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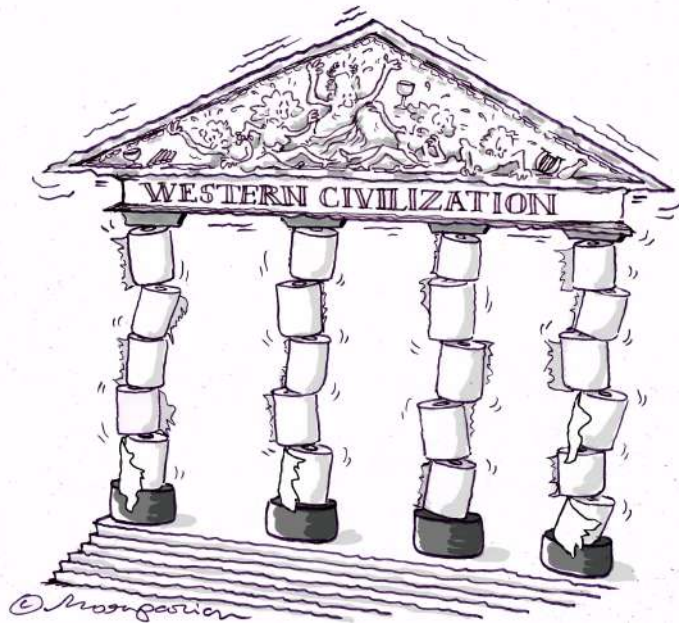
**The risk posed by social media
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**Face to Face
Bharathi Gundappa**



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Should pre-primary education be regulated?

*Pre-primary education in India is largely unregulated and suffers with several crippling issues such as poor quality education, absence of standardised curriculum, lack of accountability, fee structure, etc. It is time to address these issues, and we have a law on par with the rest of the world, writes **Prachi Desai**.*



India is a fast-growing economy and a rapidly evolving one too. The changes in socio-economic conditions have transformed family structures to the extent that in most cases both parents are working individuals, especially in urban and semi-urban areas.

To cope with the perils of a nuclear family and the absence of a child-caretaker at home, parents have started sending their young children to day-care centres during the day and leave them in the supervision of housemaids at other times. In the last few years, thousands of day-care centres have mushroomed in cities – often doubling up as pre-primary schools.

Research studies conducted all over the world suggest that pre-primary education is critical to the development of young children even before they start their learning through formal education in primary schools. Pre-primary schooling helps prepare children for the next important phase of their lives in elementary education and also develop cognitive skills, necessary for the overall development of the child.

Pre-primary education is thus the first step for a child into the ever-growing realm of knowledge and provides

basic skills to the child to find his bearing, become independent, gain confidence and ensure all-round development. Earlier, day-care centres, crèche or playschools (often used interchangeably) would be restricted to providing care and supervision to infants and young children during the day, particularly for working parents who had no help from family members to look after their children. However, with changing times and an increased demand, these centres gradually started providing pre-primary ‘education’ i.e. basics of formal education to prepare young children for primary education.

Preparing children for school

The main purpose of pre-primary education now is to prepare children physically, mentally, socially and emotionally for formal education. Studies suggest children who attend pre-primary schools learn faster in formal schooling set ups as they quickly grasp the structured curriculums.

The demands of the competitive world today have put immense pressure on parents and their children to perform better than others and excel in academics. Pre-primary education has now become important for children of

the age group 3 – 6 years. And, with the lack of family support, in nuclear families of all socio-economic backgrounds, pre-primary schooling is a necessity.

So, Rakhi Talwade, a corporation communications executive working in a PR firm in Mumbai and her maid Shanti Parab, both drop their respective children to day-care centres before they leave for work. While Rakhi's three-year-old daughter goes to a private nursery school that offers facilities of day care and pre-primary schooling, Shanti drops off her two and half-year-old son to a crèche run specifically for children of migrant workers. "The crèche is my lifeline and it ensures that my older daughter can go to school rather than look after her younger brother at home," comments Shanti.

Rakhi, on the other hand, can afford a full-time nanny at home but sends her daughter to the nursery, primarily to prepare her for the admission process she will soon face. "I want to send my daughter to the best school in Mumbai and it is important to lay the right foundation at an early stage and prepare her for the demands in the future."

In India, pre-primary education is also called 'kindergarten' (KG) which means children's garden. So, pre-primary education includes playschools, nurseries, lower/junior KG and upper/senior KG. The structure, curriculum and activities vary in pre-schools vary around the world. In India, many schools have their own nursery and kindergarten facilities and the children directly get promoted to Class 1 (primary school) after completing their upper KG.

Competition triggers stress

However, the task of getting admission into a new school for primary education is a gruelling one. The competition among schools and limited seats make the admissions process extremely stressful for the parents who have high expectations from their children.

Pre-primary schools were originally meant for holistic development of children by involving and engaging them in creative works, art and craft, dance and music and sporting activities. Any kind of learning was done through

interesting activities involving toys, stories, role play, rhymes, group activities, etc. Lately, formal education has been introduced in pre-schools where teachers, often untrained, 'teach' the basics of formal education to young children. Their lack of training means children who need special attention or care are devoid of the same and lag.

Need to regulate pre-school sector

There are private and public pre-primary schools in India. The former are mainly attended by children belonging to higher socio-economic groups while the latter belong to lower income groups. Education is a fundamental right but education of children below six years i.e. before primary school is not.

Consequently, pre-primary education is largely unregulated and suffers with several crippling issues – absence of registration mechanism of pre-schools, unregulated fee structure, lack of trained and certified teachers, poor quality of education, dearth of safety, absence of standardised curriculum and, concurrently, lack of accountability by law.

The policy framework for pre-primary schools in India is not a concrete one. The National Policy on Education 1986 had placed immense importance on pre-school education but it is not fully managed by the central or state educational departments. The Union Ministry of Human Resource Development (HRD) is responsible for elementary education but the Ministry of

Women and Child Development (WCD) looks at pre-primary education. A WCD report titled 'National Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Curriculum Framework' states:

"The programme at the early childhood stage helps to ensure opportunities for holistic learning and growth. The ECCE programme needs to be determined by children's developmental and contextual needs, providing for more need based inputs and an enabling environment. Given this need for an individualised approach, it was believed that a common 'curriculum' would not be appropriate for all".

The WCD report has listed recommendations to regularise and improve the pre-primary education sector.

(continued on page 10...)

Focus is back on holistic education

*The importance of holistic education that focuses on overall growth of a child and not just academic excellence is increasingly felt by many pre-primary educators, who are now incorporating holistic development modules, says **Raani Ved**.*



In a fiercely competitive world today, educationists are constantly looking for the 'best' to offer to students and parents. And, holistic education is one of the best-selling lines when it comes to schools, even for pre-school, pre-primary education and playschools.

Educators and the administrative staff associated with such pre-primary education centres, playschools and nurseries keep looking for innovative and effective modes of teaching students for holistic development. In lieu, they charge exorbitant fees promising overall development of the child thereby ensuring a bright future.

The debate is always fresh and ripe with inputs from all about how best to train future generations and ensure a strong foundation is laid for the child to be able to take up the responsibilities of a proud citizen.

The objective of such institutions should be to educate the child in all spheres of life – academics, arts, sports, communication, compassion, etc. The research on teaching pedagogy, educational philosophies and the various elements is ongoing albeit debatable. Every such educational entity decides what is best for students based on their personal prejudices and choices.

So, for some holistic education means educating

children to ensure they grow up into responsible global citizens, for some it would mean environment-conscious citizens, for others it could mean cultural diversity, while for others it could mean active sports life and overall development in athletics, and so on and so forth.

In India, holistic education was the basis of traditional education system i.e. the gurukuls – a residential schooling system dating back to ancient times. Primarily existent in the Vedic times, gurukuls taught students various subject including how to live a disciplined, meaningful and responsible life. The focus of gurukuls was to impart holistic education to the students but in an environment where the pupils could learn several other attributes.

So, living and residing together inculcated virtues of discipline, love, kindness, brotherhood, etc. In gurukuls, the disciples were taught diverse skills – learning languages, understanding scriptures, debating, practising archery, learning science and mathematics, playing sports, learning music, etc. Diverse modes of teaching and learning were implemented and emphasis was given on developing logical reasoning, intelligence and critical thinking. Yoga and meditation were integral to daily routine to instil discipline, mindfulness and a healthy way of life.

In India, gurukuls had children from a very early age as parents would send their children away to become a responsible, wise and aware human beings. It is no wonder that even kings would send their sons to these gurukuls to make them fierce warriors and wise kings.

Focus on 'curriculum' evolved

As time evolved, with invasions and external influence, the traditional mode of education got lost in oblivion and modern-education system took over, especially under the British where focus was primarily on the 'curriculum' and anything else was called 'extra-curricular' and second priority.

In 1835, the British introduced the English Education Act. Lord Macauley produced his 'infamous' memorandum on the Indian education system, particularly the native (Hindu) culture and learning and declared it inferior. The new system of education was devoid of personality development, moral science, etc. and only focussed on academic excellence.

The competition, standardised format and the fact that all students are marked against the same parameters

has led to unnecessary burden on young children, stress and even depression. The child is unable to explore his own potential and talent, and excellence is measured only in academics.

In the last few decades, the concept of holistic education has resurfaced and more new schools are adopting the same every day. This could arise from the fact that the generation gone by realises the importance of holistic education that was denied to them. They want the best for their children and so focus on an overall development of the child rather than the child turning into a 'book worm'.

Pre-primary school is the right time when a growing child can be moulded into a well-developed human being. It is also the best time as the child is a blank slate and if the foundation is laid properly, with the right intention, the child will turn into a responsible citizen. Holistic education is rooted in experience-based learning and centres education on the relationships that people create with each other. These relationships form the core of the educational environment. Holistic education is considered a form of alternative learning because of its emphasis on creating a different learning environment from what is typically practiced.

So, when the existing framework boasts of a rank-based education system, it is only obvious that the rat race fuels animosity, negative competitiveness, jealousy and contempt. A move towards holistic education is therefore important and timely so a value-based education system comes into order that focusses on treating every child as a unique individual and allows an organic growth of the child through his natural talent and potential. The idea being not to judge all children on the same parameters as every individual is different.

Holistic education is also essential for character building. An important essential of this education system is the relation between teacher and the student – it has to be friendly, inspiring, respectful and trusting. This allows the child to develop a sense of security, explore and excel in his area of interest.

'Overall' growth is needed

Pre-primary education sector is incorporating holistic development modules. Many playschools, day care centres and nurseries lay emphasis on overall growth and not just specific aspects. Delhi-based Yogini Sharma sends her three-year-old son Rohit to a private nursery that provides holistic education. "The best thing I like about this system is that they focus on growth in all aspects of a human being – intellectual, social, emotional and cultural. I am glad I sent my child to this place and did not get swayed by popular perception of making my child suffer just to get 'good marks' in academics."

Holistic centres prepare children to be lifelong natural learners. Pune-based Kavita Tope, whose four-year-old daughter is enrolled in a playschool that

provides holistic education, says "The school is making sure that my child is also learning basic human values which we are losing gradually – compassion, gratitude, respect, belongingness, etc. I learn so much from my own daughter every day."

There are some critical components of holistic education that pre-primary education centres must offer to the children. In nurseries and playschools the children are very young and highly impressionable making it easier to inculcate a well-rounded behaviour. Most holistic education centres focus on hands-on lessons for academics, emotional development, character formation, development of communication and social skills, team work, good manners, etc.

