

# ONE INDIA ONE PEOPLE

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## ***Climate Crisis: A reality check***

***Climate refugees:***

***Staring at a grim future***

***The threat from pests***

***Going green with bamboo***

***Know India Better***

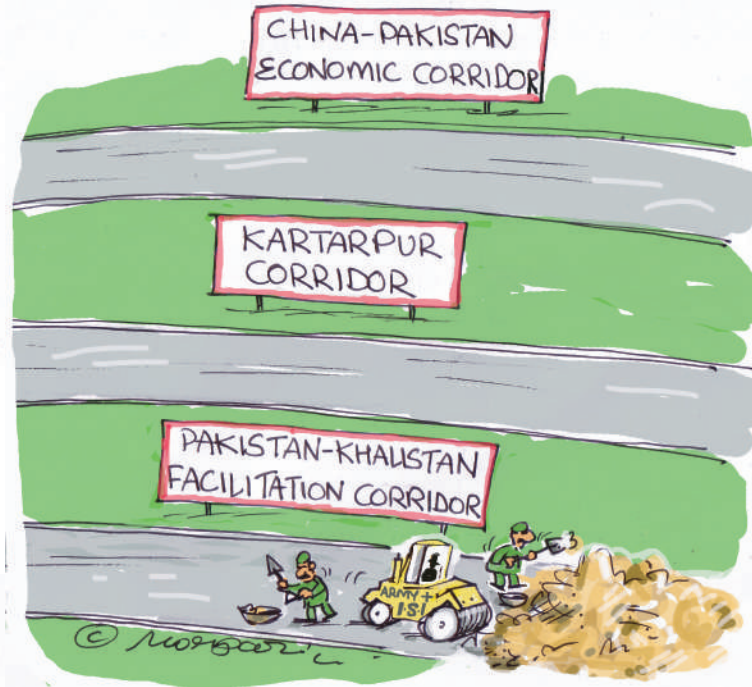
***Face to Face***

***Ruzbeh N. Bharucha***

***Ranikhet: The Himalayan queen***

***Wild and beautiful Kaziranga***





SMOKE ON  
ODD DAYS...

EAT CARROTS  
ON EVEN DAYS.



THE CARROT & STICK  
METHOD OF KETRIWAL & HARSH  
VARDHAN TO AVOID LONG DAMAGE

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December 2019

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MAJOR THAKUR DALPAT  
SINGH MC



GEMINI GANESAN



DR T S KANAKA



**Managing Editor**  
Mrs. Sucharita R. Hegde

**Editor**  
Anuradha Dhareshwar

**Design**  
Resurgam Digital LLP

**OIOP Clubs**  
Nagesh Bangera

**Advisory Board**  
Sucharita Hegde  
Justice S. Radhakrishnan  
Venkat R. Chary

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Mrs. Sucharita R. Hegde for  
**One India One People Foundation,**  
Mahalaxmi Chambers, 4th floor,  
22, Bhulabhai Desai Road,  
Mumbai - 400 026  
Tel: 022-2353 4400  
Fax: 022-2351 7544  
e-mail: oiopfoundation@gmail.com  
oiopsub@fouressindia.com

visit us at:

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# Climate refugees: Staring at a grim future

*India has been facing the worst of climate change, prompting mass migrations of entire villages due to drought, floods, cyclones, coastal erosion, etc. The cities in turn, are facing the heat of an overstretched infrastructure that is unable to cope with the influx of migrants. The out-migration is also resulting in a host of other problems such as child prostitution, drug-running and sex-trafficking. Strong measures would be required to minimise the impact of climate change, which is here to stay, says **Dr. Rina Mukherji**.*



*The sea-facing southern part of G plot. The Bay of Bengal has swallowed up large chunks of farmland forcing people to migrate. Embankments built from time to time have proved ineffective against a rising sea.*

**T**he latest research by Climate Central, a US-based climate research and communications organisation, using CoastalDEM – a new digital elevation model, says that three and a half crore people in India – as against the 50 lakh estimated earlier – could actually be affected by annual coastal flooding by 2050, with large parts of Mumbai, Navi Mumbai and Kolkata getting inundated by the rising sea levels. According to the study, coastal flooding will impact 300 million people globally by 2050 and the high tide lines could permanently rise above land occupied by 150 million people, mostly in Asia.

In September 2019, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Special Report on the Oceans and Cryosphere in a changing climate has warned of an increase in the Category 4 and Category 5 tropical cyclones in a warming world. Warning us about frequent El Nino and La Nina events, which would bring droughts and heavy monsoons respectively, the IPCC tells us of annual extreme weather events by 2050, a 4 mm rise in sea level in 2100 which will cause coastal flooding, posing grave danger to

coastal cities even if we confine ourselves to a two degree rise in temperature in future. (given the fact that the world has already recorded a 1.1 degree rise in temperature above pre-industrial levels). Of course, this would be far better than the 15 mm rise in sea level if the world decides to follow business as usual.

## Mass migrations on the rise

India has already been facing the worst of climate change, with years of drought in central India, particularly in the Vidarbha and Marathwada regions of Maharashtra, and parts of Andhra Pradesh, prompting many farmers to commit suicide following crop failure. Mass migrations of entire villages is commonplace, as people struggle to survive. In the Indian Sundarbans, the effects of climate change are stark and grim. Islands like Sagar and Ghoramara are losing precious land to the seas, with schools, post offices and fertile farmland being swallowed up. Research by experts from Jadavpur University's School of Oceanographic Studies have revealed that Sundarbans has been



experiencing a 3.24 mm per year rise in sea level as compared to the global mean sea level rise of 2 mm per year, which given its eastward land subsidence, and huge deltaic sediment load, translates into a scenario where coastal erosion is pushing populations into despair.

Naturally susceptible to storms, the Sundarbans is experiencing frequent cyclones of high intensity, with coastal flooding and salinity intrusion destroying precious farmland. Manoj Gayen, who owns a five acre farm in Sagar Island, tells me, “Initially, saline water would affect only the outer boundaries of my farm. But now, nearly an acre is affected. The salt water ingress has increased over the years. Standing water in farms has decreased the fertility, and sowing is affected.”

In Mathurapur, which is further inland, delayed monsoons in recent times have been making the rivulets saline. Since agriculture here is rainfed, the farmers are faced with low-yields now. These factors have seen a high rate of out-migration in Bengal. The earliest environmental refugees, who lost their homes in Ghoramara and other islands, were accommodated by the government in Sagar Island. But those who were subsequently affected, could not be rehabilitated. Even otherwise, islands like K-plot, and G-plot are now just one fourth of their original size. Sagar, the biggest of the islands, has lost two-thirds of its original land. As a result, women-headed households are the norm in most villages.

Agents in search of cheap labour often scour these islands, and whisk able-bodied men and boys to places as far off as Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and even Kashmir. But then, not all such employment may provide relief. The manner in which five farm labourers from Bengal were brutally dragged out and killed by militants in Kashmir is a pointer.

There are cases of exploitation by employers as well. Manoj Gayen's younger son, Pintu Gayen had been promised a lucrative job in Tamil Nadu by such an “agent”. After travelling to the outskirts of Chennai, the agent introduced him to the owner of a small eatery, where he was employed thereon as a bearer-cum-helper. Thereon, the “agent” “disappeared. Pintu soon realised that he had become “slave” labour, and was not paid for months. Demanding his wages meant getting mercilessly beaten. Since he did not know the local language, returning home was next to impossible. However, Pintu managed to contact

his father and inform him of his plight. His elder brother, Santu, who had been working in Kerala since some time, managed to locate him with the help of friends. “The eatery-owner would not let him go. He claimed to have paid money to the “agent.” And hence, we had to pay a goodly sum to have him released,” his father tells me.

Pintu has returned home for now and is on the lookout for another job. He may avoid Tamil Nadu; but

Kerala and Karnataka are options he is open to. But conditions in host regions may not be conducive any more. In Bengaluru, people are no longer open to employing Bengalis, as demands for a National Register of Citizens (NRCs) become shriller by the day, especially with a huge influx into the city from neighbouring Bangladesh in recent times. Meanwhile, lack of livelihood opportunities and the dire need to survive has made many turn to crime. Trafficking of women and children and drug-running are common, now.

### Climate change here to stay

In the past, the eastern seaboard would periodically experience cyclonic storms that would leave farmers in the coastal region distressed. But these have become more intense and frequent. This year, there have been three cyclones in succession affecting both the western and eastern coasts. Every

landfall means acres of standing crops getting destroyed, although improved cyclone warning systems have drastically brought down casualties in the cyclone-prone states of Odisha and Andhra Pradesh. Rural distress in these parts, means a host of problems, including child prostitution and sex-trafficking, triggered by out-migration.

In Maharashtra, farmers battling drought in Marathwada for the last few years, have been forced to migrate to the industrial centres of western Maharashtra and the nearly urban conglomerates of Aurangabad and Nagpur. Pune and Mumbai, in turn, feel the pressure of an overstretched infrastructure that is unable to cope with the influx of migrants. This year, untimely rains have played havoc with standing crops all over the state. Bajra, maize and grapes have taken a bad hit, with nearly half the harvest getting destroyed.

**Climate Change is real and here to stay. But to minimise the damage to our land and population, it is important that the government digs in to adopt strong measures under its National Mission for Climate Change.**

(continued on page 14...)

# Impact of climate change on human health

*In India, global warming has manifested itself in disease vectors affecting even colder regions in recent years. There have been other public health emergencies as well, exacerbated by poverty and malnutrition. Dr. Rina Mukherji tells us how climate change is impacting human health, and posing a challenge for ongoing efforts to contain vector-borne diseases.*



**Warmer temperatures and high humidity have been major reasons behind the rise in Swine flu.**

A recent report in the medical journal, Lancet, claims that India has had the singular distinction in 2017, of ranking fourth in malaria cases reported globally; that is, of the 219 cases reported in 2017, 10 million cases were in India. It further noted that India would be among three countries that would struggle to eradicate malaria by 2030, given the current trajectories and the urban environment in the country that facilitates the breeding of *Anopheles Stephensi*, the mosquito responsible for the spread of the malaria virus.

It is a similar scenario that has caused dengue to become the fastest growing viral infection transmitted by mosquitoes, as declared by the World Health Organisation (WHO). In fact, as of today, figures show dengue to be spreading far ahead even of malaria. The worldwide incidence of dengue increased 30-fold in a 50-year period, with its prevalence shifting from a handful of countries to becoming endemic in 128 countries, including India. At the moment, dengue is endemic in all 35 states and union territories of India.

The onset of monsoon this year, saw over 700 cases of dengue being reported from hospitals in Hyder-

abad. High humidity levels during the retreating monsoon season in September saw Kolkata getting badly affected by the disease; while Mumbai registered a sharp rise in dengue cases in the comparatively cooler months of January-March (2019). With the authorities focussing their energies on controlling dengue, Delhi saw a spike in malaria, with 459 cases, even as it battled 467 cases of dengue.

## Climate change and disease vectors

The 4<sup>th</sup> Assessment Report of the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) had shown that various arthropods carrying vector-borne disease such as ticks, mosquitoes and sandflies, have all been moving into more northern latitudes in response to global warming. In India, global warming has manifested itself in disease vectors affecting colder regions like Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir in recent years.

The years 2012, 2015, 2016 and 2017 that were marked by dengue epidemic corresponded to a slow arrival of the monsoon, and below-normal rains in the first half, and an above normal rainfall in the second half, followed by an anomalous delayed withdrawal. 2019, too,

has been no different. Such years show high maximum and minimum temperatures during the monsoon and post-monsoon periods, widespread floods and high humidity levels. Shorter winters and longer summers also enhance the transmission season and expand the geographical distribution of vector-borne diseases, since disease-carrying arthropods thrive in the range of 20-30 degrees centigrade.

