

# ONE INDIA ONE PEOPLE

Patriotism Redefined

# 2021

## *Year of Picking up threads*

OF LOCKDOWNS, VACCINES AND LIFE

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SMASHING RECORDS IN OLYMPICS

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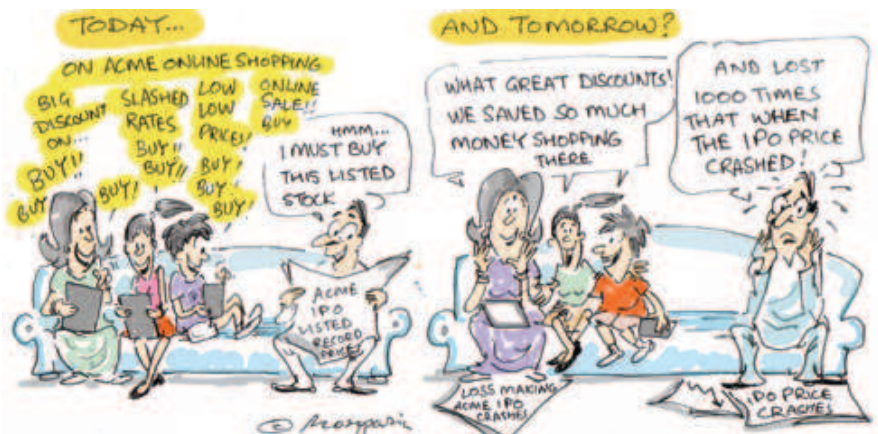
ENTERTAINMENT AS PANACEA

**Know India Better**

DAMAN, A TOWN ENCLAVED  
IN RICH HISTORY

**Face to Face**

PRASHANT VANKORE



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BRIGADIER SHER JUNG  
THAPA MVC



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## Muscles flexed, all fired up

*How India handled the logistically tough vaccination issue, took China head on and managed rescue missions in Afghanistan showed the government wasn't the one to dither. It displayed a remarkable resolve in meeting every challenge across all spheres. **Nivedita Pal** outlines India's rise as a country with stature and sense of purpose.*



**Indians being evacuated from Afghanistan**

**T**he year gone by was challenging, remarkable and memorable for many reasons. Not only did India, a country of more than a billion people, successfully handle the Covid-19 crisis that it received as a legacy from the year before that, it helped the world fight it too by manufacturing coronavirus infection vaccines at an unprecedented scale and numbers.

Apart from that, at the international front, India flexed its muscles when China entered India's sovereign territory. India also ensured its citizens were safely and swiftly evacuated from neighbouring Afghanistan when Taliban took over the country. India's evacuation missions were lauded by the citizens and foreign onlookers with awe.

### Settling border disputes

In November 2021, a month after the 13 th round of Corps Commander-level talks between India and China failed, that had led to the hardening of positions on both sides, Indian

and Chinese diplomats agreed on the "need to find an early resolution to the remaining issues along the LAC in Eastern Ladakh while fully abiding by bilateral agreements and protocols so as to restore peace and tranquility."

In the last year, India has dealt with China with an iron hand. The 13 th round of Corps Commander-level talks took place at the Moldo border personnel meeting point near Chushul on 10 October - a year-and-a-half after the skirmishes in Eastern Ladakh, to resolve the situation at Hot Springs. To put things in perspective, the day after that, the two nations had one of the worst clashes in June 2020 at the Galwan Valley.

### Creating records, saving lives

History was created in October 2021, when India achieved the landmark milestone of 100 crore vaccinations. Over 20 lakh workers at 4.3 lakh vaccination centres across the country helped achieve the feat over a period of nine months. The unthinkable feat was the result of a collective effort by sever-

al agencies, individuals and public-spirited agencies.

In 2021, as India vaccinated the 100 crore citizens, the world watched in envy. The feat was also made possible owing to the far reach of digital technology in India, due to which vaccination process was expedited using smart phones and mobile apps – Arogya Setu app, CoWIN platform, etc.

In order to implement the vaccination drive that started on 16 January 2021, the one of its kind in the world, India prepared well. For the purpose, 2,360 Master Trainers, 61,000 Programme Managers, 2 lakh Vaccinators, 3.7 lakh other Vaccination Team Members had been trained before the drive began.

## Right to Education in a new avatar

The right to education is a fundamental right guaranteed by the Indian Constitution. In the year gone by, the education sector went through significant changes owing to the COVID-19 pandemic. Education institutes such as schools and colleges were shut since the lockdown was announced in March 2020. After that, many industries and sectors started opening up, as and when permitted by the government. But schools and colleges continued to remain shut, in most Indian states, till the end of the year.

So, the industry had to adapt to the new demands, and it did. Education was disseminated online to one and all. After several initial hiccups and with the hard work and dedicated contribution of teachers, professors, administrative staff and the parents, children were able to continue their education, despite the physical units being shut.

## India shone at the Olympics

The year 2021 was special for India because the national contingent for the Tokyo 2020 Olympics and Tokyo 2020 Paralympics achieved unprecedented success, after many years. The international multi-sport event, held once every four years, normally, is closely watched by the international fraternity.

Japan's capital Tokyo was selected as the host city during the 125 th IOC Session in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Originally scheduled to take place from 24 July to 9 August 2020, the sporting event was postponed to 2021 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the first such instance in the history of the Olympic Games.

While Saikhom Mirabai Chanu won India's first medal in the games, 23-year-old javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra created history with his gold as he became the first Indian to win a medal in athletics since the country started taking part in the Games in 1920 in Antwerp, Belgium. Chopra's gold at the Tokyo Olympics raised India's medal tally at seven, highest so far in any Olympics.

Not just this, in 2021, the Paralympians too registered India's best-ever medal tally in Tokyo by winning 19 medals - 15 more than any previous count. India created history with the highest-ever medal tally that included as many as five gold medals, eight silver medals and six bronze medals, finishing inside the top 25 at the para games in Tokyo.

## Controversies and more

A country as vibrant, diverse and large as India is not alien to controversies. Year 2021 too witnessed several controversies that hogged news and social media space for long.

Padma Shri awardee Bollywood actress Kangana Ranaut, who is known for hit films like *Tanu Weds Manu*, *Manikarnika*, etc. and for speaking her mind out aloud, caused a controversy when she claimed that Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and revolutionary Bhagat Singh 'got no support from Mahatma Gandhi'. She even mocked Gandhi's talisman of peace and non-violence.

Following her remarks, Shiv Sena MP Krupal Tumane lashed out at the actress. Sena leader Neelam Gorhe also called for the recently- conferred Padma award to be revoked. Aam Aadmi Party leader Preeti Sharma-Menon and Congress leader Arif Naseem Khan also sought action against the actor for her remarks.

Religion has always been a sensitive issue in India. Every now and then, it is also used strategically by politicians, film-makers, advertising agencies and brands to serve their purpose. Very often advertisements have been banned when they depict a certain religion in a bad light or modify something to suit their needs like the Fabindia ad to launch their Diwali 2021 collection stirred a controversy too.

## The politics of 2021

Indian has one of the world's most diverse and vibrant democracies. Prime Minister Narendra Modi came to power with an unprecedented majority and with the highest number of votes than anyone else in the world. Indian political scenario is dynamic and volatile.

In 2021, the biggest political event was the West Bengal assembly election, for 292 constituencies of the 294 constituencies in West Bengal, held from 27 March to 29 April 2021.

The other big event was state bypoll elections in 2021. The bypoll elections were held in three Lok Sabha seats and 30 assembly constituencies- Lok Sabha polls were held in Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Mandi in Himachal Pradesh and Khandwa in Madhya Pradesh, assembly bypolls were held in 30 seats across 14 states.

The politics at international fora is a different game altogether. In 2021, PM Modi was ranked as the most approved world leader with a score of 70 per cent, followed by Mexico President López Obrador at 66 per cent and Italy Prime Minister Mario Draghi at 58 per cent. US President Joe Biden received 44 per cent and Canada PM Justin Trudeau 43 per cent approval, respectively.

In the year gone by, India stood its ground during international conferences and summits including G-20, BRICS, UN climate change conference COP26 and the UN Security Council. India has emerged as a world leader at several fronts.

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## Of lockdowns, vaccines and life

*Vaccinating 100 crore people amidst a raging pandemic, skepticism from several quarters against a plethora of odds, was a phenomenal achievement by all standards. The country's heroes were front-line warriors who displayed exemplary collective spirit that justifiably won kudos. It was a challenge met with fierce determination and if India earned global appreciation, it was all well- deserved, observes **Kriti Kalra**.*



**Vaccination drive in progress**

**I**n October 2021, India created history when it achieved the landmark milestone of 100 crore vaccinations. Over 20 lakh workers at 4.3 lakh vaccination centres across the country helped achieve the feat over a period of nine months where four to five individuals were involved at each centre, this means – the formidable task was completed by over 20,00,000 workers. This was not a small achievement, not just by the sheer numbers involved but also how India managed to achieve this despite opposition and resistance from multiple quarters.

In the year gone by, one of India's biggest achievements was the way it tackled the Covid-19 pandemic and how effectively it administered the vaccination programme. Apart from the vaccination programme that started in early 2021, many other initiatives were taken and efforts made to ensure all aspects of the Covid-19 pandemic and related healthcare management situations were addressed at the earliest and effectively.

### An achievement par excellence

India's achievement of 100 crore vaccinations was the result of a collaborative effort of multiple entities, government agencies, departments and civic officials. "The real stars in this entire campaign are Asha workers and the nursing staff. The Asha workers, who were given charge of far flung districts, took cold ice boxes to areas with no connectivity. They would do all the paperwork and later upload the data on the CoWIN platform," said a government official speaking on the occasion marking the great feat.

"CoWIN played a huge role in enabling the 100 crore vaccination landmark. Each and every dose was recorded on CoWIN. Granular details such as who gave the dose and who received it, were recorded on the platform. No district could fudge the numbers. All the data related to vaccination numbers could be traced live from anywhere," the official said.



