

# ONE INDIA ONE PEOPLE

Patriotism Redefined

## #Gandhi150

*The icon who continues to inspire*

**Was Gandhi patriarchal?**

**In defence of the Mahatma**

**Spinning a revolution**

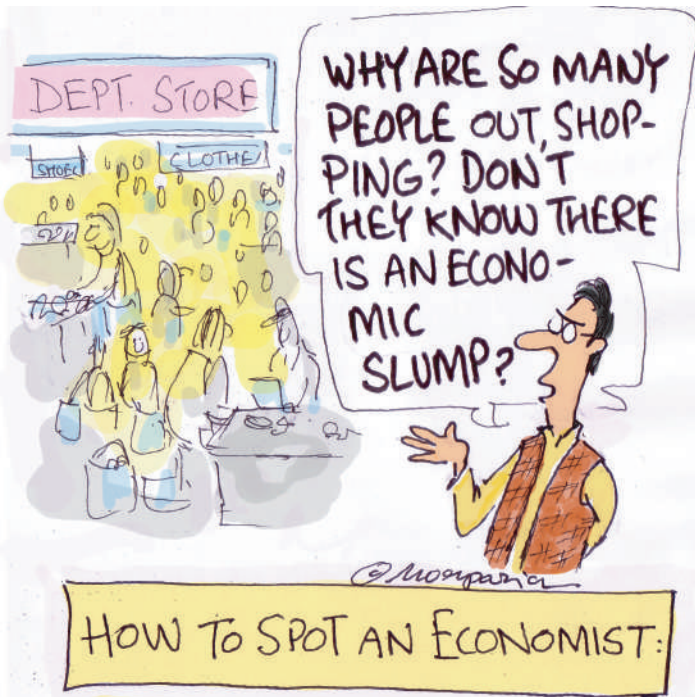
**KNOW INDIA BETTER**

**The legendary weaves  
of Bengal**

**FACE TO FACE**

**Ananth Mahadevan**





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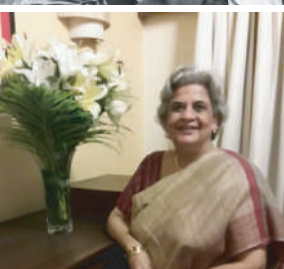
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LT GEN Z C BAKSHI PVSM,  
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# The icon who continues to inspire

*There is an overwhelming urge today among political parties, including the ones who are his bitter critics, to appropriate Gandhi and his legacy. Even if Gandhism is not preached or practiced in India, with the same fervour as it once was, Gandhian thoughts and ideologies will continue to shape the destiny of this great country, says C. V. Aravind.*



A file pic of Gandhi with Sarojini Naidu

**T**he hundred and fiftieth birth anniversary of the Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi was celebrated with great fanfare across the country on the 2<sup>nd</sup> October, this year. Reams have been written about the Mahatma's invaluable contribution to freedom struggle, the rich legacy that he has left behind for future generations and the values that he cherished right through his life. Politicians holding office and those bereft of power have thundered from the pulpits about the imperative need to revisit Bapu's life, imbibe his ideologies and put into practice his doctrines. The cacophonous, monotonous and maudlin chant has always been an annual affair but this time around it reached a crescendo as the celebrations revolved around an important milestone in Gandhi's life – his hundred and fiftieth birthday.

Is Gandhi as relevant today as he was when he resorted to satyagraha to free India from the British yoke? Is there an overwhelming urge among political parties to appropriate Gandhi and his legacy and use it as cannon fodder to fuel their petty, political designs? Is there a rethink on the part of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)

vis-a-vis the Mahatma and his ideologies? Are the Mahatma Gandhi roads and streets, the postal stamps, the currency notes, caricatures on government office walls and Gandhi Jayanti the only reminder of the apostle of violence who walked tall through his life? Has parochialism dented Gandhi's cherished principles of harmony and humanism? These are all posers that are valid in today's India where Gandhism is not preached or practiced with the same fervour as it once was.

## The relevance of Mahatma

Seven decades after he fell to an assassin's bullets, Mahatma Gandhi continues to be revered as an icon, an inspiration not only to billions of Indians but to leaders and people in all parts of the world. Former US President Barack Obama once opined that Gandhi was an inspiration to him because he embodied the kind of transformational change that can be made when ordinary people come together to do extraordinary things. World leaders like Martin Luther King Jr., who fought for civil rights and former South African President Nelson Mandela who adopted



Gandhi's principle of non-violence and came out of jail after serving a term of nearly three decades to head the first black majority government were all enamoured of Gandhi and his ideals. At a time when strife rules the world and its tremors are being increasingly felt in our country too, Gandhi's policy of ahimsa is hugely relevant and his observation that an eye for an eye would only leave the whole world blind is perhaps the strongest indictment of violence in any form. Right through his lifetime Gandhi laid great emphasis on 'truth' and he practiced it with all sincerity. His book 'Experiments with Truth' was an eye opener to all. Duplicity in any form was anathema to the Mahatma. His focus on a clean environment remains highly relevant and the 'Swachh Bharat Abhiyan' a government initiative that aims to create a clean open defecation India has met with a high degree of success and continues to be a flagship scheme of the Narendra Modi led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) now in its second term in office.

## The BJP's mascot

Although leaders occupying the highest echelons of the BJP would like to place the Iron Man of India, Sardar Vallabhai Patel a notch above Gandhi, the realisation that as an icon Gandhi stands head and shoulders above all his contemporaries has compelled the BJP to appropriate him if not for any other reason but at least to derive a tangible benefit on the electoral front. The BJP's eagerness to be seen as a party that defines the idea of India too has prompted it to make Gandhi its own, and he has now become a mascot for the party and his image has been utilised to the optimum in campaigns including the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan where the Mahatma's spectacles are prominently featured. The ruling government at the Centre has been keen to propagate Gandhi's idea of non-violence, Swachh and Swadeshi, but it has been clearly been a bit deficient where the question of religious harmony is concerned. In his recent address to the United Nations General Assembly, Prime Minister Narendra Modi alluded to the Mahatma and observed that as long as the thoughts of Gandhiji continue to be a significant part of humanity, his inspiration and relevance will also remain among us. However the opposition parties have decried the attempts of the BJP to appropriate the Mahatma and the interim President of the Congress party Sonia Gandhi has charged the party with attempting to sideline Gandhi and make the RSS the symbol of India as Gandhi had always been a tenacious obstacle to the RSS's dreams of forging a Hindu state.

## Gandhi and the RSS

Gandhi's biographer Ramachandra Guha has gone

on record to remark that Gandhi was ambivalent about the RSS. Right from the pre-independence days, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) distrusted Gandhi and the latter too had his doubts about the Sangh's bonafides. The founder of the RSS, Dr Keshav Balram Hedgewar had always been a bitter critic of Gandhi and had once stated that the path of Gandhi and RSS appeared parallel and incongruent. Deendayal Upadhyaya, a leader revered by the BJP had even gone to the extent of advising his followers to cease calling

Gandhi the 'Father of the Nation'. However the Sangh had cherished the visit of the Mahatma to an RSS *shakha* and has never fought shy of reiterating his impressions. Obviously Gandhi had been impressed by their rigorous discipline, the complete absence of untouchability and the simplicity. The main bone of contention between Gandhi and the RSS was the Sangh's continuous harping on the need to turn India into a Hindu Rashtra which Gandhi staunchly opposed at every opportunity. The Mahatma's insistence on equal political status to numerically smaller Muslim and Christian communities was unacceptable to the Sangh, and its espousal of Hindutva as its credo. However there is evidence that the RSS had been blowing hot and cold in

its relationship with Gandhi and sarsangchalak M. S. Golwalkar had once exhorted the cadres to imitate Gandhiji and act on his thoughts as that would enable them to reawaken the great Hindu dharma that imparts such lessons.

The RSS mouthpiece 'Organiser' had carried a cover feature on the Mahatma to commemorate his 150th birth anniversary but the present sarsangchalak of the Sangh, Mohan Bhagwat has once again reaffirmed the organisation's commitment towards the ushering in of a 'Hindu Rashtra' which is clearly an antithesis of all that the Mahatma stood for. There can however be no denying the fact that Gandhian thoughts and ideologies will continue to shape the destiny of this great country and that those who lead the nation now and in future will toil hard to realise his unfulfilled dreams. The Mahatma is and will always be a beacon light to billions of Indians in their unending quest for a better India where peace and harmony will reign supreme and where all castes, creeds and religions will co-exist in a spirit of universal brotherhood.



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



# In defence of the Mahatma

*Gandhi's views on caste system and division of labour have been criticised by political entities and certain section of the people in society. However, it is his fight against injustice against the Dalits and untouchables, and giving them social acceptance that has led to affirmative actions to correct a historical wrong, argues Dr. Rina Mukherji.*



***Gandhi's voice against casteism and untouchability led to affirmative actions***

In recent times, there has been a lot of criticism levelled against Gandhi's attitude to the caste system and untouchability, especially by political entities like the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and Dalit leaders. The contrasting viewpoints of Ambedkar and Gandhi on the matter of tackling untouchability is often cited, as proof of Gandhi's insincerity in dealing with the problem.

To be sure, Gandhi represented a moderate viewpoint, and in keeping with his principles, was not for a direct condemnation of Hinduism or the division of labour that the caste system entailed. He rightly saw it as throwing the baby out with the bath water. He often referred to the *varna* system, as the foundation on which Indian society was laid, and saw casteism and untouchability as a degraded form of the well-founded division of labour which needed to be rooted out. However, he wanted the upper castes to realise the wrongs perpetrated on the outcastes and scheduled castes, rather than launch an attack on the system. Ambedkar, on the other hand, had faced caste discrimination first-hand, and hence, declared, that he would never "die a Hindu."

## Gandhi's fight against casteism

If we are to evaluate Gandhi's role in the affirmative action enshrined in our Constitution, in favour of the scheduled castes and tribes, we need to understand that Gandhi, in spite of never having had to face untouchability or caste discrimination, had the sensitivity even as a child in a privileged middle class home in Porbandar, to feel the wrong being perpetrated on another human being.

To understand the extent and depth of affirmative action in India, we need to realise that the India in which Gandhi lived as a child two centuries ago, did not see Dalits or Bahujan as deserving to be treated as equal human beings. A man or woman belonging to a scheduled caste or tribe was denied education, never allowed to enter temples or walk freely in a public place. There was no avenue for progress or growth. In the absence of education, Dalits could never develop any leadership skills, or even have leaders who could rise and demand their rights. Centuries of subjugation had taught the Dalit to acquiesce in his down-trodden state. It was people like Gandhi, who, in going against the social norm, enlightened the upper-caste gentry



to the wrongs perpetrated against an entire mass of people. Of course, Gandhi's was certainly not the lone voice against casteism. There were others too, such as Periyar in the south, and litterateurs like Premchand in north India, who had dissented strongly against the practice. Gandhi travelled south to take part in the Vaikom satyagraha in Kerala, that demanded the entry of Dalits into temples. Although the satyagraha could not achieve its objective, it did manage to have the roads around the temple to be made accessible to Dalits. But in a vindication of sorts, in a few years following it, the state of Travancore-Cochin threw open all temples to outcastes and Dalits.

## Contrarian views

Ambedkar abhorred and condemned both varna and caste, since the former was the "parent" of caste. However, Gandhi upheld varna, and its division of labour, which had inherent advantages in the dissemination of skills within families, although he condemned the rigidity of caste, and the blot of untouchability in Indian society.

Gandhi had objected to separate electorates as demanded by Babasaheb Ambedkar; but he had consented to more seats for the untouchables under the Poona Pact. Perhaps, it was a political ploy to prevent divisions within the Indians from affecting the fight for Indian independence. But he tried his level best to awaken the nation to the injustice against the Dalits, and even coined a new term for them 'Harijans'. He dedicated an entire newspaper, *The Harijan*, to fight social injustice, and his writings drew attention to the plight of untouchable Christian converts in Kumbakonam, who were prevented from praying with upper castes in their churches, the imposition of beggar (unpaid forced labour) on untouchables in the United Provinces, as also the prevention of untouchables from using *palkhis* or *dandis* in the Garhwal hills. Gandhi also started the Harijan Seva Sangh with volunteers within the Congress, to improve the living conditions of untouchables, and report on atrocities faced by Dalit untouchables. He also ensured that there were no separate seating arrangements for the untouchables at his meetings, and took especial interest in seeing that there was intermingling of people in the audience.

