

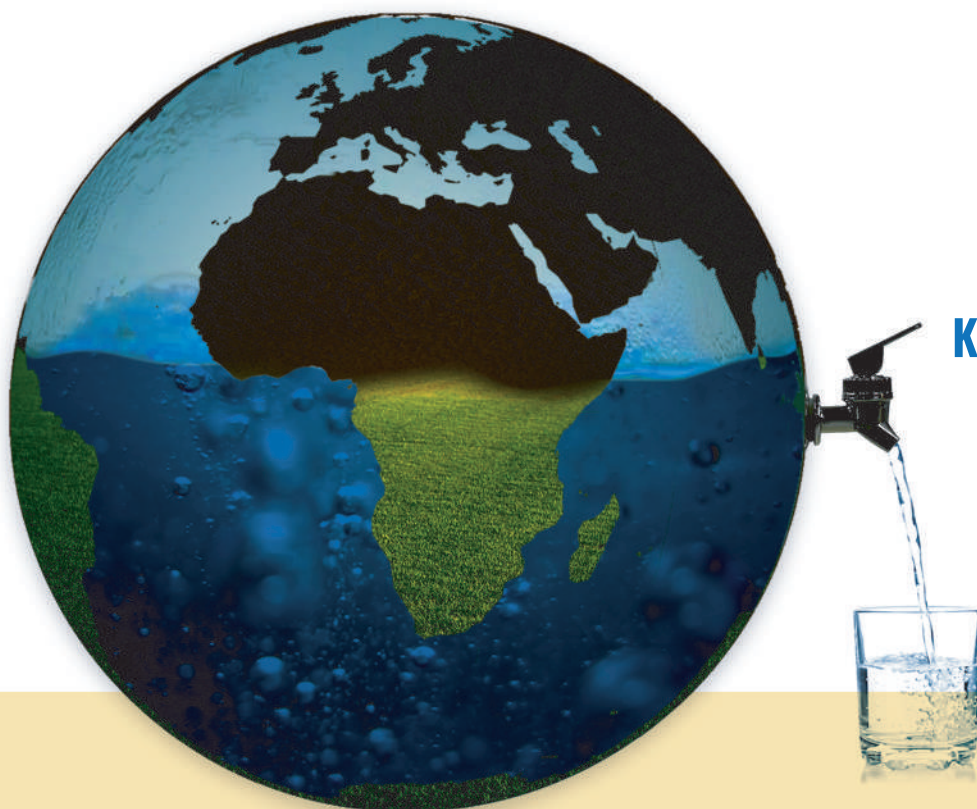
ONE INDIA ONE PEOPLE

Patriotism Redefined



***HARKING BACK
THE VANISHING WATERS
IRRIGATING HUMOUR***

BLUE GOLD



KNOW INDIA BETTER

Himachal Calling

FACE TO FACE

Suresh Ramdas

ANYTIME, ANYWHERE FOR
THE RAIN GOD.



YOU'RE DRINKING YOURSELF
TO DEATH. NO MORE
BOTTLED WATER FOR YOU.



WATER BOTTLES,
WATER BOTTLES
EVERYWHERE,
AND NOT A
DROP TO DRINK



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July 2019

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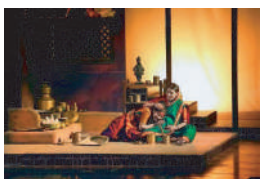
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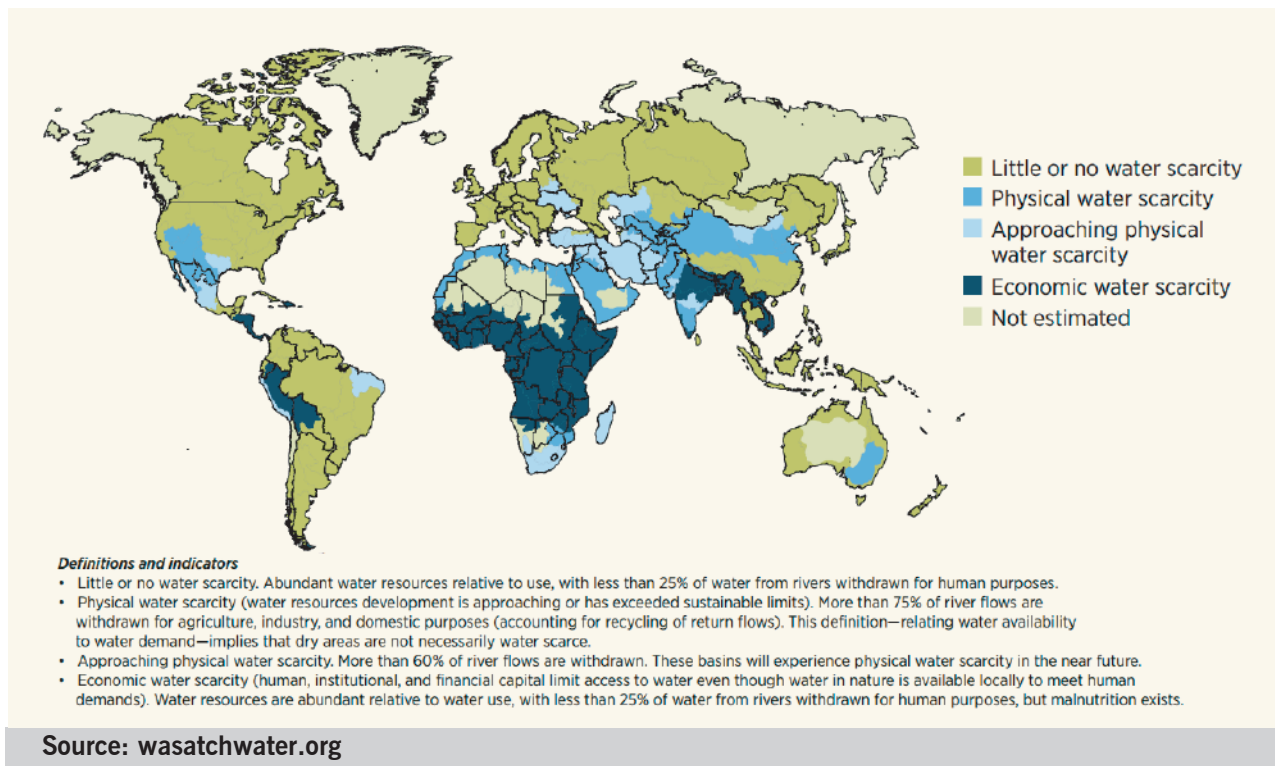
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Sustainably saving water

*Water shortages have been identified by industry, government, academia, and civil society as one of the top three global concerns. India, home to 16 percent of the world's population, has only four percent of the world's water resources at its disposal. It is therefore imperative to link fresh water and sustainable development, to ensure no one is left behind, says **Dr. Arvind Kumar**.*



Did you know that over 1.7 billion people live in river basins where water use exceeds recharge, leading to the contamination of rivers, depletion of groundwater, and the degradation of ecosystems?

The water conundrum

The human right to safe drinking water places obligation on States to ensure that services are affordable. More than two billion people are compelled to drink contaminated water, resulting in a child dying every minute of every hour of every day. Without safe drinking water, it is harder for women and girls to lead safe, dignified, productive, and healthy lives. It is now widely recognised that the primary determinant for addressing the issues of global poverty is the provision of safe water; access to safe water enhances the potential for educational opportunities (particularly for girls), and facilitates participation in local community economic development. It would be safer to say that economic security is also at risk due to lack of clean water.

When clean water arrives in a community, the impact ripples through every aspect of daily life. Freed from the persistent disease that results from dirty water and poor sanitation, their future becomes brighter, as does the economic prospects of their communities and countries. Women no longer have to spend hours every day fetching water that they know could well make their children sick and deplete their funds in availing medical facilities. Instead, they can spend more time helping their families, perhaps with time to boost the family income. Understanding the relationship between drinking water and good health is vital to population and public health.

The need of the hour is to go circular by embracing the need to recover, recycle, repurpose, refurbish, repair, refuse, rethink, reduce, reuse and remanufacture. Attainment of the targets of the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) within a stipulated period, along with achieving the targets of Paris Agreement on Climate Change, with water being at the core, can be facilitated by adopting new policies and programmes based on innovative techniques

and technology, along with new concepts of cooperation and partnership in tandem with existing concepts and approaches. Scientific concepts like new water, rewilding, use of green infrastructure, roof-top gardens, hold high potential to revive the water economy, and the application of circular economy principles can help us meet the changes to practice that will be necessary for it to meet future water demands.

India, home to 16 percent of the world's population, has only four percent of the world's water resources at its disposal. Burgeoning demand for water due to growing population is projected to very soon overtake the availability of water. Currently, our on-field experiences working in the 'Aspirational Districts' of Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand by way of community engagement and stakeholder consultation, resulted in understanding the problems and challenges of the aspirational indicators underlying the water sector; basic education, health, infrastructure, financial inclusion, and skill development. It summed up to the absence of clean drinking water, and as discussed earlier, led to 80% of the illnesses prevalent in rural India, which further prevented children from attending schools. It forms a vicious cycle, and we have to work towards breaking this cycle because sustainable interventions can only be achieved through education, empowerment, and ownership.

Moreover, without an understanding of the social, political, cultural, historical and economic contexts within which humans live, work and play, sustainable change in human behaviour is not possible.

To link fresh water and sustainable development, some key imperatives must be acknowledged, which as per my understanding, can help in filling up the gaps:

- To secure access to water as a human right, we must envisage the twin-track approach of 'Comprehensive Water Governance'. Governance mechanisms at all levels (local, national, regional, and global), need to be more open, inclusive, and accountable to marginalised groups. Local communities must be closely involved in developing local targets and indicators, and take an active role in monitoring and holding local authorities accountable for SDG implementation.
- Combining these instruments into a well-designed policy is critical for effectiveness. For example, water legislation must prioritise water use for domestic consumption over other uses. A well designed policy needs to have a substantive vision accompanied by assessment, monitoring and evaluation, for cost effective benefits, so that they can be appropriately improved based on an assessment of feedback mechanisms.
- Nature based solutions like recharge of natural aquifers, community conservation water bodies, integrated watershed management, restoring wetlands, and water food energy nexus should be adopted.
- Upholding the human right to water and sanitation

requires paying special attention to geographical differences in access, access by vulnerable and marginalised groups, and affordability issues.

I must here refer to a recent yet important news piece, "Delhi: Everyone wants a piece of Yamuna". It is acknowledged that the river continues to flow quietly through the heart of the city, but is quite dirty and murky, but ought to be a source of fresh water. The ancient city Delhi is lost in a haze of water pollution with Yamuna as a sewer, uncontrolled, sprawling growth, and urbanisation, and inadequate solid waste management, creating an environmental disaster zone, not necessarily because of lack of resources only, but also because of lack of policy and proper planning.

As water resources become more stretched, the energy and food sectors' dependence on water, and the fact that all three underpin several of the Sustainable Development Goals, means that decision-makers in all three domains are now increasingly focusing on water resource management, ecosystem protection, and water supply and sanitation, as part of their policy and practice. One of the targets is the attainment of policy coherence for sustainable development, which requires the individual goals to become interlinked. The governance of water and climate change are the themes that are best connected to SDGs, and should therefore be addressed by policymakers by adopting a multi-sectoral approach to policy integration. "Leave no one behind" is a core principle of the 2030 agenda, and policy integration is a necessary condition for its successful implementation. Recognising that the dignity of the human person is fundamental, we wish to see the Sustainable Development Goals and targets met for all nations, and for all segments of society. And we will endeavour to reach the furthest behind first. This is also in line with Gandhiji's idea of 'Sarvodaya, reaching the last man standing'.

To conclude, sustainable development is supported by 'nature's contributions to humans', including the rich biodiversity, and the four ecosystem services – supporting, regulating, provisioning and cultural services. We often take these for granted, and therefore must begin with a new paradigm of moving towards 'conscious and collaborated' efforts, envisaging water as a valuable resource. The inextricable linkages between these critical domains require a suitably integrated approach to ensuring water and food security, and sustainable agriculture and energy production worldwide. Broad estimates indicate an investment of One Trillion USD in water sector in India in the coming years, and it is felt that water is the oil of the 21st century, and will command the world market place in the years to come, and the time is ripe and right to collectively make sure, 'No one is left behind'.



Dr. Arvind Kumar is the President and Founder of 'India Water Foundation', a New Delhi based civil society organisation.

Harking back

*In water deficit India, it is time we harked back to age-old practices of water conservations, says **Rina Mukherji**. She highlights a few such simple practices.*



(Left) Water makes its way across rocky channels in Jharkhand; (Right) Paal made of stones to hold water in a khadin The outlet is for the excess water to flow to the neighbouring farm

In most parts of India, water-harvesters in various forms have been the norm. The most elaborate of these have been the step-wells, generally referred to locally as the *baori* or 'vav'. Elaborately built all around, step-wells were several-storeyed structures that stored water collected during the monsoon months, and kept them fresh all year round. Since these were covered structures, the hot summer months did not allow the water to evaporate. At the same time, openings in the ceiling would allow air and sun to enter the structure, keeping the water fresh and clean. The architecture, of course, was such as to keep the interiors cooler than the outside by at least six degrees and more; hence, serving as a place of congregation for the community, as also a place of worship.