## Praises came from all quarters

And, not just this, congratulations poured in from all quarters when India reached the billion mark. WHO South-East Asia Regional Director Dr Poonam Khetrapal Singh said, "Huge congratulations to India for marking yet another milestone -- a billion Covid- 19 vaccine doses administered. This extraordinary feat in a short span was not possible without strong political leadership, inter-sectoral convergence, dedicated efforts of the entire health and frontline workforce, and the people themselves. India's progress must be viewed in the context of the country's commendable commitment and effort to ensure that these life-saving vaccines are accessible globally."

Fortis Healthcare MD and CEO Dr Ashutosh Raghuvanshi said, "It is a stupendous achievement for India to reach the one hundred crore vaccination milestone in a record 275 days. Amidst numerous challenges related to supply, logistics and vaccine hesitancy, and a severe second wave this year, this landmark achievement is a salute to the focused, invaluable efforts of our Health Minister, Mansukh Mandaviya, who is spearheading the vaccination drive, along with many public and private partners and stakeholders, who have worked hard to spread awareness and vaccinate as many people as possible. Our goal should now be to continue supporting the vaccination drive and focus on ensuring the second dose, for those who have taken the first. Continuing to vaccinate, while following Covid protocols, is the only way to beat the virus and prevent community transmission."

## India continued to fight despite odds

In early 2021, when most countries were returning to normalcy after months of battle with Covid-19, India, after having recovered from the first wave successfully, had to gear up once again to fight the second wave, which it did with strong determination.

In what was one of the deadliest pandemics of all times, the phase also gave India its heroes. The coronavirus infection period was marked by the national lockdown where the essential service providers and frontline workers emerged as Covid heroes that included doctors, nurses, medical personnel, policemen, delivery personnel, postmen, grocers and vegetable vendors even watchmen worked non-stop when the rest of the countrymen stayed in the safe confines of their homes.

Interestingly, in the initial days of the Covid-19 crisis in India, the shortage of PPE kits, masks and other medical essentials ended soon. India meticulously and swiftly boosted manufacturing and within a span of weeks became an exporter of PPE kits and masks. Then, the export of the kits and other protective equipment was banned to ensure enough supplies for domestic needs. Soon enough, domestic manufacturers had exported 23 lakh personal protection equipment (PPE) kits to five foreign nations when the government allowed sale of such medical coverall to foreign entities.

## The vaccination drive numbers

India was slowly but steadily recovering from the pandemic when the vaccination drive began on 16 January 2021 and that hastened the process. In the vaccination drive of an unprecedented scale, different categories of professionals were roped in for the drive and, for that purpose, 2,360 Master Trainers, 61,000 Programme Managers, 2 lakh Vaccinators, 3.7 lakh other Vaccination Team Members had been trained before the drive began.

When the vaccination process began, India had to



*People waiting in a queue for the second dose of vaccination*

prioritise who would receive the vaccine first. In the first phase, the vaccination was conducted for approximately one crore healthcare workers and two crore frontline workers - police, paramilitary forces, sanitation workers and disaster management volunteers --- from both public and private sectors. In the second phase that started on 1 March 2021, senior citizens and people above 45 years with comorbidities were given the vaccines. Simultaneously, it was in the second phase when the online registration through Aarogya Setu app and Co-WIN began too. The digitisation of the vaccine registration process expedited the entire process and also increased the reach of the vaccination programme to more people. India, not just ensured vaccination of its people, by March 2021, it had also exported 60 million doses of the vaccine to 76 countries. In the third phase that started on 1 April 2021, India started to vaccinate its citizens who were above the age of 45. Later, all citizens above 18 years of age were immunised against the novel coronavirus.

## India continued to fight despite odds

In India's fight against the Covid-19 pandemic, several government agencies and departments came together to address shortages of supplies including the Ministry of Health, Power, Railways, Steel, etc. Several collective initiatives were taken for unforeseen situations and contingencies. For example, to fulfill the shortage in oxygen, the production was increased from 5,700 MT/day in August 2020 to 9,446 MT/day in May 2021. Simultaneously, the PM CARES Fund accorded sanction for the procurement of 1,50,000 units of 'Oxycare' system developed by Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) at a cost of Rs 322.5 crore.

Significant efforts were made to ensure Covid- positive patients in need of medical oxygen get the same in time. Between 27 April 2021 and 11 May 2021, cumulatively 9,284 oxygen concentrators, 7,033 oxygen cylinders, 19 Oxygen Generation Plants, 5,933 ventilators/Bi PAP were dispatched by the central government to increase the Covid management capacity of states and UTs.

The Covid-19 pandemic posed an enormous challenge to India that the country dealt with in an efficient, uninterrupted and safe manner.

Kriti Kalra is an activist and field researcher with [www.thewomansurvivor.com](http://www.thewomansurvivor.com) – an initiative of DraftCraft International to protect and empower women by bringing on one platform the latest on rights and issues, strategic case studies, state initiatives and informed legal opinions

## Education donned new robes

*While the country battled the Covid situation with remarkable stoicism, India took everything that it needed to retain its acknowledged reputation as an education hub. The Education sector acclimatised itself with the attendant risks and embraced new measures and solutions to ensure academics did not suffer. Authorities and stakeholders made it tick, says **Ruchi Verma**.*



**There was a big drop in the number of Indian students seeking enrollment in foreign universities in 2021**

India is known to be the education hub of the world. Not only are there some of the largest number of schools and higher education institutes in the world, these entities also offer some of the most diverse and coveted education programmes. The smooth-running private and government-run education system came to a screeching halt, like many others, when the Covid-19 tsunami hit India. The robust and resilient education sector, however, did not succumb to the adversity and soon adopted new measures to continue benefiting the millions dependent on it.

The year gone by brought in several long-lasting changes in the education industry. In the wake of the unprecedented tragedy that came in the form of the Covid-19 pandemic, the traditional education system in India soon adapted its functioning and switched to online modes of education. In this effort, it was not just the education administrators but also teachers, professors, personnel of the education department and other personnel whose tiring efforts led to the successful conducting of online classes and lecture sessions during the pandemic.

As per the provisional figures of Census 2011, in India 77,84,54,120 persons have been counted as literates. Among all literates, 33,42,50,358 are females, whereas 44,42,03,762 are males. The literacy rate of India in 2011 was 74.0 per cent. Literacy rate among females was 65.5 per cent

whereas the literacy rate among males was 82.1 per cent.

In order of higher literacy rates; Kerala, Lakshadweep and Mizoram states hold first, second and third positions respectively; whereas in female literacy, Kerala is the first while Mizoram and Lakshadweep hold second and third positions among all States and Union Territories.

### Adopting new measures

In the education sector, the Covid-19 induced lockdown was the driving force behind most of the decisions made and actions taken in the year gone by. When the lockdown was announced, no one had thought how long the period will last. So preparing for the same was out of the question. But when people realised that it's not going anytime soon and that life and its processes cannot stop, the education department geared up too to come out with new measures and solutions for the problem.

Problems were turned into opportunities and obstacles into stepping stones. In 2021, not only did the millions of schools and colleges in India turn to online education, they even conducted examinations, viva, etc., through various online modes. Of course, training the staff and then ensuring students are in a position to avail the sessions online was a different





challenge in itself.

## People who made it happen

"I feel the teachers and professors must be saluted for their contribution in making virtual education possible in the last year. Despite multiple challenges, particularly pertaining to technology and infrastructure gaps, education providers made it work," feels Mumbai-based advertising professional Nandita Singh. "India must applaud the millions of teachers and educationists ... they helped saved careers of the country's children. It's amazing how in a country with a billion plus population, the education sector reinvented itself."

During the last year, apart from teachers, parents too had to put in efforts to make virtual sessions a success for their children. "For older children and college students it was not a big issue as they are used to working on computers and laptops and could sit for hours to attend virtual classes. However, virtual education for primary school children was a big challenge and that really must be acknowledged. Parents also played an important role in ensuring their children have access to internet and smartphones or laptops for their virtual education," feels Pune-based primary school teacher Sujata Rathod.

"I feel the year gone by was a blessing in disguise as with online classes I could personally oversee how my daughter was performing and fitting in her class. As a single working mother, I was unable to spend quality time with my daughter. I would sit with her during her classes and make sure she completes her homework on time. I feel, as a nation, we all really came together and made the most difficult things happen in this past year...it's really amazing what collective effort can achieve, even the most impossible and formidable tasks," maintains Nandita.

## The robust intricacies of the system

The education sector in India is a robust one. Education is the key to all processes of human development which is why educational planning needs to be done meticulously and executed with great sensitivity. The education sector in India is a concurrent subject which means both the union government and states can participate in the process of making and implementing education law and policy.

As per the National Policy on Education (NPE, 1986), the Union Government has the responsibility 'to reinforce the national and integrative character of education, maintain its quality and standards, to study and monitor the educational requirements of the country with regard to manpower development, to cater to the needs of research and advanced study, to look after the international aspects of education and human resource development and in general to promote excellence at all levels of the educational system.'

There are two departments concerned with education in the Ministry of Human Resource Development – one for Elementary Education and Literacy and the other for Secondary and Higher Education. Both of these closely interact with the States and the Union Territories.

In the year gone by, it was due to the collaborative efforts of the state and the union education departments that quickly devised, administered and implemented new education policies and rules and regulations to ensure millions of 'students' continue to avail education.

## Foreign education affected too

It's no secret that in most countries, Indian students are the largest in terms of number of students enrolled in foreign universities. And, that is primarily because of the well-structured education system in India. According to an annual report released by the Institute of International Education, the number of Indians studying in the United States decreased by nearly 13 per cent in 2020-21 as compared to the previous academic year. Indian students form a formidable population in the United States and the US officials are attributing the drop in numbers to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

The United States, however, still remains the 'top destination' for international students of which Indian students form the second largest group of international students in the US after those from China, according to the 2021 Open Doors Report.

