

ONE INDIA ONE PEOPLE

Patriotism Redefined



ANONYMOUS NO MORE

THE BATTLE TO COVER, NOT COWER

FREEDOM REGAINED

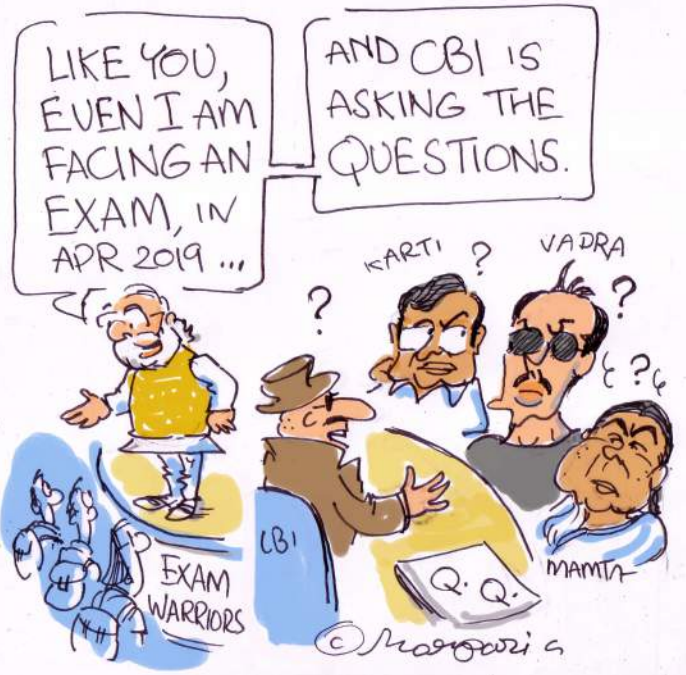
WOMEN WHO FARM

KNOW INDIA BETTER

AGRA AND FATEHPUR SIKRI

FACE TO FACE

PRABHAKAR GOPAL PATWARDHAN



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Anonymous no more

There is no paucity of women heroes, or if we may say so, 'sheroes'. There are umpteen stories of women triumphing over adversities and odds. Akul Tripathi, Reshma Jain and Vandita Morarka highlight some of them.



Nirmala Sitharaman (left) and Mary Kom; true achievers

“For most of history, anonymous was a woman.” - Virginia Woolf

This quote chills me to the bone. It is unfortunate that such a statement defines a majority of human presence on the planet.

Especially, in a culture where the female element has been deified simultaneously with the male divine enshrined in the inseparable 'Shiva-Shakti'; it is particularly disappointing that Shakti was very intentionally and wilfully made powerless by the very same society that revered the stones and danced the nights celebrating her feminine. The repercussions of this imbalance has had far reaching consequences, many of which are very evident in the world we live. The fact that this quote is not attributed to 'anonymous' anymore reads like poetry to my ears.

It is a testament to the spirit of that very feminine Shakti, that some have burnt so bright, that not only do they shine through the ages, but it is through their light that others of their time find standing and recognition. It is often spoken in hushed whispers that women who today lead prominent public lives, have contributed to, and achieved distinction in their chosen fields, have it easier than their counterparts in history; and that it is increasingly easier for women to get ahead in the world today, especially compared to their male colleagues.

In my opinion, the very statement reeks of the same prejudice that created this disparity. It is condescending to the women they refer to, while eulogising and dismissing historical unforgivable inequality, through a misplaced sense of entitlement. The women of today who smile past these smirks are worthy champions of the sparks that have endured through the ages, and in their defiance, burnt brighter.

To single any for recognition over the rest is sacrilege, and though I am compelled to put in context them who inspire me more than the others, it is driven solely by the necessity of beginning somewhere, and the ever dangling sword of editorial brevity. In recent times, my awe is in total surrender to the grace, grit, and dignity that Nirmala Sitharaman has brought to the rather dreary office of the Defence Minister. Never before to my memory, has a Raksha Mantri displayed such poise, passion, and pride. In speech, she is as disciplined and taut as a soldier at parade, while her persona holds potent the entire might of the Indian armed forces. As India's first full-time woman defence minister, not only has a glass ceiling been smashed to smithereens, a bench mark has been set that will loom over all those who aspire to run this gauntlet.

While the iron fist of defence is clad in a velvet glove, the soft power of sports supremacy is set in stone by the indefatigable Mary Kom. Mother of three is in itself a full

resume. Add six time world boxing champion to it, and my jaw never lifts from the floor. That India's only female boxer to win an Olympic medal, and the only one to win a Commonwealth Gold comes from a geography that is namesake to a genteel dance form, makes me smile even wider. Trivia, factoids, biographies, life histories and even hagiographies of both are a Google search away. Repeating them will only add to the online alphabet clutter. Their true glory is not just their own story. They are not icons because

they happen to be women. Through them is exorcised the stifled light of generations before; and it is them who light the torches which carry the spark of Shakti for brighter times.

Sometimes I think to myself that the root of my admiration may be driven by a subconscious filter that places on a pedestal those who rise in fields historically dominated by men. But then, weren't they all?



Akul Tripathi is Content and Programming Head, EPIC Channel.

All the notes of life

Kavita Seth's magnificent voice can render Hindi film songs and Sufi music and ghazals with the aplomb and poignancy that caress the ears as much as the heart.

The singer grew up in Bareilly, in a middle-class family that had no background in music or the arts. She discovered her affinity for music when she started taking lessons after school with a neighborhood guru who taught the children how to play the harmonium. Kavita persuaded her father to buy her a harmonium and was soon experimenting with it. She began lessons with Guru M.D. Sharma of the Gwalior Gharana. He joked, "*Kya baat hai! Harmonium aagaya, ab tabla bhi manga lo!*" (Wonderful, you have got a harmonium, now ask for a tabla) Soon enough, she got a tabla as well, and thus started her journey into classical music at the age of 10.

Music was Kavita's total preoccupation whether she was helping in the kitchen or studying and every day after school she would listen to music on the radio. Incidentally, an uncle who lived in the neighbourhood was a violinist who played for the radio. This fired Kavita's imagination and she began filling forms for auditions and composing music. She was selected on her first attempt and her mother accompanied her to her first audition. Her first cheque for ₹180 forms part of her unforgettable memories along with her depositing it in the joint bank account she held with her father. She received the Best Singer award from the famous Hindi film music composer O.P. Nayyar, who invited her to come to Mumbai.

Kavita's father Vinod Kumar Tandon told her, "*Shaadi ho jaye, tumhara pati gavaye -toh gaana! Mere bass ka nahi hai!*" (After your marriage if your husband lets you sing then do so. It is not my cup of tea) After that, the family launched a hunt for a suitable partner for Kavita – one who would support her music. And there came Krishna Kumar Seth, who awestruck by her bhajans, said to Kavita, "You don't worry – you just do



your *riyaaz*, I will do everything for you". Soon, they were married and he made sure that Kavita participated in many music competitions all over the world. The more she immersed herself into music, the more she felt the need to dive deeper into it.

Her world came crashing down when Krishna Kumar passed away in December 2011. She maintained a strong and focused attitude as she single-handedly shouldered the responsibilities of running the home and taking care of her children's education. In memory of her husband, Kavita organises concerts twice a year – once on his birthday in June, and another to commemorate his death anniversary in December.

As a child she had dreamed of singing in a stadium in front of a crowd of a lakh of people, a dream that was realised when she sang at the Shrinathji Temple during Morari Bapuji's katha, before an audience of 75,000 and was appreciated by Bapuji. It is one of the high points of her life.

Kavita has tried her hand at many musical

forms. But when she heard the Sufi mystic Abida Parveen in Delhi, she says she found what she had been seeking all these years. She says, “Sufi is not just music, *woh ekjeene ka tareeka hai* (It is a way of living)”.

Meanwhile, her second love story had begun to unfold in her life. In 2007 she had met Dharmesh Bothra during a concert. He was a diamond merchant, and the two would exchange occasional greetings and hold conversations. Dharmesh had also lost his wife and following Kavi-

ta's loss in 2013, he insisted she come to live with him in his house. Dharmesh proved to be a pillar of strength when Kavita was ailing. Soon afterwards she agreed to marry him, and today the two are very happy together.

Her life has seen many ups and downs but *Jeete hi chal!*, her famous song of the film *Neerja* is the principle that Kavita Seth lives by. She believes that everything happens for a reason, and everything eventually falls into place.



Reshma Jain is one of the co-founders of The Narrators which is a publishing platform to lend a voice, a shape, a form to help people tell their story through the print or visual medium like biographies, documentaries or even e- platforms.

A shero called Swarnima Bhattacharya



When Swarnima was around eleven years old, there was a person close to her who suffered from a series of menstrual disorders, and medical help was often inadequate. She remembers that this person was the subject of constant whispers, and as a result had started losing her self-confidence. This left a lasting impact on Swarnima.

At the time Swarnima didn't know enough about these issues and was unable to articulate her questions. When she was in the eleventh grade, her mother had a hysterectomy – this helped her realise how difficult it is for women to talk about the changes in their bodies, because it is seen as a personal failing on the part of women, if they face complicated gynaecological issues.

For her, these have always been experiences that she could personally connect with as a woman. She felt as though she was 'implicated' – that she had a personal responsibility towards correcting these issues. Swarnima later started studying feminism, and actively participated in it. For her, women's health and bodies emerged as a primary area of intervention as she saw gaps in women's health everywhere.

The experiences while growing up determined her life journey and career trajectory. Today, Swarnima Bhattacharya is the Founder of TheaCare, a women's health companion, and the curator of FemmeCon, India's first women's health festival. Her work centers around women's health and history. She believes that digital intervention in women's health is the future.

For Swarnima, in retrospect, her educational experience at La Martiniere College in Lucknow, a girls school, run by prolific single women and female educators of all categories, has been a defining aspect of her life. Especially, as she found this radical, progressive space in an otherwise conservative town. It has subconsciously guided her choice of mentors, associations, and even the kind of mentor she wants to be. She has always faced subtle sexism but that effective mentoring has helped her avoid any roadblocks.

To the readers her message is: Till the last frontier, our family spaces do not evolve, true gender justice in women's health is not possible. As a recently married woman, she says that she has begun to realise how difficult it is for women to have an opinion, live the way they want to, or have a career. She asks people to focus on building families that can hold space for empowered women.

Kirthi Jayakumar, activist, storyteller, author

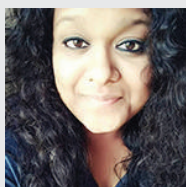
Kirthi Jayakumar was born in Bangalore, but grew up between her grandparents' home in Bangalore and with her parents and brother in Chennai. She says she grew up with stars in her eyes, wanting to study medicine in the hope of helping people, until she realised that she could do that with development too. So she went on to study law in Chennai and founded the Red Elephant Foundation, a civilian peace building initiative working for gender equality through storytelling, digital interventions, and training workshops. She is also an author, artist, and activist.

She says that while the idea behind REF had been in the making for a while, it was after the December gang rape in Delhi that shook the conscience of an entire nation, that her idea took shape. It was on December 17, 2012, as she was at the US Consulate General at Chennai, receiving an award for her work with a US-based NGO called Delta Women, that she realised, instead of feeling happy, she felt like a hypocrite. "I felt as a community, we had betrayed the girl who was battling for her life, and there was so much to do. I felt we as a community sacrificed her at the altar of patriarchy, misogyny, toxic and hegemonic masculinity, and inaction on part of a civilian populace that should have been vigilant. I went to bed that night, thinking of how much we had allowed to pass in the name of 'We are like this only'." It was on the same day that she came to face a dissociated past, which she had completely blocked out of her memories of facing abuse as a child.



Farzana

She decided to do what she could on her own, and began by telling her own story. Six months later, she looked back to see how telling her own story had made a difference; one, parents and to-be parents began to be vigilant about the vulnerability of their children, and began to have open conversations regarding their safety; two, she realised that she felt better, comfortable and her own journey of healing had begun. She says, "Being a woman has been my journey, and the only message I'd like to leave everyone with: Just be who you are."



Vandita Morarka is the Founder and CEO of One Future Collective. She is a lawyer, policy consultant, researcher, and rights based facilitator.

The strong voices from our South

Nivedita Louis holds out a burning torch for the pioneering women of South India, who have contributed so immensely to various fields, from law and engineering, to the civil services and health.

It is time to shatter some myths. Say, for instance something like, “Women of South India are conservative, subdued and submissive”. That is of course the biggest myths of all times. The South has produced some of the most pioneering women that we see today, starting from Pepsico’s Indra Nooyi to Gita Gopinath, the Chief Economist of IMF. How did all this happen? What was the state of women in South a hundred years ago? The research into lives of women a century ago threw up so many surprises that left me spellbound. The country’s first woman engineer, doctor, chartered accountant, veterinary doctor, neuro-surgeon, cardiologist, mayor, ambassador, civil service officer, English novelist, pilot, editor of a woman’s magazine, head of Botanical Society of India, head of Central Social Welfare Board – you name her, South has produced her!

A women’s magazine that inspires

What piqued me was a passing mention of Kamala Sathianathan, the pioneering woman who started, edited and successfully ran the country’s first women’s magazine – *The Indian Ladies Magazine*. Further research into her story led me to the famed Connemara Library of Chennai, where I could lay my hands on the practically unknown magazine! Each page I turned, there popped up a woman. One playing tennis donning a saree, a whole bunch of women holding babies and seated with tennis racquets by their feet, one posing inside a cockpit, and another holding a gun and posing with a slain cheetah. Fascinated would be a misnomer. Awestruck, I started digging deeper, and slowly emerged faces of women who rose above the mundane.