Step-wells, of course, were generally built under royal patronage, with rulers – both Hindus and Muslims – encouraging the building of these rainwater harvesters. But there were many other traditional harvesters and water-harvesting techniques, that were maintained by ordinary people and communities, which were also in vogue.

Stories of revival

In recent times, these fell into disuse, owing to a variety of factors. As global warming and climate change

affects our seasons, and has rains playing truant, farmers in India are returning to traditional water-harvesting techniques to keep themselves afloat and save crops. Take the case of Jharkhand. Blessed with ample rains in the range of around 1100-1800 mm, Jharkhand was once covered by forests. In the past, its green woods helped store its rains as groundwater. In the summer months, this bounty was tapped by farmers through wells and water-harvesters. Irrigation was never the norm, since it was not necessary. *Daadhis* or traditional water-harvesters built in the direction of the water flow would give farmers the necessary water for crops.

However, as forests got annihilated by greedy forest contractors, the bounty of the rain gods proved insufficient for the natives of Jharkhand. Groundwater levels receded, making farming difficult. Migration of able-bodied men became the norm, even as families struggled to survive off the rocky land. Pushed against the wall, farmers here are now turning to age-old practices that they had once abandoned in their quest for modernity. The traditional adage of holding raindrops where they fall is being revisited in a big way in Jharkhand. A combination of irrigation measures using hand pumps connected to natural water – bodies and traditional *daadhis* – are helping farmers tide over their water woes.

A *daadhi* is a lot like a traditional well. However, there is a major difference. It is much smaller, of a depth that ranges from 15 to 20 feet, and is made of local material. Made of rocks, the *daadhi* is so constructed that each rock fits into another. Since it is in the direction of the natural flow of rainwater, it can store water for the summer months, and is always full. Constructing a *daadhi* is extremely economical too. It costs a maximum of ₹ 20,000, which is contributed by the community. In comparison, a well costs around ₹ two lakhs.

Lok Jagriti Kendra (LJK) has been helping local farmers return to traditional water harvesting methods with funds from the Sir Dorab Tata Trust, since the last few years. Several *daadhis* have been built, and existing *daadhis* have been restored or strengthened all over Giridih and Deogarh districts. “The water from these *daadhis* is not only helping irrigate farms, but are also being used for drinking and cooking purposes,” explains Arvind Kumar, Secretary of the Kendra. But care needs to be taken when bringing abandoned *daadhis* back to use. For this, the tribals here lower a hurricane lamp into the well. “If the lamp goes out, it indicates the presence of poisonous carbon monoxide. Such *daadhis* are left alone,” explains local farmer Jero Tuddu.

In Rajasthan, the dry Thar has always been a water-scarce region. This made communities and families revere nature’s blessings twice over. Traditionally, catchments were respected, and the little water brought by rain conserved and harvested. However, the building of the Indira Gandhi canal, and so-called modernisation saw the neglect of many traditional practices here. Today, climate change, global warming, repeated droughts, and increased population pressures in this sparsely populated region have resulted in locals here returning to traditional water-harvesting techniques. ‘Beris’, or traditional shallow cylindrical structures, always harvest the scarce rainwater for drinking purposes. These are always built on a bed of *meth* or *multani mitti* (fuller’s earth), so that the water does not seep off into the desert sand around.

During the monsoon, the rain collects in a catchment or *khadin*, which is often walled up in a semi-circular fashion by a *paal* by farmers using stones and mud, just so that the water does not escape. Once the water evaporates, the soil retains the moisture, and is ideal for sowing a variety of crops. All along the *khadins*, farmers plant *khair*, *kehjri*, *phog* and *ankda* trees and bushes. “These retain moisture, and help maintain the groundwater level,” explained Chhattar Singh Solanki, a local village chieftain, and a volunteer with Sambhaav Trust. A *khadin* is accepted as nature’s largesse to be shared by the community. Thus, outlets from one *khadin* let out excess water to fill up farms on the other side, so that farmers on both sides benefit equally. Since cattle-rearing is common to all farmers in the Jaisalmer-Jodhpur belt, and an important mode of enriching the soil, every *beri* also has a small tank on the side reserved for animals to drink water from. Within villages and around pasture lands, one finds *kunds* or tanks to store water. *Kunds* may be big or small; every family collects

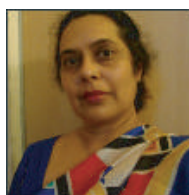


Adalaj step-well close to Ahmedabad

water on its verandah, and stores the same in *kunds*. Families also collect water from terraces, and this water finds its way into tanks that may lie under bedrooms or verandahs. Every terrace slopes to one side, where *surakhos* (openings) let rainwater in through netted filters. This water is collected in tanks small or big, and used the year round for drinking, washing, and cooking. *Kund*-building is an important occupation here, and the ingenious methods used ensure that the rainwater collected remains clean and germ-free all through the year. Local *phog* wood or stone is used to make these *kunds*, which are lined with lime to keep them germ-free. Large *kunds* have a door for people to come in and collect water. Every *kund* or *tanka* is covered, and kept clean. These harvesters are cleaned regularly, and maintained spotless by families or communities.

When there is a natural pond or *talaab*, *beris* are also built along its banks. The pond being an open body, the dry heat of the desert can dry it up in summer. But *beris* remain unaffected and continue to retain water for use by communities.

Each of these techniques point to the ingenuity and knowledge of our communities. It is only such appropriate technologies that will help us tide over a water-starved future promised by climate change.



A senior journalist, Dr. Rina Mukherji specialises in all aspects of sustainable development, with special focus on the environment and climate change. She has been a UGC doctoral fellow, and holds a doctorate in African Studies, with specialisation in Third World conflict and developmental issues. She is currently an independent journalist based in Pune.

The vanishing waters

Urbanisation has cost us quite dearly. Mamta Chitnis Sen points out why the destruction of natural water bodies to make way for construction projects, will only make matters worse in the long run.



Disappearing urban water bodies; src: Deccan Herald

Mumbai in the early eighties was different. It was less crowded, green, and had less traffic than what we see now. My childhood was shared between Dadar's Shivaji Park area at one end, and suburban Chembur at the other. An only child of working parents, till the age of 10, I would be dropped off at my maternal grandmother's home in Shivaji Park (where she would babysit me while my mom went off to work) in the mornings, and return to our home in (the then green and pristine) Chembur in the evenings.

At that time, there used to be only two public buses operating from Dadar to Chembur, and we would often find ourselves making a halt at Sion to change or catch a connecting bus. The reason I am sharing this tale is because in the eighties, Sion too wasn't the crowded junction that we see today. The bus stop at Sion where we used to wait for the bus, stood next to a huge lake. Calm and clean, it used to be quite a treat to view the life that went around the many trees surrounding it, and the birds that adorned them.

Our bus to Chembur would pass through a long stretch of wetlands on both sides of the road (now the Sion highway), and the marshes that spread far and wide. In between the marshes, one could see spots of water bodies, ponds, and mangroves. Sometimes we took the train from Dadar, and in such cases, we would disembark at Kurla

station and walk all the way upto Chembur (many times there were no autos, especially during the monsoons), passing by several smaller ponds and lakes on our way.

Vanishing heritage

Over the years, the big lake where I stood waiting for the bus, has vanished. A small part of the lake's end is being used for immersion of Ganesh idols during Ganpati festivals. While the wetlands that graced the Sion highways too are no more, concrete structures now stand on it. Similarly, the small ponds and lakes in Kurla too are gone. They have been replaced with buildings that house residential complexes and offices. There are hardly any signs of lakes or ponds here.

Mumbai had a fairly large number of water bodies in the form of ponds, lakes, catchment areas, wetlands, and mangroves, which over the years have slowly been filled up or dried out to make way for construction projects. Water bodies, floodplains in most low lying parts of Mumbai, were protectors of the city from the rains — they drained off the overload of rains that poured in. But construction over these water bodies not only blocked off the water, but also created extensive water logging in the city. The situation continues to escalate every year, as more and more construction sites are added to the city, and the areas continue to be concretised.

I recall one such lake in the plush area of Seven Bungalows which too was filled up to create a jogging track, and a garden for local residents. Or the smaller fish ponds at Mira Road that have been encroached upon, and have been asphalted permanently.

Villages not far behind

Like the cities, our villages too are not far behind when it comes to vanishing water bodies. My first visit to a village outside Mumbai was to Guptipara, a small town nestled in Hooghly district in West Bengal renowned for its terracotta temples, and famous for starting the first community Durga Puja in the country. Guptipara in the late nineties was a dream. With the River Bhagirathi flowing through it, the village blessed with lush greenery and several ponds and lakes too, has gone the urban way.

In a bid to capitalise on the rising property prices, residents have taken to selling off their ancestral properties or turning themselves into local builders and filling up their centuries old fish ponds with debris to construct ugly concrete structures, that are a misfit with their local surroundings.

Over the last decade or so, many such villages in the district have lost their green cover. Similarly, across many villages of India, under guise of development, natural water bodies – lakes and ponds – are being filled up for construction projects. These ponds, streams and rivulets are erased from our maps, their absence creating grounds for man-made disasters. Putting up construction on these water bodies that act as natural drainage basins, causes irreversible damage to the environmental structure. Furthermore, construction alone does not seem to be the problem for the disappearance of our lakes. The failure to identify and correct the neglect of one of our most treasured natural resources is definitely on us.

While there are strict laws within government norms to protect these water bodies, sadly, no one seems to care. Encroachments on water bodies invite heavy fines as well as imprisonment, but interestingly, these stringent laws are not implemented in most cases.

Courts to the rescue

Thankfully, it is our courts, the highest constitutional authorities, who are doing the job. They are the ones who are coming to the rescue of the water bodies. Like in the year 2014, when responding to a Public Interest Litigation (PIL), a Madurai bench of the Madras High Court gave a historic judgement directing the then government not to grant permissions to construct buildings on lands located on water bodies.

A year earlier, the Supreme Court had directed officials at the Kanpur Dehat District to keep a check on the water encroachments in their area. Before that, the Rajasthan High Court too had pulled up its own government over illegal encroachments and allotments on the many catchment areas of water bodies. Recently in 2018, the Supreme Court had directed the Delhi Jal Board to revive the water bodies in the state.

Should we be dependent on our courts to do the job for us? It is high time that we as concerned citizens also take equal responsibility for this mess that we have created, and act upon it soon. The writing is on the wall. Our cities are flooding every monsoon. People are losing lives due to such over flooding, and the earth is getting warmer and hotter day by day. We are the reason for the climate change. And we cannot remain ignorant for long. Ignorance cannot be bliss

anymore, because reality has already come to bite us.

Like the cities, our villages too are not far behind when it comes to vanishing water bodies. My first visit to a village outside Mumbai was to Guptipara, a small town nestled in Hooghly district in West Bengal renowned for its terracotta temples, and famous for starting the first community Durga Puja in the country.



A journalist for over 15 years, Mamta Chitnis Sen has worked with reputed publications in Mumbai, reporting on crime, politics, religion, art, community, human interest, and general news. She was Executive Editor of *Dignity Dialogue*, India's foremost magazine exclusively for the 50 plus age group. She presently handles Media Advocacy for Child Rights and You (CRY) – an NGO working for the rights of underprivileged children in India covering the states of Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh and Gujarat. Mamta is also an artist and has exhibited in various groups shows in India and abroad.

Irrigating humour

When there is no water, use satire! Nivedita Louis resorts to dark humour to write about the water woes in her perennially water-starved city, Chennai. But threading through it all, is her deep frustration and anguish at the state her city has been reduced to.

When the last drop of water vanishes into thin air... there is always air in Axe Deo to aerate your underarms crying for breath. Air bath is all we can do in the hottest city down South, Chennai, where mercury soars faster than the price of petrol. It is 45 degree Celsius as I write this. The air conditioner's usual low humming now almost sounds like a person with the worst wheeze inside the room. Plants and trees look parched, grass along the pavements and sidewalks have died long ago, street dogs run around looking for a drop of water to quench their thirst.

When data is cheaper than water!

Mrs. Janaki and Mrs. Uma, the neighbours who used to boast of their Kanjivaram saris and diamond necklaces, now have a different competition. One boasts ruefully, "400 feet", and the other smiles emphatically and announces with pride – "250 feet". The depth of the borewell that you've recently sunk is now the criteria for deciding who is richer than who! The house owners gladly, willingly, and happily share two buckets full of water with the tenants every day and suggest, "See, this is all that the motor could pull. Just be frugal with this water. Thou shall wash vessels, shower, wash your clothes, mop the house and cook with these two buckets." Welcome to the #TwoBucketADayChallenge! Tiktok videos, facebook fighters, Instagram warriors, and Twitter leaders are inventing new ways to conserve water, thank God data is cheaper than water in the city.

If borewells in suburban areas of the city save the middle-class, half ground, 800 sq ft house owners, the elite flat dwellers of the city who perch on the pigeonholes survive on water on wheels. The new swanky drool-worthy vehicle is neither the Merc nor the Audi. It is our Muniyandi Water Supply lorry! Booking a tanker of water through Chennai Corporation's website has been outsourced through those same guys who designed the IRCTC website, folks!