As per the report, 'over 62,000 student visas were issued this summer alone, more than in any previous year.' The status of student visas from the United States indicates that the decline in the number of Indian students studying in the US was because of the pandemic. The number of Indians studying in the US decreased by about 13 per cent in 2020-21 vis-a-vis the previous academic year, while in reference to the same period, the overall decrease in number of international students in the US was about 15 per cent, according to the report.

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

## Smashing records in Olympics

*The dark, ominous Covid clouds had their bright silver linings too. Indian sportspersons gave a dazzling account of themselves at the Tokyo Olympics by not only raising the bar but also by justifying the expectations of an eager nation. In the year gone by, Indian sports was marked by several 'firsts' and those will remain etched in public memory asserts **Anushka Singh**.*



**In the Tokyo Olympics, 23-year-old javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra created history with his gold**

**I**n July 2021, when Saikhom Mirabai Chanu won India's first medal in the Tokyo Olympics 2021, a silver in the women's 49 kg weightlifting, she not just made Indians proud but ended India's wait for a weightlifting medal at the Olympics by opening the account. Mirabai had a total lift of 202 kg – 87 kg in snatch and 115 kg in clean and jerk as she finished second behind China's Hou Zihui 210 kg (94 and 116) who set an Olympic record in snatch.

In the year gone by, it was not just Chanu who made India proud at the Tokyo Olympics. For the first time after four decades, India won seven medals including one Gold medal, two Silver medals and four Bronze medals. In the year gone by, Indian sportspersons created history at several fronts and embossed India's name in gold in the international sports world.

### Neeraj Chopra brought laurels

In the Tokyo Olympics, 23-year-old javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra created history with his gold as he became the first to win a medal in athletics since the country started taking part in the Games in 1920 in Antwerp, Belgium. In the 2012 London Olympics, India had won six medals including two silver and four bronze, which until then, was India's highest tally at

the Olympics. But that changed with Chopra's golden throw at the Tokyo Olympics. When Chopra won the gold for India, he helped India surpass the previous best of six medals achieved in the 2012 London Games. Chopra's gold at the Tokyo Olympics raised India's medal tally to seven, highest so far in any Olympics.

Among the other athletes who bagged medals for India are Mirabai Chanu, Ravi Kumar Dahiya, Lovlina Borgohain, PV Sindhu, Bajrang Punia and the Men's Hockey Team. In the Tokyo Olympics, India had sent its biggest contingent so far that included 126 athletes across 18 sports disciplines. Indian athletes participated in 69 cumulative events. The first medal came in with Mirabai Chanu in weightlifting.

The next medal was won on the seventh day of the quadrennial event by Lovlina Borgohain who won a bronze medal in boxing. Ace shuttler P V Sindhu, too, won a bronze medal by defeating Bing Jiao of China.

### Mirabai's triumphant return

Twenty six-year-old Mirabai Chanu lifted a total of 202 kg (87 kg + 115 kg) to better Karnam Malleswari's bronze in the 2000 Sydney Olympics. The gold medal was won by



***Mirabai Chanu's win at the Tokyo Olympics was an emotional moment for her and the country***

China's Hou Zhihui with an effort of 210 kg (94 kg + 116 kg) while Aisah Windy Cantika of Indonesia won the bronze medal with an effort of 194 kg (84 kg + 110 kg).

Chanu attempted 84 kg in her first snatch attempt. She lifted 87 kg in her next attempt and raised the weight to 89 kg, which was one kg more than her personal best of 88 kg that she had lifted at the national championship last year. In the clean jerk, Chanu, the world record holder in the section, lifted 110 kg and 115 kg in the first two attempts. She was, however, unable to raise 117 kg in her final attempt that was enough to fetch a medal and open India's medal tally at the Tokyo Olympics. Chanu's win at the Tokyo Olympics was an emotional moment for her and the country. She had tears in her eyes and later broke into a dance to celebrate her historic win.

## Paralympians too won many

In the year gone by, it was not just the Olympians who made India proud, even the Paralympians registered India's best-ever medal tally in Tokyo as they brought back 19 medals that was 15 more than any previous count. India created history with the highest-ever medal tally that included as many as five gold medals, eight silver medals and six bronze medals, finishing inside the top 25 at the para games in Tokyo.

India's tally of 19 at the Tokyo Paralympics went past the tally of 13 registered at the Summer Youth Olympics in 2018. The record tally in Paralympics comes after the Paralympians made history at Tokyo Olympics after winning seven medals in all.

In 2021, India finished inside the top 25 in the medal table at the Tokyo Paralympics. From its first-ever Paralympics in 1968 till 2016, India had won 12 medals. Their performance in the past year has raised the bar for future para-athletes. In the Rio Paralympics, India had only 19 athletes where they won four medals only. In 2021, the Indian Paralympian contingent

comprised 54 members.

Table tennis player Bhavinaben Patel became the first Indian para-athlete to win a table tennis medal at the Paralympics. After that, two badminton players won medals when Krishna Nagar won a historic gold in the men's singles SH6 category and Suhas Yathiraj, an IAS officer, won a silver in the SL4 category.

## Felicitation of the winners

In the year gone by, Indian sports was marked by several 'firsts'. These unprecedented achievements were rewarded by the government as well. Olympic champion javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra, veteran woman cricketer Mithali Raj and the glorious Paralympians were awarded India's highest sporting honour, the Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna by President Ram Nath Kovind in New Delhi.

In a beautiful ceremony that was organised at Durbar Hall at Rashtrapati Bhavan, the President felicitated India's triumphant Olympians and Paralympians. The star attraction of the event was Neeraj Chopra who received a big applause as he received his Khel Ratna. Chopra was the first among the Khel Ratna awardees to receive the honour. Other recipients of the Khel Ratna included Olympic bronze-winning Indian men's hockey team captain Manpreet Singh, veteran goalkeeper P R Sreejesh, Olympic silver-medallist wrestler Ravi Dahiya, Olympic bronze-winning boxer Lovlina Borgohain and Mithali Raj.

Sunil Chhetri became the first footballer to receive this award. Other awardees included Paralympic gold-winners Avani Lekhara (Shooting), Sumit Antil (Athletics), Pramod Bhagat (Badminton), Krishna Nagar (Badminton) and Manish Narwal (Shooting). During the ceremony, Sports Minister Anurag Thakur, predecessor Kiren Rijiju and other dignitaries were present too.

In 2021, along with the 12 Khel Ratna, India also had 35 Arjuna awardees. It was a result of the historic medal win of Indian sportspersons during the Olympics and Paralympics in Tokyo.

Not just that, even Prime Minister Narendra Modi hosted the Olympians for breakfast too. PM Modi offered his words of consolation to those present. When Deepika Kumari, the world's number one archer came, she told the PM that this was her third Olympic participation, he said, "A sportsperson never loses hope." PM Modi also complimented C A Bhavani Devi, the first Indian fencer ever to qualify for the Olympics. Examining her sword, the PM said, "You have inspired the children of India to take up this new sport."

During an online chat that the PM had with badminton star P V Sindhu before she left for the Olympics, he said that if she wins her second successive medal in women's singles, he's have an ice cream with her after her victory. Other than Olympics, in the year gone by, India performed extremely well in other sports too that included Cricket, Athletics, Badminton, etc.

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## Entertainment as panacea

*When the Covid-19 took the country in its stranglehold, the entertainment industry – read the Cinema and OTT platforms – bent backwards to keep it in good humour. In 2021, many films and web series, in Hindi and other regional languages, were released despite all the speculations and concerns of potential losses; lockdown notwithstanding. **Renuka Goel** makes out a case.*



**Hindi-language film Sooryavanshi was one of the biggest releases in 2021**

**T**he entertainment industry in India has been stirring emotions of all kinds among the masses for decades. It's no secret that the Indian film industry is the largest producer of films in the world and also the largest in terms of ticket sales. Moreover, if there's one thing that binds the 'warm' and 'emotional' Indians around the world, other than their love for cricket, it's their love for entertainment, particularly cinema.

In the year gone by, when India, like most nations around the world was fighting its way back to restore normalcy post the havoc wreaked by coronavirus infection, it was the entertainment industry that continued to work, with the Covid-19 precautions in place, and dole out creative content to keep the masses entertained, read occupied, amid the gloominess that the pandemic caused worldwide.

### The vibrancy of the entertainment industry

The entertainment industry in India is not just the largest in the world but also one of the most popular sources of entertainment for Indians, NRIs, foreigners the world over. The industry comprises films, television and now the new addition,

Over-The-Top (OTT) content also.

In 2021, when most of India was under a full or partial lockdown, it was this content that worked as an insulator and kept people productively occupied. Before OTT became popular, it was films that provided entertainment. The Indian film industry is not just the largest but also among the more popular cinema in the world.

Cinema is immensely popular in India and every year more than 1,800 films are produced in India in several languages. India also has the largest number of film admissions displaying diversity. Mumbai, Hyderabad, Chennai, Kolkata, Bangalore, Kochi, Guwahati are the major centres of film production in India.

And, if it's films then Indians the world over cannot hide their love for them. Consider this; films made in India have a huge viewership not just in India but in several nations around the world especially with a significant expatriate population. This includes a dedicated fan base in over 90 countries in Europe, South Asia, North America, the Greater Middle East, Eastern Africa and China. Not just this, interestingly, overseas

revenue account for 12 per cent of the industry's total revenues and music rights comprise about five per cent of the net revenue.

## OTT platforms to the rescue

In the beginning of 2021, India was still recovering from one of the hardest punches blown by the coronavirus. Despite that, the films continued to release, on OTT, if not in theatres. Although many producers and film-makers deferred the release of their films fearing losses and poor response from the audiences, a few did take the risk, and some succeeded in a big way too!

The OTT digital space in India is as vibrant as its people. Major OTT platforms that entertained people in 2021 include Amazon, Disney+ Hotstar, Netflix, Zee5, SonyLIV, Alt Balaji, Voot Select and many more.

In 2021, many films and web series, in Hindi and other regional languages, were released despite all the speculations and concerns of potential losses. It was during the last year and the year before that due to the lockdown and the dependence of people on limited available options for entertainment that OTT became hugely popular in India and worldwide.