Take for instance India’s first woman engineer A. Lalitha. Married as a 15-year-old and widowed with a child when she was barely 18, the girl needed all the push her father could give to pursue education. Pappu Subba Rao, the father, urged the girl to enter the College of Engineering, Guindy, as its first woman student. He even put up an advertisement in a leading daily to lure more girls into the college! The ploy worked, and Lalitha passed out of engineering college with two other pioneering women. She travelled all over the world and went on to design generators for Bhakra-Nangal Dam! All this because her father believed his daughter would be successful if she took up education as a weapon against the society that tried to oppress her. All this happened in the 1930s, when the society wanted the frail girl to sit at home, enduring the long widowhood.

A botanist, a convict, and other stories

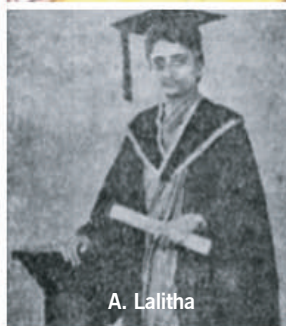
Circumstances were much different for E.K. Janakiammal, the first Director General of Botanical



R. Sivabhogam



EK Janakiammal,



A. Lalitha



Kamala Sathianathan



Durgabhai Deshmukh



Mary Clubwala Jadhav

The pioneering women from South

Survey of India. The woman after whom a flower species has been botanically named – ‘Kobus Janakiamma’ — she was the first woman to obtain a doctorate in botany in the United States! And this was in 1931! Born into an affluent family, the affluence and richness didn’t protect her from the male chauvinism that meddled with her fledgling career that took off in India. Posted to the sugarcane breeding center at Coimbatore, her research papers sat on the table of her superiors, gathering dust for years. The patriarchy shooed her back to England where she continued her research on genetically modified magnolia flowers, to invent a new variety, that was named after her. It was sheer luck that placed her on the same flight with the then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru who invited her back to India to work for the country. The lady who had to take cover from patriarchy, marched back into the country, and how well she did! She reorganised the Botanical Survey of India, built the set-up from scratch, and till she died, she continued her research on medicinal plants.

The story of R. Sivabhogam is equally inspiring. A released convict from prison who was arrested for her involvement in India's freedom struggle, started for her native place in Kerala for her purported 'marriage', in 1930. No one was interested in marrying a convict, and her being slightly handicapped, didn't help the cause either. A determined Sivabhogam caught a train to Madras, keeping in mind Swami Vivekananda's teaching – "Keep faith in self!" A few years later when she had doggedly pursued her studies in accountancy and articeship, came the next obstacle, a government ban on practicing chartered accountancy by those who had been convicted. Sivabhogam approached the courts unfazed. After a few more years of struggle, she finally got the nod to practice. The first woman auditor of the country had to file a suit to begin practice!

In 1948, when C.B. Muthamma, the first Indian woman cleared the Indian Civil Services viva, she was asked for options. She readily mouthed her favourite choice - Indian Foreign Service. Despite the low marks awarded to her, she did indeed enter service, and worked with gusto, until road blocks hit her career after three long decades. Muthamma had to file a suit against the Government, charging she was overlooked for promotion because she was a woman. She also argued that this discrimination was evident in the rules that permitted Government to terminate services of married women civil service officers if it feels her marriage will hamper her work. The court finally pulled up the Government against this discrimination and women were then treated at par with men in service, thanks to Muthamma! This happened in 1979. The court chided the Government for practicing gender bias, even after thirty years into Independence.

The ladies with a heart

Padmavati Sivaramakrishnan, the country's first woman cardiologist's story is another of grit and determination. Born in a wealthy family in Burma, Padmavati, who was pursuing her medical studies in Rangoon had 24 hours - notice to leave her country, as the Second World War had started. The women folk of the house including Padmavati caught the earliest possible flight and landed up in Coimbatore, Tamilnadu. Under tremendous pressure, Padmavati continued to study, her passion for cardiology taking her to England for further studies. This pioneering woman is the backbone of cardiology in India. Her continuous efforts led to opening of dedicated wards for cardiology in leading hospitals of the capital, and Asia's first foundation for heart disease – All India Heart Foundation, in 1962! It was only her passion that led her to scale such heights!

We know of women who have been awarded Padma Shri, Padma Bhushan and Padma Vibhushan. But all the three to one woman? Mary Clubwala Jadhav was an industrious Parsi woman of Madras, married to Nogi Clubwala when she turned 18 and widowed ten years later. With a little son to take care of, Mary did something that none of us would dare to – hit the streets with a passion. She moved all over the city, tending to orphaned children, sick adults, convalescing aged ones, and poor women. When World War II tremors hit Madras, Mary plunged into active service through Guild of Service, providing "meals on wheels" to the soldiers, providing moral support to them, tending to the injured in the hospitals. She was rightly called "Darling of the army" by General Kariappa. The philanthropist opened Madras's first college of social work, the Madras School of Social Work in 1952. Love bloomed again in her life, and Mary married Major Chandrakant Jadhav. Though she lost her only son Phil, she continued to build a hall for the Parsi Anjuman in Madras. Recognising her yeomen service, the Government awarded her all the three Padma awards.

On the other hand, this little girl was a tiny 12-year-old when she attended the first meeting of Gandhi at Waltair. She was so impressed by the Mahatma that she came home, burned her party frocks, and took up the task of educating children around the household. Her "Balika Hindi Patshala" coached and trained children in Hindi, and she remained its Principal, till she was 21 years of age and moved to Madras. Durgabai Deshmukh, the illustrious lady was arrested repeatedly, for participating in India's freedom struggle, and it was in prison that she decided she would learn law to support the women unjustly arrested and convicted without legal support. She was the oldest woman to sit for Bar exam, and it was her law practice that brought her closer to the women when she started the Andhra Mahila Sabha. The Sabha has now branched out to about 50 institutions now, providing health care and education to women and children.

The women of the past century stand tall and proud as icons of persistence and perseverance showing us, the modern women, the path to tread on with ease. Their journey is our lesson and our journeys will be for the next generation. Women of those days were not conservative, but they had to fight tougher battles to claim their space as career women in this society. They deserve our attention and of course, respect!



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

The battle to cover, not cower

The struggle of the women of the South Indian Nadar community to cover their upper body in the face of strict caste regulations against it, is remarkable, and relatively unknown. Nivedita Louis chronicles this astonishingly difficult struggle.



Lace makers of Travancore sporting the *kuppayam*

The Nadar. Shanar. Nadan. The name refers to a caste group that inhabited Travancore and southern parts of Madras Presidency during the 19th century, and the story of how a bunch of missionaries rewrote the destiny of their women has to be told and retold. As such, 19th century Kerala was ruled by Travancore royalty with support from the British Diwans. The existing caste system was prevalently favourable to the upper caste people. There was marked animosity of the upper castes against the Avarna people or those who didn't find a space in the system. The Shanars of Travancore numbered around 1,00,000 and Ezhavas another 80,000 during the beginning of the 19th century. The main occupation of the Shanars was tending to palmyrah trees and work allied to that, including making palm jaggery and toddy tapping.

The tradition as it was

Owing to the humidity and balmy temperature of the west coast, the inhabitants of Travancore were prone to wearing a coarse cloth covering the lower parts of their body, leaving the upper torsos bare. With the arrival of Europeans in droves, the local people tried to emulate them, by wearing coarse upper cloths covering their torsos. The upper caste women had different set of rules with respect to covering their torsos. The Namboodri women had the right to wear blouses and upper cloth when in the presence of people of any caste, but Nair women had to bare their bosoms when they visited the temples or in front of other Namboodri men and women. There is a recorded instance of a royal woman tearing down clothes of low caste women who covered their bosoms in their presence. If women of lower castes wanted to cover up their bosoms, they had to pay a tax called "mulakkaram" or "breast tax". There are alternate opinions that say "mulakkaram" was the tax collected for number of women who worked in farms, just

like "moustache tax" collected for number of men working, though it holds no plausibility.

A new social order was slowly forming wherein the upper caste women sported upper cloth, whereas the lower caste ones were watched with disdain if they chose to wear it.

When the missionaries entered

Enter the missionaries into Travancore, the trouble assumed epic proportions. The missionaries who set up schools and started preaching in Travancore and Nagercoil areas of Tamil Nadu, had an acute following of Nadar women. Women were permitted to read and write, the missionaries of Nagercoil like Rev. Mead, Mault, Duthie went to the extent of offering money in exchange for slave children brought to learn in the missionary schools. Slavery did exist in Travancore and was rampant among Hindus. The missionary women detested the inequality among women in covering themselves up. Mrs. Mead, Mrs. Mault, Mrs. Thomson, and Mrs. Miller invented a unique blouse for the converted Christian women to wear, called the *kuppayam*. The Nadar and Ezhava women converted willingly from Hinduism to Christianity in droves, as they saw this as an opportunity to cover themselves up. The missionaries introduced embroidery and bobbin lace making to this part of the country, where women excelled in needle work.

The hate slowly spread throughout the kingdom and women from lower castes, if they sported upper cloth, were attacked. It was in 1813 that Travancore's Resident Diwan Colonel Munro issued an order to the Sarvadikariakar (chief tax collector) of Travancore and Neyyattinkara Taluks, permitting converted Christian women of these two taluks permission to cover their upper body with coarse cloth. Unfortunately, the Nadar women wanted more. They just were not happy with the *kuppayams* or blouses alone. They wanted to cover themselves up like the upper caste women, draping *seelai* over their shoulders. This brought much disdain to the upper caste Hindus and skirmishes erupted in 1822, at Eraniel and Kalkulam Taluks of South Travancore, joined by Mohammedans. Nadar women who sported *thol seelai* in addition to their *kuppayams* were attacked in broad daylight in market squares. Rev. Mead complained to Padmanabhapuram Court against the attacks, and when no action was taken on his complaint, he appealed to the Resident of Travancore, Col. Newell. Mead was able to obtain a decree in 1823 from Padmanabhapuram Court that read – "If these people were Christians and if the religion required them to wear upper cloth for the sake of decency, when they go to the

fairs, markets and other places and that, they were instructed to do so and it ought to be so ordered agreeably to Christianity". Donning the *thol seelai* was thus viewed as a Christian rite, and this angered the upper castes further.

Their anger rightly turned to those who aided the Christian missionaries and churches were burnt, those who supported the Nadar Christian women were jailed on false pretenses, Nadar Christian women who wore blouses were stripped in markets. The Madras Presidency Government took note of the complaints of Rev Mead and Mault and sent 15th Regiment and Capt Cibbald to South Travancore and this quelled further riots. Another proclamation followed in 1829. By 1850, about 17,000 Christians were in South Travancore, most of them Nadars. The revolt of 1857 had its adverse effect on the women, transfer of power from East India Company to British Sovereign meant lesser interference in local governance by Maharajas and Ranis. The Nadars fearing persecution fanned out to the coast of Tamil Nadu, from Kanyakumari to Thengapatnam. The upper castes were further afraid of these 'new born' Christians upsetting their caste system, and were looking for opportunities to rise up in revolt against them.

What education wrought

When the atrocities became too much to bear, Nadar youth in villages around Nagercoil started wielding stones and weapons against the upper caste people who tore the blouses and upper cloth of their women. Decades of education and conditioning of moral equality by the missionaries had borne fruit by the late 1860s. Those who did not want to continue fighting the caste system moved to nearby Paniyanadu – the areas under British direct governance of Madras Presidency. The missionaries on the other hand mounted pressure on the Governor of Madras, Charles Trevelyan. Despite Trevelyan's direction, the Crown in Travancore remained silent. The final letter Trevelyan sent to Major Tracy on 7th February, 1859 read, "If you can't quell the atrocity with your police force, the respect of women will be safeguarded at gun points of our military force".

It was finally the effort of Diwan Madhava Rao in convincing the Travancore Royalty that another uprising by Nadars would bring in British soldiers, aided by missionaries, and eventually it would sound the death knell to the Travancore Royals. In 1865, the decree permitting Nadar and other low caste women to wear upper cloth as they deem fit was announced. The emancipation of women and slowly the power of education and empowerment were giving the Nadar women was remarkable. Colleges and schools established in Travancore region, including those in southern parts of Tamil Nadu where Nadars were spread out were teeming with women interested in gaining educa-

tion and thereby societal acceptability. The needlework taught by missionaries also came in handy. The teacher training colleges led to a revolution where Nadar women of the three southern districts, especially the Christians - Catholics, Church of South India and Protestants altogether, passed out in multitude. The hard working Nadar women could plant themselves easily in any part of the state and take up the best profession their education could offer-teaching. Not a single school is now bereft of a Nadar lady teacher in the state now.

When a struggle for female emancipation was happening in Travancore, the Hindu Nadar women of Sivakasi and allied areas were going through a different phase of riots and struggles for temple entry and its aftermath. The Hindu Nadars of these areas were finding it increasingly difficult to remain 'outsiders' in temples and their struggles for entry into temples started from late 1800s. The Kamudhi temple riot and other repeated riots to gain entry into temples for worship had direct impact on the women folk. The arrival of Madura Mission into Madurai and nearby areas and the schools and colleges set up by missionaries slowly induced these women to convert, thereby gaining access to worship in churches that practiced equality. Men too followed suit and mass conversions happened. Yet, the best was yet to come.

