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PANDEMIC

How India weathered the second wave

Crisis that left India breathless

**Remedy worse than the
disease!**

Masks off Western media

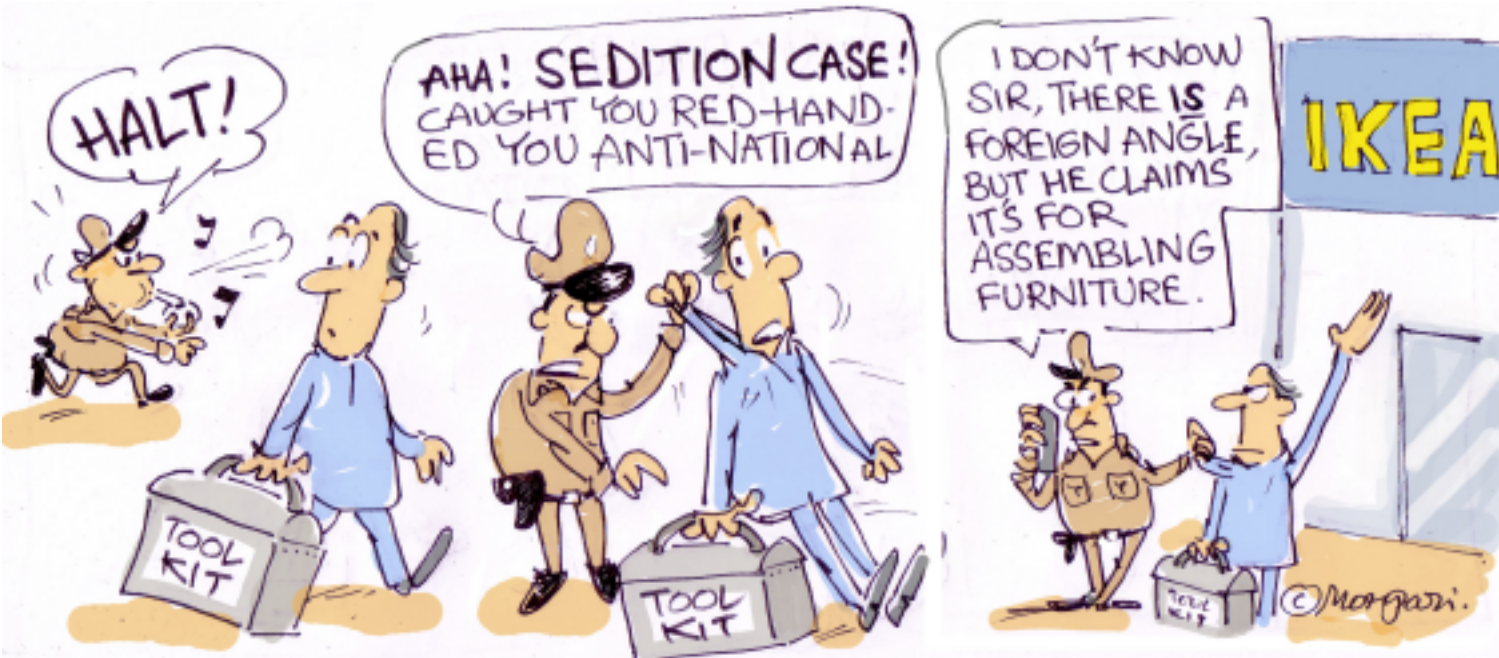
Know India Better

**Mysterious Roopkund
Bhangarh Fort**

Face to Face

Malabika Delzad Marzabani



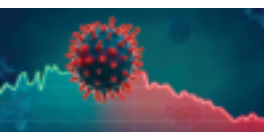


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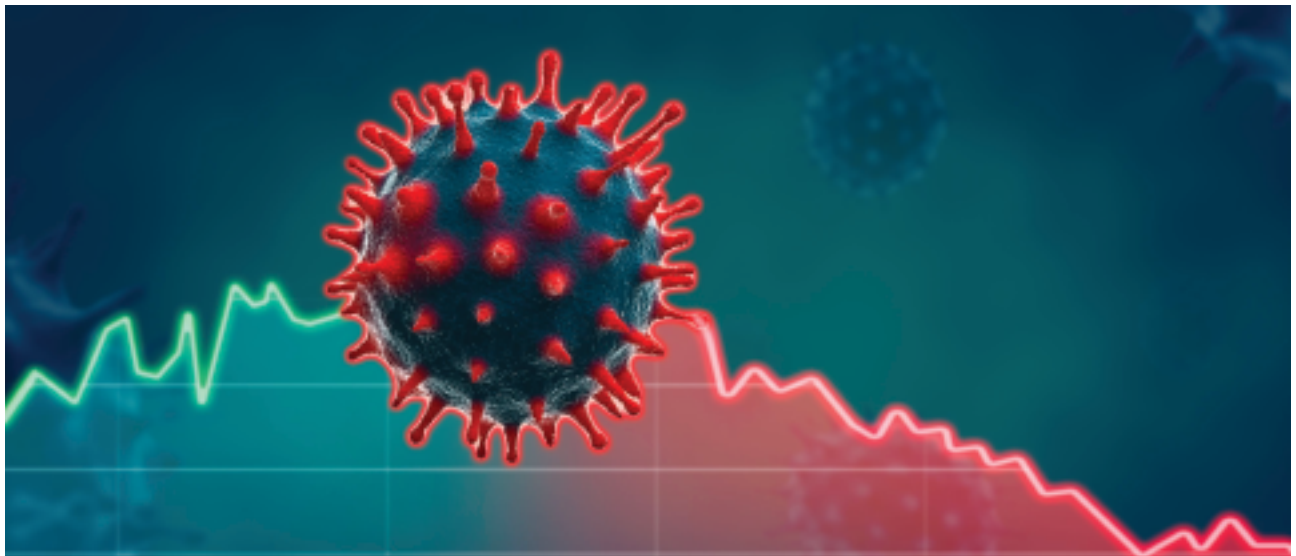
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How the second wave too was weathered!

*The government machinery got its act together right in the days of the first wave by boosting its PPE kits and mask manufacturing to become self-reliant and carried the same efficiency when the second and more intense wave was upon the country. **Nikita Shastri** outlines the trajectory, describing how the challenges posed by the shortage of oxygen and vaccination were overcome with prudent measures and sound logistics with marked emphasis on 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat'.*



The second wave of the pandemic peaked between March-May and started declining from June onward

At a time when most countries were returning to normalcy after months of battle with Covid-19, India, after having recovered from the first wave successfully, had to fasten its seatbelt one more time to fight the second wave. And, it did so with conviction and determination!

The first wave of the coronavirus infection was marked by the national lockdown where the essential service providers and frontline workers emerged as Covid heroes. Doctors, nurses, medical personnel, policemen, delivery personnel, postmen, grocers and vegetable vendors even watchmen had continued to work as most of the country stayed in the safe confines of their homes.

Making steady progress

In the initial days of the Covid-19 crisis in India, the shortage of PPE kits, masks and other medical essentials soon turned around when India swiftly boosted manufacturing and with a span of weeks became an exporter of PPE kits and masks. In March 2020, the export of the kits and other protective equipment was banned to ensure enough supplies for domestic needs. In July 2020, domestic manufacturers

had exported 23 lakh personal protection equipment (PPE) kits to five foreign nations when the government allowed sale of such medical coverall to foreign entities. The country was steadily recovering from the pandemic that was set to accelerate when the vaccination drive began on 16 January 2021. Different categories of professionals were roped in for the drive and, for that purpose, 2,360 Master Trainers, 61,000 Programme Managers, 2 lakh Vaccinators, 3.7 lakh other Vaccination Team Members had been trained before the drive began.

The first phase of the vaccination was conducted for approximately one crore healthcare workers and two crore frontline workers - police, paramilitary forces, sanitation workers and disaster management volunteers --- from both public and private sectors. The second phase began on 1 March 2021 for senior citizens i.e. those above 60 years of age and people above 45 years with comorbidities. With the second phase, online registration through Aarogya Setu app and Co-WIN began too.

By March 2021, India had also exported a significant number of doses and 60 million doses were dispatched to 76 countries. Starting 1 April 2021, all citizens above the

age of 45 were permitted to get the vaccine. On 19 April, the next phase of vaccination was announced that would immunise citizens above the age of 18 from 1 May 2021 onward. It was an enormous challenge to vaccinate a population of the size of India in an efficient, uninterrupted and 'safe' manner.

Overcoming vaccination challenges

Till 4 June 2021 that happens to be the 140th day of the vaccination programme in India, a total of 33,57,713 vaccine doses were administered. This included 31,01,109 beneficiaries who had received their first dose and 2,56,604 who had taken the second dose as well. The cumulative number of Covid-19 vaccine doses administered in the country exceeded 22.75 Cr (22,75,67,873) as per the 7 pm provisional report by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare released on the day.

During the vaccination drive there were some hiccups such as shortage of vaccines, lapses in distribution by the state government, etc. At the same time when private sector was roped in for vaccination, not only did the vaccine cost shot up drastically, at some places there was a shortage owing to hoarding and mismanagement.

So, in a pro-people move, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced on 7 June 2021 that the central government would purchase Covid-19 vaccines and supply to the state governments at no cost. At the same time, the cost for a vaccine dose was capped and the service charge of vaccination that is charged above the price of the vaccine in private hospitals cannot exceed Rs 150.

Tackling the second wave

In February this year when a slight bump in the Covid-19 cases trajectory in Punjab and Maharashtra turned into a constant and soon enough heralded the second wave of Covid-19 infection. Even as the vaccination programme was underway in the country, the second wave came in fast and very strong, far worse than the first one.

In mid-April, states such as Delhi, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Gujarat, Punjab, and Maharashtra displayed an alarming rise in Covid-19 fatality rates. Punjab's seven-day average of daily cases were the highest in the country at the time as it went up 509 per cent from the trough after the first wave, nearly eight times the national average. Even Maharashtra witnessed a rise of 331 per cent from its post-peak low seen for the week ending 11 February 2021.

The second wave also created a 'shortage' of medical oxygen due to the manifold rise in oxygen demand for treatment of patients. Even then, India was producing sufficient oxygen to meet the needs but a shortage of oxygen carrying tankers and the overwhelming logistics created a shortage for some time.

Government machineries came together

Several government departments from the Ministry

of Health, Power, Railways, Steel, etc. came together and in a first-of-its-kind collaboration, undertook several key measures in May 2021 'to increase the availability, streamline the distribution and strengthen the oxygen storage infrastructure in the country. Oxygen production increased from 5,700 MT/day in August 2020 to 9,446 MT/day in May 2021.

The PM CARES Fund accorded sanction for the procurement of 1,50,000 units of 'Oxycare' system developed by Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) at a cost of Rs 322.5 crore.

Between 27 April 2021 and 11 May 2021, cumulatively 9,284 oxygen concentrators, 7,033 oxygen cylinders, 19 Oxygen Generation Plants, 5,933 ventilators/Bi PAP were dispatched by the central government to increase the Covid management capacity of states and UTs.

Indian Railways delivered nearly 62,60 MT of LMO (liquid medical oxygen) in more than 396 tankers to various states across the country till 12 May 2021. The Indian Air Force airlifted 403 oxygen containers of 6,856 Metric Tonnes (MT) capacity along with other equipment of 163 MT capacity, in 634 sorties from different parts of the country including Jamnagar, Bhopal, Chandigarh, Ranchi, Agra, Jodhpur, Mumbai, Lucknow, Vijayawada, Dimapur, etc.

Indian Naval Ships, as part of operation 'Samudra Setu II' returned home with 260 MT of LMO for direct supply to various states, eight oxygen containers of total capacity 160 MT, approximately 2,600 oxygen filled cylinders and 3,150 empty cylinders for oxygen from Persian Gulf and Southeast Asia in the same period.

Between 3 January 2020 and 16 June 2021, there have been 2,95,70,881 confirmed cases of Covid-19 with 3,77,031 deaths in India according to the World Health Organisation (WHO) data. The United States registered 3,31,51,678 Covid-19 cases and reported 5,94,888 deaths in the same period. It's important to note that the US population size is a third of that of India's. The relative Covid-fatality figures in India are far lesser than most advanced nations of the world with better health infrastructure and much lesser population numbers. What India has achieved in terms of managing the Covid-19 crisis is commendable and inspiring. Apart from a significant push for self-reliance that was initiated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's call for Atmanirbhar Bharat, India has taken several steps in the right direction to achieve self-reliance in all spheres.

Nikita Shastri is a researcher with The History and Heritage Project – a DraftCraft International Initiative to document details, analyse facts and plug lacunae generated by oversight or to further national or foreign agenda in History and Heritage Across India and Beyond Borders

Crisis that left India breathless

*In the midst of the mist created by fake news and rising Covid cases, the Central Government acted with alacrity to address the surge in oxygen demand. By second week of May 2021, it undertook a plethora of key measures to increase the availability, streamline the distribution and strengthen the oxygen storage infrastructure in the country. **Kriti Kalra** traces how the situation was tided over and the country could breathe easy again.*



LMO (liquid medical oxygen) being transported by tankers

The second wave of the Covid-19 infection in India was marked by the acute shortage of oxygen that became a priced commodity overnight due to the manifold rise in oxygen demand for both medical facilities and for home treatment of patients.

