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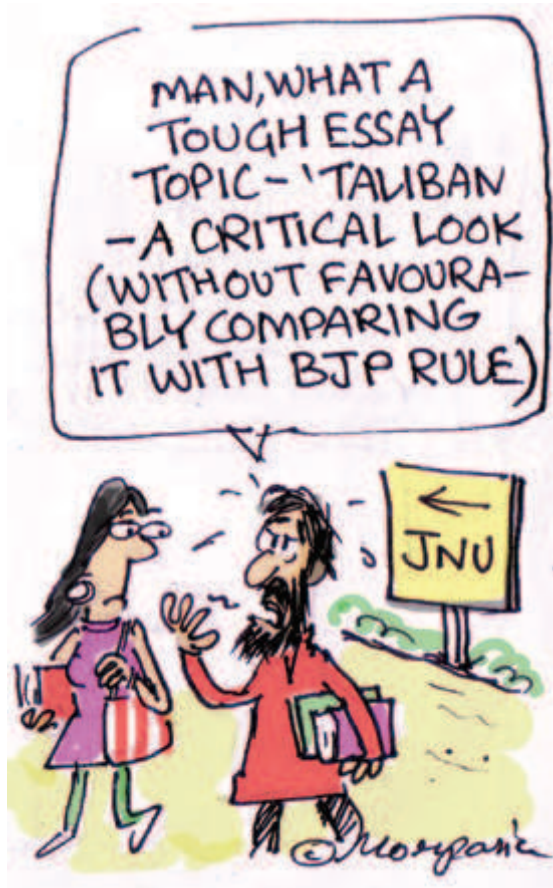
INVOKING NATURE FOR SURVIVAL

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CHHOTA CHAAR DHAAM

Face to Face

DEEPTI SIVAN



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India continues to fail her tribals

*Caste has always been a contentious issue in the country. With a number of ramifications attached to the word, **Gajanan Khergamker** points out at the failure of the law from which legislatures cannot absolve themselves of their responsibility as also the darker side of a brute majority that subjugates the weak.*



Members of Pardhi tribe have to battle daily harassment from the state authorities

The issue of caste throws open the floodgates of intellectualised criticism across India. Posturing depends, as always, on positions taken by birth, gender or profession and in the order affected. Liberty is assured to those who reach out for it. Modelled on tenets that work along the lines of first-come-first-served, justice being available to those who make a bid for it, and more, the defences of contributory negligence, limitation lapses and provocations offset claims and nullify pleas. Law is within the reach of the privileged in a democracy, who comprise it too, brought within the reach of the marginalised few by 'affirmative action' which, as a rule, fails a few.

The failure of law is pointedly intended and practiced to a shameless perfection by legislatures elected by the powerful majority. A majority that reveals its true nature in the dark of the day or night to subjugate the weak, perform acts patently illegal but never defied, extorting consent by exerting undue influence in social, religious, economic, and political pecking orders. Reservation is the dole offered by the law of the land less to the weak who deserve them but flaunted as a barter to powerful groups, like the Marathas, who even manage to procure unwieldy constitutional amendments despite oppositions to legitimise their claims.

Reservation for affirmative action

Caste confabulations are peppered with lofty insertions of reservation policies and penal sections guaranteed by the Atrocities Act, as 'affirmative action' is offered by the State in India, but insidiously kept out of reach by the same majority they needed to be protected from, and preposterously backed by the State's disdain. In Western India's Maharashtra, for instance, a Caste Certificate is provided only on the fulfilment of a Domicile condition. According to an amendment in 2012 to The Maharashtra Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, De-notified Tribes (Vimukta Jaatis), Nomadic Tribes, Other Backward Classes and Special Backward Category (Regulation of Issuance and Verification of) Caste Certificate Act, 2000, an applicant for a Scheduled Caste (SC) certificate would have to submit a domicile certificate dating back to 1950. This cut-off year was fixed as 1961 for nomadic tribes, and 1967 for OBC candidates. To expect a member of a nomadic tribe to obtain a domicile certificate, for a caste certificate to avail State benefits, defeats the purpose of extending social justice to the tribe. Given the sheer nature of his existence, it's an impossibility and reduces the entire exercise of affirmative action to a joke.



Members of Pardhi community in Mumbai

‘Denotified’ yet treated as criminals

The urban tribe happens to be one of the myriad Denotified Tribes (DNTs) which were historically been branded as Criminal Tribes by the British through a mischievous Act of legislation, the ‘Criminal Tribes Act 1871’ and tagged with contempt over the years. The British had selectively branded a few communities as Criminal Tribes sometimes to quell their acts of nationalist resistance towards them. The Indians swayed by colonial sentiments continued to echo the narrative and conveniently plastered the stigma of caste on these who were kept at bay by the rest. Intriguingly, following the revolt of 1857 in which tribal chiefs such as Dhan Singh Gurjar were labelled traitors and considered rebellious, the entire tribe of Gurjars was castigated as ‘criminal’ This, despite their strong agrarian roots. Cut to March 2020, as India approached her 75th year of Independence, and a nationwide call for lockdown made in the world’s largest democracy. In the sea of RT-PCR tests, curfew orders, work from home and police action, nobody even spared a thought for the millions of DNTs who depended entirely on peregrination and lived in public spaces apparently ‘illegally, in the eyes of the law. They were driven away by the police, law-enforcers, stopped from performing in public, selling wares in zones where tourism had come to a halt, and forced to beg and live in abject penury. The ones who were on foot, enroute, were forced to stop and prevented from movement by police action. Inter-state and intra-state travel norms, drawn up by those oblivious of the survival needs of these communities, forced them to stay put wherever they had stopped and survived, with families in tow, on alms for months on end.

Clean up operations rid tribals

Consider this as a case in point: In January 2020, just before the COVID pandemic struck India, following persistent complaints by a group of affluent residents of South Mumbai, the local police and the civic authorities launched a & ‘clean-up drive’ of the streets and by-lanes of India’s financial capital Mumbai’s oldest heritage precinct Colaba to rid the zone of ‘Pardhis’. Police vans drove into Pardhi-infested zones, driving away the ‘vagrants’ who left back their clothes hung for drying on parked vehicles, infants wrapped in cloth being overseen by older children, screaming the choicest of expletives.

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Mumbai’s oldest heritage precinct Colaba to rid the zone of ‘Pardhis’. Police vans drove into Pardhi-infested zones, driving away the ‘vagrants’ who left back their clothes hung for drying on parked vehicles, infants wrapped in cloth parked vehicles, infants wrapped in cloth being overseen by older children, screaming the choicest of expletives.

A Beggar Van arrived to pick up the children and infants who were then taken to ‘homes’ to be rehabilitated. Over the fortnight-long operation, most of the Pardhis were driven away from the roads to other areas, beyond the jurisdiction of the acting police and where they stayed without being apprehended, for the time that is. And, in the third week, they started to trickle back into the zone, one family at a time, darting furtive looks beyond their shoulders for a local policeman. And by the end of a month, they were all back to the streets...their ‘homes, for over decades now but had ‘lost’ their infants to ‘police action’. Every Pardhi family ‘loses’ a few children to police action as a rule.

The Pardhis of Colaba, most of them born in the city, on public roads itself, live on the roads in South Mumbai, selling cheap Chinese wares to tourists in the zone in and around Taj Mahal Palace during season from October through the year end, till the next year’s March end after which most of them travel back to villages in rural Maharashtra. In the villages, they live in shanties on farms where men work as human scarecrows, standing in the centre of fields circling over their head stones tied to the end of a rope to drive away crows and other flying pests. In turn, he gets basic food for his family and shelter by way of a simple thatched hut. After six months of stay, the family returns to Mumbai.

...And history risks repeating

This spilled over to 2021, as one lockdown eased out to lead to another, worse in its wake. The tribals had no place to go. After all, the road was their home and they were being booted out by resident co-Indians, who, despite being cooped up safely indoors owing to COVID restrictions, held virtual meetings and urged the authorities to force them to act against the ‘dirty’ littering tribals and move them away from sight. Now, with the third wave, hopefully the last and weakest of them all, upon India, the urban tribals, have begun returning from temporary make-shift rural settlements they stayed put during the lockdown, to their homes in the cities: To lanes where it’s ‘illegal’ for them to stay; and affluent residents will, once again, capture their images on smartphones from their home’s windows, share them on WhatsApp groups and force the police and civic authorities to act. Again, at the sight of the approaching police van, forced into action by ‘networked’ resident groups, the tribals will run, leaving behind their washed clothes, spread out to dry on parked vehicles, meagre belongings...and infants, once again. The law on Social Justice will be upheld in letter but not in spirit. And free India will, once again, have failed its own brothers and sisters.



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

Pardhis, an unending tale of struggle

*The Pardhis are well known for their exceptional skills in handling exotic wildlife and their knowledge of India's jungles. However, the community lives in penury owing to the flurry of wildlife laws and skewed socio-legal perceptions, observes **Gajanan Khergamker**, and describes how they keep losing their young even as they keep fighting social neglect and fighting against other odds.*



Pardhis makes excellent nature guides due to their exceptional skills in handling exotic wildlife

Till a decade back, the Pardhis would be found selling deer musk (kasturi), wild berries and jewellery made from animal skin and beads. Pardhis, whose name is believed to stem from the Marathi word for hunting --- Paradh, today work as low-paid day labourers in urban and rural areas. Today, in the city, they buy cheap Chinese goods in bulk and sell them on pavements to tourists while living on public pavements for six months before moving onto their villages where they work for others on farms as 'human scare-crows' to rid the fields of crows and other pests. In India are counterparts of Africa's Masai's, the Pardhis, renowned in history for their exceptional skills in handling exotic wildlife and their knowledge of India's jungles but relegated to penury owing to the flurry of wildlife laws and skewed socio-legal perceptions.

Why, during the Raj era, the Pardhis were known to have assisted in royal Bengal Tiger hunts, even trained the now-extinct Asiatic cheetahs which, they kept as pets and hunting companions.

Ban on hunting affected Pardhis

When hunting was banned in India with the promulgation of the Wildlife Protection Act in 1972, the Pardhis lost their traditional occupation. The lot were often blamed for their hunting skills and their expertise in creation of traps for the decline of the tiger population in Panna in Madhya Pradesh. Abhi kya karega, hamare takdeer mein jo hai, woh hai (What can I do...it's fated?),” says a Pardhi woman, attributing her situation to fate. She is one among thousands of Pardhi tribals who live on Mumbai streets, homeless in the eyes of the law, but on a pavement that has been 'home' for her for years on end. “Hum bhi idhar hi paida hua tha aur yahan jahan se



A Pardhi family in a makeshift home on the roadside

bhagate hai mujhe” (I was born here in Mumbai, on the very her situation to fate. She is one among thousands of Pardhi tribals who live on Mumbai streets, homeless in the eyes of the law, but on a pavement that has been 'home' for her for years on end. “Hum bhi idhar hi paida hua tha aur yahan jahan se bhagate hai mujhe (I was born here in Mumbai, on the very street from where they drive me away),” she says, revealing how all of them (Mumbai's Pardhis) lived over generations in India's financial capital but sans any legal paperwork. And, if you thought that being homeless in Mumbai was a deplorable situation to be in, there's worse to follow. Surekha, like thousands others, has 'lost' two of her infant children on the streets of Mumbai and not to an act of crime but, paradoxically, the State's action. Almost each of the 5,000-odd Pardhis living in India's financial capital has 'lost' a child or two to the trappings of urban legal processes which slot a child on the streets as 'homeless' and whisk them off in 'bachche ki gaadi' (Homeless Children Van)' and off to a Children's Home.

Hawking leads to police troubles

The Pardhi parent would probably be a few metres away selling Chinese wares in a tourist zone during that time but oblivious of his/her child's predicament. No amount of cajoling and begging before the local police, for details on the child's whereabouts, helps the Pardhi driven away as a rule. So, each time, a Pardhi puts to sleep her child in a huddle on a make-shift bed at a street corner, to sell her wares, she risks losing the child, for life. “Hamare do bachche toh aise hi ghum gaye,” recalls paraplegic Pardhi Sanjay Kale who rides a tri-cycle with three of his children atop meandering through the by-lanes of South Mumbai's Colaba, selling balloons and toys for a living. Elder daughter Deepali rides behind while Radha sits with him and the youngest, Babu, at his feet throughout the day.