## AES & Japanese Encephalitis

There have been other public health emergencies too, exacerbated by poverty and malnutrition. Incredibly high temperatures in June 2019 saw Muzaffarpur in Bihar reel under a bout of acute encephalitis syndrome (AES), affecting 222 blocks of the district, as also parts of adjoining districts. A total of 440 cases, with 103 deaths were recorded in the region, with the high rate of fatalities being attributed to high temperatures, malnutrition and poverty among the patients. AES has shown a spike in recent years, and is being attributed to the prevalence of the scrub virus. The Muzaffarpur deaths are attributed to the lichi strain of the virus, with the deaths traced to a chemical found in unripe lichis that reacts in malnourished children who have lichis on an empty stomach. However, doctors are not yet clear about causes behind AES, though the early development of AES in India was found to be in line with JE (Japanese Encephalitis).

On its part, JE has seen a spike in cases since 2010. Characterised by neck stiffness, stupor, disorientation, coma, tremors, convulsions and spastic paralysis, with 30 to 50 per cent of the survivors ending up with cognitive and neurological disabilities. The first case of JE in India was discovered in Tamil Nadu, where it remained confined until 1973, when it struck West Bengal. It then invaded 22 rice-growing states, where its carrier, the Culex mosquito, breeds in stagnant water, and spreads by feeding on infected domestic pigs, the amplifying host, and migratory birds, the natural host. JE was known to thrive in the Northeast, which presented ideal conditions for the virus. However, recent years have seen the virus become endemic in Uttar Pradesh. The disease made a comeback (after two decades) in Odisha in 2012, leaving 24 dead, amid 274 cases. The same year, Uttar Pradesh reported 1139 confirmed cases. In July 2016, Manipur faced several JE-related deaths too. JE has a tendency to invade new areas that host stagnant water and paddy fields, which are its traditional habitat. Of late, as revealed by the National Vector Borne Disease Control Programme (NVBDCP), sub-groups of the Culex mosquito have been found in vegetation along the Yamuna, where they are infecting people in Haryana. Between 2011-2016, JE cases rose by 210 per cent, with fatalities rising by 181 percent.

## H1N1 flu

The H1N1 virus first made its appearance in India, in 2009, during the global H1N1 pandemic, that lasted until 2010. Generally referred to as the swine flu virus, the H1N1 virus which affects humans is, however, different from that affecting hogs. The H1N1 flu virus struck again in 2015, with 42,592 cases and 2990 deaths being recorded

throughout India. In 2017, there was another major H1N1 wave, with 38,811 cases and 2270 deaths.

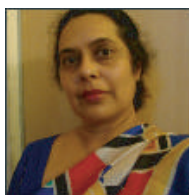
Warmer temperatures and high humidity have been major reasons behind the rise in H1N1 over the last decade. Although the numbers affected in 2018 and 2019 are much lower, it is nevertheless a cause for concern. In 2019, there were 26,000 cases and over 1000 deaths all over the country. Although H1 N1 flu is symptomatic of any other seasonal flu, causing fever, chills, sore throat, body-ache, headache, runny nose and fatigue, it can cause complications like pneumonia and can be fatal for the very young and elderly. H1N1 is often fatal for those with asthma, lung, blood, endocrine or heart disorders, or a weakened immune system. This year, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, were the worst hit, with over 200 deaths each, followed by Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, and Karnataka, with over 100 deaths. The disease also took its toll in Jammu & Kashmir, Delhi, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Kerala, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, with fatalities everywhere.

## Leptospirosis

Nearly unknown in India until a few years ago, leptospirosis or rat fever reared its ugly head in parts of the country in 2017, with flooding and inundation becoming commonplace in many urban centres. In 2018, there was a fatality in Pune, and several cases of leptospirosis reported from all over Maharashtra, Gujarat and Karnataka. Mumbai reported 218 cases in 2018, and 102 cases in 2019. There were several cases reported from Surat, Mangaluru, Dakshin Kannada too. Caused when infected rat and animal urine mixes with floodwaters, leptospirosis is caused by the Leptospira virus. Symptoms include sudden fever, headache, muscle pain, chills, red itchy eyes, difficulty urinating, a skin rash, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhoea. As the disease progresses further, a patient experiences bleeding from the nose and mouth, cardiac and respiratory failure.

## Preventive measures

From all accounts, climate change is here to stay. But where diseases are concerned, disease vectors thrive in unhygienic conditions and stagnant water. Since prevention is always better than cure, we need to ensure that ticks, mosquitoes and rodents never meet the ideal conditions to breed and multiply. The Swacchh Bharat Mission is a step in the right direction. Let us step up and fight disease by keeping our homes and environs clean.



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



# The threat from pests

*Insects are proliferating across the planet due to rising global temperatures, and are posing a serious threat to food security. In future, crop protection technologies will have to be customised to suit the rapidly changing climate, writes*

**Hiren Kumar Bose.**



## ***Increasing pest population are a threat to food security***

**C**limate change and increasing pollution directly harm not just humans, but also affects agricultural and fruit crops -- exacerbated due to the intensity of pest attacks. As global temperatures rise, insects are proliferating across the planet, which scientists say will threaten food production, particularly in bio-diverse countries like India.

### **Threat to food security**

The Ministry of Agriculture has mentioned to a parliamentary committee that crops such as paddy, wheat, maize, sorghum, mustard, potato, cotton and coconut are likely to be adversely affected by climate change. The committee headed by veteran BJP leader Murli Manohar Joshi states that wheat production will decrease by 6-23% by 2050 if effective steps are not taken in a timely manner. Wheat production could decrease by 6,000 kilos for every 1°C increase in temperature.

According to India's National Action Plan on Climate Change, maize production could fall by 18%; paddy may witness a fall by 4-6% by 2020, and potatoes would show a decline by 2.5% by 2020, 6% by 2050 and

11% by 2080. Soybean is, however, predicted to fare better in the future, with its production likely to increase by 8-13% from 2030 to 2080.

India as a whole will experience 1-1.5 degrees Celsius increase in mean annual air temperature from 2016 to 2045, which could have profound implications for agriculture, according to a study by IIM Ahmedabad, IIT Gandhinagar and Council on Energy, Environment and Water. These effects could be further pronounced given the estimated increase in heavy rainfall and snowfall, resulting in flooding and damage to infrastructure.

Climate change will affect agriculture, but its exact impact is difficult to predict. However, it can be said without any ambiguity that increasing pest population are a threat to food security—for the pests love a warmer world.

Insects are vital to our ecosystem as they pollinate crops and flowers, provide food for higher-level organisms, break down the detritus, maintain a balance in ecosystems by eating the leaves of plants and help recycle nutrients in the soil. However, they also consume somewhere between 18% and 26% of crops produced around the world, a loss valued at USD 470 billion.

Insects burn calories at a faster rate when their surroundings heat up, forcing them to consume more. Elevated levels of carbon dioxide can increase levels of simple sugars in leaves and lower their nitrogen content. This can increase the damage caused by many insects, which will wolf on more leaves to meet their metabolic requirements of nitrogen.

Explaining the phenomenon V.V. Ramamurthy, Division of Entomology, Indian Agriculture Research Institute (IARI), New Delhi, says, "As insects are cold-blooded organisms, the temperature of their bodies is approximately the same as that of the environment. Due to global warming, when the temperature rises, and also the relative humidity with more rainless humid days, the sucking pests, in particular, are likely to multiply. Also, due to climate change in hilly terrains, there will be an upward movement of insect population. In this process, at least temporarily there will be extensions in range."

## The pest menace

Several minor pests have become major due to change in agricultural practices and climatic variability. Take, for instance, the brown planthopper. It was a minor pest in rice of no economic significance till its outbreak in Kerala in 1973-74. An infestation of brown planthopper in Basmati (aromatic) and non-Basmati rice in western Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Delhi are recent examples. Another example is of the spotted bollworm which completes its life cycle in 88 days when the temperature is 16 degrees Celsius, but at 25 degrees, the lifecycle reduces to 31 days, which means more pests.

Incidents of thrips (a sucking pest) attack on crops like groundnut, cotton, chilli, roses, grapes, citrus and pomegranates are being reported. There are also more frequent attacks of diamondback moth in cabbage, and hoppers on mango. In layman's terms, the appetite of the caterpillar is likely to rise as the earth gets warmer.

Increased temperature results in the extension of the geographical range of pests and pathogens and sudden outbreak of some notorious pests, according to R.R. Patil, Professor of Entomology at the Department of Agriculture and Entomology of Dharwad-based University of Agriculture Sciences.

Researchers at the Coimbatore-based Tamil Nadu Agricultural University having studied the effect of elevated temperature on the development time of rice Yellow Stem Borer (YSB), revealed that the number of eggs laid increased at higher temperatures, while egg hatching was reduced. Insects develop faster, which may be why they lay eggs early, and hence, the population is likely to grow earlier than expected.

Studies undertaken by Indian scientists on the trends of temperature rise, heatwaves, droughts and floods, and sea-level rise are in consonance with the findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), though

the magnitude of changes could differ.

The mean temperature in India is projected to increase up to 1.7 degrees Celsius in the Kharif season (July to October) and up to 3.2 degrees during the Rabi season (November to March). Mean rainfall is expected to increase by 10% by 2070, a scenario leading to a situation affecting many familiar insects restricted to smaller habitats while new pests spread over wider areas.

Invasion by migrant pests due to global warming has become a fact which farmers in India have to deal on a regular basis. Also as quarantine regulations are diluted due to free-trade agreements, more pests are likely to get into areas previously free of them. The most recent case is that of the dreaded Fall Army Worm (FAW) pest (*Spodoptera frugiperda*), which mainly devours maize in its caterpillar phase, but can feed on more than 80 plant species, including other key crops like rice, sorghum, cotton and vegetables.

First spotted in Africa in 2016, it has spread rapidly through the sub-Saharan belt and has created havoc in some 10 states in India, first spotted in Karnataka. According to Down To Earth magazine, the worm though detected mostly in maize crops—a preliminary calculation estimates it has affected nearly 170,000 hectares (ha) of maize crops—there have been reports from states where it has infested paddy, sugarcane and sweet corn.

## Protecting the crop

As pests are part of natural ecosystems and compete with humans for their existence, crop protection technologies are likely to be less effective and need to be customised to suit the climate changes. We are looking at a future when the effectiveness of traditional crop protection technologies will be put to test. In such a situation, pest forewarnings are likely to provide a lead time for impending attacks and thus minimise crop loss and optimise pest control leading to reduced cost of cultivation.

How do we deal with the situation? Make integrated pest management methods the norm, says Nigel Andrew, Professor of Entomology at the University of New England and Fellow of the Royal Entomological Society. He adds: "Cultural methods of insect control will need to be re-introduced and used more extensively. Areas of alternative habitat will need to be replanted on to farms to enable predators and parasitoids to be active. Methods such as sterile insect techniques will also need to be used as alternatives to chemical controls."



**Hiren Kumar Bose** is a journalist based in Thane, Maharashtra. He doubles up as a weekend farmer.

# Eco-friendly alternatives to plastic

*India generates a whopping 26,000 tonnes of plastic waste every day and by 2020, our consumption is expected to increase exponentially. If we have to eliminate plastic from this earth, every individual will have to make a concerted effort.*

**Usha Hariprasad** attended a fair where a wide range of plastic alternatives were exhibited that will help us make the switch to eco-friendly products.



## **Bio-degradable packaging products are a good alternative to plastic**

**R**ecently, the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) had organised a fair to promote eco-friendly alternatives to plastic. Titled 'Parisara Snehi Vastugalu'--- environment friendly products, it boasted of more than 70 stalls displaying a wide array of plastic alternatives. A number of colourful brochures were put up at the event. Some of them made you think. For instance there was a heart-tugging poster that said 'Don't feed plastic to sacred cows that provide you milk'. The event was also informative. It came as a shock to know that Karnataka was one among the top five plastic producing states of India.

Karnataka had banned the usage of single use plastic three years back. The banned items were carry bags, flags, banners, flex, polystyrene plates, spoons, cups, cling film etc., all made from plastic. However certain plastics were exempted from the ban such as diary products, bags and sheets used in forestry, etc.

However Bengaluru has been rather slow in implementing this. Despite conducting raids on shops in the city and imposing fines, plastic continues to be in use. In an effort to bring in awareness and also to showcase viable

alternative to plastic, the BBMP had organised this fair. And to lead the way, BBMP has stopped using plastic disposables in its offices and in public meetings.