When the match stick and cracker revolution erupted in Sivakasi and neighbouring areas around mid-1920s, economic power glided down the order directly to the women. These hard-working women who were into palmyrah cultivation readily worked in match box and cracker factories, the new-found financial independence gaining education for their children. The ones who were enterprising, joined hands with families and became successful entrepreneurs.

For those who were not lucky enough to get the education or financial independence, the "petti kadais" or "Nadar kadais" offered solace. The Nadar clan had the cohesiveness in churning out 'rags to riches' businessmen, their acute business acumen winning them success. The richer Nadars now probably own the shopping districts of all major cities of the State and their not so lucky counterparts are having control of smaller areas. The women, of course, they march hand in hand with the men, controlling the business empires - be it king size or bite-size. The tremendous growth of the women of this community from the pariahs who bared their bosoms to upper caste men to being the most educated and economically independent, fierce women of the State is worth mentioning as we celebrate Women's Day. Success comes only to those who toil. And to those who dare to wear the "kuppayams"! Happy Women's Day to all of us!



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

Freedom regained

*What does freedom mean to a person who may be disabled or wheelchair user? A young student, **Dhruv Shirpurkar**, decodes freedom and accessibility after talking to three disability rights women activists, about their own experiences negotiating the Indian society and space.*

Freedom is for all, it is everyone's right. Yet we see in every era, a particular community losing its freedom. In this era, individuals with disability are losing their freedom. The meaning of freedom is always taken in the context of social and natural factors. We are free to do whatever we want to do, but only within certain limits. The limitations on freedom change with time, especially natural limitations. Though this is easier said than done for people with disabilities. Discrimination and prejudices not only destroy everyone's freedom to live a dignified life, but in certain cases, their very existence. Freedom for me as a person with disability is to be who I am, and live my life with my adaptations as it is. In a bid to understand my definition – which includes overcoming social stigma, and inaccessibility to places, which encroaches upon my freedom. I interviewed three leading disability rights activists.

The accessibility activist



The first person I talked with was Nirmala Kevlani, who is a prominent accessibility activist. She has won many accolades, and is the winner of Miss Wheelchair India 2013. Fondly known as Neenu, she has also written articles for many newspapers like *The Indian Express*, and is also a motivational speaker. On a sunny afternoon, I called her and we began discussing freedom. I was met by a cheerful and free spirited voice. Neenu is a jovial, fun loving, and a people's person, something that her friends and family agree with. The conversation flowed smoothly. The usual greetings later I began by asking her to tell a little bit more about her work. "I mostly work on accessibility in public spaces. There are many barriers that individuals with disabilities

face, like education and societal attitudes, but having no infrastructure is a major source of distress. Inaccessibility affects not only individuals with physical disabilities, but also pregnant women and the elderly." She highlighted the fact that this affects a person's sense of freedom, and has a detrimental effect on education, employment, and day to day activities. It becomes a challenge for family and caretakers also. She works with builders and architects to include accessibility in their projects.

I tried to understand what freedom means to her. Neenu says, "For me as a woman, freedom means moving without fearing for my life – When I get up in the morning I should not have fear as the first thought in my mind – and being able to live independently and with dignity." Freedom has its own limitations and costs. I asked what she thinks causes this. She says that when it comes to overcoming your fears and troubles, the cost of freedom is overcoming your own demons. Disabling fear and prejudices are the only restrictions on freedom for Neenu.

When asked about what message she would like to give to others, she said "Open minds and hearts. Accept everybody not just individuals with disabilities. For me compassion is more important than being progressive, and I would like to tell women to accept us (women with disabilities), as we too are in the same boat as you." She also calls out to women to fight against injustice as this is the only way the Indian society can become a better place for women.

The one who reclaimed her freedom

Moving on, I came across Neenu's friend and fellow activist Sunita Sancheti. Neenu and Sunita have worked together in various organisations, and have been a part of the 'Beyond Barrier - The Incredible India Tour', which was a project to review and increase awareness about accessibility in the entire country. Sunita's journey as a disability activist began with a spinal injury at age 17. The disability that followed made her feel that she had completely lost her freedom, as she had to be dependent on someone for her daily chores. What was most disturbing for her was that after rehabilitation, was the sheer lack of infrastructure which made her discontinue her education. She decided to work on this. "I realised then the need to make places barrier free. Lack of infrastructure is the main cause of people with disabilities losing their freedom to do whatever they want. My wheelchair doesn't make me disabled, but lack of infrastructure does." She also provides counselling to people with spine injuries at

the NINA Foundation. She has also won a silver medal in badminton at the first Maharashtra State Paralympic games. Bringing in a fresh new perspective to freedom, she highlighted something all of us can connect with. “Freedom for me is the ability to do whatever I want to do with my life, and not let others make decisions about my life and career. Their advice is enough.” Sunita believes that financial freedom is very important. “Some individuals with or without disabilities misuse their activism. They do not do any work and seek funding for their living with the excuse of activism. This for me is seeking charity where no such thing is required. Financial freedom gives me the confidence and security to do activism. I am not dependent on anyone or have to show results of my work to somebody who is not willing to be a part of the change.” Freedom has different meaning for others and we need to accept it, she says.



I asked her what changes she would like to see in the society. She replied that she wanted people to be more sensitive to others. “People are hardly sensitive to the feeling of others such as employees. They too seek freedom from disrespect and equality. Gratitude is what we all seek, and that is the very thing Sunita means by being sensitive. She agrees with Neenu that limitations on freedom only exist in our mind. In order to overcome these limitations, Sunita feels that it is important to accept yourself as you are. Who can say this better than her in a society where disability is looked down upon, and where people with disabilities are expected to be ashamed of their existence?”

Sunita attributes her smooth transition towards activism, her success and her being able to overcome social prejudices, to her friends and family. “My friends have always treated me with respect and supported me. My disability was no big deal for them and they even joked at times when a bit of sympathy might be required.” She recalls that when she underwent a major surgery, they joked about their share in her will instead of giving her words of moral support. She also tells me that her niece fondly calls her a panda because of her humble nature. Everyone in her family says that not only is she inspirational, but a very good confidant.



Dhruv Shirpurkar, a 17-year-old wheelchair user due to Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy, is an FYBA student of KET's V.G. Vaze college, Mulund. He wants to specialise in Economics research. He has been trying to use his experiences with disabilities to raise awareness and bring it into mainstream discussion. He is a regular at the NGO Trinayani's Inclusive Meetups. Trinayani has facilitated the publication of Dhruv's article in line with their motto of empowering friends with disabilities, and changing mindsets and attitudes about the world of people with disabilities.

The ‘My Train Too’ campaigner



I would like to conclude with a talk with Virali Modi, a very prominent disability activist. She is most well known for her ‘My Train Too’ campaign. She first rose to prominence in 2014 when she was the runner up for the Miss Wheelchair India Pageant, and has since then spoken at various TEDx events. Her activism began as a result of being molested thrice while taking assistance from porters at railway stations to go inside the train. “I started a campaign on Change.org for making train accessible in India, and after getting two lakh signatories, I was able to make six stations in Kerala accessible”. This experience of Virali highlights what Neenu said earlier about being able to live and move around with safety and dignity. Lack of accessibility poses a grave threat for people with disabilities, especially women.

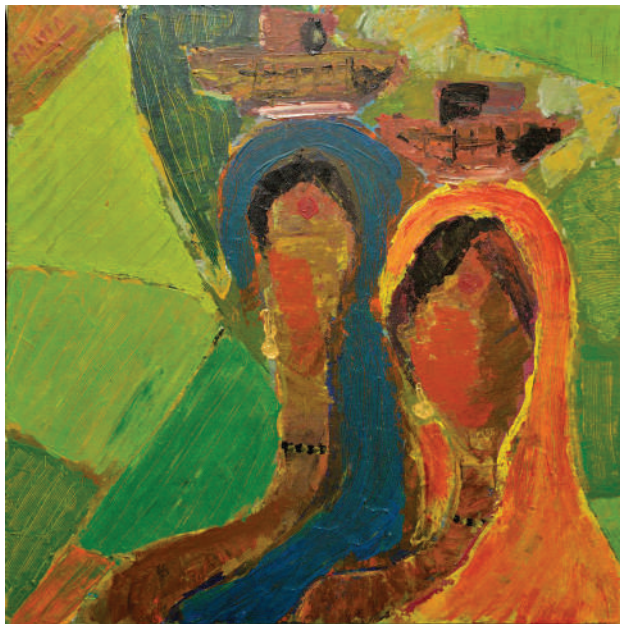
Virali sees freedom in a much broader perspective. “Freedom for me is inclusion and being treated like others regardless of my disability. Freedom for me is also not having barriers which would prevent me from being included.” She says that freedom can only be achieved when “A day comes where we all realise that we are all humans, a day when all stigmas and barriers will be overcome, and all segregation based on discrimination, even inadvertently, ends.”

Virali shared an experience of her initial years dealing with her disability where she attempted suicide twice, because of the change she had underwent. After significant counselling and support from her parents, she was able to overcome her depression. This was to prove a major turning point in her life allowing her to become what she is today. “I believe that I have some purpose for my existence on earth, and the day I find it, I will experience true happiness.” Espousing Sunita, she says that to gain true freedom and a sense of purpose it is necessary not to give up, and to overcome difficulties with a smile on your face. “Life will throw many curve balls at you, but all that matters is your perception and willingness to free yourself from your own limitations.”

The conversations I had with these three ladies have widened my perspective of freedom. Freedom, as is popularly understood, is not always about the ability to do whatever you want. Sometimes life is about overcoming your own limitations and creating your freedom.

Women who farm

Women farmers in India are largely voiceless, as officially, there is no such category called women farmers, but only women cultivators. Mamta Chitnis Sen, who is also an artist, highlights the plight of the invisible women farmers of India, through her paintings, and the written word.



Mamta's painting showing women farmers

The idea of exploring, documenting and writing about women farmers of my country took shape through a personal experience. A few years ago, I inherited some ancestral farming land owned by my father's side. While I was entitled to the land legally through birth, I soon found myself defending my rights in courts of law mainly because members of my extended family, (mostly male), believed that ancestral rights to property belonged to men alone.

Excluding women

In the following two years, I had to legally fight the matter (and won too), but during those numerous visits to the court which was based in a remote rural area of Konkan in Maharashtra state, where the matter was being heard out, I came across several such cases of women being denied inheritance of their own properties. A majority of them hailed from underprivileged backgrounds, and were mainly agricultural workers or cultivators. Interestingly, while they too toiled equally hard as their husbands, fathers, and brothers, a majority of these women were categorically kept away from being legal heirs on the lands the family owned. Even when division of land happened, the distribution would mainly take place amongst the men in the family. In rare cases, when few women did get property on their names on

paper, in reality, they were refrained from taking decision of their own land. It was the men who were decision makers. The women ended up merely as caretakers. Unfortunately, most women in rural areas despite being educated up to primary level, are not aware on how to use their vacant land to their benefit. The situation isn't just restricted to Konkan. I found women farmers in a similar quandary in the states of West Bengal and Chhattisgarh where I would often travel for work. In West Bengal, women were expected to take 'permission' to toil their land, if they actually ended up owning one. While in Chhattisgarh, they largely worked as agriculture labourers on fields other than theirs, for a pittance. The agrarian crises in India and farmers committing suicide further compounded the problems of women in agriculture, as they have been left without any source of livelihood. Reasons for farmers committing suicides are many – drought, debt, poor irrigation, genetically modified seeds, use of pesticides, failure of crops, stress etc., being the major ones. Widows of farmers who have committed suicide again are at the mercy of the government machinery to get compensation or loan waivers.

Reality of women farmers

In official terminology, there is no category called women farmers, but only women cultivators. For purpose of the census, a person is classified as cultivator if he or she is engaged in cultivation of land owned or held from government, or held from private persons or institutions for payment in money, kind, or share. Cultivation includes effective supervision or direction in cultivation. A person working on another person's land for wages in cash or kind or a combination of both (agricultural labourer), is not treated as a cultivator. In practical terms, a woman is not treated as a cultivator because she does not hold the patta (a legal document issued by the government establishing the ownership of a person over a particular piece of land); the husband owns it. So, technically, he is the cultivator, not she. Even if she owns the patta, the patriarchal society/family does not treat her as a farmer.

As per the 2011 government census report, there are about 41,896,000 female cultivators in India, out of 127,313,000 cultivators, i.e., 32 per cent are women cultivators (farmers). Following are some interesting statistics on active women farmers in Maharashtra, West Bengal and Chhattisgarh. While Maharashtra has 1.27 per cent of women cultivators, (50779 out of 4000724), West Bengal has 2.32 per cent, (8678 out of 373138) and Chhattisgarh has 1.1 per cent (13218 out of 1241967), respectively.

The percentage of women farmers with land in their own names is dismal. According to expert agrarian economist from Tata Institute of Social Sciences Prof. R. Ramakumar, as many as 87 percent women in India do not own their land; only 12.7 percent of them do. And since these women farmers do not own land they are not entitled for a bank loan since banks insist on land as collateral in return for sanctioning loans. And women farmers hardly have patta in their name. While patriarchal social/family structures deny them inheritance, neglect by official rules/laws do not provide them patta over their land, and because of which they are denied a bank loan. All of these problems make the presence of women farmers in agriculture invisible.

