in Jind. Born on Army Day, he was destined to join the Army and was commissioned into the Dogra Regiment on 14 December 2013. When asked why he didn't join the Navy or the Air Force, he answered that he was in love with the olive green uniform.

He had volunteered to later join the elite 10 Para Special Forces in June 2015. To join the Army and kill militants was his childhood dream. The unit was deployed in Kashmir in February 2016, and he had led two operations successfully in which three terrorists were killed. Reports were received on 15 February 2016, that two or three terrorists were hiding in the seven-storied building of the government-run Entrepreneurship Development Institute (EDI) in Phulwama. He volunteered to lead his men into the most difficult part of the operation. It was a difficult operation as some civilians were also trapped in the building. His commitment to the uniform and his team can be judged from the fact that in spite of having been wounded in an earlier operation, he declined to proceed on sick leave, and chose to be with his men. It was more than a gun battle with the terrorists, as some locals were throwing stones at the military personnel. He evacuated all the civilians from the building to safety, and led his team to clear the premises. The only way to ascertain the location of the terrorists was to close in. He did so, leading from the front, and drew a volley of fire. The location of the militants became clear and the team retaliated. But Pawan Kumar succumbed to his injuries. Captain Mahajan, L/Nk Om Prakash, and two jawans from the CRPF (Central Reserve Police Force) also were martyred in this operation. Three unidentified foreign militants were later killed in the forty six-hour gun battle. Pawan Kumar was awarded the Shaurya Chakra (SC) for outstanding courage and leadership. The 23-year-old commando was given a befitting farewell by tearful comrades in a solemn ceremony at the Srinagar airfield.



It was well attended by officers from the Border Security Force and Central Reserve Police Force as well. Lt. Gen. S. K. Dua, GOC 15 Corps, said, "He was a young and dynamic officer. He was a true commander." He saluted the courage and selflessness of the martyrs and assured that their cause would be taken to its logical conclusion. "Pawan's friends recall him as a fun loving young man interested in motor cycles, jeeps, and his pet dog.

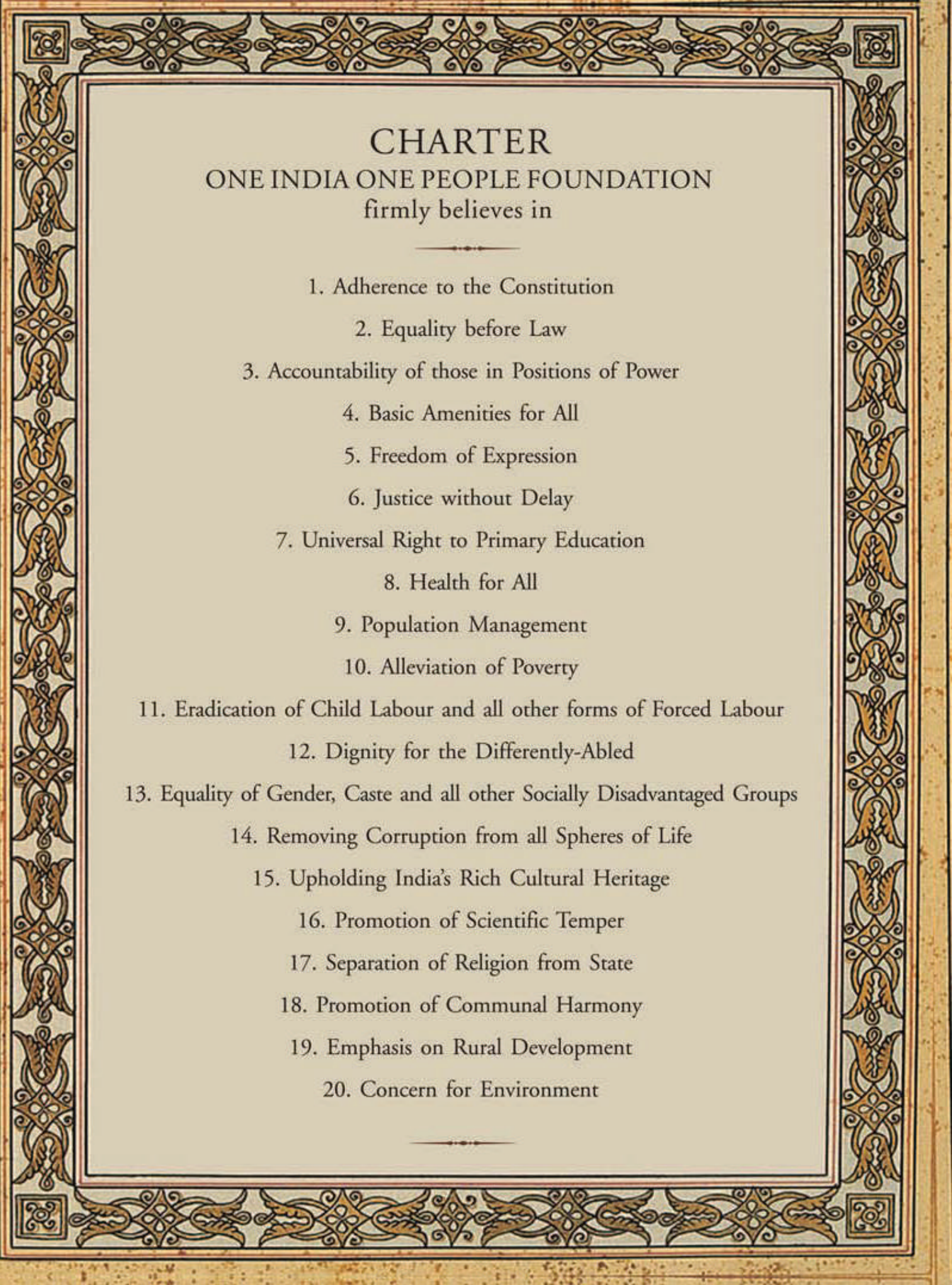
He had studied at JNU where agitation in the name of *azadi* was the norm, and he was from the Jat community who were demanding reservation.

His last Facebook post was, "Some want reservations, some even freedom, but I want nothing, just my blanket."

His simple outlook concealed his commitment to his unit and military. A wreath laying ceremony was held at Pathankot and the body draped in the national flag was flown to Jind as the roads had been blocked by the Jats agitating for reservations. Pawan was the only son of his parents and yet, his father Rajbir Singh, commented "I had one child. I gave him to the Army, to the nation. No father can be prouder."

Lt. Gen. Shokin Chauhan, GOC 1 Corps, visited the village to offer condolence to the family. He assured Rajbir Singh that the Army was ready to establish a school in village Badhana if the district administration forwarded a proposal. Captain Kumar's last rites were performed with full military honours. His colleague Captain Abhimanyu, wiping his tears said that Pawan's sacrifice had taught a lesson to the youth of the state, and if one has to lay down his life, it should be for the sake of the country.

- Brigadier Suresh Chandra Sharma (retd.)



CHARTER

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-

WHO AM I?

Am I a Hindu first or an Indian first?

Am I a Muslim first or an Indian first?

Am I a Christian first or an Indian first?

Am I a Buddhist first or an Indian first?

Am I a Brahmin first or an Indian first?

Am I a Dalit first or an Indian first?

Am I a South Indian first or an Indian first?

Am I a North Indian first or an Indian first?

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

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

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Sadanand A. Shetty, Founder Editor
(October 9 १९३० – February 23 २००७)
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