Empathetic to Dr Ambedkar's angst at the "forced" poverty and scavenging imposed on the untouchables, courtesy Hindu texts, Gandhi nevertheless countered by stating: "In my opinion, the profound mistake that Dr. Ambedkar has made... is to pick out the texts of doubtful authenticity and value, and the state of degraded Hindus who are no fit specimens of the faith they so woefully misrepresent... Can a religion that was professed by Chaitanya, Jnandeva, Tukaram, Toruvalluvar, Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Raja Ram Mohun Roy, Maharshi Devendranath Tagore, Vivekananda, be so utterly devoid of merit...?"

It is true that Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar paved the way for Dalit emancipation in the new India through our Constitution, that boldly declared – as per Article 17:

"Untouchability" is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden. The enforcement of any disability arising out of "Untouchability" shall be an offence punishable in accordance with law.

Articles 15 (1) and (2) declare clearly that:

"The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them"; and

"No citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them, be subject to any disability, liability, restriction or condition with regard to – (a) access to shops, public restaurants, hotels and places of public entertainment; or (b) the use of wells, tanks, bathing ghats, roads and places of public resort maintained wholly or partly out of State funds or dedicated to the use of the general public."

Similarly, we have Article 16, declaring that:

(1) There shall be equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the State.

(2) No citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, descent, place of birth, residence or any of them, be ineligible for, or discriminated against in respect of, any employment or office under the State.

The Constitution further declares, the intention of the State of "making special provision for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens or for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes" in educational institutions, unimpeded by the provisions in Articles 15, 16 or 29.

Without Gandhi awakening people to the plight of untouchables in Indian society, it is unlikely that affirmative action could be introduced in India in the 50's, as a necessary tool to correct a historical wrong.

## Affirmative action that brought a change

Our Constitution brought in vertical mobility in life for an entire generation of people, and also gave us leading Dalit intellectuals in many fields. If Ambedkar and the Indian state gifted economic strength, and a political voice to the Dalits, Gandhi and many others like him, gave them social acceptance. Affirmative action gave us literary figures like Namdeo Dhasal, politicians like Mayawati, and the young Jignesh Mewani, economists like Narendra Jadhav who could aspire to a better life and position through education. Noted Marathi Dalit writer Urmila Pawar, in her autobiography 'Aaydan - The weave of my life', has clearly acknowledged the role the scheduled caste quota played in helping her, and members of her scheduled caste Mahar family to get educated, and move into government service as skilled professionals.

(continued on page 10...)



# Was Gandhi patriarchal?

*While recognising the important role women could play in politics and public sphere, Gandhi's revolutionary ideas were trapped in traditional socio-cultural values, which created a contradiction in his understanding of a woman's place in family, society and politics, and was thus discriminatory, opines **Shoma A. Chatterji**.*



**Gandhi has been accused of being patriarchal**

**W**e leave all icons, celebrities, great stars and national leaders alone when it comes to questioning their ideologies and their philosophies, especially after they are no more. Mahatma Gandhi is one of them. Any critique of Gandhi is beyond imagination. He has been labelled the “Father of the Nation” and was instrumental in the creation of an independent India. True. But what ideas did he nurture about the role of women in society and in political participation? Were they patriarchal? Were they biased against women?

Shyam Benegal's film *The Making of the Mahatma*, or, Anil Kapoor's film *Gandhi, My Father* and a noted play *Gandhi Versus Gandhi* have shown quite clearly his attitude and treatment of his wife Kasturba Gandhi and his turbulent relationship with his eldest son Harilal Gandhi who died unattended in a Bombay Hospital of tuberculosis just a few months after his father was assassinated. Kasturba's marital life with Gandhi was affected by Gandhi's total abstinence from sex after the four sons were born. Did he practice this abstinence with her consent? Or was the

decision his alone? These are rhetorical questions that have the answers structured within them.

## Gandhi's take on women's liberation

Extending the same idea to all Indian women, for the first time, a distinct approach to the role of women in society began to make itself felt, so far as Gandhi's thoughts are concerned. The leadership realised that women were “condemned to slavery.” Thus, the leadership within the Indian National Congress under Gandhi and Nehru with Gandhi taking the lead, sought to liberalise the family so that women's activities in the public domain “within politically acceptable limits”, could expand. What exactly did the phrase ‘politically acceptable limits’ imply? Politically acceptable to whom? Who determined the ‘limits’ of this so-called ‘political acceptance’? The leaders themselves who were men? It is thus clear that the motives for bringing women out to participate in the public sphere were largely in the interests of men and were also determined and decided by men. So, what kind of ‘liberation’ was this from ‘domestic slavery’?<sup>1</sup>

Women were urged to give up the *purdah*, and to liberate themselves from their family-centred roles to participate in the country's struggle for freedom. Gandhi viewed women's oppression as historic and nearly universal.<sup>2</sup> He lamented (a) their non-participation in social and political affairs, (b) their sexual subjugation to their role as 'man's plaything', (c) their lack of autonomy in the use of their bodies, and (d) their backward consciousness which made them accept their low social position. But he also believed that women had the courage, the endurance and the moral strength to deal with these oppressions. In his view, these qualities made women "natural leaders of a non-violent struggle against an unjust socio-political system. He wanted to feminise politics because women had the potential to give a blow to the established socio-political power structure and they could be the vanguards of a non-violent struggle for a just and non-exploitative socio-political order."<sup>3</sup>

It is interesting to note the views of the same Gandhi when he speaks on women's education. "In framing any scheme of women's education, this cardinal truth must be constantly kept in mind: man is supreme in the outward activities of a married world, and therefore, it is in the fitness of things that he should have a greater knowledge thereof. On the other hand, home life is entirely the sphere of women, and therefore, in domestic affairs, in the upbringing of children and in their education, women ought to have more knowledge." Gandhi reinforced the sexual division of labour which led, according to Karl Marx, to inequality between the sexes. Instead of decrying it, Gandhi supported the division.

In the first Non-cooperation movement, women were called to participate within the limitations of their social conditions. Gandhi placed emphasis on spinning because it could be carried out within the home. Women were encouraged to tear down the veil, come out to attend street meetings and join processions. A 1000 women marched in a procession in Bombay to oppose the visit of the Prince of Wales in November 1921.<sup>4</sup>

In the Bardoli Satyagraha in 1928, women were not seen at first. Yet, from April onward, they outnumbered men in political gatherings and even held their own separate meetings. The year 1930 began with a pledge for Independence. In March, Gandhi announced that he would launch a civil disobedience movement by breaking the Salt Law.

His plan was to walk from Sabarmati Ashram to Dandi, a deserted village on the sea coast 200 miles away to make salt on the beach there. He did not include women in the first batch of 79 refusing their request to take four or five women with him. But as Gandhi walked towards Dandi, women were everywhere on the way to greet him and to hear him speak.



***For couples who dedicated themselves to freedom struggle, Gandhi advised celibacy and no children (a file pic of Acharya J.B. Kripalani and his wife Sucheta)***

At Abhrama on April 10, 1930, there were 2000 women in an audience of 5000. About 560 women received him when he arrived at Dandi.<sup>5</sup> But some women refused to be restrained in this manner. Khurshedbehn Naoroji and Mridula Sarabhai jumped into the struggle despite strict orders not to do so. They were both arrested in Ahmedabad. Ahmedabad witnessed a grand procession of khadi-clad women on April 23. The procession stretched to half a mile, and was managed by saffron-saree-clad volunteers of Videshi Kapade Bahiskar Samiti. On 1 June 1930, 11 women took part in the Wadala raid organised by the Bombay Provincial Congress Committee in which Lilawati Munshi took an active part. They were all arrested and detained in the Salt Prevention Office at Wadala.

## Setting boundaries for women in politics

Men were not opposed to Gandhi drawing their women out onto the streets to participate in the nationalist movement because Gandhi did not challenge the patriarchal order. He did not disturb the status quo of the conventional Indian family. He held that woman was not inferior to man, but her role was different. Political participation was not to be at the cost of domestic duties. Service to her husband, family and country was a woman's primary duty. Gandhi advised women who wished to dedicate themselves totally to the cause of freedom to remain unmarried. Dr. Susheela Nayar and Ushabehn Thakkar are examples of this Gandhian rule.

For couples who were similarly dedicated, he advised celibacy and no children. Acharya J.B. Kripalani and his wife Sucheta followed this ideal. The power-equation within the home remained undisturbed. Gandhi spoke of Sita as the ideal wife. His aim was to use the traditional role of the Indian woman to extend these to the wider political sphere. The logic was simple if not simplistic: she was used to sacrificing for her husband, children, family; therefore, she was now being asked to sacrifice for her country's freedom.<sup>6</sup>



According to him, since relationships between the sexes were not unlike those between other groups unequal in power, the liberation of women was inextricably tied to the liberation of India, the removal of untouchability and the amelioration of the economic condition of the masses.<sup>7</sup> Gandhi deplored the fact that women who belonged to women's organisations were out of touch with their rural sisters. He preferred them to spend more time to find out about the lives of women in villages.<sup>8</sup>

Gandhi critiqued women leaders for 'foolishly' thinking that any law or code could solve the problems of rural women. Many elite women seemed to agree. Yet, they continued to work for the reform of the legal system. They were neither foolish nor selfish. They did not agree with Gandhi about the direction of social change. They aimed at gaining legal measures to grant women some degree of equality. Measures were designed to (a) equalise women's right to divorce, (b) systematise marriage, (c) give protection in the case of desertion, (d) grant them guardianship over their children, and (e) make it possible for females to obtain a share in the family property. Though the gains were less than originally hoped for, there was victory in terms of organisation and systematisation of the law.<sup>9</sup>

All this sums up Gandhi's ambivalence on the political role of women in pre-independence India. The leadership was against the excessive subordination of women by men. But not to the fact that women generally played a socially subordinate role. Both liberals and radicals in the nationalist movement regarded women's political participation as an extension of their filial roles within the home. Women were mobilised to participate in the freedom movement because they were ideally suited to carry on non-violent, passive resistance, which the hierarchical structure of the traditional family had moulded them into. The Gandhian leadership urged women to function in the order of husband, family and country. If there was a conflict between family and country, filial responsibilities would

come first.<sup>10</sup> Women's political participation was not to be at the cost of their domestic duties.

*(Note: This is part of a larger presentation made by the author at a seminar in the History Department at the University of Heidelberg, Germany, in 1998.)*

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<sup>1</sup>Shoma A. Chatterji : *Beginning of the Women's Movement in India in The Indian Woman in Perspective*, Ajanta Books International, New Delhi, 1993, page 116.

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<sup>4</sup>Aparna Basu : *Gujarat Women's Response to Gandhi 1920 - 1942*, in *Samya Shakti*, Vol.I, No.2, 1984, page 9.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid, page 10.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid. Page14.

<sup>7</sup>M.K. Gandhi : *The Position of Women*, *Young India*, Oct.17, 1929, page 340; *Liberate the Women*, *Indian Social Reformer*, Vol.37, May 25, 1929, page 615-616.

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<sup>10</sup>Karuna Chanana Ahmed : *Gandhi, Women's Roles and Political Participation*, paper presented at the Second National Conference on Women's Studies, Trivandrum, April, 1984.



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.

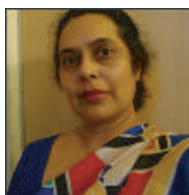
# In defence of the Mahatma

(continued from page 07...)

In recent years, we have had a scheduled caste Vice-President K.R. Narayanan, and an OBC President from the Ramgariha (carpenter) community in Giani Zail Singh. Our current Prime Minister Narendra Modi, too belongs to the backward Mod Ghanchi (oil-presser) community, and started life selling tea.