The percentage of women inheriting land is also sketchy. Prof. Ramakumar points out that there is no data on this. Till the Hindu Religious Act 2005 came into force, it was not even mandatory for a father to give any asset to the daughters. Even after 2005, this law, due to strong patriarchal structures in family, is violated. As a result, daughters hardly get rights of inheritance. The problems women face when inheriting lands from their fathers/husbands, is the same. In most cases, sons argue that as dowry has already been given to their female siblings while they were married off, they can't claim land in the father's family any more. Further, women farmers who do have land in their names are not allowed to take decisions for themselves. That decision is taken either by their brothers or husbands.

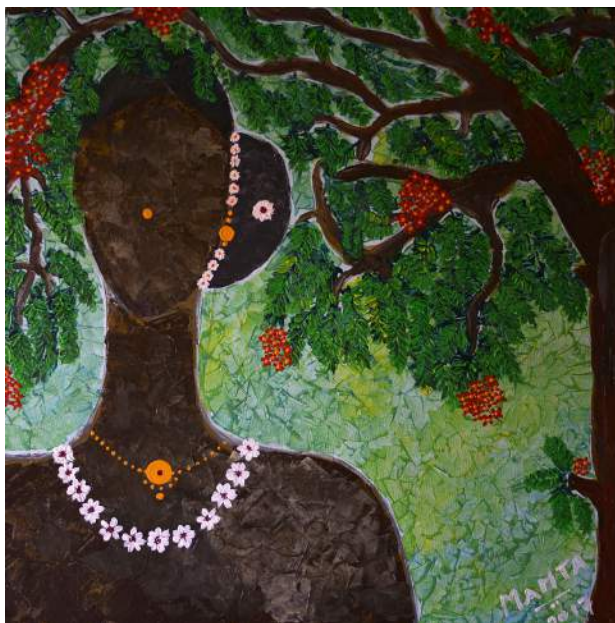
Interestingly, not only is there no data available on how much a woman farmer earns compared to her male counterpart on the fields, but there are also no safety measures like gloves, masks etc., when they handle fertilisers/pesticides/weedicides on the field. Furthermore, the condition of women farmers in India differs from state to state because the agro-ecological regions and crops grown differ. For example, the condition of women farmers in a sugarcane growing region of Maharashtra are different from those of women growing 'ragi' or paddy in a tribal region of West Bengal.

Translating social issues on canvas

I believe art is a universal language and social subjects like the above when portrayed through art (painting in my case), connect well with different audiences.

Documenting the inequality and issues of women farmers through art came naturally to me following my first-hand experiences. The inspiration behind my first set of paintings 'Sawantwadi Series' were the women farmers

from Sawantwadi – a former princely state in the Konkan district of Maharashtra. The series was an attempt to document the plight of these women farmers through art. My paintings depicted women either solo or in groups, going about their daily chores on the fields of Sawantwadi. This was followed by my second series, 'Women in Fields'. The paintings showcased women farmers (of all ages and stages in life – single, married, ageing), attending to their daily chores in life in the fields – either alone or with companions, or in conversations with each other with the lush green fields forming the backdrop for their activity.



In 'Silent Brides', I tackled the subject of marriage amongst the tribal communities of Bengal and Chhattisgarh wherein again women farmers from the poor and marginalised communities were married off for a price by their parents. Again, these women did not have a say in their choice of partners. The blank faces of these women in my paintings are an indication of how women farmers in India are devoid of their own voice and identity, and how they continue to remain a minority, neglected and ignored. Interestingly, these very paintings when exhibited in countries other than India, connected with the audiences instantly. In European countries like France, Denmark, Lithuania and Germany, both men and women seemed to identify with the issue. Artists in the past and present too have used woman as subjects to invoke various passions in the viewer. My idea of documenting this subject through art is an attempt to create a revolution of change in their lives and making the world aware that even in progressive times like ours, certain sections of society do need upliftment. And art is one way of doing it.



A journalist for over two decades, Mamta Chitnis Sen has worked with reputed publications, reporting on crime, politics, religion, art, community, human interest, and general news. She was Executive Editor of *Dignity Dialogue*, and presently handles media advocacy for Child Rights and You (CRY) – an NGO working for the rights of underprivileged children in India. Mamta is also an artist, and has exhibited her works in India and abroad.

Farmer widows, a neglected constituency

Widows of farmers who have committed suicide are struggling to make ends meet, as they do not have either land or house in their name. Meena Menon narrates the plight of these women, and urges the Government to engage constructively with the issue of land rights for women farmers.



The March protest for farmer widows

Since 2017, farmers, both men and women, have taken to the streets in a sort of last stand, to make their voices heard. The country has been apathetic to their plight since decades, but this time people couldn't but stop and take notice. Be it the bleeding feet of marching farmers, or their long struggles for a decent income, their voices seem to have been heard. However, for the first time perhaps, women farmers spoke up at separate meetings, part of the many in the country, on their troubles and demands related to farming.

The tragic stories

Married at 15, Reshma Sawant led a life of itinerant daily wage labour in the district of Beed, Maharashtra. In 2016, her husband Balu committed suicide after a failed attempt at setting up a hotel and borrowing money, which he couldn't repay. Now Reshma lives with her brother-in-law, has no home to call her own, and looks after her young daughter with her meagre earnings. Even though her father-in-law owned five acres – he left it to another son, and neither Balu nor his wife were given a share in the land.

The stories of Reshma and other women who barely survive on daily wages, with very little help from anyone, have been documented by the Mahila Kisan

Adhikaar Manch (MAKAAM) in a booklet titled "Vanwa" released in November 2018. MAKAAAM has been working with women farmers at a national level since 2014, and has been demanding recognition of their status and land rights to them. In September and October, 2018, the organisation conducted a survey of 505 women whose husbands had committed suicide in 11 districts of Vidarbha and Marathwada, and the findings released last year indicated that 29 per cent of them were not able to get land in their name. After the death of their husbands, 43 per cent of the women didn't have a house in their name either.

In Mumbai, the women from Marathwada and Vidarbha, mobilised by MAKAAAM held a symbolic protest and a condolence meeting in November 2018, as well. They mourned their loved ones and spoke at length about their plight as widows. Nilima from Wardha had to fight a long battle to get a little of her husband's share of land transferred to her name. He committed suicide in 2015. The land he tilled belonged to his father. Still, she continues to have no support from her in-laws and when she tried to share the electricity, they cut the power line. Most of the time she lives in darkness. "There should be some help - though I get ₹ 600 as widow's pension. Why can't we get a smart card for free health care as dryland farming is not getting me any money?", asks Nilima. On the other hand, the women were also happy that they were able to speak up and communicate their problems to the authorities. In an earlier meeting, women farmers like Manda appealed to the Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis to stop the bank from cutting her husband's debt from her compensation. "I got courage from speaking up, and I want other women to speak up and live in dignity", she said.

Less access to government schemes

Most women end up as daily wage labourers and struggle to make ends meet, with no land in their name or even a house. They have very little social or economic support, and mainly the education and sustenance of children is a big worry. The survey found that 33 per cent of the women had not submitted the application for the pension scheme, and while 26 per cent had filled in the forms, their pension was not approved. Only 34 per cent received regular pension. Of the women surveyed, only 52 per cent had ration cards in their names.

(continued on page 28...)



Agra and Fatehpur Sikri

Agra is a fascinating city. Though Taj Mahal – the elegant marble tomb is the highlight of the city, there is still a lot to explore in Agra. The fort, bazaars, and the bustling town beside the River Yamuna gives you astonishing glimpses of this Mughal city. Not far from Agra is the city of Fatehpur Sikri, a powerful reminder of India's Mughal history and the way one of the greatest Mughals, Emperor Akbar, lived and governed.



The majestic Agra Fort

History of Agra

Agra has an ancient past. Coins, sculptures and figures found in the vicinity demonstrate this. Batesar or Surjapur locality in the region connects to a king Surasena, said to be the great nephew of King Rama. In Mahabharata it finds mention as Agrabana.

Agra has a rich history. There is mention of construction of the Badalgarh Fort by Badal Singh in 1475. Agra was the residence of Sikandar Lodi who made it his capital in 1505. His son Ibrahim Lodi succeeded him, but he was defeated by Babur in 1526, who went on to consolidate Mughal rule from Agra. Babur's son Humayun was crowned king at Agra after Babur's death in 1530. However, his empire was claimed by Sher Shah Suri who ruled for five years, after which his son Salim Shah took control. Meanwhile, Humayun returned to reclaim Agra in 1555.

Akbar his son, later took control and brought in the much needed stability to the region. He renamed the city as Akbarabad. The modern city was built on the right banks of River Yamuna, while the capital that Sikandar Lodi had built was on the left bank of the river. Agra remained the capital during Akbar, his son Jahangir and Shah Jahan. However, Shah Jahan shifted his capital back to Delhi, and its importance as a political centre slowly declined.

After the decline of Mughal Empire it went into the hands of several rulers – Jats, Marathas etc... In 1803 it went into the hands of British colonial power, and until India got Independence, it was administrated by them.



The engravings on the Taj

Agra's attractions

My first visit in Agra was not the iconic Taj Mahal, rather the Taj Nature Walk. Located near the East Gate of Taj Mahal, this is a forest area of 70 hectares. The beauty of this forested area is not the zig zag winding paths, the lush green mounds or the flora and fauna, rather, it is the stone benches provided at crucial points that offer unhindered view of the Taj. The plus point – no crowd, and you can view the Taj from various angles.

The bazaars of Agra

Leather goods, carpets, handcrafted boxes, books and bags, incense sticks from mild sandalwood to heavily scented jasmine – this is a glimpse of a bazaar walk in Agra. Not to forget – Agra is famous for its sweet petha, gazak, and salty snacks called dalmoth. Some shops are exclusive to Agra. The marble inlay work that they do here is rather unique, and so are their embroidery works. Some of the bazaars worth checking out are Sadar Bazaar, Gokulpura and Tajganj.

The Taj

Just on the banks of River Yamuna, this white marble monument built by Shah Jahan for his beautiful wife Arjumand Bano Begum or Mumtaz Mahal, is a heritage monument. Mumtaz Mahal died in 1631 while

giving birth to her 14th child.

Started in 1631, it cost rupees four crore, and took nearly 17 years to construct. The white marble was brought from Makrana, Rajasthan. Inlaid with precious stones – Lapis lazuli, Cornelian, Jasper, Coral, in varied geometric and floral patterns, the tomb with its four minarets is a beautiful tribute of love.

Not just the Taj, there are other structures too in the Taj complex. A mosque and a Mehmaan Khana (guest house) are placed on either side of the Taj. Both these red sandstone structures enhance the beauty of the white marble mausoleum of Mumtaz. Both the structures are similar. However, the Mehmaan Khana, unlike the mosque, does not have a mihrab and Quranic inscriptions. Its interiors have detailed carvings in red and white.

There are also two pavilions on east and west of Taj complex. They are known as Jal Mahal, as they are on two ends of east-west water canal. Standing on raised platform four feet high – they are majestic with a white cupola topping the red sandstone structure

There is a small Taj museum that gives details about the building of Taj, the precious stones used, the calligraphy, the swords, daggers used by the Mughal emperors, and so on. Don't forget to see the Taj at night if you visit during the Full Moon period.



The audience hall at the Agra Fort



The Agra Fort has many structures inside

The Agra Fort

This is a citadel built by Akbar on an earlier site, Badalgarh; successive rulers after Akbar have modified, repaired and added on to the fort structures. Built in red sandstone in 1565, it took eight years for the fort to complete with the help of 4,000 workers. Some of the original structures were destroyed by Shah Jahan to replace them with his white marble buildings. The fort is impressive with its 21.4m high fortification walls, bastions and gateways.

Inside the Agra Fort there are varied structures like the Jahangir Palace, Khaas Mahal, audience halls like Diwan-i-Aam, Sheesh Mahal, Nagina Masjid, etc. It served Akbar, Jahangir and Shah Jahan too. After Shah Jahan's death, Aurangzeb was busy with regional conflicts. In 1666 however, there is a mention of him meeting Shivaji at the Diwan-i-Khas. After Aurangzeb's death it was taken over by varied rulers – finally the British got control of it in 1803. Agra became a civil establishment headquarters, and later the British established the Agra Presidency in 1835. After the 1857 mutiny the provisional government shifted to Allahabad. Agra was under the control of the English until India's Independence.

Some interesting structures inside the fort are the Sheesh Mahal of 1631 by Shah Jahan, the Shah Burj, the palace where Shah Jahan was imprisoned and he spent his last days till 1666, and a 16.5m gate brought from tomb at Ghazni by the British, and touted as part of Somnath Temple. You can happily loiter inside for half-a day looking at the palaces, glass works on ceilings and walls, inlay work of the white marble not to mention the ancient Mughal water supply systems inside the complex.

Other attractions

Other monuments on the other side of Yamuna are the Baby Taj Mahal or Itimad-ud-dalah that Nurjahan the queen of Jahangir built in 1622, in memory of her father Mirza Ghias Beg. It is a replica of Taj much smaller in scale made of white marble, and inlaid with semi-precious stones.

Rambagh is an early Mughal garden of Babar. When Babar died in Agra he was temporarily buried here before shifting to Kabul. Chini Ka Roza – a mausoleum of Shah Jahan's Prime Minister, Mehtab Bagh – a garden complex, and Sikandra – the tomb of Akbar, are other attractions.