Some of the biggest releases in 2021 included Hindi-language film *Sooryavanshi* that was released on 5 November 2021 in theatres. The Akshay Kumar-starrer was released on Diwali where he played the role of Deputy Superintendent of Police, the chief of anti-terrorism squad. The film also featured Katrina Kaif as his love interest and other big stars including Ajay Devgn and Ranveer Singh in lead roles and was directed by Rohit Shetty.

Superstar Rajinikanth-starrer and Sivatha- directed *Annaatthe* was also released on Diwali in 2021. The film is set in a village and will essay the story of a brother-sister duo where Keerthi Suresh plays the sister. Another popular actor Nayanthara has been cast in the film who will play the love interest of the male lead. The film's digital rights are owned by Sun Next of the Sun group along with Netflix.

Other films that were released in 2021 and kept the audiences engrossed included Akshay Kumar-starrer *Bell Bottom*, *Roohi*, *Mumbai Saga*, *Madam Chief Minister*, *Saina*, *Radhe, Sherni*, *Dial 100*, *Bhuj*, etc. Among the regional language films, Telugu films *Red*, *Bangaru Bullodu*, *Rang De*, *Vakeel Saab*; Tamil films *Bhoomi*, *Master*, *Sangathalaivan*, *MGR Magan*, *Jai Bhim*, etc.

The popular web series of the year gone by include *Family Man Season 2*, *Gullak Season 2*, *Bombay Begums*, *Mumbai Diaries 26/11*, *Kota Factory Season 2*, *Maharani*, *Grahan*, etc.

## The young and old stayed tuned

"I had nothing to do to kill time during the lockdown last year. And, this year, when things started to open, I still had to work from home only so would have a lot of time to spare. I can't even imagine what my life would have been if it weren't for the many films and web series that helped me keep my sanity. I am sure many people will concur with me," says Delhi-based freelance journalist Shivani Joshi.

And the entertainment industry helped not just the work-from-home professionals but also mothers who had young children. "My five-year-old son Ankush just wouldn't sit quietly in one place. He's a very active kid and with no choice to go out and play, he would get extremely restless during the lockdown period.



**Richa Chaddha in *Madam Chief Minister***

The only way I could keep my son engaged in something and not have to be with him the whole time was to show him a kids' programme on the phone," maintains Ranchi-based homemaker Archana Suman.

And, rightly so, the content that was available on television, OTT platforms and other such mediums accessible to people on their smartphones, computers and other smart devices, helped millions in getting through the COVID-laced months in the years gone by.

"The intermittent lockdown periods came as a double whammy to me as I had a pregnant wife and a septuagenarian mother at home. It was very important for the both of them to step out of the house and stay physically active...to destress basically," offers Chennai-based cloth trader T. Suraj who lives with wife and mother in a Chennai suburb. "I had to ensure they don't fall sick at this time so I culled out their favourite movies and television shows, even those they liked in the past, to keep them busy and happy!" he adds.

In the year gone by, it wasn't just the 'entertaining' content on OTT and television that helped Indians survive the lockdown. Even content that was educational and wellness / fitness-related content helped many people such as children, the elderly, those with injuries, etc. "I had a back injury that left me miserable. I realized it was due to my hectic work schedule and that I had to do something about it. I decided to get into a routine and take control of my health and life. I found content on the internet that could help me and it worked for me amazingly well," says Pune-based consultant Rajesh Kokate.

**Renuka Goel works with DraftCraft International as a Media Researcher and writes mostly on issues affecting the Fourth Estate**

## Heady highs, dismal lows

*2021 was truly a year on the boil. A spate of unseemly controversies of all hues erupted and engaged the people in an animated, and at times, ugly debate. **Nikita Shastri** outlines the prominent ones – from Kangana's incendiary statements to l'affaire Sameer Wankhede and the Fabindia episode with religious overtones, not to speak of the usual political drivel – that kept the cauldron hot.*



**Bollywood actress Kangana Ranaut continued to kick up controversies with her inflammatory statements in public and on her social media handles**

In the year gone by, several controversies rattled India at various fronts and originated both domestically and in foreign lands. India not just weathered those but came out of the hurricane of controversies smartly and with the least damage caused. Some controversies found their way up to the mainstream media while others died a natural death.

In 2021, controversies propped up in several spheres including politics, sports, films, etc. Starting from Bollywood actress Kangana Ranaut who triggered a controversy and a national debate on India earning its freedom to Narcotics Control Bureau's (NCB) police officer Sameer Wankhede who arrested Shah Rukh Khan's son Aryan Khan, controversies in India kept the media and the masses simmering.

### Controversy on India's freedom struggle

Bollywood actress Kangana Ranaut has always stayed in the middle of controversies with her inflammatory statements in public and on her social media handles. Most recently, she claimed that Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and revolutionary Bhagat Singh "got no support from Mahatma Gandhi". She also went on to mock his talisman of ahimsa by saying that offering another cheek gets you "bheekh" not freedom.

Additionally, when she made this comment, Kangana Ranaut further said that India's independence was given as alms i.e., 'bheek' to Indians and that real freedom came in 2014 with the new government coming to power. Kangana Ranaut also posted a series of posts on her Instagram account where she targeted Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi and said that "choose your heroes wisely."

The Bollywood actress stirred the controversy when she shared an old new clipping with the headline "Gandhi, others had agreed to hand over Netaji." The report shared by her claimed that Gandhi, along with Jawaharlal Nehru and Mohammed Ali Jinnah, came to an agreement with a British judge that they would hand Subhas Chandra Bose over if he were to enter the country.

### 'Correcting' history with controversy

It must be noted that Kangana Ranaut's Twitter account has been suspended because of her controversial tweets and comments. With regard to the latest controversy, Ranaut wrote, "Either you are a Gandhi fan or Netaji supporter. You can't be both... Choose and decide." That's how she captioned her post as she shared the news clipping.



She went out to post further and claimed, “Those who fought for the freedom were ‘handed over’ to their masters by those who had no courage burning/ boiling hot blood to fight their oppressors but they were power hungry and cunning.” She targeted Mahatma Gandhi and even claimed that there was evidence suggesting he wanted Bhagat Singh to be hanged. She said it’s time people know their history and their heroes.

Following the comments and posts made by Ranaut, there was a huge uproar in the country and she received a lot of flak for her comments from politicians, fellow actors, etc. There were even demands to revoke her recently-awarded Padma Shri award that was given by President Ram Nath Kovind in New Delhi.

Even Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar said comments such as those made by Kangana are made for “publicity”. “How can anyone publish this? We should not even take notice of it,” he said.

## Using religion to spark row

As Diwali approaches, every year, a host of new advertisements, sales, offers, hoardings and posters appear out of nowhere in digital and physical spaces. And, more often than not, companies and brands promote their products and services using Diwali, the festival, food and celebrations as an underlying theme.

In the year gone by, advertisements and promotional content also stirred controversies as they either hurt sentiments of a religious group or a minority group or ‘insulted’ a religious figure in some way through the ad or promotional content.

In 2021, popular ethnic wear line and fashion retail brand Fabindia landed in trouble when a commercial that the company rolled out stirred a controversy. In the advertisement released before Diwali 2021, the festival was used as a theme to showcase the company’s new collection and was called *Jashn-e-Riwaaz*. The use of Urdu names for a Hindu festival was not taken well by some groups who demanded that the ad be taken down.

## Never-ending political squabbles

The year gone by was marked by a big controversy when the Pegasus news came out. The Pegasus project expose was done by media organisations around the world and was based on a leaked database of 50,000 phone numbers that had purportedly been spied upon. These were spread across several nations including India, UAE, Morocco, etc.

In October 2021, the Supreme Court ordered a probe headed by former SC judge R V Raveendran to look into the allegations of unauthorised surveillance using the Israeli-built Pegasus spyware. The court set seven terms of reference for the committee. These include determining who procured Pegasus and whether the petitioners in the case were indeed targeted by use of the software. The Court also asked to look into the laws that justify the use of such spyware against citizens. The Apex Court asked the committee to make recommendations on a legal and policy framework on cyber security to ensure the right to privacy of citizens is protected.

Most recently, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi stoked unrest by attacking Hindutva and RSS, one more time. He claimed that BJP’s ‘hateful’ ideology was eclipsing Congress’ ‘loving, nationalistic’ ideology. Addressing Congress’ Jan Jagran Abhiyan virtually, Gandhi claimed that Congress has not



***Congress leader Rahul Gandhi stoked unrest by attacking Hindutva and RSS, while Congress veteran Salman Khurshid (right) said ISIS and Hindutva were similar***

propagated its ideology aggressively, unlike BJP. He further added that there is a difference in Hinduism and Hindutva and said, “What is the difference between Hinduism and Hindutva, can they be the same thing? If they’re the same thing, why don’t they have the same name? They’re obviously different things. Is Hinduism about beating a Sikh or a Muslim? Hindutva of course is.”

Responding to the inflammatory comments made by Gandhi, BJP I-T Chief Amit Malviya tweeted, “If you thought Salman Khurshid and Rashid Alvi were free agents, demeaning Hindus and Hindutva, here is Rahul Gandhi echoing their abhorrent claims. Supreme Court called Hindutva a way of life, Rahul calls it violent. He equates Hindu scriptures to Islamic writings to justify.”

Giving the controversy a different line of reasoning, Congress veteran Salman Khurshid said that while ISIS and Hindutva were not the same, they were similar. Khurshid was addressing reporters in Sambhal discussing the ire faced by his new book ‘Sunrise over Ayodhya’. He claimed he had not maligned any religion and was only targeting those misusing religion. It should be noted that Khurshid had kicked up a controversy comparing Hindutva to radical jihadist groups like ISIS and Boko Haram in his new book ‘Sunrise over Ayodhya’.