It is not that discrimination against Dalits has totally ended. Honour killings continue in the southern states as also northern India, with upper castes unable to reconcile themselves to daughters marrying into scheduled caste families, however educated they be. But if there is outrage and widespread anger against such atrocities, we have Mahatma Gandhi to thank for having opened our eyes

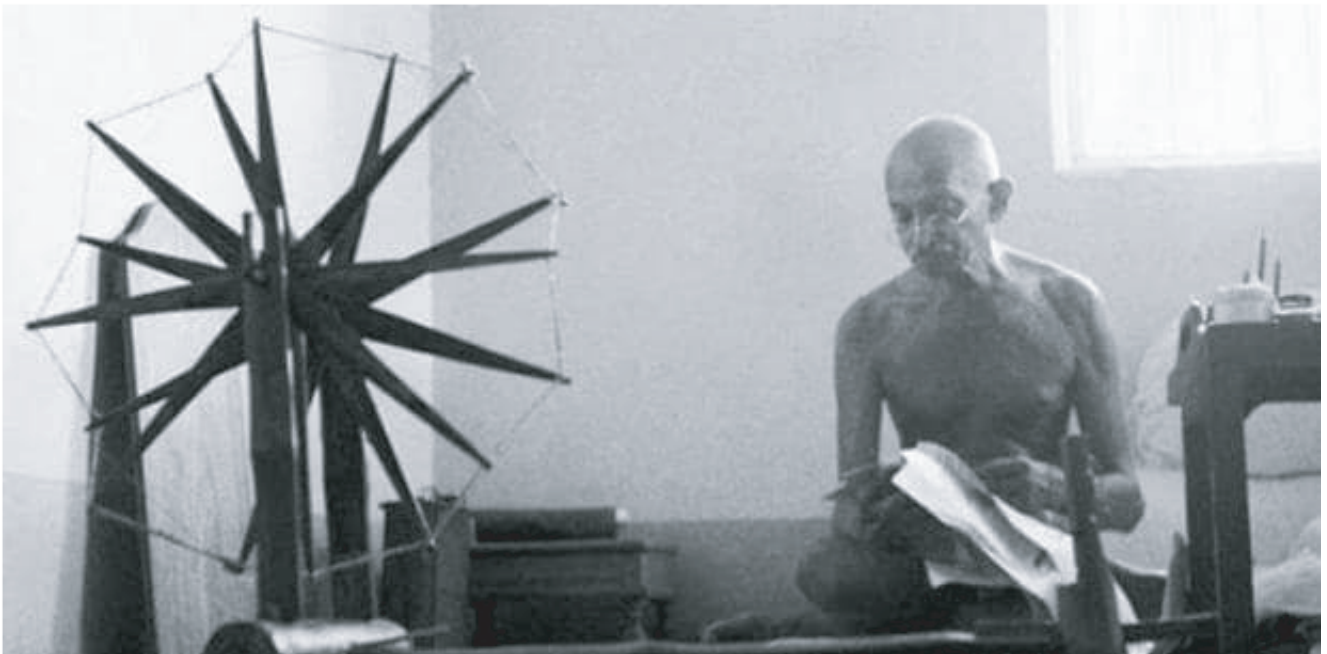
to the injustice of it all. We certainly have a long way to go, but the light that he once shone continues to hold up hope to millions who were once confined to the dark underbelly of our nation.



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.

# Spinning a revolution

*Every state in India is making efforts to promote its traditional textiles and handi-crafts by giving it a modern twist. For example, khadi is today the rage on fashion ramps. For this, we need to thank the simple man who wore a home-spun dhoti and chaddar to steer our nation to freedom, writes **Dr. Rina Mukherji**.*



***The charkha was the epitome of Swaraj and Swadeshi, and found its pride of place on India's pre-Independence flag***

**K**hadi, in its cotton, silk and woolen avatars, is today the rage on international and national fashion ramps. We have celebrated designers the world over, singing paeans to the versatility of Indian handspun textiles and dedicating entire collections to Khadi. For this, we need to thank the simple man who wore a home-spun dhoti and chaddar to steer our nation to freedom.

Gandhi, the Father of our Nation, always believed in the dictum- “Be the change that you want to see.” This is what elevated him from being the ordinary Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi to Mahatma Gandhi, whom we all revere today.

Even as far back as 1909, when he was yet to embark on his political journey in India, Gandhi felt strongly about the collapse of India's village economy, and the self-sufficiency that had characterised it. This is evident when we read his Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule, even though his ideas were yet to coalesce into a definite pattern back then. Swaraj, Swadeshi, and Sarvodaya were uppermost in his mind, as he visualised an India, free from the trappings of the lopsided progress that the British had

brought forth to enslave Indians. He upheld the rejuvenation of the self-sufficient “village-based economy”, which had nurtured and nourished India in the past, and condemned the industrialisation, modern medicine and education which the British had brought into India.

As he matured through direct contact with the poorest of the poor in India, travelling in third -class general compartments in trains across the length and breadth of the country, he realised how the British had looted the country's wealth, and impoverished the Indian masses. From a country that had once boasted a rich heritage in textiles, India was reduced to surviving on cheap mill-made cloth from Britain. And what better way to bring back India's lost glory, than reviving the charkha?

Burdened by heavy taxes, India's weavers had been forced to leave their traditional occupation, and become landless agricultural labourers. Indian cotton was being exported by the British to feed their mills in Manchester, and turned into cheap mill-made cloth. Gandhi decided to reverse the trend by mobilising people to spin yarn from Indian cotton, and have it converted to handspun cloth (khadi).



Thus, the simple spindle became the precursor of a national economic revival since the 1920s. Since charity begins at home, Congress workers were made to switch to khadi, even as they took to boycotting all British goods. Soon, the masses followed, and hundreds of thousands of Indians took to wearing khadi along the length and breadth of the country.

The charkha – which was the epitome of Swaraj and Swadeshi, as a direct consequence found its pride of place on India's pre-independence flag, as it spelt the path of self-reliance and national prosperity.

## Khadi gets a makeover

Under Gandhi's tutelage, the All India Khadi Handloom and Handicrafts Board came into existence; this was to formalise itself into the Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) in 1957 following an Act of the Indian Parliament in the post-independence era. Successive Indian governments have since nurtured our textile heritage by extending loans to weavers, and making yarn available to them at reasonable rates. Stalwarts like Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay and Pupul Jayakar have also nurtured KVIC into rediscovering and promoting India's traditional textiles and handicrafts, and through Weavers Service Centres, rejuvenating our rich heritage in textiles through modern designs and techniques. Although Gandhi's idea of an India of "village panchayats" was dismissed by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru as impractical, his emphasis on khadi and self-sufficiency was always upheld by subsequent Indian governments. To this day, post-liberalisation, India continues to nurture khadi in its many avatars, including poly-vastra. Meanwhile, the rough hand-spun khadi that Gandhi once wore has now given way to the best handlooms, and khadi cottons and silks are coveted items treasured by the rich and famous world over.

Today, every state in India has its handloom and handicraft emporia, whereby traditional textiles and handicrafts are marketed and promoted. The Gujarat government was one of the first to take the lead in roping in outside talent to promote new design techniques for its handloom and embroidered products, with many other states following suit. KVIC has roped in the celebrated fashion designer-Ritu Beri, to promote khadi through her 'Vichar Vastra' collection, while its Bengal counterpart – Biswa Bangla, has brought in designers Agnimitra Paul, Sharbari Dutta and others to promote hand-woven muslin. Many long-forgotten textile traditions such as the Baluchari of Bengal, or the Patolas of Patan, or the Jamawars of Banaras, that had nearly been lost, have since been brought back to life. Vegetable dyes that had been replaced by chemical alternatives, are once again being brought back by designers who are now returning back to our rich traditions.

## Reviving India's traditional crafts

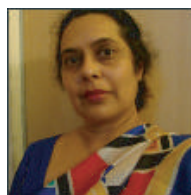
Today, the interest in rejuvenating our traditional crafts is not confined to textiles. Through its six zonal

offices and presence in 29 Indian states, KVIC promotes the production and sale of hand-made herbal creams, hand-pounded spices, bags, footwear and accessories. In addition to the central and state governments, efforts are on by many organisations to promote khadi cotton, silk and woollens at the private level.

The rich array of footwear that India once boasted of is also intriguing European designers like Christian Louboutin, who recently teamed up with Sabyasachi Mukherjee to make the most of Indian jooti designs for his latest collection. Others too, cannot have enough of India, especially since Indian traditional embroidery in gold and silver thread, cool mulmuls and muslin, ikat weaves, wild silks like eri, tussar and munga, raw (ahimsa) silk provide a rich variety of textures and colours to be explored. After all, India is perhaps the only country in the world where every region can boast a multiplicity of weaving styles and techniques, with every state and region boasting an array in dyeing and weaving styles.

While Assam remains the only state in India to produce all four varieties of silk-eri, munga, tussar and mulberry, in addition to cotton fabric, each state can claim its own place in the sun. Thus, Bengal has its Phulia, Dhaniakhali, Tangail and Shantipuri cottons, along with Bishnupuri and Baluchari silks, while Odisha has its cotton and silk ikats, and Sambalpuri cotton and silks. Andhra Pradesh has its Narayanpeth cottons, Pochampally, Gadhwals and silk ikats, Tamil Nadu has its Coimbatore and Kanchipuram cottons and silks, Kerala has its lovely calico cottons, Maharashtra has its Paithani cottons and silks, Gujarat has its Patan patolas, Rajkot silks and Bandhani cottons, Rajasthan its vegetable dyed cotton fabrics and leheriyas, Punjab its unique Phulkaris and woven rugs, Himachal Pradesh has its khadi woollens, Uttar Pradesh has its Chikankari and Mukaish embroidered fabrics, Benarasi silks and Mou cottons, Bihar its tussar silks, and Madhya Pradesh its Maheshwari, Chanderi and tussar silk fabrics.

As India progresses on in its journey of self-discovery where its textiles and handicrafts are concerned, it is time we acknowledged our debt to Mahatma Gandhi and his humble spinning wheel that set us on the path of a quiet revolution for all time.



**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.**

# Life enriching workspaces through holacracy

**Shammi Nanda** *explains how the trusteeship model proposed by Gandhiji has its parallels in holacracy, which his organisation 'Ahimsagram' has adopted for its governance to create life enriching workspaces.*



I often wonder how decision making was organised in so many movements which Gandhiji initiated or led, and am left more curious about it. I have also heard of a few things from those who were connected with Vinobha ji, about his experiments with money, natural living, community living and governance. Now the question for me was, how would they have further evolved in their quest for finding non-violent, inclusive ways of governance in organisations and institutions, or even businesses.

Gandhi ji had the idea of trusteeship where the business owner is there to serve as a steward and serve the community through the businesses. I am trying to inculcate this trusteeship model at 'Ahimsagram', our business organisation, which has the vision of creating a world where individuals can reach their highest potential while working for the collective purpose, and while doing so, we want to set up regenerative businesses, so we can make the planet a safer and healthier place for all.

After actively engaging with different forms of political groups, movements, film production houses, businesses and NGO's, I have often felt an unfulfilled desire to search for processes of governance where there is more autonomy, freedom, transparency, belonging and effectiveness.

In my past space of engagement, I was not finding a balance between individual empowerment and collective interdependence, and I wanted to raise my threshold in terms of being in more fulfilling and enriching forms of organisation. I saw that my own capacity was also limited at that time and there were not many people in those organisations who were willing to work on the processes themselves, to the extent I would have wanted to see them there at that time.

## Holacracy, as a form of governance

So, I took a break from community engagements and shifted to learning Nonviolent Communication (NVC), and then to look for self-managed organisation systems like Sociocracy and then towards Holacracy. Through the NVC lens, I began to look more into my interpersonal connections while being a bit more aware of the needs of all the people in a given situation, and how can we live in integration with the world around us. While going deeper into NVC, I also discovered Sociocracy and Holacracy which are about forms of governance which try to work with shared authority and power in their own nuanced ways, where they integrate the collective and individual needs while keeping the purpose of the organisation as their vision. This also led me to creating 'Ahimsagram' as a learning and living space of people willing to organise themselves for a purpose, and one of the



purpose itself being – to develop conscious and evolved ways of organising which allow us to reach our highest potential.