Members of Pardhi community fighting for their rights

daughter Deepali rides behind while Radha sits with him and the youngest, Babu, at his feet throughout the day.

"Ab kissi ko footpath pe chodneka risk nahin le sakta hoon" Now, I just cannot risk losing a child)," he says. While a handicapped Sanjay breaks into a sweat as he struggles to hand-run the cycle with his by-now-older children, it's another issue that plagues him.

Following a police raid on his 'shop' and the 'ceremonious' ransacking of balloons and Chinese toys that followed, his Aadhar Card was misplaced. And now, without an Aadhar Card and the associated phone number, another's borrowed for temporary use, Sanjay is left twiddling his thumbs. "Abhi, Aadhar ke bagair toh kuch bhi nahin hota". Aur ye police log to har roz hairan karte hai (Now, without an Aadhar number, I can do nothing. And, the police refuse to stop harassing me)," he rues.

The origins of this disgrace can be traced back to the pre-Independence era when the British swiftly adjudged the entire lot as preordained criminals. According to an 1880 report of the Bombay Presidency, an area dominated by the modern states of Maharashtra and Gujarat, members of a Pardhi sub-tribe are "always ragged and dirty, walking with a sneaking gait," justifying the tag that stuck for years on end.

Notified as criminal by British

In fact, the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871 was created to ensure members of about 150 tribes registered with the police; were banned from moving around freely and, often, cordoned off into wired camps in a flagrant violation of the Rule of Law and Presumption of Innocence tenet and one that stuck till date.

The Criminal Tribes Act of 1952, in Independent India, repealed the notification, i.e. 'de-notified' the tribal communities. This Act, however, was replaced by a series of Habitual Offenders Acts that asked police to investigate a 'suspect's' 'criminal tendencies' and whether their occupation is 'conducive to settled way of life.' The de-notified tribes were reclassified as 'habitual offenders' in 1959.

Today, 90 per cent of Pardhis hail from Maharashtra mostly from Solapur, Osmanabad and Parbhani districts, according to a study on the Denotified and Nomadic Tribes (DNT) conducted in 2010 by Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) on Pardhis in Mumbai. In the study, researchers interviewed approximately 5,189 Pardhis across 1,018 households, settled in 31 enclaves, and, predictably too, found little evidence to support

the popular belief about organised Pardhi gangs engaging in robbery and theft in the city, a notion held by the police force across India.

Valsad-based social activist Meghabhai Parmar, an authority on Pardhis, maintains, "They originally resided at different settlements at Solapur, Bijapur, Bagalkot, Gadag, Hubli, settlements at Solapur, Bijapur, Bagalkot, Gadag, Hubli, Khanapur, Belgaum, Baramati, Ambarnath, Jalgaon, Dohad, Ahmedabad, Dhulia, etc. – and would be used as labourers for spinning and weaving mills, railway workshops and factories. From road construction work, metal breaking activities and cultivation works over the years, they've now been reduced to penury in urban India."

Deprived of caste certificate

The Pardhis are deprived of the single-most important document to protect them, the Caste Certificate that links one's personal identity to one's social identity. Technically, depending on their sub-group, in Maharashtra, Pardhis fall within the category of either scheduled tribe or a de-notified tribe. However, of 89 percent of Pardhi households, not a single member possesses a caste certificate leaving just 11 per cent of the total Pardhi population in Mumbai with one that may be put to use. Now, gather this: To procure a caste certificate, one requires a series of documents to prove that s/he is indeed a Pardhi and belongs to the caste in question...documents s/he can simply never provide. "In order to get a caste certificate, the Pardhi needs to produce a school-leaving certificate issued by the headmaster, a caste certificate of a family member, a domicile certificate, etc.," says 'disability' activist Smita Raje. For one who hasn't been to school, never received any benefits of a caste certificate at home or lived continuously in 'one' place for ten years owing to the very nature of his nomadic existence, getting a caste certificate is a near impossibility. While, on paper, the laws for DNT tribes like the Pardhis seem perfect, in practice, they lack teeth leaving the erstwhile tiger hunters in urban jungles risking extinction.



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

‘Gondhal’ the traditional ethnic flavour

*Gondhalis, as they are called, are nomadic tribals who are found primarily native to Maharashtra, MP, Karnataka, Andhra and more recently in parts of Goa. They are a community that reside in and around places of worship and temples of regional Gods and deities. Through their singing, they narrate mythological stories and folklores and are a huge draw. **Manu Shrivastava** traces their origin and legends.*



Gondhalis are nomadic performers who sing devotional songs



A Gondhal being performed during an all-night 'jagran'

It is not uncommon in Mumbai's chawls to see a group of ornated, traditional instruments-bearing folk singers performing during a 'jagran' or a night-long celebration.

These unique performers belong to the Gondhali tribal community, named after their musical performances, called the Gondhal - a unique method of telling stories of mythology and folklore through lyrical songs.

The traditionally nomadic performers, Gondhalis sing devotional songs of praise for gods and goddesses in performances deeply interwoven into the cultural fabric of Central and West India comprising Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. During their performances, called the Gondhal, the Gondhalis sing and sway with the tunes of the instruments that are unique to the tribal community.

The origin and the legends

Gondhalis are nomadic tribals that are found primarily in Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh and more recently in parts of Goa. The community dwells in and around places of worship and temples of regional Gods and deities. The male performers are called Waghya meaning 'tiger' and female performers are called Murali. The community was originally dedicated to Khandoba – a fierce Hindu deity and reincarnation of fierce Hindu deity and reincarnation of Lord Shiva worshipped mainly in the

Deccan plateau region of India, particularly in Maharashtra. Today, the Gondhalis i.e., the Waghyas and their female counterparts, Muralis, sing and dance in honour of the God, narrating his stories and express their devotion to the fiery deity.

Khandoba is also a kuldev or a family deity in the region comprising Maharashtra, North Karnataka and some parts of Andhra Pradesh. A warrior king also known by the name Malhari, Khandoba is worshipped by several warrior communities, farming communities and hunter/gatherer tribes native to the forests of the region.

According to a legend, there was a battle between Khandoba and the demon brothers named Malla and Mani, who were wreaking havoc in the world, where the brothers were killed and that led to the birth of Lord Martand Bhairava - a fierce form of Lord Shiva. Khandoba's main temple in Jejuri, near Pune, draws pious devotees from all over who worship him with turmeric. There are two shrines on top of a hill in Jejuri - Kadepathar and Gad-kot Temple. The Gondhalis are themselves devotees of Khandoba and worshippers of Renuka Mata and Tulja Bhavani and perform to keep calamities at bay and to welcome peace, happiness and prosperity in life. There are several legends associated with the Gondhalis' origin and work. Some believe that the Gondhalis' native place is Mahur.



Today, the Gondhalis strive hard to retain ethnic folklore, traditional art and literature that otherwise risk extinction. More members of the community are venturing out and seeking alternate sources of income and sustenance. However, the performances do not lose relevance, even in urban India.

Most Gondhalis in Maharashtra are frequently invited by religious families in Pune and Mumbai to perform on auspicious occasions. Mumbai's famous chawls often witness Gondhali performances where not just the family who invited the performers but neighbours and passers-by stop to experience and revel in the musical performances too.

"I have often seen how a Gondhali performance just lifts up the mood and the ambience of the zone. The songs and the way these performers sing transcend you to a different zone completely," says a Mumbai-based homemaker Sujata Naik. Men and women don traditional attire and participate in the night-long event also called the prasang.

Among families valuing traditions in Maharashtra and Karnataka, every auspicious occasion is marked with Gondhal during a jagran i.e. night-long performance. If not, these families may even pay a Gondhali family to go to a place of worship and perform on their behalf.

Staying relevant even today

Before the lockdown, the Kathar family in Mumbai's Colaba area invited the Gondhalis all the way from Nashik, 167 km away, for a jagran (night-long performance). The family comprising Kishan Kathar, wife Sita Kathar and sons Vishal and Kiran Kathar had organised the prasang and invited relatives and neighbours.

The family matriarch Sita says, "A few members of our family including my husband, I and some elderly relatives had visited Jejuri to seek blessings from our Kuldev Khandoba and upon return organised this prasang in devotion of Khandoba and Renuka Devi. It was a night-long programme that began at 10.30 pm and continued till 4 am."

For devout families, such occasions call for big celebrations and the event holds a lot of importance for the members. A family may put in all their resources to organise a 'proper' Gondhal. The performers usually charge between Rs. 10,000 to 20,000 for an overnight performance by 6-8 members.

A Gondhal performance holds special place in the hearts of the devotees. "This was the first time we organised such a performance and called the Gondhalis. It was a very special moment for our family," says Vishal. Families call Gondhalis from far-flung places especially from areas near the famous temples in Maharashtra.

Facing modern-day challenges

Just like other tribal communities, the Gondhalis too face several challenges posed by modern-day life particularly in the urban pockets. Many Gondhalis have risen in the socio-economic ladder and are well placed in different fields such as science, technology, law, etc. But there is a significant population that continues to travel and perform Gondhal.

In late 2018, in South Goa, a group of nomadic Gondhali tribals issued a list of demands including that of reservation for their members in education and employment. The Gondhalis too face problems with obtaining caste certificates due to which they cannot avail several government welfare schemes.

Pune-based artist Smita Gondhali says, "There are several families that have diversified from the traditional vocation of performing and have taken up other vocations but there is still a significant number of those who need assistance."

Interestingly, despite the fast-paced life in urban India, the nomadic Gondhalis remain an integral part of devout families and preserve age-old traditions and folklore. Despite their nomadic existence, it's their visits to urban settlements mandated by rituals during key occasions that help families retain their ethnic culture.



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.

Wandering to entertain ... and struggle

*Known to the urban populace as Gugububuwalas, Chabukwalas, Bioscopewalas, these nomads have led a convulsive existence. Some of their ilk like snake charmers and Waghris are doing menial jobs to make ends meet. **Manu Shrivastava** takes a peek into the lives of these entertainers who appear to be on the verge of extinction.*



Nomadic groups like the guggububbuwalas, chabukwalas, bioscopewallas and others are mainly street performers who now face the risk of extinction

In India, about 15 per cent of land area is occupied by tribal communities that live across geographical landscapes including the forests, mountains, islands and arid areas. The indigenous groups are diverse in their way of living, culture and the skills they possess. Some are forest-dwellers who are entirely dependent on forest products for existence while others are nomadic who move from one place to another and wherever they stop, they perform to entertain locals or for a religious cause.

It's the nomadic groups that have a delicate existence that was further threatened during the Covid-19 pandemic when during the lockdown, movement of people was strictly regulated. In urban India particularly, the 'performing' nomadic groups were hit the worst as they survived on alms given by the people.

Gugububuwalas and their 'holy' cows

Mumbai is home to several nomadic groups, albeit temporarily, like the gugububuwalas who come to the city on foot from far flung places. The members of this tribe live in the interiors of Maharashtra and walk by foot all the way to Mumbai over a few days, making stops at regular spots. Back in Mumbai, they walk with their cows, part of their family and holy owing to the presence of an extra limb or hump and said to possess magical qualities to heal and prophesise about the future.

Also known as the Nandi Bailwalas, the male members of the

Also known as the Nandi Bailwalas, the male members of the community walk around the city with the bull or the Nandi bail with an extra hump, etc. that is considered holy by the devotees. As they walk around the streets of the city and through crowded markets, the devout approach, pay obeisance to the Nandi bail and donate food, clothing or money to the man. Sometimes, the gugububuwala asks a question, related to one's health or marriage prospects, etc., to the Nandi bail on behalf of the devotee and the bull 'answers' accordingly.

The Gugububuwala are called so owing to the guru guru sound that emanates from the special drums they have. The holy cows shake their heads to the sound of these drums, in acquiescence or denial, as the case may be.

Over the last whole year, owing to the ban on public movement, the Gugububuwalas stayed back in their villages and didn't come to Mumbai to beg on the streets and at temples where they earn their daily alms and live on food donated by devotees.

The women of the community often sit outside temples in the city with the female cow. The devotees feed the cow while others give food or money to the women in order to make a donation.