You never know when you will lose the connection or when the server will bunk its duty. And remember, there is no Tatkal here. If someone is dying of thirst, corporation website will crank that day and say 404 error.

The 'wet' nights of Chennaiites are those when the Corporation decides to supply water to your area. Satellite TV channels have now gleefully

started airing Midnight Masala throughout the night, duly supported by the city's Metro Water. Ever alert citizens in streets take turns to stay awake every night to 'smell' water the moment it starts its descent down the tap nozzles. The last time the whole city took turns to stay awake in the nights was during World Cup cricket matches in Australia! Metro Water is also adding to the woes of population expansion during these summer months, keeping poor citizens awake at ungodly hours.

The cost of 12,000 litres of water through private tankers is 4000 bucks! The lesser privileged ferry water in colourful plastic pots across the city, right, left and center. If it is midnight masala for the flat folks, it is WWF fight scenes for the poor neighbourhoods. Left with no other options, no borewells, no private tankers,

these men and women are left at the mercy of their counterparts. And remember, thou shall not cut the queue while waiting for water. Cutting the queue is punishable with the choicest expletives, and abuse hurled like tornadoes on the prowl.

IT Companies have always been unique in their problem-solving skills. They have now come up with the brilliant idea of WFH (Work From Home)! Seriously? WTH! Husbands working in US shift and wives working in UK shifts can now finally see each other every other day. A boon or a bane, you decide! Work From Home of course has its benefits, you need not wear your best attire while sitting at home and waste litres of precious liquid gold in that Ghatotkach washing machine of yours!

Mrs. Janaki and Mrs. Uma, the neighbours who used to boast of their Kanjivaram saris and diamond necklaces, now have a different competition. One boasts ruefully, "400 feet", and the other smiles emphatically and announces with pride – "250 feet".



A common scene in Chennai today

Hell, no one will bother even if you elect to dress up a la Archimedes. Just be sure you don't end up attending official Skype calls wearing the Emperor's clothes!

I now like the consistency of milk supplied by our milkman. It is thicker, creamier and tastier! It is no easy magic, the fella doesn't find water anywhere to mix it with the milk. Thankfully, God has blessed us these few months with unadulterated milk. Our street water tap has gone so dry that the wind through it permeates the air around us with peculiar music. I know for sure that if the Martians invade the Earth, our street will be Point Zero. The water tap sure can be a point of study for NASA.

We follow the three Rs of dressing these days. Repeat, Recycle, Reuse. Never wash! The recycle part is a little bit tricky though. Air dried clothes carry the stench of rotten meat, so recycling it with the best perfume will be a challenge. The gardens out there bear the brunt of the heat, and we Chennaites finally have started following Gadkari ji's advice. Thanks for that Ji! Just as how you splash your urine over your garden trees, we too literally 'water-loo' our trees. Trees gracing the sidewalks always have the help and support of beer-drunk men. Chennai has been hosting its own SeptemberFest from last March!

The most wanted handymen are the water tanker drivers and AC mechanics. Every time you try calling their

number, the formidable lady in their phones keeps chanting 'user busy..user busy'. Never have we seen this demand for drivers and mechanics, hopefully South will produce more drivers and mechanics than engineers. One out of every one person of the state is an engineer, and hence finding a driver and mechanic has become more difficult than choosing a groom through online matrimony.

Water is our foe and woe. Water God must have been kicked at his behind so hard by this city and its burgeoning populace in their previous birth, and he has now returned with a vengeance to haunt the city. 2015 witnessed the worst floods in decades, and 2019 is privy to the city's worst drought. We live in a cursed city and have a love-hate relationship with it. And we, we alone are responsible for this man-made mess. Water management is an art, and I am sad we haven't learnt that...I can hear our water tanker honking...It is the middle of the night, and the rest of the world is busy in its beauty sleep. The night is scary, dark and dry, but I have tanks to fill before I sleep...



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.

Saving water begins at home

There is a lot of water wastage by apartment complexes in cities. In water-starved Bangalore, some complexes have undertaken exemplary water-saving measures.

Usha Hariprasad chronicles some case studies.



(Left) A rain water harvesting system; (Right) Barrels to recharge water

For one, they charge exorbitant rates, and they hike prices in a jiffy. A 6,000 litre tanker can cost around 800 rupees and can go up. Sometimes the tankers auction the water to the highest bidder. Areas like Bellandur that boast of more than 1,000 apartments are still not connected to Cauvery water supply and face such issues.

Our city does not have any perennial source of water. It was once dependent on its lakes and rivers until the piped water supply came into the city. Slowly the lakes and wells disappeared. Over time, with rapid development of the city, bore wells are also running dry. The aquifers that these bore wells tap are finite, and with no recharging of the water tables below, the borewells do not retain water. The borewells get dug

Last week I had been to Munireddypalya, a layout in South Bangalore. One of my aunts stays there in an independent house with a beautiful terrace garden. As she was watering her plants she also sprayed water on the terrace. 'That is to keep the rooms cool', she explained. I was stunned. You see, I stay in North Bangalore, and we are reeling with water crisis in our apartments. Our borewells have gone dry, and we are dependent on water tankers for our survival.

Most of the times in monsoon, the Gali Anjaneya Temple in Bangalore gets flooded. It is a low lying area. But some of the residents living nearby have no wish to move out. 'It is a problem when it rains, but in summer we don't have any problem getting water,' said Vidya a teacher who conversed with me. 'We have 24 hours water thanks to the Cauvery water supply,' she added.

This is the situation in Bangalore. While some developed areas in South Bangalore have a good supply of water throughout the year, in certain areas of North Bangalore, the piped water supply is infrequent, and the layouts are dependent on borewells. However, the borewells in most of these areas are drying up rapidly. Newer layouts, areas in the city's periphery do not have piped supply at all. The situation in these places is worse with borewells already dry, and the apartments depending on tankers for water supply. And tankers compound the problem further.

deeper. However, no water is found even if the depth of the borewell is increased to 1,000 feet and more. In areas like Varthur in Bangalore South taluk, the depth of the borewell has increased to more than 1,700 feet. The adjacent Varthur Lake is silted; the aquifers are polluted. This is cause for concern as the bore well water will be contaminated and can lead to gastroenteritis.

Water conservation strategies

So, how have the residents coped in these areas? Water rationing, digging bore wells deeper have been certain measures. According to a report in *The Hindu*, in certain apartment complexes in Mahadevapura, water rationing is done; water supply is restricted to certain hours so as to save water.

In Akshaynagar, in some complexes, the associations have urged flat owners to use the reject water of RO filter. Individual metering has been installed as well. There are advantages of individual water metering. 'Installing water meters makes the flat owners diligent and they make sure that there are no leaks in their flat. Or if they have gone for a vacation, they ensure that water valves to their apartment is closed,' mentioned the secretary of an apartment association from South Bangalore.

Using reject water from RO filter: Maa Brindavan apartments in Whitefield has managed to save 500 litres of water everyday just by adopting a few measures. Initially they were dependent on tankers. Later the residents decided to use rejected RO filter water for non-drinking purposes. So the residents collect the RO water; their apartment approximately generates around 500 litres of reject water every day. The house keeping staff is responsible for collecting and storing it in big drums kept in parking lot, which is used for washing cars and floors.

Adding water aerator: Adhinarayana Rao Velpula, a resident of the apartment and a water warrior mentioned that they were additionally using water aerators to save water. This has not only conserved water, but also brought down their expenses.

Water aerator is a device that reduces the flow of water discharge from taps. He says, “We have installed water aerators in 115 wash basins in the month of April. This has helped us save around 42,000 litres of water.” In April the water consumption of their apartment complex was 6,87,000 litres, while in May the water consumption came down to 6,45,000 litres.

It has also brought down their tanker expenses. “This water saving has led us to save on 12 tankers. And we have saved approximately ₹6,600,” he says, considering that they pay ₹550 for a tanker of 3,500 litres.

Installing water meters: In Doddanekundi, East Bangalore, ‘The Greens’ apartment took a couple of water saving measure to save water. They installed individual water meters for flats. Amal Padmanabhan, a resident says, “We saved around 25-30% of water by putting water meters and charging users based on what they consume.” Installing individual water meters was not easy and required a lot of plumbing work. Yet, this does not stop them from going ahead.

Using treated STP water: Another worthy water saving measure that they adopted was to reuse water from Sewage Treatment Plant (STP). The idea was to use the treated water from their STP plant in flush tanks. Could the treated water be used directly? “The output of a cleanly running STP in flush tank is of reusable quality. So no further processing is required. However, it also depends on the type of STP technology apartments are using,” said Amal Padmanabhan.

How was the reaction of residents to this idea? “Initially they were averse to the idea. But slowly it started picking up. Now everyone is happy for having done this”, says Amal Padmanabhan. Rain water harvesting was also done in their apartment.

As per the Bangalore Water Supply Sewage Board, rain water harvesting is mandatory for existing buildings with site area 2,400 square feet or more. And for newer buildings, it is 1,200 square feet and above. Installing overflow valve in the overhead tanks, water leak detectors, using recharge



An RO filter

structures wherever possible to rejuvenate water table, are some other methods to save water from getting wasted.

Other conservation measures: Campaigns and conservation measures have also been initiated to save water in the city. The #BAFHalfBucketChallenge, a social media campaign is one such initiative which challenges member residents to use only half a bucket of water to take baths.

It is initiated by the Bangalore Apartments Federation, one of the largest body of apartments in the city. It has some 400 apartment complexes as its members, and it has thrown up this challenge to conserve water.

There are also other projects taken up. A million recharge wells, for instance, is undertaken by Biome Environmental Trust and voluntary citizen network Friends of Lakes. The idea is to revive the open wells, thereby recharging ground water. It plans to engage community, individuals, corporates and institutions in this project.

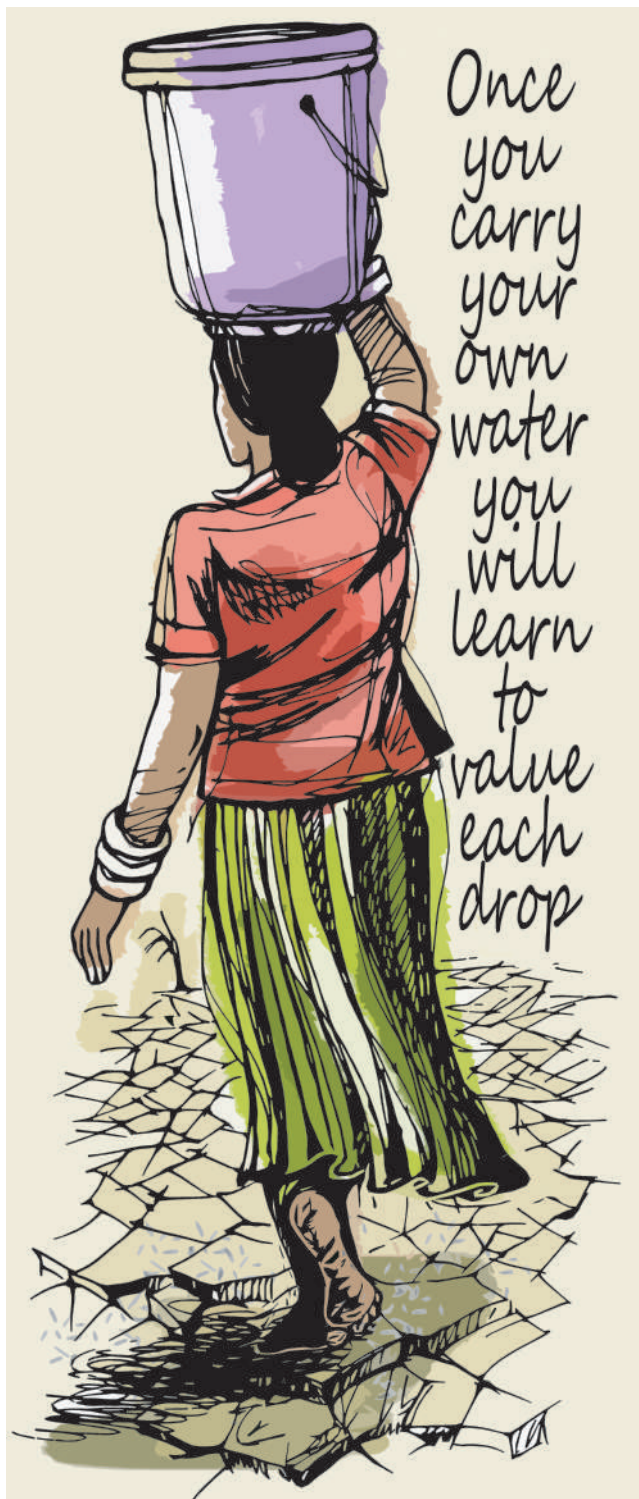
The beginning is always NOW. So if you are committed to saving water, there are umpteen number of ways to do so. One of my friends collects the water from washing of fruits and vegetables. She then uses it to water her plants. A small beginning is enough. After all, the beginning is the most important part of work, according to ancient Greek philosopher Plato.