We use holacracy as our system of governance. According to me holacracy has its roots in Ken Wilber's work, where he proposed the idea of a 'whole', where everything is complete and every part is complete and two parts come together to create the third bigger part which is complete or whole. So in a way each person who is working in the company is an 'whole' while playing his/her role. These wholes are interconnected through a web of processes which are directed by the constitution of holacracy.

We have been working on self-management for four years and for the last two years we are practicing holacracy. It has been a journey of celebrations and challenges, and working with diverse group of people, I am now seeing the real fruits of this experiment and can see how when we organise ourselves with purpose, transparency and distributed power, it brings autonomy, inspiration and freedom which leads to a self-managed organisation where each one is seen as a respectful player and enjoys the dignity of their work. Above all, it also builds more authentic and deeper personal connections outside the workspace. I often see miracles and magical moments where things run in perfect synchronicity, and I am wishing to have more such moments in our enterprise to happen at a more sustained level.

## Control and command structure vs self-management

There can be two extreme ways of running a business on the two ends of the spectrum, one is a control and command structure like a military, and the others is self-managed, and you can see where your organisation falls in the spectrum. We have been moving more and more towards, what I also call an eco-system organisation where we all play the role as it happens in a forest eco-system in our own place, and it also fits the larger picture and builds a mutually nourishing and ever growing world.

Often in a control and command structure the employee takes commands from others, is not trusted enough for their intent and even skills, making mistakes is punished, competition is encouraged, lack of transparency comes natural to the system as the one who does and one who plans are two different people, and then the thinking person knows more and may not even have the time or trust to share all the info to the person below them. No wonder, in such a system, people who do stuff have much less autonomy and do not use their intelligence or even experience and end up less inspired in their work. As a result the bosses have more on their plate and can be overwhelmed with nitty-gritties and are left with no time for ideation and strategising for innovation. Such system according to me will not be dynamic and people friendly.

In a self-managed organisation, there is high level of transparency, trust, collaboration, autonomy along with

interdependence and feedback loops. All this creates inspired teams which can be more innovative and work towards the purpose of the organisation. I am seeing them each day in our four year experiment. People are willing to fight, say 'no' to requests and still be friends.

Self-management is not easy initially, when people who are not used to taking ownership, and take orders or demands in their past. It's a challenge in the beginning, as people are coming from a society where so much is unsaid, and power is not shared. Submission and domination is the default mode for some people and it's safer to not take charge or initiative, and so you do not get blamed for anything. Hence, there is very low accountability.

In self-management, we encourage another set of habits of taking ownership of roles and even mistakes. In case something does not work out, people can bring up the tensions arising out of their work and find solutions with support of other team members and even propose new policies or roles. Besides, the autonomy that is provided to each person, it gives them the space to take initiative, even if it ends up in mistakes. Here mistakes are seen as a way to evolve, and thus individuals can customise changes to establish new processes and policies unique to that organisation. Best part is that each one who is filling a role has a say in it and it's not imposed top down. Even those on 'top' or in design roles need to reason it out with those who do the work. At the same time, some of the roles which are supposed to create the vision and allocation of resources are still with those who are investors or the initiators of the vision, but the way the work is organised and decisions taken are inclusive. Holacracy does not work with consensus but with integrated decision making and distributed authority, so even the owner cannot take away the autonomy of a certain role without reasoning it, though they still will have the overall macro prioritisation or strategising in their role.

As a result there is really no vertical hierarchy, but a functional hierarchy, where there is a demarcation of roles and circles and they are interconnected. The information passes effectively in the whole eco-system of the organisation, and there is high level of transparency. In a mature holacratic organisation, everybody would be aware of the structure of the organisation, its policies, the reasons behind the actions taken, even the criteria for deciding the compensation, or how an employee can be asked to leave the organisation and the reasoning for hiring someone.

## An effective self-evolutionary process

I am often asked, "How can such an organisation be more effective, when someone does not do their part for whatever reason?". When this happens, it causes a gap somewhere and another person gets impacted, but has access to processes where he/she can bring out the tensions. People could be reminded of their role and accountability.

(continued on page 16...)

# Invoking the Gandhi within us

*We are living in times where there is a collapse of moral values in society. If Gandhi was alive today, he would be overcome with remorse and sorrow at the state of affairs, rues **Nivedita Louis**.*



**Sanjay Dutt in the film *Lage Raho Munnabhai***

**O**n the 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of the great leader, United Kingdom celebrated by promising to issue a coin commemorating him. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi issued a special coin celebrating the Mahatma. But if there is one question that should be put across the country to every single citizen, it should be this: Is Gandhi alive?

The usual run-of-the-mill public functions, display of white caps, khadi shirts and the ostentatious display of love and affection for Gandhi on television and social media with trending hashtag #Gandhi150 had us all mesmerised for a day. We were given to think all is well with the nation. Alas! the next day, things were back to normal. Corruption, bigotry, fake nationalism, scams, violence were making headlines in media space.

Bapu gave us non-violence, the principle of Satyagraha. Do we practice the same now? We turn violent at the slightest provocation. It has become a fad to brandish knives and swords in religious processions. A country that

isn't safe for its children, that unleashes violence on hapless women – that is what we are today. Be it the Kathua rape of an 8-year-old girl or the horrendous abuse, rape and murder of Nirbhaya, as a nation we keep our collective conscience packed somewhere in the bylanes of silence. We of course get down to the streets to demand justice for the victims. As the prime time shifts to some other "breaking news", our memory fades as we guzzle whatever is fed to us by the various television channels battling for TRPs. Every time we hear of injustice or oppression against the voiceless, the loop repeats. We choose silence over justice.

What about Gandhi's prime virtue of 'truth'? Does a day pass by without us mouthing a lie? How impossible it has become to remain truthful, the least to self? Our day starts with us wishing 'Good Morning' to all and sundry in the 1000-odd WhatsApp groups where we are members. Do we really wish the 1000 people in the group a 'Good Morning?' Is there a feeling of kinship when we wish them? We wish we could run over many of them with our bikes, a few with our cars and a couple of them – well yes, you



guessed it right, we wish we could tie them to the tyres of aeroplanes and ferry them half way across the world. The virtues of forgetting and forgiving have become things of the past. All we want to have is now revenge, and we go easy with packs of lies hidden under our sleeves.

Lying under the teeth for nothing is what we do with aplomb. Can't agree? Take a test and analyze! And oh, think of the tolerance that Gandhi preached... the word is extinct now in the dictionary. We have not heard about tolerance since the Nehru-Gandhian era. All we have now is hate politics and intolerance striking at the very root of our democracy. Gandhi drew Satyagraha as his weapon against oppression and showed supreme tolerance. We live in those times when we jump at every single occasion to wield the stick and the sword, more so when the reason is religion. One group wants to annihilate the other. Gone are the days when we used to celebrate Diwali with Christian and Muslim friends and Christmas with Hindu and Muslim friends. All that is left now, after 72 years of freedom is bitterness and hate.

If Gandhi was alive today, he would be overcome with remorse and sorrow to see the country at such a crossroads. Neither do we respect his principles of non-violence and non-cooperation, nor do we have the trust our forefa-

thers had in our leaders. There was this collective consciousness we had as a nation which unfortunately has gone missing. What did the thin, fragile man do to hold such immense power over the people of the land? Only love and care.

All that Gandhi ever had for this nation was his unquestionable love and unflinching devotion to the country. It is imperative that we re-invent the Gandhi in each one of us. Gandhi was not just the man who had lofty principles and executed them to the dot. He lives in every one of us who stands up against oppression. He stokes the love for our nation, for peace and harmony in this divided nation now. If we are to survive the storm and tide over all the negativity surrounding us, all we need to have is little patience and lots of love, invoking the Gandhi within each one of us. We need to walk the path of truth. That is the best tribute we can offer to our Bapu.



**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.cloud-ninetalks.blogspot.com](http://www.cloud-ninetalks.blogspot.com).**

# Life enriching workspaces through Holacracy

(continued from page 14...)

The person who experienced the tension can even propose a new policy, or change in policy, a new role or a new accountability in an existing role. For all this there are different meeting formats and processes so that anyone who experiences a tension, while playing their role has an equal opportunity to process their tension in consultation with others, and while integrating the needs of the different role fillers. The facilitator is not the leader but someone elected from the circle, and their role is to protect the space of each individual in the circle.

Self-management allows more autonomy and since there is space for feedback to be heard, there is a way for correcting tensions. It becomes a self-evolving process in organisation-building and each person in a role, becomes the sensor of tensions that arise in the system, and is able to process them alone or with help of others.

There are many nuances to it, and it meets my vision of creating a world where while working for a vision each person's voice also matters, and all can creatively contribute to the best of their potential with dignity and self respect, towards the purpose of the organisation. I am loving holacracy for its integration of effectiveness, auton-

omy and interdependence, which leads me to experience a work space which is life-enriching and integrates ahimsa in our daily life.

(In case anyone wants to know more about us or wants to do an immersion programme with us, they can write to us at [ahimsagram@gmail.com](mailto:ahimsagram@gmail.com))



**The writer has been a film maker who studied at the Film and Television Institute of India. He began to associate with communities working on sustainable life practices, and has been on organic farms and with home schooling communities all over the country. He founded Ahimsagram which is a self managed organisation working with Holacracy and Nonviolent Communication(NVC), while setting up collaborative and regenerative businesses. To know more about their work see [www.facebook.com/ahimsagram](http://www.facebook.com/ahimsagram).**



## THE LEGENDARY WEAVES OF BENGAL

*Bengal has always been famous for its fine muslins and silks. Some of the lost weaves are now being revived, thanks to the efforts of designers and local craftsmen who are blending the traditional with the modern to create innovative fabrics, saris and stoles to cater to modern taste.*

*Text & Photographs : Manjira Majumdar*





**(Above) Kantha embroidery on sari;  
(Right) Abstract jamdani work on tussar**

Colonial wars have been waged over silks and chintz in addition to spices and gems from India, and undivided Bengal was known particularly for its textiles.

Records prove that the fine muslin and silks of the region were so famed that these were big items of trade among foreign merchants. From William Dalrymple's latest book 'The Anarchy', we learn that "with its myriad weavers – 25,000 in Dhaka alone – and unrivalled luxury textile production of silks and woven muslins of fabulous delicacy, it was by the end of the seventeenth century Europe's single most important supplier of goods in Asia and much the wealthiest region of the Mughal Empire."

Bengal was particularly known for its muslin, which was said to be so fine that it could pass through a ring! And the jamdani work – Persian in origin – on muslin was much sought after. Even today super fine handloom saris or Taant, in addition to Dhakai jamdani saris, with its geometric patterns, is what the state is known for, even if the name Dhakai is today a bit of a misnomer.





## Fusion of old and new

Cotton is the most preferred fabric for hand-woven saris because of the state's sultry weather. Then there are the Baluchari and the Swarnachuri silk saris. Silks are reserved for special occasions such as weddings and festivities and the fleeting winters. However, in keeping with modern tastes and requirements, Bengal saris today have gone through various blends of threads, design innovations, colour combinations and are embellished with block prints, batik, zari work, hand-painted (Madhubani motifs), and even embroidery, the most famed being the Kantha. This fusion is so popular that we now have combinations of Taant Benarasi or matka muslin or silk saris with jute which is further combined with cotton or silks threads.

The matka silk is today another favoured fabric. This is the rough fabric made from the waste of the mulberry silk, without removing it

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sericin. Usually obtained from outside the state, the spinning is mostly done

in the two districts of Malda and Murshidabad in West Bengal. Giccha silk, again is a yarn that is obtained from cocoons of silkworms which do not get included in the process of spinning of the tussar.