## **A wide array of products**

The fair showcased tonnes of environment friendly products. Here is a brief look at some of them.

### **Sanitary napkins**

Every year, India has to dispose of 12.3 billion sanitary napkins, most of them non-biodegradable. The plastic in sanitary pads is inorganic and does not biodegrade. Chemicals used to bleach pads are unsafe causing problems such as skin rashes, urinary tract infection etc. Organic pads made from cotton are also not so great either—they are water intensive as cotton requires gallons of water.

So the fair provided an alternative --Saukhyam Reusable Pads made from banana fibres. The pads were made of banana fibres and cloth. Banana fibres are astonishingly good absorbers, a lot better than cotton, and most



importantly they degrade within 3-6 months. Banana tree fibres are agro waste. When a banana tree is cut, the fibres are extracted out of it. The recyclable pads last for a good four years, saves money and are eco-friendly. Saukhyam has budget friendly options like the Essential line of pads. Their starter pack begins at Rs 330. And can be bought online.

Other eco-friendly options come from brands such as Eco Femme, Saathi Pads etc.

## Return gifts

We often buy gifts such as Barbie dolls, super heroes, plastic toys, etc., for children. However a stall at the fair caught my eye. It offered something unique--seed pencils. Made from recycled paper it works like a regular pencil. When the pencil becomes short, invert the pencil and plant in soil. The end of the pencil comes with seeds and if watered daily will germinate within a week or more. This stall by Sangeetha had other interesting products -- toothbrushes made from wheat, corn brushes, diyas made from cow dung that burn completely and get rid of mosquitoes.

Another alternative is to gift saplings of flowers, herbs etc. It is an innovative way to get children interested in gardening and helping them connect with nature.

## Recycled paper

An interesting stall was from Compact Innovation Avenues. It displayed note books, diaries, plain printing paper, bags etc., all made from recycled paper. 'We can save about 17 trees, and 30,000 litres of water per ton of recycled paper if we switch over to this option,' explained a representative from their team. The product titled 'Ethical Paper' is unbleached thus conserving water. The paper therefore is not your usual bright and white colour that you normally use. You can order copier paper, notebooks, files, conference pads etc., from their online website – Recycledpaper.in

## Straws

Something as innocuous as straw made a headline in 2015. It was a video that shocked the world-- a sea turtle was wounded with a plastic straw stuck in its nose. Single use, non-biodegradable, it is a dangerous type of waste that harms marine life. As an alternative to this useless straw there are other eco-friendly choices. Straws made from bamboo is one of them. These were getting sold as cheap as one rupee in the fair. The benefit of using this straw is that these are reusable. You just have to wash them and allow them to dry. You can soak them frequently in hot water to give an extra edge. There are health benefits too. Plastic straws have polypropylene and contact with hot liquids can leach out chemicals. Bamboo is a safer alternative free of chemicals. After a couple of uses when you see significant wear and tear you can just break them and bury them.

Eco Products, Pappco, Bamboo India are some brands from where you can buy such straws.

## Food packaging

Very often we carry food that's hot in containers made from food grade plastic. These are touted as safe. However an essential compound of such plastic containers is BPA. Though approved by FDA it is still unsafe. BPA leaches out at high temperatures. So they cannot be used in microwaves or to store hot liquids. Their effects on our body are alarming. They interfere with our hormonal functions. So what's the alternative?

Enter Chuk that manufactures plates, bowls, trays, containers-- tableware which are completely compostable as they are made from agri waste. And microwave safe. These products are all made from sugarcane waste and are a great alternative to plastic coated food containers. They are lightweight yet strong enough to prevent leaks. Apart from Chuk, there are other companies like Pappco too that work with such alternatives.

At the fair there were local manufacturers like Shree Enterprises who promised to manufacture containers for idli, cake and sweet boxes as well that were 100 percent recyclable without using plastic lamination.

## Composting

Composting is a novel way of getting rid of kitchen waste and turning it into black gold for soil.

Daily Dump a household name in the city provides a variety of products for home and community composting. They have a variety of products – starter kits, home composters, community composters, leaf and garden composters etc. For home composting they have units like the Kambha, Gobble and Chomp. For community composting they have products like Aaga. This is a hot pile composter and comes in pairs for every 20-25 homes. Their products are available at purchase on their dailydump website.

Our country generates a whopping 26,000 tonnes of plastic waste every day and an average Indian generates 11kg of plastic every day. By 2020 it is predicated that our annual plastic consumption would cross 20 million tonnes. If we want to eliminate plastic we have to personally make a switch to such alternatives. And fairs such as these are of great help in connecting citizens, corporates, manufacturers and distributors together.



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

# Going green with bamboo

*Bamboo has been traditionally known as poor man's timber. But not anymore. Recognising its diverse uses, the tallest member of the grass family is being promoted in many new and interesting avatars, including saris and sweaters, writes Usha Hariprasad.*



*Various products made from bamboo on display*

There is a haunting song of bamboo in the folk song of Kannada. It goes something like this. 'Bidirama tai kele, neenyari galadavale'. The gist of the song is:

"Mother Bamboo... You touch the lives of everyone. You grow as a grass, yet as bamboo you touch the skies. You become a cradle when a child is born, his toy horse when he becomes older. You become the pillars of his wedding hall when he gets married and become a ladder when he wants to climb. When he becomes older you support him through a walking stick and when he dies you don't ditch him. You carry him to his grave."

The song depicts how bamboo is intimately connected to our villages – from getting involved in all significant aspects of man's life and then some; a storage granary, a roof, a basket, an oar, a flute and so on... There are more than 1500 uses of bamboo. An article in the Guardian titled 'Bamboo species at the risk of extinction' mentions that there are around 2.5 billion people depending on bamboo for food, for construction, trade etc. Yet today it has a negative connotation with bamboo being relegated as poor man's timber.

## Bamboo and its uses

Bamboo belongs to the grass family – Poaceae. It is one of the fastest growing plant, which can survive in most

adverse climatic and soil conditions. Some species of bamboo can grow to 39 inches in just 24 hours. Bamboo grove is said to release 35 percent more oxygen than any other group trees. What's more, it absorbs four times as much as carbon.

As bamboo has a root system that is fibrous it acts as a good soil binder.

Many animals depend on it for survival. Apart from the giant pandas, red pandas, bats, lemurs, mountain gorilla etc., depend on the bamboo. Asian elephants take shelter in bamboo forests.

Bamboo has also been used as herbal medicine. It is considered as an aphrodisiac.

Compared to steel, bamboo has higher strength density ratio. It can be used efficiently in construction industry as flooring, bamboo plywood panels and boards etc. Bamboo fibers are stronger than steel and is a safer material to be used in earthquake zones. Industrial bamboo can ease the pressure on forests.

And bamboo industry is one of the traditional cottage industry in our country. It can create a wealth of opportunities for tribal people.

## The bamboo market

Bamboo grows in almost all the states of India. India happens to be the second largest nation growing bamboo after China. Around 125 indigenous and 11 exotic species of bamboo are found in the country. More than half of bamboo cultivation in the country happens in the North-east – Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, etc. Despite all this, India's contribution to the global market happens to be a mere 4.5 percent.

One of the chief reasons for this was the old Indian Forest Act of 1927 that classified bamboo as tree and felled bamboo as timber. Therefore bamboo had to face restrictions for its cutting and transportation. Though the Forest Rights Act of 2006 did away with this grouping of bamboo classifying it as non-timber, it gives the right of ownership of bamboo to tribals. So artisans and groups involved in manufacturing of bamboo products face restrictions. All these factors have gone against the development of bamboo industry in India.

## Formation of Bamboo Society of India

However things are slowly changing. Seeing the potential of bamboo the Bamboo Society of India was formed in 1989. It started out with 15 members and today it has around 1050 members. Apart from promoting bamboo and its products, it has taken up several activities- organising workshops and conferences to create awareness, training programmes for farmers to market bamboo, sponsors research and scientific study on bamboo and undertakes bamboo development projects. It has seven recognised state chapters in Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, New Delhi, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Kerala, Karnataka and Tripura. Through these chapters they are trying to realise these objectives.

This year on 'World Bamboo Day' a fest was organised by Bamboo Society of India – Karnataka Chapter along with Department of Horticulture, Government of Karnataka at Lalbagh, Bangalore. The Thai Royal Forestry Department started the Bamboo World Day in 2009, and it has been continuously celebrated by the Bamboo Society of India here. The fest tried to create awareness about bamboo and its uses.

There were various products made from bamboo on display – baskets, furniture, jewelry etc. But two to three things were of special interest.

## Bamboo dress

There was a bamboo fashion show at the event. And that's when I realised that even clothes could be made from bamboo!. Bamboo pulp is used to create fibre for the fabric. The yarn made from bamboo fibres is either used on its own or mixed with other fibres to make cloth. Clothes made from bamboo fibre are environment friendly as it decomposes in soil. Plus, as the fibres don't undergo any

form of chemical treatment they are easy on the skin, breathable, and also have antibacterial and antifungal properties. From sarees to tops and tunics to sweaters, bamboo can be seen in all avatars.



## Musical instruments

There were various types of musical instruments made of bamboo at the event – flute, drums, mariamba to mention a few. A Kerala band versatile in playing these instruments performed a lovely number at the event.



## Bamboo rice

At one of the displays a stall of 'Kudingila Grameena Naturals' was selling bamboo rice or what is known as Rajan rice. This rice astonishingly takes around 60 years to form. Every 60 years, the bamboo blossoms and the flowers produce this rice. Though expensive there were many buyers, as the rice is considered to have medicinal value and is touted as effective for diabetes, joint pain, lowering cholesterol etc. it is also said to improve the immunity levels. Today, you can buy bamboo rice online.





## Engineered bamboo lumber

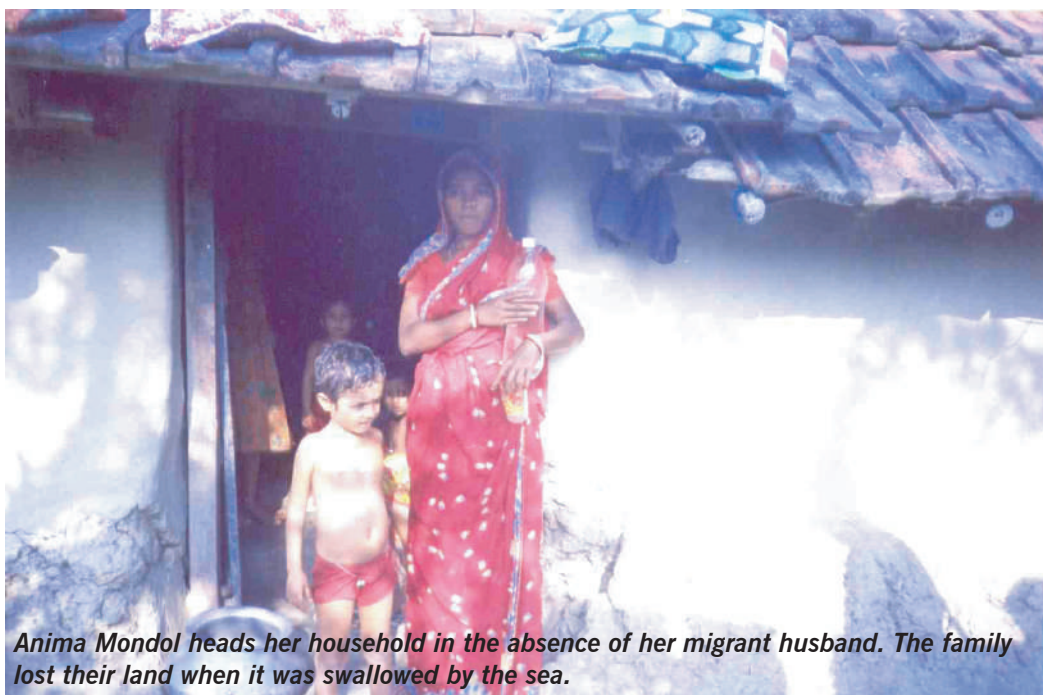
Traditionally, bamboo has been used in the construction industry. Its popularity lies in the fact that it is low cost, and widely available. It was however limited in use due to the fact that it had a hollow core. To overcome this, engineered bamboo lumber can be used. The lumber is developed using crushed bamboo and phenol formaldehyde resin in a definite ratio of 1:1.8. The process of making engineered lumber to increase durability is a long one. It involves hydrothermal preservative treatment, resin application, drying, hot press etc. This lumber can be very easily used in making doors, windows, columns, tiles etc. Laminated bamboo boards are good substitutes for wood. Bamboo wood is comparable to teak. And can be used as flooring tiles, furniture etc.