With the deepening crisis, government entities such as the Ministry of Power, Ministry of Railways, etc., undertook proactive measures to address the situation. Several stories surfaced where quick thinking administrative officers warded off the crisis in their respective zones by taking swift measures.

During the national crisis, the Fake News factory regularly churned out unsubstantiated, misleading and wrong news. So the government machinery had to work overtime to ensure fake news circulated irrationally among the masses was countered with facts to prevent panic and distress among members of the public.

The importance of medical oxygen

Liquid Medical Oxygen (LMO) is high purity oxygen used for medical treatments and suitable for use in human body. LMO is extensively used in medical procedures as it provides a basis for almost all modern anaesthetic techniques. This oxygen also restores tissue oxygen tension

as it increases the availability of oxygen thereby helping in maintaining cardiovascular stability.

A Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) explainer issued in May 2021 elaborated the use and significance of LMO for Covid-19 treatment. It read, 'Oxygen is crucial for the treatment of patients with severe Covid-19, since the disease affects lung functioning. Shortness of breath or difficulty of breathing is one of the most common symptoms in patients with severe Covid-19. It also hampers the supply of oxygen to various parts of the body. They hence need oxygen therapy to be supplied through medical oxygen. One of the ways in which this oxygen can be supplied is through Liquid Medical Oxygen (LMO).'

The World Health Organisation (WHO) includes LMO on their List of Essential Medicines. The Drug Prices Control Order, 2013 also places LMO under the National List of Essential Medicines (NLEM).

India's manufacturing prowess

The most common production method is separation of oxygen in what are known as Air Separation Units or ASUs that are plants that separate large volumes of gases by using the Fractional Distillation Method. The process produces pure oxygen from atmospheric air, which consists

mostly of nitrogen and oxygen – 78 per cent nitrogen, 21 per cent oxygen and remaining one per cent other gases including argon, carbon dioxide, neon, helium and hydrogen.

India's daily oxygen production capacity is around 7127 Metric Tons (MTs). Starting April 2021 when the second wave intensified, surplus oxygen available with steel plants was also being utilised for treatment. During the crisis, the production was increased to 8,922 MTs and was set to go even higher to address the situation.

According to a release by the Ministry of Steel on 25 April 2021, Public Sector Undertakings under the Ministry of Steel and other private companies in the steel sector were ramping up efforts to supplement those of the government in making available Liquid Medical Oxygen.

Total daily medical oxygen production capacity of Steel plants in India is 2834 MT. As against 2834 MT of daily LMO production capacity in the steel sector, the production of LMO was 3474 MT as reported on 24 April 2021. With all these efforts, 2894 tonnes were dispatched to different states on 24 April by Steel Plants in Public & Private Sector as against 1500/1700 Metric Tonnes/Day a week earlier.

The average delivery of Liquid Medical Oxygen by SAIL has been raised to more than 800 tonnes per day that has been continuously enhancing LMO supply. In the last FY 20-21, Vizag Steel had supplied 8842 ton of LMO. This FY, between 13 April and 25 April 2021, more than 1300 ton of LMO was dispatched and the first Oxygen Express left Vizag Steel Plant site on 22 April 2021 for Maharashtra carrying 100 tons of LMO to meet the need there.

The reality of the crisis

According to government reports, on 12 April 2021, the medical oxygen consumption in the country was 3,842 MTs that is 54 percent of the daily production capacity. The maximum consumption of medical oxygen in the country is by states of Maharashtra, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Delhi followed by Chhattisgarh, Punjab and Rajasthan.

The country was producing sufficient oxygen to

meet the need of the hour. The 'crisis' was triggered by a shortage of oxygen carrying tankers and the overwhelming logistics that came into play for transportation of LMO from distant locations to the second wave hotspots.

On 24 April 2021, several hospitals in Delhi made frantic calls seeking emergency supplies of oxygen. The state does not have sufficient in-house production capacity. At the time, the country was struggling to use all means including air, road and train transport to move medical oxygen to hospital in Delhi that was one of the worst-hit during the second wave.

According to experts, the main hindrance in the supply of LMO was not shortage of oxygen but the logistics that delayed the supply of medical oxygen to hospital beds in time. The distance of production units from Covid hotspots was very large and the distribution network was already stretched delaying the supply chain. Other factors included limited tankers, companies not buying cryogenic tankers, oxygen leakage, black marketing of cylinders and irrational use.

Additionally, with the spread of Covid-19 infection to neighbouring oxygen-producing states, the demand-supply equilibrium got affected as the local demand for oxygen increased multi-fold.

In Maharashtra, Chief Secretary Sitaram Kunte wrote to Union Cabinet Secretary Rajiv Gauba and demanded 'at least 200MT more liquid oxygen for Maharashtra as 16 districts saw continuous rise in Covid cases. The Centre had allocated 1,814MT medical oxygen to the state of which 1,650 MT had been received.

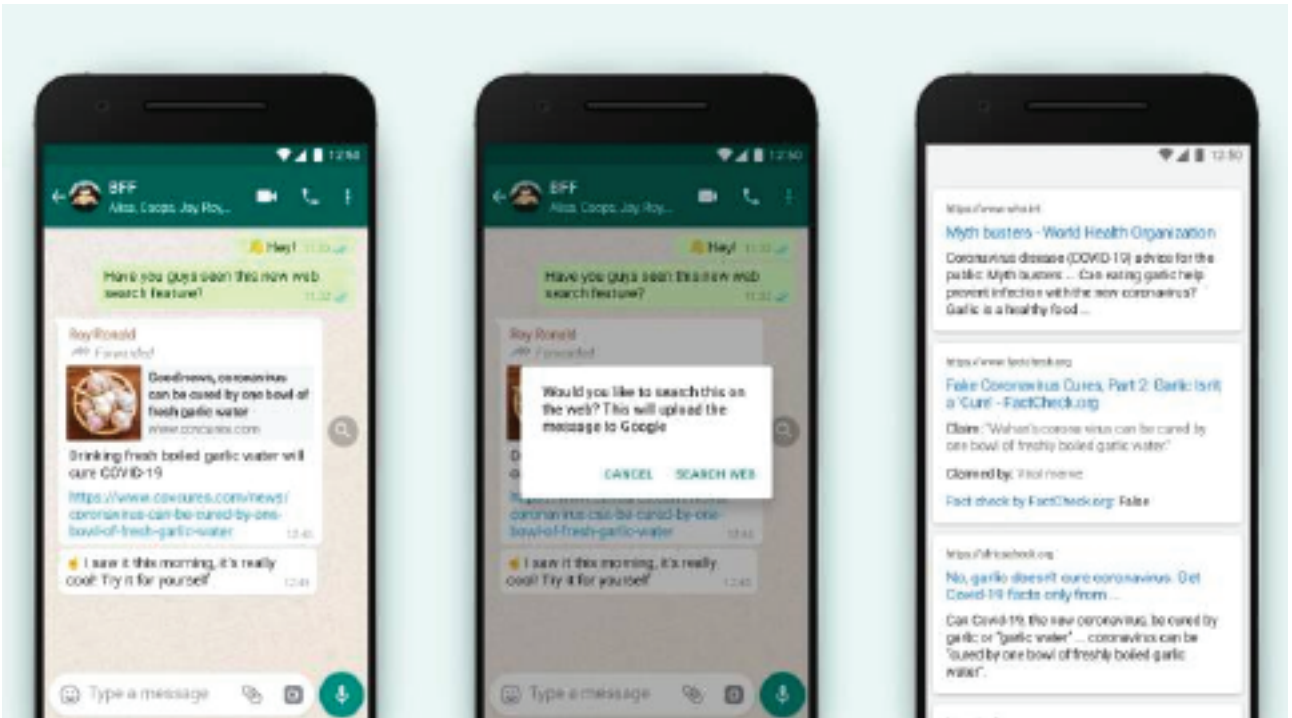
Proactive government initiatives

To address the surge in oxygen demand, by the second week of May 2021, the Central Government had undertaken several key measures 'to increase the availability, streamline the distribution and strengthen the oxygen storage infrastructure in the country.' The steps focussed on the entire oxygen supply chain that included 'efforts for improving oxygen production, enhancing tanker availability to optimise logistics, improving oxygen storage at the last mile and easing norms of procurement.'

(continued on page 29...)

Remedy worse than the disease!

*The social media going on an overdrive did more to harm public health situation than to ameliorate it in the midst of the raging second wave. **Manu Shrivastava** finds that the gullible stood at risk because of the so called magical cures and remedies of home-grown concoctions. However, a semblance of accountability seems have been thrown in with the social media putting red alerts in place.*



The scourge of Social Media has raised its hood like never before. And, the present-day Covid-19 crisis only provided the perfect platform for fake news peddlers and charlatans to crawl out of the woodwork and present a range of unthinkable possibilities that could wreak further havoc.

So, almost everyone has access to a smart-phone and, concurrently, social media accounts that include WhatsApp which has become almost an essential 'disservice' of sorts. The number of 'cures', of home-made 'kadhas' and 'immunity boosting concoctions' especially during the lockdown, rose to heights.

Messages trigger health issues, crisis

What's worse is that when a message promising a recipient of magical cures and remedies fail to perform, it does worse...it triggers health issues and crisis that could lead to further problems, even death. Also, there's nobody who takes the blame for a 'forward' which is then 'forwarded as received', at least not on the face of things. Legally, however, things are different. A sender of a message is legally bound for any action or inaction that may occur

following the receipt of a message sent. But, how many people who operate on messaging apps like WhatsApp are even aware of their liabilities: Probably only a miniscule. That apart, there's even no threat of penal action or legal reprise following damage suffered by a 'false message'. Which is why the law appears to be finally catching up with the Social Media platforms which only provided fora for mischief but never ever owned up any responsibility of sorts?

Messages arriving on social media and on WhatsApp in particular, tend to be taken with seriousness and dollops of faith, whether they deserve them or not. A medical remedy promising weight loss, or cures to commonplace ailments like acidity, hair loss or depression could cause side-effects, even other problems but are taken very seriously.

False message didn't hold sender accountable

If a medical practitioner would, on prescription, suggest a pill or a treatment that could cause serious side-effects or damage, the remedy would lie in legal prosecution, penal action that could lead to imprisonment, loss of license and/or damages following a suit in court. Yet, in cases where

the identity of a medical practitioner is not revealed or a doctor speaks 'in good faith' before an audience or a person and his 'recorded' message - audio-visual or text-based is circulated without his implied or express consent, he is not bound legally.

There have been innumerable cures by way of 'kaadhas' during the time of Covid-19. Now, not many are aware of the issues that may arise from indiscriminate use of the ingredients in a kaadha. For instance, the use of garlic could lead to bleeding issues if taken along with blood thinning medications and even death to bleeding - external or internal. Concurrently, the use of dalcini - cinnamon powder - in kaadhas for diabetics, already on blood sugar reducing medicines or insulin could lead to a serious case of hypoglycemia, low blood sugar and coma, even death.

Health concoctions may harm more than heal

The ingredients in a kaadha being strong and abrasive in nature could cause severe heartburn issues in one prone to acidity even trigger Gastro Oesophageal Reflux Disease (GERD) that could wreak havoc for months on end. At a time when the Covid-19 pandemic was at its worst in 2020 and again in 2021 when the second wave emerged in May, medical practitioners were mostly reluctant to physically examine patients and would mostly either prescribe Covid-19 tests for just about any suspicious ailment saying that the symptoms of Covid-19 were 'vast and vague.'

Also, a lot of doctors would even start of patients on antibiotics - mostly broad-spectrum - or strong ayurvedic concoctions to control ailments that could be tackled by diet, exercise and life-style modifications. These medications like all others come with their bandwagon of side-effects and problems. And, these manifested in odd ways, triggering need for further treatment and intervention and so on and forth.

Self-diagnosis, treatment cause harm

While the chances of misdiagnosis and mistreatment were high, the problems caused by self-diagnosis and self-treatment were even worse. WhatsApp and other messaging Apps only worsened things. With no accountability in sight, and nobody to take the blame for damages occurring owing to false messages, it seemed like quite a bleak affair. Till of late when the Centre has pulled up all such platforms to help identify the first originator of the message and procedures to delete such damaging material and other. All said and done, it's the gullibility of the common man which is to blame for the damage that has occurred due to indiscriminate messaging in particular on health issues. If it doesn't bad enough believe a dangerous message to be a cure, what's worse is that people forward them and force others too to follow suit.

So, if you approached a police station with a message that reached you and was dangerous or misleading, they would simply ask you to either delete the message and/or block the sender. Apart from that there would be no

remedy in sight. If you had to file a suit, it would have to be in personal capacity and the legal route would be purely individualistic in nature.

New rules help enhance accountability

Now, with the social media platform being held accountable, a recipient who has been outraged or hurt by the contents of a message can approach 'a' grievance officer appointed by the social media platform, say WhatsApp and ask for the message to be deleted from across the originator's platform or penal action be sought after identifying the source of the original message that could be causing all the harm.

Now, messages with the 'Forwarded' label help you determine if your friend or relative wrote the message or if it originally came from someone else. When a message is forwarded from one user to another more than five times, it's indicated with a double arrow icon, highlighting the message to be a 'frequently forwarded message.' If you're not sure who wrote the original message, double-check the facts with trusted news sources.

Importantly, one must always verify information before forwarding it to others. Sometimes 'forwarded' messages may seem helpful or harmless on the face of it, particularly so if they come from family and friends. Yet, no matter how harmless the situation may seem, one must confirm the facts of the message before forwarding it ahead. It's easy to verify facts.