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The rural deficit

*While we are aware of the acute water shortage in most Indian cities, the rural areas are worse off, as agriculture, people, and livestock, are all adversely affected by water shortage. **Bharat Dogra** provides a status report.*



While visiting remote villages in the summer months, it is common to see women and girls walking long distances to fetch the daily supply of drinking water, and yet remaining uncertain about whether they will actually be able to get this basic need for their family. It is possible that at the end of the long walk in the scorching heat, they find that the water source has dried up, or else, very little water is left in it. So they walk back with very little supply of this basic need in their pitchers, often, the water they carry is muddy and dirty. Increasingly, men and boys also join this effort, pots of varying shapes and sizes accommodated precariously on cycles.

When one visits houses where elderly parents of migrant workers are staying, the situation can be even more pathetic, as it is difficult for them to fetch water from a distance. Of course, neighbours try their best to help, but conditions do become very difficult in times of overall scarcity.

When it is so difficult to quench the thirst of people, the water needs of farm and dairy animals can only get second priority. In several villages one can see animals dying of thirst when the water scarcity is at its peak in summer months.

Need for a new policy?

According to recent reports and indications, the Union Government is on the verge of making important changes regarding drinking water, and a new ministry completely dedicated to this task is being created. One hopes that this will lead to a significant improvement in rural drinking water supply, but at the same time it is important to learn from past mistakes so that these are not repeated.

Actually, in terms of increasing the number of handpumps or the length of pipelines, the record of the government has not been too bad. The real problem comes when the water sources dry up, or the water table declines steeply. It is due to such factors that the pipelines and handpumps go dry, and cannot serve their purpose. So on paper the government performance looks impressive, but on ground, things remain much the same.

Such problems arise due to many-sided ecological ruin, including deforestation, indiscriminate mining and quarrying, pollution from industrial wastes and agrichemicals, resulting in depleted or polluted water sources, and a declining water table. These problems often get compounded

by the ill-planned spread of water guzzling industries and crops, ignoring the limited water availability in an area. As powerful interests may be responsible for this ruin, steps to check this are not taken in time. This is often the reason why water scarcity increases for common villagers. At the same time, the work of water conservation and rainwater harvesting lags much behind the real needs. The traditional systems which promoted this have broken down at many places due to complex factors. Once again, encroachments by powerful persons or vested interests have been responsible for the decline of several invaluable traditional water sources, where enough rainwater could be collected earlier.

Hence there are important aspects of power structures and inequalities which need to be kept in mind to understand how water availability for common people has declined in recent years at many places. In fact, from the perspective of dalits and other disadvantaged sections, the situation is worse, as even in a situation of scarcity sometimes, they have to suffer discrimination in accessing this basic need.

Not enough budgetary allocation

Another aspect which deserves notable attention is that in terms of budgetary allocations in recent times, rural drinking water has not received the attention which was needed. The government may have impressive statistics about how much it has done to improve the drinking water situation in villages, but the sad fact which cannot be ignored is that across vast areas, the scarcity of clean drinking water is worsening, and one important reason for this is that adequate budgetary resources have not been allotted. Providing safe and adequate drinking water is a very important national objective, and the National Rural Drinking Water Programme is the main programme of the government for achieving this objective. Hence it is important to ensure adequate budget allocations for this.

The actual expenditure on this programme in 2017-18 (the last year for which actual expenditure is known at present), was ₹7,038 crore. In the recent interim budget there is a modest increase in the allocation for this programme. In the interim budget for 2019-20, the budget estimate for this programme is ₹8,201 crore. The increase is more if compared with the revised estimate for the previous year, but this was much less than the actual expenditure in the previous year.

While this increase is welcome certain other aspects need to be noted if the budget situation for this programme is to be understood properly. During the financial year 2018-19 the revised estimate amounted to ₹5,500 crore only. This is a very low amount. This cannot be justified for a programme as important as the National Rural Drinking Water Programme. Whatever increase that has happened in the

interim budget has to be seen in the context of this low revised estimate, which was much lower than the actual expenditure for the previous year.

Also, it needs to be noted that the actual expenditure by the Union Government five years earlier on this programme was as high as ₹9,242 crore. In other words, it was higher than what has been provided five years later in the recently announced interim budget.

Hence, one important step that the government should initiate in the near future is to significantly increase the budgetary allocations for improving rural drinking water supply. Another step which is no less important is that the government should issue strict instructions that deforestation, indiscriminate mining activities and pollution, which harm water

sources, should be suitably checked. In addition, steps should be taken to increase water harvesting and water conservation, and to protect traditional water sources.

We are passing through difficult times of climate change when the frequency of drought, rain failure at critical times, and other unpredictable weather behaviour are likely to worsen. Hence, it is all the more important to make the necessary corrections, and overall to give much greater importance to ensuring adequate and clean drinking water in our rural areas. Also, attention should be given to providing water to livestock.

Providing safe and adequate drinking water is a very important national objective, and the National Rural Drinking Water Programme is the main programme of the government for achieving this objective. Hence it is important to ensure adequate budget allocations for this.



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

Corporatising water

*The trend of using water as a prop to win elections by politicians since decades, isn't lost on the Indian electorate. As the country stares at its worst water crisis ever, and with rich corporations seeking to dominate this natural resource, **Mamta Chitnis Sen** discusses why politicians themselves may stand to lose control over water in the long run.*



The Godavari River at Parbhani

In the winter of 2016, during a return journey from the interior villages of Parbhani district one full moon night, the driver of our vehicle asked whether we would like to take a short cut. "You will also get a close view of the Godavari river," he prodded. Hungry, tired, and eager to reach our destination as soon as possible, we agreed to the driver's request, little knowing that our drive wasn't over the Godavari river, but right through it instead.

The river bed, appeared dry and caked, the bright moonlight dancing brightly off it, giving off an eerie feeling. As we drove on for a full 30 minutes through the river bed, it took us a full moment to realise that the legendary Godavari river, one of the longest rivers in the country, had almost vanished in Parbhani, and all that remained of her was the hard and dusty land below us.

The river that has disappeared

Often referred to as Dakshin Ganga (South Ganga), the Godavari river originates at Trimbakeshwar hill in Nashik district of Maharashtra, and extends to the states of Telangana, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha and Karnata-

ka. After flowing for over 1,465 kilometres it finally falls off towards the east into the Bay of Bengal. Although the Godavari has many dams and barrages over it spread across the state, the river has dried up in the districts of Beed, Hingoli, Nanded, Latur and Parbhani through which it flows. Godavari which supplies water for drinking as well as for several agricultural purposes, (it even supports wildlife in several sanctuaries that it flows through), has been and continues to be embroiled in disputes across the states that it flows. The careers of many politicians have flourished thanks to this river.

Like the Godavari, the Narmada river too has been dominating headlines for decades now. The waters of this largest river too had invited protests and agitations due to the controversial Sardar Sarovar Dam project.

Activists who have been advocating for the rights of such river waters point out that the politics over making the waters of these rivers accessible to the common man has been happening for decades now, but they may cease to exist once big corporations and industries come into the picture. Many believe that under the guise of development, industries seeking access for water through governmental subsidies may soon end up dominating this natural resource, thereby cutting off everyone from it.

Many settlements of villages along the riverbanks of these rivers, which had free access to the waters of these rivers, are forced to move out and are displaced overnight. The original inhabitants of these lands — farmers, the nomadic tribes, forest dwellers, soon find themselves orphaned due to such 'redevelopment policies'.

Dam it all

Activist Sanjay Kale informs that dams were originally constructed keeping the needs of the common man and agriculture in mind. But today, water has become a commodity thanks to the corporations who claim to own it. He has been advocating for making the waters of the Godavari accessible to the common man for drinking and agricultural purposes.

"In the priority list as per the National Water Policy, water should first be allotted for drinking, then agriculture, and lastly for industry purposes. But in the year 2005, the Maharashtra Water Policy was changed, and water was awarded to industry on second priority, replacing agriculture.

(continued on page 32...)



KNOW INDIA BETTER

Himachal Calling

Himachal Pradesh doesn't have to mean only Shimla and Manali. The attractions like Sach Pass, the Chamba town, Dharamshala and the enormous Kangra Fort, all beckon, if you want a journey through the more unexplored parts. Along the way you may encounter some adventure too, which only adds to the charm of these places.

Text & Photographs : Nivedita Louis



The waterfall at Satrundi on the way to Sach Pass

“Don't settle down and sit in one place. Move around, be nomadic, make each day a new horizon" – Jon Krakauer.

Delhi airport always has that overwhelming effect. As we waited for our cab at the car park, we could feel sweat trickling down through every crevice of our body. We were a group of five adults and three children, and weren't sure if we could be accommodated comfortably in one Innova. As we battled with the cab company asking for an 8-seater and drew a blank, we had to book one more cab, and by the time all was settled and the additional cab arrived with its driver, it was well past midnight. A couple of parathas and curd later, we hit the highway to Dalhousie, via Panipat, Jalandhar, and Pathankot.

I was cursing my bad luck as our driver, after driving for about an hour complained of sleep or the lack of it, and it was my husband who drove, allowing the driver to sleep for the next three hours! Our lives were more precious than our ire, we decided. We were supposed to reach Dalhousie around five in the morning as per our original plan, but as it had backfired, we were well past all deadlines. I had carefully avoided the regular tourist spots of Shimla, Kulu and Manali as we wanted some peace and quiet up on the mountains, not traffic snarls and crowd. It was post lunch that we arrived at the Dalhousie Club, where we had booked rooms, and got some beauty sleep.



Saint Francis Church, Dalhousie

An amble through Dalhousie

As the sun went down, we slowly ambled through the town, a lazy walk leading us to the oldest Catholic church in Dalhousie, Saint Francis Church. The imposing stone edifice built in perfect Victorian style in 1894, boasts of intricate high wooden ceilings, stained glass panes, and its diorama sculptures of the Way of the Cross. The quaint wicket gate and garden around the church gave it an ethereal feel in the setting sun's light, the pink roses and warm yellow glow from the church offering us tranquility.

Established in 1854 and named after Lord Dalhousie, the British Viceroy, the town was a retreat for British bureaucrats and soldiers. Surrounded by snow-capped mountains on the western Dauladhar ranges, the town is the gateway to Chamba and Pangi valleys. We walked past the saints in different poses, Saint Antony holding a pair of pigeons, Jesus on the Cross being hugged by a disciple, and reached Subhash Chowk. Scores of people strolled across the chowk, with corn stalls throwing up flares of fire. We walked through the Tibetan market, wondering at the scarves, shawls, Chamba slippers, and knick-knacks being sold.



Beautiful stained glass panes inside Saint Francis Church, Dalhousie



The picturesque route to Sach Pass



The Bhuri Singh Museum in Chamba

Visiting Sach Pass

The next day we had plans to visit Sach Pass, about five hours' journey from Dalhousie. People from South India mostly have never experienced snow, and while planning a trip up the Himalayas, they always look up places where there is possibility of snow. We were no exceptions either, a phone call to some friends in the Army, and we were assured the pass was open. We set out in the morning around seven, after breakfast, as we had only one agenda on hand – travel to Sach Pass and play in the snow! The travel from Dalhousie to Sach Pass is a real ordeal, one should undertake it only if they are sure they can relocate the bones in their body once they get off at the pass. The flitting greenery and blue mountains make up for the loss of balance though. We crossed Chamera lake, watching the gigantic Chamera tunnel with awe.

We had a brief stopover for *chai* and continued up the mountains, crossing Badoh, Tissa and Satrundi helipad. The topography changes dramatically as giant snow-capped mountains started showing up, towering over our heads. Soldiers at the army check-post verified our identity cards and send the vehicles up with caution, saying there had been a landslide recently. We closed our eyes as the cars were off-road the last few kilometers. Snow melting on the roadsides collects and runs across the road as small streams, and at places if one is lucky enough, one can see rivulets gushing from hills as waterfalls. The sight of snow as we neared the pass was mind blowing. Jumping down from our cars, we waded in ankle deep snow, and by the time the husband called me to wear proper earmuffs and cap, I was already freezing.



The two-storey high thangka painting at Norbulingka



The Khajjiar Lake surrounded by Cedar trees

Have you noticed places that abound with snow, always have a Maggi stall nearby? A short walk from the Pass, from out of nowhere was the Maggi stall, selling chai and Maggi. The hot steaming brew and noodles were enough to bring our poor battered bodies back to warmth, and we turned back. A small dhaba on the roadside announced hot parathas, and we stopped. The window of the dhaba offered amazing views of snow and the valleys. Strange, as we ordered food in English and conversed with each other in Tamil, the owner of the dhaba asked, "*Amma, thayir venuma?*". (Ma, do you need curd?) Taken aback, we queried how he spoke fluent Tamil. He said he had worked for a few years in Sriperumbudur, the automobile hub in the outskirts of Chennai, and had learnt Tamil! "I earned enough to come back and set up this dhaba. The mountains are my home and I can't leave them", he said in Tamil. If necessity arises, a person from Himachal will learn Tamil, as I have learned Hindi and can converse in it easily. Language is just a mode of communication, eyes and hearts mean more than words, don't they?