From bamboo brushes, to bamboo furniture, we are spoiled for choice when it comes to choosing bamboo. And going for these biodegradable products is one way to reduce our contribution towards landfills. Bamboo is also a source of good luck. And we sure could do with a bit of luck in our lives, don't you think? So opt for ecofriendly bamboo this year and go green.



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

# Climate refugees: Staring at a grim future



**Anima Mondol heads her household in the absence of her migrant husband. The family lost their land when it was swallowed by the sea.**

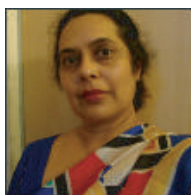
(continued from page 05...)

In such a scenario, rural distress compels a few members of every family to migrate, to keep the rest afloat. It is the same story in western Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Assam, where yearly floods, and untimely rain are eating into farmers' savings on a regular basis.

Climate Change is real and here to stay. But to minimise the damage to our land and population, it is important that the government digs in to adopt strong measures under its National Mission for Climate Change. This would mean refraining from groundwater prospecting

or sand mining along our coasts, or building within 500 metres of the tidal line. It will also mean taking utmost care to maintain our coastal wetlands, marine ecosystems, and mangroves.

The IPCC's Special Report on Climate change and Land has outlined the need for improved agricultural practices, land and forest management for mitigation. It is time we paid heed.



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

# The green touch by coffee-chains

*Coffee-shop chains around the world are adopting several initiatives to minimise the anthropospheric footprints, in their effort to address issues related to climate change.*

**G. Venkatesh** says, 'coffeephile' sustainabilist like him can now sip their coffee with a clear conscience.



*Coffee shop chains such as Starbucks are realising that they can be able stewards of environment*

**'C**offee is a language in itself,' said Jackie Chan. Now, it has started speaking the language of sustainability.

Coffee shops have been the wellsprings of creativity and original ideas which have transformed the world. New ones keep springing up in cities and towns around the world these days...and play a key role in promoting social welfare by bringing people together, and also contributing to economic development not merely by way of making people pay for coffee, but also inspiring ideas which are subsequently transformed to realities in industries and universities around the world. The health benefits of coffee are quite well-known and coffee-shops would thus surely rank well above the beer bars in this regard. A lot of research has also been conducted into the comparative life-cycle environmental impacts of the various ways of consuming coffee; and when one does an analysis of this type, several other product life-cycles get enmeshed, and consumer behaviour becomes a key determinant of how small (or big) the environmental footprint of coffee consumption can be. And if you add the food which is also available at coffee shops these days (in fact the diversity and variety has increased conspicuously at least in Europe, over the last couple of years), you have a complex case to handle – in terms of sheer numbers of product life-cycles to manage and 'make greener'. For a conscientious 'coffeephile' sustainabilist like yours sincerely, any news about coffee-shop chains by adding on the 'green touch' to the social and economic 'goods' they provide directly/indirectly, is something to

rejoice, for then, I look forward to the 'complete coffee experience' – enriching the brain and the soul – when I step into one such coffee-shop. I read one line about Starbucks' initiatives to address climate change, and was impelled to find out more. Thereafter I decided to contact a Swedish coffeehouse chain (Wayne's Coffee), which I frequent here in Karlstad in south western Sweden, and also seek out more information from Starbucks. If little drops of coffee fill a whole coffee cup, efforts taken by coffeehouse chains around the world (Wikipedia lists several of them), will certainly go a long way in contributing to the truncation of the anthropospheric footprint. And then, wherever in the world a sustainabilist goes, he/she can sip on his/her coffee with a clean conscience.

## Stewards of environment

Often sustainability declarations are branded as greenwash. Many I have come across do not believe much in what corporates claim in such reports. But it must be said that efforts are being made. The water, energy and material-resource footprints of many coffee chains, has grown at a slower pace vis-à-vis the sales registered by their outlets and/or their geographical outreach.

Wayne's Coffee has influenced the reduction in the use of pesticides upstream – by coffee farmers in exporting countries in Central and South America. Of course, when you look into your cup of coffee, it would not be easy to imagine the environmental impacts caused by the pesticides used to



grow the crop hundreds of kilometres away. But it would be a good thing to pause and understand what is 'embedded' in the drink. KRAV, for instance, is an environmental certification given by authorities in Sweden for products which, over their life-cycles, pay close attention to biodiversity preservation, social welfare and health, reduced water usage and environmental upkeep. While 35% of the Swedish chain's products have secured this certification, the company has set its eyes on a higher target – over 50%. While coffee can only be sourced from faraway, Wayne's Coffee makes it a point to source whatever possible locally – to minimise environmental impacts associated with long-distance transport. The shops are equipped with LED-lighting to reduce electricity use. Ofcourse, Swedish electricity is not carbon-intensive at all; being made up predominantly of nuclear energy and hydropower. But even then, reducing electricity usage wherever possible is a desirable approach to adopt. However, the electricity Wayne's Coffee prefers to use is totally hydropower! Nuclear energy is not renewable, as we know, and has some other risks. The employees are committed to travelling by train whenever that alternative is available. All waste is sorted diligently, and material cycles are either closed, or the energy content of materials is extracted in incineration plants.

Now, to Starbucks, and attention must be drawn at first to the fact that the chain has reduced its water usage by over 26.5%. This of course becomes noteworthy, if Starbucks decides to expand into countries where there is relative water scarcity. Then, there is the Reclamation Drive-Thru which has come up in Tukwila, Washington, which is made entirely of reclaimed shipping containers (which otherwise may perhaps have been smelted and

recycled back to steel). Starbucks has pioneered the use of recycled coffee grounds in the table-tops of its shops; and claims to account for over 10% of materials extracted within 500 miles of every outlet it sells coffee from. LED-lighting in Starbucks' US-shops would surely contribute significantly to not just reduction in energy usage, but also a truncation of the carbon footprint of the enterprise, considering that the US energy-mix is carbon-intensive!

We have coffee shop chains in India as well, and of course there are several such all over the world. One can be certain that many of them are realising that small though they may be in the global retail sector, they can be able stewards of the environment. Learning from one another and emulating, will work wonders. The Bamboo Cup sold by Wayne's Coffee (yours sincerely has purchased a few of these as gifts for friends), is something one could use for a long time. It is compostable....from soil to soil, after having being instrumental in slaking your thirst and sowing the seeds for creative ideas to take the world further on the road towards sustainability. As Anneli Östlund from the Export/Marketing department of Wayne's Coffee tells the author, 10,000 cups have been sold thus far...and many more will follow hopefully.



**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.**

## WHO AM I?

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



*Earth...*







## RANIKHET: THE HIMALAYAN QUEEN

*The soaring pine trees with the jagged peaks of the Himalayas forming a backdrop, Ranikhet is an alluring hill resort in Uttarakhand. Besides the green tranquil landscape, this tiny hamlet, discovered and developed by the British has an aura of spirituality too.*

***Text & Photographs : Gustasp and Jeroo Irani***





***A charming church (above) and Durga temple (right) at Ranikhet***

**T**he temple dedicated to Goddess Kali was shielded by mighty deodars that soared heavenward as though in search of the divine. We had stumbled on this magical little temple on our way to Ranikhet in the Kumaon region of Uttarakhand. The heavily garlanded idol exuded a sense of power as well as serenity.

Childless women conceived when they turned to the Goddess for help; sickly children grew strong and robust like the deodars nearby, and adulterous spouses realised the folly of their wanton ways when dragged to the Goddess by an aggrieved mate, related a priest at the temple.

We wanted to linger, for the temple had filled us with a spiritual sense of well-being but Ranikhet beckoned. We had left Kausani fairly early that morning, careening down vertigo-inducing roads that coiled around the vast bellies of mountains, some cloaked in forests, others mantled by terraced mustard fields. The occasional truck driver hurtled past us, down narrow ravine-hugging roads, while slate-grey rivers, swollen with snow-melt, kept us company for a part of the way.





## Sylvan getaway

Our car zipped down roads, shielded by trees brushed in shades of green, gold and rust and occasionally daubed with the blood-red hues of rhododendron flowers. In the distance, small hamlets seemed to wobble on mountain ledges while the occasional green field added an aura of lush fertility to the landscape.

We arrived in Ranikhet, located 1,830 m above sea level, shaded by arrow-straight pine trees, with the jagged peaks of the Himalayas forming a backdrop in the distance. Sprawling across a forested ridge, the picturesque locale was discovered and developed by the British in 1869. The hill station with its grand Himalayan vistas floored Lord Mayo, the then Viceroy of India, who seriously contemplated shifting the army headquarters from Shimla to Ranikhet. Even today, we discovered after a two-day stay, Ranikhet is alluring, with its wide open spaces, a high altitude golf course and long enchanting walks in the surrounding forests. The Kumaon Regimental Centre at the heart of vast lush grounds also houses a museum and a memorial.

For us, our trip to Ranikhet was calibrated to nostalgia, for we were returning to this sylvan getaway after a gap of 40 years, having been there as children. And while much

has changed, there are parts of Ranikhet where Father Time is a stranger and has not managed to sneak in. In the old days, Ranikhet was the place one headed to, in order to *ooh* and *aah* at the Himalayas as they rose in snowy splendour at dawn when a timorous sun would brush the peaks a shade of pink and then gild them with gold. That was the time when Almora, Chaukori and Munsiyari were not part of the traveller's lexicon.

During our recent stay, the Himalayas coyly hid behind veils of mist, but Ranikhet still exudes a sense of intimacy with nature and untouched beauty. Part of its many charms are undoubtedly the weathered churches, and sprawling Raj bungalows where we could feel and touch the legacy of the Raj. In the charming bungalows with their pitched red-tiled roofs, shielded by soaring pines, probably lie buried many a tale of intrigue and skulduggery that happened in that era. Most have a patch of garden out front, and some have been repurposed and function as elegant country house hotels. The 119-year-old Rosemount Ranikhet hotel, for instance, has been restored with great sensitivity, its warm wood-panelled interiors glow in the light of crackling fireplaces. Its café au lait façade basks golden in the evening sun, and splendid lawns with wrought iron garden furniture make viewing the Himalayas a treat there.



***A high altitude golf course surrounded by soaring pine trees***





***Forest walk – one of the undeniable pleasures of Ranikhet***

## Deep, mysterious forests

One of the undeniable pleasures of Ranikhet are walks in a forest when birds with multi-hued plumage flutter overhead, while pine trees tall as totem poles from some pantheon of forest gods needle the sky. Locals exercising their dogs of indeterminate breed (all hill dogs look handsome with their fur-like coats) cast warm smiles our way. In contrast to the green tranquil landscape is the undulating bazaar, a-swirl with colour and awash with wonderful buys fashioned by local craftsmen – tribal jewellery, local woollens, brass lamps and candles... Nearby, two old churches have been converted into boutiques with hand-operated looms where one can buy bright spangled shawls and tweed material.

This miniscule hill resort, virtually un-ravaged by time's heavy hand, has an aura of spirituality too... It has ashrams like the Anandpuri Ashram, described "as a place of spiritual purification, healing and education based on the teachings of Shri Babaji", embraced by many gurus in the region.

We did not have the time to embark on walks and

long treks in Ranikhet, though we would have loved to linger and explore unknown hidden terrain; and stop to smell the mountain flowers. The tinkling of bells in the Jhula Devi temple beckons visitors to step inside, to meditate and feel the deep peace that swathes this ancient house of worship. And the Chaubatia orchards, full of fruity bounty, are also within walking distance, south of the main Mall Road of Ranikhet. Another pretty place is the artificial lake of Bhaludham, where we picnicked with some cucumber sandwiches, pastries and fresh fruit.