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## West Bengal loss vs win in UP

*In 2021, political ferment was palpably stronger. All eyes were on the two politically sensitive states of West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh. In October, voting was held for the bypolls, regarded as testing waters for the overall political mood in India, ahead of the next round of assembly elections in five states, including the ever-important state of Uttar Pradesh, says **Rohini Sharma**.*



**West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress got a convincing win from the electors, as it won all the four assembly seats, including two that it snatched from the BJP**

**T**he hype that surrounded the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) prospects in the West Bengal state elections in 2021 was phenomenal. The 2021 West Bengal Legislative Assembly election for 292 constituencies of the 294 constituencies in West Bengal was held from 27 March to 29 April 2021, in eight phases.

For the two remaining constituencies, voting was delayed and held on 30 September 2021. Ironically and in a dramatically manner, the Bharatiya Janata Party underperformed proving almost all opinion polls predicting a close race. With the BJP having been dealt a resounding defeat in the polls, it was Mamta Banerjee's loss to Suwendu Adhikari that became the moot point for national politics.

On 18 January when Mamta Banerjee announced at a rally in Nandigram that she would contest the upcoming assembly elections from Nandigram, barely a few hours later, her rival, Suwendu Adhikari declared he would defeat the ruling Chief Minister by a margin of at least 50,000 votes or quit politics.

As fate would have it, on May 2, after 17 rounds of counting, the returning officer declared Suwendu Adhikari to be

the winner. Mamta Banerjee moved High Court over recounting, calling the result a fraud. Owing to BJP's overall loss in the state election, the Nandigram seat had become a battle of prestige. And Mamta's loss shocked and how.

### The bypolls boiler

In the year gone by, the arena of politics was as tumultuous as any other year and no part of the country was spared from it. In October 2021, for example, voting was held for the bypolls, seen as testing waters for the overall political mood in India, ahead of the next round of assembly elections in five states, including the ever-important state of Uttar Pradesh.

The bypoll elections were held in three Lok Sabha seats and 30 assembly constituencies. It must be noted that Lok Sabha polls were held in Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Mandi in Himachal Pradesh and Khandwa in Madhya Pradesh, assembly bypolls were held in 30 seats across 14 states.

In what is considered one of the most important bypolls owing to the upcoming elections in several states, the results

( Continue on page 28 )



## DAMAN : A TOWN ENCLAVED IN RICH HISTORY

*The diminutive town bordering Gujarat is a big-ticket draw for its attractive trappings – delicious food, tranquil beaches, adventure sports, drop-dead landscapes and what have you – all packaged in pulsating history and compelling lineage. Manu Shrivastava traces its early dynasties, Portuguese legacy and evolution as a tourist paradise.*

***Text & Photos : Manu Shrivastava***





*The Daman Ganga River*

**P**erched on India's western border adjoining the Arabian Sea is an enclave, a treasure trove of history and a photographer's paradise – Daman, the larger unit of the Union Territory (UT) of Daman and Diu and its headquarter. Located on the western coast near South Gujarat, Daman, for its diminutive size, still happens to be a huge draw for tourists owing to its rich history, tourist-friendly activities, beautiful attractions, serene beaches and stunning scenic landscape.

The UT of Daman and Diu comprises two districts, namely Daman and Diu. Both Districts are situated on western coast of India at a distance of about 700 kms. Daman is the headquarters of the Union Territory. And, while Daman is a coastal enclave on the main land, bordering Gujarat, Diu is an island.

The city of Daman was formerly a Portuguese colony and today, the UT of Daman and Diu has some of the most beautiful beaches in the Arabian Sea. Interestingly, the river Daman Ganga divides the town into two parts Moti Daman and Nani Daman. Daman, itself, on the other hand, is separated from Gujarat by the Kolak River in the north and the Kalai River in the south.

The best time to visit Daman is in the months between September and May when the temperature and humidity are in the normal range. The small, quaint enclave is littered primarily with Portuguese history: Churches, forts, chapels, old bungalows and quarters. The town also has scenic beaches, colourful temples, picturesque bridges, delicious food options and

drinking joints offering tax-free alcohol making it a favourable holiday destination, for those in the neighbouring states.

Some of the must-visit places include The Fort of Moti Daman, The House of Bocage – Moti Daman Fort (The Poet House), Nani Daman Jetty, Church of Bom Jesus, Dominican Monastery (The Ruined Church), Moti Daman, Jampore Beach, Devka Beach, etc. Daman and the nearby areas such as Vapi, Silvassa have units of major industries also. The closest railway station is seven km away at Vapi in Gujarat. The city of Surat lies to the north and Mumbai to the south, situated approximately 160 km from Daman at the Arabian Sea coast.

## **Treasure trove of history and heritage**

The Daman Ganga River passes through middle of Daman District dividing it into two parts namely Moti Daman and Nani Daman. Daman is divided in two parts - Nani Daman (nani meaning small in Gujarati) and Moti Daman (moti meaning large in Gujarati). Contrary to their names, the Nani Daman area is the larger of the two towns and houses most of the residences, hospitals, markets, schools, etc., while the older Moti Daman area houses large Portuguese bungalows and government offices, many of which are in the Moti Daman Fort area.

The history of the Portuguese enclave of Daman dates back to second century BC when it formed part of the Mauryan empire under the reign of Emperor Ashoka. The District of Daman is known to have formed part of the country known as Lata which was one of the seven divisions of the Aparant or Konkan Vishaya between 2 nd Century B.C. to 13 th Century A.D.



***The Nani Daman Beach***

Interestingly, after the Mauryan power was weakened, the Daman district was under the rule of Satkarni I, the Satavahana ruler in the end of 2nd Century B.C and later during the 1st Century A.D. Daman was ruled by the Kshaharatas who were the provincial governors i.e., Kshatrapas under the Kushana emperors.

## **Multiple dynasties render vibrance**

The region continued to be ruled by several other dynasties. These included Satkarni who during A.D. 125 drove away the Kshaharatas and ruled for a short time before the Kshaharatas of Ujjain re-conquered the district by about A.D. 150 from the Satavahana ruler Satakarni and Daman District again passed under the rule of Kshaharatas of Ujjain till A.D. 249. After the Kshatrapas, Daman was ruled by the Abhir Kings till A.D. 416 followed by the rule of Traikutakas during the 5 th Century A.D.

In a few years, the power of the Traikutaka was destroyed by that of the Vakataka King Harishena in A.D. 500. Daman then was ruled by the Kalachuris of Mahishmati King Krishnaraja and his successors till A.D. 609. Later, by 609 A.D., King Mangales of Chalukyas of Badami routed out the last king Budharaja of Kalachuris – their descendants known as Lata or Navasari Chalukyas ruled from Navasari, modern-day Navasari in Gujarat state, on the bank of the river Purna to the north of Daman till A.D. 671.



***Two sanitation workers taking a break at a Nani Daman Beach***



***A tourist capturing the sunset from the St Jerome Fort***

They ruled independently as feudatories of the Badami Chalukyas of the Deccan. For the following 800 years or so, Daman was ruled by several Hindu kings and chieftains before finally falling to the Mughals. Mahmud Shah Begada, Sultan of Gujarat, conquered fort Parnera on Par river and port of Daman and levied tribute from Jagatshah in 1465. Naranshah who succeeded Jagatshah ruled from A.D. 1470 to 1500 and Dharmshah II from 1500 to 1531.

## **The Portuguese influence**

The Portuguese colonisation of Daman began when Daman was acquired by the Portuguese from the Shah of Gujarat. The Portuguese noticed the port of Daman for the first time in 1523 and attacked it several times before finally taking over in 1559 by means of a treaty with the Shah of Gujarat, Bahadur Shah of Gujarat. So, the 16 th century marked the beginning of the Portuguese rule in Daman. The Portuguese went on to rule the region for more than 400 years when, eventually, in 1961 the Indian armed forces annexed the district and the Union Territory was formed.

While Bahadur was fighting the Mughals in Mandu, a strong Portuguese fleet led by Nuno da Cunha sailed from Bombai (now Mumbai) and on 7 February 1531 it neared Shiyal Bet island, capturing it. Eventually, Gujarat fell and Bahadur Shah was forced to court the Portuguese. He signed a treaty that gave the Portuguese the power to control the city of Bassein (Vasai), as well as its territories, islands and seas which included Daman and Bombay islands too.

Similar to the administrative division in European Portugal, Daman district (Distrito de Damão) was established as an administrative division of the Portuguese State of India (Estado da Índia) in the first half of the 19 th century – comprising the Portuguese territories of Daman, Dadra and Nagar Haveli. The district was divided in the two municipalities of Daman and Nagar Haveli, which were further subdivided into civil parishes.

In 1961, after liberation from the Portuguese, Daman and Diu became a part of the Union Territory of Goa, Daman and Diu first and later, in 1987, became the UT of Daman and Diu after Goa became a state. An eclectic mix of cultures and traditions, every aspect of the lives and existence of the people of Daman is unique, rendering the many traits it acquired during multiple rules over centuries. This can be seen in the language, food, architecture, culture and the traditions of the people of Daman.

## **Forts, big and small**

Daman is divided into two parts – Moti Daman (translating to bigger Daman, in Gujarati language) and Nani Daman (translating to smaller Daman, in Gujarati language). There are two big forts in the enclave that have been named based on the part of Daman they are located in i.e., Moti Daman Fort and Nani Daman Fort.

The Moti Daman Fort is reminiscent of the colonial past of the zone. The name, Moti Daman, which means bigger fort, is a misnomer as this fort is the smaller of the two forts. Inside the fort there is the Pergola garden with a rock monument in the centre. The entire fort area is a well-planned structure that encompasses well-planned roads and lanes, side cafes, mini gardens, seating areas and flowering trees.

A major attraction, the Moti Daman Fort is situated at the confluence where Daman Ganga meets the Arabian Sea. It houses several government offices in buildings and structures that have been coloured in splendid hues. The best feature about the Moti Daman Fort is the Light House that renders the zone a unique character. Also a famous landmark, the light house is situated within the Fort and commands a magnificent view of the Nani Daman Fort and Daman Ganga river.