Khajjiar Lake and Chamba town

Our first stop the next day was Khajjiar Lake. The lake by itself is a small heart shaped pond in the middle of a vast grassland. Traffic snarls in Dalhousie can get ugly, and we safely parked our cars about a kilometer from the lake and walked. Translucent zorbing balls rushed across the grassland, para gliders lifted off and landed, rabbits ran around and people renting out traditional Himachal outfits surrounded us the moment we entered the lake area. The grass was so green that a few sheep found their pastures straight in the middle of

all this mayhem. We picked a couple of balls for zorbing, tried out the Himachal outfits, and posed for the cameras.

Post lunch, we headed to the town of Chamba, the day's next stop, as we were intent in visiting the Bhuri Singh Museum in the heart of Chamba town. Situated at the confluence of Ravi and Sal rivers, this quaint town has a glorious past, being the capital town of the Chambyal Rajput Kings who ruled it from the 6th century CE. The suffix of these Kings – Varmans intrigued me. The town's name comes from Princess Champavati, on whose request the capital of Chambyals was shifted from Bharmour to Chamba in 920 CE.

The famed Pahari paintings were nurtured here. This museum is named after Raja of Chamba Bhuri Singh, who ruled Chamba when it was set up in 1908. About 8,000 antiquities lie waiting in this museum, waiting to enthrall the visitors. The best among them are inscriptions in Sarda and Chambyali scripts, Indo-Greek coins, Pahari miniature paintings belonging to the Royal family donated to the museum by Raja Bhuri Singh, fountain stone slabs, copper and silver plate grants, wood carvings, memorial stones, tribal jewellery, and musical instruments of the anthropology gallery.

We had planned to visit the Church of Scotland, a stone's throw away from the main market. It was unfortunate that we couldn't get hold of the keys to the locked 19th century church. Interestingly, though this church was built by the first missionary in Chamba, William Ferguson, the foundation stone was laid by the Raja of Chamba himself, a devout Rajput Hindu in 1899. The church was built with a huge grant from the king. Tired beyond words, we reached Dalhousie.

The spiritual Dharamshala

The next dawn we started from Dalhousie to Dharamshala. The route via Nurpur and Dramman was picturesque, winding through the hills and arid mountains. The sweat and heat as we neared Dharamshala showed we had lost altitude. Our first stop for the day was of course, the Dalai Lama Temple. The Tsuglagkhang Complex that houses the Dalai Lama Temple is at the heart of the city. The crowd keeps burgeoning, prayer wheels rotate in unison and scores of people sit, calmly reciting the prayers. The humongous statue of Buddha inside the main temple, and the colourful Thangka paintings hung around it, paintings on the murals, give an ethereal experience to the devotees. This is also the headquarters of the exiled Tibetan government that now functions under the spiritual leadership of the 14th Dalai Lama, Lhama Thondup.

The memorial erected for the martyrs just outside the main temple draws numerous visitors who pray in silence for the martyrs. The Tibet Museum right next to it, called "A long look homeward", has a huge collection of photographs, documents and articles that induce awareness about the Chinese occupation of Tibet. We stood dumbstruck in front of a torn and mutilated off-white trouser-shirt set that was splattered with blood. It would be a miracle if the man who was subject to that cruel torture is alive today.



The Dalai Lama main temple, Dharamshala



Visitors at the Tibet Museum, Dharamshala



The beautifully landscaped Norbulingka Institute is dedicated to preservation of Tibetan arts and culture

With heavy hearts we watch the videos that are shown about how life is for a Tibetan every day in occupied land. One seldom respects the freedom offered to one, unless one understands how it is to be a slave! The museum offers a window to peek into Tibetan history and its unique culture. It was a treat to see pictures of the flag of Tibet, Tibetan bank notes used once, yak skin coracles, gardruk dancers, monastic festivals in Amdo, black necked cranes, women in Tsang attire, and old pictures of Lhasa.

Our stop after lunch was the Norbulingka Institute in Dharamshala. Started in 1995 at Sidhpur near Dharamshala, this unique institute is dedicated to the preservation of Tibetan arts and culture. The moment we stepped into this beautifully landscaped complex, nature encompassed us totally. Gurgling streams, bamboo gardens designed in Japanese style, colourful birds and insects, gave us peace. The architecture is typically Tibetan, we felt as if we had stepped into some Tibetan temple complex. A guide took us through the complex, where Tibetan artists and artisans were at work, teaching the apprentices. We wandered along the statue-making, Thangka painting, wood carving, wood painting, tailoring and weaving sections. The Thangka painting workshop captured our immediate interest, as we sat and watched about 20 artists at work in unison, only the

scratches of the brushes on the medium audible.

One of them called us aside and showed how tiny plates of gold are melted, and gold colour is obtained and stored in vials for use in the paintings. No wonder these paintings cost a bomb, for the workmanship and material used. It takes about two weeks to complete a small painting, quipped the guide. Hours of concentration and delicate workmanship! At the end of the tour, the guide led us to Deden Tsuklagkhang, a beautiful temple built exclusively by the institute's artists. There are Thangka frescoes, but what captured our interest was the huge applique Thangka hung from the ceiling, over two stories high, showcasing Buddha and his 16 Arhats. The centerpiece of this temple is the 14 feet gilded Sakhyamuni statue, the largest of its kind outside Tibet!

We walked into the Losel Doll Museum next to the temple and were taken aback by the beauty of over 100 dolls displayed. Each one is unique, dressed in distinct tribal styles ethnic to various parts of Tibet. The richness and diversity of culture in Tibetan plateau can be seen through the dolls. The mask dance dolls, the set of monk dolls near a lhakang in diorama cases were a treat to the eyes. We returned to the room, all tired and looking to rest, but the daughter pulled us for a trip to the city center for some shopping.

Shopping in Tibetan town

The Tibet local market and the adjoining Tibetan mini market in Jogiwara Road are well known for the unique Tibetan goods sold here – pashmina shawls, hand embroidered purses, incense, precious and semi-precious stones, woolen wear, books, spiritual objects like mandalas, thangkas, decorated conches, bells and dream catchers! The daughter took quite a fancy for the huge dream catchers hanging in about every stall. A silver Tibetan ring designed like a rose caught her attention and we bargained for it, unsuccessfully, and returned to the homestay after gorging on a few aloo parathas and washing it down with chai. Himachal and aloo parathas are inseparable, I guess. Even small roadside dhabas sell delicious aloo parathas.

The Kangra Fort

Day 5 of the trip was set exclusively to visit the Kangra Fort. Said to be the oldest dated fort of India, the eighth largest fort of India in size, and unarguably one of the

largest and most beautiful in the Himalayas, Kangra Fort lies 20 kms away from the town of Dharamshala. The fort is located bang at the confluence of Manjhi and Banganga rivers. At the entrance to the fort is the Maharaja Sansar Chand Katoch Museum, maintained by the Royal Family of Kangra. The museum has on its display valuable sculptures dating back to 9th century CE, lower paleolithic tools, pre-historic stone tools like hand axes, choppers, discoids excavated from Guler, Kangra, Sati stones, and a pricey collection of Pahari paintings donated by the Kangra Royals to the museum.

The fort is said to have been established around 1500 BC by Maharaja Susharma Chandra, a descendant of the Katoch family of Rajputs. The earliest recorded account of the kingdom comes from Xuanzang who visited the Kingdom of Kangra, which he mentions as Jalandhra. In 1009 CE, Mahmud of Ghazni invaded Kangra and captured a large booty. The main gates to the fort were built by the Sikhs and from here a long, narrow passage leads to the fort through Ahani and Amiri gates, both attributed to the first Mughal governor of Kangra, Saif Ali Khan.



An artist working on a Thangka painting at the Norbulingka Institute

After a few such gates is the Darshani Darwaza, flanked by statues of Goddesses Ganga and Yamuna which opens up to a large courtyard, to the south of which we found three temples - Ambika Devi, Lakshmi Narayan, and interestingly, a Rishabanatha Jain temple! The Lakshmi Narayan Temple is a marvel, only parts of it now stand, with exquisite floral carvings and miniature gopuras. A British garrison occupied the courtyard until it was damaged in an earthquake in 1905. For a private fort, it has been maintained reasonably well.

The unbearable heat pushed us indoors for the rest of the day. The evening was cooler as we ambled down the road from Tibet main temple towards MacLeodganj. The pictures of Saint John in the Wilderness Church are no match to the beauty that envelops you when you reach the gates. This church has been built in new Gothic style, in 1852, and is dedicated to Saint John the Baptist, who baptised Jesus. The stark grey stone building is decorated with beautiful stained Belgian glass, donated by Lady Elgin, the wife of Indian Viceroy Lord Elgin.



Maha Kali Pahari painting in Kangra style at Katoch Museum, Kangra Fort



The majestic Kangra Fort is the eighth largest in India



The Lakshminarayana Temple at Kangra Fort

The church must have been under British army control, as we saw memorial plaques erected for fallen soldiers of World War I, in action at France, Mesopotamia, Palestine and Baluchistan. Many of them mentioned the 1st Gurkha Rifles, one of the earliest battalions of the army. There is also a huge plaque dedicated to all the officers who fell in the Great War, without mentioning the names. At the back of the church is a memorial erected in memory of Lord James Bruce, Earl of Elgin, Viceroy and Governor General of India, by his widow Lady Elgin. Pines and junipers offer canopy to the church. On the way back, the daughter insisted on her silver ring, and what would be a trip to Dharamshala without Tibetan silver? A few minutes into bargaining, we succeeded, and bought the souvenir.

Himachal to average South Indians is Shimla, Kulu and Manali. We opted to touch the lesser explored parts, and

don't regret the decision. Be it the snow-capped Sach Pass, or the greenery of Khajjiar, the enormous Kangra Fort or the museums, we enjoyed every bit of the trip! As the flight taxied along the runway after a smooth touch down, the daughter asked, "Mom, when will you take us to tourist places like Shimla?" Probably sometime later, I smiled. Perhaps she will grow up to be a wanderess. Like the Wanderess of Roman Payne – *"bound by no boundaries, contained by no countries, tamed by no time..."*



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.

Our Last Six Issues

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“When in school, I tried to kill myself, not once, but thrice.”

Suresh Ramdas, Mr. Gay India 2019 (37), is a multi-faceted personality who has taken life on his chin. Despite the hardships he has faced, he is an optimistic person. He describes himself as a dynamic, charismatic, and humble person. Read on what he had to say to **A. Radhakrishnan.**



How did it feel when section 377 was decriminalised by the Supreme Court?

September 6, 2018, is India's LGBTQ community's Independence Day, when the Supreme Court (SC) of India struck down Section 377 and declared we were not criminals, but had the freedom to be ourselves. A great step towards an inclusive society. I was with friends and people from the community at the Alternate Law Forum in Bengaluru, and broke down with tears of joy.

What does gay pride mean to you? Were you ever ashamed of being gay?

It is the stand we take against discrimination and violence toward lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people; to address the acceptance of dignity, equal rights, and celebrate sexual diversity and gender variance. Notwithstanding what others think, nobody should be able to make you feel ashamed of who you are or what you stand for. Though when young, I was ashamed, now, I wear my sexuality with pride, like every other heterosexual person.

What more has to be done for the LGBT community?

Removing anti-discriminatory laws, having legal rights, marriage equality, medical and insurance benefits, better support and empowerment of the transpeople, etc., top the list. Post Section 377, as the SC has also said, government has to take steps to sensitise and bring awareness to people. It is the dual duty of both the government to remove old laws and make changes, and the courts to ensure the law is implemented; else, call them out.

What is discrimination to you? Have you been personally

discriminated against?

Discrimination is treating someone in an unjust manner, just because they are different, guided by narrow mindedness or prejudice.

I have been discriminated based on my skin colour, mannerisms and feminine behaviour during my school and college days. I literally got into physical and verbal fights. I fought it at times by proving better than others in sports.

Who are your gay icons? Why?

Ellen DeGeneres, Prince Manvendra Singh Gohil, Harish Iyer, are my icons. I was able to relate to their stories of being in the closet, and their struggles to being accepted. I am inspired by how they succeeded and got better at their work, championing the cause for the LGBTQ+ community.

How are you involved with your community?

I am co-founder of a group called 'Working With Pride', where in tandem with various organisations, we help create, learn and help workplaces to be LGBTQ+ inclusive. Also, I am the co-facilitator for an exclusive Leadership Programme for the LGBTQ+ people called 'Leading With Pride'. I also work on awareness and sensitisation programmes at various educational institutions and corporates.

Is society more open today about the LGBT community?

Yes, and no. The reason being, in metros and big cities, there is more awareness and acceptance level, but when you go to small towns and villages, the struggle is real.

Do you look for empathy? How do you cope with negative

feedback?

Indeed, I think my community needs empathy. People need to understand what we are going through and help us make our lives better. From my initial years of work, I have looked for constructive feedback, for my development. If the intent is good, I consider it; if it's just to malign me, I don't bother at all.

Did you ever contemplate suicide?

Suicide is an escape from reality, and caused by helpless situations. Many from my community have taken this extreme route as they were being harassed, bullied or even tortured for who they were.

When in school, I tried to kill myself, not once, but thrice. A point came where I couldn't take it anymore as I couldn't tell anyone, and the frustration inside me was building up.

What do you think about the straight pride rallies in the US?