In May 2018, Union Minister for Human Resource Development Prakash Javadekar announced the launch of 'Samagra Shiksha' an integrated scheme for school education extending support to states from pre-school to senior secondary levels. The scheme marked a huge shift from the existing mode of education and treats school holistically as a 'continuum starting from pre-school'. Speaking at the occasion, Javadekar said "The scheme focuses on improving quality of education at all levels by integrating the two T's – Teachers and Technology. 'Samagra' means a holistic approach to treat education as a whole and the scheme is very aptly named as it sees school education holistically without segmenting it into various levels of education."

Need for better human beings

It is no secret what Mahatma Gandhi said about education, that it should focus on all-round education and not just literacy. 'Education is the systematic process of training of the head, hand and heart. Head – learning to know, Hand – learning to earn a livelihood and Heart – learning to be'. He said education is needed to make better human beings and that allows them to meet basic needs of an individual.

However, to ensure holistic education is imparted, the teachers must be properly trained, curriculum must be properly designed and an environment is provided that promotes balanced relationships between children and with people and the environment.

Holistic education is a welcome alternative to the mechanised mode of education that is primarily instruction based. There are different theories on modes of discourse but the underlying goal is the same – assist children in understanding the concept of a balanced life so when they grow up they make the right decisions about their own lives.

Raani Ved is a Trainer with Maverick – A DraftCraft International initiative to further reach, accountability and the law in Pre-Primary, Primary, Intermediary and Secondary Education.

Untrained Pre-School Tutors 'Judge', Ruin Child's Chances

Judging children in playschools can be counterproductive. Testing and judging children in play schools and nurseries should be strictly avoided as it can kill their natural curiosity, creativity, social skills and future development, writes
Manu Shrivastava.



pressure and bias - decided to put him through rigorous tuitions and study sessions from 'untrained' teachers to ensure he performs well in the 'good' school, stressing the child even more.

Now, Fizan is on the brink of a 'schooling' process and will, sadly start with a disadvantage. He is already judged for being unable to write certain alphabets even before having started school. Judged by untrained 'tuition teachers' and ill-informed 'well-wishers' those who have little or no idea about pre-school education.

These formative years of a child's life before he starts going to primary school are very critical as they begin to absorb everything they see around them. This affects the child's development – physical, emotional, social and cognitive.

Pressure is counterproductive

The National Council of Education Research and Training (NCERT) in a report on pre-primary / pre-school education recommends avoiding formal education at that age stating: 'Early focus on developing knowledge, skills and cognitive abilities in children harms their ability to develop a positive attitude, disposition to learn, be reflective, be inquisitive, be inventive, be resourceful, and being a problem solver'.

There are ample studies that indicate brain connections or neuron synapses multiply exponentially in the first three years of a child's life making it the optimal time for a child's development.

In September 2019, pre-primary education was slated to become a part of the school system as declared in the Draft National Policy 2019. At a meeting of the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE), the highest policy-making body on education, the approval came. The draft National Education policy is set to make early childhood care and education (ECCE) i.e. from age zero to

When four-year-old Fizan Khan from Mumbai found it difficult to identify and write English alphabets despite going to a playschool, nursery and tuition classes in Mumbai for about two years, his family got worried. It was time for him to take admission in a primary school and the stress only mounted.

The playschool, predictably, shrugged all responsibility saying it wasn't their job to teach the child as playschools are only for 'fun-filled and creative activities', despite charging hefty fees in the name of preparing children for admissions to primary schools.

Fizan is an extremely intelligent boy with a sharp mind, immense curiosity and extraordinary skills but he is not able to identify alphabets that well, probably because of the disdain sparked by the senseless scolding at school and back home.

Instead of taking the child to a specialist tutor or being patient with him, the family – swayed by peer

six years, part of the Indian school system.

The highly unregulated pre-primary school set their own curriculum and standards. There is a need to bring them under the purview of law to have a universal, formally-designed curriculum. The pressure on young children (and parents) to acquire academic excellence at that age must be questioned. The age is ripe for children to learn freely out of their natural curiosity, eagerness to experiment which must not be spoilt with formal education.

Pre-primary must not be formal

Pre-primary school are centres where generally pre-primary education is imparted before the compulsory 'formal' primary education begins. It is supposed to lay foundation of knowledge in children and ensure an overall development of child.

Formal education is a classroom-based training that is provided by trained teachers or instructors. This process of acquiring knowledge is primarily by way of instructions and involves schools or institutions. This type of education is subject oriented and has a hierarchical structure.

In formal learning, children learn basic academic skills in the premises of a school. Generally, formal education begins in elementary or primary school but now, in many instances, basics of formal education begin in pre-primary education itself. It is yet to be ascertained if starting formal education that early is good or bad for the overall development of children.

In India, similar to many Asian countries, there is immense pressure on the child to perform well in academics and on the parents to ensure the child performs well to maintain their reputation among the peers. Formal education is one type of education that has developed hundreds of ways to 'mark' children.

There are tests of all kinds during the academic session, at the end of academic session, exams, competitions and activities where children are constantly judged and ranked against each other. In these activities, children understand one thing for sure – that anything they do, they will be either better or worse than their 'friends' and peer.

Preparing for the rat-race

When it comes to pre-primary education, the focus of nurseries and playschools has shifted from engaging children in creative activities for healthy growth and development to preparing them for the rat race that lies ahead – admission to a 'good' school, performing 'well' in academics and getting a well-paying job in the future.

Modern pre-primary schools have forgotten the importance of non-formal education i.e. the purpose of pre-primary education.

The process of admission to a 'good' elementary school itself is extremely stressful for parents and the pressure percolates down to the children also. Pre-primary education centres have made the most use of this race to get into a reputed primary school and many now teach the basics of formal education to children in nurseries, even playschool.

So, this means that at the very beginning of their lives, children are judged for their performance or non-performance in tests and activities devised by other individuals. Also, all children are judged on the same parameters and put into boxes, ranked, rewarded and punished. It is no secret that every child is different. Every child is unique and has a natural talent and aptitude for something specific. They just need the time to find their niche.

Someone may be good at learning numbers, other might be good at drawing while someone may be good at sports. So, putting all of them through the same standardised test and then marking them for their performance is not only illogical but also inhuman. It is the chronological grading system in formal education that makes matters worse.

Even if children do not take their performance in these tests seriously, their teachers and parents ensure that the child does not forget how important it is to excel in these tests.

For children going to playschools and nurseries it is not a healthy environment as instead of learning to be kind to each other and share things with everyone around, they learn to be selfish, focus only on themselves and see their friends through the prism of their performance and

Someone may be good at learning numbers, other might be good at drawing while someone may be good at sports. So, putting all of them through the same standardised test and then marking them for their performance is not only illogical but also inhuman. It is the chronological grading system in formal education that makes matters worse.

their 'ranks' in the class.

Creativity takes a backseat

Pre-primary schools and centres teach basics of formal education and, in the process, the focus on creative activities, arts, sports is diminished drastically. Worse still, these schools do not take any responsibility in ensuring the child learns the basics. Their convenient response is that formal education starts in primary schools and is not their responsibility.

Fact remains most children at that age are too young to understand and learn certain things. At this stage, they must be engaged in activities that develop their creative skills, thinking abilities and moral values and not focus on how well they 'learn' or 'remember' alphabets or numbers. Also, every child has a different growth curve. They may learn and understand different things at different pace. This does not mean that one is inferior to the other.

So, if someone understands and identifies alphabets faster does not mean he is smarter, another child may be better in building blocks. So, the pressure of undertaking formal education in pre-primary schools may often be counterproductive.

When children don't perform well in academic tests, their parents enrol them in tuition classes. The child is burdened unnecessarily and deprived of other outdoor and developmental activities that are quintessential at that

age. There are innumerable parents who send their children to tuition classes every day after they come from their playschool or nursery classes. It is not only exerting for the child physically but also mentally as he thinks he is not at par with his friends who do not take tuitions.

Need to nip rigidity

The rigid system of formal education makes it inappropriate and inapplicable for pre-primary school children. "My son liked going to school but he does not like reading alphabets and now it has become very difficult to take him to school every day," says mother of three-year-old Alisha Shah from Ahmedabad. So, if the child loses interest in an activity as he is not able to score good marks in it, there is a risk of the child losing interest in schooling completely.

And, more often than not, in this race children with disabilities or special needs are completely ignored. Many children who are dyslexic, autistic or have other mental disorders are completely ignored in the rigid formal education system.



Manu Shrivastava is a media legal researcher with DraftCraft International, and co-convenor of 'The Woman Survivor' initiative that documents abuse of women and children within families.

Should pre-primary education be regulated?

(...continued from page 5)

"To ensure optimal development for all children, there is a need to create a planned curriculum framework, encompassing developmentally appropriate knowledge and skills, with flexibility for contextualisation and diverse needs of young children.

A curriculum framework is also required to ensure that important learning areas are covered, taking care of all the developmental needs of the young child. It also facilitates adoption of a common pedagogical approach to ensure a certain level of quality and address the widespread diversity in the ECCE programmes available for the young children in India."

The Indian government adopted the National ECCE Policy to lay out 'the vision for children below the age of six years'. The Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act (RTE Act) 2010 also addresses the Early Childhood Education under Section 11 of the Act which states "with a view to prepare children above the age of 3 years for elementary education and to provide early childhood care and education for all children until they complete the age of six years, the appropriate Government may make necessary

arrangements for providing free pre-school education for such children".

The Draft National Education Policy 2019 has strong recommendations on formalising pre-primary education in India and has tackled the issue with the seriousness it commands. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 2030 that the Government of India adopted states, "by 2030 to ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education".

In a country where more than half the population is under 25-years-old, the demands of quality education for these youngsters and for their children are high. It's time to take stock of things and bring in a much-needed law, on par with the rest of the world, for pre-primary education in India.

Prachi Desai is a Delhi-based researcher with Maverick – A DraftCraft International initiative to further reach, accountability and the law in Pre-Primary, Primary, Intermediary and Secondary Education.

Nurseries far from safe

*Nurseries used to be a fun place for kids until a few years ago. But with growing incidents of crimes and accidents, they are no more considered safe. The absence of regulatory guidelines further compounds the risk of safety of the children in pre-primary schools. **Rashmi Singhvi** urges the government, school authorities and parents to work in tandem to ensure safety of these children.*



In 2014, a Bengaluru-based private school came in the news when a nursery student was sexually abused by the office assistant.

A four-year-old boy was headed in a human sacrifice ritual in Andhra Pradesh in October 2015. The boy was kidnapped as he was returning home from his nursery.

In November 2015, a three-year-old nursery student was crushed to death in the school elevator at Dilsukhnagar in Andhra Pradesh.

The Greater Noida police arrested a lifeguard at the swimming pool of a reputed private school in July 2018 as he raped a three-year-old girl in the school premises. The lifeguard was working at the school for 13 years.

In August 2019 in Delhi, a private school sweeper was arrested for sexually assaulting a five-year-old nursery girl on multiple occasions.

In February 2020, a school van caught fire in Sangrur, burning four children alive. The risks of mishaps

are higher with vehicles that do not comply with norms especially in smaller schools in residential areas.

The above mentioned incidents have sent shockwaves across the country because such brutal offences have happened even in schools of international repute apparently 'regulated by statutory guidelines.'

Children in pre-primary education centres are at a higher risk as in the absence of a regulatory framework the chances of irregularities are more. There are several instances to show how children's safety and wellbeing are being compromised in nurseries/schools.

Apart from sexual abuse, children face physical harm due to accidents and mishaps that cause physical injuries. Bullying, corporal punishment, physical and psychological harm, mental harassment and discrimination are now quite common leaving little boys and girls scarred for life.