The city of Fatehpur Sikri

Fatehpur Sikri is half a day trip from Agra. Tourists throng to see Agra attractions mainly the Taj Mahal and the Agra Fort, and if they have a half a day, head towards Fatehpur Sikri. However, the city deserves a lot of attention perhaps more than Agra. It was not just Akbar's capital, but a royal centre full of palaces, offices, tanks, and not to mention the tomb of Salim Chisti – a Sufi preacher. Poets, singers, writers graced this place – Birbal, Tansen, Todar Mahal, Abul Fazl, to name a few.

Akbar began to build this city in 1571. But what was Sikri before the advent of Mughals? Perhaps the name Sikri is derived from the word Saikh that meant a region surrounded by water. A Jain inscription of 1010 names the place as Sekriya. Before the Mughals arrived it was under the control of Sikarwar Rajputs, and later the Delhi Sultanate. Babar named this place as Shukri, which means 'thanks'. On his way to battle with Rana Sangram Singh of Mewar he had visited Sikri, and after his victory he revisited the place and named the place as Shukri. He constructed a garden, a lake palace and a step-well. None of them however remain at Sikri.

It was Akbar who renamed the city as Fatehpur Sikri. Akbar was a devotee of Sufi saint Khwaja Sheikh Muinuddin Chisti, and often used to visit Ajmer. Akbar was childless and was saddened that he did not have an heir to rule his empire. In 1568 he heard of a Sufi saint at Sikri known as Sheikh Salim and decided to visit him. The saint assured him that he would beget three sons and this turned out to be true. His first son was born in 1569 and was named as Salim. His second son was born in 1570 and



A passage near the Imperial Residential Complex of Akbar

another in 1572. Convinced of the saint's powers, he started building a city in 1571. The city was renamed as Fatehpur – city of victory when Akbar conquered Gujarat, building a commemorative gateway known as Buland Darwaza in the city. Akbar lived in Fatehpur Sikri for 14 years and in 1585 left the city. In the 17th century, the city lost its prominence when Shah Jahan shifted the capital from Agra to Delhi. Later under the English it turned into a cantonment town. Today it is a spiritual centre filled with devotees who visit the Dargah of Sheikh Salim Chisti. And being near Agra, it has also gained prominence as a tourist centre. It has also been declared as a world heritage site in 1986.



The Anup Talao is a sandstone bank, which was once filled with gold, silver, and bronze coins



The towering Buland Darwaza

The drive to Fatehpur Sikri

The one hour drive from Agra to Fatehpur Sikri is pleasant. The yellow mustard fields, Kos Minars – the stone milestones from Mughal times – are some common things that you will encounter. As you enter the town you are greeted by shops selling Nankhatai, the flavoured biscuits popular in the town. Passing the Agra gateway at the entrance you see a road winding upwards to the royal centre. All around you will see the remnants of a medieval city with its red sandstone walls, gateways and bazaars. The fort boasts of nine gateways. The city is surrounded by fort walls on three sides and on the fourth is bounded by a lake.

As you enter inside, you first sight the Diwan-i-Aam the public courtyard, then the royal palaces of king and queens, and going further the main mosque of city Jama Masjid and the mausoleum of Sheikh Salim Chisti. The city was built on a ridge. Palaces, institutions, mosque, were on top while the bottom of the ridge saw bazaars, houses for the common people and factories. Step wells with perineal water sources provided adequate drinking water.

For such a planned city Akbar did not stay here much. In 1585 he went on a military campaign to Punjab and shifted to Agra. His visits to Fatehpur Sikri became less frequent. One of the reasons – the city was not a strong citadel. The walls are low and do not boast of defensive structures like bastions. During Akbar's time he had to deal with lot of external and internal revolts. So he may have thought it prudent to retire to Agra Fort.



The mosque complex with Jama Masjid and dargah

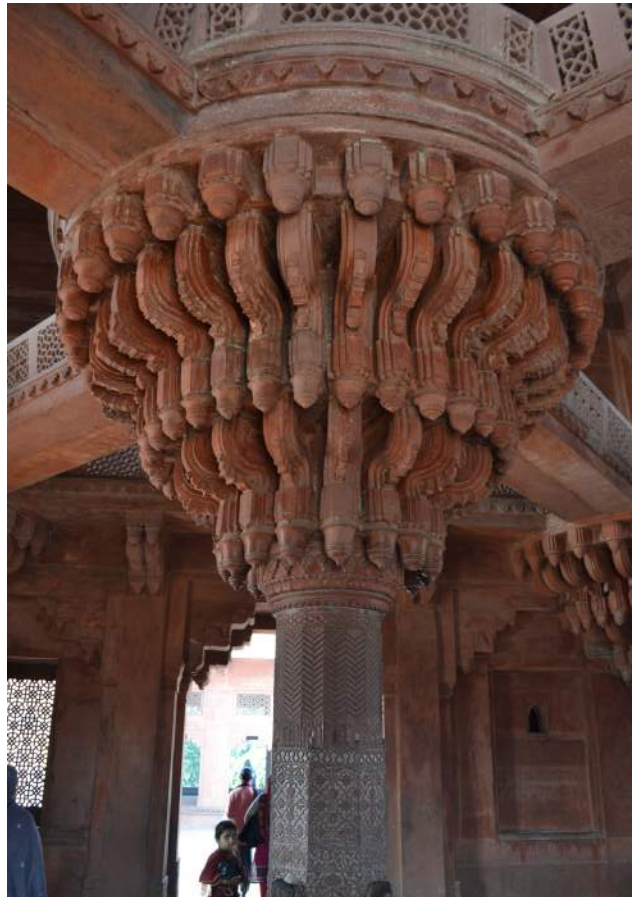
The attractions of Fatehpur Sikri

The city can be divided into the mosque complex and the imperial complex. The mosque complex boasted of the Jama Masjid, tomb of Salim Chisti and Buland-Darwaza. The imperial complex consisted of the King's palace, harem, store house, treasury etc. Some of the structures that you can see here are:

Diwan-i-Aam: This was a public hall meant for audiences with the king. It is an extensive courtyard flat roofed. At the centre the king was seated and on either side, his ministers. It was here that the king listened to his subjects, and met out his judgements.

Diwan-i-Khas: This is a square palace and Akbar used it for private audiences with foreign envoys, officials, and important visitors. At the centre of the hall is a stone pillar with a round seat on top. The base is square, then becomes octagonal higher up, and divides into 16 sides. It then further opens up as a flower with serpentine brackets to support a circular platform. The functionality of this structure is not known.

Aankh Michauli: This structure known as blind man's buff is touted as the place where Akbar used to play this game with queens. However, it is more of a treasury used to hold gold and silver coins. There is also a structure in the south-west of this structure known as astrologer's seat. This has torana arches similar to temples of Gujarat. And was mostly the seat of court treasurer who used to supervise works.



A glimpse of the Diwan-i-Khas



The Diwaan-i-Aam, or the audience hall



The five-storeyed Panch Mahal

Panch Mahal: This is a five-storied structure open on all sides. It was said to be used by the king and his queens to enjoy the breeze and the panoramic view of the city. Below in the open courtyard there are patterns resembling a Pachisi – an Indian board game. It is said that the



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.

king used to play on this using people as living pieces.

Anup Talao and Turkish Palace: Anup Talao is a red sandstone tank located centrally. It was once filled with gold, copper and silver coins, and sometimes silver and copper coins were donated to charity. Near the Talao is Khwabgha that was Akbar's room. It still has faded mural paintings on walls. This structure connects to Haramasara - the royal harem. It also has a window to the south called Jharokha. This is where the king used to show himself to people. Towards the north-east of the Talao is Turkish Sultana's Palace. It is a square building with richly carved brackets and columns. The walls, ceilings have floral and geometric patterns.

Haramasara: This was the harem of Akbar and was said to be administered by Akbar's mother Hamid Bano Begum. The harem was heavily guarded by Rajput guards, eunuchs, and women. Akbar's chief wives had their own quarters. The Sunhara Makan was probably meant for Akbar's mother and it lies close to Akbar's space. The Birbal palace was perhaps used by his queens. There is also a Hindu styled palace known as Jodha Bai palace. It is quite a large palace with a bath, garden and kitchen of its own. The palace has a Hindu shrine and motifs like lotus and vines. There are niches to keep idols. There is also a tulsi plant in the courtyard.

Jama Masjid and Dargah: This is the main mosque of the city. Next to it is the mausoleum of Chisti. The mausoleum is made of white marble. Inside the cenotaph is covered with silk and flowers. There is a circumambulation path all around it with perforated carved screens. Next to the mausoleum are buildings holding the graves of family members of the saint.

Buland Darwaza: This is another impressive gateway built after Akbar's victory over Gujarat. Fifty metres high, it is made of red sandstone with work of white marble. It has verses from the Quran written on it.

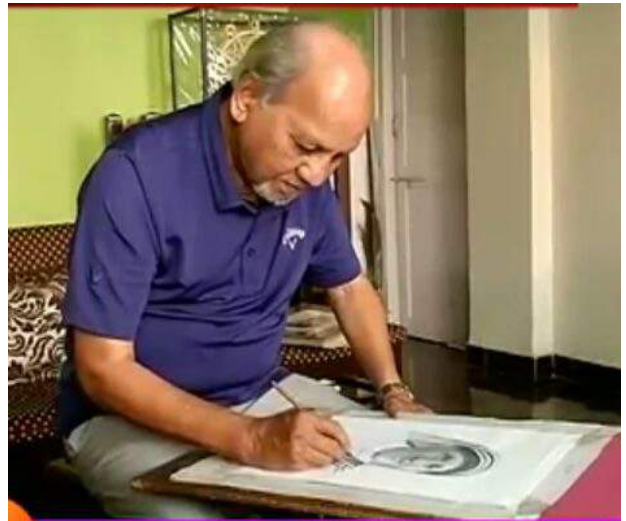
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“Stippling works well in all related arts such as landscape, birds, animals and portraits.”

Simple, gregarious, calm, and interested in people, **Prabhakar Gopal Patwardhan**, practices the art of ‘stippling’. Stippling is an art form which is practiced by very few people, and hence relatively less is known about it. Prabhakar speaks to **A.Radhakrishnan** about stippling and the future of this art form.



What is the art of stippling?

Stippling is an art form in which an artist puts thousands of individual dots very close to each other so as to create an image out of it. This was and even now is a very rare form of art in India, and is on the verge of extinction. State patronage is needed to help it survive.

What was the inspiration?

I observed lithography, which is a method of printing originally based on the immiscibility of oil and water. The printing is from a stone or a metal plate with a smooth surface. You have to put an individual dot to create a picture out of it. I first thought of trying this on a paper with water-proof ink, before making up my mind to walk this path.

Tell us about your background.

Born in an average family in village Bavdhan, a suburb of Pune, Maharashtra, I moved to Mumbai to take my degree in arts from the J. J. School of Arts.

As an intern with Voltas Limited for my regular living, I soon undertook to design and print six different magazines the company used to then publish, with the additional responsibility of designing the brochures, catalogues, posters, and advertising materials of its products, and the concept of exhibiting these products not only nationally, but internationally. It was my sole responsibility from conceptualisation to implementation, including the ideas, promotions, designs, setup, etc.

This passion for art and creativity lead me to also work in Bollywood as an assistant art director with Sudhendu Roy and M.R. Achrekar, respective art directors of famous

directors/producers Bimal Roy and Raj Kapoor. For some time, I also worked with Hashu Advani of the BJP, and also took up social causes with activist Lilatai Mulgaokar.

How exacting a hobby is stippling?

Yes, though initially it was a hobby, I thought of continuing so as to keep it alive as an art. It is not tedious, but I would rather say it is a test of your patience. Everything in this world has a process, and you have to go through it from start to end, to get better results.

What is the process involved in stippling?

I select an image, take an actual size print on a regular paper, draw the outline and prominent details by pencil first, and then fill the entire thing by putting dots of different sizes with the help of crockwell nib and waterproof ink.

Is it easier to stipple from an imagined source or a hard copy?

I do it with a hard copy next to me. I cannot imagine the other way of having a portrait in mind, to take it on paper. Sometimes it is really detailed as when trying to show something sharp such as a saree design, texture or facial hair, curly hair or eyes which are not black.

Is stippling different from drawing, painting, printmaking, engraving, sculpting, and line art illustrations?

Yes indeed, it is different than regular drawing. Every art has a different type and method. Drawing itself consists of pencil drawings, scathes, water based paints etc., and everyone has their expertise over something. I may not draw a beautiful painting over my sharp portraits, and vice versa.



Very realistic portraits created using the art of stippling

How can you compare it to hatching, half toning, dithering and computer printers? What is Pointillism?

Here halftone effect is created manually by the size of the dots. Pointillism is a technique of painting in which small, distinct dots of color are applied in patterns to form an image. Georges Seurat and Paul Signac developed the technique in 1886, branching from Impressionism.

What are the materials, implements, and tools required?

Firstly a good quality drawing paper. Crockwell nib, water-proof ink, rubber, pencil and sometime a small brush.

Which subjects do stippling work well for?

Stippling works well in all related arts such as landscape, birds, animals and portraits. Yes, you can show the texture effect, but I am not sure about its use in digital or forensic science.

How many ways can stippling be used? Can stippling be used to produce a 3-dimensional shape?

Stippling can be used only in one prime way to show darkness and lightness of the object. Yes, you can show 3D effect through type and sizes of dots, though I have never tried it.

How dense should the dots be?