Simple, I think they just want the attention that the LGBTQ community people are getting. The straight people who are walking the parade want to celebrate their 364 days of privilege of having everything they want, which includes, be who they are, love whom they want to, marry, have kids naturally or through surrogacy or adoption, and everything else. If you mapped the countries where straight people are getting killed for who they are, it is nonexistent.

What discriminations exist 'within' the community?

Discriminations like fat shaming, bottom shaming, etc., exist. The gay community for instance, discriminates between lesbian, trans and queer, and others.

When did you realise that you were gay? What triggered the realisation?

I realised I was different at a very young age, but I didn't know what it was called, as those days we didn't have internet/mobile to research or learn. Like kids in their teens who develop feelings towards another person, be it same sex or opposite sex, I also went through it.

What about college life?

It was here that I found there was a word to describe it. My college life was good and painful in its own way. My mannerisms, behaviour and colour were being called out at various places. But at the same time, it's in college that I learnt a lot, and met my best friend too.

How did it feel being a subject of curiosity or a data point?

When young, I detested being the subject of curiosity as it always brought attention/limelight, something that I abhorred as I wasn't confident. Now, with my work and the title of Mr. Gay India 2019, I enjoy it, as I get the opportunity to

reach out to the people and create that awareness about my community.

How did you break the news to the family? How did you come out?

A privileged patriarchal society gave me the right to say yes or no in a marriage. Years ago I had vowed I would not get married to a girl and mess up her life.

My parents' search for an eligible girl had begun. With time, they zeroed in on a girl and it was then that I came out to my parents, and it was a difficult process. My parents were angry, upset and frustrated; then they started blaming themselves or thought someone had done black magic.

But I had to hold my ground. I reminded them they had taught me to be honest, truthful and do the right thing. They were unable to digest my explanation. All this was very shocking to them. They were worried who would look after me when they passed away, as they thought that only a woman could take care of a man.

How long did it take for you to be accepted in work and life?

It took me around 25 years to accept myself. When I started working, I decided not to mix my personal and professional life, and hence I was in the closet for the first 10 years. Post that, I had also come out to my parents, so decided to come out to everyone. Acceptance at work was not an issue. Everyone was very happy to see me being myself.

How important is it for people to come out of the closet?

In current times, I believe it's very important, be it to everyone or just close ones or only parents. Being in the closet leads to issues like low confidence, lack of trust, authenticity and honesty, which may lead to mental health issues.

Do you have a boyfriend? Will you marry? What is your attitude to having children?

Yes, I have a partner Soham from Kolkata, since the past three years. And if same sex marriages get legal in India, I would like to get married to him. We both love kids, but of others!

How did the Mr. Gay India 2019 pageant happen?

Mr. Gay India Pageant was started in 2015 with Sushant Divgikar as the National Producer and Director for India. Mr. Gay India Pageant 2019 was held in January 2019. Of the many participants, only seven reached the final rounds held at The Lalit, Mumbai. I won the social media campaign, the sports challenge, the people's choice awards and also the final round questions.

Winning it made me feel on top of the world. I wanted to hug my boyfriend Soham and my four-legged baby Suzie. I also wanted to tell my parents how blessed I was to be their son, and hoped they were proud too.

Has it give you any boost?

Yes, definitely, it has given me a lot of visibility, helping me represent India at various events, conferences and programmes.

What is your religious belief? Why is there hate in some religions for gays?

I'm a Hindu. No religion asks people to hate each other. We are expected to live in harmony and be supportive. A few men in power decide what is right and what is not right, and that has got us to this sorry level today.

Which gay films would you recommend to understand your situation?

Evening Shadows, My Son is Gay, Margarita with a Straw, Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga, Kapoor & Sons, Naanu Avanalla...Avalu, Prayer for Bobby, Sec 377 Ab Normal, Aligarh, and Milk.

Where do you work? What's the attitude of your co-workers?

I have worked with an IT company for close to 15 years. My co-workers are very proud of me. They, at times tell me that they are jealous of me (in a good way), as I am living my life with no fear or regrets, and with honesty.

What would you like to change about yourself?

Nothing. Today the person that I am is because of the past that I have experienced. I want to evolve to be a better

human being. So, physically I would only like to be healthier. Mentally, I would like to learn to be at peace with what I have, and emotionally I would like to be more stable. I would never have liked to be straight. Even the roads are not straight, then why would I want to be.

Any lessons you would want to share?

It's one life that we have, and everyone is born different from each other. What's life if you cannot live it authentically? There is more joy in giving back to the society.

What are your hobbies?

I spend some time at an Old Age Home and a Center for kids affected by HIV, and I like watching movies with friends.

Do you envisage a world where all, including gays, are equal?

Yes, but not in my lifetime. Maybe it will take two or three more generations.



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

WHO AM I?

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

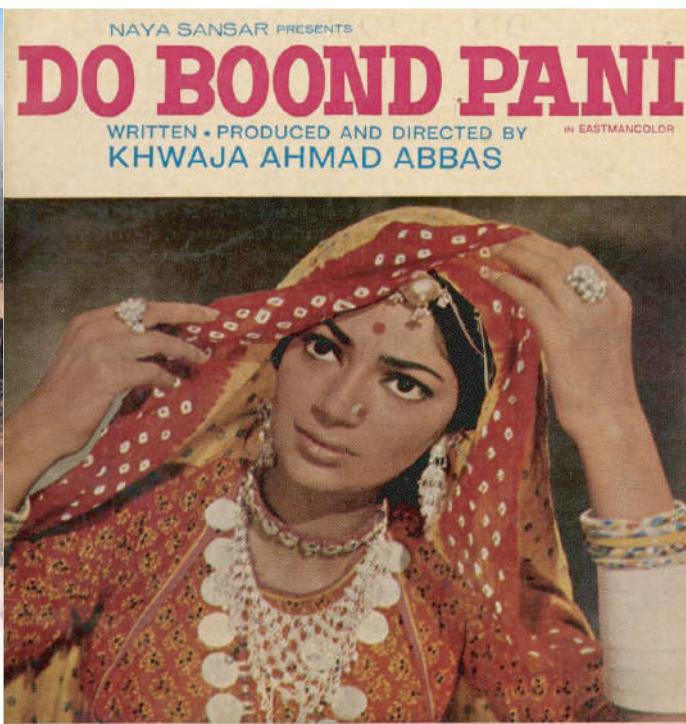
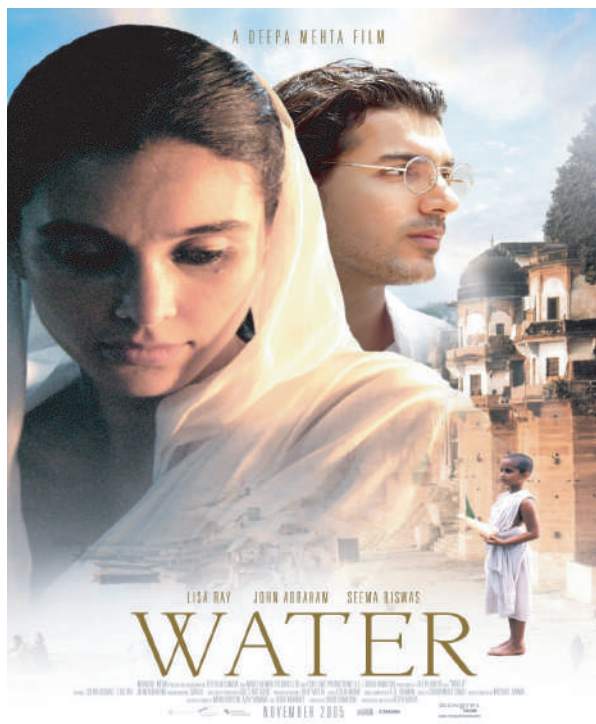


Earth...



Where water was the star

The theme of water and the lack of it, have been addressed rather well by filmmakers in India and Hollywood, says **Shoma A. Chatterji**. She writes about some of these films and their portrayal of this vital life force.



Posters of films *Water* and *Do boond paani*

“Once Upon a time, there was water.” This is a sentence that appears in a film named *Kaun Kitne Pani Mein* (2015) directed by Nila Madhab Panda, that dealt with, among other things, how the scarcity of water impacts not only our lives and livelihoods, but also our relationships within the family, neighbourhood, and even neighbouring villages.

If you juxtapose two films, Deepa Mehta’s Indo-Canadian film *Water*, and Guillermo del Toro’s *Shape of Water*, you will see how cultural perceptions around water differ from one culture to another. While Deepa Mehta’s *Water*, located in Benares, the holy city of the Hindus and the place of salvation for widows of all ages, uses water as a physical reality, as also a metaphor for life and the cruelty that death entails when a young widow drowns in the water of the Ganges. *Shape of Water* is a romantic, dark, fantasy film which narrates the story that follows a mute cleaner at a high-security government laboratory, who falls in love with a captured humanoid, an amphibian creature.

Films that star water

Mehta’s *Water* exemplifies the oft-repeated saying

about women: “Women, like water, take the shape of whatever vessel they are poured into.” Set in 1938 in the holy city of Benares, India, it focuses on the deprivations experienced by Hindu widows, still an issue today in a country with 33 million widows. When Mehta started making this film in Benares, Hindu fundamentalists protested, claiming that the film was anti-Hindu. She was forced to shut down the production and start over, a year later in Sri Lanka. (Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat in their essay – *Water – Musings on Gender, Race, Class.*)

Water or the crisis it creates or the life-saver it functions as, is not articulated in bold capital letters, but asserts its presence through the way it plays a strategic role in the lives of the widows in the widows’ ashram that stands on the banks of the Ganges. A little, eight-year-old widow makes the other widows begin to look differently at their own state of widowhood. Water flows quietly, like a dangerous undercurrent, waiting to swallow up young widows like Kalyani (Lisa Ray) whose long hair is not chopped off because the ashram heads use her for prostitution.

There are other Hollywood films where water plays a significant role which reflect the Western cultural perspec-

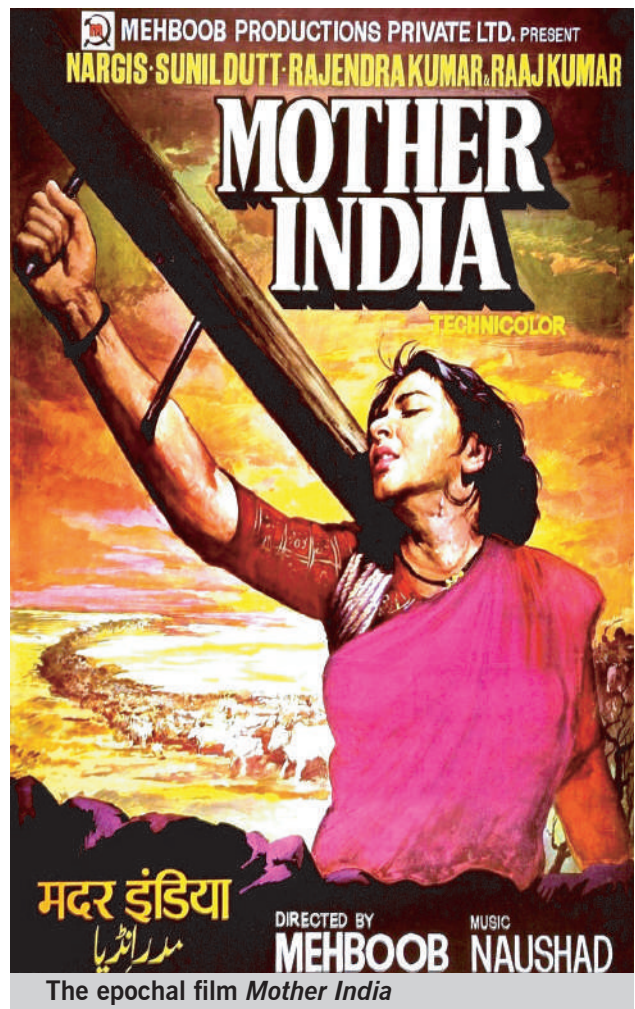
cative to water that bears no resemblance to the Indian cultural perspective towards water. Among them are some outstanding films like *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* (1954) based on the famous 1970 novel by Jules Verne, Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* published in 1851, and turned into a film in 1956. It comprises a story being narrated by the sole survivor of a lost whaling ship that says how the captain's self-centred obsession for hunting the white whale, nick-named Moby Dick, led to the huge tragedy. In another film *Free Willy*, a young boy befriends a captive orca and tries desperately to set it free from its captive state. The underwater scenes in all these films are a water-lover's delight, only to know the reality that this visual beauty may not last long, unless we pull up our socks and take care to save our waters.

Erin Brockovich perhaps, is the sole example from Hollywood where an unemployed single mother fights from the legal office she works in, when she discovers how a power company is by deliberate design, polluting local water sources, which is deeply affecting the local families in the area. "This film represents a very real problem in today's world, of multinational corporations and global conglomerates extracting and polluting water unsustainably," writes Priya Desai (in India Water Portal).

For Indians, water is considered a holy entity which is offered in prayers and in poojas, often drawn from the holy Ganges or the Triveni Sangam or Jamuna rivers. Water is a means of basic survival of everyone across the world, but we do not realise this even now. In Hinduism, the River Ganges is considered sacred, and is personified as a goddess known as Ganga. It is worshipped by Hindus who believe that bathing in the river causes the remission of sins and facilitates moksha (liberation from the cycle of life and death). Pilgrims immerse the ashes of their kin in the Ganges, which is considered by them to bring the spirits closer to moksha. Several places sacred to Hindus lie along the banks of the Ganges, including Gangotri, Haridwar, Allahabad and Varanasi.