Threats and abuse during childhood

Children spend a major part of their childhood years in schools. If they are not in schools already, they are either in a crèche, a playschool or in a school nursery, working their way up to enrol in a primary school. At all these places, the safety and security of children in the premises should be given utmost importance.

The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) defines 'school safety' as 'creating a safe environment for children, starting from their homes to their schools and back. This includes safety from any kind of abuse, violence, psycho-social issue, disaster: natural and manmade, fire and transportation'. The children, however, are extremely vulnerable and prone to abuse – physical, sexual and mental from the same people who are supposed to care for their well-being in these places.

A child needs a healthy, protected and supportive environment for proper growth and development. This is a fundamental right of a child guaranteed by the Constitution of India under the Right to Life and Dignity, Right to Education, Right to protection from abuse, right to opportunities to develop as able adults. The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012 (and the amendments) and Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act,

2015 have strict provisions to deal with offences against children.

The discussion on safety of children in pre-primary education sector has gained momentum in recent years following the increase in cases of violence, abuse, even murders in schools. The rise of sexual crimes against children – of both genders – and that of violence, murder, etc. has shocked the nation. Playschools and nurseries are considered second homes for children and but rising instances of abuse and crime have caused fear, panic and mistrust in parents and children alike.

Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse is one of the most rampant offences perpetrated against school children. In most cases, children are not even aware of the kind of physical and mental harm done to them nor do they have an understanding of the gravity of the situation. Given the rising instances of children being sexually abused in pre-primary schools the worries of parents are growing. Often, children do not even tell their parents about such incidents because of shame and ‘humiliation’, and for the fear of being judged. So who does the child face threat from? The answer is, from anyone and everyone – teachers, principal, peons, janitors, maids, cleaners, drivers, guards, other students, etc.

The school staff has the responsibility to ensure protection and wellbeing of every child who is studying in their school. In most instances, it is the protector who turns out to be the predator and commits the crimes against children. So, a background check of everyone who works in the school and comes in contact with the children is of utmost importance.

Transportation and associated risks

Safety of children while commuting to school and back should be ensured. Parents and schools opt for multiple transport options for school children. The vehicles and the vendors need to comply with the safety rules and guidelines as laid down by authorities from time to time. The responsibility of doing a background check of the staff employed at the school lies with the school authorities. Parents too need to be vigilant. A background check of the drivers, cleaners and other attendants who come in contact with the child should be thoroughly done.

The safety of children in the school premises is of utmost importance and often neglected by the school management. Dilapidated buildings, under construction areas, haphazardly placed rubble, hazardous material in the premises can cause injuries and even death. All precautionary measures for the safety of the children should be taken seriously by the schools.

Pinning accountability

The Supreme Court in an order dated April 2018 had directed ‘framing of guidelines for fixing accountability

of the school management in the matter of safety of the children studying in private and government schools within six months.’ The Union Ministry of Human Resources Development, Department of School Education and Literacy issued draft guidelines in August 2018 ‘fixing accountability of school management towards safety and security of children in schools’.

The guidelines were drafted for primary, secondary and higher secondary schools. They aimed to fix responsibilities of the school management towards safety and security of children in schools. The NCPCR developed a comprehensive Manual on Safety and Security of Children in Schools – a compilation of various existing guidelines, circulars, notifications and Government Orders on safety and security related issues in schools.

These guidelines must also be implemented for pre-primary schools --- playschools, crèche and nurseries to ensure safety of young children. Following some of the guidelines such as handing the child only to parents or authorised person, installing CCTV cameras in the campus, mandatory police verification of candidates while appointing or hiring teachers, physical instructors, lab technicians, drivers, janitors and other support staff including the security, involving parents in decision-making, ensuring safety compliance in school buses and vehicles such as presence of first-aid box, fire extinguisher, windows with horizontal grills, doors with reliable locks and proper space to keep school bags, proper screening of the driver and attendant, formation of a grievance committee for child sexual abuse (CSA) to address cases of child sexual abuse should be formed by the school, etc., are some of the important guidelines that can safely be implemented for pre-primary schools and centres.

The way ahead

It is important that the government, schools and parents work in close tandem to address the situation. Whenever there is a case of child abuse or an accident, a blame game starts between the executive, polity, administration, school management and stakeholders i.e. parents, etc. There is a need to fix accountability on schools and bring in regulations that can ensure safety of the children. Being vigilant in schools and better co-ordination between parents and school authorities will also help in preventing such crimes and ensuring children’s safety.

Rashmi Singhvi is a Lawyer volunteering with Maverick – A DraftCraft International initiative to further reach, accountability and the law in Pre-Primary, Primary, Intermediary and Secondary Education

The risk posed by social media

*Social media is widely used by predators and paedophiles who target young, innocent children. Parents and pre-primary educational centres should be careful about the information they share on social networking sites. There is a pressing need to address the situation and ensure children are safe in the confines of their homes and schools, says **Mamta Gupta**.*

KEEP YOUR KIDS SAFE Online



Social media is the new 'evil'. Despite its many benefits and advantages, the perils and risks of social media keep drawing attention. Social media is everywhere and used by almost everyone capable of using a smartphone. And that includes predators and paedophiles who target young, innocent children.

All over the world, governments and education institutions are grappling with the problems that arise with the 'abuse' of social media. In most nations around the world, the governments are drafting policies to regulate social media as it is widely used to cause unrest, trigger anti-national activities and riots and spread fake news. Similarly, educational institutions such as schools and colleges are finding it difficult to prevent the misuse of social media that directly puts their students at risk.

In India, the government is twiddling its thumb over a comprehensive and encompassing policy to ensure the safety and security of school children. In the absence of a clear-cut regulation or legislation regarding the use, misuse of social media and ensuing penalties and remedies, each school is left to frame rules and regulations for their own students. In fact, schools are devising ways to incorporate social media and new-age technology with the existing teaching styles to upgrade teaching standards and learning outcomes. So, to strike a balance and ensure social media is

'used', not 'misused' is a difficult task and almost impossible to achieve.

The internet is flooded with social networking sites – Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, LinkedIn, Youtube, TikTok being some of the most popular ones. For older children, the risks mostly originate directly from their own activities by being active on social media. The fact that social media has become too pervasive and intrusive also means that the risks are also very high.

Both children and parents must be aware of the perils of social networking sites. Predators are always on the look for vulnerable and unaware children who are easy prey. Once the risks are identified and understood, actions and strategies can be implemented to minimise the danger and the threat to children on social media.

For children in the pre-primary age group, the risks of social media arise mainly from the activities of their parents, relatives, teachers and other users of social networking sites and not the children themselves.

Young and vulnerable

The fact that they are too young to use networking sites or apps means that they will not be active themselves

but it also means they won't have a say in someone clicking their pictures or videos and uploading on social media without their consent or that of their parents or guardians. Not to mention that pre-primary age group children are now getting access to smartphones and social media, albeit through the profiles of their parents or family members, as parents often hand over their phones to keep their children engaged.

The law on protection of privacy of children in terms of posting content on social media is weak. Unless a parent or guardian explicitly denies permission and raises objection to such content of their child or ward put on social media, there is nothing in law that prevents such activity by itself. That is the reason why online predators who eye unassuming parents posting 'happy' pictures and those of their family and children on social media find it very easy to find their targets online.

People in general are sharing too much information today on social networking sites which is clearly avoidable and not advisable. Parents put all kinds of 'dangerous' details on their social media platforms – the school their child is attending, places they visit, vacation itineraries, events the child or family is going to participate in, travel plans, family details and pictures, etc.

All this information that an unsuspecting parent divulges is the perfect fodder for an online predator. These predators are always fishing for such information, images and videos. And they can do a lot more with that information that one can imagine. The predator can be present at the specific event, can walk up to the child's school and befriend the child using other details of family members and their lives, posted online.

There is nothing people don't talk about on social media – their birthday, name of spouse, parents' name, hometown, pet's name and details, their favourites, etc. All this information can also be used by cyber predators to get access to platforms that house sensitive information such as a child's school records, medical records, private images and videos and portals that can be used for identity theft also.

One must understand that smaller, innocuous details shared over a long period of time can be used by online stalkers and predators to draw a big picture and infer information that you have not even posted online. In case of adults, such details are often used for hacking as they reveal answers to secret questions, email passwords, etc.

Additionally, not just actively putting live content, pictures and images but also commenting on other people's (friend's) posts reveal a lot of information and can easily be misused.

Social media reveal much

Most social networking sites and apps offer privacy options that seem to protect the data you put online making it available only to those you wish to. However, the fact

remains there is nothing like privacy in cyber space. Most content that you post online gets crawled through search engines and hundreds of other sites that keep this information in their databases.

So, if you have made a public picture on your social media account private, there is no guarantee that the image wouldn't have been taken up by other sites. Also, these platforms keep changing their privacy policy, making it difficult for the user to understand or keep pace with. A lot of information despite being marked private is revealed to 'mutual' friends, followers, etc.

Online stalkers and predators act in different ways. While they may not have access to children of this age group directly on social media, they may approach children physically based on the details divulged online by their parents or other family members.

The threat is not restricted to activities by parents or family members. Children are at risk from their schools (playschools, nurseries), day care centres, tuition teachers and instructors of other hobby classes that they go to.

Pre-school activity raises risks

When day care centres, nurseries, playschools, tutors, hobby class instructors post pictures of children on social media, they put these children at high risk. Such content may be uploaded for various reasons – to promote their respective entity, to publicise about events, activities, award functions, outdoor visits, etc. or generally on their social media platforms for public viewing. In most cases, parental consent is not acquired, the content is 'public' and 'innocuous' use of such images and videos jeopardises the child involved.

Often, such predators cultivate relationships with such children and create a trusting bond, so the child does not raise alarm or inform anyone. Then, with the right opportunity, such predators start abusing children in different ways. It is important for parents to develop a close bond with their children, so the child trusts them completely. Parents should also be aware all the time about their child's behaviour and any change, if so. The child must know and understand that it is not okay to have any interaction with strangers and any such instance must be reported to the parent.

The benefits of social media are often argued for – staying in touch with family, friends; getting to know new people; interacting with people with similar interests and hobbies; professional networking; etc. But the dangers are far more serious and cannot be ignored. It is the responsibility of every parent to protect their child.

Mamta Gupta is a Research Associate with Maverick – A DraftCraft International initiative to further reach, accountability and the law in Pre-Primary, Primary, Intermediary and Secondary Education.

Privacy of children at risk

*How does privacy affect the pre-primary education sector and what are the crucial aspects that we need to understand that affect the children directly? **Tulip Sinha** gives us a low down on this new threat that is looming large in the age of technology and high penetration of social media.*



Humans are a hyper-connected global community now. Even at places where there is an absence or dearth of basic amenities, technology and the internet have made inroads. So, it does not come as surprise that even in the remotest geographical area or in an uneducated group of people or within a traditional society, the internet, gadgets and social media are an integral part of their lives, among all age groups.

With the penetration of technology and internet comes the risk of intrusion into private space and of privacy violation. The concept of privacy may be different for people but in the eyes of law, 'privacy' is well defined and the law of the land ensures that privacy of an individual is guaranteed through constitutional provisions.

The right to privacy extends to children also as legal citizens of the country. The schools in the country are governed by regulatory mechanisms but entities facilitating pre-primary education such as playschools, crèche and school nurseries are largely unregulated. In the absence of law regulating such entities and the fact that millions such playschools and crèche have mushroomed in cities, even in single rooms spaces projects the seriousness of the issue.

The privacy of children attending playschools, nurseries and those going to crèche is at risk. As such entities are largely unregulated they possess a higher chance of other irregularities that crop up – absence of verification of teaching and administrative staff, negligence towards structural stability and propriety of the building or structure housing the entity, transportation irregularities, etc. For private and government schools, such checks are done by the law, regulations and government guidelines -- not applicable to pre-primary education sector.