For every micro and large dot, the nib is the same, whereas controlling the hand to create a size of that dot is a different art altogether. Every dot has a meaning. If you drop a larger dot instead of a small one, especially in the eyes of the picture, you cannot show the non-black eyes. In Marathi we call it "Ghare Dole".

How much importance does light have in stippling?

Light plays a partial but not a crucial role, as you can do it in natural light as well as even with a tube light. Concentration and good eye sight is the key.

How is white space important in stippling? Is stippling in black and white or in colour better?

White space is equally important just like the black. You cannot get sharper details on any other combination to black other than white paper. Certain things are left white to show as white hair or skin color. Black and white is always better as it gives more liveliness to the picture. With colours, it might take more time, as you need to change nibs, different colour shades, etc.

How can gaps between the dots be an expressive tool in itself? As you work, how do you prevent producing unwanted "tails" on your dots?

The distance between two dots is very important to show the density of it. You should not leave a tail. Even if you do, you can cover it up with white ink if it is manageable.

How long does one creation take?

The process of one portrait takes about 30 to 35 hours. Sometimes a 10 minute work stretches to a straight 5 to 6 hours, depending on the circumstances and mood.

Why restrict it to personalities and not include nature too?

A lot of people have suggested this to me. Presently, I have taken an assignment of creating only eyes of certain celebs and after that I don't mind trying landscape, where you can easily cover up the mistakes you make, but here with a particular face, a mistake cannot be covered up at any given point, for a good result.

How do you get the patience and strength for it?

Firstly, you have to have sincere interest in such an art, especially when you know it is time consuming. Once you start with this intention, patience will automatically build when you realise the process, approach or motivation is leading to creation of something good. I must of course give credit to my wife, who is my strength, for her infinite patience, especially when I avoid lunch or ignore her at such times.

What have you done with your creations? How many have you created?

I have made more than thousands of them. Some of them I have gifted and received great appreciation. My collection includes portraits of famous personalities across the globe encompassing industry, politics, and sports to celebrities and artists.

Have you commercialised them?

It's still a hobby. I have not yet commercialised it, but I don't mind selling them to the right buyers. But to be honest, I am not aware of such channels.

Have you had exhibitions of your work?

After shifting to Pune, I got the opportunity to meet the famous cartoonist late Mangesh Tendulkar. It was he who encouraged me to hold my first ever exhibition in Pune. To my surprise, I got a tremendous response. It proved the beginning of a new chapter in my artistic life. In fact it was

he who gave me the title, 'the magic hand'. It spurred me to have exhibitions abroad too. I have held a total of 10 exhibitions till now on a year to year basis in Pune, rest of Maharashtra and abroad.

The French government and the Savarkar Samiti are planning to build a monument at Marseillaise in France (from where he jumped into the ocean to make his escape). I can reveal with pride that a portrait of Veer Savarkar made by me, for which I received a gold medal, will be displayed there. Recently I was also honoured with the Punyacha Abhimaan award by the Maharashtra government and ISKCON (International Society for Krishna Consciousness).

What other hobbies do you have?

I love travelling and meeting new people. I also write short stories which are currently under consideration with certain producers to be made into films.

Can this art have a message?

The message is that nothing is impossible at any age. I still do it at the age of 79. This art should live long.

What is the purpose of life?

There is a subtle difference between a human being and being human. I donate all I earn through exhibitions, by way of entry fee and donations to various NGOs, and try to be a good human.

**Prabhakar Patwardhan can be contacted on his
Cell: 9763669781**



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

WHO AM I?

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



Earth...



afterworld@gmail.com

Farmer widows, a neglected constituency

(...continued from page 16)

Not many children availed of fee concessions – only 12 per cent – and only 24 per cent received any material help in the form of books, uniforms or stationary. The main stumbling block is the government rules on deciding if a suicide was eligible for the rupees one lakh compensation or not. A government committee assesses crop failure, land ownership and institutional credit, among other criteria, and then decides. While most of the credit comes from informal sources, and lands are not in the name of the people who are tilling them, the question of compensation become fraught with uncertainty for the surviving families. After a death, families run around in a welter of red tape for their entitlements. Some of the women in the survey were not aware of the government's health scheme, the Mahatma Phule Jevandayi Arogya Yojana, and some had to bribe officials to get the benefits.

Even the Prerana mental health scheme was not known to more than 15 per cent of those surveyed. This scheme was launched in 2015 to identify farmers in need of counselling, after which they can go to designated government hospitals for help. From 2015 onwards, 137 households had mental health patients, but 83 didn't go for treatment. About 23 patients went to government hospitals and many of them ended up paying for treatment.

In New Delhi too, women farmers held a Kisan Mukti Sansad or a mock Parliament with social activist Medha Patkar as speaker for a day, in November 2017. The stories of the women highlighted the agrarian distress in India, a fact that government has wilfully ignored despite over 300,000 farm suicides from 1995 to 2015 – when the last recorded data was made public.



Kavitha, from Telangana, whose husband committed suicide after repeated loss of cotton crop, blamed the government. Both the parents of Manisha from Siddipet in Telangana committed suicide as they couldn't repay loans at high interest from money lenders, who harassed them for repayment. "We have come to Delhi wanting to know from the Prime Minister who will help us, if he does not?" she said. Farmers demanded a reduction in the cost of inputs - especially seeds, fertilisers, water and power, a comprehensive social security scheme, in a massive list of demands to the Centre.

The stories of Reshma and other women who barely survive on daily wages, with very little help from anyone, have been documented by the Mahila Kisan Adhikaar Manch (MAKAAM) in a booklet titled "Vanwa" released in November 2018.

While the government recognises and strives to promote women in the private and corporate sector, women in the marginal and unorganised sector are floundering on their own. After the MAKAAM survey, women demanded increase in ex-gratia payment, doubling of widow's pension, free education for children, ration cards, and land rights to be transferred to the women's name, apart from a helpline in all suicide prone districts.

Under the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi, ₹6,000 per annum has been announced for marginal farmers, in the recent interim budget, but such schemes are sure to bypass most women farmers since they don't have the land in their name. Instead of sops, it is time the government engaged constructively with the issue of land rights to women farmers, and provided support to survivors of farm suicides.



Meena Menon is former deputy editor *The Hindu*. She is now an independent journalist and author of *Reporting Pakistan, Riots and After in Mumbai*, *A Frayed History: The Journey of Cotton in India* (coauthored with Uzramma), *Organic Cotton Reinventing the Wheel* and *On the Trail of the Girl Child* (co-authored with Sharmila Joshi).

In pursuit of power

Despite 33 per cent reservation, the percentage of women in leadership positions in Indian politics continues to be abysmally low. Mamta Chitnis Sen tries to decipher the reasons for the same.

The upcoming Lok Sabha elections appeared to have an interesting start early February this year, when West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee upped her rhetoric against the Centre, first through her dharna (in her home state), following it up with a massive rally in the Capital, which was well covered by all sections of the media.

Although the move, she cites, was in reaction to the Centre's 'personal' use of the country's investigative agency, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to further the ruling party's political agenda, one couldn't help but notice how this act of protest managed to draw support from an undivided Opposition as well. The move prompted political pundits to predict that the All India Trinamool Congress founder may soon be on her way to the Prime Minister's office next year, if she played her cards well.

Like Mamata Banerjee, the former Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh Mayawati too, is considered to be a formidable political strength in the Hindi heartland. Both strong political leaders with tons of election experience behind them, Mamata Banerjee and Mayawati are known to run their own parties and their cadre with a certain amount of tact and discipline.

Interestingly, both TMC and BSP led by these two strong women do not have women wings like other political parties. This spoils the notion that women wings alone provide a platform for women party workers to enter mainstream politics. Fact is, both Mamata and Mayawati are treading the harsh political waters on their own strength, and are examples for aspiring women in politics to follow.

Few women leaders

A decade ago during a study undertaken to understand the role of women workers in women wings of political parties, I was confronted with women complaining that not much is being done to encourage the participation of women in politics. The findings of the study, an interview of over 500 women from different political parties in Mumbai published in the form of a paper *Evolving Role of Women in Political Parties – A Perspective* had women politicians complaining that even within political parties, women are rarely found in leadership positions.

Many had also pointed out then that women continued to be fielded from 'losing constituencies', unlike their male counterparts who were given prestigious constituencies, and that a majority of women gaining access to political life was also due to support or contacts from their family already in or with access to politics. Many women



Has Mamta Banerjee played her cards well?

individually confessed that they did feel nervous while surrounded by men whenever discussing any concrete social issues, and refrained from arguing for two reasons — lack of political geographic knowledge, and the inability to handle large and unruly crowds which most men are at ease with. Most women also agreed on the point that inspite of having illustrious men and women leaders in their parties they felt left out merely because of their own inability to make their higher ups understand their point of view. The vast class differences existing between a leader and his/her grassroots worker, leaves the latter at the lowest rung of the political ladder for the rest of her life.

Most women had in fact no idea of what their role and contribution for the overall women in the society in general should be simply because none of the political parties or the male and women political leaders conducted meetings or interacted with them to generate any favourable ideas for women empowerment. While women between the ages of 24 and 28 years did show interest in joining mainstream politics, many often gave up post marriage due to family responsibilities, or due to disillusionment after scrutinising the party inside out.



Mayawati is considered to be a formidable political strength

The prime age at which independent women were drawn to political participation was between the ages of 32 and 40 years, in both cases though, not voluntarily, but at the instance of a family or a friend and only after having given considerable time to the upbringing of their young family.

Women from upper-middle class in urban cities generally preferred to stay away from politics as they claimed they had better career opportunities and more lucrative options outside of politics, to choose from. The endless wait for that big break to come in politics, was therefore not their choice. Dynastic dominance too was a major factor for independent women not desiring a political career. Many national parties like the Congress and the BJP were controlled by strong dynastic families, and breaking into their circle of confidantes would take years for a new entrant, admitted many women.

Many admitted that for women with almost no political connections to make a mark on their own merit within the party structure or outside it, took up a

considerable amount of time and energy. Many women admitted that they were forced to toe the party line as independent ideas were often rejected for safer options.

Not in touch with ground realities?

Although a decade later, things seem to have changed a bit. A lot more women are opting for politics, and thanks to the Internet, many of them are posting their opinions and work on social media sites.

Yet, one fact which cannot be ignored is that while a majority of them are still working hard to be in leadership positions, they continue to be disconnected with ground issues. Trafficking of young girls, women being forced into prostitution, child marriage, single parenting, sexual harassment, and women being underpaid are issues not many women politicians want to talk or fight for. Their lack of knowledge about these social issues, policies and geography of caste and religion that dominate the vast Indian political landscape, is another story in itself. Devoid of power to make decisions, they end up playing second fiddle to their political masters.

Political analyst Nadeem Nusrath believes that regional women leaders do not have women wings, because being confined to a particular state it doesn't make sense to have a plethora of central organisations. But for national political parties like Congress or BJP, it is politically wise to have a plethora of frontal organisations to reach out far and wide to all sections of people and accommodate them.

Interestingly, both TMC and BSP led by these two strong women do not have women wings like other political parties. This spoils the notion that women wings alone provide a platform for women party workers to enter mainstream politics.

“However, it finally boils down to how women leaders ultimately redeem themselves by charting a political narrative. And they are very few in number. A Smriti Irani could do it. Priya Dutt after inheriting a rich political legacy of her father and being empowered as Mahila Congress in-charge and All Indian Congress Committee's (AICC) media in-charge, confessed that she is not cut out for politics. So in that sense, it is not about having a women's wing in a party, but more to do with having women who are able to make a difference through their tenacity, intelligence, and understanding of socio-political and economic issues of the day”, he sums up.



A journalist for over two decades, Mamta Chitnis Sen has worked with reputed publications, reporting on crime, politics, religion, art, community, human interest, and general news. She was Executive Editor of *Dignity Dialogue*, and presently handles media advocacy for Child Rights and You (CRY) – an NGO working for the rights of underprivileged children in India. Mamta is also an artist, and has exhibited her works in India and abroad.

Meeting the Emperor

*While most of us may not be able to visit the remotest regions of our planet, we can enjoy these places vicariously through those intrepid adventurers and explorers who do. **Harshad Sambamurthy** met such a traveler who visited the Antarctica to chronicle the Emperor Penguins. He writes a fascinating account of that meeting.*

Very rarely do you meet someone who has visited Antarctica. Usually, movies like *Happy Feet* or *March of the Penguins*, or the visually stunning *Blue Planet* or *Planet Earth* suffice, taking us to this remotest region of the globe. But then again, sometimes you do meet that special person. A certain individual with a unique drive and infectious enthusiasm for exploration. Someone who finds meaning in nature's most beautifully desolate places, and documents their travels with a precision and patience worthy of wider notice and readership. Sometimes that person is not as foreign or as far off as you might first presume, but rather, just a few streets away.

Srikanth Chandrasekaran, a photographer, and founder of The Learning Community at Quest in Chennai did just this. About a decade ago after he and his friend bought a long-lens camera, a passion for wildlife — inspired by this friend — rapidly emerged, and ever since, Srikanth has been capturing the splendour of the natural world with a deep reverence for his subject, honing his craft with charming complexity.