That evening we sat by a crackling fireplace, warming our chilled fingers, happy that Ranikhet had borne the weight of history so well and had repelled the onslaught of modernity. We recalled a legend told to us by a local, of a Kumaoni queen Rani Padmini. The Rani was enchanted with the mountains and green glens of a tiny hill hamlet and requested her king, Raja Sukherdev, to build her a grand palace there. They then named it Ranikhet or queen's meadow. The palace has vanished but the place continues to enchant tourists in search of a serene escape; wayfarers explore the deep forests of wonder and mystery and hike down the mountain trails to stumble on scenes that resemble a painting by John Constable.





***A colonial home – reminder of the Raj legacy***

## Fact File

Ranikhet is a year-round destination but March-April are good months to visit as also the months of October and November when the snow-mantled peaks preen with unfailing regularity for the visitor.

There are lots of excursions that one can embark on, to picnic spots in the area.

By way of accommodation, there are the Kumaon Mandal Vikas Nigam (an arm of Uttarakhand Tourism) properties, Rosemount Ranikhet (part of the Chevron group of hotels), Trishul Lodge, Majkhali (on the outskirts of Ranikhet), West View Hotel (in a pine grove) and a number of other options as well.

Contact: Kumaon Mandal Vikas Nigam Ltd, at: [www.kmvn.org](http://www.kmvn.org)



**Gustasp and Jeroo Irani are travel companions for whom life is a never-ending journey. Over the last 25 years they have travelled extensively across India and the globe, taking the rough with the smooth; sampling different cultures and cuisines. In the process they have trekked in the Australian Outback, slurped snake soup in Hong Kong, have danced with the Samburus in Africa, stayed with a local family in a Malay village, cracked the Da Vinci Code in Paris... For them, writing and photography are more than just freezing moments of that journey; it's a passion.**





## WILD AND BEAUTIFUL KAZIRANGA

*The vast open grasslands and water bodies at Kaziranga National Park in Assam, make wildlife viewing a unique experience. The park is a paradise for nature lovers, with the One-horned rhino being the star attraction.*

***Text & Photographs : Gustasp and Jeroo Irani***





**Entrance to the Kaziranga National Park**

**W**e gazed at the star attraction of Kaziranga National Park in Assam – the Asiatic One-horned rhino – confused. The beast posing for our cameras on our elephant safari was downright ugly. Beady eyes, a big long snout with a wart-like horn, an overhanging upper lip, long pointed ears, terrible skin, obese... Yet, we had to concede that he was an amazingly handsome hunk who commanded our attention to the exclusion of everything around him. And like a model who was aware of his striking good looks, he posed for us – looking straight into our lenses and then presenting a picture-perfect profile.

Out in these untamed wilds, a fleeting thought injected itself in our stream of consciousness and we found ourselves offering silent thanks to Lady Curzon for saving these magnificent animals from extinction. Way back in 1904, the wife of Lord Curzon, the Viceroy of India visited the area in the hope of seeing the rhino in its natural habitat. All she got to see were its pugmarks, droppings and little else. Poachers had systematically felled the great beast for its prized horn till only twelve remained. She realised that the matter called for action at the highest level and prevailed upon her husband to declare Kaziranga as a protected area.



**A serpent eagle**



The rest, as they say, is history. Kaziranga's conservation effort is an amazing success story. In 1926, Kaziranga was declared a Reserve Forest, in 1940 a Wildlife Sanctuary and, soon after, a National Park. In 1985, Kaziranga National Park was declared a United Nations World Heritage Site. According to Forest Department statistics, the rhino population touched 366 in 1966, 1,700 in 1993 and stood at 2,413 in 1918.

Though Kaziranga was not part of the Project Tiger conservation programme till 1908, the big cat has thrived there thanks to the protection offered to the rhino. Currently, over 100 tigers stalk its wilds. Though we did not see a tiger during the game drive following the elephant safari, we did get to see its gruesome handiwork: the half-eaten leg of a baby elephant it had killed two days earlier. The brown stump-like remains by the side of the road was a grim reminder that there was a dark side to this seemingly idyllic Garden of Eden: that the brutal laws of nature – eat and be eaten – still prevailed.

## Savage paradise

We had entered this savage paradise through the Mihimukh gate where a sweep of grassland was smudged with

silvery-blue pools of water. A snow-white egret rode the back of a rhino as it strolled across nature's grand canvas. We pulled up alongside an embankment further down the safari trail and climbed to the top of an observation tower and gazed out at the ever-changing tapestry of a flock of pelicans swimming with pendulum-like regularity in front of a wading rhino; wild ducks lazing on a finger of land that needed the water; black-necked storks balancing on red stilt-like legs in the shallows; flocks of birds gracefully soaring into the blue skies above, the feathers on the tips of their wings twitching as they navigated the wind currents...

According to the forest ranger accompanying us (all vehicles are required to have one), Kaziranga is a sanctuary for over 500 species of birds. Even if the park were devoid of mammals, it would still be one of the best bird watching sites in India. But the truth is that it is home to a variety of wild residents, large and small. We were rewarded with excellent sightings of herds of wild Indian water buffalo and barasinghas, the males carrying their 12-point antlers with ballerina-like grace.

Since much of Kaziranga is open country covered by wetlands and grasslands, wildlife viewing is a treat. Around January, each year, the tall elephant grass that provides



*An elephant herd roaming in the wild*





***A one-horned rhino and a buffalo come face to face inside the park***

cover for animals is burned by the Forest Department in controlled stages and from February onwards up to the monsoons – when the park is closed to tourist traffic – animal sightings are the best.

However, there are sections when the safari trail ducks through dense forests that are watered by the Brahmaputra. Once the monsoons set in around mid-June, the placid water of the river is transformed into a torrential flood that spreads itself like a giant all-consuming slug across the park. These are trying times for the rhinos and other residents of the park who must retreat to the surrounding highlands or risk being stranded on the many temporary islands that emerge across the floodplains or, worse, drowning in the rising waters. Come October, when the monsoons and the floodwaters abate, the animals return to more hospitable habitat. It is also the time when the park reopens and tourists are welcomed into the animal paradise once more.

We emerged from the dense forest, and grasslands rolled out ahead of us. On a pillar at the base of an observation platform, flood levels over the years had been

recorded in bright red strips. As we drove down the last leg of the safari trail, we felt a tinge of denial: Kaziranga was holding back on us and keeping one of its treasures under wraps – elephants; not the ones that take visitors on a safari but the ones that roam free in the wilds. Just as we started to reconcile ourselves to the fact that a safari is a roll of the dice when it comes to animal sightings, we came upon a herd of elephants grazing on water hyacinths a few metres from the dirt track. Upon seeing us, the matriarch started to organise the retreat of her brood; the babies lined up in single file, the youngest in the front and the older ones behind, as they marched off towards the thicket.

One greedy youngster lingered on to feed on the succulent vegetation only to earn the displeasure of the matriarch who trumpeted her discontent; a chilling, thrilling blast that reverberated across the wildlife park. The young elephant immediately responded to the warning and hurried off to join the rest of the herd as it melted into the forest.

It was time for us too to leave the soothing calm of the forest and head back to the bustle of civilisation.





*A flying stork*

## Fact File

Jorhat (96 km) and Guwahati (225 km) are the two closest airports to Kaziranga.

Bokakhat is the closest town to the entrance of Kaziranga National Park.

By way of accommodation, Assam Tourism runs a number of lodges, including Aranya Lodge. All the lodges, hotels and resorts – government and private – are located outside the park.

Most lodges and resorts will help arrange jeep and elephant safaris for their guests.

Elephant safaris (prior reservation is essential) operate only during the early morning. The duration of the safari is around 45 minutes.

Jeep safaris are conducted in open vehicles. Forest department guides and guards (at a price) must accompany every vehicle that enters the park.

There are three safari trails within the park: Kohora or central range (the most popular one and the venue of the Elephant safari) Agaratoli or eastern range (a birder's paradise) and Bagori or western range.

The park is closed during the monsoon months. The best time to visit the park is between February and May when the elephant grass is burnt and game viewing is at its best.

## Animal spotting at Kaziranga safari

The vast open grasslands and water bodies in Kaziranga National Park makes wildlife viewing both easy and unique and visitors are very likely to spot rhino, elephant, hog deer, sambar, barasingha, water buffalo, turtle... and abundance of birds including water birds. You may probably spot Langur monkey, Gibbon, wild boar and snakes. If you are lucky then you are likely to spot tiger, bear, otter, leopard and gangetic dolphin.



Gustasp and Jeroo Irani are travel companions for whom life is a never-ending journey. Over the last 25 years they have travelled extensively across India and the globe, taking the rough with the smooth; sampling different cultures and cuisines. In the process they have trekked in the Australian Outback, slurped snake soup in Hong Kong, have danced with the Samburus in Africa, stayed with a local family in a Malay village, cracked the Da Vinci Code in Paris... For them, writing and photography are more than just freezing moments of that journey; it's a passion.

## Our Last Six Issues

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## *“Good and evil come about because of the use of free will”.*

A devotee of Sai Baba of Shirdi, Mumbai-based **Ruzbeh N. Bharucha** is one of the most influential spiritual writers. A former journalist and documentary film-maker, he has authored nineteen books, and his articles have been published in leading newspapers.

His collaboration with Zambhala-India's yoga, music and life spirit festival, the first of its kind, gave birth to a series of powerful videos called 'Ramblings with Ruzbeh N. Bharucha'.

The 110<sup>th</sup> Master for the 'Speaking Tree', where he writes an immensely popular blog on spirituality; his daily Facebook page affirmations and messages are a source of inspiration to thousands.

### **A. Radhakrishnan in conversation with Ruzbeh N. Bharucha.**

#### **What makes you write?**

I am not really sure as to why I write. Despite writing numerous books, the process of writing being sharing one's views and thoughts, I am only a story teller, communicating various stories to like-minded people.



Spirituality has so many facets and such great Masters have walked the earth, that it is always with a sense of joy and happiness that I write about 'Them' or in my limited way, try to share 'Their' philosophy and 'Their' lives. May be this is my way of sharing the Light with others.

#### **What does your literary success mean to you?**

I don't know whether you can call me a literary success. Adulation, praise or even numbers have never mattered as I just have a story to share.

It immensely pleases me to read mails of people confessing how my books and philosophy have changed their lives for the better, and helped them overcome a tragedy or cope with life. The knowledge that my simple words and philosophy are helping people to walk the path and be better versions of themselves, is what truly inspires me to continue writing and makes success worth its while.

#### **Tell us in brief about some books published by you so far.**

My first book was The Last Marathon, based on spirit communication and life after death, while Devi's Emerald is a book on Swamiji Vishnu Sadanand Nayak, who channelled Maa Mookambika Devi.

Then I got into writing on social themes. *Shadows in Cages* is the first English book in India to discuss the issue of mother and child living together in Indian Prisons. It got translated in other languages too.

*My God is a Juvenile Delinquent*, is on children who commit crime and their lives in juvenile homes. The Supreme Court placed it on the list of Recommended Readings for Judges presiding over Juvenile Courts. I also wrote a book on slum demolitions, called *Yamuna Gently Weeps*. The book and the film have been showcased worldwide. Then there is the *Fakir Trilogy*. The fourth part shall be published early next year. This book has been translated in German too.

Books on essays and quotes on spirituality have also been published and a book called *Conversations with Dada Vaswani: A Perfect Disciple, A Reluctant Master* on my dear Dada Vaswani too has been well received.

*Rabda* is very close to my heart as it is about Sai Baba of Shirdi, a fiction book with His life as the main theme; whereas Sai Baba, *The Messiah Of Oneness*, is about his life and him as a human being, his routine and his philosophy. I am also very fond of *The Perfect Ones*, a book on various Masters and their lives and their philosophies.

*ICE With Unusual Spirits* is a fiction book about spirit communication, life after death and mainly the philosophy of Sage Thiruvalluvar who channelled through a drunken artist.