When protectors turn violators

There have been numerous instances across the world where the privacy of a child is violated by the people who are in position to protect the child. In playschools, crèche and nurseries, instances are aplenty where privacy of a child is violated and unfortunately, owing to poor understanding of the concept and lack of knowledge of the availability of legal remedies, the matter is brushed aside. When privacy violations cross certain limits, the trauma affects the child's life and often stays for the rest of his/her life.

In such school nurseries, crèche and playschools,

it is often the staff that perpetrates such violations owing to access to children, to resources and 'authority' to handle and tackle children.

With the flood of cheap smartphones today, almost everyone, at least every adult now has a smartphone that he/she actively uses. Camera phones, CCTV cameras and cameras in general are used by perpetrators to violate privacy of children in their space of trust.

Despite the increase in crimes against children and specific guidelines for installation of CCTV cameras in the school premises and in classrooms, many schools are lagging behind. In the absence of any regulation for pre-primary schools, there is neither any enforcement nor compliance pressure on playschools, etc. to install CCTV cameras for the safety of the children.

This greatly increases the risk of perpetrators clicking pictures or making videos of innocent children in classrooms, even toilets. There have been several instances in playschools around the country, and the world, where the staff or cleaner, even teachers have violated privacy of unassuming children by clicking videos and pictures.

In fact, there have been several cases where the perpetrators have misused CCTV footage to their advantage by grabbing images and videos of children from the CCTV footage, owing to lack of security and proper measures deciding who gets access to such footage.

Police clearance and verification of the employees of schools are often not done as laid down by law. So, expecting unregulated pre-primary nurseries, tuition classes and crèches to go through the time-consuming process of getting police verification done of their staff and teachers is foolhardy.

Risk while commuting

Transportation is another area where children are at risk. Here, the trustworthiness of the driver, cleaner and attendant comes into play as children are completely dependent on them while commuting to and from home to school. Especially when the commute is done through private vans, auto rickshaws, etc. the chances of privacy violations and serious offences are even more as they are often not registered or verified by the relevant authorities.

Smartphones and technology advancements have given a big boost to authorities in nabbing such crimes. However, the same have even empowered and emboldened paedophiles and perverts who use technology for their pleasure.

The threats posed by such acts are far too many than can ever be quantified. When a pervert shoots a video of a child, he often sends the same to many other people. Anything that goes in cyber space once stays there forever. So, there is a high chance of such material resurfacing after years. The trauma that the child as well as the family suffers

due to such acts is inexplicable.

In 2018, a nursery student was raped in Greater Noida. The incident shook the parents and the administration so much that it led to an overhaul in security measures on the premises. In another case, a four-year-old nursery student was raped by the driver of the school bus in Pinjore. The driver raped the girl after dropping off all the other kids.

Private tuitions too pose threat

Another important area where privacy of children and their safety is at risk is private tuitions. The rat race to get children admitted to a 'good and prestigious' school has allowed a whole new supplementary education system in terms of private tuitions.

A toddler who is only beginning to understand the basics of formal education, is often put through tuitions by over-ambitious parents who want to see their children in renowned schools when they start their primary education. The tutors and such tuitions are completely outside the purview of the law and regulations and pose grave risks to children.

To understand privacy, one needs to understand the definition of privacy within the socio-cultural fabric of the country. The right to privacy is encompassed under the right to life and personal liberty i.e. Article 21 of the Indian Constitution. In India, privacy was not considered a fundamental right earlier.

In a landmark judgment in 2017, the Supreme Court of India declared that 'The right to privacy is protected as an intrinsic part of the right to life and personal liberty under Article 21 and as a part of the freedoms guaranteed by Part III of the Constitution', thereby protecting the country's 1.3 billion people. With this milestone ruling, India joined the United States, Canada, South Africa, the European Union and the United Kingdom in recognising this right.

So, every individual, including every child has a right to privacy and it is time now that the government brings in a law to regulate entities running pre-primary education i.e. playschools, crèche and school nurseries.

Tulip Sinha is a Law Student interning with Maverick – A DraftCraft International initiative to further reach, accountability and the law in Pre-Primary, Primary, Intermediary and Secondary Education.



MURSHIDABAD

Tales of grandeur and defeat

The historical city of Murshidabad in West Bengal is located on the banks of the River Bhagirathi. The palaces, tombs, mausoleums, mosques and palatial mansions are the reminders of its once rich legacy of Nawabi heritage. The region was also a well-known centre for weaving muslins and silks under the patronage of Malla kings and later Muslim rulers.

Text & Photographs : Manjira Majumdar



One of the few terracotta temples in Murshidabad

Murshidabad, once known as Mukshudabad located on the banks of northern Ganga known as River Bhagirathi, could be written off for being a small district of West Bengal today. The rich legacy, however, of the Nawabi heritage mingled with various other strains make the place anything but insignificant.

Of late, there has been a renewed interest in Murshidabad with two comprehensive books published – Plassey: The Battle that changed the Course of Indian History (Sudeep Chakravarti) and The Anarchist (William Dalrymple), which document the importance of the region. Though tourists flock to the grandest monument in the region --- the Hazarduari Palace, literally translated to a palace with thousand doors, and adjacent to it – the Imambara, there are several must-dos by way of tombs, mausoleums, mosques, terracotta temples and palatial mansions. To get a sense of history, traces of Armenian and Dutch footprints on account of trade and commerce should also be viewed to put the town in the historical perspective.

History is all about battles over territorial rights

and the stakes obviously are higher if the territory is lucrative. Under Mughal rule, Murshidabad, with good fertile agricultural land, became well-known also for its production of silk and ivory, and highly skilled crafts persons. Being located on the banks of a river facilitated trade and soon, it became the capital of undivided Bengal covering large portions of Orissa and Bihar. It is said Bengal was the richest province under the Mughals and, naturally, when colonisation began, all the East Indian companies (as most European countries such as the French, Dutch and Danes set up an East India Company too), for trade and commerce, fought for control over this river port region. Eventually the British established their supremacy. So it is with British politics that the history of the region is intrinsically linked.

Over centuries, the British had kept sending emissaries to the Mughal court in Delhi for trading favours, but ultimately it was the Battle of Plassey that sealed the fate of the Mughals, considerably weakened over time. Through the chicanery of The Company, local rulers and businessmen, a trading company took over an entire country!

Chequered history

The Company ruled for over a hundred years till it handed over the reins to the Imperial Crown. For unlike what most think, it was not the British monarchy which ruled us. Initially and for a long time, it was the East India Company (EIC), which made Calcutta its headquarters. The British monarchy took over when the EIC was compelled to declare itself bankrupt due to all the plundering and looting. After a long and bitter struggle against the imperial power, the country gained its freedom. By then, Murshidabad was stripped off much of its glory and of course, treasures.

Hazarduari Express hurtles through lush green fields and cows grazing lazily. It crosses a small station Palashi, where the famous or call it infamous, Battle of Plassey was fought, between Siraj-ud Daulah, the last nawab under Mughal rule, and the British forces under Robert Clive in 1757. Rest, as they say, is history. There are numerous stories of political intrigues and betrayals as to what happened but the human interest stories are to be noted as well; of how the British in a bid to promote their own textiles, dealt a death knell to the weavers here by

cutting off their fingers!

Murshidabad is not known for opulent Mughal architecture. Rather, in keeping with the simplicity of Bengal, the trademark is of burnt terracotta edifices. The only grand building, the Hazarduari Palace or Bara Kothi was built in the nineteenth century and designed by Scottish architect Duncan Macleod under the titular rule of Nazim Humayan Jah. Marked by long verandahs, most of the administrative work was done here. Today, it has been converted into a museum. The illusionary thousand doors made effective through mirrors is the main attraction of the museum, which showcases priceless artefacts utilised by the nawabs, such as the marble throne of Murshid Quili Khan, silver throne of Siraj-ud-Daulha, silver palki, billiard board, and portraits of the nawabs who ruled the region and their families. Silver and ivory items, weapons and daggers with carved ivory handles and manuscripts are on display. So are howdah(s) or canopy seats made of embroidered silks and velvet to be used on elephants.

The Imambara is another impressive structure located opposite this Palace. The Nizamat Imambara is a



A part of the detail of a temple facade



***(Above) Hazarduari Palace or Bara Kothi designed by Scottish architect Duncan Macleod is now a museum.
(Below) A typical vegetarian thali of Murshidabad's Jain community known as the Sheherwali community***

Shia Muslim congregation hall and the present Nizamat Imambara was built in 1847 AD by Nawab Mansur Ali Khan. The old one, built by Nawab Siraj ud-Daulah was destroyed by fires of 1842 and 1846, because it was made with wood, according to the local guide. A smaller mosque – the Madina mosque is located between the Hazarduari palace and the Imambara. This mosque is believed to have been built from the earth brought from the Islamic holy city of Madina, hence the name, Madina mosque. According to legend, Siraj-ud-Daulah's mother had promised to build this mosque if her son became a nawab.

The Katra Mosque is what defines the true history of Murshidabad. There are several mosques which are actually mausoleums. If the Hazarduari Palace galleries showcase various paintings and treasures of the nawabs, the mosques are simple, stark structures, now well maintained by the Archeological Survey of India (ASI).

Murshidabad gets its name from Murshid Quli Khan, who was born a Hindu, and came from the Deccan Plateau. His original name was Surya Narayan Mishra, who was sold as a slave to Haji Ispahan, a merchant of Ispahan. In course of time, he embraced Islam and was



renamed Mohammed Hadi. Favoured by Aurangzeb, he became the first Nawab of Bengal, after the Emperor shifted the capital of Bengal from Dacca to Murshidabad. The revenues sent from here to Delhi were one of the highest under him.

The famous Katra Masjid was built under Murshid Quli Khan's direction. Only two of the four minarets in four corners of the Masjid remain. Khan is buried under the staircase of this masjid as per his wish that he be penalised for some of his wrong doings. He was succeeded by Shuja-uddin, his son-in-law. Finally the nawab title went to Siraj-ud-Daulah who was betrayed by his general Mir Jaffer, considered a traitor and there is nothing really in his name, except a small neglected grave! Another beautiful mosque, Kadam Sharif said to contain a replica of the footprint of Prophet Mohammad, a huge canon Jahan Kosha and Moti Jheel or the Pearl Lake to the south of the palace are some of the other attractions at Murshidabad.

The small Dutch cemetery and the renovated Armenian Church are the two other relics that are part of the tourist itinerary. The Armenians too came to trade just like the Baghdadi Jews made forays into Calcutta and Dhaka. The Armenian Church too smacks of simplicity in keeping with the rural landscape.