Tussar is another much in demand fabric, for its understated elegance. If fabrics are blended with silk, cotton or even viscose, it is sometimes difficult to gauge the absolute purity of a sari, but the overall design and look of the sari win over anything else. Like in its neighbouring state Bihar and more importantly in Bhagalpur, where we also have a variety of tussar, obtained from the larvae of various kinds of silk worms, Bengal too now makes use of these yarns to mix and match. For the present generation of weavers, the Internet has opened up newer designs and for those sari designers working in Bengal, any yarn is good enough for their creativity. So khadi, linen – obtained from flax plants, is another sought after fabric.



*kantha pallu*





***Traditional design in batik silk***

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enough for their creativity. So khadi, linen - obtained from flax plants, is another sought after fabric.

Today, muslin weaving has been revived thanks to the individual efforts of those connected with the promotion of art and craft in the state. So where does it leave the other traditional weaves of Bengal such as Taant, Baluchari, Dhakai (known here as Tangail jamdani), Bishnupuri and Murshidabadi silks? To understand Bengal handloom, we must travel back in time to the once undivided state.



### **Taant or cotton tangail sari**

#### **Tangail saris of Phulia**

The district of Tangail, near about Dhaka in undivided Bengal, was known for what is broadly categorised as Tangail saris, woven by talented weavers. The very soft cotton weaves had borders and *butis* all over the body that were woven with silk thread and sometimes, with *zari*. Various indigenous motifs such as conch shells, birds, fish, flowers, and stars and moon, were common. After Partition, Nadia district saw large influx of refugee Hindu weavers, settling down in Phulia or Fulia, to weave the same type of saris. Another area within this same district, Shantipur, already had a great tradition of sari weaving under Mughal patronage.

The Neelambari sari with its special navy blue and silver *zari* borders spun here were much sought after by the aristocratic women. Bethuadahari is another place within Nadia district that today is synonymous with tussar weaving. In the Hooghly district of Dhanekhali, the cotton weaves are

thick in nature and of solid colours with '*ansh paar*' resembling fish scale and wider borders. Another village in the same district of Hooghly, Begumpur, is a well-known weaving centre also known for its particular type of warp and weft weaving.

#### **Jamdani work**

The finely woven lightweight muslin, mostly cotton, however, is what legends were made of, its reputation travelling beyond the shores of the country.

The muslin has received a revival of sorts in West Bengal. Daccai muslin jamdani which are products of Bangladesh have been re-invented in this state as saris, which combine three features: a blend of muslin and sometimes matka threads, and hand-woven or hand-embroidered jamdani motifs. These have resulted in some ethereal looking saris in soft pastel shades. Depending on the amount of work and time taken, a sari is priced.





*Abstract jamdani design on tussar*

However, it must be mentioned here that well-known designers of the country have their own set of dedicated weavers who are adept at jamdani weaving anywhere in the country, to produce specially designed high-end saris or other items of fashion accessories like scarves and stoles.

## Baluchari and Swarnachuri

More to the north of the state, Murshidabad was once the capital of the three states of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries under the patronage of Muslim rulers. But even before that it was a great centre of weaving under the Malla kings. Later the centre of weaving moved to Bishnupur in Bankura district, known for its terracotta temples. Baluchar was a village in Murshidabad on the banks of River Bhagirathi. But shifting sands and flooding of the village displaced the weavers. The art of weaving such saris then shifted to Bishnupur.

This special craft of weaving mythical figures on its borders and pallus on traditional looms received a death blow under the British, who in a bid to encourage mill-made textiles from England, squeezed the weavers out.



*Manjira Majumdar in a handloom sari*





**Baluchari sari border with Ramayan motif**

It was not until the middle of the twentieth century that the weaving of Baluchari saris was revived, with the introduction of jacquard looms. These looms make the production of a sari less laborious and quicker.

The Baluchari sari is known for their *resham* or silk motifs of entire stories out of Hindu mythologies woven on its borders and pallu. Chapters from Ramayan and Mahabharat are the most popular. For those not preferring these motifs, the paisley is the most common motif.

The making of motifs for the borders and pallu is an elaborate process. The design is first drawn on a graph paper and then coloured and punched onto the cards. After punching they are sewn in order and fixed into the jacquard loom. The Swarnachuri saris are woven with silver and gold threads, especially the mythological motifs and if a meenakari effect is desired,

coloured thread are interspersed to give that definitive enamelled look. Depending on the work and quality of the silk threads, the price is fixed, usually on the higher side.

Bishnupuri silk is another of Bengal's handloom specialities. Again patronised by ancient rulers, The East

**The muslin has received a revival of sorts in West Bengal. Dacca muslin jamdani which are products of Bangladesh have been re-invented in this state as saris, which combine three features: a blend of muslin and sometimes matka threads, and hand-woven or hand-embroidered jamdani motifs. These have resulted in some ethereal looking saris in soft pastel shades.**

India Company at one time, sourced its silk dress materials and scarves from here. The super fine silk thread is not produced here but procured from Malda and Murshidabad. These saris as woven here are extremely light-weight and comfortable to wear. Earlier floral designs were common. But newer and smarter designs, mostly in block prints, in beautiful colour combinations are in vogue in place of older designs.

## Block Print

Block printed saris are always liked for their summery feel and it is an ancient craft, whereby there are various kinds block printing techniques typical of various regions within the country. Stretching from *ajrakh* to *bagru* to *bandhni* and *kalamkari*, every region in the country has its own designs, which are carved into wooded blocks and then dipped into colour to be pressed onto the



In Bengal too, there have been a great tradition of block printing, especially in Bardhaman and Serampore; the latter which saw the first printing press set up by an Englishman William Carey, a Baptist reformer. His mission was to print the Bible into Bengali among other things. At that time, Serampore, then known as Fredriksnagar, was under the Danes. Alongside paper printing, textile printing was first introduced here. The printed fabrics commanded a great market all over the world in the nineteenth century. Today, contemporary designs are block printed on all kinds of saris, both silk and cottons, in traditional and modern motifs.

## Batik

Batik printing which is derived from Indonesia is a very ancient technique of wax-resist dyeing applied to handloom fabric. In Viswa Bharati Shantiniketan, a two-year certification course is imparted to learn the history, and several of the students work as textile designers later to bring newer batik designs into batik silks. Therefore, Shantiniketan has emerged as an important hub of batik printing like some other parts of India, namely Gujarat and Tamil Nadu. Batik silk saris, once prized, have also made a comeback in Bengal in newer designs. But what Shantiniketan has of late captured the imagination is with the hand-embroidered Kantha saris. The simple stitch of kantha has been elevated to an exalted status through exquisite designs.



***Batik with fine kantha stitch; (above) Block printed saris are liked for their summery feel***



**Muslin with jamdani work**

Though Kantha saris can be made by women anywhere, Murshidabad being another important hub, the Shantiniketan Kantha has acquired a different status through some beautiful colour, thread combinations and effects. From its humble origin of stitching light quilts of castaway cotton, with *naksha* or patterns, the Kantha sari has evolved into a high fashion statement today. The making of Kantha sari has become a cottage industry of sorts in and around Shantiniketan and Bardhaman district.

The beauty of kantha is that the women sometimes just embroider without pencil drawing or tracing the designs. Embroidered on tussar or Karnataka silk, the designs can be bright or understated in keeping with ancient motifs of flowers, leaves and birds.

A hand-crafted sari is much in demand today though mill-made saris have flooded the market for its competitive pricing, durability and

easy to wear and maintain, by working women. In the process a number of Indian weaves are getting lost until revived by modern textile designers.

On August 7, way back in 1905, several prominent freedom

fighters initiated the Swadeshi movement advocating the boycotting of millmade yarns and favour indigenous products. Keeping this in mind, in 2015, the same day was declared as National Handloom Day to encourage handloom products.

**Though Kantha saris can be made by women anywhere, Murshidabad being another important hub, the Shantiniketan Kantha has acquired a different status through some beautiful colour, thread combinations and effects. From its humble origin of stitching light quilts of castaway cotton, with *naksha* or patterns, the Kantha sari has evolved into a high fashion statement today.**

In Bengal as elsewhere, however, the new generation of weavers are unwilling to continue with the laborious process of hand weaving a sari and rue the price of raw materials. Yet the silver lining is that several young designers and women entrepreneurs are dipping into our rich legacy of reviving our old designs and in trying to replicate them in some way or the other. Women co-operatives with the aid of government funds have seen the rise of Self Help Groups. The story of middlemen eating away at profits often prompts weavers to move to other means of livelihood but in most cases, a greater majority cling on as weaving is the only skill they have. With demands from e-commerce portals, there is a demand of Bengal saris today.





**Tussar with print and zari border**

Do rookha, where both sides can be worn, Ganga Jamuna meaning borders of two contrasting colours, the half and half patterns, *patli pallu* are a fascinating tale of rich heritages and fine craftsmanship in sari weaving. From Chanderi to Paithani to Kanjeevaram and hundreds of others in-between, such as Benarasi, Mooga, Gadwal, Ikat, it would take more than this space to cover the entire range of regional weaves, divided into further smaller towns and villages.

With revivals and experimentations going on, and with the hope that more private capital will be pumped in,

Bengal weaves are an important addition to the list of Indian weaves; to be showcased and preserved.



Having worked as a full-time journalist, Manjira Majumdar today is an independent journalist combining writing with part-time college teaching and media advocacy. She is also the author of 3 children's books: *Ten of Us*, *The Story of Anjana* and *Ghost Stories from Bengal & Beyond*.

## Our Last Six Issues

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*“We live in the stone age of cinema compared to the space age on the global arena.”*

An actor, director and screenwriter, **Ananth Narayan Mahadevan** is a multi-faceted person, who has directed many thought-provoking Hindi and Marathi films, as well as television serials. He has also been a journalist with a trade magazine.

A man of few words, he is always on a creative drive, searching for subjects which touch human emotions. Recently, his Marathi film, *Mai Ghat: Crime no. 103/2005*, bagged the best movie award at the Singapore South Asian International Film Festival. The film is based on a true story, revolving around a mother's fight for her son who was wrongly arrested as a thief and tortured to death. It raises a vital moral dilemma in the end. "Can one really win justice after everything is lost? "

In conversation with **A. Radhakrishnan**.

#### Describe yourself.

A man in love with the camera...both, in front of it and behind... a camera buff.



**What made you pursue film making? What according to you are the attributes of a good film?**

The moving visual in a dark precinct always fascinated me. Characters coming alive, thanks to the magic of technology. It led me to fantasise and eventually manifest my dreams as an actor and film maker. Now the art of cinema is the reason to live... to emulate the great masters and outdo myself with film after film.

But a good film should speak the language of cinema, it should not be a mindless movie. Films are made not by turning on a camera, but turning on the mind that in turn, turns the audience on.

**What were the roadblocks you faced when you were starting out?**

By no stretch of logic could I imagine myself on the humble platform that I am on today. No one to tell me where to go or whom to see. But I knew what to do...how to act, react, write and direct. That held me in good stead as I crossed the fences like a good soldier, not knowing how long the war would last, but knowing how to wield the weapon.

I am still fighting my way through even as the 'enemies' get bigger and stronger. I am that man who lives in a secluded war... the man who has lost his mind; the man for whom the war is never over.



**How do you come up with the idea for a film, considering you are known for new subjects? What is the toughest thing about it?**

A film is only as good as the subject you choose. Everything else comes later. So over the past 10 years I have been very careful to select concepts that challenge me and push my limits as a film maker. Not all subjects that I choose find favour with a producer or funder.

I still have several subjects which can make memorable cinema, but are beyond the comprehension of commercial big wigs. International cinema has taken great strides, but we aren't interested. We live in the stone age of cinema compared to the space age on the global arena.

**How come you have a penchant for Marathi films, despite being a South Indian?**

I have had my share of glamour, gloss and glory with films like *Dil Vil Pyar Vyar*, *Dil Maange More*, *Aksar* and the like. But real cinema is another world. The world that I tutored myself was watching the great masters from Europe, Japan, and Russia and to a certain extent America. Mee Sindhutai Sapkal, my first big critical success on the national and global fronts made me realise that concepts far outweigh language and budgets.