Back in the villages, most members of this nomadic tribal group face poverty and illness. Most do not have any farming group

group face poverty and illness. Most do not have any farming land in the village and sustain themselves only by way of the food and money they receive during their trip to the city. Thousands of such gugububuwalas have a fragile existence and need assistance for uplift.

Chabukwalas' precarious existence

Also known as the Potraj, the Chabukwalas are street performers and a nomadic group. They move about in two, entertaining the public. As the Chabukwala's wife plays a drum, usually holding an infant in a cloth sling by her side and an idol of 'Khada Laxmi' on her head, the Chabukwala swings a heavy whip made of rope around his torso and hits himself to the astonishment of onlookers while dancing throughout the act. The loud sound of the whipping action captivates the onlookers. In the other hand, the man often shakes a bell in sync with the sound of the ghungrus tied to his feet. At the end of the act, the audience may give money to the performer for his 'brave and entertaining' act.

The Potraj also are a Denotified Tribe (DNT) and a marginalised group who make a living by performing on the streets in cities. During the lockdown, this group too was prevented from free movement and that severely disrupted their way of living and dried up their source of income. Their existence is entirely dependent on being able to perform in public places.

"It's really interesting how the Potraj and other such communities that are street performers like the ones who walk on ropes or do magic tricks or the madaris whose acts include monkeys and other animals are integral to the culture of a city like Mumbai. So many films especially older Hindi films regularly featured these communities. In a few years from now, we may only be able to see these acts in older films," says

Mumbai-based homemaker and history enthusiast Gayatri Sharma.

Childhood memories with Bioscopewalas

Another regular feature in old Hindi films, the Bioscopewalas are those who'd arrive with a 'bioscope' — a contraption with a round window, where children would kneel down and look through to view slides of images of the city, old films and Bollywood stars in 'action'. Several Hindi films had songs that featured the Bioscopewalas — for example 'Paisa phenko, tamasha dekho' of Rajesh Khanna and Mumtaz-starrer Dushman that showcased a bioscope and its functioning. Now, it's impossible to find a Bioscopewala in the city.

There are several other nomadic groups that are struggling for survival and to keep their age-old traditions alive. The snake charmers are another group found in various parts of India and are a semi-nomadic community that often live on the outskirts of urban and rural settlements.

They are known by different names - Barwa Sampheriya in West Bengal and Sapera in North India. The primary occupation of this community is snake charming and they perform in public zones with snakes even deadly ones like the cobra, as they wander from one place to another. Members of this community are also expert snake catchers. They are often called by the villagers to catch snakes and to remove poison from those who are bitten by poisonous snakes.



The bioscopewallas are an extinct group, struggling for survival

The struggle for survival

South Asia has the world's largest population of nomadic groups. In India, about ten per cent of the population comprises Denotified and Nomadic tribes. The number of DNTs stands at 150 and more than 500 communities form the nomadic tribes. The former have settled across India in rural and urban zones while the latter continue to stay nomadic and more from one place to another pursuing traditional professions and vocations.

Other than the urban nomadic tribes that frequent cities to make a living, there are those who stay in rural and agriculture zones only. These pastoral nomadic communities are spread in different parts of the country. These include the Bakarwal in Jammu and Kashmir, Gaderia in Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, Gujjar in Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh, Van Gujar in Uttarakhand, Jath in Kutch, Mer in Saurashtra in Gujarat, Bhutia in Sikkim and more.

Apart from those nomadic groups who are living by performing on streets, many nomadic communities are known to do petty jobs in cities such as the Waghris in Mumbai. Today, Waghris are involved in selling toys and other wares in tourist zones in Mumbai. Many Waghris are also found in tourist hubs across India such as Goa, Kerala, etc., where again they are involved in the tourism sector selling wares, etc.

Most such communities are now struggling to survive and if things don't change for the better, these forgotten communities risk extinction.



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

Sculpting stones, restoring belief

*The Wadars found in the Deccan plateau region are nomads and known for their lowly status in the society – socially and economically. Most of them, however, are engaged in their traditional work of stone carving and sculpting. Listed as a criminal tribe during the British rule, it was subjected to neglect and discrimination. **Ruchi Verma** traces the tumultuous existence of a wronged community.*



The stone-carving Wadar community were relegated to a criminal status, like many other tribes by the colonial rulers

India's rich cultural heritage is a result of the interaction and amalgamation of the thousands of communities and groups – native, nomadic and invading – that have existed in the region for centuries. One such community in central India has been instrumental in not just creating history but restoring and recreating the heritage for the present and future generations to see.

The nomadic Wadar community of Maharashtra have been carving stones since time immemorial. According to anthropological records, the Wadars, a stone-carving community, were relegated to a 'criminal' status, like many other such tribes, by the British colonial rulers following a mischievous study on these communities carried out by the officers appointed by the administration. The study was aimed at 'identifying and enlisting criminal tribe-castes' and the Wadars were castigated as a 'criminal tribe' in the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871. Historically, the Wadars have been associated with creating stone temple sculptures and cave rock carvings.

The history and the origin

The Wadars are found in the Deccan plateau region of India, in large numbers in Maharashtra and a few in northern Karnataka

and Telangana as well. There are nearly thirty-five Denotified Tribes- Castes and more than two hundred sub-tribes castes in Maharashtra that have adopted other religions that include Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism. Many of these groups converted to Buddhism after 2006 including the Darveshi, Beldaar, Madari, Shikalgar and Sapparudi tribes. Most of these are involved in works such as street performances, wrestling, snake-charming activities, etc.

The Wadars were restricted to their districts in the colonial and non-colonial territories of India followed by a notification on 23 June 1939 that declared them as 'criminals'. The notification was issued by the Solapur, Belgaum, Bijapur, Dharwad, Deccan, South Maratha, Mysore and Madras Presidencies. Due to the nomadic nature of their existence, the Wadars retain lower status in the society – socially and economically. Most of them, however, are engaged in their traditional work of stone carving and sculpting.

The types of Wadars

The Wadars are known by different names such as Wadda, Bhovi, Tudug Wadars, Voddar, Girini Wadars, Od and Odde. The word 'Bhovi' is a derivative of 'Bhavi' which means 'earth-digger'. That is because this nomadic group has also

been involved in the digging of wells. In Maharashtra, there are three types of Wadars based on the work they do. The 'Mati Wadars' are known for doing all the work related to digging of soil. In Marathi, the word 'mati' means 'soil' and these Wadars are involved in soil digging, transportation, loading and unloading and finally using the soil for levelling up the ground.

Those involved in breaking stones and in the loading and unloading of the same into a cart are called 'Gadi Wadar'. A third type are called 'Jate Wadar' are involved in grinding stones. The Jate Wadars consider themselves higher than the other two groups.

The Jate Wadars are primarily nomadic and always on the move and wherever they are staying temporarily for a few days, they put up a shop under a shade, near a temple or on the outskirts of a settlement, etc., to repair stone grinders or make new one for the locals.



The legend of the stone carvers

There are several legends about the origin of the Wadars. According to one legend, the first Wadar males were two brothers named Asalo and Kasalo who travelled from Marwad to Gujarat. At the time, King Sidharaj Jaysingh was the ruler of the region. Jehman who was the daughter of Prince Jaradhan got married to Kasalo who died and Jehman jumped into the pyre to complete the death rituals of 'sati'.

It was then that labourers dug up 99 lakes on behalf of Jehman and the money she received was used to take care of these labourers during the famine. These labourers were said to be the forefathers of Wadars. Since then, the Wadars have been involved in stone and clay-related works such as digging, breaking stones, transporting soils, etc.

Another story narrates an incident when once Sita was taking a bath near a pond behind a rock when a Wadar man broke it accidentally and saw her. Fuming with rage, Sita cursed the Wadar man and said that she forbids Wadari women from covering their upper body. Interestingly, the women of the nomadic tribe cover their breasts only in urban zones.

Another legend says that once King Sidharaj of Gujarat brought

Wadars to his kingdom from Malva for the formation of a lake to be called the Sahastraling Lake. The Wadars were called in to dig the lake and among them was a young married girl named Jasma. The king fell in love with her the moment he saw her and asked her to live with him in the palace. Being married, Jasma declined the proposal and even tried to run away fearing forceful submission from the king.

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According to Rasmal scriptures, King Sidharaj got angry upon learning the young bride had run away and chased her and, in the process, killed the Wadars who tried to stop him. Seeing the king's relentless advances, Jasma killed herself after cursing that the lake the king wanted built would never have water. She also cursed that to avoid another such misfortune, no Wadar woman should be born beautiful again. So, even today, the Wadari women do not apply hair oil in memory of Jasma.

Denotification didn't change much

It was only in 1949 when the young government of newly-formed India decided to repeal the law made by the British that labelled tribes such as Wadar as criminal tribes. It was decided that the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871 was not in line with the spirit of the Indian Constitution and that it was time to alleviate the socio-economic conditions of such tribes.

The law was repealed but, even today, Wadars like most such DNTs face discrimination and lack of opportunities. In Maharashtra, most of the Wadars are engaged in construction work and that related to stone carving, sculpting, etc. Many have stuck to the nomadic trait of their ancestors and in rural areas, the women go from one village to another making and repairing stone-grinders. Some have adopted the new way of life by taking formal education and working in urban centres of the country. In Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, the Wadars are called the denotified tribes (DNTs) while in the rest of India they are either included in the Scheduled Castes list or the Scheduled Tribes list.

Despite a significant reduction in their population, the Wadars are considered immigrants from Southern India mainly from Andhra Pradesh and are mainly found in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Orissa, West Bengal, Bihar, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu.

Today, many families have adopted modern ways of living and the younger members of the family are getting educated and procuring jobs in cities. In Maharashtra, Wadars can be seen working at Elephanta Caves – the UNESCO World Heritage Site, doing restoration and repair works and in turn maintaining the rich heritage of the zone.

Tourists, in awe of the caves, often overlook the Wadar workers who sit next to the caves doing what they the best...carve stones!

Ruchi Verma is a media 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)

Weaving through thick and thin

*The story of the traditional communities of Bhujodi is as interesting as that of the zone itself. The 2001 earthquake in Gujarat flattened several cities and towns in Kutch region but the calamitous event notwithstanding, the region not only overcame, it also flourished in quick time, narrating the story of resilience of the locals. **Nikita Shastri** spins an interesting tale.*



Bhujodi weavers and artisans have created a huge array of products that are in demand worldwide

A small town in Gujarat is one of the major centres for textiles and crafts in the region. Bhujodi, located eight km from Bhuj is a traveller's delight not just for the abundant textile variety but also for the vibrant Vankar and Rabari communities that have called it home for centuries.

The Vankar community are experts in handicrafts including weaving and tie and dye and form an important part of Kutch's handicraft industry and trade where almost every family is involved in the handicrafts industry.

The 500-year-old village Bhujodi and the communities in it form a unique ecosystem that has led to the region's prosperity. Bhujodi is built around a central road that branches off from the Bhuj-Anjar highway. The zone has characteristic one-storey structures flanking the road. And, in almost each such structure, there is a loom with a family involved in the handicraft trade.

The ecosystem of the trade

The Vankar community is known as the weaving and cloth trading community. Earlier, the Vankar weavers would make and sell their works to the Rabaris and the Ahirs only. Rabaris being the herding community and Ahirs the farming community of the region.

Interestingly, the Ahirs would only choose the brightly-coloured fabrics while the herding Rabari community would opt for the black and white undyed yarn fabric. The relationship between the Vankar weavers and the Ahirs and Rabaris is interesting and unique. When the trade was in its initial stages, each Vankar

weavers was associated with a Rabari family and an Ahir family. The Rabari family would supply yarn from the sheep and goats they were rearing and the Ahirs would grow kala cotton.

In the earlier days, the fabric woven by the Vankar weavers would be much heavier weighing around three kilograms as opposed to that of today that is much lighter. The Bhujodi shawls, as they are commonly known, were worn for daily use and for special occasions too by the locals. The wool collected by the Rabaris would be used to make shawls, blankets, skirts, etc. And the cotton grown by the Ahirs would be used to make headgear, smaller shoulder cloths, etc.

The story of survival and revival

The story of the traditional communities of Bhujodi is as interesting as that of the zone itself. Most people may remember Bhuj because of the devastating 2001 Gujarat earthquake that levelled several cities and towns in the Kutch region. Despite the catastrophe, the region not just recovered but soon flourished narrating the story of resilience of the locals.