### How did publishing your first book change your process of writing?

It took me a decade of writing various books which I would eventually tear up, till the first book *The Last Marathon* was published. It didn't change my process of writing, but only motivated me further. Also as a stickler for schedules I only write on subjects that truly interest me. If a book can't captivate me, how will it captivate my readers?

### What kind of and how long do you spend researching, before beginning a book?

For a social subject, the research is exhaustive, possibly over a year. But if writing fiction, there is very little research and the book can be written faster. While the research for *Rabda* or *Sai Baba, The Messiah of Oneness*, took a few months, the books were written in less than forty days, which is my norm. The same goes for the book and documentary on Dada Vaswani and the book I am presently working on Avatar Meher Baba.

### Do you want each book of yours to stand on its own, or are you trying to build a body of work with connections between each book?

When you are writing about spirituality, there shall always be a connection. In every language, adding two plus two will always make four. Similar are the tenets of spirituality. The way to proper living is always going to be good thoughts, good words and good deeds.

Thus, whether I want it or not, connections between various

books shall always be present. But each book has its own individuality, its own strength, its own substance, its own characteristic.

Thus, each book is an individual river, but all flowing into the ocean of Oneness.

### How do you see your role in impacting and influencing society?

If somebody who reads my books can become a better human being, then I think as an author I have accomplished my purpose. If my books can make an individual lead his or her life with greater self-respect and dignity, then my role has been achieved. If my words can give strength to somebody to pick up their cross and walk onwards, then the purpose is met.

### Why are you a Sai devotee, despite being a Parsi?

First of all, I am a Zoroastrian by religion. Not Parsi. Parsi is a community amongst Zoroastrians. Secondly, Sai Baba is my spiritual Guru. Every ancient religion preaches each one to find themselves a Guru to help one to go through life with dignity, integrity and spiritually. I say my Zoroastrian prayers and I visit the Fire Temple and am very proud to be a Zoroastrian. Just as I am very humbled to have Sai Baba of Shirdi as my Guru.

### Your view on the Hindu religion today.

Hinduism is a way of life. I truly believe Sanatana Dharma, which lays down the eternal duties of all beings, is an all-encompassing way of life. The only religion that has opened Her arms to all. I am not certain if everybody is following Her tenets to the spirit, but majority of people are trying to live their lives with as much dignity as possible, and keeping their heads above water.

### What is the difference between being religious and spiritual?

In today's time and day, religion has become a tool to divide people. Spirituality shall always try to unify people, as it goes beyond all rituals and dogmas, and focuses on oneness and living with dignity, self-respect and selflessness.

### Is spirituality the answer to every question of life?

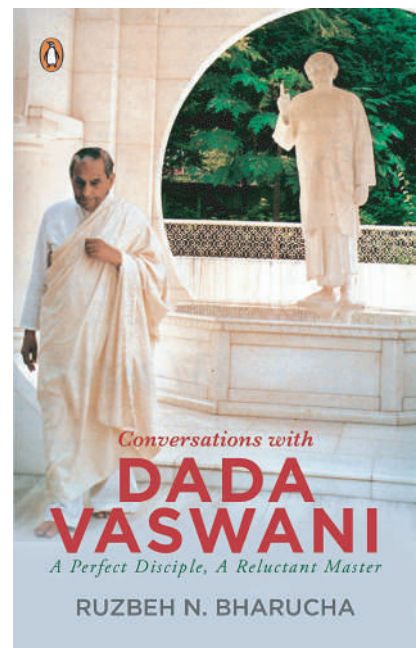
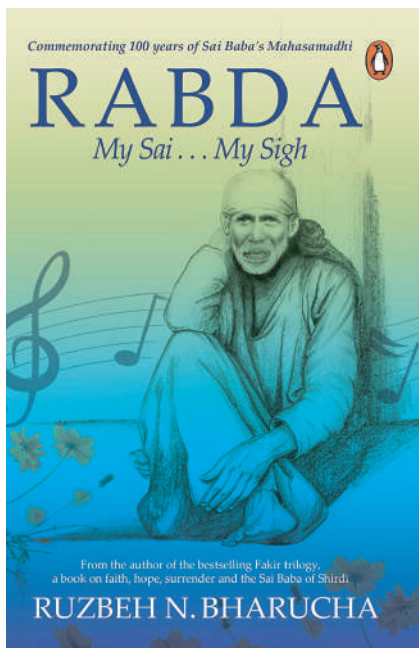
Spirituality is not a trip, but a way of life. I believe that what it truly teaches an individual is to give one's best to life and to each moment, and then joyously leave the decision and the final outcome to the wisdom of one's Goddess, God, Guru, the Cosmos, whatever one believes in, the Creator, knowing for sure that 'They' know what is best.

While spirituality may not give you all the answers, it shall endow you with the strength to go through life and face all its vicissitudes with a smile and grace.

### What's the most spiritual experience you've ever had?

Whenever I have been able to go through discomfort,





hardship, disaster, calamity, with a certain sense of calmness, humour and dignity; those moments I believe are my true spiritual experiences.

Miracles are a way of life, not spiritual experiences, only affirming the presence of The One in every moment of our existence. I don't need a miracle to prove Their presence or Their existence.

### On Indian godmen?

I have been fortunate to meet very advanced children of God. Swamiji Vishnu Sadanand Nayak and Dada Vaswani, are two children of God, or as you would like to call them Godmen, who truly stood for everything that is noble, pure, divine and walked the path with dignity and purity. They have left their bodies but their lives are a living testimony of goodness and divinity. Morari Babu is another sage that I have deep respect and regard for.

### Why is there evil in the world?

Good and evil come about because of the use of free will. So your question should be why do human beings use their free will in spreading evil than goodness? I don't have any answer to that. It's all up to each individual.

Prophet Zarathushtra writes that wherever there is light, there shall be a shadow. In the same way good and evil exists in each individual, and it is for the individual to choose between being good and spreading light or being evil and spreading darkness.

### Do all religions lead us to God?

The true essence of all religions lead us to salvation and the final merger with the One. It is the distortion and manipulation in the name of religion which is leading to chaos,

duality and bloodshed, which no real religion propagates.

### Is there any real right or wrong?

Of course there is something right and something wrong. A doctor picking up a knife to save his or her patient is right. A doctor picking up a knife to kill a patient is wrong. There is nothing right or wrong with the knife. The intention shall decide what is right or wrong.

### Which is the right way to do meditation?

When you are in the moment, you are in the ideal form of meditation. When you sit with eyes shut, you shall automatically be in the moment of silence.

### How will I live, knowing I will die?

The only truth about life is that it never ends. We keep changing forms but life is eternal, be it in the body or the spirit world. We can't destroy anything, we can only change its form; similarly we never die, we keep living in different bodies and in different dimensions.

### What is my purpose in life?

To live each moment with calmness, joyous acceptance, kindness and spread the light.



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

# Little known stories around Christmas

With Christmas round the corner, **Shoma A. Chatterji** tells us how the celebrations first began, and the different customs associated with the festival around the globe.



**T**he only associations we have with Christmas is that it is mainly a Christian festival celebrated across the world in different, colourful ways from 25th December which happens to be the birthday of Lord Jesus Christ and closes around the New Year. Other associations are linked to Santa Claus bringing gifts at midnight and stuffing children's stockings with these gifts when children are asleep; or, the exchange of Christmas cards now easily done online through the Internet. The plum cake, the roasted turkey, sweets specially designed for Christmas and often home-made, and the famous Christmas tree filled with glass

baubles and gifts and the mistletoe. Candles and colourful lanterns conventionally with a hexagonal design decorated with transparent coloured paper form an inevitable part of the festival.

## Exchange of cards and gifts

Did you know that the first ever Christmas card was created by John Calcott Horsley, an English illustrator in 1843? The message on the card which looked very much like an ordinary postcard, said, "Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to You" showing a large family enjoying a Christmas celebration. A 1000 copies

of the card were sold out soon after it hit the market. By 1860, the custom of exchanging Christmas cards had spread throughout Great Britain. Louis Prang, a German-born painter who lived in Boston, USA, manufactured the first Christmas cards in the US in 1875. Today, the Christmas card is 'father' to all variants in cards expressing emotions that perhaps, might not be possible to convey in person.

The custom of giving gifts to relatives and friends on a special winter day probably began in ancient Rome and northern Europe. It is said that in ancient Rome, the customers of their employers gave apprentice workers money gifts in small boxes and this custom could be traced back to this practice. By 1100, St. Nicholas had become a popular symbol of gift giving in many countries. Legend says that he brought presents for children on the eve of his feast day, which fell on December 6. Non-religious figures replaced St. Nicholas in certain countries and December 25 became the day for exchanging gifts.

Today, Santa Claus brings presents to children in USA, Australia and Canada. Other countries have their own versions of Santa Claus such as Father Christmas in the British Isles, Pere Noel in France and Weihnachtsmann in Germany. St. Nicholas still brings gifts for children in the Netherlands, Austria, Belgium and parts of Germany. The custom of hanging stockings by the fireplace probably evolved from the tradition of children filling shoes with straw and carrots for Santa's horse (at that time, the legend went that he came on a horse-drawn chariot and not on a reindeer-drawn sleigh) and placing them in front of the fireplace. In Australia, the British Isles, New Zealand and parts of Canada, people exchange presents on Christmas day and on Boxing Day, the day following Christmas.



## Celebrations across the world

A traditional Christmas dinner includes stuffed turkey, mashed potatoes, cranberry sauce, and a variety of other dishes. All Christian women go in for a heavy binge of baking and steaming and kneading of dough for all kinds of cakes, sweets and savouries weeks before Christmas is to begin. Some families prefer roasted goose to turkey. Favourite desserts include a mince pie or a pumpkin pie, plum pudding and a fruitcake. Eggnog is a popular beverage though now everyone goes in for hard drinks like scotch and merrily gets tipsy. But most people in England still drink punch today made up of wine, other alcoholic beverages, fruit and spices.

The word 'carol' came from a Greek dance called choraulein, which would be accompanied by music, played on the flute. This dance later spread right across Europe and became especially popular among the French who replaced the music on the flute with singing. By the 1600s, carols evolved into songs alone and the dance disappeared into history. Christmas turned into the main event for the singing of these carols. Most of the carols sung today were originally composed in the 1700s and 1800s.

An Austrian priest named Joseph Mohr on Christmas Eve in 1818 wrote "Silent Night, Holy Night," one of the most popular carols to this day. Franz Gruber, the organist of Mohr's Church, composed the music the same night and the carol was sung at midnight Mass. "O Holy Night", another famous carol, was introduced at midnight Mass in 1847. Adolphe Adam, a French composer, wrote the music. Popular non-religious carols include "Jingle Bells" and "White Christmas." In England, during the days preceding Christmas, children or groups of adults go from house to house singing Christmas carols. They arrive around midnight waking children from deep sleep and ask them to join in, never mind if they are groggy with sleep.

Children ask for money for themselves, which they generally use

to burn "the old man" for the current year and welcome the New Year but adults usually ask for money for charitable purposes. Churches have their own carol-singing groups and they invite donations to the church charity. This tradition began many years ago when visitors sang carols in return for a drink from the 'wassail bowl.' This bowl contained a hot punch made from ale, apples, sugar, eggs and spices.

**Christmas is not just a festival; it is a cross-cultural and global celebration, which has gained in popularity across the world. Though there are cultural variants, certain customs are common such as the custom of exchanging gifts and cards.**

In Mexico, celebrations begin nine days before Christmas. These days are called posadas, which mean inns or lodgings. On each of these nine days, Mexicans re-enact Mary's and Joseph's search for lodgings on the first Christmas Eve. After each posada ceremony, they feast and celebrate. Children enjoy by trying to break the pinata, a brightly decorated paper or clay figure containing candy and small gifts. Shaped like an animal, an elf, a star or some other object, it is hung from the ceiling and children take turns trying to hit it with a stick blindfolded. When a child breaks the piñata, the gifts and the candy scatter across the floor and the children scramble for their share of the booty.