The emperor of all trips

In October, he set out on an expedition to photograph the iconic Emperor Penguin of Antarctica. Departing from Ushuaia, the Southern-most tip of Argentina on a four-day journey aboard a mammoth-sized ship, his group had to forge their way through delays prompted by the arduous and hostile Drake's Passage — that involved a tumultuous downpour and innumerable seven-storey colossal waves — till suddenly, a singular tranquillity seemed to thrive. They had reached. Srikanth was in store for three



Srikanth Chandrasekaran (in blue jacket) on an expedition to Antarctica

windless, sunny days in a landscape so fragile and delicate, as it is overwhelming in its vastness and solitude. The history of the penguin itself dates back millions of years, so in essence, the Emperor Penguin colony Srikanth got to know, was like stepping into a time-machine and coming into contact with a primordial past.

Emperor Penguins are the largest of their species, reaching up to four-feet in height. As of 2012, there were about 238,000 breeding pairs in existence, but scientists have since projected populations to plummet by as much as 33% by the turn of the century. They are one of the most ice-dependent of all penguin species, requiring it for foraging, breeding, and raising their young. With the onslaught of climate change, sea-ice cover has reduced by 60% in the last 30 years, which has knock-on effects on the supply of krill, a major food-source for Emperor Penguins. Fortunately, “life always finds a way and adapts”, as Srikanth tells me that the penguins now live on thicker, sturdier glacial ice.

When interacting with the penguins, Srikanth had to reconcile for himself the seeming paradox of being a wildlife enthusiast, whilst causing disturbance in a pristine polar paradise. From the ship, a helicopter was used to transport passengers to the Emperor Penguin colony. On the ground, a strict distance was to be maintained between you and the penguin. If a penguin waddled close, you were to freeze, and if need be, assume a non-threatening horizontal position. Others were not so empathetic to these strict rules however, and taking advantage of the wide expanse, ventured off in search of that perfect shot! Upon his recent return from the South Pole, Srikanth delivered a presentation about his trip at Quest, where a display of his beautiful photography can still be viewed. For Quest, Srikanth has also structured a sequence of images from his expedition to encourage children to create and form their own stories about these penguins, stimulating a sense of learning that harnesses and inculcates a much-needed empathy and personal affiliation towards the well-being of our wildlife.



Emperor Penguins in Antarctica (Photos: Srikanth Chandrasekaran)

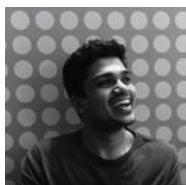


A drop at a time

After he witnessed first-hand the impact of human-induced climate change on sea-ice and its effects on our avian friends in the Antarctic, I ask Srikanth what we, sitting in Chennai can do to make our lifestyles more environmentally friendly? It all starts with small steps he tells me; simplicity is vital. Turning-off the lights when not in use, being conscious of the food we eat and where it comes from, how many times we use our car. Things we

take for granted can have severe repercussions for wildlife across the planet. If we can strive to take small consistent steps in minimising our individual carbon footprint, even marginally, this can have an immense effect upon both our climate, and the conservation of our wildlife. It all adds up.

In a pivotal point in our world's history, perhaps it is the utilisation of creative tools like photography and storytelling that can touch us at our core, and breathe emotion into the way we relate with, and perceive our environment. Perhaps the suffusion of these pieces in the larger and more intricate puzzle of conservation education is what will spur us towards re-discovering our once timeless compassion for, and harmony with all living beings.



Harshad Sambamurthy is an environmental writer. Through the written word, he hopes to develop an environmental consciousness that recognises the inherent link between humans and wildlife using creative educational and pedagogical tools like storytelling and folklore. He is based in Chennai, and can be reached at harshad.samba@gmail.com

The death of us

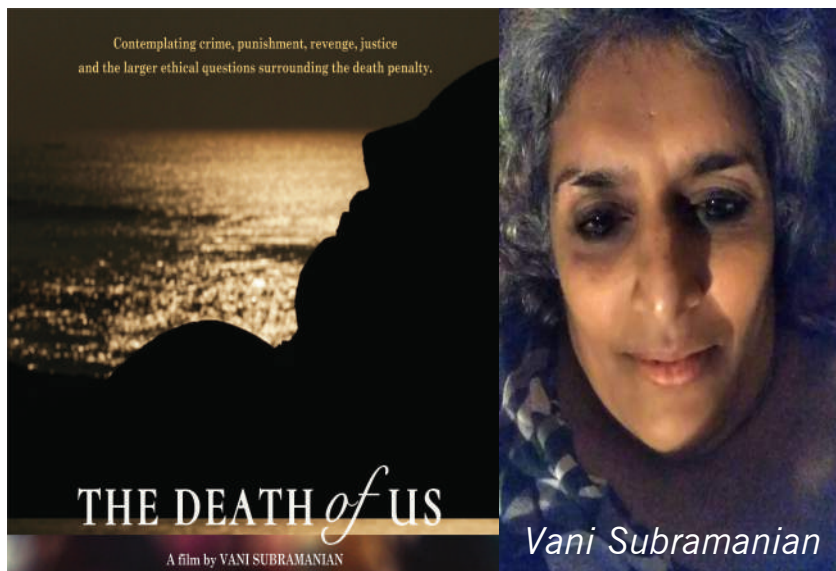
*The debate over capital punishment has been dealt with in a new film called **The Death of Us**, where director Vani Subramanian has interviewed death row convicts and gone in-depth into the issue, says **Shoma A. Chatterji**.*

Vani Subramanian switched from copywriting to feminist activism and documentary filmmaking. Her work as a filmmaker explores the connections between everyday practices and larger political questions, be they in the areas of culture, food production, primary education, urban development, communalism, sex selective abortions, or even matters of identity embedded in our food practices. Her films have been screened and have received awards, both nationally and internationally. She recently made a wonderful documentary called *The Death of Us* which is making news across film festivals. The film has been produced by the Public Service Broadcasting Trust in association with Doordarshan and Prasar Bharati.

'The death of us'

The film is an ideal blend of aesthetics and documentation that covers interviews of actual convicts sentenced to hang for their crimes, and quotes the statistical data on hanging, features crimes that lead to the death sentence, and finally, points out the anomaly in the justice system that applies and executes the rule of law that raises questions on whether justice has truly be served or is biased against the poor, the marginalised and the underprivileged.

The film opens with a scene of a rope coiling and uncoiling unto itself captured through different angles in close-ups which, given the title of the film, is quite scary because you are actually looking at a rope made exclusively for hanging a man/woman sentenced to death. This makes for a shocking beginning to a film that is both informative and educative, and also entertaining in a certain sense. The voice-over states that these ropes are made in the Buxar Central Jail in



Patna, Bihar. But it was closed when Vani was shooting the film and so, she could not include the shed where workers wove these ropes – thick, supple and made of Manila. A top prison official from the prison in which the death row convict is jailed, visits the work shed where inmates make the ropes to test the quality of the rope, and find out whether the rope as been tampered with. The rope is made on order from another prison.

When asked why she chose to use the rope as a visual metaphor, Vani says, “In obvious terms, it’s the means of carrying out an execution in India. While I didn’t want the film to be dramatic or grisly, I wanted the viewer to never forget that that was what this wide ranging conversation was really all about.” This rope twists and turns like a snake before transforming itself into a hangman’s knot. A list of all the different crimes that are punishable by death in India follows, such as; (1) terror offences, (2) dacoity with murder, (3) murder, (4) abetting suicide by minors, (5) kidnapping, (6) sexual offences, (7) drug offences, and (8) rape of minors.

The actual cases

The film carries some very important interviews of men sentenced to death. The first among these is K. Thiagarajan who was born on the very day Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated. Around the 1970s, he joined the Naxalite Movement and became the first Tamil youth to join it. After meeting Charu Majumdar, he burnt his certificates and documents, left his family, and became an extremist. His sentence is linked to the Kilvelman case, the site of the first massacre of dalits in independent India. When dalit farm labourers, supported by the Communist Party fought for fair wages, the president of the paddy producers’ association, Gopal Krishna Naidu, decided to crush them to death. On 25th December 1968, Naidu and 300 others attacked Kilvelman. They shot and knifed the people who scattered to save their lives. The rest were rounded up and set ablaze. There were 23 children, 16 women and five men all burnt to death. The attackers served light sentences or were released. Thirty dalit men got rigorous imprisonment, but Naidu remained free.

The rebels in a revenge attack, after their first attempt failed, launched the second one. The main perpetrator, Thiruconam Muttuthangappa was a cruel landlord and acaste fanatic, and his crimes against women were notorious. Thiagarajan attacked him from behind and cut him up. Later, he was asked whether he would want to be an approver for a lighter sentence, but his mother told him not to betray his other two partners in this attack. The verdict was announced on 27th September 1970 in Thanjavur district, where for this homicide, one received life imprisonment at the High Court, and three were sentenced to death.

This is just one of the cases the film discusses at length through detailed interviews with the death row convicts, which, we later get to know, ended in acquittal of most of them. The narrative and the voice-over is often intercut with lines of an Urdu poem by Faiz Ahmed Faiz recited in his own voice with the English translation. The recording is very old so the voice does not come out clear and lucid, so the magic of Faiz is somewhat dissipated.

The next person on death row to be interviewed is S. Chalapathi Rao, imprisoned in Central Jail, Nellore. He was an extremely poor dalit who worked as a day labourer in Narsaropet in Guntur district. He stepped into crime for reasons of poverty feeling that crime will give them a higher income. He had been sentenced to death for involvement in a bus robbery which led to 23 dead and 14 injured.

The film quotes a paragraph from Bhagat Singh's famous article "Why Am I An Atheist?" He writes, "What of a person who is born in a lower caste family? His fate is that people of higher castes will treat him with hate, disgust and scorn. His lack of education, his poverty and the contempt he faces from them will most

likely harden his heart. If he commits a crime, who should be held responsible? God? Or, him? Or, the pandits and intellectuals of his society?"

Sculpting a cause

Sudarshan Pattnaik, who is a noted sand sculptor at Konark, Odisha, lends the voice of balance to the film which repeatedly points out the tragic anomaly in carrying out the death sentence in India. "I was a child labourer," he said. "But the minute I touched the sand, I felt – this is my canvas and my fingers were my pencils and colours. I firmly believe that social issues and current topics are what sculptures should be created around and I thought that the beach where I create so many sculptures can be seen by the thousands who come here for leisure. Also, lakhs of people have died here during the Tsunami." He adds that his sand sculptures are his tribute to those who have laid down their lives and "that is my responsibility to society as an artist." The camera pans across many sand sculptures created by Sudarshan Pattnaik.

Says the director Vani, "The sand artist, Sudarshan Pattnaik, has a somewhat mixed position – at one level he believes in frightening people with what will finally happen to you if you are a terrorist/rapist etc., through his works... but when you push him to it, he says there is no actual deterrence that the death penalty assures us of – so to my mind, he is sort of a mainstream opinion that propagates itself through popular art. I understood that my film was going to be seen in a pro-death environment, so didn't feel like I need to reflect that in the film – hence it attempts to propose the counter to the pro arguments already in our heads/all around us."

There are other interviews such as that of S.A.R. Geelani sentenced to death for the bombing of

Parliament House on 13th December, 2001, where 14 died and 18 were injured, with death for three and one given rigorous imprisonment. One of them has already been executed. Then the drug smuggling case at Palk Straits, Indian Ocean that happened on 29th November, 2013, leading to three Sri Lankans and 5 Indians receiving the death sentence at the High Court in Colombo in Sri Lanka.

The film gives us some stunning statistics as follows. Of those sentenced, (a) 99% prisoners are very poor, (b) none of those involved in big scams reach the prison with few exceptions, (c) even if they do reach the prisons, their wealth protects them. Prison authorities do not care about when or whether Presidential clemency has been applied for, received or rejected because they just want to finish formalities and get the job done.

The All-India data on death row inmates (2013 – 2015) reveal that: 84% of those who reach the death row and life sentence are uneducated and illiterate, (2) 74% are economically weak, (3) 65% are punished for the first time and (4) 76% are SC/ST/Minorities.

The last word on this subject goes to Vani who says, "I wish I could have spoken to people on death row today... so we could hear what it means to be living, at this very moment, with the threat of execution hanging over you. What gives them hope? What causes despair? Do they have the energy to fight it, if so, where do they draw it from, etc... Because for me this film was not about comparing the pain caused by the original crimes to the survivors/loved ones of the victim or the pain that the capital punishment causes to those close to the person who is/may be hung. I wanted to give voice to people we don't have a chance to listen to."



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.

How to study, without losing your mind!

*Exam time is on, all over India. As young students prepare, **A. Radhakrishnan** seeks to ease their burden with some timely tips, and some humour!*

Exams are like girlfriends

- Too many questions
- Difficult to understand
- More explanation is needed
- Result is always 'fail'!

Exams naturally are a major cause of stress for students. The outcome, on which much depends, is terrifying. Newton's 4th law for exams says, 'Every book will continue to be at rest or covered with dust until some external or internal exam moves it!'

Manage your time

Courage and calmness, in tandem with regular reading is the bulwark. Manage time and set up a study timetable. Last-minute cramming is a bad approach. Studying for long stretches can be counterproductive. Would you try and run 24 hours a day when training for a marathon? Study bit by bit over a long period, taking breaks, as it helps in long-term retention of knowledge.

Try to slowly interlink ideas as a quick recap, rather than a first attempt at learning. Your only goal should be to understand information, so it will stick with you for assignments, tests and life. Notes and books should be a medium for learning rather than an end result.

Set a time to wake up, eat breakfast, get dressed, brush your hair and look presentable and begin studying every day, to feel motivated. Study sessions with friends, parents and siblings, may answer your doubts. Try

teaching the subject to another who needs it. This exercise will force you to be organised. You may want to give some exams more study time than others; so find a comfortable balance. An effective way to prepare for exams is to practice answering past exam papers. Breaking up study into multiple, smaller sessions, is the answer.