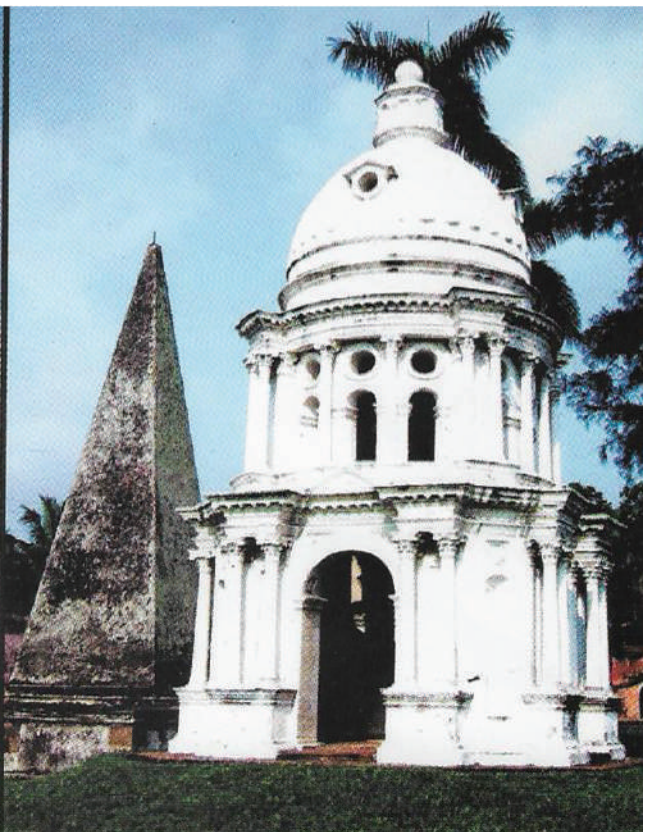
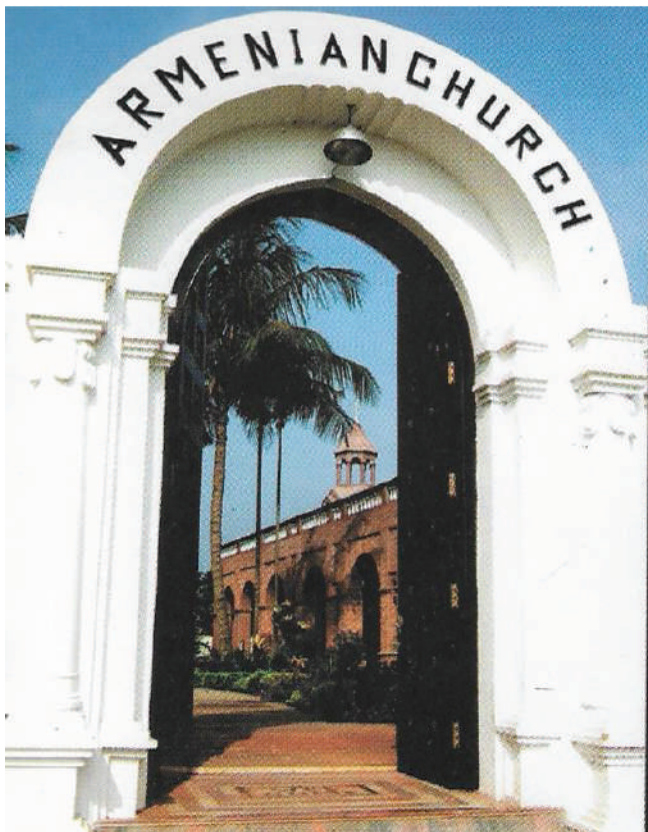
What makes Murshidabad unique is that some of the mansions and houses built along the banks of the river are palatial; many are now abandoned. They were owned by well-known families. The Murshidabad Heritage Development Society is today trying to develop its tourism potential by restoring heritage structures.

But what makes Murshidabad unique is that some of the mansions and houses built along the banks of the river are palatial; many are now abandoned. They were owned by well-known families. The Murshidabad Heritage Development Society (MHDS) is today actively trying to develop its tourism potential by restoring and reviving the heritages around the adjacent areas of Azimganj and Jiaganj.

According to a British historian, the wealth of the billionaire families residing in that area was more than the wealth of the entire British empire. It was mostly held by the Oswal Jains who came from Rajasthan in the eighteenth century as Murshidabad was an important trading hub in silk, muslin, ivory, bell metal etc. The Jains came to be known as Sheherwali as the men went to the seher means the town of Murshidabad on work, while their families lived in the twin cities of Azimganj and Jiaganj on either side of the River Bhagirathi.



The Imambara - old one built by Siraj-ud-Daulah was destroyed in a fire in 1846; rebuilt in 1848.



Glimpses of Armenian Church & Dutch tomb

A rich tapestry

The Sheherwali community, as they came to be known, adapted to the region while clearly retaining their own culture. They built opulent mansions in an architectural blend of European, Bengal and Rajsthani styles and several Jain temples. A fusion cuisine evolved among this community that is considered very unique; till now available only in private homes. Attempts are being today to make the cuisine public through food festivals and during trips organised by MHDS. Plans are afoot to convert some of these mansions into luxury hotels.

The cuisine of the Sheherwalis, strictly vegetarian, is fused with local spices like the paanch phoron with Mughal influences of rose water, saffron and dry fruits. Rest is in their liberal use of wheat, ghee, and curd. Murshidabad also is a mango growing region and the nawabs developed various hybrids so the Sheherwali cuisine include liberal use of mangoes, especially in their dessert. The Bengali mishti (sweet) channa bora is a speciality of Murshidabad district; it resembles the kala jamun; a very crusty outside holding a soft and sweet channa or cottage cheese mixture inside.

Azimganj has its fair share of temples in the Bishnupur terracotta style. Though not many, a few have exquisite carvings. The Maharani of Natore (Rajshahi, now Bangladesh) Rani Bhavani had commissioned several



The lathe-shaped polished pillars insides the navaranga

temples here and one of them is the richly carved Char Bangla temple with the typical atchala style roofs. Several temples are in ruins existing amidst weeds.

Murshidabad was also a well-known centre for weaving muslins and silks under the patronage of Muslim rulers. But even before that it was a great centre of weaving under the Malla kings.

Later the centre of weaving moved to Bishnupur in Bankura district. Baluchar was a village, but the shifting sands of the river and flooding of the village, displaced the weavers. The art of weaving such saris then shifted outside. This special craft of weaving mythical figures on its borders and pallu on traditional looms received a death blow under the British, who in a bid to encourage mill made clothes from England, squeezed the weavers out. It was not until the middle of the twentieth century that the weaving of Baluchari saris was revived, with the introduction of jacquard looms. These looms make the production of a sari quicker and less labourious.

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

Whatever maybe the case, Murshidabad today steeped in past glory is a neglected part of the country. The State Government is trying to bring in the development that the region is in need of, but as far as tourism goes it would have to inject more funds to make it more vibrant. Better infrastructure, more restaurants catering to the local diverse cuisine, and to revive the silk industry are areas that need to be seriously addressed.

So Murshidabad remains a quick getaway from Kolkata and a couple of days are enough to pack in the major landmarks. Plan your tour according to the areas in which they are located. You may even be surprised by some old relic not part of the tour, but standing forlorn and a mute testimony of a time gone by.



Pareshnath Temple built by local Jains



A new palace built by Wasif Ali Mirza, a later Nawab

How to reach Murshidabad

Murshidabad is about six hours journey from Kolkata in an Express train, of which there are quite a few. One can also drive down from Kolkata. The local Hazarduari Express which leaves Chitpur station (as different to Howrah and Sealdah stations) early morning, reaches around noon. It stops at Baharampur/Berhampore, the administrative town of Murshidabad. The tidy State guest house is located here; otherwise many budget hotels abound. One can also take a bus to Berhampur and hire

either an auto-rickshaw to Murshidabad.



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

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A.Radhakrishnan meets popular Pune-based home-chef **Bharathi Gundappa**, a modest homemaker, whose supreme passion is cooking.



Please tell me a little about yourself. Your strengths and weaknesses.

I am an ambitious, confident, enthusiastic, friendly, honest and organised person. My strengths are always saying 'yes' and going out of my way to help, leading a systematic life, a good planner, building family cohesiveness and infinite patience. My weaknesses are unfortunately my inability to say 'no', wanting everything to be absolutely perfect and getting carried away by people.

Did you choose cooking by accident or was it design?

I think cooking was a hidden talent in me. Most of the time friends appreciating my cooking made me ponder over the possibility of taking it up as my profession and when my kids moved out of Pune for higher studies, the support and trust I got from family members / my team members made me design and convert my culinary skills into a startup.

Till I got married, I never had any experience of cooking. It was my grandmother, mother who inspired me initially and the realisation and confidence that I can cook well came with the appreciation from my father-in-law, as he always eagerly waited to be served food that I cooked.

What does food mean to you? Are you a foodie? How creative is cooking?

To me, food is life. I will cook and serve through life as long as the Almighty gives me strength. Creativity in cooking for me is presentation of food in its simplest form and garnishing it. If people applaud it, then I think the purpose is achieved.

Cleanliness in cooking is also creative work.

I'm not a foodie though my son and caring hubby are. Their critical views matter. Enhanced communication between brain and tongue, I believe is a must for good cooking and eating.

What type of people form your clientele and how do they relate to your dishes? Where do you draw inspiration from? How would you rate your cooking skills?

Families /teachers who love vegetarian fare are my clients. Of late, working women have been added to my client list, as for them home cooked food is vital. Those whom I serve food have always shown appreciation as well as given critiques. Inspiration is derived when people appreciate your hard work and simply love the food you have prepared. My husband himself is a good cook and he keeps trying out new recipes (either from his mother's recipes or popular channels). As for rating my cooking skills, I leave it to customers, as I strongly believe that delivery on time and meeting the customer expectation is paramount.

Is it the sheer love for food or commercial gain that rides high in your mind? How motivated are you?

Cooking with love is my passion. It helps me keep busy and connects me to the best of people. Through cooking, one also gets opportunities to learn by venturing into new territories, which motivates me further.

Do you keep abreast with the ongoing trends and developments within the culinary world and new spins on traditional



dishes and does this inspire you to try out your own ideas?

Yes, I keep in touch with ongoing trends, through social media and my sister who is a food nutritionist, and try to make the best out of it. I try to also be creative with catering through the use of eco-friendly packing, delivery of friendly menu items and of late, wanting to cook what is of late becoming obsolete like Grandma's recipes and also authentic and traditional food items.

Creative new ideas also emerged because my daughter at 14 years of age was troublesome in eating. As she was into dancing, I needed to feed her healthy and nutritious food. This prompted me to explore new recipes and I cheated her by adding almond and walnut powders in few curries and milkshakes. She went on to perform her Arangetram, where she danced for four hours on stage.

Truly, necessity is the mother of invention!

Explain your typical day as a home chef. Are you able to work flexible hours?

As a home maker, I wake up to the morning alarm at 6 am, and say by 6.30 am, I hit the kitchen and by 11.30 am, most of my work is done. Then it's me time and workout at the gym. I plan the menu for the next day in the evening. As for being able to have flexible hours, it depends on the need. Sometimes, my day begins at 4.30 .

Tell me about your budgeting, purchasing and inventory control experience.

I am a small timer, catering to family and friends in a small

way. It's just an extension of my daily cooking. What I wish to maintain, however, is the QCD (Quality / Cost and Delivery).

Do you work well under pressure? How do you remain calm and composed when a rush of orders come in?

As I said, I am an organised person. The belief in my energy level keeps me cool and I try and deliver to the best of my abilities. I abhor getting into difficult situations. Knowing my strengths and limitations, I accept only what I can deliver. I do have my maids who assist me and are ready to put in extended working hours, in case of the odd difficult situation arising.

How many different types of cuisine are you capable of producing? What is your specialty? How customised are your menus?

I am a vegetarian and cater only to vegetarian food, both South/North Indian and sometimes Chinese too. Ideally the food we serve is what we eat at home, sometimes customised, based on the customer requirement. Our specialty however is South Indian Food.

How do you ensure the quality of the food going out to customers? How is your knowledge on food hygiene and allergens and dietary requirements?

We serve what we eat; so quality is adhered too. We certainly do take the benefits of the pricing of vegetables available in that particular season. Based on customer requests, we also accommodate food dietary requirements and also deliver

Satvik food.

How often do you and family go to restaurants?

We do go to restaurants, maybe once a month. As kids are away, we both are not keen on eating out. My favourites are Paani Puri and my evening tea! When I go to a restaurant I always try some new dish. This way I have learnt bhendi kurkure, vegetable biryani and few other recipes.