Check for facts before forwarding

Either search for facts online before sharing it with contacts and check only trusted news sites or ask professionals for an informed comment on the same.

What is more important than lofty legal processes is the need to educate one and all about the risks of social media and messaging platforms. There is the need to sensitise everyone about messages being harmful and dangerous irrespective of their 'seemingly harmless nature or well-meant appearance'. Catchy tunes, flashy videos and tear-jerking episodes may break your defences and convince you of the efficacy of a drug or remedy that could actually harm you.

The next time a message reaches you, you must ascertain the identity of the sender and the creator. Also, the message if related to health must be cross-checked with a professional and not the internet which is an ocean of data - valid and invalid. Readers must take all that arrives on one's mobile with a pinch of salt.



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

Masks off Western media

*The Western Media found an ideal stick to bash India as the Covid situation apparently started spiraling out of control. The oxygen crisis and Remdesivir shortage fuelled by social media anguish came in handy to camouflage a patently politically motivated campaign that was meant to show India in poor light. **Gajanan Khergamker** describes how even respected journals like Lancet became a cog in this wheel.*



When the second wave of Covid-19 hit India, the popular notion was that India was caught completely off guard. For one, the number of cases that were being registered as Covid positive was phenomenal and unheard till date. India looked like it was staring down the barrel of a gun and with no respite in sight; the going seemed bleak for the World's largest democracy.

There were a series of problems that seemed to plague India and in insurmountable ways, going by Western media. For one, there was an acute dearth of oxygen that led to a surge of deaths. That no country in the world either produces or provides for oxygen through cylinders and ready-to-use for medical treatment in hospitals for its entire population was lost in the process.

The issue of shortage was spurred by a phenomenal surge in a 'need for oxygen' in India. Oxygen was not mandatory for one and all contracting Covid-19 and that the need must have been expressly prescribed by a medical facility and/or treating doctor or institution. But, in reality, things were different; just like the shortage in Remdesivir, the 'miracle' drug, prescribed officially for only hospital use

and in severe cases of Covid-19.

Twitter was abuzz with users making heartfelt requests for hospital beds, oxygen cylinders and Remdesivir shots and broadcast them through celebrities and media. Most national media and the Western media operating entirely on the social media platforms, saw the flurry as a 'real issue' of shortage and mismanagement across India and went on to amplify it without any sense of responsibility or accountability.

In India, across States, rules to prescribe the need for oxygen cylinders and vital drugs were made and arbitrary use of the same banned by law, even made punishable. But, in States run by Opposition governments, the polity keen on castigating the Centre continued to play politics and raise alarm on make-believe situations that appeared to be going out of control.

Why, with the vaccine situation too, across Twitter ran claims of States prevented in the first lap when the Centre was procuring and delivering the vaccines were keen on procuring vaccines themselves and continued to flay the 'Centre's policy' of keeping control to itself.

Those on Twitter and Social Media, celebrities - Indian and Western - ran vitriolic campaigns against the Indian government spoke at length about the failing 'federal' structure of Indian state and how the Centre had garnered all the power and was restricting control entirely to itself.

And then, when there was an acute shortage of vaccines owing to the inability of states to procure the vaccines by manufacturers directly, despite their tall claims and promises, the Western media swiftly did a turnabout and blamed the Indian government for the low figures of vaccination and its slow process that raised the risk for citizens to contract Covid.

While a record number of deaths occurred across the world to Covid and developed nations struggled with their thousand-odd deaths each day, the Western media was sensitive and played down the situation. Now, when India faced the music and the death toll rose in the world's largest democracy owing to the sheer dint of numbers, even Indian journalists photographed the dead, burials and sold them for a fortune to the Western media.

Sensitivity and accountability were given the convenient go-by as India-bashing was the name of the game. Why, even the virus strain was named after India, till the government played the move and rebuked all those who did so.

When it came to attributing the control of the first wave to effective control by the Indian government, the Western media was swift to quote 'studies' that ran down the administrative control and political will to give credit instead to the BCG vaccine that most Indians had taken soon after birth, to an innate immunity possessed owing to the 'travails of living in a not-so-clean India' and genetic proclivities.

India's Swachata Abhiyaan, launched a few years ago, had helped India avert an overwhelming disaster was simply not written about. Not by most sections of the Indian media and not at all by the Western media.

Among Western media was the report by United Kingdom's 'The Lancet' that spoke volumes about the bias that Western media harboured towards India in particular and Asia in general. Lancet, deviating from its core expertise of medical reportage and research, blamed the entire Covid

situation on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's administration. The Lancet, known to exceed its jurisdiction and supposed 'core expertise', has opined on a wide range of issues and political leaders in the past too.

The Lancet rebuked the Modi government for its tackling of the Covid-19 crisis maintaining it has given the impression of being more occupied with "removing criticism on Twitter than trying to control the pandemic".

Among Western media was the report by United Kingdom's 'The Lancet' that spoke volumes about the bias that Western media harboured towards India in particular and Asia in general. Lancet, deviating from its core expertise of medical reportage and research, blamed the entire Covid situation on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's administration.

While pointing out the shortcomings of the government's response, The Lancet suggested a two-pronged strategy to control the outbreak. "The impression from the government was that India had beaten Covid-19 after several months of low case counts, despite repeated warnings of the dangers of a second wave and the emergence of new strains. Modelling suggested falsely that India had reached herd immunity, encouraging complacency and insufficient preparation, but a serosurvey by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) in January suggested that only 21% of the population had antibodies against SARS-CoV-2," read the editorial.

It criticized the government's decision – despite repeated warnings – to allow religious and political congregations. These events are "conspicuous for their lack of COVID-19 mitigation measures".

Lancet's views on India and Prime Minister Narendra Modi didn't come as a surprise. It was only in keeping with its hardened vitriolic stand against India that the British medical journal The Lancet is facing backlash for its editorial on Kashmir, where it described India's move on the Valley as 'controversial' and raised concerns about 'health, security and freedom of people in

the region'.

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi vows that his decision to revoke autonomy will bring prosperity to Kashmir. But first, the people of Kashmir need healing from the deep wounds of this decades-old conflict, not subjugation to further violence and alienation," said The Lancet in an editorial, drawing sharp criticism on social media. In its editorial titled "Fear and uncertainty around Kashmir's future" Lancet said the "protracted exposure" to violence has led to a formidable "mental health crisis" in Kashmir.

(continued to page 29...)

How health sector is winning the Covid war!

*While the world grapples with the raging pandemic, India has pulled up its socks in confronting it head on. Figures elsewhere and in the country are a tell-tale story even as India's burgeoning health sector revs up reforming its infrastructure and emerging as a good investment option in the process. **Vinita Pathak** enlists the proactive measures government took to turn the situation around.*

**TILL
WE WIN**

**INDIA'S FIGHT AGAINST
COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

ison, USA would have registered 18,65,945 fatalities (almost 12 times the number of Covid-related deaths India witnessed) if its population size was that of India's and UK would have seen 15 times more deaths counting to 1.6 million if its population was the size of India. In fact, in UK, this number would be nearly 2.5 per cent of the country's population.

India's health sector

When the world was still figuring out how to tackle one of the worst pandemics of recent times, India had already taken a leap in terms of Covid-19 management. After the initial hiccups and scares, India managed to revive its health sector and pull itself out of the widespread public health crisis.

India is one of the few countries in the world that has tackled the Covid-19 crisis in an exemplary way. A country with a population of more than a billion people, the second-largest in the world, India has fared extremely well on Covid-related indicators among nations.

The Covid-19 numbers game

In order to understand how India successfully tackled the Covid-19 pandemic, it's important to analyse the 'astronomical' numbers.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) data, in India, between 3 January 2020 and 16 June 2021, there have been 2,95,70,881 confirmed cases of Covid-19 with 3,77,031 deaths. As of 7 June 2021, a total of 23,88,40,635 vaccine doses have been administered in the country. In the same period, the United States registered 3,31,51,678 Covid-19 cases and reported 5,94,888 deaths, according to WHO. India's population stands at 1.37 billion while the United States at about a third of India's at 33,01,60,000 people. For better compar-

The NITI Aayog released a report on 30 March 2021 detailing the range of 'investment opportunities in various segments of India's healthcare sector including hospitals, medical devices and equipment, health insurance, telemedicine, home healthcare and medical value travel.' The Indian healthcare industry, one of the largest sectors of the country's economy, is expected to reach USD 372 billion in 2022, both in terms of revenue and employment. NITI Aayog CEO Amitabh Kant remarked that the 'Covid-19 pandemic has not only presented challenges but also several opportunities for India to grow. All these factors together make India's healthcare industry ripe for investment.'

According to the report, 'Covid-19 is likely to catalyze long-term changes in attitudes towards personal health and hygiene, health insurance, fitness and nutrition, as well as health monitoring and medical check-ups. The pandemic has also accelerated the adoption of digital technologies, including telemedicine. Furthermore, there is a growing emphasis on the emergence of public-private

partnership models in India's healthcare sector.'

Proactive government measures helped recovery

The proactive and swift decisions taken by the government of India went a long way in giving the necessary time to the country's health industry to prepare for the pandemic. First, when the Covid-19 situation began to worsen worldwide in early 2020, even as most countries around the world were contemplating drastic measures such as a complete lockdown, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the national lockdown on 25 March 2020 and India, with its 1.37 billion people, went into a total shutdown.

It wasn't an easy decision and more difficult was its implementation but India made it happen and so did its people. The lockdown in India was the biggest on the planet. When the second wave hit India in 2021, the government moved swiftly this time too. Prime Minister Narendra Modi personally oversaw the situation.

In April 2021, he had called several video-conference meetings with multiple CMs at one time to discuss the ground zero situation of the second wave in the country. Since 6 May 2021, the PM was calling up the state Chief Ministers 'individually' to discuss Covid-19 strategy one-on-one and ensure all related demands, that mostly included demand for more oxygen and vaccines, are met with immediate effect. The PM directly asked the Chief Ministers of their requirements, side-lining the bureaucracy and any unnecessary delays.

Based on his interaction with the state leaders, PM Modi asked the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare to inform states about the vaccine supply at least a fortnight in advance.

The country's success stories

During the Covid-19 pandemic, India wrote several success stories. The Atmanirbhar Bharat (Self-Reliant India) mission was launched during the Covid-19 crisis and has been a driving force in achieving self-reliance in critical areas during this time. In January 2020, for example, India's local manufacturers did not have the capability to produce PPE kits like body coveralls and the nation was entirely dependent on imports. However, India soon developed a successful indigenous supply chain of PPE kits in 60 days, marking a big win for self-reliant India.

By September 2020, India had become the second largest producer of PPE Kits globally with a daily production of more than five lakh PPE kits, according to the Union Minister for Chemical and Fertilizers D V Sadananda Gowda.

The government, through coordinated efforts, developed an efficient ecosystem where local manufacturers could be guided by bigger players in the market and industry

associations. The government also constituted an empowered committee 'to manage the operational challenges and for facilitating the availability of time-critical medical supplies.'

By 12 May 2020, India was manufacturing 2,00,000 units of PPE Body Coveralls and 2,00,000 units of N95 masks on a daily basis. In July, India exported 23,00,000 personal protection equipment (PPE) to the US, UK, UAE, Senegal, Slovenia, etc.

During the second wave, a similar crisis of medical oxygen was addressed at war footing by the government. Not only did the government step up manufacturing of Liquid Medical Oxygen (LMO) by roping in relevant private and public manufacturing entities, it announced guidelines for swift and uninterrupted transportation of the same.

Foreign media writes off India's success story

It's not the first time that foreign media has written off India's success and achievements globally. In the last decade, since India has taken a strong stance on global issues, taken stern measures to protect the interest of its people and brought in new laws and policies to the same effect, foreign media has been critical of the 'New India.' Several international media outlets, publications and think tanks criticised decisions made by the Indian government to overcome the Covid crisis. They also showcased India as the global Covid-hotspot when the most advanced nations like USA, UK and several European countries were in a far worse condition.

'Foreign Policy' raised aspersions on the effectiveness of the lockdown in India and later in June 2020 published another article headlined 'India has bungled its coronavirus crisis.'

An article published in the 'Washington Post' read that the Modi government took a series of 'reckless decisions' and that invited the second wave in India. 'The Boston Review' said, in July 2020, 'The government's inadequate and impetuous management of the pandemic reflects an effort to win international approval by following the paradigm of advanced economies, without heeding the ethical urgency of providing a robust program of relief, both medical and economic.'

And all of this, when India's case fatality rate has been consistently below the world rate!

Vinita Pathak is an intern with www.HealthAndTheLaw.com – A DraftCraft International Initiative to spread awareness among patients of legal rights and position in law, boost medico-legal awareness, initiate legislative change and enforce accountability among healthcare players

India's crusade to lift patent protections

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's clarion call to waive patents on Covid vaccines and the widespread support it has elicited at the G7 Summit has brought into sharp focus an important issue that now rests with the World Trade Organization.

Manu Shrivastava explains the nitty gritty and the matrix surrounding the issue of intellectual property rights pertaining to Covid vaccines.



When Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi made an express plea to seek support of the group to lift patent protections for Covid-19 vaccines, during a virtual address at the inaugural outreach session of the G7 summit in the UK, he touched upon the real issue.