Tourists even locals throng the zone in the evenings as the sunset view from the tower is breath-taking and memorable. Built by the Portuguese towards the end of 16 th century for





***The cross at St Jerome Fort***

their ships that would arrive in the port of Daman, it lends wondrous views and is a photographer's delight.

The other fort, Nani Daman Fort, also known as St. Jerome Fort, is a beautiful Portuguese fort standing tall next to Nani Daman beach. Also situated on the Daman Ganga river, to the north of it, the view from this fort is spectacular especially at the time of sunset, as the rays of the setting sun gloss over the sparkling waters of the Arabian Sea. The Nani Daman Fort encircles an area of 12,250 sq. meters. The imposing church of 'Our Lady of the Sea' is the principal building within the fort.

## **Serene churches and colourful temples**

Built in 1672, the fort has high stone walls, grand gateways facing the river. The smaller of the two forts, Nani Daman Fort's high stone walls with three bastions and two gateways face the river with a huge statue of St. Jerome and two magnanimous human figures. Born Eusebius Hieronymus Sophronius, St. Jerome was the most scholarly of the Fathers of the Western Church. He was born circa 342 in a small town at the head of the Adriatic called Stridonius.

The Catholic Church happens to be one of the earliest seats of office. It is marked by an intricate altar with a beautiful paneling. And huge ramparts that offer a splendid view of the nearby fish market and fishing boats. The fort also offers a



***Local tribals gather in shade to discuss affairs on the Daman Beach***



*Individual flags mark fishing boats and help identification on river Daman Ganga*



*The bridge on Daman Ganga and commuters plying across*

striking view of a Jain temple to the north whose inside walls are covered with murals dating back to the 18 th century. These murals are glassed-over and depict the austere life of Mahavir who was born in 599 B.C. and lived a life of honesty, truthfulness and chastity.

The Cathedral of Bom Jesus is one of the most important catholic monuments in Daman built by the Portuguese. Built in 1603, it is an exquisite example of Portuguese architecture and revered by the local Catholics. The Dominican Monastery was once a Catholic monastery that lies now in ruins and was also a place of worship. It was once a place for Catholic scholars who came from all over for religious studies.

### **Beautiful beaches and seafood**

The main specialty of Daman is the sea food that is available in most of the food outlets and restaurants there. Lobster, fish and crabs are the most famous delicacies for the sea- food lovers besides the famous Jetty Rolls that are very popular among the locals. The rolls are made with a variety of fillings wrapped in flat breads. Along the Daman coastline, local fishermen can be seen fixing their boats, fishing nets, etc. Another common sight is fish left to dry on strings under the sun.

There are two popular beaches in Daman - Jampore Beach and Devka Beach besides the locals' favourite Nani Daman beach. Jampore is a pristine, palm-lined beach in the Moti Daman area and is extremely popular among tourists who come for adventure activities and beach sports such as





*A temple where local fishermen pray to catch a good yield*



*A chowk on Nani Daman*



*A fishing trawler readies for a trip to sea on Daman Ganga*

parasailing, camel and horse rides, car racing and a panoramic view of the sea. The beach also has a unique mien and the sand is actually blackish in colour.

Devka beach, on the other hand, has many resorts and water parks making it an ideal place for families looking for some fun and adventure with children and the elderly. It has a long, uninterrupted shoreline, peaceful environs and delicious food and exotic drinks served by hotels lining the beach.





*A colourful fishing vessel greets visitors on the road to Daman*

## An interesting experience

Daman has something for everyone – from delicious food to adventure sports to gorgeous structures for history lovers. Daman has several interesting places to visit for the quintessential tourist. The locals in Daman speak Gujarati and a Portuguese-based creole language. The best part about visiting Daman is its close proximity to big cities and well- connected transportation services.

Situated approximately 180 kms from Mumbai, it take three hours to reach Daman by road from Mumbai. Other options are taking the train and the nearest railway station is Vapi that is situated 13 kms from Daman, on Western Railway between Mumbai and Surat. Daman is a world in itself. Spread over an area of 72 sq km the population is a meagre 1,91,173 persons (2011 Census).

A little ahead of Daman, is Silvassa which is a city and

municipality and the headquarters of Dadra and Nagar Haveli. Today, it's the largest city in Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu. The Tribal Museum at Silvassa is a must- visit place for history-lovers. The museum is an attempt to preserve and portray the rich heritage of tribal culture and civilisation of the region. The museum exhibits items used by the tribal people such as ornaments, musical instruments, fishing and hunting gadgets, agricultural and household articles and other tools and items that help tourists get an insight into the lives of the indigenous people.

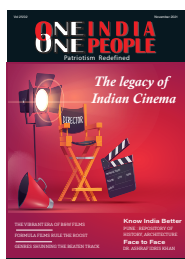


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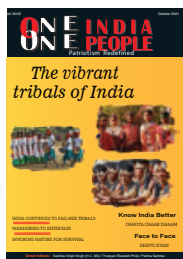
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November 2021



October 2021



September 2021



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## ***“You evolve with hands-on experience”***



*Prashant Vankore*

A passionate microbiologist and a You Tube star, **Prashant Vankore** is also a tireless social worker running health camps in urban and rural areas. In a freewheeling interview, he tells **A. Radhakrishnan** that his is a demanding work where each day offers a new learning curve and how striking a good work-life balance is essential.

### **What made you choose to become a microbiologist? What is its scope and your experience and background?**

Right from my 12th grade, I was inclined towards virology and bacteriology. Thanks to some really amazing professors, I fell in love with the subject.

For the past 18 years, I am operating a clinical lab in Katraj, Pune, monitoring people's health. I also work towards creating social health awareness.

Microbiology offers a range of career opportunities but it depends on the orientation of a person as to what he/she would like to work on. Sectors include pharmaceutical industries, diagnostics centres, healthcare setups, water management plants, research lab, etc.

### **What hard and soft skills should a clinical laboratory technologist possess?**

One should be able to handle responsibilities from collecting and processing the body fluid samples to providing accurate and on-time reports to the patient. It also includes tackling all the collection centres, managing the staff, keeping the records of tests done, ensuring stock does not run out, etc.

One needs to communicate properly to understand patient's needs, meet their requirements and satisfy them.

### **Is the demand for such technologists increasing due to advancement in the field of diagnostics and medical technology?**

The demand is increasing as society collectively is getting more health-conscious and aware, especially after the pandemic. Also diagnosis of various diseases have evolved over time, making the process more accurate and feasible.

### **How do they play an important role in the detection and diagnosis of various diseases?**

Actually there is a big difference between detection and diagnosis while running a particular test. A technologist essentially is only allowed to interpret the readings he receives from the test run on the machines. For diagnosis, a pathologist is required to correlate the results of the tests with patients' clinical history and current situations. So factually speaking, the job of a technologist is collecting, preserving, processing and providing results of the samples received.

### **What sets your Centre apart from others? Your connection with Thyrocare?**

We try to understand wholly the needs and priorities of our clients. We have many back and forth conversations before collection, to provide the level of service expected from us. Also we are extremely conscientious about the commitments we make.

We act as a collection centre for Thyrocare and provide reports, particularly for those clients who insist on Thyrocare lab reports.

### **What is your approach to working with large sets of data?**

All the data is saved through a software, making it more efficient for us.

### **Share your experience consulting with pathologists for diagnostic purposes.**

The pathologist and medical lab technologist do have conflicts but both sides when handling results, make sure they come up with the best possible way to work collectively. In many cases consulting pathologists about the reading we get becomes necessary in



order to give an accurate analysis. So it is a good mix of all kind of experiences.

#### **How did you handle a situation when you had to overcome an obstacle in a lab setting?**

You have to start with whatever knowledge and learn as you go. You learn to handle obstacles in the journey as there are no specific rule books. My method is simple. You start, run for a while, fall, then analyse the reason of the fall and start again. This makes you better and faster.

#### **What are the factors to keep in mind when performing duties?**

We need to be mindful right from the point of collecting client data to providing them with accurate, prompt and precise results. Missing even a small point can be a blunder.

We need to be cautious about our clients and our safety. The

samples need to be mobilised keeping the standard practices in mind and preserving them until they are run on our machines in an adequate way.

#### **What is your greatest strength and biggest fear about being a medical lab technologist?**

My biggest strength is the opportunity I get to serve people, the joy of doing what I love. The fear I nurse is unwittingly causing harm to any client.

#### **Do you love being in the laboratory? How much do you learn about biology and patient?**

Yes of course I learn more and more every day. We can understand the essence of biology not just through books but by getting hands-on experience. During our college days we learnt through books that a person with haemoglobin less than 4 is in extremely severe condition and is bed-ridden. But we see cases where individuals seem to be completely fine at even such low levels.

It is a phenomenon only physicians can explain but there are also cases where we see diabetics with low platelet.

#### **In a scenario where your laboratory finds contamination, what troubleshooting step would you take?**

Firstly, every lab conducts hourly sanitization and disposes biomedical waste. In case of a contamination we have to first inform the government authorities and the localities in the vicinity. Then the isolation of the staff members and proper guidance given by the physicians is to be followed with consultations. The labs should also be sealed for a certain period of time and sanitization around it and in the neighborhood done on regular basis.

#### **How would you handle testing 100 samples?**

This is not a tedious job any more, thanks to the technological advancement. There are machines which can perform more than thousand tests every day. We can also provide results in very short time.

#### **Are you comfortable performing venipunctures?**

Yes, it has become comfortable with the years of prick, practice and experience! shown by the patient also counts .

#### **How do you learn how to assess for a good vein and hold a patient's loose skin taut to help observe for a vein?**

To observe and find the right point to prick. Just searching visible veins won't work. We have to touch and sense if it is the right point to prick.

#### **Has there ever been a time that you had difficulty drawing blood from a patient, and if so, how did you handle that situation? How do you deal with elderly patients?**

I do face some cases but at such times we try to convince patients that we may need to prick more than once as their veins are tricky to find. In most cases patients are cooperative. As for elderly people we have to be extra cautious since their veins are slippery.