What do you think about food critics? Is there a celebrity chef you admire the most?

Critics are most certainly welcome. Celebrity chefs like Sanjeev Kapoor are most learned and experienced and I do observe their cooking style and methods. He is the man who convinced me that cooking can be fun and creative and was the first cook celebrity in India, I believe. I have learnt so many recipes from him. Brown bread sandwich, Lauki aur Matar ki sabji and so on.

What is your marketing strategy?

I depend on word-of-mouth publicity and sharing in group chats.

How would you respond to a customer's criticism?

I appreciate customer criticism a lot as it provides room for improvement. It also helps one work on ones' beliefs.

How often do you cook with ready-made products?

Seldom do I use ready-made products, unless the recipe calls for it.

Are personal chef services becoming main stream? Where do you see yourself in five years? Any idea to open your own restaurant?

Yes, personal chef services are becoming widely accepted. I have no plans as of now to open my own restaurant, as I am too small a player. What is important is to enjoy what I do. But who knows the future?

Best cooking tip for a novice just getting into the business? Or to a home cook enthusiast?

I would say start with easy recipes; ensure it is fast and tasty and also presentable. Most important enjoy the food you cook!



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

WHO AM I?



India's farmer innovators

*Innovation is rarely associated with vegetables, fruits or spices. **Hiren Bose** introduces us to some of the farmer innovators of India who have developed crop varieties, which besides being high-yielding, are pest-resistant and can be grown in a non-traditional environment.*

Sixty-four-year old Navnath Malhari Kaspate is a farmer innovator having developed a new variety of custard apple. Called NMK-01 (Golden), the variety is preferred among prospective custard apple growers and is presently being grown in 15 states of India. Kaspate holds IPR (Intellectual Property Rights) for the variety, he has developed.

The term 'farmer-innovator' is a very recent coinage in India, thanks to the National Innovation Foundation (NIF). The Foundation over the years has assiduously identified innovators from the country's small town and villages. Besides recognising their contribution to agriculture and horticulture, it has promoted them too.

Innovation is rarely associated with vegetables, fruits or spices. Interestingly, there are scores of unlettered farmers who have been ingenious enough to develop crop varieties, which besides being high-yielding, are pest-resistant and can be grown in a non-traditional environment.

Earlier known as the Honey Bee Network, the NIF was set up by the Department of Science and Technology. It has documented, added value, protecting the IPR of the contemporary unaided technological innovators and traditional knowledge-holders, disseminating their innovations on a commercial and non-commercial basis.

According to Hardev Choudhary, Innovation Officer, NIF, it is the volunteers spread across districts in the country who identify the prospective farmer-innovators and validate their achievements.



Navnath Malhari Kaspate with his new variety of custard apple called NMK-01 (Golden)

The Biennial Grassroots Innovation and Outstanding Traditional Knowledge Awards being held since 2001 help in this regard. So far, NIF has filed for 71 registrations under the plant variety, of which only 10 have been granted. Following proper verification, documentation, evaluation and validation by local agriculture universities or the Indian Council of Agriculture Research (ICAR) which involves the work of several years, NIF assists the innovators in acquiring registrations.

Developing a new variety of crop or fruit is generally undertaken either by universities or institutions like the Indian Institute of Horticultural Research. But in the case of Kaspate, a class 11 dropout he had the passion of a grower and the perseverance of a plant breeder. Visit his sprawling

farm in Gormale village in Solapur, Maharashtra, and you're likely to come across a 'living museum' of 42-odd varieties of custard apple collected from different parts of the world.

Kaspate introduced the farming community to NMK-01 (Golden) in 2011 and five years later, he was awarded the Plant Genome Saviour Farmer Reward constituted by the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Authority. He received a cash prize of ₹ 1 lakh for the same. Ever since NMK-01 (Golden) was launched, he claims to have sold 30 lakh saplings and made at least one crore from selling the fruit. Mainly grown in dry-land zones, growers not only have a good word about the NMK-01 variety, but are all praises about the yield, which can be as high as 12 tonnes per acre.

Sadabahar, a new mango variety

Have you heard of a mango variety called, Sadabahar? Very unlikely. It's called so as it fruits thrice in a year.

Developed by Shree Kishan Suman, a Kota-based horticulturist and farmer, Sadabahar is a recent entrant in the mango-sphere and has quite a few similarities with Alphonso. Mango growers the world over are making a beeline for this new variety of the 'king of fruits' to have in their orchards. Fifty-two-year-old Suman of village Girdharpura, 15 km from Kota, belongs to a family of farmers who used to grow rice and wheat but gave them up due to the fluctuating market rates. In 2000, he identified a mango tree in his orchard, which had bloomed in the three seasons viz. January-February, June-July and September-October. He prepared five grafted mango trees, using them as a scion. This tree had a good growth habit and had dark green leaves. Growing them for years, he found the mango trees immune to major diseases and common disorders. He took about 15 years to develop this variety.

Soon the NIF got in touch with him and has grown the variety at different places in the country to authenticate the veracity of Suman's claim. In 2017, Suman was conferred with the Farm Innovation Award during the 9th Biennial Grassroots Innovation and Outstanding Traditional Knowledge held at Rashtrapati Bhavan. Perhaps the nation's or in fact, the world's only hybrid mango that flowers thrice a year, Sadabahar has been registered under the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Act as a farmers' variety. So far, Suman has sold over 1500 plants, to nurseries and individuals in different parts of the country.

Jumbo cauliflowers

Jagdish Prasad Parikh is a 71-year-old farmer from Ajitgarh, Sikar district of Rajasthan, who proudly tells visitors that his jumbo cauliflower has earned him an entry

into the Limca Book of Records. As his cauliflowers are very big, they are preferred by hotels and restaurants. Growing cauliflowers since 1990, his variety received the Grassroots Innovation Award in 2001, also making him the recipient of an IPR in 2017. The biggest cauliflower he has so far grown is 25.5 kgs. The variety is unlike the regular cauliflowers you see with the vegetable vendor or purchase from your neighbourhood mall. Unaffected by warm temperatures, the variety is disease-resistant as well as tolerant to insect attacks. It can also be grown thrice in a year.

Wonder spices

These innovations by farmer-innovators, who hold IPRs for their innovations, are shining examples of livelihood security leading to crop improvement, assuring food and nutritional security, enhancing production technologies and also providing environment security. Of them, one is Sabu Varghese of Pampadumpara village in Kerala's Idukki district, who sells around 10,000 saplings of his 'wonder cardamom' each year. It is a drought-resistant variety which yields around three kg of the spice per plant and can be grown in rubber plantations. The variety can be grown in high-temperature surroundings, requiring shade and humidity for a good harvest. He received an IPR for his variety in 2015 and has not looked back since then.

Like Sabu, T.T. Thomas (71) is from Idukki and has developed "Pepper Thekken", a high yield variety of black pepper which gives a yield of more than 1000 pepper balls in one pepper bunch and is a recipient of IPR for his developed variety. About 8600 kg of dry pepper can be produced from one hectare. Since the pepper is produced in bunches, harvesting is also easy.

Plant breeders, researchers and farmers like Kaspate, Suman, Parikh, Sabu and Thomas have been granted IPR under the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Act (PPV & FR) of 2001. Exclusive rights to produce, sell, market, distribute, import and export a crop variety

are granted to farmers under this Act. They are also exempt from payment of any fee.

The Apple man of Bilaspur

Among the unique fruit variety developed by the NIF's farmer-innovators is an apple that can be successfully grown in plains in temperatures between 40-45 °C, called HRMN-99. Developed by Hariman Sharma of Paniala village in Himachal Pradesh's Bilaspur district, the variety is scab disease-resistant and can be grown in tropical and subtropical regions in the country. In 2017, he was awarded the 9th National Biennial Grassroots Innovation Award by erstwhile President Pranab Mukherjee.

Called the 'Apple Man of Bilaspur', Hariman (61) owns a 1.75-hectare orchard, in which he also grows mango, pomegranate, kiwi, plum, apricot and peach, along with coffee. There have been reports of successful fruiting of the HRMN-99 apple variety in Manipur, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka, Haryana, Rajasthan, Jammu, Kerala, Uttarakhand, Telangana, Himachal Pradesh, Delhi and even Dadra & Nagar Haveli.

"Till 2005, no one would have believed that apples could be grown along with pomegranates and mangoes in the plains, 700 m above sea level in warm temperatures. But HRMN-99 has made this possible and is presently being grown in 29 states of the country," Hariman concludes.



Hiren Kumar Bose is an independent media professional who writes on development issues.

Delhi government shows the way

*The success of the Delhi education model in schools has caught the attention of other state governments in the country who are now looking at replicating it to improve the quality of education, writes **Poorvi Bose**.*



Delhi government schools have seen the best-ever CBSE class 12th Board results with a pass percentage of 94.24% in 2019 – girls 96.3% and boys at 91.48%. This is a vast improvement from total pass percentage of 90.64% in 2018 and 88.27% in 2017.

There is an overall improvement in the quality of education in government schools of the capital, courtesy the Delhi Government governed by the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) which now is into its third term since coming to power in 2015. With slogans like “education first”, the party has kept its promise of improving the state education system and the results are encouraging.

The success of the Delhi school education system has galvanised all other states including that of Maharashtra to adopt the model. In January 2020, Maharashtra's deputy Chief Minister, Ajit Pawar announced that the state government will soon adopt the Delhi school model for

schools under the municipal corporations in Mumbai, Pune, Nagpur, etc. At the school education review meeting held in January 2020, Pawar went on to mention that the Delhi education system is the best in the country and that it would even help in better financial management.

Focus on quality education

Delhi has adopted a number of changes differing from the previous traditional approach and experts have lauded them for the results. One of the key changes was the increased share of budget allocated to education. In 2015-16, ₹6,208 crore was provided to the school and higher education department, it was increased to ₹11,201 crore in the 2018-19 annual budget and to ₹15,133 crore in 2019-20. The increase in the budget allocation was to improve school infrastructure and update teacher-training system as well as student learning programme. In addition, 21 new schools with the state-of-art facilities were established and 8,000

new classrooms were added to existing schools. Computer facilities have been added in 88.82% of schools, as well as science labs along with SMART classrooms.

There was an overall improvement in the maintenance of hygiene. Government run schools all over the country are known to be in a bad state with poor infrastructure – lack of toilets for girls and boys and no clean drinking water. But Delhi set an example with clean, hygienic and fully functional toilets for both girls and boys.

Teacher's Training Programmes were given top priority to help teachers gain contemporary knowledge about their subjects and improve their teaching abilities. More than 36,000 teachers went through an extensive capacity building exercise in 2017.

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The creative journey of Jyoti Choudhury

Shoma A. Chatterji profiles the art journey of Jyoti Choudhury, a talented artist who had her first painting exhibition recently, at the age of 92.



Can anyone imagine a male painter having his first art exhibition, a solo show, at the ripe age of 92? In an art ambience dictated by patriarchy as much as the society is, I do not think this is possible, at least in India. But Jyoti Choudhury's three daughters, Aloka, Tulika and Lipika have made this possible.

Jyoti remained a successful wife and mother for decades and kept a very low profile so far as her talent in visual art was concerned. It never even occurred to her to imagine that her art works were worthy of display at an art exhibition either in a group show or in a solo show.

A young Jyoti was studying at the Government College of Art and Craft in Kolkata when she fell in love with her tutor who encouraged her to pursue art and also got her admitted to the Art College directly into the second year. But she quit studies to relocate to Bombay when she married

him and he decided to move over to Mumbai in 1953. Her tutor was none other than Salil Choudhury, the miracle musical talent who has left behind his own distinctive school of music as a musical heritage and brought in fusion music into Indian cinema long before the term "fusion" became *infra dig*.