Indian cinema however, has shown greater consciousness around water, both as a cultural signifier as well as a critical reality where shortage of water could lead to a huge threat to life itself in all its forms – forests and plantations, animals and birds, flora and fauna and last but not the least, the entire human race. *Life of Pi* is a truly visually rich and beautiful story set entirely on the sea, which gives us incredible views of the ocean in all its varied manifestations, through the eyes of Pi and his friend Richard Parker, the tiger who walked away as suddenly as he had arrived. The ocean in its fluid mood changes – happy, peaceful, angry, filled with fury, threatening, and then complacent, keeps the audience hooked to the screen.

Let us take a brief look at films that have explored the question of water that would offer us a viewpoint of the cultural perspective of the oriental world. Mehboob's *Mother India* (1957) had a political context in the aftermath of the Independence of India in 1947. Immediately following Independence, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru announced



his idea of socialism and human resource empowerment. At the time of the First Five Year Plan (1951–1956), India was challenged by major issues such as, (a) the influx of refugees, (b) severe food shortage, and (c) mounting inflation.

The film closes on one of the major features of the Plan and that is "to build economic overheads such as roads, railways, irrigation, power, etc." Irrigation through the construction of a canal forms the focus of the latter half of the film. The village mother, Radha is requested by the entire village to inaugurate the canal so that the "the waters may flow freely" and the farmers need not be pressurised by the fear of natural calamities or debts or both.

When the water begins to actually flow from the newly dug out canal, it is red in colour, symbolising the bloodshed that got the country its Independence, and the metaphorical 'blood' of farmers like Radha that went into the creation of a canal. As the water continues to flow through the rough terrains of the land, like a stream, it slowly loses its redness and turns transparent like clear, natural water, with the soil underneath showing through. The larger goal was to bring attention to New India, and to inform the world at large that the nation was now free to enlarge the concept of equality and the strategy of using agriculture as the primary way of attaining development.

In 1971, K.A. Abbas produced and directed *Do Boond Pani*, a moving story of how a young, newly married man leaves home and hearth to work towards the construction of a dam in an area wrought with lack of monsoon, and a dry, arid weather in some pocket of Rajasthan. Jalal Agha, a great actor, who was severely under-utilised by the Hindi film industry, portrayed the role of this man, Ganga Singh. They live in a desert-like area and suffer greatly from lack of water. But as the work goes on and the dam is about to be completed, Ganga Singh slips and loses his life, keeping his wife Gauri (Simi Garewal) and the little son waiting for his return. He never returns, but the villagers remember his sacrifice and name the dam Ganga Sagar Dam.

The film did not do well commercially, but it had one of the most melodious musical scores composed by Jaidev in one of his best compositions belted out by a range of wonderful vocalists from Laxmi Shankar through Asha Bhonsale, Parveen Sultana, Minoo Purshottam, Mukesh, and Noor Jahan. The title song is especially memorable which repeats the title and says that without water, there can be no life. The film won the Nargis Dutt Award for Best Feature film on national integration.

Kaun Kitne Paani Mein (2015) is a remarkable film that uses an ingenuous blend of comedy and satire to question significant truths in the lives of people residing in two neighbouring villages. Directed by Neela Madhab Panda, the film is a satire on various social issues that are relevant in India such as water scarcity, caste discrimination, and

honour killing. For a Hindi film, *Kaun Kitne Paani Mein* deals, perhaps for the first time, with the concept of "soil re-mineralisation." The film shows that when water is scarce, there can be severe exploitation of those who are devoid of water by those who begin to sell water to these buyers turning water, a natural resource, into a saleable commodity. This is a very powerful reality brought to the fore perhaps for the first time in Hindi cinema. The film sets an example of how cast schism can be eliminated through very honest and dedicated hard work and also how a director can take his socially committed message across without sounding patronising or derogatory towards the audience.

Actor-producer Priyanka Chopra has recently announced a Marathi film called *Paani* which, against the backdrop of a love story, deals with the issue of drought in Marathwada. The film directed by Adinath Kothare stars Subodh Bhavde and Kishor Kadam in prominent roles. It also stars Girish Joshi and Rajit Kapur, and is inspired by the true story of a common man and his village, Nagardwadi, situated in the drought-prone Marathwada region of Maharashtra.



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.

Corporatising water

(continued from page 16...)

Kale continues that agriculture which is dependent on dams has been threatened as the priority has changed only on papers. "The Act still holds agriculture as tertiary. The government has sanctioned lifting irrigation on dams, huge illegal water lifts have thereby created a big threat to water management," he states, adding that reservation of water meant for agriculture is being diverted to industries and development of cities had further endangered the future of its availability. By 2041, water for agriculture may almost be non-accessible.

It is a known fact that industries need a lot of water to function, and tapping into government controlled dams and reservoirs seem to be an easy way. Kale points out that Aurangabad for example has the highest number of liquor industries, and it requires 25 litres of water to produce every litre of liquor. Often, governments have no record regarding water storage capacity of the companies, nor have they ever checked water lifting by industries.

Author and economist Robin Banerjee warns that water is currently the scarcest commodity on earth. "Strange as it may seem that with over three-fourth of the earth's surface covered with water, there is not enough potable water. I feel that if there is another world war in the near

future, the cause of it could be water. With enhanced paucity, many commercial organisations are looking at 'water' as a business opportunity. There is nothing wrong with it, as long as the poor are not taken for a ride or deprived of it." He opines that governments must focus on rain water harvesting, water conservation, and economical conversion of salt-water into potable stuff.

"Till this is done, water could become a serious tradable commodity with many not being able to afford it", he concludes.



A journalist for over 15 years, Mamta Chitnis Sen has worked with reputed publications in Mumbai, reporting on crime, politics, religion, art, community, human interest, and general news. She was Executive Editor of *Dignity Dialogue*, India's foremost magazine exclusively for the 50 plus age group. She presently handles Media Advocacy for Child Rights and You (CRY) – an NGO working for the rights of underprivileged children in India covering the states of Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh and Gujarat. Mamta is also an artist and has exhibited in various groups shows in India and abroad.

Finally, victory!

*The campaign to declare Masood Mohammed Azhar as a global terrorist finally bore fruit when China, which had blocked the effort on technical grounds, agreed to support the move. **Prof. P.M. Kamath** discusses the reasons behind this, and what it means for India.*



Finally Masood Azhar was declared a global terrorist

For almost a decade, India's effort to declare dreaded terrorist Masood Mohammed Azhar, Founder and the Chief of terror organisation, Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) as a global terrorist was being blocked by China on behalf of its all-weather friend, Pakistan, on one ground or the other. However, after incessant efforts, the Modi government succeeded in gaining it on May 1, 2019.

Importance of the ban

Mohammed Azhar was first arrested in Kashmir in 1994, when the Congress was in power at the Centre. An Indian Airlines flight from Kathmandu was hijacked to Kandahar in December 1999, pressurising the then BJP-led NDA government under A.B.Vajpayee to give into emotional

pressure, and release the three terrorists, including Mohammed Azhar.

Then onwards, Azhar has been a valued asset in foreign policy making of Pakistan, for its Army and its Intelligence agency, ISI. There is a method in the madness of Pakistan using terrorist attacks against India. While JeM has been used against BJP-led governments — NDA I and NDA II, Hafiz Saeed has been used against UPA I and II.

Thus, Masood Azhar and his JeM were instrumental in hitting Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) legislative assembly in October 2001, the Indian Parliament in December 2001, and more recently, to compel the Modi government to initiate talks with their patron-government — Pakistan, at Pathankot airbase, in January 2016,

and Uri in September 2016. The Uri attack prompted the government to conduct surgical strike at the terrorist training camp in POK.

However, what really made the government to say, thus far, and no more at the use of terror instrument by the Pakistan is; the JeM suicide attacks on CRPF soldiers at Pulwama on 14th February, 2019, in which 40 soldiers were killed, reducing them to charred bodies beyond recognition. Prime Minister (PM) Modi had said that the perpetrators would be made to pay for their crime. For that the nation was not made to wait long. On 26th February, the Indian Air Force stealthily moved deep into Islamabad's Balakot and attacked JeM terror training camp.

(continued on page 35...)

An enjoyable Marathi musical

The Marathi play Sangeet Devbabhali recently completed its 250th show, and it is worth seeing this play for the number of thought-provoking ideas it discusses.

Prof. Avinash Kolhe analyses the popularity of this play.



A still from the play

The commercial Marathi theatre is witnessing a resurgence of sorts, as unconventional plays like *Sangeet Devbabhali* recently completed its 250th show, and is still going strong. This is indeed noteworthy for a new play by a young writer-director, and that too on an unusual subject. Old commercially successful plays like *Ashrunchi Zali Phule* (Tears have turned flowers) and a few other time-tested plays are running to packed houses. In such a milieu, a fresh, unconventional play by a young writer-director Prajakt Deshmukh has touched the right chord in getting the crowds back to theatre. This is Deshmukh's first commercial outing. The play is produced by Bhadrakali Productions, a theatre powerhouse.

A throwback musical

Sangeet Devbabhali is a period-drama that depicts life in the 16th century rural Maharashtra. It is a musical like they used to have in the good old days of Balgandharva in the

1920s and 1930s, when actors were accomplished singers too. This modern musical has only two female characters who hold audience attention for a good two-odd hours. It is story of two women, Avali and Lakhubai. Avali, also known as Jijabai, is Saint Tukaram's second wife. The popular culture has depicted Avali as a woman who had troubled Saint Tukaram a lot on mundane matters. Avali is often compared with Greek Philosopher Socrates's wife Xanthippe. Given Avali's straightforward pragmatism, she could never understand Tukaram's spiritual quest, his utter devotion to Lord Vittal. And yet, with her hard, back-breaking work, she keeps the kitchen fires burning.

The play opens with Avali taking lunch for Tukaram in the jungle, a daily routine for her. On one particular day, her foot is pierced by a thorn. God Vittal personally takes out the thorn, while Avali lies unconscious in the jungle. This in turn arouses the curiosity of Rakmabai, wife of Vittal, who initially fails to

understand the position Tukaram occupies. She takes on the guise of a stranger Lakhubai, to know more about Avali, and why God touched her foot!

Ultimately, *Sangeet Devbabhali* is the story of two women, marginalised in their lives, who find comfort in each other's company, and they develop a feeling of kinship. This musical weaves multiple tales in one; it presents Avali's plight of deprivation and desertion, her constant denial of Vittal's superior position. The play has lot of *abhangas* of Tukaram which provide *Sangeet Devbabhali* its musical texture. A word of caution is necessary here. This is not a feminist play of self-actualisation – here, men are centre-stage in all respects, endowed with all good qualities.

Shubhangi Sadarvate (Avali) and Manasi Joshi (Rakumai/Lakhubai) are two trained actors who carry their roles with professional ease. Their singing prowess is really top-class. The music is composed by Anand Oak who has used historical *abhangas* and some fresh ones written by playwright and director Prajakt Deshmukh. A mention must be made of the versatile stage-design by Pradeep Mulye. The stage-design and the lights take us into the hut of Avali one moment, and the very next moment we are transported to Bhandara Hills, where Saint Tukaram used to retire for meditation.

The missing Tukaram?

Though this is a top-class production, some issues troubled me. Why did the playwright not get Tukaram in the script? If Tukaram were to appear, it would have given this play an altogether different perspective on devotion to God, His

place in day-to-day life, and can one really attain moksha while practicing domestic life? How does one keep detached from issues around us? The entry of Tukaram would also have brought in a male perspective, which is lacking in the present avatar of the play. Tukaram occupies an important place in the history of saint poets of Maharashtra.

The tradition of saint poetry starts with Dynaneshwar who wrote Dyaneshwari when he was in his early 20s, in the 12th century A.D.

Finally, victory!

(continued from page 33...)

China relents

How did the changes in the Chinese approach on the issue come about? First and foremost, after the Pulwama attack, the Indian government was determined to deny any more opportunity to China to put off once again the issue of Azhar's declaration as international terrorist on technical hold. It indicated strength of Indian diplomacy and geopolitical manoeuvres, and the mobilisation of international support especially by France, US and the UK (in order of the significance of their contributions). What is significant is: India made even an Islamic country like Indonesia to join the efforts in the UN and force re-evaluation by China.

Both China and Pakistan see India as the common adversary with a history of unresolved national borders. Pakistan sees a perpetual national security threat to its survival. China is using Pakistan as a pawn in its ambition to confine and limit India as merely a South Asian nation than emerge as a Superpower. What is interesting is: China claims a right to remain actively involved with almost all Indian neighbours, by weaving, what Americans call as a 'string of pearls,' all around Indian borders. Yet, it denies a reciprocal right to India to promote its security interests in Southeast Asia.