#### **How can the patient be sure his/her reports are factual?**

Every sample that we collect has a unique barcode. It ensures all samples are processed in order and not one is misplaced. There is no chance of any mix-ups. As for accuracy, all reports we provide are from government-approved and NABL certified labs, which is a symbol of quality.



which is a symbol of quality.

The machines and devices we use need to be calibrated daily which enable us to make factually correct reports.

**Equipment in medical laboratory have evolved. How do you keep up with the latest innovations?**

The advances in the field are remarkable, Every time there is a Major

change or upgradation, we have to go through an organised training course provided by the companies.

**Working in a high-stress field, do you have work-life balance? How do you find time to do social service and run a YouTube account?**

Initially, it was tough to strike work-life balance as it was a small business and small team. With time we could build up a great team who helped us delegate our tasks. Currently all the internal lab management is handled by my wife Meenakshi. The rest is looked after by me. It leaves us time for social activities.

And about my YouTube channel, I felt the need to have social media presence to propagate our work and business.

**What advice would you give others who are considering pursuing this career?**

My advice to the aspiring would be to think, plan and chart a well-defined roadmap on team management and raising capital.

Being a capital-intrinsic business, it ideally requires a team of 8 to



10. The person should have enough capital for at least continuing without profits for a year. I observe that many generally start, merely looking at the revenues they can generate and shut down in a year or less, the problem being their lack of runway capital or a mediocre team.

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



( Continue from page 16 )



**Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's government approach regarding law and order in the state has been received well by the electorate**

were closely watched. BJP and its allies won 14 assembly seats while the Congress bagged eight out of 29 seats in the latest round of bypolls.

On the other hand, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress got a convincing win, from the electors, as it won all the four assembly seats, including two that it snatched from the BJP, with a staggering 75.02 per cent vote share.

So, the results that came from 13 states bypoll elections were a mixed bag for the BJP as well as the other parties like Congress. In fact, Congress made gains in Rajasthan, Karnataka and Himachal Pradesh and made losses in Assam, Meghalaya and Madhya Pradesh. The final tally looked like this - BJP got seven assembly seats while its allies JD(U) won two (Bihar), United Peoples' Party Liberal - two (Assam), MNF -one (Mizoram) and NPP - two (Meghalaya).

## Covid-19 vaccination politics

Any report on the year gone by is incomplete without tackling the effect of Covid-19 on the situation in question. The politics over India's handling of the Covid- 19 crisis and later the Covid-19 vaccination programme existed and lasted for the most part of the crisis itself.

The world's largest vaccine producer, India was at the centre of the global vaccine diplomacy game at the peak of the crisis. In January 2021, at the annual Davos meeting, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said, "While two India-made vaccines have already been introduced to the world, many more vaccines will be made available from India."

India was a key player of the UN-backed Covax programme, which was supposed to provide 2 billion vaccine doses to low- and middle-income countries. In January 2021, PM Narendra Modi announced that India would export its two vaccines free of cost to Mongolia, Oman, Myanmar, Philippines, Bahrain, Maldives, Mauritius, Bhutan, Afghanistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Seychelles, as "a goodwill gesture."

Later, in the framework of the 'Vaccine Maitri' (Vaccine Friendship) initiative, India exported 64.4 million doses of vaccines, including 35.7 million on a commercial basis, 18.2 million through the Covax programme and 10.4 million as donations. India's vaccination drive started in January 2021, by the beginning of April 2021 120 million people had been vaccinated in India. But, by October 2021, India had already achieved the 100-crore vaccination milestone.

## All eyes on Uttar Pradesh

Uttar Pradesh is the most populous and fourth largest state in India which is why elections in the state have been very crucial and closely-watched by one and all. The state is getting ready for the assembly elections in 2022. In the year gone by, all decisions, actions and promises made by the ruling party and the opposition parties in the state were done keeping the upcoming elections in mind. BJP's strategy in UP is under scrutiny especially after the loss in West Bengal.

In November 2021, the state government announced cuts in fuel prices and extended the free ration scheme in the state till Holi that will be in March 2022. According to political experts and pre-election surveys, the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party is all set to retain Uttar Pradesh with a comfortable majority in the upcoming assembly elections.

As per the projections, BJP is projected to win 239-245 of the 403 seats, while the Samajwadi Party (SP) is touted to finish as a distant second with 119-125 seats. The Bahujan Samajwadi Party (BSP) is expected to lose a major chunk of its votes to the other two parties, as per the survey.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's government approach regarding law and order in the state has been received well by the electorate. Additionally, his firm approach towards handling the forced conversion activities in the state.

## The 'medical oxygen' politics

In April-May 2021, amid the subsequent Covid-19 wave, India's capital Delhi was reportedly hit by an unprecedented medical oxygen crisis. Oxygen was in high demand to treat critical COVID-19 positive patients. While several Covid-19 patients had died waiting for beds with oxygen support, a few individuals alleged that their kin died inside hospitals due to oxygen shortage.

The Delhi government cried shortage of oxygen owing to inadequate allocation and supply by the central government. Later, however, it was revealed that there was no shortage. In a communications sent by the Delhi government to the Centre, the city administration projected a demand for 700 MT per day till 28 April and revised its demand to 976 MT 29 April. The government in the centre had already begun to increase Delhi's quota of oxygen on a piecemeal basis from 21 April.

In June 2021, an interim report by a Supreme Court-appointed audit team revealed that the oxygen crisis in Delhi was a hoax. The state government had artificially created an exaggerated demand of medical oxygen – by four times between 25 April and 10 May during the second wave of Covid-19.

**Rohini Sharma 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**

## Indian stamp on global issues

*From Tokyo Olympics, Paralympics to climate change meet, not to speak of PM Modi's approval as top world leader and India's say on world issues, the country has occupied the high pedal, points out **Vidya Prakash**. She says India's assertion in the UN fora is a strong indication that it is making its presence felt and how!*



**PM Narendra Modi was ranked as the most approved world leader by American research firm Morning Consult**

In 2021, India made its presence felt globally, in more ways than one. In Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics 2021 the Indian contingent broke several records; in international conferences and meetings India became a strong and unflinching variable in global equations; India also struck several successful strategic partnerships with nations, groups of nations and other entities to promote trade and commerce and defence activities and partnerships; and, India also dictated its terms firmly at global conventions such as the recently-concluded United Nations conference on climate change, the COP26.

Most importantly, during the Covid-19 vaccination diplomacy, India stood its ground and did what was the best for its people and not giving into the demands of the developed world. There is no doubt about the fact that PM Modi is one of the most popular world leaders of all times. Everywhere he goes, he leaves a mark of the true essence of India and what the country stands for.

In November 2021 came a pleasant surprise when Prime Minister Narendra Modi was declared as the having topped the 'Global Leader Approval Tracker' put out by American research firm Morning Consult, with the highest percentage of ratings.

### Prime Minister leading the way

According to the data put out by the firm, PM Modi was ranked as the most approved world leader with a score of 70 per cent, followed by Mexico President López Obrador at 66 per cent and Italy Prime Minister Mario Draghi at 58 per cent. Other world leaders like Chancellor of Germany Angela Merkel received 54 per cent ratings, Australia PM Scott Morrison 47 per cent, US President Joe Biden 44 per cent and Canada PM Justin Trudeau 43 per cent.

The rating done by the American research firm Morning Consult stated that as of November 4, 2021, 70 per cent of average Indians (sample representative of the literate population) approved Prime Minister Modi while only 24 per cent disapproved of him. When it comes to US President Joe Biden, only 44 per cent approved of him while 48 per cent disapproved of him.

It must be noted that this is not the first time that PM Modi has topped the ratings of the American research firm. In January 2021, Morning Consult rated Prime Minister Narendra Modi as the 'Most Popular Head of Government' and in September 2021, PM Modi was ranked the most approved world leader by the firm among 13 world leaders, with a



percentage of 70 per cent.

After receiving the news of PM Modi's approval ratings, several Union Ministers and senior party leaders expressed their happiness and pride on social media. Uttar Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya, on the other hand, said PM Modi is the most influential powerful popular and accepted leader of the world. He even acknowledged that after making it to the top 10 list of most popular world leaders for three consecutive years, the Prime Minister has now been established at the first position.

On PM Modi becoming the 'world's most popular leader' again with the highest Global Approval Rating, Home Minister Amit Shah said it is the result of people's faith in the hardworking and visionary leadership of PM Modi to realise the resolve of 'Antyodaya' and Aatmanirbhar Bharat.

## Big win for Indians abroad

In 2021, the month of November marked another moment of pride, for India and Indians, when a new bill was introduced in the US Congress requesting Diwali to be made a federal holiday in the United States of America. The introduction of the bill came as good news to millions of Indian workers and students residing in the US presently.

While introducing the bill, American Congresswoman Carolyn B Mahoney announced this would make Diwali, which is one of the biggest and most notable festivals in India, a nationally recognised federal holiday in the US. Later, Democrat Congresswoman from New York joined with Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi, Congressman Gregory Meeks Chair of the House Foreign Affairs Committee to announce the introduction of the Deepavali Day Act.

Speaking on the occasion, Maloney said, "I want to start by wishing a Happy Diwali to all those celebrating around the world this week as the time of reflection and renewal that marks the Hindu New Year comes to a close. This beautiful festival celebrates lightness over darkness, goodness over evil, and knowledge over ignorance. My bill today recognises the importance of this beautiful holiday and gives it the respect and acknowledgement it deserves."

## India voice in foreign nations increases

Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi said, "I am proud to join Chairwoman Maloney and our colleagues in introducing this legislation to establish Diwali as a federal holiday in recognition of its importance to our nation's more than three million Americans of Indian descent, including Hindus, Sikhs and Jains. The meaning of this legislation extends beyond honouring the significance of Diwali to the Indian- American community to acknowledging the contributions of Indian-Americans to our nation," added Krishnamoorthi.

Rep Meeks also addressed the lawmakers and said, "I am proud to support Congresswoman Maloney's resolution to make Diwali a federal holiday. The United States of America is about celebrating the different cultures that make us one. I understand the importance of the festival of lights and hope we can soon make this a reality for members of the Indian diaspora in my district and Indian Americans all over the country."