A proposal by India and South Africa to temporarily waive patents on Covid-19 vaccines to ensure their equitable access, received widespread support at the G7 summit in the UK.

Reportedly, the Indian PM's call was supported by South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison, WTO Director-General Okonjo Iweala and UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.

The UN Secretary-General extended support to the initiative, cautioning that "technology transfer" must be backed up by "technical support".

Patents: An Intellectual Property

A patent is an intellectual property that prevents competitors from simply copying a company's discovery and launching a rival product. In India as in the US, patents on

medicines typically last 20 years from when they are filed. The filing takes place when a drug maker thinks it has an important or lucrative drug.

The 'term of a patent' when used is indicative of the maximum time during which it can be maintained in force. The term is usually expressed in the number of years either starting from the filing date of the patent application or from the date of grant of the patent.

In most patent laws, annuities or maintenance fees must be paid regularly in order to keep the patent in force. A patent may lapse before its term if a renewal fee is not paid in due time.

Usually, it takes almost a decade to get a drug approved, till when companies enjoy competition-free sales during the period. And, concurrently, drug makers find ways to improve their product or widen its use and secure additional patents that can extend their monopoly for many more years.

The need for patents, one must understand, it felt because medicines are very expensive to develop. And most experimental drugs fail at some point during the years of

laboratory, animal, and finally human testing before making the mark and hitting the market.

Cost of failures hike up price

Taking into consideration the cost of failures, it typically costs a fortune to bring a drug from discovery to regulatory approval. If it were not for the prospect of years of sales without competition, there's very less incentive to take that risk. Now, given the situation, the Biden government has acted primarily under pressure from many Democrats in Congress to get more vaccines to the rest of the world. The patents waiver idea has been gaining support from several other countries while the outbreak worsened in many places.

The decision on the vaccine patent waiver depends on the 164-member World Trade Organisation (WTO) that administers complex trade rules among nations. And, for that, everyone will have to agree in tandem. A single refusal to consent to the proposal will lead to a rejection. To have a unanimous vote to waive the vaccine-related patents, PM Modi has spearheaded the campaign.

For the record, this kind of waiver has never been passed ever in the history of the World Trade Organisation. About 20 years ago, WTO members had passed a temporary waiver allowing poor countries to import cheap generic drugs for HIV, tuberculosis, and malaria amid health crises. And that temporary waiver was eventually made permanent.

Now, where the US is concerned, pharma companies, driven by profit, charge prices that are raised twice a year, often doubling or tripling them during a drug's patent-protected years. It isn't without surprise to find most lofty drug-producers among the world's richest entities. Now, for innovation needed to fund early research there's need for investment. Few investors would fund any kind of research if it weren't for the prospects of profit in sight. It would be foolhardy to expect investors to work for social good and without profit in mind.

Pharma Cos generate jobs, medicines

Pharmaceutical companies generate thousands of

plush jobs, create tax benefits and provide new medicines that save lives and most wealthy countries across the world lead in areas of research and innovation. Drug-makers spend fortunes year after year lobbying governments to maintain the status quo on patents.

Those opposing the move to waive patent rights feel the move won't get Covid-19 vaccines delivered to developing countries any faster. Making the vaccines is a lot

more complex, they maintain, than sticking to a formula that is shared. It needs extensive factories, skilled workers and quality control, all of it being above and beyond the simplistic move to waive patent rights.

Till date, while most developed nations that include Britain, Canada, EU, Japan, Norway, Singapore, Australia and the US opposed the waiver idea, some 80 countries, mostly developing ones, supported the proposal. Earlier, China and Russia hadn't taken a stand but were open to discussions. Now, most of these countries who opposed the decision, including the US, have changed their position.

Joining the Biden administration, Australia's Prime Minister Scott Morrison and Russian president Vladimir Putin are known to have welcomed the call to relax vaccine patents. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has welcomed the US decision too. India and South Africa are already onboard. Now, while the EU remains non-committal, they are open for dialogue.

While France supposed the patent waiver, Macron said manufacturers in places like Africa were now equipped to make Covid-19 vaccines and that donations of shots from wealthier countries should be given priority instead. China too has said that it's open to discussions.

Germany openly opposes

lifting curbs

Germany, on its part, has spoken extensively and without mincing any words against lifting the restrictions. "The protection of intellectual property is a source of innovation and must remain so in the future," said German Chancellor Angela Merkel's office. Germany, reportedly, is focused instead on how to increase vaccine manufacturers' production capacity.

The decision on the vaccine patent waiver depends on the 164-member World Trade Organisation that administers complex trade rules among nations. And, for that, everyone will have to agree in tandem. A single refusal to consent to the proposal will lead to a rejection. To have a unanimous vote to waive the vaccine-related patents, PM Narendra Modi has spearheaded the campaign.

In India, the first compulsory license was granted by the Patent Office on 9 March 2012 to Natco Pharma, an Indian company, for the generic production of Bayer Corporation's Nexavar, a drug used for the treatment of liver and kidney cancer. It is the best-known example of grant of compulsory license in India. Soon after, pharmaceutical companies began paying a lot of attention in selecting composition/drugs to apply for patent in India, drafting of specifications, launch of new drugs, licensing and assignments of related patents, drug pricing in India, etc.

Indian law provides for compulsory license

Under the Patents Act, 1970 (the Act), the enabling provision for compulsory license is Section 84, which stipulates conditions for grant of a compulsory license, viz., if (a) the reasonable requirements of the public with respect to the patented invention have not been satisfied, (b) the patented invention is not available to the public at a reasonably affordable price, or (c) the patented invention is not worked in the territory of India.

Incidentally, before applying for the compulsory license under above mentioned conditions, the applicant is first required to make an attempt to obtain a voluntary license from the patentee. When the applicant is unable to procure a licence at reasonable and equitable terms within the prescribed period (six months), the applicant can file a request for compulsory licensing before the Controller.

With new laws, come ingenuity and tapping the same entities mostly in 'developed' nations find creative loopholes in the law to extend their monopoly over a drug. A case in point being, to fight legal challenges to its patents, Allergan transferred all patents for its eye drug Restasis to the St Regis Mohawk Tribe in September 2017, because the Native American tribe holds sovereign immunity against intellectual property lawsuits.

The deal was subsequently defeated in the US courts, with the Supreme Court rejecting Allergan's petition to appeal the case; it became a powerful example of lengths some entities go to extend patent protection. This, among a string of others, provides a glaring example of how patent protection is misused and extended to simply maximize profit.

Probably, now the Covid-19 situation provides the perfect situation for the world to come around and understand the India's age-old philosophy of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* and curb the greed... to start with.



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

WHO AM I?





MYSTERIOUS ROOPKUND

Eerie & creepy but gutsy and thrilling!

The Roopkund Lake situated atop 15000 ft in the lap of Himalayas is an abiding enigma. Not just as a treasured destination for the trekkers but for the folklores that surround it. Filled with human skeletons that are visible during the autumn, it leaves visitors awe-struck and confounded but the feeling of having scaled the peak is over-riding. Sucharita D and Ankur K, known as the Banjara Couple, sketch their journey.



View of Mt Trishul and Nanda Gunti

Trekking mountains is pure bliss. You are in communion with nature. Its pristine beauty rubs off on you, rejuvenates you. You “find yourself” rather than being alone in the solitude. The climb to the summit gives you a sense of fulfillment, more so, when you know the peak has a kinky legend behind it.

Roopkund is a furtive lake high up in the Garhwal Himalayas and its presence makes you wonder what would have led to its creation there. A “*Kund*” means a lake hence the Roopkund trek. It’s a test of your grit and endurance but the journey is well worth its rewards. Bordering on surreal but one that guarantees unadulterated tranquil, its snow-clad peaks of Mount Trishul and Nanda Ghunti are visible all through the year. It’s a six day trek starting from Loh Jung (the base) which is at about 8000 ft.

To reach Loh Jung, you need to catch a train to Kathgodam from where it takes eight hours by road. For the first two days you get to stay at the home-stays. Camping begins from the 3rd day onwards. The first campsite is Didina village where one gets to spend the night in cottages and mud houses.



Stay in Didina Village

The “Bugyals” along the way

The real trek begins from Didina through dense forests to reach Ali Bugyal on way to Bedni Bugyal. The ascent leads you to a receding tree line, and after a while, you are greeted by lush green meadows also called the Bugyals in the local language.

Bugyals bring out the child within you as you feel like rolling on those green meadows. A host of colorful tents from other groups love to camp here. It's a locale right out of some romantic movie. Also it is here that you witness your first snow-covered peaks of Mt Trishul and Nanda Ghunti.

Himalayas being susceptible to unpredictable rains, it makes horse sense to carry jackets. The temperature plummets quickly enough for you to catch a cold if you get wet. On the other hand, if the skies are clear, Bedni Bughyal is just the ideal setting for stargazers. The sky unveils itself in all glory as a million stars twinkle in your eyes.

Altitude mountain sickness

Bedni is at an altitude of 12000 ft. From there one has to scale 4000 ft more in the next two days. Trekking the Himalayas is not fun when faced with AMS - Altitude Mountain Sickness. Symptoms may vary from headaches to nausea and vomiting to bleeding nose. The trick is to keep

having liquids. Taking a Diamox course before starting the trek helps. It thins the blood and provides you better blood circulation and more oxygen. After crossing Patar Nachauni from Bedni, you reach Bagwabasa which is your final campsite before scaling the summit. There is snow and stones around and that is tough. The camps on these rocky patches hardly give any rest but the thought of reaching the summit at 16000 ft keeps your spirits high.

On the summit day, you need to leave your campsite at 2 or 3 in the morning as the climb is quite steep and through snow. The snow gets soft once the sun shines bright, so you need to reach the summit and reach back to this campsite before 9. But the beautiful lake at the top, is worth the exertion.

The legend and the mystery

A first dekho of the lake leaves you with a spooky feeling. It is filled with skulls and skeletons. There are legends and stories around the mysterious skeletons found at the bottom of the lake but no one knows the truth about what happened up there. Till date more than 700 skeletons have been found. It is said that the king of Kanauj was supposed to take the pilgrimage to Nanda Devi. A pilgrimage is a sacred and ritualistic odyssey one performs as an austerity to please the principal deity. As per the rules, the king and the queen were supposed to carry on the pilgrimage with pure and spiritual intentions devoid of any worldly



Campsite at Bedni Bugyal



Valley view from Patar nachauni campsite

pleasures. But the king insisted on taking all his entertainment troupe of musicians and dancers along with the best chefs to pamper their taste buds.

Legend has it that this enraged Goddess Nanda Devi and she warned the king to stop forthwith. The egoistic king didn't heed which is when the Goddess threw a storm in his path. It rained hailstones as heavy as iron boulders destroying the king and his entire troupe. Patar gets its name from this very legend. "Patar" means stone and "nachauni" means dancer. It is exactly the place where all the dancers of the king's troupe vanished. People from nearby villages sing paens to the goddess even today.

Situated in Chamoli district of Uttarakhand, this is one of the very popular trekking destinations in India. There are two seasons for this trek - spring (April - June) and autumn (September - October). Both seasons offer a different perspective. You get to witness different landscapes in

both the seasons. The lake is frozen in the spring, but in autumn when the ice has melted, the lake is filled with blue waters and one can clearly see the skeletons at the bottom and around the lake.

We went on this trek in 2016 May end since it would have shown the snow in all its glory. Roopkund is one trek which should be in the bucket list of every trekker. The provocations are many – folklore, mystery and above all the spirit of adventure that beckons you.



Sucharita D and Ankur K are an avid travel couple who have travelled India extensively and trekked in difficult terrains of the Himalayas and Sahyadris. Both are working professionals. You can follow their travel stories on Instagram handle @banjaaraa.couple or visit their blog – <https://www.banjaaraa.com>



Bhangarh Fort

Esoteric but bewitching

Bhangarh Fort draws its mythos from the “eerie and haunted” stories that envelope its enduring imagery. An hour and half drive from Jaipur, its remnants and rubble spin fables that have survived more than four centuries and continue to charm visitors even today. Sucharita D and Ankur K, the ‘Banjara Couple’ in their nomadic spirit, foot it through abiding tales of awe and spookiness emanating from its ramparts.



Temple dedicated to Lord Krishna near the Fort garden

Just 90 kms away from Jaipur (the nearest airport), the Bhangarh Fort beckons with its unique mystic! The drive to the fort is laced with captivating imagery as it passes through the Sariska Reserve and finally lands you in the lap of a valley but not before you have coughed up ₹50 per vehicle as toll.

There is enough parking for the visitors which is why tourists do not feel inhibited to visit. Tickets can be bought without hassles either on the counter or through an app for ₹25 or ₹20 respectively. Before the Archaeological Survey of India shouldered the supervision of the monument, there was no entry fee.

A part of the mystic has something to do with the timings of the visit – 10am to 6pm. It is generally believed that after 6pm the fort is besieged with paranormal activity but there is little to substantiate that beyond the legends that surround it. All those stories of mishaps inside the Fort in the night appear to be hearsay. Some locals say that in the past the fort with its ruins was a haven for anti-social elements from nearby hamlets as they would use it to drink, gamble and loot people on a visit. Since the Fort happens to lie within the Sariska precincts, it is also host to wild animals who quench their thirst from a nearby pond. The attacks by wild animals and the presence of notorious elements conjured up the image of the Fort as “haunted”.