Salil Choudhury encouraged Jyoti to pursue her art and she did, between her busy schedule as wife and mother, playing host to her husband's music crew and assistants and students who would walk in casually and stay back for lunch and then, after rehearsals, sometimes, for dinner. In those days, strugglers in the Bombay film industry found smooth and easy access in the homes of their mentors and Salil Chowdhury's flat, first in Andheri and then at Pali Hill was no exception.

Jyoti's inspiration to paint came from her maternal grandfather who mostly painted the figures of gods

and goddesses. When Jyoti painted, Salil too felt inspired and spent his spare hours painting. Jyoti painted him while he himself was painting and this time, she used oils but sadly, none of these paintings have survived the onslaughts of time. He also bought for her books on art and on paintings to keep her work going. But with three little daughters one after another and a very busy husband who kept odd hours of work, she could hardly make time for her creative pursuits.

Her long trips to Darjeeling and Delhi, USA and UAE, added to her inspiration and her creative instincts. The blooming gulmohur outside her balcony, the fishermen's boats beached at Mahim, stark desert fortifications standing in sharp contrast to rolling Himalayan hills were all subjects that inspired her work. The 'bai' who washes her dishes is portrayed with the same passion as the cat reclining at her window. Her bold strokes, along with the directness and vividness of her



paintings restore freshness to our perception of the everyday life.

"I had no special subject in mind when I sat down to draw or paint. I would work on anything that took my fancy – nature, landscapes, portraits, black-and-white charcoal sketches of people and places, anything. I usually worked with pastels. So, I did not ever think of focussing either on a particular form or a specific content," said Jyoti in an interview just before her first exhibition in Mumbai a couple of weeks ago. Now, she cannot move out of her Mumbai home any more but is visibly happy with the fact that a solo exhibition of her works has at last been organised for the first time.

"Jyoti Chowdhury is no ordinary artist. Wife-mother-home-maker-artist, over the years she has juggled her familial responsibilities with her passion for art – with equal assurance. Her devotion to art not encroaching on her role as a house-

wife but, instead, offering her the complete freedom to devote time to both with equal fervour. There was always time for a quick sketch of what caught her fancy whilst the next meal simmered on her stove. And the fruit of her perseverance is sweet, as this exhibition demonstrates" the creative souvenir-cum-invite to the Bombay exhibition stated.

A cultural organisation in Mumbai called Milon Mancha, organised an exhibition of her chosen works under the title – Jyoti's Journey – Life on a Broader Journey, for two days beginning on 29th February, and they are planning another exhibition in Kolkata soon. She lived as a single mother for many years when her daughters were growing after her husband Salil Choudhury left the family to seek new roots. But all that did not dampen her spirits and her cheerful demeanour.

Like most talented wives of her time, Jyoti never cared to highlight

the creative side of her life. The walls of their home were dotted with her art works but she did not say that they were her works unless specifically asked who had done the paintings. And now that her works are on show, one keeps wondering when and how she did this all and also confronted her personal problems with that ever-smiling face.



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.

Three Sisters – A timeless classic

*The Three Sisters, an adaptation of Anton Chekhov play staged in Mumbai by the Jeff Goldberg Studio is engaging, engrossing and leaves the audience in a deep meditative mood, says **Prof. Avinash Kolhe**.*



Classics by definition are timeless and relevant to any situation, anywhere in the world. Anton Chekhov's (1860-1904) 'Three Sisters' is one such play which can be adapted to many situations in today's world though the play was written during the closing decades of the 19th century in Czar's Russia. In today's India, we hear echo of the 'Three Sisters'. Mumbai audience could easily relate to the production mounted by the Jeff Goldberg Studio, Khar, Mumbai.

Anton Chekhov, a medical practitioner by profession, was part of the Great Russian writers like Tolstoy, Turgenev and Dostoevsky. These stalwarts could see the shape of things to come which eventually came in 1917 under Lenin's Bolshevik Revolution.

Chekhov was good at handling short stories as well as plays. His plays like 'The Seagull', 'Uncle Vanya', and 'The Cherry Orchard' are regarded as modern classics and performed all over the world. 'The Three Sisters' was written in 1900 and performed in 1901 at Moscow Art

Theatre.

The Jeff Goldberg Studio is a five-year old Mumbai-based theatre group that is a fully integrated Method Acting School. The group also regularly holds acting workshops. The play under review is the production of one such batch but directed by a senior theatre person Ashok Pandey, himself an accomplished actor.

Ashok not only has directed the play but has also adapted it to Indian conditions and located it in somewhat modern days. This is somewhat easy to do as the Three Sisters is about the decline of old system and emergence of a new one. The play is engaging, engrossing and leaves the audience in a deep meditative mood.

The story

The Prozorovs family has shifted out of Moscow to this small town some eleven years ago. Now the father is dead and there are three sisters and one brother. Olga, 32, the eldest, is a spinster and has a boring job of a school teacher. Masha, the middle one, is 23. She was married at 18 and that too, to a school teacher.

Masha does not love her husband and spends half the time in her maternal home with her sisters and one brother, Kabeer. Irina, the youngest, is 20 and unmarried. She too has an equally boring and tiring job in a local post office. They all yearn to go back to Moscow, the city life and what it normally offers. Kabeer is not married when the play opens but during the course he gets married to Natasha, a town girl, not at all as refined as the three sisters who always boast of their tests and polished way of life. Three sisters, especially Masha does not leave a chance to taunt Natasha for her low-brow tests. In addition to these characters, the play has some army officers who come and go as per the need of the plot. The play is essentially about the life of three sisters through which Chekhov shows the decline of feudalism and emergence of new class of unrefined people who will soon capture power and drive out these relics of old times.

Natasha represents this new class. After her marriage with Kabeer, she becomes part of the Prozorovs family. Once she becomes pregnant and delivers a baby boy, she realises that now her time has come and starts bossing around with these three sisters. The sisters just cannot adjust to this new force that has invaded their refined life and is not going to go away at all. Their dream of migrating back to Moscow does not become a reality and they realise that they are condemned to stay here, under the baton of Natasha, the new lady of the house.

The theme of Three Sisters has been handled before with varying success. I remember Satyajit Ray's 'Jalsaghar', a black and white film made in 1958. Here too we find Ray exploring similar theme.

Ashok Pandey had a set of

amateur actors, freshly minted, to mount this challenging show. Feroza Singh (Olga), Sharvi Bhujbal (Masha), Sanya Sagar (Irina), Jeniffer Piccinato (Natasha) and Aditya Jain (Kabeer) are the main characters who have delivered a splendid performance.

Plays like Three Sisters force audience to put on their thinking caps and try to understand the changing nature of societies. Which is why authors like Chekhov never get dated.



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

Mumbai.

Delhi government shows the way

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And 200 teachers got trained as “mentor teachers” by world’s top educators at National Institute of Education in Singapore in 2018. On completion of the training, they were assigned five to six schools which they visited daily and provided on-site learning support to other teachers. Rather than hiring retired teachers to train young teachers like it was always being done, the Delhi government decided to take a step in a different direction.

Over the years several studies have been conducted on the state of education in India and children’s learning levels and they revealed that many of these children could not cope with what was being taught in their respective grades. Most of the times the issue was the lack of basic knowledge like understanding numbers and letters or reading and writing. To tackle this, a programme called Chunauti was introduced in 2018 aiming at students from grade 6 to grade 8 in Delhi. They were divided into three groups called Pratibha, Nishtha and Neo-Nishta according to their learning levels. This helped teachers in providing students with different teaching techniques and a better student-teacher interaction catered to their needs. They are even provided with special study material based on the groups.

Involving all stakeholders

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009, had made School Management Committees (SMCs) a compulsory part of all schools consisting of local elected representatives, parents and teachers. They had duties like monitoring the working of schools, preparing a school development plan and monitoring usage of grants provided. These committees have been established in few schools across the country since implementation of the Act, but not given the required importance or responsibility. The Delhi government thought differently and decided to utilise this unrecognised stakeholder group’s power in children’s education.

From 2015, SMCs have been given the responsibility of organising parent-teacher meetings, streamlining admission process and helping students maintain their attendance. Members of SMCs are given regular training and are provided with ₹5 lakhs per annum to be able to carry out their duties. Since parents are one of the key stakeholders in their children’s education, they are concerned about their development and progress, and thus are active participants in this decentralised model.

A child cannot obtain holistic development in terms of education

and overall growth, if every stakeholder in his or her life does not have the required skills to help them grow. Apart from this, the surroundings of a child create a huge impact on their mindset. Along with having fully functioning classrooms and labs, a child should be healthy and feel safe in a school. Focus should not only be given to one aspect of a student’s life, but to all of them.

Maharashtra government has realised the need of good quality education and is planning to introduce these much-needed initiatives. They have to create success stories though the results of the changes may take time to show.

Education was never mentioned as a top priority by any state government at top level. Delhi’s government run school system has been an inspiration and if followed well with some tweaks here and there to suit individual states, there certainly is a ray of hope for more success stories emerging out of our public education system.



Poorvi Bose is an Electronics Engineer and a Teach for India fellow, Poorvi Bose is presently pursuing her

Master’s in Public Policy for NLSIU Bangalore.

RAJALAKSHMI PARHASARATHY

Educationist par excellence (1925-2019)

Rajalakshmi Parthasarathy was born on the 27 November 1925 in Madras (now Chennai) in an affluent and educated family as the daughter of R. Parthasarathy and Alamelu Ammal. She pursued her early education at the St John's School and later joined the Holy Cross College in Madras for her graduation.

A fascination for the written word saw her enlist for a journalism degree in the Madras University at a time when few women ventured to undertake higher studies. She was the only woman in her class and also had the distinction of being the first woman in her family to complete her graduation. Later when she felt a desire to divert to the educational mainstream, she finished her Masters in Education (MeD) and also acquired a post graduate degree in History as well.

As a journalist, she did a short stint with one of the premier newspapers in the country 'The Hindu' before leaving the journal to join the weekly Tamil tabloid 'Kumudam'.

Sensing that there was a need for a sound educational system in the city of Madras where she had settled down after her marriage to the well-known playwright Y G Parthasarathy, Rajalakshmi started a school which she named the Padma Seshadri Bala Bhavan (PSBB). When it first commenced operations from a shed in the terrace of her house in the year 1958 it had just 13 children on its rolls. Enthused by the spontaneous response to her maiden venture she later shifted the school to a more spacious building and in 1971, a new branch of the school began functioning in Nungambakkam, a well-known locality in the city.

Since then Rajalakshmi never had to look back as by then the school had earned a reputation for quality education and students flocked to it in large numbers. She served as the school's Dean right from its inception in 1958 till she passed away on 8 August 2019 at the age of 93. By 2009 the school had five branches and a student strength of around 8000 with a faculty of over 500 all imbued with the same spirit for quality education as the founder. Today PSBB

has grown even further and is imparting education to over 10000 students and has expanded its network to neighbouring states like Karnataka. Several of its alumnae have risen to great heights in their careers, thanks to the good grounding that they received at Padma Seshadri. Rajalakshmi's contribution to the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has been acclaimed and the Board has over the years largely benefited from her valuable inputs.