I choose to make films in Marathi only if the subject demands. My latest film *Mai Ghat: Crime No. 103/2005*, a true story that happened in Kerala, also suited the Sangli Marathi milieu. Besides, logistics work better in Marathi right now.

Even as a South Indian, I took the Marathi language seriously in school. But I would like to try my hand at Malayalam, Tamil and Bengali subjects too, wherever suitable.

**Tell me about your upcoming projects.**

A shocking revelation of a disturbing ritual in a cash rich industry in Maharashtra is the subject of my next film, following which I begin my work on Satyajit Ray's original story, a satire that I have the rights for.

**Do you prefer commercial cinema or so-called art films? How would you face failures?**

All films are meant to be commercial. Which film maker would not want large audiences? We have irresponsibly labelled films as commercial and art. They should be good films, bad films or no-films. A majority fall in the last category but rake in money leading to more mindless exercises, leaving the audience with no choice.

A mental revolution has to happen with film making and film goes in India. My failures are only if I fail to make a film that does not match my high standards. I will wait for the audience to discover them by and by. *Gour Hari Dastaan* is an example. Audiences who did not see it on release are

applauding it now. Success is a slow process.

**How do you combine the roles of a screen writer, actor and director ?**

They are all allied parts of film making. If acting is the body, direction is the brain. And I aim to be a complete film maker. I now write and edit my own films.

I also decide the frames along with the cinematographer because at the end of the day it is my vision that ends up on screen. So I better know the job...every department of it.

**Do awards mean anything to you?**

Yes, the national awards, four of them for *Mee Sindhutai Sapkal* reinstated my faith in me, and inspired me to better myself as a film maker. Any award that is genuine and not rigged (utopia, of course) means an acknowledgement of my work that is important as much as audience patronisation.

**What do you feel is missing in entertainment today?**

Entertainment is a misconstrued term today, as all our present films resemble a circus and are passed off in the name of cinema. An entertaining film need not necessarily be escapist.

Would you not term Hitchcock's films as entertaining? They were suspense dramas that gripped you. Most of our stars define entertainment as comedies, action dramas and farces. We have to extricate ourselves from this mindset.

**Have things changed since you got into the line?**

I have traversed three decades...have seen film makers come and go, styles change. Technology has advanced. Today attention spans and tolerance levels are diminishing fast, and to hold a great moment on screen demands audience patience. They expect the film to run away with the plot.

Even critics are ill-informed. One of them called *Gour Hari Dastaan* slow, not realising that it was the film about a man for whom time had stood still for 35 years to prove his identity as a freedom fighter. This kind of reaction is stupefying.

**How important is social media in your work?**

Social media is a useful tool considering that the newspapers are all paid advertorials that people no longer believe in. But the same rigging is seeping into the internet and that is a pity.

**How important is background score?**

It is important as long as you don't misuse it. Or overdo it telling people where to cry or laugh. I believe in minimalist scores.



Poster of Mee Sindhutai Sapkal

### How important is the script?

Like I said it is the foundation for the structure you are building. You can assemble the best of names but no actor will rise above a mediocre script. It is unfortunate that most corporate houses fall for star power and totally overlook the script logic.

### Any philosophy in life that influences your creative work?

Always. Life guides art and art is but a mirror to the truths and untruths of life. A film maker needs to be socially responsible. I cannot make biopics that are exploitative of the subject and the audience, who come to see a true story. Formulaic treatment and dumbing down of political and scientific scenarios is sacrilegious.

### Your icons in the film industry ?

Bergman, Truffaut, Fellini, Wajda, and all the European masters. Kurasawa, Eisenstein, Bondarchuk, Ray, Mrinal Sen, Ritwick Ghatak. Adoor Gopalakrishnan. Shaji Karun, Shyam Benegal, Bimal Roy, Govind Nihalani... They made cinema that was world class in an age where their thinking was ahead of time.

### How do you get the finance?

Very tough for film makers like me. But I have miraculously survived. Don't know how long one can subsist in a very difficult, money-driven industry. I admire Rima Das who set out with a 5D Canon and picked raw talent from Assam and made *Village Rockstars*. I guess the time has come for me to set out on my own and make the kind of films I want to make.

### How do you cast your actors?

A very careful exercise. I cast the right faces, doesn't matter if they have experience or not. What is important is intelli-

gence and awareness. In *Rough Book* all the students were raw....but brilliant!

**It is said there are only six or maximum twelve stories. What do you do to keep it fresh? Can you subvert it and keep it original?**

That's why the extra effort to go the extra mile in concepts. There may be six stories reversed inside out to make 12; but the idea is to reinvent each genre and explore depths. Today our films, even the so called true stories are superficial. None of them have layers. We need to do 'advanced cinema' to get to world class levels.

### Which do you like more, acting or direction?

Acting is now a picnic and direction is like a General leading his forces. Both are adrenaline pumping. A great script drives me to direct. A gear role awakens the actor in me.

### What is your advice to people wanting to join the industry?

Enter, if you have the ability and the perseverance; if you have the passion and the honesty of an artiste...or else keep out.

### What does success mean to you and how successful have you been?

Survival itself is success in this cut throat industry.



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



# An iconic actor with an impeccable comic timing

*Best known for his most memorable role as 'Kalia' in Sholay, veteran actor Viju Khote, passed away on September 30, at the age of 77. A. Radhakrishnan pays him a tribute.*

Vittal Bapurao Khote, popularly known as Viju Khote was an iconic Indian actor known for his work in more than 440 films and serials in Hindi and Marathi. A friendly guy, his humour was contagious. I still recall him calling out... 'Radhaakrishnan' in a slow, deliberate way when I met him at film parties. Hilarious on stage, iconic on screen and a darling of a human being in real life, Viju was an institution by himself. His stunning screen presence and unique impeccable comic timing entertained. He made us laugh with his expressions. Passionate and well informed about American films, he was not just a fantastic actor, but professional to the hilt. Acting seemed to flow in the Khote blood. He was the son of noted theatre and silent movies actor, Nandu Khote, younger brother of popular actor Shubha Khote, nephew of the veteran actress Durga Khote and uncle of Bhavna Balsaver.

Making his silver screen debut with 1964 film *Ya Malak*; in an over five decade career Viju left a legacy. He also did Marathi theatre and advertisements. He went on to star in movies like *Sholay* as the iconic 'Kaaliya', *Qurbani*, *Karz*, *Nagina*, *Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak*, *Phir Hera Pheri*, *Andaz Apna Apna*, as the bumbling 'Raabert', *Ajab Prem Ki Ghazab*, *Atithi Tum Kab Jaoge*, *Kahani* and *Golmaal 3* as the quintessential Bollywood househelp 'Shambhu Kaka', National Award-winning Marathi film *Ventilator* (2016), *Garam Masala*, *Club 60*, *Pukar*, *Mela*, and *China Gate*, etc. His last film was *Jaane Kyun De Yaaron* in 2018.

He is remembered for the popular 90s sitcom, *Zabaan Sambhal Ke*, an Indian adaptation of the hit



British comedy, *Mind Your Language* and was seen also in *Aflatoon*, among 30 TV shows. Despite his body of work, Viju however gained prominence and hearts only with Ramesh Sippy's 1975 blockbuster *Sholay*, becoming synonymous as the iconic, bumbling sidekick henchman 'Kaalia', of the dreaded dacoit Gabbar Singh, and mouthed one of the most memorable film dialogues, as he reminded his boss of his loyalty. He caught the public eye with the get up itself. Bushy brows, twirled up moustache with *tilak* on the forehead and a *taweez* (talisman) around the neck. It leads on to the long, iconic sequence, involving Kaalia's timid and frightful exchange with a livid Gabbar: "Tera kya hoga Kaalia? ... Sardar, maine aapka namak khaya hai ... Ab goli kha." Another scene Gabbar questioning Kaalia about a raid gone wrong, "Kitne aadmi the?"

The character left a deep impression on viewers' hearts. Gabbar wouldn't have been Gabbar and *Sholay* wouldn't have been *Sholay* without Viju's Kaalia. An entire genera-

tion, for whom the film has been a cinematic Bible of sorts, easily recall even today, the chain of events and the dialogues on screen. Just these two scenes in an over three hour-long film were all Viju had to do to make an indelible impact. In an interview he revealed that the scenes involved ten days of shoot and fetched him a royal pay packet of Rs. 2,500/- as well as the pain of falling down an unruly horse, not once, but six times.

Sometimes it just takes a small role or two to make an artiste immortal. But it could also become a cross to bear, covering up the many other talents, accomplishments and achievements. Notwithstanding the role of a dacoit turning him famous, Viju went on to get circumscribed by comic appearances. His next unforgettable role was in Rajkumar Santoshi's 1994 comedy, *Andaz Apna Apna*, where, as the affable dim 'Raabert', the actor got a catch-phrase which has left a strong pop-culture footprint: "Galti se mistake hogaya."

He turned the silly into sublime with a wisecrack and goofily made *Sharbat-E-Jannat* the drink to raise a toast with for the giddy-headed. Thus two of his iconic roles have a common thread of transcending generations. Viju comfortable in comedy roles, gradually shifted from villainous to comedy and character roles later. Viju Khote passed away on September 30, at the age of 77, at his Mumbai home due to multiple organ failure.



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

# A different “surgical strike”

**Lt Gen Vijay Oberoi** *puts up a spirited fight against the Big C, and once again comes out a winner.*

The first two surgical strikes across the Line of Control (LoC) were launched for electoral reasons but successfully presented by India as “change and assertion of political will” by the political leadership of India to signal a major policy change of a resurgent India, which would no longer accept passivity in its dealings with rogue states!

The third surgical strike, launched on 11 September 2019, was neither of the above and it was not even across the LoC. However, it was the real macoy (US metaphor meaning “the real thing” or “the genuine article”).

Following the receipt of biopsy report of a molar site of mine, which used the word ‘carcinoma’, the ball was set rolling by the competent military doctors of Command Hospital, Chandimandir and the earliest date was set for the “surgical strike”. The aim was not to scare or neutralise the vermin, which had managed to penetrate and then started spread with impunity in my mouth; but to pull them out from their layers; whining, screeching or screaming; and destroy them for good. There was no question of any corner being given or taken; as these venal agents known generically as cancer and colloquially as The Big C, did not deserve any pity or remorse from anyone!

Having fought in two wars and losing a leg in the India-Pakistan War of 1965, I was not at all perturbed. After all I was now in my 54th year of not just living with an artificial leg but soldiering and competing with my peers. I had soldiered on in my battalion and regiment – First Battalion – The Maratha Light Infantry (JANGI PALTAN), had surprised the skeptics by competing and mostly beating my

peers and comrades in both physical and other spheres. This was the result of a combination of factors, including doggedness, persistence, hard work, zest for life and support of family and friends.

The team consisted of a diverse set of professional men and women from various medical, dental and other disciplines. Technical and intelligence assistance was provided by another set of professionals, specially chosen for their abilities. Modern machines of the electronic kind, along with conventional ones, supplanted by human expertise were successfully used in collecting a variety of data that was ‘de rigueur’ for such a precise strike.

The result was that from a captain with four-year service, I had advanced in the Indian Army to nearly the top of the steep pyramid, when I had superannuated as the Vice Chief of the formidable Indian Army. Earlier, I had commanded two Commands – Army Training Command and Western Command; had been the DGMO and GOC of a Strike Corps and had converted the Mechanised Division to an Armoured Division, despite being an infantry officer.

Unlike other segments of the Indian Government’s officialdom, the army does not give concessions or handicaps for physical or other disabilities; it only recognises professional ability and merit.

Even before the ‘surgical strike’ was launched, I had taken the news with my usual equanimity and resolved to fight it; whether it was the Big C or a humble Small C. My family and friends supported me fully. I also had full faith in our military doctors, who are professional, experienced and highly dedicated.