Johri Bazaar



The ruins inside the palace courtyard of Bhangarh fort

Undoubtedly among the best forts we visited in the country, it has a potential tourism attraction. Apart from the structure, it has an interesting history that lends it a peculiar feel.

About the fort...

History has it that the Fort was built by one Bhagwant Das for his son Madho Singh. Of the five gates, four have been closed by the ASI and only one called Hanuman Pol – because of the Hanuman temple next to it – is functional. The other 4 gates are the Lahori Pol, the Ajmeri Pol, the Phulbari Pol, and the Delhi Pol. Once you pass by the Hanuman Pol, you enter the ruins of the market place called Johri Bazaar, believed to be a takeoff on the Bapu bazaar of Jaipur. The ruins suggest that this must have been a thriving market in its heyday.

Leaving behind the bazaar, we enter the main fort area comprising the temples and the havelis (large mansions). Amidst the ruins, the Shiva and Krishna temples, right at the foothills of the Fort, have managed to survive. Quietude prevails at the place as the temples are defunct but a well maintained garden right at the base of the Fort, corners your attention.

Like all forts, typically nestled on the hills, the entrance is a 200 meters slant that leads you to a palace in ruins. Once a 7-storey structure, it has crumbled to just

3-storeys. Made up mostly of black stone, there is a patch of white marble with some carvings. The view from the top is as majestic what with the vast expanse of the mountains that your eyes can soak in. The summit of the mountain range has a watch tower and fable has it that a tantrik residing there was responsible for the fort's ruination.

As you descend the stairs, towards your left you come across an arched hallway that supposedly served as the prison. At the end of the hallway there is a small room with its stairs leading down into the dungeon. It remains unexplored till date with stories of negativity around it - the spooky side of the Fort.

Another spooky side is at a level down when you enter another arched hallway on the right. This hallway leads you to the end of the Fort where lies a small enclosure where the locals visit to worship a Djinn. It is said that the complete hallway is haunted by that Djinn. People continue to please him with offerings and whoever is possessed by the Djinn remains unmarried.

Haunted folklores...

There is a folklore that surrounds the Bhangarh. Surprisingly, even the ASI guide accompanying you avers that the destruction of the fort was caused by Tantra (supernatural power). Our guide chose to defend his contention saying "Saab, 500 saal pehle kisne jaake dekha he ki kya



The watch tower situated at the hilltop where the Tantrik dwelled

hua tha (who knows what happened 500 years back).

The story

It is said that after the death of the king of Bhangarh, Rani Ratnavati took over the reins. A Tantrik fell in love with Ratnavati and in order to win her he cast a spell on a potion and asked one of the shopkeepers in the Bazaar to sell it to the Rani's maids. When the maid took the potion to the queen, she sensed a weird smell and threw a few droplets onto a stone. The spell was so strong that the stone got enchanted and flew all the way to the Tantrik's cave and fell on it killing him. Before dying, the Tantrik cursed the entire kingdom to get destroyed by stones falling from the sky. That's what is believed to have happened.

There are many such legends associated with the cursed and the mysterious Bhangarh Fort, but no one has been able to demystify the facts from the legends. What is sure is the Fort despite being in a dilapidated state, contin-

ues to provide a grand setting for the travellers and the film folks. Quite a few movies have been shot there. The iconic choodi bazaar from the sets of movie "Karan-Arjun" is the Johri Bazaar of Bhangarh fort.

Bhangarh was an exhilarating experience. Folklores, rumours and everything else apart, the Fort still holds people in thrall. It stands true to the dictum that "khandhar kehte hai imaat kitni bulund thi" (the ruins tell you how magnificent and strong the construction once was.)



Sucharita D and Ankur K are an avid travel couple who have travelled India extensively and trekked in difficult terrains of the Himalayas and Sahyadris. Both are working professionals. You can follow their travel stories on Instagram handle @banjaaraa.couple or visit their blog – <https://www.banjaaraa.com>

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“Yoga is a panacea to the infinite stresses modern life brings.”

Pune-based **Malabika** is a BSc graduate with honours in Economics, who has worked with various corporates for 15 years as a Graphic Designer. A wellness enthusiast, her journey has been from making materialistic things look good externally, to a yoga teacher who now designs her sessions to raise self-awareness in every student and make them feel good both internally and externally.

Here she talks about yoga with A.Radhakrishnan

Describe your personality in three words.

Sincere, Compassionate and Resilient.

What does yoga mean to you? How has practising and teaching it impacted your life?

It's not just a physical exercise but a journey towards realising our true potential as humans. Balancing our lives and calming the restless mind, yoga is a panacea to the infinite stresses modern life brings.

Earlier, I was physically, mentally and emotionally weak, and had lots of health issues like bronchitis, asthma, gynecological disorders, emotional restlessness, anger, etc. Practicing yoga brought me to a level of inner bliss and contentment as a person. Whatever I teach today is more from my inner awareness, through self-practice.

This beautiful journey has transformed me as an individual, helped me know the purpose of my life, and made me strong. I am learning to live worthily.

What style and tradition of yoga do you teach? What is unique and effective about it?

I teach and guide Classical Ashtanga (eight limbs) yoga, divided into three disciples. The Bahiranga-sadhana comprises ethical practices in the form of Yama, or general ethical practices, universal morality, Niyama, personal observances, and physical practices in the form of Asanas as well as Pranayama through breathing exercises and control of prana.

The second discipline, Antharanga-sadhana, is emotional or mental brought to maturity by Pranayama and Pratyaha-



Malabika Marzabani

ra or mental detachment.

Antaratma-sadhana is a successful quest of the soul through dharana, dhyana and samadhi.

Rather than instructing, I attempt to raise awareness amongst my students, on how to apply yoga in daily life.

I first studied under Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati (Bihar School of Yoga, Munger), then was for four years under supervision of B.S.K.Iyengar Yoga, Pune and lastly was with Dr. Renu Mehtani of Param Yoga, Pune.

What qualities are essential to be an ideal yoga teacher?

A yoga teacher should be deeply involved in both own personal development, as well as of his/her students. His/her thoughts should be motivating, inspiring, energetic emerging from the heart and the higher self, rather than just from the mind. Always well prepared, respecting the students and committed towards teaching and available for discussion after class, recognising a student's potential and invest in it.

The teacher has to constantly challenge and encourage the students, at all levels, offering alternatives. This requires observation skills, taking into account the physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual state of the students. He/she should give individual guidance to each student according to their age, ability and health condition.

Is yoga a way of life or just a way to exercise and meditate? Is it more mental or physical? Is it an alternative form of healing and medicine?

Yoga is a way of life. It also improves the functioning of whole body systems (nervous system, respiratory, circulatory).



ry, digestive, and hormonal and lymphatic systems). An ancient art, based on an extremely subtle science, that of the body, mind and soul, its prolonged practice will, in time, lead to a sense of peace and a feeling of being at one with the environment.

Yoga is thus a dynamic, internal experience, which integrates the body through asanas, the senses through pranayama, the mind through concentration, and the intelligence through meditation, with the self.

Diseases are caused by fluctuations in the brain and in the behavioural pattern of the body. In yogic practices, the brain is quietened, the senses are stilled, and perceptions are altered, all generating a calm feeling of detachment. Practice helps treat the brain as an object and the body as a subject. Energy is diffused from the brain to the other parts of the body. The brain and the body then work in tandem and energy is evenly balanced.

Yoga is thus termed sarvanga sadhana or holistic practice. No other form of exercise so completely involves the mind and self with the body resulting in all-round development and harmony. Other forms termed angabhaga sadhana or physical exercise, address only particular body parts.

Is yoga just another buzzword or the next big trend in well-being that will come and go?

Yoga is not buzzword or any big trend...

According to Maharishi Patanjali, the aim of yoga is to calm the chaos of conflicting impulses and thoughts, which leads to pain and distress in our daily lives in the forms of false pride, ego, false knowledge, reluctance to work, laziness, doubt, indifference, unsteadiness in the body and unsteady respiration. Only yoga eradicates these afflictions, and disciplines the mind, emotions, intellect, and reason. It is a

necessity of human life...to bring balance in our nature and environment.

Do you associate yoga with Hinduism? How can yoga be honoured and not appropriated?

Yoga is not associated with any religion, though it is a philosophical approach very much connected with fundamental Indian philosophy. It is for everyone and can be honoured through practicing it in its true form. We need to develop the receptors to yoga. This is the way our asanas can evolve, and the way our living can change. We will then respect and appreciate everything, our environment, our nature, our life as well as other lives.

Your views on the idea of competitive yoga?

Yoga should not be a competitive sport, as it is a way of life. People should use it for self-improvement rather than to win rewards. The reward should only be in bettering themselves and sharing that knowledge and experience to improve others' lives as well, and raise awareness.

What is the single most defining issue facing the global yoga community today? How has the yoga community adapted to the Covid crisis?

In today's world, the essence and tradition of yoga is getting diluted. People are creating their own versions of yoga for professional benefits without considering the wellbeing of their students. A true practitioner is not bogged down by the negativity around. The community is utilising the current situation by spreading positivity and inculcating the sense of self improvement and discipline.

What is your yoga philosophy, dharma, and life mission?

My yoga philosophy is simple. Imbibe the practice in daily action following eight paths and help others to do the same.

What's your favorite quote/affirmation/mantra?

Om sarve bhavantu sukhinah
sarve santu nirāmayāḥ
sarve bhadraṇi paśyantu mā kaściddu
khabhāgbhaveta
Om śāntih śāntih śāntih
May all become happy,
May all be free from illness,
May all see what is auspicious,
May no one suffer.
Om peace, peace, peace.

How important is meditation in yoga practice? How do you handle stress and pressure?

Meditation (dhyana) is the higher stage in yoga, the seventh path. This state of freedom is the goal of yoga and can be reached by constant enquiring into the nature of things. It is our tool to see things clearly and perceive reality beyond the illusions that cloud our mind. Through concentration and meditation we bring out true potential or wisdom as human beings to understand a situation.

What are some of the challenges you've experienced as a yoga teacher?

The only challenge I face is to raise self-awareness.

What is your greatest weakness? What are you doing to improve it?

A yoga teacher should be bereft of any weakness and if it exists, not to allow it to get the better of him/her. I am compassionate and get attached to people easily. I can feel their pain and hence I am practising detached compassion with dharana (concentration) and dhyana (meditation).

What advice would you give to someone who is just starting out on their yoga journey?

Be persistent, practice hard and never give up. Regular practice will help you to look at yourself and your goals in a new light and help remove the obstacles to good health and stable emotions and help achieve emancipation and self-realisation, the ultimate goal. Sometimes, despite their best efforts, students are unable to perform certain asanas. It is important to practice a series of actions before moving on to the next. Sequencing helps derive the essence of the asanas, experience their beneficial effects, and elevate the mind's structure. Guiding students about principles of eight limbs of yoga build the right mannerisms that help us attain the sight of the soul. Initially students apply force to perform asanas that can lead to sprained muscles, painful joints, and shakiness in breathing and instability in the body.

The brain and body cannot be like dry earth. It is the intelligence or the mind that softens them into clay. I teach the importance of setting goals in order to perfect asanas, but also insist that students be compassionate towards each part of their body.

Without sincerity, complete involvement, and truthfulness, asanas remain mechanical. There is enthusiasm and chaos at beginning, when students often get carried away and aspire for advanced asanas, without practicing the simpler postures. I teach them the inner awareness about their own body. The foundation of Dharana (concentration) and Dhyana (meditation) has to begin from the practice of asanas and pranayama.

The eight paths have to be followed one after other by perfecting each stage, as it is a holistic focus which eventually brings completeness to the individual, as they find connectivity to the divine.

What is the age group you train? You prefer a Zoom or actual class? Do you prefer to instruct small groups, large groups, or one-to-one?

For yoga, age is not a barrier. You are never young or too old to imbibe yoga in your daily life. I have students as old as 5 yrs and as young as 86 yrs.

I prefer both Zoom as well as taking my classes in person. Virtual platforms have their benefits as well as limitations. On virtual platforms, I prefer small groups and one-to-one. In personal actual classes, large groups are preferable.

Why should yoga be shared? Has one got to be religious or spiritual to do yoga?

We gain knowledge only when we share. If our yoga knowledge is going to benefit someone, it is better to be shared. Practicing all the stages gradually, spiritual awareness flows into the student. Pain and misery vanishes, and the art of simple and peaceful living is realised. It brings spiritual dimension in our lives and in our relationships. This has led many reflective people to realise that solace and inspiration, peace and happiness cannot come from the external environment but must come from within.

What legacy would you like to leave?

All my Gurus have already shared pure and vast knowledge and discipline selflessly and patiently. I am purely taking it forward. I don't want to leave any legacy. I just want to be remembered as someone who brought about a change for the good and betterment of students. Everyone should be truly happy.



A. Radhakrishnan is a Pune based freelance journalist, poet and short story writer, who when not enjoying is favourite cup of kaapi, loves to make people happy.

Masks off Western media

(...continued from page 11)

The journal even went on to state a study by Médecins Sans Frontières, in two rural districts affected by conflict which found that nearly half of Kashmiris “rarely felt safe” and of those who had lost a family member to violence, one in five had witnessed the “death firsthand”.

“Therefore, it is unsurprising that people in the region have increased anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder,” it read.