A number of honours and awards have come the way of the dedicated educationist and apart from the Padma Shri conferred on her by the Central Government in 2010 for her contribution in the fields of literature and education, Rajalakshmi also won the Achievement Medal for Leadership and Commitment to Excellence in Education awarded by a US-based Center for Excellence in Education. She was also a recipient of the Government of India's Vayoshreshtha Samman and the Rotary Club of Madras honoured her with the Paul Harris Award. Her autobiography titled 'Excellence Beyond the Classroom : A memoir' highlighted her experiences in the field of education, the pitfalls that she encountered on the way and her views on how students should shape their careers and rise and shine in life. One of the most eloquent

tributes on her passing came from the double Oscar Award winning composer A R Rahman, an alumnus of PSBB who hailed her as a visionary educator who changed the lives of thousands of young men and women. An avid patron of the fine arts Rajalakshmi, even in her advanced age was a regular at drama festivals in Chennai and always had a pat for the artistes and the troupes.



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

WENDELL RODRICKS

A multi-talented fashion icon (1960-2020)

Wendell Rodricks was a consummate Goa-based award winning fashion designer, historian, author and activist. Born into a modest Goan Catholic Mumbai family, Wendell did his graduation in catering. He however, switched to studying fashion designing, in the early 2000s, at Los Angeles and Paris, and completed internships at the National Museum of Costume and Fashion, Lisbon and the Museum at the Fashion Institute of Technology, New York City.

He worked for fashion houses such as Garden Vareli, Lakme Cosmetics and DeBeers, before launching his own eponymous label in 1989. His creative world was in another silo, frequently colliding with what was happening elsewhere. Advocating, he always surprised women by being able to tell their size without bringing out the measuring tape. He advocated eco-friendly and sustainable fashion and brought to his shows thought and precision. His models often were real women...women he knew from high society, an aunt he loved, a friend, an ex-model who had decided to abandon dieting and let herself look like a real woman.

A homosexual, he was an icon of Indian's LGBTQ rights movement and married Frenchman Jerome Marrel, in a civil ceremony in Paris in 2002. Wendell not only designed clothes for many B-town personalities, but even featured in cameo roles in Bollywood films like Boom (2003), Fashion (2008) and Fan (2016) and a television play True West in the year 2002. In 2014, he received the Padma Shri for a collection that showcased outfits with Braille. He was also ordained Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et Lettres (Knight of the Order of Arts and Letters) in 2015. He worked on the planning of the first ever Lakme India Fashion Week in 2000 and was prescient in his ability to see potential amongst the gauche young who thronged such events. He was also one of the speakers at TEDx, Panaji 2019. The trauma of the 1993 Mumbai riots saw him shift base to his native Goa in the 2000s.

A talented writer, in 2012, he brought out his first book, Moda Goa: History and Style, on Goa's costumes and

also his autobiography, titled The Green Room, not only about his own life but also of the evolution of the fashion industry. In 2017, he released Poskem: Goans in the Shadows, a work of fiction about the darker side of Goa --- the practice of wealthy families taking in orphans for their labour, to become servants, in some cases even victims of abuse.

An activist, he ached for the way Goa was being gobbled up by greedy builders and mining companies, and mobilised new ways of community living and for fighting against a system that was bound to destroy it. He traced the history of and revived the kunbi sari, the traditional Goan coarse checkered sari and its weaving patterns that farmers' wives (of the Kunbi tribe) wore, designed (with shorter length and easier drape) to enable them to work freely in the fields, helping the weavers get an enhanced amount of more than ₹ 7,000 from a meagre ₹. 700 and showcased the design at the Wills Lifestyle India Fashion Week.

He restored his 450-year-old home, called Casa Dona Maria in Colvale into a costume museum called Moda Goa Museum. It will preserve indigenous cultural heritage through his 30 years collection of over 800 artefacts dating from the 7th century C.E. to the present, including costumes and accessories ranging from an original pano bhaju, to Reita Faria's bathing suit (Miss World in 1966), to an apsara found in a nearby field dating to a Buddhist monastery.

In 2016, announcing his retirement from his label, he handed over its creative control to his student, Schulen Fernandes, a first for any major Indian fashion label. Wendell died at his Colvale, Goa residence aged 59 of heart attack. By being unabashedly local, he was truly universal. Hopefully, his legacy will live on.

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



MAJOR AMIT DESWAL, SM

The young, brave hero from Haryana (1985-2016)

Amit was born on 15 January 1985 in village Surheti, Jhajar district, Haryana. His father, Subedar Major Rishi Ram Deswal celebrated his son's birthday and Army Day on that day.

Amit studied in the village school and passed his high school examination from Kendriya Vidyalaya, Nasik. He graduated in 2004 from Guru Gobind Singh College Delhi and fulfilled his father's dream by joining the Army. He stood second in the merit list of Indian Military Academy in 2005 and was commissioned in the Artillery Regiment on 10 June 2006. His father had also served in Artillery.

Amit was selected for Special Forces and transferred to the elite unit 21 Para (SF) in January 2011. He had obtained distinction in the commando course. He excelled in sports, was an outstanding cross-country runner and was called a flying machine. He was an undefeated hockey player and his troops looked up to him.

Amit was posted to Sikkim in January 2016 and got involved in Operation Hifazat. Manipur was facing a violent struggle by Zeliangrong United Front (ZUF) who had the objective of protecting the natural resources, people, land, assure individual dignity and ensure integrity of the Zeliangrong people. The Zeliangrong, a subgroup of the Nagas, formed ZUF on 25 February 2011 and vowed not to have any peace agreement with the government. The ultimate aim of the ZUF was to have a separate Zeliangrong state within the Indian Union. They openly declared their agenda on the Raising Day of 25 February 2015 and submitted their appeal in a memorandum to the Prime Minister. According to a survey report the ZUF had cadre strength of 300. With relentless hard work and excellent tactical acumen, Amit was able to check the activities of the ZUF cadre.

Credible information was received on 13 April 2016 from intelligence sources about the presence of hostile militants in a heavily wooded area in Manipur's Tamenglong district about 30 kms off the National Highway 36. This group of the ZUF cadre declined to take part in any peace

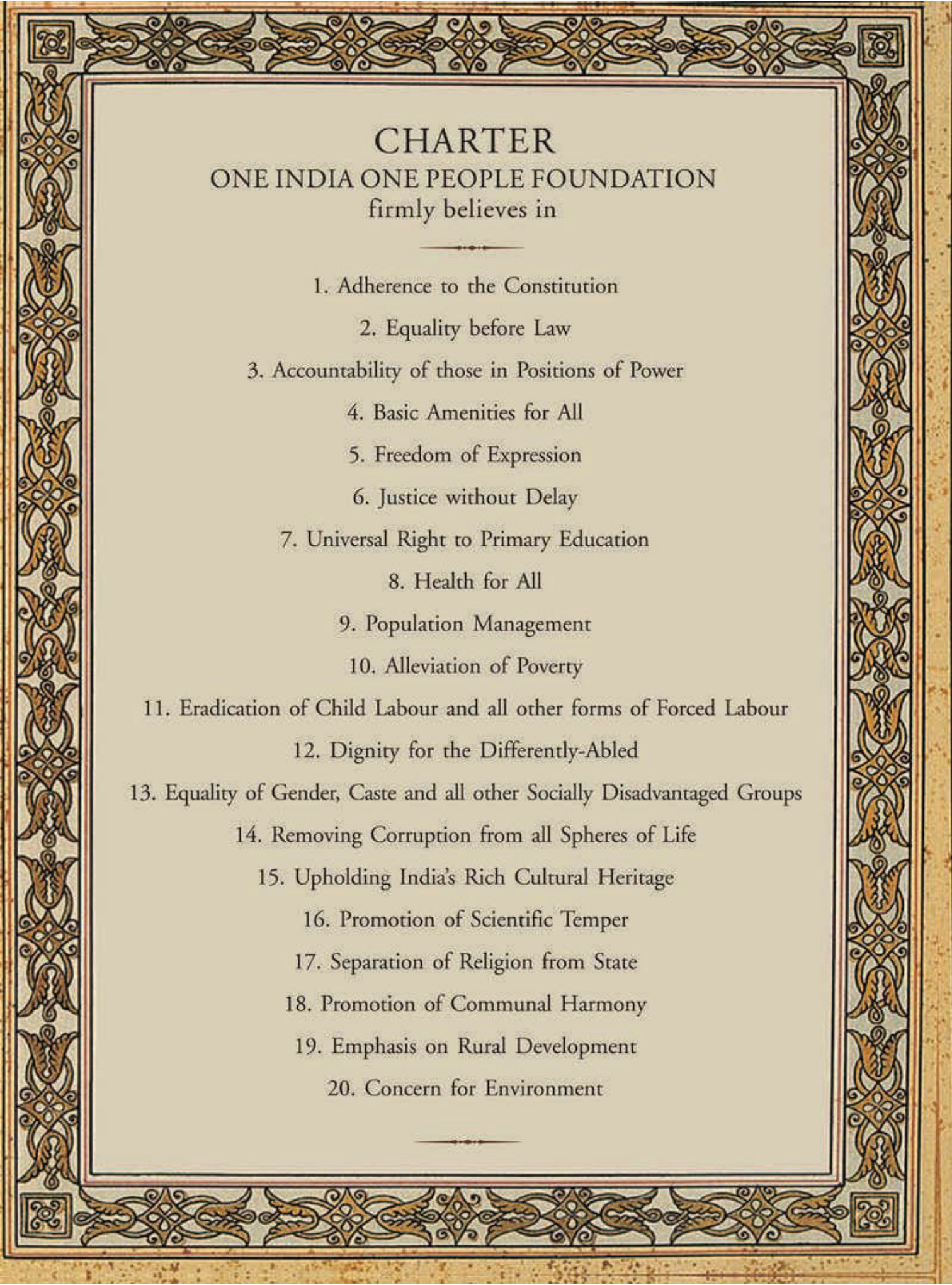
negotiations with the government. 21 Para Group was detailed to round up this group and an operation under Major Amit Deswal was launched for this task on 13 April 2016. After intensive search, the militants were located leading to an exchange of fire. Major Deswal killed an insurgent at about 7a.m. and also seized an AK 47 gun. The other militants managed to flee into the dense forest. Amit continued to search for them and located them at 4 p.m. at a site about 20 kms away from the highway. A fierce exchange of fire ensued in which Amit received six bullet wounds and succumbed to the injuries. His body was recovered from a remote site in Manipur. Amit had displayed exemplary courage and leadership in carrying out this mission for which he was awarded Sena Medal (SM).



Amit is survived by his wife Neeta and their three-and-half year old son Arjun. Amit's body was kept in Assam for two days due to bad weather where the Army paid tributes to him. It was then flown to Delhi. The Army Chief, General Suhag, also paid tribute to him. The body was brought in a special helicopter to his village where a large crowd had gathered to pay tribute to their hero. Amidst shouts of "Amit amar rahe", the body was cremated with full military honours. His brother lit the pyre as the gun salute roared in presence of former chief minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda several political, military and civil officers.

Neeta Deswal too decided to join the Army as a Short Service officer. The Haryana Government had offered a civilian job to her but she chose to serve in the army. She worked hard to qualify in the selection board tests and had full support of her family.

- Brigadier Suresh Chandra Sharma (retd.)



CHARTER

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1. Adherence to the Constitution
 2. Equality before Law
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 16. Promotion of Scientific Temper
 17. Separation of Religion from State
 18. Promotion of Communal Harmony
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WHO AM I?

Am I a Hindu first or an Indian first?

Am I a Muslim first or an Indian first?

Am I a Christian first or an Indian first?

Am I a Buddhist first or an Indian first?

Am I a Brahmin first or an Indian first?

Am I a Dalit first or an Indian first?

Am I a South Indian first or an Indian first?

Am I a North Indian first or an Indian first?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Sadanand A. Shetty, Founder Editor
(Mayoer 9th 1930 – February 23rd 2007)
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