The Kutch village of Bhujodi prospered for more than five centuries before losing everything to the natural calamity and then regained all that it had lost. The weavers of Bhujodi were running a successful trade through sheer hard work and by forming a cooperative for collective prosperity. The famous Bhujodi fabrics and handicrafts were being supplied across India and overseas and had made a name for itself.

When the 2001 earthquake happened, it destroyed the village and everything that had given the locals a regular source of income and an identity – the looms, the work sheds, etc. Not

only did the weavers lose their income-generating source but the entire infrastructure was destroyed leaving them with little means to sustain themselves.

It was then that a few Bhujodi weavers decided to bring back their cooperative and initiated what would later become an inspiring story of survival and revival. The Vankar weavers of Bhujodi paved their own way for sustenance and bounced back as if nothing ever happened to them.

The blooming trade

Over time, the Bhujodi weavers and artisans have created a huge array of products that are in demand not just in India but worldwide. For decades, the hardworking weavers have worked weaving beautiful fabrics and supplying to loyal patrons.

Earlier, the designs on the fabric would be representative of the community that was wearing the cloth. These included the shapes of musical instruments, footsteps of a herd of animals, etc. Even the names of the motifs were symbolic of the rural life such as satkani, dholki, vakhiyo, chaumukh, etc.

Today, the many workshops in the region weave out fabrics and handicrafts of all kinds. These include bags, bedsheets, blankets, shawls, kurtis, chaniya cholis, skirts, blouses, etc. Most families in the region have been involved in the trade for generations. Many workers who start working in the workshops eventually start their own business too.

The trade has flourished and expanded over the years. Today, the kurtis and bedsheets are mostly made of cotton while the shawls are made of wool. A lot of kurtis, shawls and chaniya cholis are made from 'Mushroom Fabric'. The cotton and Mushroom Fabric are brought from Ajrakhpur in Bhuj and Ahmedabad and the wool from Ahmedabad and Ludhiana in Punjab.

The challenges faced by the community

Today, as the trade has expanded and prospered, the challenges faced by the community have increased too. With the customers getting easy access to diversity and new fabrics and designs all over, there has been a pressure on the weaving community to diversify and experiment with the designs also. Not only do the customers want new designs now, they want them delivered sooner. The increased accessibility to e-commerce portals has significantly affected customer behaviour and expectations. The weavers are now in a race to create new and fresh designs and deliver them much faster than before. The patterns weaved so far by these weavers have been passed down for generations and to diversify or experiment with new designs will take some time which the customer may not understand or accept.

Also, the demands are swiftly surpassing the supply, particularly that of the intellectual property owned by the Vankar weaver. Demands for their products during the monsoon period get hit drastically owing to weather conditions. During the humid season, dyeing takes longer than in others. The weavers will have to account for these factors to ensure there is a regular supply for the demand made worldwide.



The Vankar and Rabri communities are experts in handicrafts including weaving and tie and dye

The way ahead

Over the past few decades, there have been a range of entities that have helped the Vankar weaving community diversify and stay relevant to the times. So, the weaver has diversified from the traditional shawls and carpets to new products such as skirts, bags, and bedsheets. Also, they have experimented with the designs to keep up with the contemporary trends.

Over time, there have been significant changes in the social fabric of the community also. The community has faced social ills prevalent during the time such as untouchability and were deprived of the opportunities and the incentives available to other groups in the region. However, with their financial prosperity, the social fabric has changed too and more members are now getting educated and availing new opportunities.

As for the women, they have come a long way too. Earlier, in Bhujodi, the women would only be involved in the pre-loom work that included readying the yarn, and weaving was restricted to the men. However, now, the women work equally with the men and weave at the loom participating in creating new designs and products.

It was in 2012 when the Kutchi shawl was granted the Geographical Indication (GI) tag that has greatly benefited the hereditary weavers of the region. The tag has helped the community in a big way and has boosted the prospects of marketing their products all over.

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)

Invoking Nature for survival

*Tribal groups scattered across the country share a symbiotic relationship with elements of Nature. Although indigenous tribals believe in animism, several communities have over a period of time; converted to other prominent religions while some practice totemism. **Renuka Goel** finds that among the tribals, the religious concepts, practice and terminologies are as varied and distinct as the diversity in tribes itself in India.*



In India, among tribal groups totemism is a regular practice

Most tribal groups in India, like the rest of the world, worship nature primarily because their existence and survival was always closely-linked to nature and its elements. It's the symbiotic relationship that the tribal people share with nature that makes it an important part of their lives and the customs they follow. The indigenous tribal people are animists i.e., they follow animism which perceives all things and objects, places, creatures such as animals, plants, rivers, rocks, mountains, etc., as being alive.

In India, several tribal communities have also, over time, converted to religions such as Islam, Christianity and Buddhism. Rituals and customs of the tribal groups are very close to that of Hinduism as worshipping nature and its elements are integral to Hinduism as well. So, the Hindus worship the sun, moon, animals, trees, rivers, mountains, etc. in different forms. Many incarnations of Hindu gods such as Lord Vishnu have been in the form of animals - Matsya, the fish; Kurma, the tortoise; Varaha, the boar and Narasimha, the lion-man.

The diversity in practices

Among the tribals, the religious concepts, practice and terminologies are as varied and distinct as the diversity in tribes itself in India. The only common thread is that they are all close to nature, share a symbiotic relationship with nature and its elements and maintain harmony with the elements. So, a case in point, in Arunachal Pradesh, each of the 26 tribes and the 100 subtribes has distinct customs and traditions.



Despite inhabiting a similar geographical region, the practices among these groups and subgroups vary a lot and grant them their unique identity. The houses are on stilts made of bamboo and these groups practice wetland cultivation and agriculture. The members of the tribes and subtribes in this region are skilled in craftsmanship as a traditional skill and create cane and bamboo items. Despite the finer differences, all of these indigenous groups in the region practice a religion called Donyi-Polo and worship the sun and the moon.

Alternatively, members of the Galo tribe in Arunachal Pradesh are traditional hunters and rice cultivators. The men also weave baskets that are used during rice harvesting and for sheltering livestock. They live in the West Siang, Lepa Rada, and Lower Siang districts. The homes of this particular tribe have hunting trophies.

The totems in tribal culture

A totem is a natural object or an animate or inanimate item such as a plant, an animal or even an inanimate object like rock with which a group identifies itself. In India, among the tribal groups, totemism is a regular practice. The members of a totemic group distinguish themselves from other groups by wearing totemic emblems as charms and by painting or A totem is a natural object or an animate or inanimate item such as a plant, an animal or even an inanimate object like rock with which a group identifies itself. In India, among the tribal groups, totemism is a regular practice. The members of a totemic group distinguish themselves from other groups by wearing totemic emblems as charms and by painting or tattooing the figure of the totem on the walls of their houses, canoes, weapons and

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CHHOTA CHAAR DHAAM

Fords to the fantastic

Akul Tripathi sketches a picturesque portrait of and takes you on a trip of Chhota Chaar Dham, the small four abodes that are regarded as very sacred by the Hindus. Together, the four sites --- Yamunotri, Gangotri, Kedarnath and Badrinath form a pilgrimage circuit in the rugged terrain of the Himalayas. A fascinating account of tradition and culture.

Text and photos : Akul Tripathi



Gaumukh -Top of the glacier, where the Ganga begins her journey

Since eons, the people and the land east of Indus have been called by names that are variations of the river Indus. That also forms the genesis of from where modern India derives its name. Some believe that the

term Hindu – loosely used -- to stuff several eclectic identities into a box called religion, too derives from the easternmost geographical boundary of early explorers. Another version relates the term to the inhabitants of the landmass between the Himalayas and the Indu Sagar - Indian Ocean, conferring a subcontinental geological identity.

Perhaps it was the peculiar topography that bound the people of the subcontinent into a diversely cobbled nation not witnessed elsewhere -- a nationhood defined neither by race, colour, or language; but through a symbiotically and spontaneously ingrained idea that beg the questions: Who are we? Why are we here? Where do we go next?

Peoples here sought answers empirically. The highest common factor that emerges from these answers is a melting pot recognised by its inhabitants as 'sanaatan dharma' - the eternal way to live. As Bharat it has a history so ancient that its three syllables resound with numerous intonations and elucidations. What weaved the disparate ideologies and people together seamlessly into one colourful exquisite quilt were the strands left in place by the footsteps of pilgrims who trekked from one part of the country to another in their quest to experience the divine. This tradition of pilgrimage is a ritual as old as time. One name that stands out among those who contributed to building an everlasting civilization is that of Adi Shankaracharya.

Hinduism`s greatest thinker

Adi Shankaracharya lived in the 8th century CE who championed the Advaita philosophy and played a crucial role in restructuring the old order. His most enduring legacy is the establishment of four monasteries in the four corners of India that unified the several sects and breathed fresh life into an ancient culture. Each monastery was assigned the task for preserving and maintaining one of the four Vedas, and a Maha Vakya each. These monasteries at Badrinath in Uttarakhand

(North), Dwarka (West), Puri (East), and Rameshwaram (South) remain the four primary centres of pilgrimage of India - the Chaar Dhaam.

Legend has it that each has significations from across the eras before recorded history. Badrinath, the oldest amongst the ancient is a site that gained prominence in the Sat-yuga, when Nar-Narayan, an avatar of Vishnu performed penance at the place. Rameshwaram, in the Treta-yuga when Lord Ram established and worshipped a Shivalinga at the place;

Dwarka, in the Dvaapar-yuga when Lord Krishna chose it for His residence, and Puri, where He is worshipped as Jagannath, His avataar for Kali-yuga.

Despite the passage of eras, the sanctity and relevance of these has only increased. The growing footprint of pilgrims through these alludes to a cultural ethos that describe Bharat's fabric. While these remain the four pillars of religious faith and transmission, there exist four equally ancient pilgrimage sites in the state of Uttarakhand popularly known as the Chhota Chaar Dhaam.

Within the land that birthed a timeless civilisation, Uttarakhand has a soul older than the mighty Himalayas it is nestled in. It is the Dev Bhoomi -- the land where Gods still live in the terrain that hosts holy peaks, lakes, and rivers.

In this vast array of deities, local and from the wider pantheon, are the four regarded above the rest -- all situated in the higher reaches of the Himalays; and including representatives from the three major traditions - two Shakti sites - Yamunotri and Gangotri; one Shaiva site - Kedarnath; and one Vaishnava site - Badrinath.

Traditionally, the pilgrimage begins from the west and concludes in the east with the pilgrims starting from Yamunotri, onward to Gangotri, followed by Kedarnath, and ending at Badrinath. The difficult terrain and inclement weather makes pilgrimage possible only between April and November. Each site has its own significance that is a blend of legend and mythology.



Yamunotri Temple

Yamunotri

Celebrating the source of the River Yamuna, the river whose sanctity and significance is considered second only to the Ganga, Yamunotri is situated in the Uttarkashi district of Uttarakhand. As per popular belief, the first of the Chaar Dhaam, the Goddess also blesses pilgrims by casting off the dangers of untimely death. Goddess Yamuna is the sister of Yama - the God of Death, daughter of the Sun and Sandhya (consciousness). The mountain adjacent to the river source is dedicated to Her father, and is called Kalind Parvat, Kalind being another name of Surya - the Sun God.

The temple dedicated to Her was constructed by Naresh Sudarshan Shah, King of Tehri and is made of black stone and the deity is worshipped as Mother. An idol of Goddess Ganga in white marble sits next to Her. After sustaining damage in an earthquake, the temple was repaired by Maharani Gularia of Jaipur sometime in the 19th century.

Adjacent to the temple are several hot water springs, of which the Surya Kund is considered the most important. Near the Surya Kund is the Divya Shila, where prayers are offered before worshipping Goddess Yamuna. Surya Kund along with another hot water spring called Gauri Kund are also regarded for their healing properties. The offerings at the shrine consist of a preparation of rice and potatoes boiled in the hot springs. This cooked food serves as 'prasad'.

It is believed that sage Asit Muni had his hermitage here and bathed in both the Yamuna and Ganga rivers. As per legend, in his old age, unable to go to Gangotri, a stream of the Ganga appeared next to the Yamuna for him.