Lancet’s blinkered approach towards the Indian government and its tackling of the Covid crisis was, and predictably too, quoted extensively and amplified through Western media mostly and certain sections of the Indian media again quoting Western media.

Why Lancet’s publication on the use and efficacy of Hydroxychloroquine in Covid treatment and mitigating fatalities followed by a retraction of the same report soon after, exposed its fickle stand on key issues.

The present-day health situation in India, the surge in oxygen production, the Centre’s announcement of taking over the procurement and delivery of Covid vaccines for all above 18 years of age from 21 June 2021 and the drastic fall in number of cases following the meteoric rise of cases and deaths in the second wave, are predictably ignored by the Western media.

Of course, there’ll be some catastrophe in the future to write about and amplify. Till then, India will work its way to health and better times and the Western media will talk about Elephants in the streets, the Great Indian Rope Trick and the ‘Issues faced by Minorities’ in India.



Gajanan Khargamker is an independent Editor, Solicitor and Film-maker. He is the founder of the International Think Tank DraftCraft.

Crisis that left India breathless

(...continued from page 07)



Oxygen production increased from 5,700 MT/day in August 2020 to 9,446 MT/day in May 2021. The production capacity increased from 6,817 MT/day to 7,314 MT/day and the capacity utilisation shot up from 84 per cent to 129 per cent during this period.

Keeping up with the increase in production and demand, LMO sale in India also increased from about 1,300 MT/day in March 2021 to 8,920 MT/day on 6 May

2021. The maximum sale of 3,095 MT/day of LMO during the first wave happened on 29 September 2020. LMO sale grew from 1,559 MT/day on 31 March 2021 to over 8,000 MT on 3 May 2021 – a more than five-fold increase.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spruced up efforts to secure oxygen from overseas. Till 10 May 2021, 50,000 MT of Liquid Oxygen was being imported from overseas and orders and delivery schedule for 5,800 MT was finalised. LMO was imported from many nations including UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait and France and several Oxygen Concentrators were also procured. Tanker availability was improved too – The capacity and number of tankers increased from 12,480 MT and 1,040 in March 2020 to 23,056 MT and 1,681 respectively.

Efforts by local, state and central government entities in ensuring unrestricted movement of medical oxygen between states and removal of restrictions on oxygen manufacturers and suppliers also helped in ensuring LMO reaches one and all.

Kriti Kalra is an activist and field researcher with www.thewomansurvivor.com – an initiative of Draft-Craft International to protect and empower women by bringing on one platform the latest on rights and issues, strategic case studies, state initiatives and informed legal opinions

Sudeep Ranjan Sarkar - Non-conformist and nonpareil

*A filmmaker cast in a different mould, Sudeep Ranjan Sarkar had his own vision and ideas and chose to see the world from his lens. Shunning the beaten path, his multi-faceted versatility gave us out-of-the-box films like Umformung, Paradiso, Lust to Glorious Dead and The Death of Spring. A maverick filmmaker, he spun his themes that had a heady concoction of surrealism and fantasy, says **Shoma A. Chatterji***



bad. I studied English Hons in Dum Dum Motijheel College in Kolkata. I did further studies from distance learning institutions in subjects of Psychology and Management.”

Cinema, whatever little he could gain access to – as the theatres like Deshbandhu and Mahabir were very far away – fascinated him and that passion, or, obsession continued through his entire boyhood. His fascination for cinema was always above everything else and his father did not stop him from pursuing his passion. His father of course, did not care for his

boy's passion for cinema as their middle-class ambience and values did not permit children to even watch too many films.

“The struggle was long and eventful but the more I was discouraged, the more determined I became to make it as a filmmaker though I could have made it in the corporate world with my qualifications in management,” informs Sarkar.

Sarkar is spiritual, wears rings on almost all his fingers and the many bracelets on his wrists reveal his multi-layered religiosity. He is as much a believer of Buddhism as he is a devout Hindu. Sarkar is an English language poet, an Impressionist painter, a writer, a corporate honcho, a management expert and a filmmaker. He writes the story, dialogue and

screenplay of his films, does the music and sometimes even does a small cameo or a significant role. One of his cameo characters is also named after him. He dedicates all his films to his guru Sri Guru Biswajit Bramhachari.

“The Dhanbad coal belt hardly had any avenues of entertainment when I was a boy. But in winter, Jatra groups would come and the effect on me was pure magic. What fascinated me was the magical transformation the actors could bring about between their lifestyle and behaviour during the day, and their behaviour during the shows when they were actually performing. I specially recall one name – Bina Dasgupta – who is no more and her performances. This formed one more trigger for my interest in films,” he reminisces.

Another factor that added to his fascination for cinema was his addiction to *Diamond Comics*. *Diamond Pocket Comics* were a very popular series in those days that featured stories around Dharmendra, Rajesh Khanna, Jeetendra and so on. Then came the video theatre that screened films at a flat rate of ₹10 and he went to every single film show. They were fibre projections and the results were good. Then he was exposed to C-Grade films made in the South which gave him a completely different insight into cinema. His exposure to international cinema came when Doordarshan began to screen European films after 11.00 pm. He was not allowed to watch them. So, he would hide outside the window while his father watched the late-night shows and he watched

Sudeep Ranjan Sarkar is a filmmaker who is extremely low profile. Few know him as a filmmaker who has made five full-length feature films that have been screened across the world in different countries and less in India. He was born and brought up in Dhanbad in the colliery belt where his father used to work in a colliery.

Asked about his background, Sarkar says, “My late father Dilip Ranjan Sarkar was a senior overman in Coal India subsidiary BCCL. My mother Sunanda Sarkar is a housewife. I was raised comfortably and never made to feel less in a middle-class household. I studied in a premiere Jesuit run convent school De Nobili in a place called Digwadih few kilometres away from the main Dhan-



through the grills.

Sudeep Ranjan Sarkar is a one-man industry. He directs, scripts, edits, and writes the story and even acts in his films. Interestingly, he shoots almost all his films himself on an I-Phone. Why? His response is: "Firstly, it leads to the democratisation of the entire process of filmmaking. Secondly, it brings down the budget considerably. Thirdly, the quality of the final film is so good that you cannot make out that it has been shot entirely with an I-Phone as it can produce the same depth-of-field. Fourthly, I carry my I-Phone along to different locations because I shoot across the map and using the I-Phone with a Selfie stand does not call for permissions and you can shoot freely. The journey from celluloid to digital has taken a long time but it is working very well. Look at the OTT platforms making good business. I have tried to economise the entire process of filmmaking without surrendering the quality of projection. For example,

Umformung was shot on a Canon D Camera which gave the film an old vintage feel and it bagged 19 awards," he says.

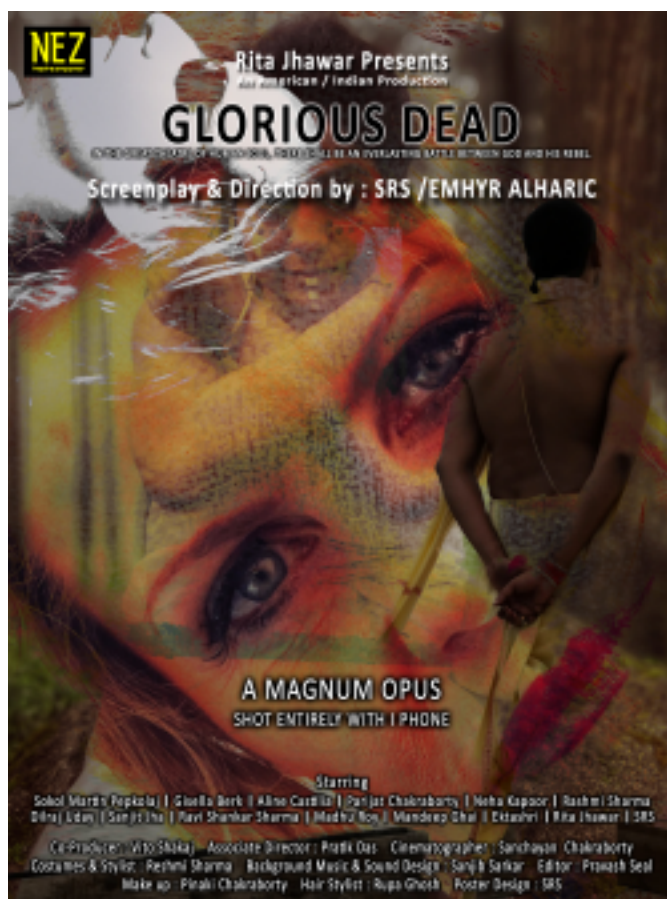
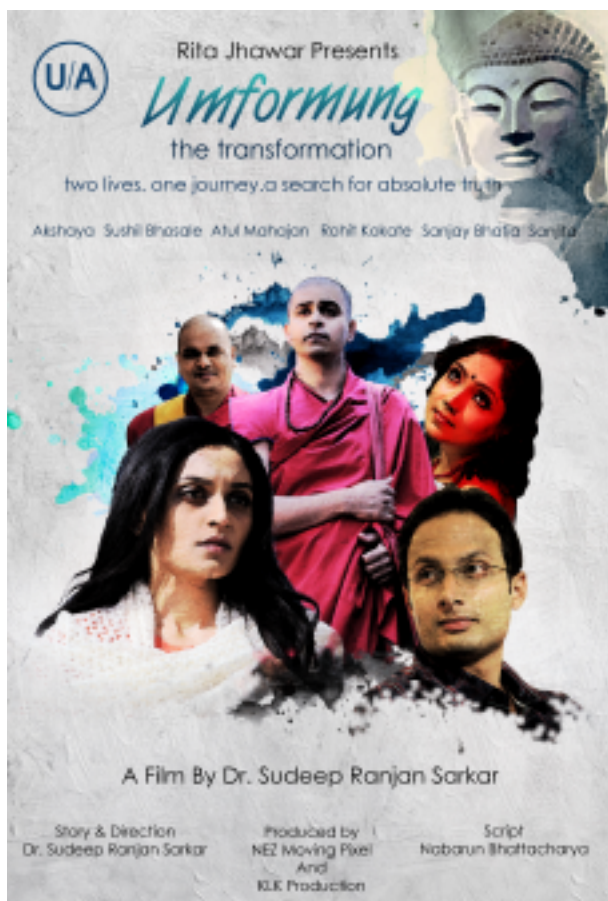
Sarkar's second film was *Paradiso* targeted at the international film circuit. *Paradiso* is set in Bengal of the 1960s and is the story of a man who lives with his family, but inhabits a real and an illusory world and both the worlds merge. It is a black comedy. The protagonist does not speak at all in the entire film.

He makes truly out-of-the-box films which hardly get

exhibitors in the country. But this is more than undercut by the number of international awards his feature films have won. His films, often made in English or a blend of Hindi and English, use a lot of surrealism and fantasy married to a story of sin and crime from which the protagonist comes out spiritually transformed to a different persona altogether.

All his films from *Umformung* (Transformation) through *Paradiso*, *Lust to Glorious Dead* and *The Death of Spring* explore philosophical, spiritual and also sensual questions around the lives of men and women in some depth which can be defined as a genre by itself.

Umformung is a unique perspective offered about how incredible transformations can happen to people when placed in challenging situations. The story has two protagonists; one is a very young Buddhist monk who quits the monastery in search of truth and his strange



relationship with sex-workers. The other character is that of a very affluent, sophisticated, educated modern girl whose material and career ambitions drive her to an extreme edge. But after a point, she wearies of the crimes she has committed to fulfill her ambition, leaves the material world in search of peace and finally finds solace in the arms of God.

His second film was *Paradiso* targeted at the international film circuit. According to Sarkar, *Paradiso* is set in Bengal of the 1960s and is the story of a man who lives with his family, but inhabits a real and an illusory world and both the worlds merge. It is a black comedy. The protagonist does not speak at all in the entire film. He is supposed to be a writer but does not always write. In one world, he is having sex with two women who he is not married to. In the real world, his wife is always complaining about his laziness and

the scarcity of means. It is a micro-cosmic celluloid recreation of the *Lotus Eaters*.

Death of Spring is an English language feature film shot in France with just an iPhone XS and a small tripod. The film deals with the story of a mystical place run by a female angel to heal broken men and women. The routine of the place is disturbed by two angels, one male and one female who aspire to experience the darkness of human soul. They get mired in the fragmentation and decimation and get sucked into the vortex of human vices. Death, destruction and lust follow. The film has closure that disturbs but also opens window to redemption, as well as leaves scope for redemption.

About *Lust*, he says, "*Lust* is my most honest effort in filmmaking. I wanted to make a political statement like George Orwell's *Animal Farm*. I showed censorship knowledge, of

world domination in the last segment and wanted to point fingers at hollowness of religious institutions so this movie is my rebellion against everything that I perceive as decaying, cannibalistic, and cancerous." On that note, we wind up.



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.