The stage was set when the Team Leader gave his assent. He is a highly professional warrior, who has notched up many successes in his military career in the surgical arena. The team consisted of a diverse set of professional men and women from various medical, dental and other disciplines. Technical and intelligence assistance was provided by another set of professionals, specially chosen for their abilities. Modern machines of the electronic kind, along with conventional ones, supplanted by human expertise were successfully used in collecting a variety of data that was ‘de rigueur’ for such a precise strike. Every segment of the team was professional; political honchos, and pseudo security experts had no part to play.



The entry points for the “surgical strike” were chosen by the Team Leader, with no embargoes like not crossing the equivalent of the LoC or hitting only peripheral targets, or minimum time for lingering in the target area. These were chosen with care, ensuring that no vermin escape. Thus, the team had a free hand in all aspects of the strike. No prisoners were to be taken, as these vermin had the expertise of multiplying even in captivity. It was also ensured that the site and surrounding areas were fully sanitised before suturing them up, so that no vermin of any type could grow in that environment again.

The team went through all the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), checked their special equipment, checked me thoroughly during the pre-operation phase and was ready for the surgical strike.

They knew that the aim was complete elimination of the vermin.

Publicity was not on the agenda at all, but it needs to be highlighted that science and technology can do wonders for restoring physical and mental peace; and good health of individuals.

The “surgical strike” was over within five hours, with all the vermin destroyed. However, confirmation came only after a thorough and full analysis, for which inputs were provided while the strike was still underway. Preparing a report of this nature takes time, as the process is long and time consuming. It is only after the report is finalised that the team decides on future actions to be taken.

The detailed report was positive all the way, except for a small spot that seemed suspect. Phase II commenced a week later with radiation therapy to complete the process.

Very few people knew about

the ‘strike’, as it was kept fully under wraps to discourage visitors. Unlike the earlier surgical strikes, this one will be followed up internally for some time, so that any residual ill effects of the Big C are destroyed. I too have to do my bit by fighting it spiritedly at all times, which I will.

One must never be frightened of the Big C, but fight it. Succumbing to alien forces or vermin that gnaw at your innards surreptitiously is never the answer.



**Lt Gen Vijay Oberoi is the President of the War Wounded Foundation and former**

**VCOAS.**

## WHO AM I?

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



*Earth...*



# ‘FACTFULNESS’ – *mindfully interpreting facts*

I first heard about Dr Hans Rosling from my colleague Dr Maria Sandberg, at Karlstad University (Sweden), when I was assisting her in a first-year course in Environmental Technology. Rosling’s ‘baby’ – GapMinder (refer [www.gapminder.org](http://www.gapminder.org)) – was to be introduced to students, the purpose being exactly the same which Rosling pursued for most of his professional life as a doctor and educator. Rosling is no more. FACTFULNESS is his last contribution to humankind, a game-changer which will stand the test of time and immortalise the ‘Swedish doctor with a mission’, which will (the reviewer would very much wish that) be fulfilled as more and more readers get to read FACTFULNESS.

Rosling was a doctor who believed in the importance of communication (words are often as important if not more so, than deeds) if one wished to heal the world. Just as it takes time for one to dig through coals to get to the diamonds far beneath the seams (a process which requires patience, curiosity, persistence and hard work), Rosling, in FACTFULNESS, urges readers – one and all – be he/she the President of a country or a common officegoer watching BBC or reading the New York Times to be mindful – factful rather – and question, criticise and debate (in a friendly way) fearlessly to convince oneself about the veracity or otherwise of what one hears or reads.

Barack Obama calls FACTFULNESS a ‘hopeful book’. Bill Gates labels it as ‘one of the most important books I have read’. In today’s world, data is called the ‘new oil’. Just as oil has caused conflicts, data can be used to mislead, misguide and fill one’s coffers (‘fake news’?). Think of how politicians use data to gain traction on their own ulterior motives. However, if

oil has to be used responsibly to curb global warming, the ‘new oil’ needs to be used responsibly and honestly to provide the right impetus to actionable meaningful change.

**FACTFULNESS** by  
Hans Rosling;

Published in 2018  
by Sceptre,  
United Kingdom.

ISBN: 978-1-473-63747-4.  
Pages 340.

FACTFULNESS has ten chapters in it – ten reasons we are wrong about the world – with one word common to all the ten titles. Instinct. The word ‘Instinct’ at once tells us that it is human nature to not send ‘data signals’ received by the sense organs back to the intellect for analysis and reasoning. We ‘feel’ without much exertion and avoid ‘thinking’ too much, as the latter is energy-consuming and strenuous; often stressful. We do have valid reasons to do so in the postmodern world, in which a surfeit of data, a veritable ‘data bombardment’, makes one seek shortcuts (analogous to fast food). We end up deluding ourselves and become victims to manipulative politicians and businessmen.

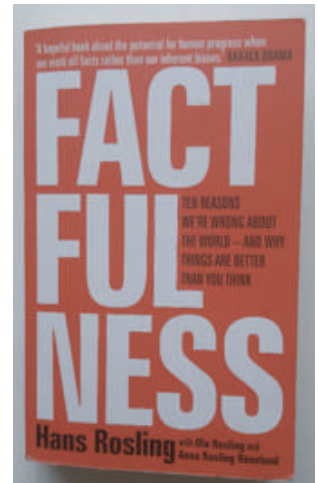
## “Data therapy” to relieve stress

Reading FACTFULNESS will be the first step – the removal of the blindfolds we walk around with. The next step would be the conscious implementation of this awareness in our daily lives when we are constantly bombarded with data – while reading newspapers, while watching TV, while conversing with friends or colleagues or sellers in the marketplace. In this age of diverse therapies and ‘pathies’, Dr Rosling recommends ‘data therapy’

to relieve humankind of the stress encountered on a daily basis by misinterpretation of data (which is presented to misguide and mislead often) and the resulting illusion of deterioration.

Rosling’s messages can be interpreted by those of us readers who are spiritual and believe in God, as ‘Good (God) acts silently in the background, while Bad (Satan) works noisily in the foreground seeking attention’. One must train oneself to understand the strength of the spirit soul seated deep inside each one of us, even as we witness the battering the sense organs receive from external stimuli. It is the sixth sense (not the one of apprehension though) of true understanding which Rosling recommends as therapy. I recall a Greek student of mine at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Trondheim sometime in 2012, asking me if the Mumbai slums shown in the film *Slumdog Millionaire* was representative of India. He seemed sceptical when he asked me the question and that warmed by heart. Filmmakers unintentionally play a role in misleading the viewers often!

(continued on page 35...)





# A fitting tribute to Devika Rani

*'Devika Rani', a gripping play produced by Lilette Dubey offers a compelling look into the tumultuous life of the ambitious, multitalented 'first lady of Indian cinema', who lived her life on her own terms, writes Prof. Avinash Kolhe.*



**Ira Dubey (Devika Rani) and Joy Sengupta (Himanshu Rai), in a still from the play**

Our cine industry has produced some outstanding individuals who were indeed ahead of their times. Devika Rani was one such actor, who ran a commercial cinema studio for about five years in an industry which is even today dominated by men. Not only was she very beautiful but a fine actress too. Her life was full of ups and downs, an ideal raw material for a gripping play. Lilette Dubey has produced a riveting play in English 'Devika Rani: Goddess of the silver screen' which is produced by production company 'The Primetime Theatre'.

This play is not a rendition of Devika's complete life on stage, but the focus is on her life as an important member of Bollywood, when Talkies as a new medium of entertainment was taking tentative steps. That is the era of 1930s and 1940s-- those turbulent decades not only in the life of our country but Europe too, which was invaded by

the Nazis.

Devika Rani Chaudhuri (1908-1994) was born into a wealthy, anglicised, illustrious family. She was the grandniece of Rabindranath Tagore. She was sent to a boarding school in England when she was just nine. She aspired to become an architect but in 1928, she met Himanshu Rai, an Indian film producer who was also in England at the time. She married him the following year and was part of his dream to set up a professional cinema studio in Mumbai on the lines of Hollywood studios. Thus was born the 'Bombay Talkies' in 1934. Prior to this, Himanshu had produced films like 'Karma' in 1933. Both got training in film-making at UFA Studios in Berlin. The Bombay Talkies was a novel experiment as it was a listed company on the Bombay Stock Exchange. This studio, based in Malad, produced some outstanding films in the next 5-6 years with Devika Rani as the lead actress.

Himanshu died in 1940 and the studio was run by Devika Rani for a couple of years. Back then her colleagues were Shashadhar Mukherjee and Ashok Kumar. Her film 'Achut Kanya' (1936) with Ashok Kumar was a super-duper hit. In 1945 she retired from the film industry and married Russian painter Svetoslav Roerich. After the marriage, the couple moved to Manali in Himachal Pradesh, and led a retired life though she produced some documentaries on wild life.

Devika Rani, often described as 'Indian Garbo' led a tumultuous life which was a challenge to put up on stage. Lilette Dubey has succeeded in this. The play 'Devika Rani' focusses on the life and struggles of an independent and ambitious woman who was determined to hit the big time. She had studied acting in London and carried an inborn passion for film-making. Though she was a top-notch performer, she had to face a multitude of problems in her personal as well as professional life. This was more often than not, due to patriarchy, male egos and societal pressures.

There is an interesting story on how this play was born. Lilette and Kishwar Desai are batchmates from Lady Shri Ram College, Delhi. They met some months ago and sparked off a conversation on the iconic Bombay Talkies star Devika Rani as Kishwar is working on a book on her. They decided to collaborate and this is how the play was born.

Lilette has collected some fine talent to mount this show. The play is written by Kishwar who has enormous amount of information about Devika Rani.

Salim Akhtar's lavish sets and Pia Benegal's stylish costumes give us a glimpse of London, Berlin and Mumbai of the 1930s and 40s. These elements breathe life into Devika's on-screen as well as off-screen histrionics. The play aptly depicts Devika's life journey – the pre-cinema days in London, her romance and marriage with Himanshu Rai, her acting career, her stewardship of the Bombay Talkies and finally her second marriage with the Russian painter. Ira Dubey lives up to the character of Devika Rani and effortlessly portrays Devika's pride, ambition, pragmatism and loneliness with ease and grace. Joy Sengupta, a regular name in Primetime Theatre productions, has ably played the complex role of Himanshu. The lead pair is supported by Kashyap Shangari (Najam-ul-Hasan) and Aakanksha Kadre, who plays the role of Devika's friend and confidant Poorna.

'Devika Rani' offers first rate entertainment coupled with some serious philosophy. There is a line in



**Devika Rani**

the play that likens cinema to being a greedy mistress. And towards the end, as Devika turns her back on cinema in favour of peace and happiness, you can't help but feel a kinship towards this path-breaking doyen of Indian cinema, who truly lived life on her terms.



**Mumbai.**

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

## 'FACTFULNESS' – *mindfully interpreting facts*

### Is the world getting better or worse?

Rosling advises us to understand the present vis-à-vis the past, using time-series graphs...and then decide if the world is getting 'better' or 'worse'. Now the point here is to define 'better' with respect to something, or 'worse' with respect to something, right? After all those two words are comparative forms of the adjectives 'good' and 'bad'. That, I guess, is the Eureka moment for readers who immediately get to the gist of the book.

Legal slavery, oil spills, child mortality, cost of solar panels, HIV infections, use of leaded gasoline, battle deaths, death penalties, plane crash deaths, child labour, nuclear arms, small pox cases, ozone deple-

tion etc, have all decreased over time (the 'good' working in the background waiting to be understood and appreciated). Likewise, access to electricity and clean water, access to sewage systems, access to the Internet, child cancer survival rates have all increased over time.

Data therapy is all about being conscious and aware of 'where we come from', and 'where we are'. This knowledge will help us to plan the 'Quo Vadis' with patience and fortitude. In FACTFULNESS, Dr Rosling is not exactly a 'Pollyannaish' optimist. In fact, he labels himself as a 'possibilist'. He rails against the negativity instinct which is inherent in most of us (in fact all of us) – an obstacle to thinking in terms of doing good for oneself and people around.