Changing your location from home to a library or a new room within the home, works wonders. A clean study space encourages clear, focused thought. A good noise-canceling headset will be able to preserve both your sanity and your love of those around you.

Human memory is quirky, complicated, and unreliable. One's ability to retain information diminishes after about 25-30 minutes. Facts which can fall out of your brain and concepts that are the glue that hold the entire big picture together, matter.

Focus on recollection, ask yourselves questions, and do not just glance at highlights. Studying less but studying smart, helps increase retention and understanding. Mere reading is insufficient. Every piece of information you cull from a text book should connect with something else you have learned. Always survey, question, read, recite and review, to retain information.

Study using just a fraction of the time others use. Don't cram at the last minute or memorise details.

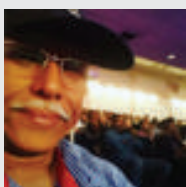
Organise information to recall easily. Don't force ideas into your skull, but link ideas together and see the whole, not just parts.

Vary your routine

Use all your senses. Come up with vivid pictures, feelings and images that relate information together. Constant reading and understanding of topics gives you flexibility in finding patterns and metaphors in new topics. A set routine, will find yourself in a rut, so switch the schedule around a bit. Variety restores enthusiasm. Set a quitting time for your day always. One may also play a board game with family or friends, read a good book, or take a walk for relief.

Practice basic self-care like eating right, as it impacts focus and energy levels. Resist constantly snacking on junk food. Being well hydrated is also essential for your brain. So drink plenty of water throughout revision, and also on the exam day. Invest in a chair that is comfortable, as sitting on your comfortable bed will put you to snooze, and promote poor posture, causing long-term health problems; also, get enough sleep.

Be updated in advance, with all the rules and requirements for your exam day. Last but not the least, when writing your exam, write points first, and then elaborate. Do not be distracted by others taking too many supplements. And keep your cool. Think of it as merely putting down your thoughts.



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

GENERAL O.P. MALHOTRA, PVSM

A most distinguished officer (1922-2015)

General O.P. Malhotra was born on 6 August 1922 in Srinagar, and was educated at the Model High School, Srinagar, and SPM Higher Secondary School, also in Srinagar. He then moved to Government College Lahore, and joined the army.

He was commissioned into the Regiment of Artillery in November 1941. He distinguished himself in the Battle of Sangshak in the Second World War, and was wounded. He later joined 13 (Dordon) Mountain Battery. He was instructor in the School of Artillery, and in 1946 attended the Long Gunnery Staff Course at Royal School of Artillery, Larkhill, UK. He was instructor in Defence Services Staff College and went through staff and command appointments before taking over the assignment of military in USSR from 1962 to 1965. He was concurrently accredited to Poland and Hungary. On return from the post of military attaché, he commanded 1 Artillery Brigade, part of 1 Armoured Division, and took part in the battle of Sialkot during the Indo-Pak War in 1965. He went through various staff and command appointments and took over as GOC-in-C Southern Command in Pune and was awarded PVSM in 1976 for service of the most exceptional order. He became Chief of Army Staff on 31 May 1978 and retired on 31 May 1981. He was given the honour of Honorary General of the Nepalese Army. After retirement, he served as ambassador for India in Indonesia from 1981 to 1984. Punjab had been facing militancy for more than a decade. The Punjab assembly had been dismissed and President's Rule imposed on 11 May 1985. Infighting amongst dominant political leaders, uncertainty about future political set up and an ineffective President's rule permitted the rise of militant groups and unsocial elements.

The Central Government realised the need for resuming the political process so that the people in rural areas could participate in the state elections. General Malhotra, the former Chief of Army Staff was appointed Governor of Punjab and Administrator of Chandigarh. He took over his assignment on 18 December 1990. Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar did not want to extend the President's rule beyond 11 May 1991.



General Malhotra had always led from the front and set himself the task of holding elections. Within 24 hours of taking over the responsibility as Governor of Punjab, he visited the Golden Temple at Amritsar to pay obeisance despite the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee boycotting his visit and refusing to present him Saropa, the traditional robe of honour. He undertook a tour of the border area to restore confidence amongst people in the area which had experienced almost complete abdication of authority. He visited the Durgiana temple in Amritsar to talk to the migrant Hindus from border villages. Three migrant Hindus responded with cynicism. They were busy feverishly loading their belongings into trucks just as he was talking of improved security.

He visited the worst hit town of Bhikiwind. The border posts of BSF displayed the smuggled arms and in place of the usual, he asked a searching question, "You have all the electronic gadgets. How then did these arms get smuggled in?". He realised that establishing control and confidence was not going to be an easy task. Patrolling by the army helped to curb violence. He ordered amnesty for militants who surrendered with arms.

Elections were announced for 22 June 1991. These were cancelled when Narsimha Rao took over as Prime Minister. General Malhotra resigned and commented, "I have been through three wars. I have been a general in the wars, but I have never felt as defeated as I feel today after the announcement by the Election Commission that the elections have been postponed."

He was a keen sportsman and was president of Equestrian Federation of India and of Delhi Golf Club. He was founder of two charitable organizations, Shiksha and Chikitsa providing help to children to study and give medical help to the unprivileged classes. He passed away on 29 December 2015.

- Brigadier Suresh Chandra Sharma (retd.)

GEORGE FERNANDES

A revolutionary leader and a man of the masses (1924-2018)

The passing away of George Fernandes on 29 January 2019 set off tributes, obituaries and assessments of his work and life, which could never ever be described as routine or uneventful. He was 88 when he succumbed to swine flu in Delhi, but for several years before that he had been out of public life due to Alzheimer's disease.

Charismatic, fluent in a number of languages, a forceful public speaker, "George" as he was known even to the most junior activist, he was participant-witness to some of the most tumultuous events of India's politics. Born in Mangalore (Karnataka) on 3 June 1930, he had entered the seminary to become a Catholic priest, but left without taking vows.

The 1974 railway strike that he led has become a milestone in the history of trade union actions in India. More significantly, it has been analysed for the processes and leadership strategies it involved in mobilising lakhs of workers by academics, trade unionists and journalists. He went on to become the Railways minister in 1989 in V.P. Singh's government. Before that, he was Industry minister in the 1977 Janata Party government. His battles in the latter role with MNC giants Coca-Cola and IBM led to the two quitting operations in India, and brought him immense public attention and criticism.

He entered the Lok Sabha in 1967 from the Bombay South constituency. He later represented Muzzafarpur and Nalanda constituencies in Bihar, and was also a Rajya Sabha member in 2009-2010. His campaigning in the Chikmagalur constituency for the Janata Party candidate against Indira Gandhi in 1977 was also a memorable performance, though Gandhi won the seat ultimately. Fernandes's role in protesting the Emergency announced by then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1975 is part of history. He was also a vocal critic of the right wing and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). So it was with incredulity that many witnessed his joining of the Bharatiya Janata Party-led National Democratic Alliance government in 1998 and 1999. The then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee appointed him Defence minister.

It was in this role that he oversaw the Kargil war of 1999, and the nuclear test at Pokhran the previous year.

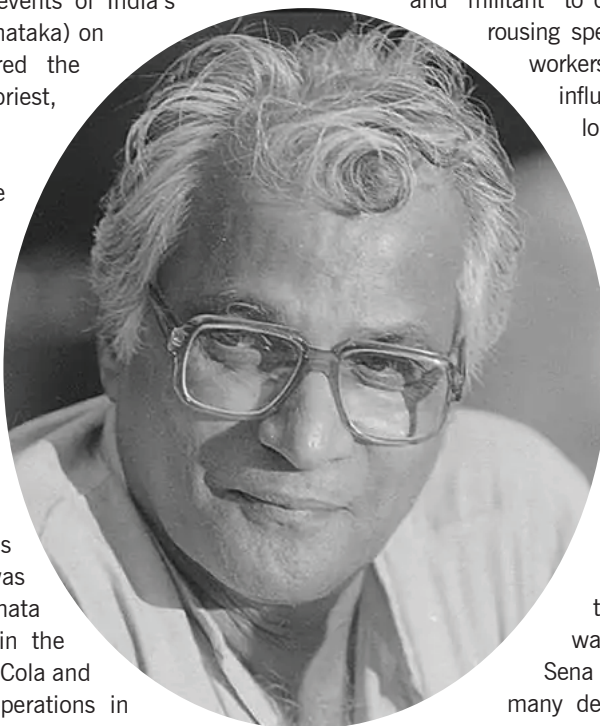
There were many other issues that Fernandes took up in his trademark enthusiastic and assertive style. One of these was the cause of Tibetan refugees who had fled to India. In fact, both the Dalai Lama and the President of the Central Tibetan Administration in Dharamshala Dr. Lobsang Sangay mourned his death in eloquent words. But overall, it was Fernandes the trade unionist who will be most remembered. The media consistently used words like "firebrand"

and "militant" to describe him, and reported his rousing speeches to Bombay (Mumbai)'s workers faithfully. He was greatly influenced by unionist Placid D'mello and Socialist ideologue and leader Rammanohar Lohia. Fernandes was also the co-founder of the New India Co-operative Bank Ltd (in 1968), and held the post of general secretary of the Hind Mazdoor Kisan Panchayat for many years. In this capacity, he led hotel, BEST, municipal workers, among many other areas.

As his long time colleagues point out he was friends with the late Shiv Sena chief Balasaheb Thackeray for many decades and was the only one among leaders of his generation who called the latter 'Bal'. Despite this, he continued to oppose the Sena on issues that he found objectionable. As they point out it was Fernandes who coined the slogan "Sundar Mumbai Kamgaranchi Mumbai" to counter the Sena's popular and differently worded slogan.

His critics point to his participation in the cabinet of the NDA government and some even term it a betrayal of the socialist and progressive movements that Fernandes had espoused. That is a part of his life and work that posterity and historians will perhaps analyse.

Notwithstanding the criticism, however, Fernandes will be remembered as one of the most colourful, passionate and articulate participant-actor of post-Independence India.



NANA CHUDASAMA

A relentless crusader (1933-2018)

The former Sheriff and Mayor of Mumbai, Nana Chudasama, who breathed his last on 23 December 2018, was an eminent jurist and civic activist who espoused several causes dear to his heart, and was hailed as the 'conscience keeper' of Mumbai. Born in Saurashtra in the Gondal District of Rajkot, Nana after completing his graduation, first joined a US-based petroleum company. His father Mansinh Chudasama was a Police Commissioner, and his elder brother, the late Mota Chudasama was a businessman, while his younger sibling Chhota Chudasama worked with the national carrier, Air India. During his long and eventful journey through life Nana remained wedded to the social cause, and founded and nurtured a number of institutions that catered to various sections of the society and undertook development projects that benefited a wide cross-section of the people.

Nana Chudasama who had been a member of social organisations like Lions and Rotary Clubs, founded Giants International, an NGO, which from its humble beginnings rose to great heights and had 500 branches across the country, and was also represented in countries like UK, USA, South Africa, Mauritius and Ukraine. Giants undertook projects in spheres like family welfare, disaster management, education and environment. Among the successful endeavours undertaken was the relief and rehabilitation of the victims of the tragic Bhuj earthquake. During his tenure as the Sheriff of Mumbai Nana Chudasama launched an initiative titled 'I love Mumbai', and undertook an extensive campaign which aimed at greening, beautification, and cleaning of Mumbai city. Much before the launching of the Swachh Bharat Mission by the government, Nana's volunteers conducted various programmes including plant shows, and promoted tree planting campaigns. He also had a habit of gifting free saplings to people in an effort to spread the message emphasising the need for a green Mumbai. Nana's contribution to Mumbai's socio-economic and cultural life was of a high order, and elicited fulsome praise from the city's citizens.

Mumbaikars would have noticed a prominent banner at Marine Drive in the city which for several decades displayed pithy and succinct messages, and was a virtual

commentary on issues concerning the state of Maharashtra and the rest of the country as well. While there was no malice, the banners were appreciated for their sarcasm laced with satire. These banners were later reproduced in the form of a book titled *Nana Chudasama's History on a banner*, compiled and edited by Meera Nanda.

The relentless crusader was also associated with multifarious organisations and was at different points of time the President of the Forum Against Drugs & AIDS (founded by him), Chairperson of the National Kidney Foundation, Founder President, Common Man's Forum (formed to safeguard the interests of the common man), National President of Jaycees and the Indo-American Society.



Nana Chudasama was honoured with several awards during his lifetime and was also the recipient of the Padma Shri conferred on him by the Government of India. His wife Munira, a double graduate, worked as a banker before embarking on a career as a fashion designer. She was a pillar of support to Nana in all his activities in the social spectrum. Nana's daughter Shaina N.C. took after her mother and is a popular fashion designer besides being a spokesperson of the Bharatiya Janata Party. Nana is also survived by a son Akshaya, who is a lawyer, and another daughter Brinda. Although he rubbed shoulders with the high and mighty of the land, Nana Chudasama never hankered after power or pelf, and one of his traits worth emulating was the way he treated king and commoner alike, and made no distinctions in his relationship with people from various walks of life. Nana was also known for his terrific sense of humour, and was the life and soul of every gathering he was a part of. In his demise the city of Mumbai has lost one of its most vibrant personalities, and the country a committed social worker and activist.

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



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