In Venezuela, people have a late supper after returning from midnight Mass on Christmas Eve. The meal consists of hallacas, which are corn meal pies stuffed with chicken, pork, beef and spices. In Argentina, a favourite Christmas dish is called ninos envultos (wrapped children) that are slices of rolled beef filled with seasoned mincemeat. In the Phillipines, people attend Misas de Gallo (Masses of the Cock) celebrated early each morning on the nine days before Christmas. On Christmas Eve, they carry colourful, star-shaped lanterns called 'paroles' and parade the streets holding these aloft, which are later displayed in the windows of most Filipino homes. Christians in Asian countries too are often found to display similar lanterns at their windows, which Indians also do during Diwali.

Christmas is not just a festival; it is a cross-cultural and global celebration, which has gained in popularity across the world. Though there are cultural variants, certain customs are common such as the custom of exchanging gifts, never mind how big or small; or, the custom of exchanging Christmas cards with members of the family, friends and relatives. This sending of cards is a kind of reaching out to close people living in distant lands, and letting them know you remember and you care. Another attractive practice is that of feasting with turkey and the plum pudding taking top place in the rankings. Christmas is one of the most favourite festivals for children because for them, it personifies the arrival of Santa Claus with his bag of gifts, one for each child.



**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.**

# The kite runner : A heart-breaking play

*The Kite Runner, based on Matthew Spangler's adaptation of the internationally best-selling novel of the same name by Khaled Hosseini, is an heart breaking play about friendship, betrayal, love and redemption. It is a must watch, says*  
**Avinash Kolhe.**



**A still from the play**

**A**dhyam, the theatre initiative by the Aaditya Birla group staged 'The Kite Runner' recently, produced by Akvari-ous Production. The play adapted by Matthew Spangler's, is based on the best-selling novel of the same name by Khaled Hosseini, an Afghan-American novelist. Adapting a novel to stage as we know is a challenge, and when the novel to be adapted has epic proportions like The Kite Runner, the job is even more difficult. Despite the hurdles, the adaption by Matthew Spangler stays true to the original work. Actor, writer and entrepreneur Akarsh Khurana has done a wonderful job of directing this saga of friendship, betrayal, love and family.

The play unfolds by the narrative of Amir, the main protagonist of the play, who is modelled on Sutradhar. Amir uses flash-back technique to move back and forth the story line, and it is through him we are

introduced to other major characters in the play.

The first act of the play is set in Kabul, capital of Afghanistan and the time frame is around mid-1970s, when the country was witnessing various political upheavals. This first act highlights the deep friendship between Amir and Hassan, two young lads. Amir's father who he calls Baba is a wealthy aristocrat Pushtoon of Kabul whereas Hassan's father Ali, who is their servant belongs to a low cast 'Hazra'. The friendship between Amir and Hassan is such that they are inseparable and are always indulging in their favourite past-time, kite flying, or Amir reading aloud well-known story of Sorab and Rustom. Like Amir and Hassan, their fathers too share a deep-bond, one that goes beyond master-servant relationship.

As nothing lasts in life, so will not the idyllic world of Amir and

Hassan. It is a beautiful afternoon in Kabul and skies are full of kites as kite-flying competition is underway. As per the expectations of Amir's father, Amir wins this competition but their joys are short-lived as Hassan is raped by few young rowdy boys. Amir, a boy with no self-confidence, watches this incident, too scared to help his friend Hassan. This incident riddles Amir's conscience with guilt, a feeling so deep that it continues to torment him throughout his life.

The second act begins in different locale and this time it is USA, land of milk and honey. Post-1979 USSR invasion of Afghanistan, Amir and his father initially move to Pakistan, only to finally land in USA in 1981. Now they are American citizens and Amir acquires a degree in Creative Writing from the University of San Jose, gets married to beautiful Soraya and later becomes a teacher. By this time Amir loses his father and he meet his father's good friend from Kabul, Rahim who lets him into a secret of his family's relationship with Ali and Hassan. Rahim tells Amir that Hassan is his brother who is living life in a hell in Afghanistan, now ruled by the dreaded Taliban.

Amir is once again overcome by guilt as he feels, he and his father have betrayed their land, people and are now leading a cushy life in USA. Amir now becomes desperate for redemption and decides to go back to Kabul where he gets to know that Hassan and his wife are killed, but their son has survived and living in some orphanage. Amir decides to take this boy to USA.

**(continued on page 34...)**



# Who wants to read?

*As screen time becomes habitual for most children, do they read anything besides their school books? Are parents and teachers doing anything to encourage reading habits in children? Or, more important, do they read? asks **Rashmi Oberoi**, as she underlines the importance of inculcating the reading habit in children, right from their childhood.*



time off-line, to allow sustained concentration on a story. In this busy screen dominated environment many children are simply not in the habit of reading, and find a book and long form text off putting. That includes reading on e-readers. Children's e-reading has been much slower to take off than adults. We know many of Indian households now have a tablet or e-reader – yet they are used mainly for gaming, films and music, not reading.

Yet, parents do still value reading and over half say their child loves story time. Parents say they would like their children to read more, 53% wish they had more time for reading with their child and 28% feel guilty that they don't read to them more. Clearly reading is still valued. Technological progress will continue and it offers us amazing opportunities, but how do we ensure it doesn't fill every waking moment? How do we preserve the art of reading for pleasure? Do we even want to? I say a resounding yes, because reading for pleasure is the single biggest indicator of a child's success academically, more than social background or parents' education.

Children who read for pleasure have increased concentration, memory, confidence, greater self-esteem and general knowledge. Reading builds empathy, improves imagination and language development. These are important and relevant benefits, whether we live in a digital or analogue world.

At a story-reading workshop in a private school in the city recently, 11 and 12 year-olds were read a story.

“So, do you read?” I asked the annoying brat who lives in my building, and always needs to be kept in check for his antics. The child has probably been warned and reprimanded by nearly all the flat owners, and yet, he continues with his unruly behaviour. That is because at home he is the king and allowed to behave and do whatever he feels like.

“Yes, I read,” he said with great aplomb. “That’s wonderful,” I said trying my best to sound gleeful. “What do you read?” I continued. “My school books...my notes. I read them, ok.” he answered haughtily. “Aaaah, that’s groovy...absolutely fantastic! Go read some more!” I declared with sarcasm dripping through my pores while biting my tongue to keep from swearing. And that my friends is the level of ‘reading’ most kids these days do. Today’s children’s lives don’t naturally have space for reading. They grow up with a continuous stream of

entertainment – endless TV channels, digital devices and on-demand access. Research shows that for most children screen time is habitual. They are often over-stimulated by screens, rarely offline; some carry a device 24/7. Children flit from one form of entertainment to another and media meshing (using multiple devices simultaneously) is the norm.

Parents feel obligated to buy new technology to ensure their children ‘keep up’ and it seems money is no object, even in financially challenged homes. So, where children might have picked up a book, now screens fill their time. The result is that those moments where reading took root and flourished are diminishing.

## The benefits of reading

Children need to recover the lost art of being still – having a still mind, quiet and reflective moments,

Then, during a discussion with the children, they were asked what books they read, who their favourite authors were and so on. The children sat in silence. After considerable prodding, one girl said her favourite story was a lesson from the English Reader. A couple of children seconded her choice. And that was it.

Isn't it shocking and frightening to think that the extent of reading a whole class (some 80-90 kids) seems to have done is limited entirely to school textbooks? Especially at a time bookshops are flooded with imported and indigenous children's books; many big publishing houses are doing books for children – some as an afterthought; and a handful, braving all odds, are publishing exclusively for children.

### Why are children not reading?

So why are children not reading? At least this seems to be the general complaint. Yes, we have heard the arguments about the influence of television, computers, video games, and the high pressure life children are forced to tackle given tough syllabi and tougher learning environments... But what are we doing as parents, as teachers, as concerned individuals? Instead of talking about how most school libraries function or malfunction, let's ask ourselves a few questions. What kind of books do school libraries have? Are children encouraged to use the library? Or is it treated as just another 'period' during which time they may access one or two shelves? Can they browse through the books, maybe flip

through the pages of one, put it back, pull out another? How often do they, especially the younger ones, have storytelling sessions in the library? Do they ever get to meet the authors of books or illustrators? Over the years, does the child learn to love the library? Most important, can the child walk into the library any time during its working hours or is it off-bounds except during the designated period?

Coming back to reading, adults often complain children don't read. The first question is: Do you read? If the answer is yes, do your children see you reading or do you wait until after they are in bed? Are books easily accessible to them? Basically, is there an ambience of books and reading in the house? Simply, are there books lying around within easy reach? Each child has his or her own level, like water. Given some time to themselves, some quiet, some mood, children can be encouraged to read. And once the bug bites, the child stays bitten. That is why it is so important to instil in our kids a respect for and love of real paper and ink books. I love my Kindle app as much as the next mom, but I have to admit that I can't resist checking texts when they pop up, even when I'm engrossed in a new novel. With a real book in my hands, I'm not going to get distracted by a pop-up notification of a comment on my latest Instagram story.

But how can we help our kids appreciate this 'old school' format of learning and growing? Like many things, it starts early. I still remember my mother's exact cadence when she

read me story books at bedtime. And I read to my own children the exact same way. Have fun reading to your little kids. Even if they don't remember the stories, they'll remember the warmth and safety of your lap and your attention. As they get older and are learning to read, ask them to read to you. When you model for them what it feels like to have uninterrupted attention and free reign to learn and imagine, they will start to understand what it takes to do that on their own in later years. In their teen years, help your children bridge the gap between required reading and reading for pleasure. There are many writers who understand and embrace the tumultuous time that is teendom.

In our culture obsessed with measurable skill sets, book reading is overlooked and underappreciated. But we cannot forget that for thousands of years, people have gained knowledge and skill by hearing the stories of others and passing along their own. Technology is helping us to pass those stories along at an incredible rate, but let's not forget the restorative beauty in shutting out all the outside noise, and diving fully into a story that has a little more depth than some Bollywood star's latest Twitter rant.



**Rashmi Oberoi**  
an army officer's daughter was lucky to travel and live all over India. She loves to write and has authored 2 story books for children - *My Friends At Sonnenshine* and *Cherie: The Cocker Spaniel*.

## The kite runner : A heart-breaking play

(continued from page 32...)

The play has some moving scenes and some top-class acting. Akash Khurana is completely at ease in his role as Amir's father, Baba. Kumud Mishra (Ali) is somewhat wasted as his role is not meaty enough. Abhishek Saha (Hassan) and Nipun Dharmadhikari (Amir) are the main characters of the play and both

do an excellent job, especially Nipun as a boy who lacks self-confidence and is ridden with guilt as he is not able to help his friend Hassan, who is raped. The stage design by Ayaz Basrai and light design by Quasar Thakore Padamsee, are distinctive and deserve special mention. The Afghani carpet motifs suspended as backdrops on stage add to the authenticity of the setting.

Whether one has read the novel or not, the play is worth watching.



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

Mumbai.



# A global peace march

**A** Gandhian Peace March started on 2 October 2019 from Raj Ghat, Delhi, commemorating the 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi. The peace march will cover 10,000 km., in 10 countries before concluding at Geneva on 25 September 2020, on International Peace Day. The participating countries include India, Iran, Armenia, Georgia, Bulgaria, Romania, Italy, Switzerland and others. Apart from the main march of 50 persons from various countries (the largest number are from India), there will be supporting initiatives and marches in several other countries.

The inaugural events in Delhi from October 2-4 turned out to be a colourful gathering of people from many parts of India, joined by representatives of around 30 countries covering all continents. There was a lot of song and dance, music and cheer, but the most heartwarming aspect of the celebration was the coming together of representatives from so many countries for peace and justice. A big welcome was accorded to representatives of several land struggle movements in various developing countries, including countries as far away as Ecuador. It was a learning experience to know how the poorest people in so many countries face similar problems.

This peace march called 'Jai Jagat' is part of a wider movement for world peace by the same name, based on Gandhiji's ideas for bringing peace to a deeply troubled world. The concept of 'Jai Jagat' is also linked with the name of Vinoba Bhave.