Though Yamunotri is popularly regarded as the source of the Yamuna, the actual source is situated further up on the Kalind mountain and is the overflow of a frozen lake - the Saptrishi Kund - formed by the Champasar Glacier.



Route to Yamunotri source glacier



Gangotri Temple

Gangotri

Revered as the sacred mother of all rivers, the Ganga, is formed at a place known as Dev Prayag which is a confluence of the Bhagirathi and Alaknanda rivers. Of the many sources that feed this perennial river of life, the source of the Bhagirathi at Gaumukh in the Gangotri National Park in the upper reaches of the Himalayas, north of Uttar Kashi, is widely regarded as the primary source.

The temple to the Goddess, which is the second of the four Dhaams, is over 18 kms from the glacier's mouth. It is said that the source has receded since the temple was consecrated in ancient times.

The well-known story of the descent of the river from the heavens to wash away the sins of the ancestors of the King Bhagirath, opened the avenues for the salvation of human beings. Gangotri is acknowledged as the place where Ganga first touched the Earth after being received by Lord Shiva in his matted locks. The Himalayas, known as the Shivaliks in this region are an apt allegory for this ancient story.

Near the temple is situated the Bhagirathi shila (a stone) where King Bhagirathi is believed to have meditated for his ancestors. Also at a short distance is the Pandava Gufa (Cave) where the Pandavas have believed to have rested en-route to the Kailash.

While the temple itself can be accessed by road, Gaumukh is a long, beautiful trek with breathtaking views. Every turn and twist seems alive with stories. Further above Gaumukh, across the glacier is the high altitude meadow of Tapovan where sages and ascetics from time immemorial dwelt and meditated. A pious place, the Amrit (nectar) Ganga river flows from here into the

glacier and those who brave the climb are treated to a glimpse of the almost aesthetically crafted Mt. Shivling.



Gaumukh — source of the Ganga



Amrit Ganga



Ascetic at Kedarnath



Mt. Shivling



Kedarnath Temple

Kedarnath

Situated in the Rudraprayag district of Uttarakhand, on the Garhwal ranges near the Mandakini River, Kedarnath is the remotest and most inaccessible of the Chaar Dhaams, situated 22 kms from the nearest road head. Helicopter services in recent times have made the place easier to get to but a booked flight is no guarantee due to the unpredictable weather, especially towards the start and end of the tourist season.

The legend of Kedarnath is intrinsically tied to that of the ancient Kedarkhand region of Uttarakhand as outlined in the scriptures. After the war of Kurukshetra, Rishi Vyaas advised the Pandavas to seek out Lord Shiva to atone for their misdeeds including fratricide and the killing of Brahmins in the war. Lord Shiva, however, eluded them, having disguised himself as Nandi, the bull, left his home, Kashi for the hills of Uttarakhand. The Pandavas realising that Shiva was camouflaged, gave chase till a place where Nandi jumped into the earth. Bhima, the strong one, lunged to prevent Shiva disappearing and held on to the tail and hind legs, but the bull disappeared into the ground.

The bull later reappeared as Shiva in five different forms across the region of Kedarkhand. To appease Shiva, the Pandava brothers built temples at these five places which are today worshiped as the Panch Kedars. Each temple is associated with a part of the bulls or Shiva's body. The face of the bull is Rudranath, the navel at Madhyamaheshwar, the locks at Kalpeshwar, the arms at Tungnath, and the hump at Kedarnath,

represented in the shape of the naturally occurring Shivling at the temple.

The Pandavas are believed to have constructed temples at each, including Kedarnath. The current imposing grey stone structure is attributed to Adi Shankaracharya himself, who is also said to have attained Mahasamadhi - wilful discarding of the physical body - at this holy site.

During the devastating floods of 2013, eyewitnesses attest to a large rock being carried by the waters to the rear side of the temple and placing itself there, thus protecting the main shrine from damage by diverting the flow of the river and other rocky debris. This rock that protected the temple is also worshipped as Bhima Shila, after the most powerful of the Pandavas.





Badrinath Temple

Badrinath

The holiest of the Vaishnava shrines and the only dharm to feature in both the small and larger pilgrimage circuits, Badrinath is also the most ancient of the char dhaams and celebrated in the most ancient of scriptures as abounding in spiritual treasures and being so potent that it blesses and dissolves the sins of people who arrive in its vicinity, while at other places, one must undertake ritual ceremonies. Situated in the Chamoli district of Uttarakhand, along the banks of the Alaknanda, the place gets its name from the Badri - Indian date-ber (a kind of berry) - tree, which finds mention in one of the earliest stories of the place, and of which a forest is believed to have once existed here.

As per the legend, Lord Vishnu sat here in deep meditation, unaware of the biting cold weather. His wife Goddess Lakshmi took the form of a Badri tree to shelter Him. Pleased by his wife's devotion, He named the place Badrika Ashram, from which Goddess Lakshmi is called Badri Vishaal, and Lord Vishnu, Badrinath. Another take from the Vishnu Puran credits Nar and Narayan, sons of Dharma (Righteousness), having found the hot and cold springs that emanate near the temple and established their hermitage to spread the teachings of their father.

According to legend, Adi Shankaracharya discovered the one feet tall idol of Lord Badrinath made in Shaligram black stone, in the hot springs and enshrined it in a nearby cave. It was in

the 16th century that the kings of Tehri constructed a temple which has since been renovated several times.

Like with Kedarnath, this temple too is part of the Panch Badris dedicated to the worship of Lord Vishnu. The Pandavas are believed to have visited the temple before they embarked on their journey to heaven. The route they are said to have taken to climb heaven - Swargaarohan, starts from the nearby village of Mana, where Sage Vyas is believed to have composed the Mahabharata.



Badrinath temple across the Alaknanda river



Badrinath town

Ford of time

Pilgrimage, I find, is a very meek word for inspired sites of a culture where devotion is only a part of the broader experience of searching for answers - existential and supreme. The Sanskrit word - teerth - carries a meaning more in sync with the actual drive that brings people to such places. Literally meaning 'ford' or 'a place of crossing', these four dhaams and the numberless such places that exist in the lands of Bharat, are places that assist in just such a crossing. A crossing over from existing limitations towards limitlessness, a ford across the boundaries that restrain, to pastures conducive to the growth of both the human experience and that of the immortal soul...



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“As a human being from Shankarji I learnt one of the greatest lessons -- to be cool and not to lose your temper.”

Deepti Sivan is a beautiful person – inside, outside and in the creative dimension. She is so beautiful that she could have made a career as an actress. She did act in a few films here and there but she soon decided to make her own documentary on Shankar Mahadevan on the famous trio of music composers Shankar-Ehsaan-Loy. *Decoding Shankar* is a biographical documentary on Shankar Mahadevan. It is her second independent film after having made her break with her documentary on censorship in India called *“Lights, Camera, Action; No cuts please”* with help from Rajeev Mehrotra of PSBT and her husband Sanjeev Sivan, brother of ace cinematographer Santosh Sivan.

You began your journey as an actress opposite Mohanlal. Then what made you shift to direction?

Post that experience, I was keener to work behind the camera and worked as Associate Creative Director for Amitabh Bachchan Corp Ltd., and as I had to complete my Law before taking up any film assignments as my father was insistent that I complete my academics. I was inducted into the Bar Council of India and then married off to Sanjeev Sivan who is one of the best things that happened to me. Filmmaking was the obvious choice. Thus began my journey in films as producer and director, learning the nuances of filmmaking and all that one needs to know from the scratch.

What was the trigger that set you on to make this film?

I observed that the young generation is so engrossed in scoring marks because of parental, peer and societal pressures that most of them give up on their passion or what they naturally excel. They are compelled to do things they are not happy doing. Through this film, I wanted to show that if one follows one's passion one will certainly excel in life and be happy too; academics is not everything.

What kind of homework and research did you do for the film?

I was an ardent fan of Shankar Mahadevan's music. When I got the opportunity to make this film, I was already gathering info about him through every source available. I remember sitting in the chair from morning through night till next afternoon deep into my subject, hungry to learn more about him. My writer Anirban Bhattacharya too did a lot of research and we shared whatever we knew about him to come up with the basic liners.



Deepti Sivan

The rest evolved during filming. If he quoted something or during our conversation with Shankarji, if I felt it was interesting enough to be added then I would incorporate that. For example, there was this shot where Javed Akhtar saab was dictating lyrics to Shankarji over the phone. I found that amusing and interesting, contrary to the cliché of how a song is composed.

How long did it take for you to finish the film from concept to censor certificate?

I was four months pregnant with my third child Srithik, when I got approval to make the film. From that day I started my work and shot some before I went for delivery and the rest I shot post my delivery with my three-month-old baby in arms and put in baby bag around my tummy. You can see in some of my working stills I am carrying the baby like a mattki on my hip. Shankarji was so accommodating that when my baby used to cry during the shoot for milk he used to give me free time to take care of him and he set up the home with all that is needed for the baby and also for the crew. He and Sangeetha didi, his wife, were great hosts pampering us with food and snacks. Post the shoot, the edit took few months. It took us almost three years to complete the film till censorship.

Shankar seems very unassuming and grounded. What was your relationship like as you were director and he was your subject?

Shankarji who I address as Chetta (the Malayalam terminology for brother) and I developed a fantastic relationship and also his wife and his kids. His mother is another gem of a person. I felt very much at home when I walked into their house for the first time. Usually, I have heard that often, there is a conflict



Shankar and Deepti Sivan



Decoding Shankar Poster

between the maker and the subject in the end. But I was truly touched when Shankarji said, “I have no words to express how happy I am and I had tears in my eyes when the last shoot got over. You have made a fantastic film. I could not believe I have done so much in life unless you had made this film.” The warmest response was from his wife Sangeetha when I saw tears in her eyes and the hug was so genuine that I was really touched...

What did you take away from this entire experience - as a filmmaker and a human being?

As a filmmaker, I have realised that I enjoy doing biographies and if you enjoy doing something the result ought to be very good. This film has given me the confidence to progress to next level. It taught me to take the advice of technicians working in the film but ultimately, it is the director's vision that needs to be canned, edited and finalised.

As a human being from Shankarji I learnt one of the greatest lessons -- to be cool and not to lose your temper. He never ever loses his temper. The ability to present the film along with him at various festivals and seeing his popularity and joy among the audience; seeing that expression of sheer joy satisfaction on his face and in Sangeetha didi's eyes makes me very happy.

How did Ehsan and Loy respond to the film?

Both of them were extremely happy...what fine gentlemen they both were. All three are unique and yet music is the

commonality that binds them and they are one team working together. One part of my film shows how they work together, why they have managed to keep their bond strong even after 20 years. We have seen bands from Beatles to Abba breaking up. What is unique that works in favour of their relationship is answered in the film.

What has been the audience response to this film?

Absolutely brilliant. During the screening of the film at a festival in Germany, I felt thrilled to see Germans singing the lyrics of the songs and breaking into impromptu dancing in the theatre. Post screening, I had all the foreigners coming to me and congratulating me and telling me that they felt the 52 minutes film just went in a jiffy. Some of them plucked the posters of the film around the festival venue and took my autograph on it. In Korea they screened Decoding Shankar to a jam-packed theatre. Post screening, the three-minute Q & A went on for 20 mins, something unusual in Korea and the organisers were apologetic as it went on. Outside the hall I had a huge line of people waiting to chat, take selfies, autographs and local press too waiting to take my interview. I was overwhelmed by the response. The response at IFFI was the icing on the cake and Jury chairman of Non Feature section-- Vinod Ganatra made a special mention of this film adding that the film offer a master-class to newcomers on how to make interesting documentaries. Given an opportunity I would like to make more documentaries on all great personalities, because I know I will do a great job and I am good at it.



Decoding Shankar — The whole team

Are the awards thrilling?

Of course. The film has won awards at – the Toronto International Women Film Festival, Indo French International Film Festival, Tokyo International Short Film Festival, Santa Monica Short, The Indie Fest Film Awards and the London Independent Film Festival.



Deepti interacting with Gulzar



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

WHO AM I?



(Continue from page 16)



even their body. Most tribal communities, as a way to exhibit their totem, erect a totem pole representing the figure of their totem such as a tiger or a bird that is generally carved or painted in the area where the tribal group members reside.