Time to review reservation policy

*The decision of the Supreme Court that puts 50% cap on reservations has thrown a spanner in their works but the Marathas are regardless bracing up to press for their demand again. While the legal battle will continue, **Prof Avinash Kolhe** argues that a time has indeed come to take a fresh look at reservation policy and the criteria it is based on so far.*



The politically dominant community in Maharashtra, (32% of the total population of the state) Marathas are hell-bent on getting reservations. Though the Supreme Court has rejected their demand on 5th May, the community has buckled up and is getting ready to press its demand. This time, however, they are not up against the state government as the state governments of all political hues have been sympathetic to the demand of the community. The real hurdle is the decision of the Supreme Court of 1993 in the famous Indra Sawney case that has set a cap of 50% on reservations. Today reservation break-up in Maharashtra is like this: the SCs 13%, the STs 7%, the OBCs 19%, Special Backward category 2%, Vimukta Jati 3%, Nomadic Tribes B 2.5%, Nomadic Tribes C Dhangar 3.5% and Nomadic Tribe D Vanjari 2%, taking to total reservation to 52%. The act of 2018 had given Marathas 12% reservation in education and 13% reservation in jobs, pushing the overall reservation ceiling to 64% and 65%.

The issue has become so emotionally charged that the heirs of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj too have joined the agitation. Honorable

Sambhajiiraje of Kolhapur seat and Honorable Udayanraje of Satara seat are now leading the agitations. On Wednesday, 16 June 2021, the Maratha community began its next phase of statewide silent agitation. The silent march was held at Shahu Samadhi Sthal, the resting place of Rajarshi Shahu Maharaj, a reformer king of Kolhapur and a descendent of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj. The Maratha royalty joining the agitation is quite unusual. All these years, they kept away from the humdrum of party politics, barring few occasions. Now the royalty is in the forefront. Vanchit Bahujan Aaghadi (VBA) chief Prakash Ambedkar, grandson of Dr. B R Ambedkar, too participated in the protest.

It must be noted that the OBC leadership too is upset with some changes likely to be brought in the Supreme Court verdict delivered on 4 March 2021. The state's review petition was quashed by the Apex court on 28 May 2021. The SC verdict has virtually cancelled the political reservation for the OBC. The Akhil Bharatiya Mahatma Phule Samata Parishad (ABMPSP) led by senior NCP leader Chhagan Bhujbal has declared to start

agitations to support their demands of political reservations for the OBC for local bodies across Maharashtra.

Though the OBC reservation is not directly connected to Maratha reservation demand, it shows how the entire edifice of reservation in Maharashtra is facing formidable challenges. Before we get into the nitty-gritty of the issue, a quick recap on the recent past of this problem is called for. The BJP government led by Devendra Fadnavis had appointed Justice M G Gaikwad commission to report on reservations for the Social and Economically Backwards Classes (SEBCs). The commission was set up in June 2017. The Gaikwad commission submitted the report in 2018, basis which the Maharashtra assembly had passed a bill to that effect in November 2018. As was expected this law was challenged in the Bombay High Court which upheld the SEBC reservation. It then was challenged in the Supreme Court which granted a stay on 9 September 2020 and referred the issue to a larger bench. On 5 May 2021 the apex court struck down this act as 'unconstitutional'.

The SC ruling has expectedly sparked a debate on the future of reservations. Former CM Prithviraj Chavan argues that the Indra Sawhney verdict is not sacrosanct since the Union government itself has raised the quota limit to 60 per cent by adding 10 per cent reservation to economically backward classes. The SC ruling has also sparked a debate on the future of reservations. Former CM Prithviraj Chavan argues that the Indra Sawhney verdict is not sacrosanct since the Union government itself has raised the quota limit to 60 per cent by adding 10 per cent reservation to economically backward classes.

(continued on page 35...)

Ascend to commune with God

It is a must-read while we are struggling on Terra Firma and battling menaces like Covid and the like. The sooner the spiritual journey commences in a human's life, the better, opines G Venkatesh.

Film star Rajinikanth rates this as his most favourite book in a Youtube video and calls it a 'life-changer'. So does a friend of mine from my schooldays. Watching the video per chance and a healthy review by my friend prompted me to read it. The motive was to find the higher purpose in life I have been seeking over the last year and a half in the wake of unimaginable loss and trauma. To me, this book holds within it, the truth(s) that may set me free – or rather make me realise that my soul is not a caged bird. Neither were the souls of near and dear ones I have lost.

As a probing, truth-seeking rationalist I often felt confounded by blind beliefs held by staunch adherents of religious faiths. But as Paramahansa Yogananda writes and reminds readers ever and anon in the book, seeking is a painful and frustrating process but then the answers are received by the grace of God. Some serendipitously are led to their 'gurus' (which the Yogi reminds readers, actually means 'a person who helps you to come out of darkness') as if by destiny. This happened to the author himself, to his own guru (Yuktishwar Giri), and his guru's guru (Lahiri Mahasya) too. Whether or not such things happen in the 21st century, can be answered simply by reading the anecdotes about the 20th century, narrated by the author in his book. True stories of time travel, clairvoyance, materialising and dematerialising at will, miracle-healing – not the ones which people do for money or fame or favours, but rather to pursue the God-assigned tasks of educating and guiding humans along the less-trodden spiritual path – are interspersed amidst expositions of the spiritual sciences! Evidently, Paramhansa Yogananda could easily read the minds of readers in the years to come, and knew that attention can be sustained by mixing anecdotes with abstruse theory, and in

the process, also make the theory understandable.

Venerating spiritualists

Written in exquisite English, and illustrated with priceless photographs, the book provides a look-in to the author's life from his childhood days right up to his setting-up of the Self Realization Fellowship in California. It is a self-learner for those who are interested in seeking spiritual growth, and by the time you complete reading it, you must be completely convinced about the fact that everything gross perceived by the sense organs is essentially a 'play of light', a manifestation of divine vibrations in a form which can be sensed by humans through the external sense organs. They are mere ideas in God's mind (which Albert Einstein said, he was keen to understand the working of), and humans are challenged to look for the subtle beyond the gross, the light behind matter, the unmanifest behind the manifested.

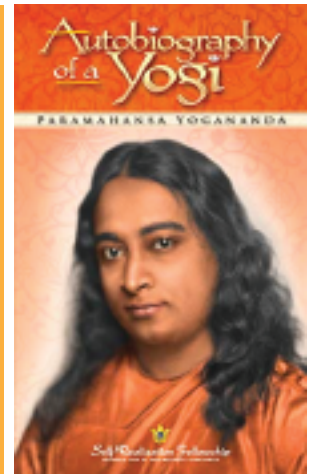
Yogananda introduces the readers to several spiritualists, true men and women of God...some lesser known ones too, who thanks to him and the book, have become known to millions of readers. He frequently refers to Jesus Christ and quotes from the New Testament, as that surely would have been the best way to bond with disciples in the USA (it is there that he wrote this book) and explain the

Autobiography of a yogi

Author: Paramahansa Yogananda

First published in 1946

Now available as the 1998 paperback edition published by the Yogoda Satsanga Society of India from www.ysofindia.org



conspicuous parallels and similarities among the teachings of prophets of different religions. For those who do not know, Jesus in an earlier incarnation was Elijah's disciple; Elijah was reborn as John the Baptist! Yogananda, in the Newtonian spirit of standing on the shoulders of giants, venerates Manu (while clearing all misconceptions the West may have about the origin and the purpose of the caste system in Hindu society), Adi Shankara the Buddha, Swami Vivekananda (who had predicted the arrival of Yogananda in the USA, to an American disciple in Chicago), Ramkrishna Paramhansa (the guru Vivekananda was automatically led to, by God's decree), Aurobindo Ghosh (the silent man, who spoke very less), and Mahatma Gandhi (the 'political saint' who popularised non-violence).

Mumbai story – three bodies for a soul

The author narrates an incident from the Taj Mahal Hotel in Mumbai, when his guru Yuktishwar Giri, appears resurrected, after having left his mortal frame a few months ago, and explains that the soul has three different bodies belonging to three

different cosmoses – physical (on earth), astral (in the astral cosmos) and causal (in the causal cosmos). The astral and causal cosmoses, in Yuktishwar Giri's words, are very vast, and vis-à-vis them, the physical universe which we are familiar with is but a small bag hanging at the tip of an expansive balloon. Souls assume human lives in this 'bag', play out their karma, and on leaving the mortal casing, ascend up to the astral realm for a period of rest. Those which have not shed their desires, return back – reincarnate – and keep oscillating in this birth-death cycle.

Some make a concerted effort to commune with God, and ascend on the spiritual ladder, and ultimately are able to escape the 'bag' altogether. However, there is one more cycle to break - the astral-causal one, before the soul merges with God, the Oversoul, the non-material world of ideas. While human beings access the astral realm and are often said to be

able to communicate with the souls of departed near and dear ones in their dreams (by tapping into their sub-conscious), this is not akin to communing with God. It is super-consciousness cultivated by some yogis which enables their souls to experience the Bliss of the causal cosmos even when housed in the bodily encasements on earth. The gist of the book, or the reason why many readers may wish to read and grasp the advice given in it, is what is called Kriya Yoga – a science of body, mind and spirit. It is a breathing technique which when consistently and persistently practised, enables humans to 'comprehend the tremendous potential inherent in them'.

Reviewer merely enabler

Do read the book. It is also downloadable as a PDF online (a shorter version though). It is a must-read while we are struggling on Terra Firma and battling menaces like Covid and the like. The sooner the

spiritual journey commences in a human's life, the better. It is not advisable to wait till one's Sannyasashrama or Vanaprasthashrama. God knows, if these 'ashramas' will even appear in one's life on earth, given all the uncertainties that prevail. Doomsday-thinking, some may complain! Well, after reading the book, you will agree with me that there is no doomsday per se. It is all a Maya.



G. Venkatesh is Associate Professor, Department of Engineering and Chemical Sciences, Faculty of Health, Science and Technology, Karlstad University, Sweden. He is also a freelance writer for several magazines around the world. The author has set up Varshita Venkatesh Girls' Education Fund with Plan USA in memory of his wife. ...

Time to review reservation policy

(...continued from page 33)

Seven states have introduced laws to expand the reservation limit above 50 per cent, but most are being challenged in the courts; only Tamil Nadu (69 per cent) and Andhra Pradesh (66 per cent) have reservation above the SC ordered limit (their laws came into effect before the 102nd amendment was passed). Sensing the unrest among the Marathas, the Maharashtra government on 11th May 2021 constituted an eight-member committee headed by retired chief justice of Allahabad High Court Dileep Bhosale to analyse the SC verdict. The Bhosale committee has recommended a review petition, challenging the verdict in relation to the 50% cap on reservations, the viability of the report submitted by a state-level commission that pointed out the need for the Maratha quota and the SCs observation over the 102nd Constitutional amendment. The Bhosale committee has recommended challenging the SC verdict on 42 legal points with emphasis on two major ones. It has pointed out that while stating that there was no need to review the Indra Sawhney judgement of

1993, the Apex court did not say anything about the quota given to the Economically Weaker Sections (EWSs). It is clear that the EWS quote case is pending in the Apex court and striking down Maharashtra state law before any ruling on it, was bad in law. The 103rd Constitution amendment made to accord the 10% quota to EWS beyond the 50% cap is yet to be decided by the SC. The Bhosale committee has recommended the setting up of a new backward class commission to decide the backwardness of Marathas, in case the review petition was dismissed by the SC.

While the legal battle will continue, time has indeed come to take a fresh look at reservation policy and the criterions it is based on so far. Till today it was on social and educational backwardness and not on economic backwardness. Now the need has arisen due to the reality that there is growing socio-economic differentiation within the dominant castes, something the leaders of these castes do not recognize. In the last 70 years, there have taken place vast changes in the

educational and economic profiles of dominant castes. Let us focus on Marathas of Maharashtra. Comparison based on statistics is called for: the percentage of graduates among Dalits in 2004-05 was 1.9 per cent. It has more than doubled to 5.1 per cent in 2011-12. The corresponding figure for OBCs was 3.5 per cent and has doubled to 7.6 per cent, while for Marathas it was 4.6 per cent and increased to 8 per cent.

The Apex court should have taken cognizance of this new reality. Instead, it preferred to stay with the Indra Sawhney judgement of 1993. Time has come to review the entire edifice of reservation in our country.



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

DR VISHWANATHAN SHANTA

A healer in true sense (1927-2021)

Dr. Viswanathan Shanta, MD was an internationally renowned pioneering Indian oncologist and Chairperson of Adyar Cancer Institute, Chennai. Having seen death so often, in so many forms, she was determined to help thousands of people fight it. Cancer being a notoriously expensive disease, she initiated one of the first attempts of affordable, quality evidence-based cancer treatments for lower-income-groups in India.

Despite the strides made in cancer treatment, lack of information and wrong perception made people fear it. Cancer was largely seen as fatal or ordained by fate. She vociferously advocated its early detection using genetic profiling, today considered indispensable and reiterated the need for tobacco control. Her mantra was equitable treatment for all and to treat patients with compassion as individual human beings, not as a disease state, developing protocols beyond treatment to holistic care. Punctual to a fault, her gentle demeanour instantly put all at ease. If bad news had to be broken, she couched it sensitively.

Unmarried, considering marriage a hindrance to her, work was worship to her. A picture of austerity, the 94-year-old lived on the top floor of the institute available round the clock. Blessed with sharp administrative skills; funding, infrastructure up gradation, and awareness generation activities, occupied her time wholly. Shanta was born in Mylapore, Chennai, Tamil Nadu in a distinguished family that included two Nobel Laureate physicists – CV Raman and Chandrasekhar Raman. She completed MBBS at the Madras Medical College in 1949 and MD in Obstetrics and Gynaecology in 1955.