Third, however, once three

Since the days of Dynaneshwar, saint poets have become integral to Maharashtra, and in this long tradition, Tukaram holds an eminent position. Tukaram's poetry was revolutionary, and challenged the vested interests. So finally they managed to sink his poetry in the River Indrayani. The character of powerful saint poet Tukaram would have raised the intellectual height of this play. Despite this handicap, Sangeet Devbabhali is a huge success, and definitely worth a dekho.

permanent members extended their support to Indian move, it would have been an expose as to how wrongly China is supporting international terrorism for its own interest, especially because the UN had already declared JeM as a terrorist organisation.

Fourth, China was keen to see that India was not pushed further into the US fold under the rubric of India-US Strategic partnership, which was evident with the growing clout of India in the changed perspective of Asia-Pacific region turned into an Indo-Pacific region. Since the US has an ongoing trade war with China, it was necessary to keep India neutral.

Fifth, should China permit entire credit for naming Azhar as an international terrorist to the US, France and the UK, when earlier the terrorist group he led, was named as an international terror group with China's support? China desired to help India, with the reciprocal help in diluting its criticism of One Belt One Road (OBOR), especially on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. The Chinese had also expressed apprehensions of JeM terrorists attacking Chinese workers.

Domestic critics

In the heat of electioneering, the Congress Party tried to win some brownie points by claiming it was the UPA government that had in 2009 taken Azhar's case to the UN Committee to declare him as an international



Mumbai.

Prof. Avinash Kolhe retired as Associate Professor in Political Science from D.G. Ruparel College,

terrorist.

Even if that was true, they have never answered what they did as a follow up action, while the Modi government during its five years pushed the issue on six occasions, to be blocked each time, before success on the 7th attempt on May 1!

India needs to learn three lessons in this case. First, the opposition needs to accept significant contrast in efforts made by them while in power to get Azhar named as an international terrorist, and the success of the Modi government. Second, China by obliging India, has extended a hand of cooperation to work for an 'Asian century', expecting Indian help in facing the US trade war. Beyond that, India needs to strengthen its domestic laws. While we have a law to ban terrorist organisations, we do not have a law to name an individual as a terrorist. Enacting immediately such a law will help India to strengthen her hand in claiming international cooperation within the UN!



Prof. P.M. Kamath is former Professor of Politics, University of Bombay, and currently Chairman and Director, VPM's Centre for International Studies (Regd.), affiliated to Mumbai University. His latest book is: Terrorism Miscellany (New Delhi: Gyan 2017)

GENERAL THIMAYYA

The Army his soul (1906-1965)

General Kodendera Subayya Thimayya, DSO, distinguished soldier of the Indian Army, served as the 6th Chief of Army Staff from 1957 to 1961. Born in Madikeri, Coorg, Karnataka, to Subayya and Sitamma, he was the third of six children in a family, who were leading coffee planters. After school, Thimayya attended the Prince of Wales Royal Indian Military College. He was one of only six Indian cadets who were selected for further training at the Royal Military College, Sandhurst.

It is with the 4/19 Hyderabad battalion in 1926 that his regimental life began, including his daring foray into the Royal Palace of King Feisal I, where at the risk of his life, he rescued a group of victimised women. Appointed the Regimental Adjutant in September 1930, Thimayya honed his soldiering skills in the Northwest Frontier, battling recalcitrant Pathan tribals. After marriage to Nina in January 1935, Thimayya was posted as an Adjutant at the University Training Corps in Madras, and later posted to his battalion in Singapore. Later in India, he served as GSO2 (ops) (a grade II staff officer) of the 25th Indian Division, the first Indian officer to get this coveted staff appointment. Commanding the 8 Kumaon in Burma during World War II, exhibiting tactical brilliance in combat, he captured the entire objective, much to the dismay of the Japanese forces. A signatory to the surrender document, he was conferred the Distinguished Service Order (DSO) and also a Mention-in-Dispatches, and also 'Keys to Manila' in the Philippines.

His innate talents of professional soldiering were recognised by Field Marshal Sir Claude Auchinleck, Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army, who specially selected him to lead the 268th Indian Infantry Brigade, part of the British Commonwealth Occupation Force in Japan after World War II. The British, as a policy, avoided giving operational command to Indians, but Thimayya was an exception.

After Partition, he was on the committee for allotment of weapons, equipment and regiments between India, and Pakistan. As Major-General, he commandeered the 4th Infantry Division and the Punjab Boundary Force, dealing with the exodus and intake of refugees.

A member of the Indian delegation that concluded the Treaty with Pakistan with respect to the Line of Control (LoC) under the auspices of the United Nations Commission for India and Pakistan, it was his tactical manoeuvres in what is known as the first Kargil War in 1948 that helped save Kargil, which we had lost to Pakistan. A unique honour came when he was selected Chairman of the Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission (NNRC) in Korea in May 1953, a sensitive and delicate task dealing with prisoners. His deft handling got him a Padma Bhushan in 1954.

At 51, Gen. Thimayya achieved the pinnacle of military success by being appointed the 6th Chief of the Army Staff. He recommended an offensive posture against Pakistan, and a policy of containment coupled with strong diplomatic and political exchange vis-à-vis China. He disagreed over matters of policy and strategy with Krishna Menon and Nehru. This discord led perhaps to India's defeat at the hands of the Chinese, fifteen months later. He retired from the Army after 35 years, and was President of the Planters Association of South India, and also elected President (later Patron) of the Old Cottonians' Association. The United Nations then sought his service in July 1964 as the Commander of a 6000 multi-national U.N. Peace Keeping Force in Cyprus which at that point, was gripped by the bitter conflict between Greeks and Turkish Cypriots.

He unfortunately died, aged 59, of heart attack, on 18 December 1965. The Republic of Cyprus, issued a 1966 commemorative stamp. The Bishop Cotton Boys' School, of which he was an alumnus, annually holds the General K.S. Thimayya Memorial Lecture Series; the General Thimayya National Academy of Adventure is representative of his spirit of adventure, in thought, philosophy, and action, and there is also the General K.S. Thimayya Memorial Museum in Madikeri, where weapons used by the Indian soldiers are exhibited.

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



HONORARY CAPTAIN GANJU LAMA, VC

An intelligent and brave officer (1924-2000)

Ganju Lama was born on 22 July 1924, in Sangmo in Southern Sikkim. His parents were of Sikkim Bhutia descent. He was actually named Gyamtso Shangderpa. The recruiting clerk by mistake wrote 'Ganju', and the name stuck. At the age of 17 years, he enlisted in the British Gorkha Army. He was not an ethnic Gorkha or a Nepalese citizen. He was accepted in the Gorkha Regiment as at that time, the British were prepared to accept any one who looked like a Gorkha. He joined No. 1 Battalion 7th Gorkha Rifles (1/7 GR) in Imphal.

1/7GR was part of the 48 Infantry Brigade in 17 Indian Division, who were advancing to recapture Imphal. Their advance had faltered north-east of Imphal on the Tiddim Road. The unit faced intense fire from machine guns mounted on tanks. Rifleman Ganju Lama crawled forward to within sixty yards of the enemy tanks. He fired his PIAT (projector infantry anti-tank) weapon. His second shot pierced the armour of the leading tank and destroyed it. His platoon was ordered to pull back and Ganju Lama remained in position to cover their withdrawal. He was awarded the Military Medal for courage. Surprisingly, the award of Military medal was announced in the London Gazette a month after the announcement of Victoria Cross (VC).

The progress of 17 Indian Division was blocked by the 15th Army of Japan on the Tiddim road near Imphal. In three weeks, 48 Infantry Brigade had barely reached village Ningthookong, a distance of 12 Miles. On 12 June 1944, the Brigade positions came under heavy fire and the Japanese infantry and tanks broke through the British positions. 1/7 GR, occupying a position near village Ningthoukhong, suffered heavy casualties from the artillery barrage, and many bunkers were destroyed. The Gorkha unit was ordered to counter-attack and restore the situation. The Gorkhas faced heavy fire from Japanese tanks and machine guns.

Ganju Lama was severely wounded in his right hand and leg, and had a broken wrist. In spite of his injuries, he crawled forward and engaged the enemy tanks single-handed. He succeeded in destroying two tanks from within a distance of thirty yards.

He could not use his hand due to the injuries, and managed to kill or wound the escaping tank crew by pulling the pin of the grenade by his teeth. He allowed himself to be evacuated to the Regimental Aid Post for treatment of wounds after completing the task. The unit succeeded in its task due to his personal courage, determination, and complete disregard for his personal safety. He was awarded the Victoria Cross (VC), the citation for which reads:

"Throughout this action, Rifleman Ganju Lama, although seriously wounded, showed a complete disregard for his personal safety, outstanding devotion to duty and a determination to destroy the enemy, that was an example and an inspiration to all ranks. It was solely due to his prompt action and brave conduct that a most critical situation was averted, all positions regained, and heavy casualties inflicted on the enemy."

He was evacuated to the Base Hospital, where he spent 22 months. The medal was presented to him by the Viceroy, Field Marshal Lord Wavell, in the Red Fort at Delhi. Lord Mountbatten and his family were also present. He received his VC and Military Medal in the wheel chair.

After Independence, he opted to remain in India and joined 11 Gorkha Rifles (11 GR). He was promoted to Subedar Major and was appointed honorary ADC to the President of India in 1965. He achieved the distinction of being promoted Honorary Captain in 1968. He retired in 1972 and became a farmer in Sikkim. He visited UK regularly, and was vice-chairman (Overseas) of the Victoria Cross and George Cross Association for nine years. His Victoria Cross medal is displayed at The Gorkha Museum in Winchester, England, along with those of the other Gorkha soldiers.

He was highly intelligent and caring, with an impressive personality. He married twice. He passed away on 30 June 2000, and is survived by his second wife and six children..

- Brigadier Suresh Chandra Sharma (retd.)



GIRISH KARNAD

A multifaceted genius (1938-2019)

Girish Raghunath Karnad, who passed away in Bengaluru on 10 June 2019, at the age of 81, was ailing for quite some time from a condition identified as degenerative pulmonary disorder. He was an acclaimed playwright, actor, auteur, author, administrator, scholar, orator, and an ardent crusader for human rights and social justice. Karnad who had his early education in Sirsi, and later Dharwad in Karnataka, eventually went to London as a Rhodes scholar, and secured his Master of Arts degree in Philosophy, Politics and Economics from the Oxford University. He was also elected as Chairman of the Oxford Union. His first job after he returned to India was with the Oxford University Press in Chennai, where he served for seven years. Here he was associated with an English theatre group, the 'Madras Players'.

Girish Karnad's passion for theatre found him don the mantle of a playwright when he was still in his early twenties. In all, he wrote 15 plays, significant among them being his maiden effort *Yayati*, followed by others like *Tughlaq*, *Hayavadana*, *Nagamandala*, down to his last effort *Rakshasi Tangadi*. He was hailed as the renaissance man in Kannada theatre, for he tackled themes that were hitherto considered taboo, and used the epics and other mythological texts to draw allegorical references to contemporary issues and times. One of his most acclaimed plays was *Tughlaq* which attracted nationwide attention, and was translated into various languages like Hindi, Marathi and so on by renowned playwrights like Ebrahim Elkazi, Alyque Padamsee, and others. The playwright soon found a niche on the large screen as well, and debuted as an actor with the Kannada film *Samskara* based on a novel of the same name by U.R. Ananthamurthy. The national award winning film was directed by Pattabhirama Reddy.

His first foray into direction was with *Vamsa Vriksha*, again based on a novel by the acclaimed novelist S.L. Byrappa. This film too won a National Award. Karnad also directed Hindi films like *Utsav* and *Godhuli*. His adaptation of the legendary director Akira Kurosawa's *The Seven Samurai* as *Ondanandu Kaladhali* had a wide canvas and attained the status of a cult classic. The film also introduced the young actor Shankar Nag to Kannada cinema. Karnad also acted in and directed

Kanooru Heggaditi which too was well received by audiences.

Karnad also took giant strides as an actor, and was a firm favourite of avant garde directors like Shyam Benegal who cast him in pivotal roles in two films, *Nishaant* and *Manthan*, and Nagesh Kukunoor, with whom he worked in *Iqbal* and *Dor*.

One of his latter day films was the Salman Khan starrer *Tiger Zinda Hai* directed by Ali Abbas Zafar. Apart from hosting TV shows, Karnad also acted in serials like *Malgudi Days* directed by his protégé Shankar Nag, where he played the father of the young hero, Swami.

The serial incidentally was based on a bestselling novel by R.K. Narayan, one of India's most celebrated writers.

Karnad was a strident critic of right wing politics, religious fundamentalism, and right wing organisations like the RSS. He minced no words in condemning the ghastly killings of rationalists like Prof. Kalburgi, and journalists like Gauri Lankesh.

In a career that spanned well over five decades, Girish Karnad won several laurels like the Padma Shri and the Padma Bhushan, the Sangeeta Natak Akademi Award, the Kalidas Samman and the most prestigious honour coveted by literateurs, the Bharatiya Jnanpith, in 1998. His autobiography *Aadadtha Aayushya* sketches in vivid detail his long and illustrious career in diverse fields. He was one of the youngest Directors of the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII) at the age of 35, and later took over as its Chairman as well. He also served as the President of the Sangeet Nataka Akademi, and as Director of the Nehru Centre in London. In consonance with his wishes his family turned down a state funeral that had been planned for him, and his last rites were performed without any religious overtones.

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





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