For example, the Santhals also called Manjhi, with an estimated population of 4.2 million, are an ethnic group of eastern India and found in large numbers in Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Odisha and Assam. The Santhals are the third largest tribe in India. They have many totem groups or totemistic clans, known as Pari, named after plants, birds and animals. The 12 clans are divided into two ranks: seven senior and five junior. The senior clans are believed to originate from the seven sons and daughters of the first man and woman, and in order of seniority they are: Hansda (goose), Murmu (Nilgai), Marndi (Ischaemum rugosum, a type of grass), Kisku (kingfisher), Soren (Pleiades, a star cluster), Hembrom (betel palm) and Tudu (owl). The junior clans are Baskey (stale rice), Besra (falcon), Caure (lizard), Pauria (pigeon) and Donker. The clan members avoid harming their clan totem and protect them under all circumstances.

The Gonds, for example, group of aboriginal peoples and now officially known as Scheduled Tribes in central and south-central India are the second largest tribal group in India. They are about two million in number and live primarily in the states of Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar and Odisha. The Gonds have a goat clan and the members of this clan worship the goat as a totem. The legend goes that a goat that had been stolen by their ancestors for sacrifice turned into a pig when the theft was discovered and thus saved the thieves from punishment. Totemism is integral to many tribal groups in India and holds 'religious' significance for them. The Kamar tribe have totemic groups named as Netam (tortoise), Sori (a jungle creeper), Wagh Sori (tiger), Nag Sori (snake), Kunjam (goat), etc. A tortoise saved the Netam at the time of a flood. Then, among the Toda, the buffaloes are also revered as totems and their rituals revolve around the buffaloes and the treatment of their milk.

The Oraons erect wooden totem posts and make occasional offerings to them. Traditionally, the Bhils believe in a pantheon of deities that include Wagh dev, the tiger god, Nandervo, the god of agriculture and Chagwam, the supreme deity. They also believe in an afterlife where one is reunited with family members.

The 'religious' practices

According to the Santhal religion, it's the supreme deity called Thakurji who controls everything. However, the weight of the belief falls on bonga which is a court of spirits and need to be pacified with prayers, rituals and offerings as they handle all the worldly affairs. The spirits operate at several levels including that of the village, household, ancestor, and sub-clan level. The evil spirits, on the other hand, can inhabit mountains, water bodies, forests, tigers, etc., and cause diseases and all the ills.

A Santhal village has a unique feature – a sacred grove on the outskirts of the settlement. The grove is where all the spirits live and where the members conduct a host of festivals. Among them, the Maran Buru is the most important spirit. It means the 'great mountain' and is invoked at the time of making offerings.

All the rituals associated with a tribal group are also deeply connected with the agricultural cycles along with the life-cycle rituals for birth, marriage and burial at death. During these rituals, offerings of animals and birds are made to the spirits. Even the Kharia and Munda tribes follow similar beliefs.

A tribe in Madhya Pradesh called Baiga that has close to 2,00,000 members worship the ever-changing pantheon of deities, which are roughly divided into those that are good and evil and includes some Hindu gods too. Priests oversee and preside over agricultural and anti-earthquake rituals while the medicine men use magic to cure diseases. The Baiga believe that after death the soul breaks into three spiritual forces: one stay goes to an afterlife, one remains in the family's home and a third, regarded as evil, ideally stays in the ground where the dead are buried.

The gods among the Gonds include clan gods, mountain gods, an earth-mother, village deities, ancestor spirits and spirits associated with every hill, lake, tree, rock or river. Important deities include Yama, the god of death. The earth goddess is responsible for bringing fertility and evil gods, it is believed, bring sickness.

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The vibrant tribals of India

*Tribals, or Adivasis as they are known, are spread across the length and breadth of the country. Each of them are ethnic groups and are considered as aboriginal with their peculiar culture, habits and customs. **Gauravi Patel** reveals the demographics pertaining to these widely spread old inhabitants with varying sex ratio and illiteracy rate.*



India is home to the second largest population in the world and the largest population of tribals in the world. As per the 2011 census, the tribals comprised 8.6 per cent of the country's total population standing at 104 million. Of these, Bhil is the largest tribe in India with a total population of 46,18,068, constituting 37.7 per cent of the total Scheduled Tribes (STs) population. Gond is the second largest tribe, with a population of 43,57,918 constituting 35.6 per cent of the total ST population in India. The Bhils are primarily found in Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan even Tripura.

A total of 9,38,19,162 people belonging to Scheduled Tribes (STs) reside in rural areas and 1,04,61,872 people in urban areas. The Scheduled Tribes comprise 11.3 per cent of the total population of rural areas and 2.8 per cent of the population in urban areas. There are about 550 tribes in India.

The widespread tribal groups

In India, the tribal population is widely spread across the length and breadth of the nation. There are a lot of tribal groups that live along the Himalayas in northern and north-eastern states including Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Assam, Mizoram, Nagaland, Manipur, etc. northern and north-eastern states including Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Assam, Mizoram, Nagaland, Manipur, etc.

Then, there are the tribals who live in central India in the forests

and hills of Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh. In the west, the tribal population is concentrated in Gujarat, Rajasthan while in the south, the tribals are found in Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Lakshadweep and Andaman and Nicobar Islands are also home to several tribal groups.

Among these states, the percentage of tribal population varies drastically. So, in Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya the tribal population is more than 90 per cent of the population of the state. In Manipur, Sikkim, Tripura and Assam the tribal population is between 20 and 30 per cent of the population of the state. Central India is home to the largest number of tribes even though the tribal population constitute about 10 per cent of the state's population. Kerala and Tamil Nadu have one per cent tribal population and Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka have around six per cent tribal population.

According to the 2011 census, the states and union territories having maximum ratio of scheduled tribes are Lakshadweep (94.8 per cent), Mizoram (94.4 per cent), Nagaland (86.5 per cent), Meghalaya (86.1 per cent) and Arunachal Pradesh (68.8 per cent).

Also, the states and union territories having minimum ratio of scheduled tribes include Uttar Pradesh (0.6 per cent), Tamil Nadu (1.1 per cent), Bihar (1.3 per cent), Kerala (1.5 per cent) and Uttarakhand (2.9 per cent). Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi and Puducherry have no population of Scheduled Tribes.

Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes

In 1949, the Indian Constitution adopted provisions for special treatment of the Scheduled Tribes (STs) and the Scheduled Castes (SCs). The SCs and the STs designations were allotted to groups who have been historically marginalised and ostracised. The Constitution has laid down several provisions that guarantee affirmative action for these groups.

The Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950 lists 1,108 castes across 29 states in its First Schedule and the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950 lists 744 tribes across 22 states in its First Schedule. According to the 2011 census, the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes comprise about 16.6 per cent and 8.6 per cent, respectively, of India's population.

Since Independence, the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes were given Reservation status, guaranteeing political representation also.

The SC groups comprise 139 million people that means more than 16 per cent of India's population. The greatest concentrations of Scheduled Caste members in 1991 lived in the states of Andhra Pradesh (10.5 million that is nearly 16 percent of the state's population), Tamil Nadu (10.7 million translating to 19 percent of the state's population), Bihar (12.5 million amounting to 14 per cent of the state's population), West Bengal (16 million standing at 24 per cent of the state's population) and Uttar Pradesh (29.3 million or 21 per cent of the state's population).

Central Indian states have the country's largest tribes and about 75 percent of the total tribal population lives there.

On the other hand, the STs represent only eight per cent of India's total population that translates to 68 million people. In 1991, Orissa had the largest number of STs (7 million i.e., 23 per cent of the state's population), Maharashtra (7.3 million or 9 per cent) and Madhya Pradesh (15.3 million or 23 per cent of the state's population). The north-eastern states have the greatest concentration of STs in India.

Sex Ratio and Literacy

As per Census 2011, the sex ratio in India is 943 whereas it is much higher among the Scheduled Tribes and stands at 990. Additionally, the sex ratio of children (0-6 age group) in India is 919 whereas it is much higher among the Scheduled Tribes and the number stands at 957. The sex ratio in Scheduled Tribes is in favour of females in Goa (1046), Kerala (1025), Arunachal Pradesh (1032), Odisha (1029) and Chhattisgarh (1020). In Jammu and Kashmir (924) the sex ratio in scheduled tribes is the lowest in the country.

As far as literacy among the Scheduled Tribes is concerned, the difference is large per cent. The literacy rate also varies drastically from one state to another. So, the literacy rate among the Scheduled Tribes is the highest in Mizoram (91.7 per cent) and the lowest in Andhra Pradesh (49.2 per cent). Among the union territories, the literacy rate among the Scheduled Tribes is the highest in Lakshadweep (91.7 percent).

As per Census 2011, the rate of literacy in India is 72.99 per cent whereas that among the Scheduled Tribes is 59 percent. The literacy rate also varies drastically from one state to another. So, the literacy rate among the Scheduled Tribes is the highest in Mizoram (91.7 per cent) and the lowest in Andhra Pradesh (49.2 per cent). Among the union territories, the literacy rate

literacy rate among the Scheduled Tribes is the highest in Lakshadweep (91.7 percent).



The Adivasi people

Tribals in India are also known by the word Adivasi the collective name used for the many indigenous peoples of India. Adivasi also means a heterogeneous set of ethnic and tribal groups considered the aboriginal population of India.

Alternatively, terms such as *atavika*, *vanavasi* and *giriyan* are also used to describe the tribals in India. All of these words mean being the original inhabitants of the land. The *adivasi* were pushed into the hill areas after the invasions of the Indo-Aryan people 3,000 years ago. In most tribal communities, land is considered a communal resource and not of one person or a group in terms of ownership.

The diversity among the tribal groups in India is unparalleled in the world. Each state and union territory in India has several tribal groups each with a unique identity and culture. Here are a few examples of some of the major tribes: Arunachal Pradesh (Aptani, Mishmi, Daffla, Miri, Aka, Sinpho, Khanti); Assam (Chakma, Mikir, Kachari, Bora); Meghalaya (Garo, Khasi, Jaintia, Hamar); Nagaland (Angami, Konyak, Lotha); Manipur (Kuki, Lepcha, Mugh); Tripura (Bhutia, Chakma, Garo, Kuki); Mizoram (Mizo, Lakher); West Bengal (Asur, Bhumij, Birhor, Lodha, Lepcha, Magh, Mahali, Malpaharia, Polia); Jharkhand (Santhal, Paharia, Munda, Ho, Birhor, Oraon, Kharia, Tamaria); Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand (Tharu, Bhatia, Jaunsari, Bhoksha, Raji, Khasa, Bhuia, Kharwar, Manjhi, Kol); Odisha (Zuang, Sawara, Karia, Khond, Kandh); Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh (Hill Maria, Muria, Dandami, Gond, Baiga, Parja, Bhatra, Agarua, Bhil, Saharia, Korwa, Halba); Himachal Pradesh (Gaddi, Gujjar, Kinnar); Jammu & Kashmir (Gaddi, Bakarwal); Rajasthan (Bhil, Meena, Kathoria, Garasia); Andhra Pradesh and Telangana (Chenchu, Yandai, Kurumba, Khond, Bagdaz, Koya, Bagata, Gadaba); Kerala (Irula, Kurumba, Kadar, Pulayan); Tamil Nadu (Toda, Kota, Kurumba, Badaga); Andaman & Nicobar Islands (Great Andamanese, Nicobarese, Onge, Jarawa, Shompen, Sentanese).

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*In “The Miniaturist of Junagadh”, film-maker Kaushal Oza evocatively depicts the saga of a miniature painter who is pushed for survival during the tumult of Partition. **Shoma A. Chatterji** sees it as a powerful example in narrative story-telling, period ambience within contemporary times and lilting music – all backed up with star performances.*



Film maker Kaushal Oza

Kaushal Oza, a FTII diploma holder, has made a beautiful film called *The Miniaturist of Junagadh*. A miniaturist is an artist who specialises in miniature paintings with every single detail captured within the miniature landscape or frame of the painting. Today, it is almost a lost art which once enriched the history of art in India.