She joined as a voluntary worker, the fledgling Cancer Institute, established in 1954 by the Women's Indian Association Cancer Relief Fund under the leadership of medical pioneer, Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy, and her son Dr. Krishnamurthi, who became her mentors. Training in oncology at Toronto, Canada, and advanced cancer care in the United Kingdom, she returned and joined the Institute as a Resident Medical Officer on 13 April 1955, remaining

there all her life. The early days at the institute were hard but the excitement of creating something new and working in a collaborative spirit of inquiry kept her going. One day, out of the blue, a stranger from a neighbouring State walked in and contributed funds toward an additional ward of 50 beds. The Institute which started with just 12 beds soon became a comprehensive cancer centre, comprising 650 beds, providing quality affordable care, and world-class facilities.

Her sustained advocacy led the Medical Council of India to finally recognise medical oncology as a speciality. She got duty exemption for cancer drugs, free travel for cancer patients in trains and buses, screening of women for cervical cancer, making cancer a notifiable disease in Tamil Nadu, declaration of anti-cancer drugs as life-saving and removal of licence and custom duty on imported chemotherapy drugs. She was the first to initiate a paediatric oncology clinic, first to establish a cancer research and treatment centre in India, first to offer postgraduate in oncology course, overseeing the opening of the first hereditary cancer clinic in India and also conducting many major cancer surveys in India. All this battling public apathy! Shanta received several national and international awards, including the Padma Shri, Padma Bhushan, Padma Vibhushan, Ramon Magsaysay awards and the Mother Theresa award.

She was the President of Indian Society of Oncology (1988-1990), served the WHO Advisory Committee until 2005, a National Academy of Medical Sciences (India) Fellow, and convener of the State Advisory Board on Cancer. She published numerous papers, contributed chapters in oncology books, and participated in many international and national conferences. She passed away in Chennai and was cremated with full police honours. She wished her ashes be sprinkled all over the Institute.

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



T N KRISHNAN

Musician par excellence (1928-2020)

Tirupunithura Narayanaiyar Krishnan, the eminent violinist was born on 6 October 1928 at Tirupunithura. He picked up the rudiments of music from his father Narayana Iyer. Later he underwent rigorous training in playing the violin under Alleppey Parthasarathy and gave his first solo concert at the age of 11. The violinist was mentored in his early years by the celebrated Carnatic vocalist Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer.

T N Krishnan gained great proficiency in his art soon and honed his talents by accompanying the Who's Who of the Carnatic music world like Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar, Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagavathar, Musiri Subramanya Iyer, Alathur Brothers (Srinivasa Iyer and Sivasubramania Iyer), M D Ramanathan, Maharajapuram Viswanatha Iyer and Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer as well.

Along with two of his illustrious contemporaries Lalgudi Jayaraman and M S Gopalakrishnan, T N Krishnan formed a trio that was hailed as the 'Violin Trinity' by classical music aficionados. Each had his own distinctive style yet all three were rated highly and their concerts were well received in India and abroad.

Krishnan who taught music in the 'parampara' (traditional) style, travelled abroad extensively as an accompanist with top musicians and also as a solo violinist. His music had a nostalgic feel that kept the listeners in a thrall. It endeared him to the audience and thousands of students who looked at his performances as education. Although Lalgudi Jayaraman was celebrated for his 'bani', Krishnan too had his own interpretation of the 'bani' which essentially involved a blende of melody and rhythm complementing the other but rhythm taking a bow before the melody.

A regular at the annual Margazhi festival conducted by the reputed Madras Music Academy, Krishnan played to packed audiences even as an octogenarian. The eminent violinist's scholarship and his in-depth knowledge of Carnatic music enabled him to rise to great heights in the field of administration as well. Krishnan served with distinction as a Professor of Music at the Chennai Music College and later went on to become the Principal of the College. He was also appointed as

Dean of the School of Music and Fine Arts of the University of Delhi and also served as Vice Chairman of the Sangeet Natak Akademi between 1981 and 1983. T N Krishnan was also an Asthana Vidwan of the Tirumala Tirupathi Devasthanam (TTD).

In an illustrious career as a violinist that spanned over seven decades, Krishnan received a number of awards and fellowships including the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award in 1974, Sangeeta Kalanidhi awarded by the Music Academy in 1980 and the Sangeet Natak Akademi Fellowship in 2006. The Government of India conferred on him the Padma Shri in 1973 and the Padma Bhushan in 1992.



While Krishnan's daughter Viji Krishnan and his son Sriram Krishnan have proved themselves to be chips off the old block and have carved their own niches in Carnatic music as violinists, his sister Rajam, an acclaimed violinist in her own right, often accompanied her elder brother in violin 'jugalbandis' that fascinated audiences whenever they shared a stage. In a tribute to her brother on his demise she observed that Krishnan mesmerised generations with his performances. Sarod maestro Amjad Ali Khan too shared a great rapport with the violin maestro and their violin-sarod jugalbandis were a special treat.

T N Krishnan passed away in Chennai on the 2 November 2020 at 92 plunging the world of classical music in grief. Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his message stated that 'The demise of noted violinist T N Krishnan leaves a big void in the world of music. His works beautifully encapsulated a wide range of emotions and strands of our culture.' T N Krishnan whose peers Lalgudi Jayaraman and M S Gopalakrishnan predeceased him, will remain a source of inspiration to all those whom he regaled with his musical prowess for decades on end.

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

MAJOR DAVID MANLUN KC

Gallantry ran in the family (1985-2017)

Major Manlun was born on 27 July 1985 in Imphal, Manipur. His father, Subedar Khamzalam served in 5 Assam Regiment and retired in 1912. While the father moved around, the mother Ms Mampi lived in Shillong to educate the children.

Major David Manlun's family is from the Zou tribe in a village called Beihang (Churachandpur district) on the India-Myanmar border. His elder brother is serving with the Army and sister is married to an Army officer Lt Col Newton.

An athlete and a keen footballer, Major David Manlun took interest in sports from his childhood and represented his team at various levels. He was proficient in many languages that among Hindi, English and mother tongue Zou included Mizo, Kuki and Paite. David finished his schooling from Army Public School, Shillong and graduated from St Anthony's College Shillong in 2006. Undeterred by the two failures for the entrance test for the army, he succeeded in the third attempt. In 2009, he joined the Officer Training Academy, Chennai. In March 2010 he was commissioned into the 1st Battalion of the Naga Regiment and joined the battalion at Naugam in Jammu and Kashmir. He served there for next two years and took part in a number of operations.

David would often give up breaks to not miss the opportunity of taking part in missions. He received warning of posting to 164 Infantry Battalion TA (NAGA) in 2014. He was awarded with the Chief of Army Staff Commendation in recognition of his exemplary service on 15 August 2016. He then opted for deputation to National Security Guard for which the probation was to begin on 23 Jun 2017.

The ULFA (United Liberation Front of Asom), a terrorist organisation, founded in 1979 had been mounting attacks since the eighties. It had support from China and had training camps near Myanmar border. It forged links with another terrorist organization, National and Social Council of Nagaland-Khapaland (NSCN-K). In June 2015, NSCN-K had ambushed an Army convoy in Manipur in which 18

soldiers were massacred. On receiving intelligence reports about the presence of militants in the Lappa area, close to the Myanmar border, the security forces decided to launch a joint operation on 07 June 2017. Major David led the mission. The team was trying to establish a mobile check post to intercept the militants reported to be travelling in two auto-rickshaws. Shortly after 10 pm, the two vehicles emerged and on being asked to stop, sped up a nearby hill. As the militants opened fire, David was hit by a bullet and a grenade splinter. He ordered his men to stay behind the vehicles. Crawling within ten metres, he used the last bit of energy to kill the three terrorists at point blank range before martyrdom took him.



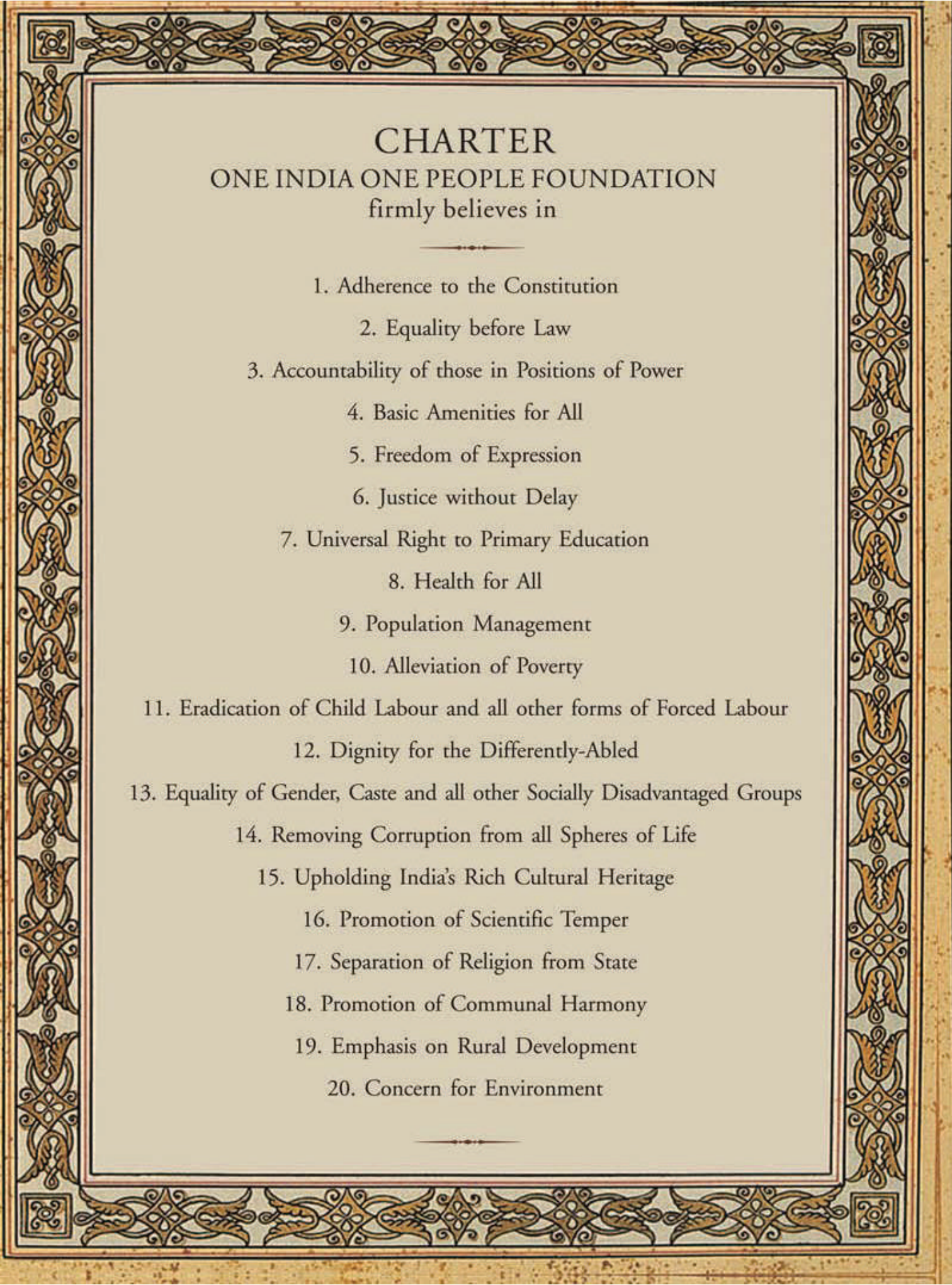
Inspired by his heroics, his troops successfully counter attacked the militants and recovered huge quantity of arms and ammunition. Major David displayed courage and leadership of a very high calibre and proved his mettle as a dedicated and committed soldier.

His supreme sacrifice is an "amazing profile" of a family from a remote corner of the country and their service to the nation. It is a touching story of the many sacrifices made by the parents that went into creating this brave-heart. It was heart-rending to see him die when he had much more to offer to the country. His void will never be filled and he will remain an inspiration forever.

When the sad news was broken to Ms Mampi, her first reaction was "please don't cry". Despite the cruel twist of destiny did to her years of toiling she put up a brave front.

He was awarded Kirti Chakra (KC) for conspicuous personal bravery. On 27 March 2018, the medal was handed over to his father by the President of India. The Army unveiled a memorial bust of David in Shillong.

– Brigadier Suresh Chandra Sharma (retd.)



CHARTER

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firmly believes in

1. Adherence to the Constitution
 2. Equality before Law
 3. Accountability of those in Positions of Power
 4. Basic Amenities for All
 5. Freedom of Expression
 6. Justice without Delay
 7. Universal Right to Primary Education
 8. Health for All
 9. Population Management
 10. Alleviation of Poverty
 11. Eradication of Child Labour and all other forms of Forced Labour
 12. Dignity for the Differently-Abled
 13. Equality of Gender, Caste and all other Socially Disadvantaged Groups
 14. Removing Corruption from all Spheres of Life
 15. Upholding India's Rich Cultural Heritage
 16. Promotion of Scientific Temper
 17. Separation of Religion from State
 18. Promotion of Communal Harmony
 19. Emphasis on Rural Development
 20. Concern for Environment
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WHO AM I?

Am I a Hindu first or an Indian first?

Am I a Muslim first or an Indian first?

Am I a Christian first or an Indian first?

Am I a Buddhist first or an Indian first?

Am I a Brahmin first or an Indian first?

Am I a Dalit first or an Indian first?

Am I a South Indian first or an Indian first?

Am I a North Indian first or an Indian first?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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