Jai Jagat is a greeting regularly used by Gandhians and members of the Sarvodaya Movement. Literally it translates into 'Victory of all in the world', or more appropriately, as 'Well-being of all in the world'. The message it seeks to convey is—Peace to all in the world. This greeting, and the movement built on it looks at the universe as one family, as



opposed to narrow nationalism. As the need for world cooperation is increasingly felt to resolve the many crucial problems affecting the people of this universe, the importance of Jai Jagat's objective is felt more than ever before. This movement also commemorates the 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Kasturba Gandhi.

Although people from several parts of the world are involved in this effort, its base is in India. P.V. Rajagopal, who has led various organisations of Ekta Parishad in India for several years, is the co-ordinator of the Jai Jagat March and the wider movement. Ekta Parishad has been deeply involved in struggles of landless people and small farmers, with a special focus on tribal communities and environmental issues. It has organised several long marches in India and is known for its organisational skills needed for such campaigns. Several organisations and eminent persons in India, Europe, Canada and other countries have extended support to this effort.

As a part of the preparatory work several ahimsa or non-violence training sessions were also organised in several countries. Keeping in view that the situation on several fronts has deteriorated globally in recent years, such peace initiatives are seen as the need of the hour. The Jai Jagat marchers have a big responsibility --- of taking forward the essential message of Gandhiji to the world, while at the same time challenging the hypocrisy of those who celebrate Gandhi events while negating his essential principles like non-violence and inter-faith harmony.



**Bharat Dogra** has covered Gandhian struggles for a long time and his book on Gandhian

vision titled *Man Over Machine—A Path Towards Peace* has been recently published by Vitasta, Delhi.

## MAJOR THAKUR DALPAT SINGH MC

The great hero of British Empire (1893 – 1918)

**M**ajor Thakur Dalpat Singh was born and brought up in Jodhpur, the cradle of heroes. He was the only child of his parents. His father, Col Hari Singh Shekhawat was a jagirdar and a well-known polo player, who guided and encouraged his son to join the army. Sir Pratap Singh, the ruler of Jodhpur State sent Dalpat Singh to UK for education. At the age of 18, he joined Jodhpur Cavalry as a soldier and later rose to the rank of Major. Units of the Indian Army had taken part in World War I, and had displayed courage and outstanding gallantry.

The 5<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Division deployed in Palestine comprised one British Cavalry Brigade and two cavalry brigades of the British Indian Army. The 15<sup>th</sup> (Imperial Service) Cavalry Brigade comprising three cavalry regiments from the princely states of Jodhpur, Mysore and Hyderabad were part of 5<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Division. The 5<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Division was part of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force organised by the British Government to ensure safety of the Suez Canal.

The Turkish Army had been pushed back by the Egyptian Expeditionary Force and they had occupied a defensive position at Haifa. An air reconnaissance on 22 September 1918 indicated that Haifa had been evacuated by the Turkish Army. This was found to be false, and advance to Haifa was stopped by accurate machine gun and artillery fire. The strong position could not be outflanked. The roads leading to the port were narrow tracks and Haifa had to be captured to ensure landing of supplies for further advance. The Prime Minister of UK had desired to offer Palestine as a New Year gift to the public.

The task of taking Haifa was allotted to the 15<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Brigade. It was considered that Hyderabad Lancers staffed by Muslims may be reluctant to fight against the Turks and had been moved to escort 12000 prisoners to Kerkur. Earlier also, Kitchener diverted a Muslim prominent unit to Africa.

The Mysore Lancers advanced along the Acre railway line, climbed a steep hill side and silenced two guns and two

machine guns. Armed with swords and lances, the Jodhpur Lancers charged the enemy position. The Mysore Lancers who had been giving fire support followed them. They captured 1350 Turkish and German prisoners, including two German and 35 Ottoman officers. A large number of artillery guns fell into their hands. Jodhpur Lancers lost eight soldiers and 60 horses. Major Dalpat Singh attained martyrdom and Captain Amar Singh took over the command.

Haifa was liberated after 450 years of Ottoman rule. Major Dalpat Singh was awarded the Mahavir Chakra posthumously. Col Harvey of British Army lamented the death of Dalpat Singh, a great hero of the British Empire. His valour is recited in the literature of Rajasthan. The British Government installed his statue with two other heroes in 1922 and a memorial was built in his name at Pratap School, Jodhpur by the Government of Marwar. Jodhpur Lancers and Mysore Lancers were formed into 61 Cavalry. The Haifa Municipality has introduced stories of their valour in school text books. The Teen Murti statues in New Delhi represent the three Lancers.

During his recent visit to Israel, Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited the Haifa cemetery and saluted the Indian soldiers who had laid down their lives to liberate Haifa and called their sacrifice a great bond between the two nations. He also unveiled a plaque commemorating Major Dalpat Singh, the hero of Haifa. At 6.30 p.m. on 19 July 2018, a commemorative meeting was held in the House of Lords in UK. The Battle of Haifa was unique and could have ended in a disaster, but it turned out to be a great success. Entry for Indians into the Sandhurst Academy for a commission was an outcome of this battle.

After so many years, Dalpat Singh is still remembered by the people of Ajmer with great respect for his outstanding bravery.

- Brigadier Suresh Chandra Sharma (retd.)





# GEMINI GANESAN

King of Romance (1920 –2005)

**R**amasamy Ganesan, better known as Gemini Ganesan, nicknamed *Kadhal Mannan* (King of Romance) for the romantic roles he played in Tamil cinema, was one its three biggest names. Sivaji Ganesan excelled in drama, MGR dominated in fight sequences, but Gemini Ganesan held his own with sensitive portrayals of the yearning lover. He never got any National award, not even as a supporting actor. No politics or fan club too. He remained apolitical in his career, even declining a Rajya Sabha berth.

With no stage background, his screen presence was refreshingly fresh and credible, his acting unstylised, without the customary excess baggage of stage conventions, frontal positioning, gesticulations and body language. His lines seemed delivered straight from the heart. After a stint as Chemistry lecturer, he later became production executive at Gemini Studios. Fresh-faced and heart-breakingly handsome, he debuted in a minor role with *Miss Malini* in 1947, followed by *Chakradhari*. People however took notice of him only in 1953, when he played a villainous role in the film *Thai Ullam*. Since he worked with Gemini Studios, he earned the sobriquet, Gemini Ganesan.

As lead in *Manam Pola Mangalyam* (1954), he finally acquired star status. The dual role, paired him with his future wife Savitri, and became a milestone in his life. But it was *Missiamma* (1955) that established him as an actor. Melodrama then ruled the Indian screen, and as a romantic hero, he broke the hearts of women with his signature kurta and pyjama, zestful, and throwing longing looks. He beautifully understated the eroticism depicted in the love scenes. Often, the plots of his films were sentimental, like in national award winning *Kalathur Kannamma* (1960) where he had introduced Kamal Haasan, as a child artiste.

His portrayal as the forlorn lover in the film *Kalyanaparisu* (1959), is the enduring image his admirers and fans have of him. Later he switched to slightly different character roles... and towards the end of his acting career,

kept busy with elegant roles in television serials, notable being *Krishnadasi*. He also directed the film *Idhaya Malar* (1976). Ganesan acted in more than 200 films over five decades, mainly in Tamil, Malayalam, Telugu, and Kannada. His Hindi films were mainly remakes of his Tamil hits. Ganesan, a shrewd businessman, invested heavily in real estate and property development. He excelled in cricket, tennis, golf and badminton. He also took part in a World Tamil Conference in Kuala Lumpur. A commemorative postage stamp of the actor, was released on February 2006, describing him as a multi-dimensional personality, who evinced keen interest in Carnatic music, reading, yoga and poetry.



Ganesan's personal life, particularly his marriages to multiple women was often a subject of criticism. At 19, he married his first wife Alamelu. Soon he was head over heels in love with his *Miss Malini* (1947) costar, the stunningly beautiful Pushpavalli. He secretly married her while still married to Alamelu. He later married South India's great actress Savitri. His fourth marriage to 30-year-old Julianna of Bangalore created media furore, but didn't last long.

In his autobiography *Vaazhkai Padagu*, Ganesan confesses 'Somehow, I seemed to attract women who were in distress.' A son and seven daughters survived him including Bollywood actress Rekha, born, through Pushapavalli. He won the T.Nadu State Film Award for Best Actor for *Kaaviya Thalaivi* (1970); the T.Nadu State Honorary Award - MGR Award; the Padma Shri in 1971, two Filmfare awards, also the *Kalaimamani*, the MGR Gold Medal and the Screen Lifetime Achievement Award.

Though versatile, he got fossilised in one type of portrayal – that of boy meets girl romantic films. He never reached his artistic peak or had his potential harnessed. Gemini Ganesan died, after a prolonged illness, on 22 March 2005.

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

## DR T S KANAKA

The pioneering neurosurgeon (1932-2018)

**D**r Thanjavur Santhanakrishna Kanaka was born on the 31 March 1932, at Madras (now Chennai) in Tamil Nadu. While she was initially drawn towards spiritual studies, she later opted to join the medical stream and completed her MBBS in 1954. Thereafter, she secured her MS in general surgery in 1963 and went on to do her Masters in Neurosurgery in 1966. Her thesis for PhD which she obtained in 1973 was the 'Evaluation of stereotactics in cerebral palsy'.

Dr Kanaka was mentored by one of India's most well-known neurosurgeons Dr B Ramamurthi. She has been recognised as the first female neurosurgeon in Asia and one of the first few in the world. Dr. Kanaka was one of the first to perform chronic electronic implants in the brain and perform deep brain stimulation as early as the 1970s. Deep brain stimulation and cerebral palsy remained two of her cardinal areas of interest right through her medical career.

Dr Kanaka pioneered functional neurosurgery in the 1960s and 1970s along with two other eminent surgeons Prof. Balasubramanian and Prof. Kalyanaraman, and the trio received recognition for their research and contribution to the field of stereotactics. As a member of the team led by Dr Ramamurthi, she participated in the first stereotactic procedure carried out in the country. She also served in the Indian army as a Commissioned Officer with the rank of Captain during the Sino-Indian war from 1963-65.

For the most part of her medical career she worked in the Government General Hospital in Madras (now Chennai) and also taught at various distinguished institutions like the Madras Medical College, and was also associated with the Epidemiological Centre, the Adyar Cancer Institute and the Hindu Mission Hospital. Dr Kanaka worked with several organisations for over 30 years to aid the provision of health care to the economically disadvantaged segments of society. Interestingly after 20 years in surgery she went back to school and emerged with a Diploma in Higher Education.

Dr Kanaka was also a recipient of the Colombo Plan

Fellowship for one year which she utilised to study phrenic nerve stimulation and bio-medical services including those for pain management and diaphragmatic pacing. She presented several papers during her tours across the country as well as abroad, most of them relating to the concept of deep brain stimulation. She devoted plenty of time and energy to the designing of an implantable deep brain stimulation kit that would serve as a boon for cerebral palsy patients.

The reputed surgeon retired as a Professor of Neurosurgery, Institute of Neurology at the Madras Medical College in 1990 at the age of 58, and thereafter set up a consultancy service. She was not inclined to descend to private practice. Her empathy towards the poor and the downtrodden saw her pooling her own funds and reserves to set up the Santhanakrishna Padmavathi Health Care & Research Foundation in memory of her parents, and the mission was to provide free health care to the needy, especially geriatrics. During her early years, Dr Kanaka had to put up with discriminatory practices, and was often sidelined and not given her due in a highly patriarchal set up that prevailed in the early 60s and 70s, but she never gave up. She was an inspiration for several women to specialise in the field of neurosurgery. She was also a passionate blood donor and had been listed in the Limca Book of Records for donating blood an incredible 139 times in her lifetime.

Dr Kanaka was elected as the Honorary President of the Asian Women's Neurological Association in 1996. She passed away on 14 November 2018 at the age of 86. A spinster who devoted her entire life to the pursuit of medicine and in serving the needs of patients needing neurological care, Dr Kanaka's departure left a void in medical circles as she remained active as a consultant till the very end.

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







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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?

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Sadanand A. Shetty, Founder Editor  
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