The Palas of Bengal are considered the pioneers of miniature painting in India, but the art form reached its zenith during the Mughal rule. The tradition of miniature paintings was further taken forward by the artists of various Rajasthani schools of painting, including the Kishangarh, Bundi, Jaipur, Mewar and Marwar. The art of Indian miniature paintings is a confluence of Islamic and Hindu traditions and is a testament to the true heights the human spirit can scale, when minds, cultures, and religions, assimilate. It is through this art that Husyn speaks to his tormentors; and in his own way, breaks free of the tyranny of lines, be they borders or religious divides.

The film is not about miniature paintings but of a man, once a miniature painter, who is pushed to the edges of survival when Partition happened in India and the family, comprised of wife and daughter, was in dire straits. He cannot paint anymore as he has gone almost completely blind.

About his learning at FTII, Oza says, “FTII became my formative years in cinema and all that it entailed such as exposure to different kinds of films and more importantly, I read a lot about films and anything related to films. We learnt a lot hands-on as we shot our films in the studio floors of the institute. My films travelled far and wide and so did I and this shaped my approach to cinema as a form of art and communication.”

The film is set in 1947 which is set in the princely state of Junagadh and when Partition happened. The Prince of Junagadh decided to annex Junagadh to Pakistan.



Scenes from the film

But he faced a lot of opposition from the newly formed Indian government and fled to Pakistan following which Junagadh was annexed to India.

The ravages of Partition compelled an old artist, Husyn Naqqash, to sell his ancestral home in Western India and move with his family to Karachi, Pakistan. When Kishorilal, a stoic and stone-hearted man, who has bought the house, comes to know that Husyn is a well-known miniature painter and has an invaluable and rare miniature collection, he schemes to get hold of the collection. But all is not what it seems and there is a secret about the collection that Husyn's family is holding back. Not only from Kishorilal... but also from Husyn.

The film is based on *The Invisible Collection* and the author is Stefan Zweig who at one time, was a widely read author and the film *The Grand Budapest Hotel* directed by Wes Anderson pays a tribute to Zweig and also mentions his stories as the inspiration for the film.

Husyn is portrayed by Naseeruddin Shah who liked the story so much that he immediately agreed to portray the blind miniaturist of the film, who finds himself being forced out of his house on the eve of Indian Independence. In the aftermath of ethnic violence, it is not just his home that is being taken away from him, but also his art.

Oza was looking for a story that would fit into the ambience of his old ancestral family home as he wished to document the home for posterity and nostalgia after it was handed over to realtors and promoters. It was a decision his family was forced to take and after scouting around for the right story, he landed on this story called *The Invisible Collection*.

Says the director Oza, "*The Miniaturist of Junagadh* was born out of the grief that I experienced at the loss of home. Home, in the literal sense, when my family's century old ancestral home was to be razed to ground to give way to a housing complex. And home in the philosophical sense, as the tolerant nation *I grew up in* elected a religious fundamentalist as prime minister, and I, like my many liberal compatriots, was robbed of the secular heritage India's founding fathers had bequeathed us. Soon, a citizenship law was proposed that marked religious minorities, and can one day become the basis of deporting Indians on religious grounds."

So, he turned his personal tragedy into a work of art much like the protagonist who hated to part with his paintings was forced to sell them for pure survival. The mansion was almost 100 years old and to capture the core essence and the flavour of antiquity, Oza shot almost the entire film indoors. The cinematography is so

years old and to capture the core essence and the flavour of antiquity, Oza shot almost the entire film indoors. The cinematography is so beautifully textured and the production design is so detailed and precise, you can almost get the feel of a musty smell from the antiques in the house.

The team joined forces to change the arrangement, filled it up with different kinds of furniture, added with research by the director and the art director Nitin Zihani. Oza says that once he began writing the story, it began to have a life of its own – the characters, the story, the time line, the period, setting, props, and so on. Oza managed to rope in wonderful actors for the film because they believed in the story and they truly felt that it was a film that ought to be made. They also knew it is a short film with a slim budget which would not take too much of their time and would not be able to pay well and they agreed without any hesitation.

The *Miniaturist of Junagadh* offers a powerful example in narrative story-telling, a period ambience within contemporary times and beautiful music not to talk about the performance of stellar performers. The dialogue based on Urdu-flavoured Hindi helped.

Then my crew – the cinematographer (Kumar Saurabh) who has used lighting like a magician, the music director, the art director, and of course, the editor (Amit Malhotra), helped enrich the film and give it its final shape.

About the very low-key background score, Oza says, "I had absolute faith in Chhabi Sodhani's ability to compose for this film. Initially we concentrated on only the melody and once we had a theme that touched us, we tried to have some silent spaces. Because the film has its own rhythm and pauses, and the feeling of silence even when the music was playing was essential. There are scenes dealing with emptiness, of the house. And also a longing, and finally, the going away."

The twist in the story comes when we discover that the miniature paintings offered for sale to the buyer of the ancestral house no longer exist and have already been sold in parts though Husyn has no clue about this. But one miniature painting remains and the family wants to hold on to it though the buyer of the ancestral home has made it clear that not a single item should be taken away when the family leave home.



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.

Polluted rivers, depleting levels!

Despite several programmes like the Ganga Action Plan, the Yamuna Action Plan, the National River Conservation Plan and Namami Gange being undertaken in the country, the problem of river pollution remains serious, endangering health of human beings and even threatening the survival of several forms of life in and around rivers.

In 2018 the Central Pollution Control Board identified 351 polluted river stretches in India, 53 in Maharashtra alone. So bad is the quality of river water in certain areas that it is not fit for bathing, let alone drinking. The survival of several rivers remains a threat. Already several smaller rivers are on the brink of vanishing, while some are showing signs of depletion.

The availability of water in terms of direct access and recharge in thousands of human and wild life habitations has thus been adversely affected. The problem must be seen not in just in terms of pollution, but also in terms of water scarcity and decline of river life and biodiversity, including biodiversity of areas around rivers.

There are several reasons why the existing programmes for protecting rivers have failed to bring expected results. Firstly, there is much water being extracted from several rivers by dams, barrages and canals that enough water is often just not there to create a proper flow to fulfill the essential ecological roles of rivers.

The second reason is that in many catchment areas, river water is being increasingly diverted and forced to flow into tunnels for long stretches, as series of hydel projects have been set up in the hilly areas. Pollutants deposited legally or illegally in rivers have also been on the rise. This has adversely impacted water quality and led to water scarcity.

Despite the fact that pollution control effort has mainly emphasized on capacity creation of sewage treatment, recent estimates tell us while 72,368 million litres per day of sewage is generated, operational treatment capacity of only 26,869 million litres exists. The existing centralized sewage treatment is expensive and alternative possibilities of decentralised, local disposal of sewage has not received the attention it deserves.

An additional problem is of industrial effluents mixing up with sewage, often illegally. As a result even best practices for sewage disposal do not yield results. Industrial effluents may be smaller in load compared to sewage, but their health impacts can be very serious and prolonged. Clear information on what the wastes include, proper knowledge of their implications and unbiased decisions based on such transparency and knowledge which protect public health interests are needed.

Existing decision making does not accord proper significance to protecting various forms of life in rivers, even though these also play an important role in purifying river water. The threat has increased with some dubious projects leading to



large-scale felling of trees in ecological crucial areas like the Himalayan region and the Western Ghats.

Indiscriminate, excessive mining for river sand and gravel has caused extensive damage to rivers and their capacity for performing ecological protective roles. Despite attempts to curb illegal mining, the extractive activities of ruthless mining mafias have not stopped.

The budgetary support for river protection is much lower than the requirement. Even in the case of the flagship Namami Gange scheme, the actual release up to June 30, 2021 has fallen much short of the sanctions. While this scheme gets the bulk of the union government budget for river protection, the National River Conservation Plan (which covers all rivers other than the Ganga and its tributaries) gets lesser budget allocation. The actual release of funds is often found to be below the sanctioned amount. This combined with lack of innovativeness in finding better solutions and technologies for protecting rivers have increased the threat to rivers. One way to improve/ protect our rivers is to involve local communities, particularly river-life communities like boatmen and fisher folk.

Bharat Dogra is a journalist and author

A case for safety in schools



On 23 September, in Gannaur area of Sonipat district, Haryana, the collapse of a roof led to 25 students of grade 3, a teacher and three other persons getting injured in the accident.

The incident highlighted once again the need for significant improvement in safety conditions in government as well as privately run schools.

About a year back, in mid-2020, the findings of a study by the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights had drawn much-needed attention to the need for improving safety in schools. This study was based on a study of 26,071 schools spread across 12 states. The study found that 22% schools functioned from old and dilapidated buildings. Thirty-one percent of the school buildings covered in the study reported major cracks in the structure.

In the week before, the survey 9 per cent of schools had experienced an electric shock or short circuit incident. About 37% did not have fire extinguishers. In 61% of the schools covered, obstructions were found to exist in corridors and/or staircases. In most of the government-run schools, mid-day meals are also cooked, needing extra precautions related to fires.

While these safety problems affect all students, there are others which affect girls more. There is no water or shortage of water in most toilets. This poses a problem for girls and students who are physically challenged. Disabled friendly wash rooms do not exist in most schools.

An exceptionally high number of schools are located close to railway tracks that also call for safety precautions for students and staff.

Other surveys have found that there is substantial need for improvement in kitchens where mid-day meals are cooked or where raw food provisions are stored. It was reported that mobile towers set up close to schools, also increase health risks for children. A student spending two to ten years faces greater health risks as children are much more susceptible to health hazards than adults, especially over a long period of times.

It is important to heed all the safety aspects as schools have reopened after a long Covid break. It is possible that during the closure some normal repair and maintenance may have not been attended to. This is particularly true of damage suffered during heavy rains. It becomes important to ensure safety to avoid minor or serious accidents like in the in Sonipat district.

It used to be common earlier in dilapidated school buildings that if there is high-risk in one classroom, then its students would be asked to share another classroom. But now with social distancing norms to be followed, this arrangement may not be possible. Hence there is more need than before for proper repairs and maintenance protocols to be followed.

In parts of Odisha even orders to demolish dilapidated buildings were given but the more important point is whether safer school buildings were created in their place and whether adequate budgets were allotted for this. This is where progress has been lesser than what is the requirement.

Accidents at Sonipat and others preceding it, have shown this neglect can prove very costly and hence there is very urgent need for launching a special programme for making our schools safer.

Bharat Dogra is a journalist and author

BRIG SUKHDEV SINGH (Vr C, MC)

THE HERO OF ZOJI LA (1913—2009)

Sukhdev Singh was born on 28 February 1913 and served in the Patiala State Force. He was awarded the Military Cross (MC) for services in World War II.

At the time of Independence, accession by Kashmir to India was opposed by Pakistan and some sections of Kashmiris. Violence broke out in the State in October 1947.

The fighting elements consisted of “bands of deserters from the State clash occurred at Thorar (near Rawalakot) on 3–4 October 1947. The rebels quickly gained control of almost the entire Poonch district.

In the Mirpur district, the border posts at Saligram and Owen Pattan on the Jhelum river were captured by rebels. Sehnsa and Throchi were abandoned by state forces after the attack. The rebels came in two waves - towards Srinagar and Poonch/Jammu. India reacted by rushing its army to Kashmir. One unit was air-lifted to Srinagar and another force to Jammu. 1 Patiala Battalion (later 15 Punjab) under then LT Col Sukhdev Singh MC was rushed to Jammu. Radio communications between the fighting units were operated by the Pakistan Army. Even though the Indian Navy intercepted the communications, lacking intelligence in Jammu and Kashmir, it was unable to determine where the fighting was taking place. 1 Patiala Battalion under Lt Col Sukhdev Singh MC fought valiantly in Mirpur, Jhangar and Nowshera. Enemy threat was neutralized by February 1948 and the unit was camping in Jammu, when news was received of advance by Pakistan into Ladakh.

Ladakh, at the time, was guarded by personnel of the Jammu and Kashmir State Force. Eyeing the entire Jammu and Kashmir State, Pakistan launched a simultaneous assault there along within the Kashmir valley. Within days, Pakistan managed to take over Gilgit and Baltistan, even before the Indian Army could react. Most of the State forces fell back to Skardu, a small town guarding the approach to Leh. The town was held by a small garrison of around a thousand men, led by Lieutenant Colonel Sher Jung Thapa, which withstood Pakistani attack till finally falling on 14 August 1948.