Read FACTFULNESS, and become possibilists. You can make what the vast majority thinks is impossible, difficult but attainable, after administering yourself the doctor-author's data therapy. May the Rosling legacy live on through GapMinder.



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



## LT GEN Z C BAKSHI PVSM, MVC, VR C, VSM

The most highly decorated officer (1921 – 2018)

**Z**orawar Chand Bakshi was born on 21 October 1921 in Gulyano village in Rawalpindi District of Punjab. His father, Sardar Bahadur Bakshi was a decorated soldier of the British Indian Army. Zorawar graduated from Gordon College, Rawalpindi and joined the Indian Military Academy in 1942. He was commissioned on 27 June 1943. After a brief attachment with a British battalion, he was posted to 6/10 Baluch battalion, then located in Arakan in Burma. The second-in-command of the unit was Major Usman who later rose to the rank of Brigadier, was awarded MVC (Maha Vir Chakra) and was martyred in the Indo-Pak War of 1947-48.

Bakshi's handling of patrols was impressive and Usman detailed him to attack a hill feature which was captured after a bloody fight. Cook Bhandari Ram had displayed great gallantry and was severely wounded. Usman recommended him for VC but the commanding officer changed it to Indian Order of Merit (IOM). Usman then made a request to the Brigade Commander who accepted his recommendation and Bhandari Ram was awarded VC. In the battle of Kangaw in January 1945, Bakshi was awarded Mention-in Dispatch.

After Partition, the Baluch Regiment left for Pakistan and Bakshi was posted to 5 Gorkha Rifles. He was appointed Brigade Major (BM) of 163 Infantry Brigade located in the Kashmir Valley. In May 1948, the Brigade captured Tithwal, inflicting heavy casualties on the enemy. Bakshi was staff officer and not commanding troops. Yet, he displayed exemplary gallantry and was awarded VC. A gallantry award for a staff officer is a rare feat. He was next assigned the task of reconnaissance in Tibet which he did as a monk. He went into Chumbi Valley, Goyantse and Lhasa. He covered a distance of 400 kms and was awarded Mavregor Medal.

He took over command of 2/5 Gorkha Rifles (GR) and moved to Congo in July 1962. The Indo-China war broke out in October 1962. That was the only war that Bakshi missed due to his tenure in Congo. He was promoted Brigadier in July 1965 and took over the command of 68 Infantry Brigade located in Srinagar Valley. The conflict between India and Pakistan in Kutch had been settled through the good offices of the Prime Minister of UK. Pakistan next launched Operation

Gibraltar to annex Kashmir. Pakistan Army soldiers dressed in civil dress infiltrated into Kashmir to carry out large scale sabotage and destruction of military installations. They were wrongly expecting support from the local population. Haji Pir Pass at a height of 8652 feet on the formidable Pir Panjal range provided a direct link between Poonch and Uri. It was being used by the Pakistanis for infiltration into India, and it was decided to capture it. Bakshi issued the orders to the units on 23 August at Uri. In addition to the details of the plan, he also explained his philosophy for the conduct of the attack, stressing the need for surprise, speed and offensive action. The Pass was captured on the morning of 28 August by Major (later Lt Gen) Ranjit Dayal.

A counter-attack by Pakistan was repulsed and by 30 August, complete control over the area had been established. He and Dayal were awarded MVC for gallant action and leadership.



Bakshi went through various staff and command appointments and attended course at the Imperial Defence College, UK. He was GOC 26 Infantry Division during the 1971 war. The role of the Division was defensive. One brigade of his division was rushed to Poonch, limiting his offensive capability. Yet, to ensure the security of Akhnor, he carried out limited offensive and captured Chicken's Neck, a strip south of Akhnor. He was awarded

PVSM (Param Vishisht Seva Medal) and was promoted Lt Gen and took over command of 1 Corps. He retired on 31 January 1979. Zorawar Bakshi was one of the most distinguished soldiers of the Indian Army. He won laurels both in peace and war time and took part in every war fought by the Indian Army after Independence, except the Indo-China War of 1962. He also had the unique distinction of being the most highly decorated officer in the Indian Army, having won awards for gallantry at every level, from company to division. A rare combination of a fighting and thinking soldier, he was as well known for his achievements.

He passed away on 24 May 2018.

- Brigadier Suresh Chandra Sharma (retd.)

# RAM JETHMALANI

The maverick lawyer (1923 – 2019)

**R**am Boolchand Jethmalani was a quintessential politician, brilliant jurist and senior criminal lawyer, public figure, crusader and family man, a former Union minister with a six-time Rajya Sabha and two-time Lok Sabha stint. Witty, courageous, gracious, outspoken, fearless, feisty and ebullient, he was a rebel and maverick who never minced his words. Often the lines between Jethmalani and criminal law got blurred. His interventions in the courts were heard with rapt attention; his physical presence intimidating enough to those embroiled in legal cases to pay through their noses to have him fly to distant places and appear for them.

Chairman of Bar Council of India for four tenures; in 1996, a member of the International Bar Association and in 2010, elected President of the Supreme Court Bar Association, his sharp criticism of the Emergency led to an arrest warrant, but opting for self-imposed exile in Canada, it became the bedrock of his upcoming political life. The political Left regarded him with disdain, and the Right as untrustworthy. After Emergency was lifted in 1977, he filed his candidature from Canada, for the Bombay North-West constituency and won, ousting the serving Law Minister H. R. Gokhale. He retained it in 1980 but lost in 1985. He became a Rajya Sabha member in 1988.

Jethmalani was appointed Union Minister of Law, Justice and Company Affairs in 1996 in the first Vajpayee Government and during the second in 1998, was Union Minister of Urban Affairs and Employment. But in October 1999, he was again sworn in as the Union Minister for Law, Justice and Company Affairs, but soon asked to resign by the Prime Minister following differences. He lost the 2004 Lok Sabha contest as an Independent from Lucknow to Vajpayee. But was back in 2010, as a BJP Rajya Sabha member. Following his public barbs, he was expelled in 2013. Since 2016, he was a RJD Rajya Sabha member, rumoured to be a quid pro quo for defending RJD chief Lalu Prasad in the fodder scam. In a career spanning 70 years, he took on numerous high-profile controversial cases, without qualms about who he represented, often facing severe flak. A highest paid criminal lawyer, his witness cross-examination

techniques repeatedly proved his mettle.

Born on 14 September 1923 in Sikhapur, Sindh, now in Pakistan, Ram completing his schooling at 13 with two double promotions, got his LLB degree at 17. He contested in the Court of Sindh, the Bar Council rule requiring minimum age of 21 to become a lawyer and won a special resolution allowing him to become one at 18. Starting his career as a lawyer and professor, he formed his own law firm in Karachi with his friend A.K. Brohi. When riots broke out in Karachi in February 1948, he fled to India with only a one paisa coin in his pocket and stayed

in a refugee camp to begin his life and career afresh. In 1954, he became a part-time professor at the Government Law College, Mumbai and the Professor Emeritus for Symbiosis International University law schools. In 1959, he shot to limelight in the sensational K M Nanavati vs. State of Maharashtra case, as a prosecution lawyer, on 'watching brief'. In 1977, he won an international Human Rights Award instituted by World Peace Through Law.

Author of books such as *Big Egos, Small Men; Conscience of a Maverick, Conflict of Laws* (1955) and *Maverick: Unchanged, Unrepentant; Justice: Soviet*

*Style*, he also co-authored legal scholarly books on different fields of law, such as criminal law, administrative law, and media law. There have been two books on Jethmalani, Ram Jethmalani: *The Authorised Biography* by Nalini Gera and *Rebel: A Biography of Ram Jethmalani* by Susan Adelman.

A very humble man, 90 percent of his cases were done for free as he didn't chase money. A week before his 94th birthday in 2017, he officially retired. Jethmalani passed away on 8 September 2019 in New Delhi at the age of 95. Married twice, he faced personal tragedies like the death of a daughter and son with grit and is survived by his son Mahesh, an eminent lawyer-politician and a U.S. based daughter Shobha.

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





# KIRAN NAGARKAR

An iconic writer (1942 –2019)

Kiran Nagarkar was an acclaimed English-Marathi Indian journalist, novelist, playwright, film and drama critic and screenwriter, who also dabbled in advertising. A lifelong establishment credit throughout his 45 years literary career, he was bawdy, lyrical, irreverent and political. He challenged religious orthodoxy, linguistic chauvinism and masculine patriarchy through his writings. Nagarkar's novels offered a biting humour and complex insights into human nature. Using his books as a means to engage with the politics of his times, he inevitably confronted difficult questions head-on and wrote of characters who were as much victims as they were heroes; as much perpetrators as they were saviours.

His first published work was in Marathi, in 1974 at the age of 32, titled *Saat Sakkam Trechalis* (seven sixes are forty-three). He took narrative fiction beyond logic, grammar and reason, exploring the complexities of the human psyche. When Emergency ended in 1977, he wrote a four act play *Bedtime Story*. Its performance was banned in Maharashtra for 17 years, as fundamental Hindu parties found it offensive.

His first English novel, *Ravan and Eddie*, in 1994 earned him both attention and fame. A stunning ode to the city of Mumbai, it was a humorous tale of two boys, a Hindu named Ravan and a Christian named Eddie, and the people living in Mumbai's chawls. It was a ribald, language-bending coming-of-age story that pulled no punches in its detailing of erotic experiences. Followed by the second in the trilogy, *The Extras* (2012), a sequel that traced the adult lives of Ravan and Eddie as extras in Bollywood, it insisted that, the original sin is not eating the apple, or making love to Eve, it is hope..." The last in the trilogy, *Rest In Peace* (2015), was a striking tragicomic story, dealing humorously with death, poverty, indoctrination, bullying and abuse; yet not losing a hint of the menace.

*Cuckold* (1997), was a novel about 16th century saint-poet Mirabai, raising searching questions about the mystery and allure of love and the dynamics of gender.

*God's Little Soldier* (2006), was a tale of a liberal Mumbai Muslim boy's tryst with religious orthodoxy, whose journey to academic excellence is derailed by exposure and conversion to fanaticism.

In *Jasoda* (2017), he created a courageous heroine who left her home to seek a brighter future, in the face of odds. His last, *The Arsonist* (2019), sought the meaning of what unites us through re-imagining of Kabir, the 15<sup>th</sup> century Indian mystic poet and saint and also critiqued the rise of Hindu majoritarianism in India. Nagarkar struggled with acceptance from Marathi audiences. He wrote, "For those who

speak English in India and are westernised, including many critics, the sun rises and sets in the west. If the West approves it, it must be good. In the regional languages, safety and security often lie at the other extreme: in parochialism and the bogey of safeguarding our culture." Scalded by the 2018 wave of #Metoo allegations, Nagarkar was accused by three women journalists of inappropriate sexual behaviour. Strongly denying the allegations, he offered up his novels as evidence of his commitment to gender justice, as though they represented unimpeachable proof of innocence.

Nagarkar received the HN Apte Award for the most effective first novel, the Sahitya Akademi Award for his epic novel *Cuckold*, in 2001 and the Dalmia Award for communicative harmony through literature. In 2012, he was awarded the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany, a Rockefeller grant and a scholarship by the city of Munich. In 2013 his *Extras* was shortlisted for the Hindu Literary Prize. *Jasoda* also received the JCB prize for literature. Nagarkar even did a cameo role as Brother Bono in Dev Benegal's movie *Split Wide Open*. The easygoing, charming and self-deprecatory author passed away at 77 of a massive brain hemorrhage. He is survived by his partner of many decades, Tulsi Vatsal.

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





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# WHO AM I?

Am I a Hindu first or an Indian first?

Am I a Muslim first or an Indian first?

Am I a Christian first or an Indian first?

Am I a Buddhist first or an Indian first?

Am I a Brahmin first or an Indian first?

Am I a Dalit first or an Indian first?

Am I a South Indian first or an Indian first?

Am I a North Indian first or an Indian first?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Sadanand A. Shetty, Founder Editor  
(Mayoer 9<sup>th</sup> 1930 – February 23<sup>rd</sup> 2007)  
ONE INDIA ONE PEOPLE