Pakistan managed to capture Kargil and Drass towns by end of May 1948. It was even more worrying that Pakistan forces could capture the crucial Zoji La Pass. The importance of Zoji La lay in the fact that it commanded entry to Leh and provided a direct all weather approach to Leh and Kargil from Gilgit and Skardu.



By March 1948, Leh was threatened both from the north and the south. In May 1948 the enemy had captured Kargil and Dras and were advancing towards Zoji La, which meant the Pass of Blizzards. Lieutenant Colonel Sukhdev Singh, commander 1 Patiala, had to be ordered to take his battalion, secure the Zoji La and prevent the enemy from penetrating the Kashmir Valley. For four months the battalion stuck out against a numerically tougher enemy. The battalion also had to protect its vulnerable communication for over 30 miles. The battle was fought at heights varying from 10,000 to 17,000 feet, amidst snow and glaciers without proper equipment and no mountain artillery. Lieutenant Colonel Sukhdev Singh conducted this operation as well as the subsequent push to Drass and Kargil with great skill and daring.

He himself came under enemy fire. He motivated the officers and other ranks to carry out amazing feats of endurance and daring ultimately forcing the enemy on the defensive. The Indian Army pulled off the unthinkable — deploying tanks at 11,553 feet in Ladakh, surprising the Pakistan military and aborted their evil design of taking over the region. Lt Col Sukhdev Singh was awarded Vir Chakra (Vr C) for courage and heroic display of leadership. Blinded by snow amid heavy artillery fire, the highly demoralised enemy ran for their lives. Sukhdev Singh who was promoted to Brigadier, passed away on 9 May 2009.

Brigadier Suresh Chandra Sharma (retd.)

THANGAM ELIZABETH PHILIP

THE GRANDE DAME OF INDIAN CATERING (1921—2009)

Principal Emeritus of the Institute of Management, Catering and Applied Nutrition, Mumbai, Thangam Elizabeth Philip was acknowledged as Indian Hospitality industry's most eminent doyenne

nutritionist. A pioneer chef, professor, cookbook writer, food scientist, mentor, nutritionist, businesswoman, writer, and mentor rolled into one, she was certainly the grande dame of the Indian catering world.

Thangam literally made thousands deliberate about what and how much they need to eat. Born at Kozhikode, Kerala, and graduating from the Women's Christian College, Chennai, specializing in Psychology and Philosophy in 1941, she secured post graduate diplomas in Home Science and Teacher Training from the Lady Irwin College, Delhi. She later completed her MS in Institutional Management and Nutrition from Kansas State University, USA in 1960.

Her career kicked off with St. Thomas School, Calcutta, as in-charge of the Home Science Department. Later she moved to Sri Lanka in 1949 to establish a Home Economic department at Southland Methodist College, Galle. Returning to India in 1950, her talents would soon catapult her to fame, latching her into place as one of the country's foremost culinary figures.

India was then witnessing episodes of famine, and the Union Agriculture Ministry sought her services to run one of the Annapurna subsidised chain of cafeterias in New Delhi, the objective being to provide an alternative to cereal-based meals, especially to the middle-class people.

In 1955, Thangam joined The Institute of Hotel Management, Catering Technology and Applied Nutrition (IHM), Bombay as a Professor. In between she did radio and television programmes, and cookery shows in the US popularising some ethnic Indian dishes. On her return in 1961, she became Principal of the Institute and took to writing columns, features and recipes for newspapers and magazines, as also a cookery programme on All India Radio.

She shepherded a syllabus that endures in part, even today; stimulated the institute's trade fairs to immense popularity and shared her knowledge of cheap nutritious cooking.

The Institute's success led to the mushrooming of pan India catering institutes.

By retirement in 1986, Thangam had gone through hectic and noteworthy assignments like a host of national and international seminars, conferences, workshops, food upgradation programmes as well as being consultant to various local and international organisations. She also served on the boards of many hospitality enterprises. She contributed as a philanthropist to the FAO's Freedom from Hunger campaign.

Recognized as one of the 38 distinguished women of the world in 1975, she was etched in her likeness on the United Nation's commemorative FAO's Ceres Medal. In 1976, she was honoured with the Padmashree. The Government of France awarded her Knighthood of Order of Cordon Bleu Du Sant Esprit in 1982.

Thangam was a Fellow of Hotel Catering and Institutional Management Association, UK, the Cookery and Food Association, UK and served as a Member of the Royal Society for Public Health, UK and elected a Fellow of the World Academy of Productivity Sciences. Four years after retirement, she was made Principal Emeritus of IHM College.

Her cookery books are Bible for catering students. She authored several books on the hospitality industry, food production and bakery. Her two volume work Modern Cookery, Book for Teaching and the Trade, is a prescribed textbook in IHM curriculum. Other books include the Thangam Philip Book of Baking and Cuisine written for the Ministry of Tourism, A Touch of Spice, Thangam Philip's Vegetarian Recipes for Healthy Living and Flavours from India.

A task master, perfectionist, and tongue lasher, she was also sensitive caring and bedrock of righteousness. A spinster, she succumbed to a cardiac arrest in her native Kottayam. She will however live on in the hearts and minds of all those whose lives she touched.

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



PADMA SACHDEV

DOYEN OF DOGRI LITERATURE (1940-2021)

Padma Sachdev, a great writer and upholder of human values, breathed her last at Mumbai on August 4 at 81. She leaves behind her husband, Meeta Sachdev.

Several eminent persons including Karan Singh and Lata Mangeshkar, with whom she shared an affectionate and long relationship, paid rich tributes to her.

Frequently hailed as mother of modern Dogri literature,

she was humble enough to refer to herself as a daughter who sought to serve Dogri language. Apart from her valuable writings in Dogri, her work of bringing Dogri folklore and songs to prominence is considered to be of great value. She also collaborated with Lata Mangeshkar to create an album of Dogri music which is much cherished.

She is lauded for her contribution to Hindi literature that includes fiction, poetry, memoirs, interviews, translations and articles. She was highly regarded by some of the most senior poets and writers of Hindi including Ramdhari Singh Dinkar and Dharamvir Bharati. In fact Dinkar commented after reading some of her poems that he himself had much to learn from Padma's 'real' and sincere poetry. Old-timers still cherish the memory of Padma's writings in Dharmayug and other leading magazines of Hindi. She also wrote in Punjabi and Urdu languages. She was familiar with several languages including Kashmiri and Sanskrit. Her father Jai Dev Badu, who died during Partition, was reputed as a great Sanskrit scholar of Jammu. Her friend Pushpesh Pant in his tribute has called Padma a leading light of Dogri-Kashmiri-Punjabi heritage.

Padma spent her early days in Jammu and her later days in Mumbai and Delhi. She contributed as a broadcaster to radio stations in Jammu and Mumbai. Her memories of early life in Jammu contributed to many memorable writings.

Her leading books include Meri Kavita, Mere Geet (which received the Sahitya Academy Award in her early years), Tawi Te Chanhan (Tawi and Chenab Rivers), Niheriya Galiyan

(Dark Lanes, Diwankhana (Interviews), Boond Bawdi (memoirs) and In Bin. She wrote against feudal values, acknowledged the important contribution of domestic helps, looked sympathetically at memories of a taxi driver in Mumbai and revealed interesting less- known aspects of well-known personalities but her more consistent contribution in her writings was of upholding the dignity of women and of conveying deeply human values.

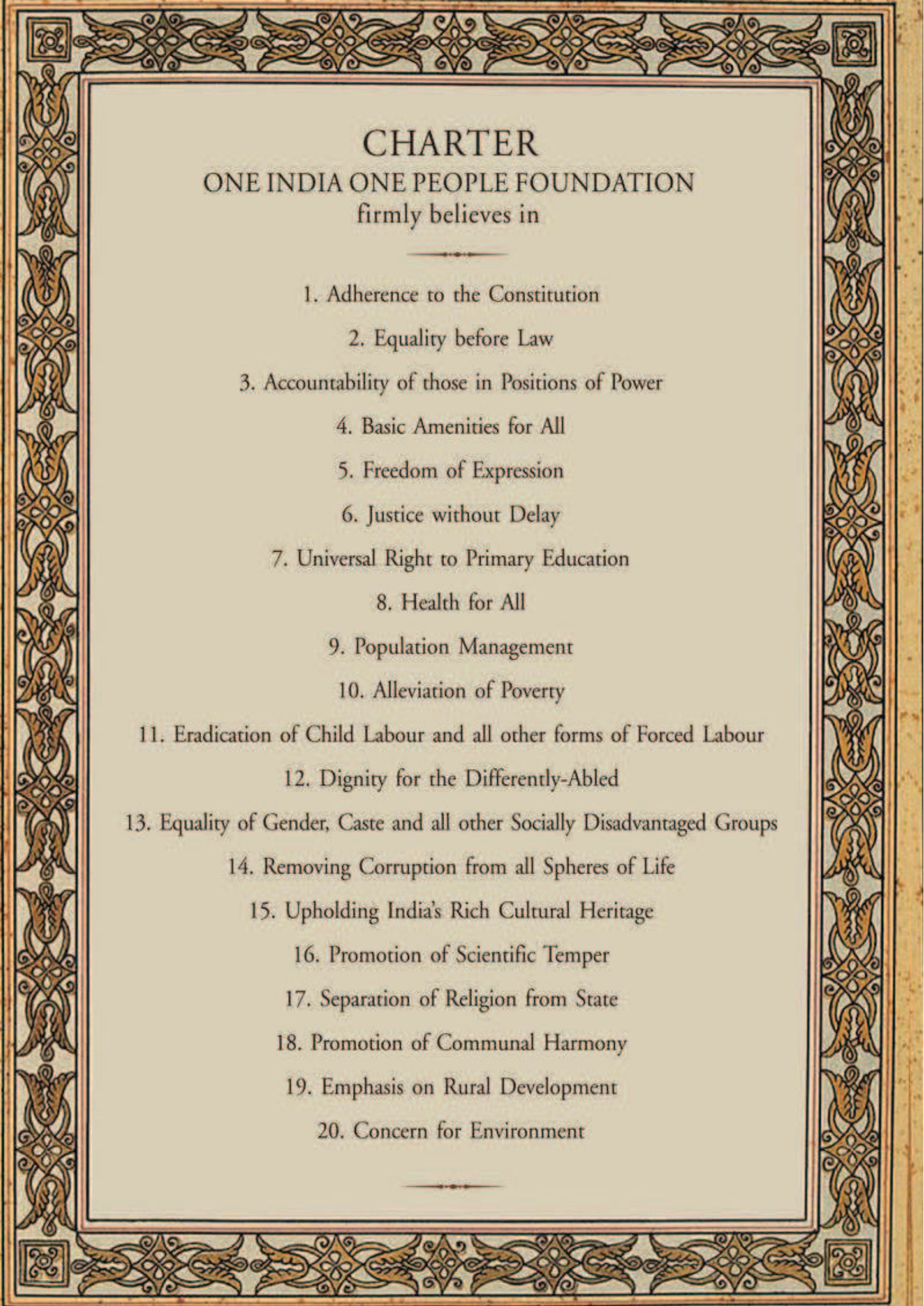
She was honored with many awards including Saraswati Samman, Kabir Samman and Padma Shri. She wrote the lyrics of a few film songs, including some much remembered ones like "Ye neer kahan se barse hain." Her husband Surinder Singh also contributed much to this. Leaving behind memories and thoughts of distress and difficulties, Padma was capable of bringing joy and warmth in the lives of many friends including those who met her briefly.

I too was among the beneficiaries of her exceptional capability of transmitting joy and warmth. Circumstances brought us together in some meetings, and she did not lose much time to invite me, a struggling young writer to her home. Don't forget to bring your wife along, she reminded me more than once.

When I landed at her Mandi house home (in Delhi) with my wife Madhu for our first real conversation, within 15 minutes we were entirely at home. It is this spontaneous warmth and closeness in relationships that came so naturally and effortlessly to her that will be cherished and missed most by her wide circle of friends. At a wider level, of course, it is the world of Dogri, Hindi and Indian literature which has lost a stalwart



Bharat Dogra is a journalist and author



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
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 12. Dignity for the Differently-Abled
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 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)
ONE INDIA ONE PEOPLE