Representative Ro Khanna also spoke and said, "Every year, I join more than six million Americans in celebrating Diwali, a festival of lights, signifying the victory of light over darkness. I am proud to co- sponsor this bill with Representative Maloney to



**American Congresswoman Carolyn B Mahoney introduced a new bill requesting Indian festival Diwali to be made a federal holiday in USA**

recognise Diwali as a federal holiday and know how meaningful this will be for many families across the country."If the bill gets approval, Diwali would be observed as a holiday in federal institutions with significant populations that celebrate Diwali.

"I urge the United States Congress and Senate to pass this landmark legislation allowing all Americans and future generations to come to be able to observe this important holiday as it signifies the democratic values of light and truth triumphing over darkness and untruth as well as strengthening the bonds between the citizenry, families and communities across our nation," said Dr Sumita Sen Gupta, Author, Educator, and Community Leader in New York.

## Multiple wins at UN fora

In the year gone by, India successfully asserted itself at various global conferences and meetings such as G20, BRICS, etc. and particularly the United Nations fora including the conference on climate change i.e., COP26 at Glasgow, United Nations Security Council and more.

India, in August 2021, assumed the presidency of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). At the time, Russia congratulated and said it is "truly impressed" with the move while France said it is "committed to working with India on strategic issues that include maritime security and counter-terrorism."

In the UN conference on climate change, COP26, the world was looking up to India. India has been a frontrunner when it comes to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and in terms of achieving the climate goals. COP26 was an important event as, this year, was the first time that a phase-out of coal had been explicitly mentioned in any decision of the climate change meetings. Not only that, it was also seen as one of the progressive elements in the Glasgow outcome.

In April 2021, US Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry had said, "India's global leadership has been critical across a range of issues including delivering Covid-19 vaccines to the world. I'm particularly grateful that India is getting the job done on climate. You're indisputably a world leader already in the deployment of renewable energy."

**Vidya Prakash 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**



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## The death knell for puppetry?

Once cherished and a high form of art, Puppetry is now a fading art. Award winning filmmaker Lipika Singh Darai's poignant documentary "Backstage" captures the essence of the life & times of the art that thrived in Odisha and shows that its performers today are last of the few left, after which, it will in all probability vanish. **Shoma A. Chatterji** provides an insight.



Odisha puppeteer Abhay Singh in Backstage

Puppetry is one of the once-popular folk-art performances in the country. It is a high form of art that is slowly dying in an era where cinema and other forms of digital puppetry is one of the once-popular folk-art performances in the country. It is a high form of art that is slowly dying in an era where cinema and other forms of digital entertainment have made heavy inroads across the rural-urban divide. Is it a threatened form of creative art? Yes, it is, according to Lipika Singh Darai, a National Award-winning filmmaker who passed out of the FTII, Pune specialising in sound.

She has now made a long documentary called Backstage selected for screening at the IFFI in Goa this year. It is also a part of the World Premiere: 21 st August 2021 at the 39 th Asolo Ast Film Festival, Italy, Feature Competition, then in October 2021 at the: 16 th Tasveer South Asian Film festival, US, followed by the 19 th Yunlin International Puppet theatre Festival, Taiwan in October 21 and then at the 2 nd Nila International Folklore Film Festival, India.

Backstage portrays the lives and times of puppeteers of Odisha. It documents four forms of puppetry; the glove, the string, the rod and the shadow, now being performed by their

Lipika Singh Darai has received four National Film Awards in various capacities between 2012 and 2017. While her feature documentary "Some Stories Around Witches" depicts the humanitarian crisis around witch- hunting cases, her short fiction "The Waterfall" focuses on people's struggle to protect a dying waterfall from rapid mining activities which has brought in ecological devastation in one of the highly bio-diverse forests in Odisha.

One evening, after watching a cultural event focusing on dying art forms, the filmmaker got to know from a senior journalist, Shyamhari Chakra, that "in her state Odisha there is an old puppeteer who has a few hundred puppets and after him, there might be no one to manipulate the puppets." The curiosity to meet the puppeteer was the beginning of a journey in which the film germinated. In the process of making the film, she documented performances by probably the last generation performers; listened to dreams at the end of their journeys; met puppeteers who had lost their puppets and saw puppets without their masters.

Lipika Singh Darai has received four National Film Awards in various capacities between 2012 and 2017. While



documenting the work and lives of folk artists, recording traditional songs of her native Ho tribe Adivasi community and following the voice of resistance. Her films are characterised by a strong personal narrative style.

Says Darai, “Technically, backstage alludes to the area in a theatre or a performing space not visible to the audience where the performers prepare. A folk artist like a puppeteer for whom the art form and life are so interweaved that it feels as if life itself is the backstage where the artist prepares. As I slowly built the narrative, the name seemed more justified than ever.”

Even as the Films Division production provides portraits of four sets of puppeteers and their individual concerns, Darai poses other questions. How do age-old folk traditions survive? Can a performance in the present day truly be called authentic, especially since the puppeteers’ tweak with the storylines and the design of the puppets? Does the art form lose its purity when it is adopted, or sometimes appropriated, by other castes and communities?

The film has been entirely shot in Odisha in five districts; Glove Puppets in Kendrapada, Rod puppet in Keonjhar, Shadow Puppet in Anugul, string puppets or marionettes in Ganjam and Raam Leela in Phulbani district. There were five districts to cover, while having our base in Bhubaneswar, the capital city of Odisha, and a schedule on road connecting all the districts that added up to around 1500 km. In 2012 the cinematographer of the film Indraneel Lahiri got a research fund from National Folklore Support Centre Chennai, to pursue a research and documentation work on these four forms of puppetry in Odisha.

Reminiscing about her field work, Darai says, “I experienced one and half year of nuanced field study. During this, we got space to build warm bond with all the puppeteers featured in the film. I and my cinematographer were the primary people to visualise this project. Initially, having all the puppeteers on board for a film and materialise it in a state like Odisha seemed quite challenging. End of 2016 when I got a fund from Films Division and started preparing to film, by then I had known all the artists for the last many years occasionally meeting them in some festivals or programmes and keeping in touch with them. So there were no such difficulties while interviewing as those would only be like our regular conversations. If you notice, the earlier old footage of the film would look more like interviews and in the later part the interviews would come across as parts of conversations. It was during the months of summer in Odisha when we got everyone on board along with the generous time from the rod Puppeteer Maguni Charan Kuanr who was recovering from an accident. It was his spirit and constant support which kept us motivated.”

Among other puppeteers she met are - Rabi Das an old shadow puppeteer featured in the film but had stopped performing since long as the team could not keep up with the challenges it faced. There were many other traditional shadow puppeteers living in nearby villages who survived under the king’s patronage for decades but eventually had to stop performing.



**National Award-winning filmmaker Lipika Singh Darai**

Shadow puppetry, also known as Ravan Chhaya in Odisha, came to the limelight when Kathinanda Das, a traditional puppeteer was awarded by the President of India in 1979. Kathinanda’s team then in need of puppets bought the puppets from Rabi Das’s elder for a few hundred rupees. In the film they refer to it as ‘stealing’ and correct it too by saying they sold it out of compulsion for monetary needs. Kathinanda’s team, which comprised of a few other villagers, performed in bigger cities and became popular. The team eventually got the status of only traditional shadow puppetry troupe from Odisha.

“The research on puppetry started in 2013 and the film germinated in the process. We started looking for funding in 2014, got it by 2017 and eventually shot the film when time permitted. It includes a seven-day pre-shoot-final-recce and fourteen-day main schedule with a professional film crew. The film was almost ready by 2019 but because of the pandemic the release got delayed. The film has important footage from the research time which also extends the span of the film,” says Lipika.

In summing up the film and her learning from it, Lipika says, “if we talk about the folk-art forms of India, we might find echoes of the same story. The story of how an art form has struggled or is struggling for its life. Deeply affected by gentrification and a shift in the audience’s priorities, many old art forms have disappeared from popular memory or have died. A new generation which has no time for learning its history, how does one engage with something which is losing its relevance day by day? In the film I try to engage with traditional puppeteers and their art form. I try to capture the time, unfold the past and find a space to engage with it.”



**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.**

## Home is where the Heart is

*'Borderlands' dwells on the lives of people forcibly settled in areas either close to the border of a neighbouring country or between two borders of two neighbouring countries. It unfolds through the lives of four people living away from their native lands, trying to eke out a livelihood and adjust to the changed paradigms.* **Shoma A . Chatterji** reviews.



*A shot from Samarth Mahajan's documentary film Borderlands*

**T**o *Live in the Borderlands* by Gloria Anzaldua is a complex, moving poem that investigates identity, heritage, and self-worth in the modern world. At the beginning of the poem, the poet starts by using the line that later became the title. She lists out words someone of mixed-race might be called.

But Samarth Mahajan's 67-minute documentary *Borderlands* does not deal with people of mixed race but explores the lives of people who are forcibly settled in areas either very close to the border of a neighbouring country or between two borders of two neighbouring countries. This unfolds through the lives of four people spread across the film, living away from their native lands and trying to eke out a bare livelihood and adjust to the changed paradigms of their lives.

The film is an in-depth journey of the director and his entire team through these borderlands and makes it a film not about places or spaces but about the people involved in this displacement which they did not desire but no one was asking! The film is produced by All Things Small and Camera and Shorts. It covers features five languages, and six locations — Imphal, Nargaon, Kolkata, Birgunj, Dinanagar and Jodhpur.

The film is deeply personal too. Mahajan was born and spent the first 17 years of his life in Dinanagar — a town in Punjab bordering Pakistan. His mother, Rekha, is also part of the film who says she too is relocated in Dinanagar and we are witness to a mother-son reunion where they share realities they never shared before. Rekha tells her son Samarth how she was terrified when terrorism struck and she had nightmares, refused to go to film theatres and felt shaky till her husband came back from a movie. She says she would never have been able to visit the Atari border had her son not taken her there for the shoot. We see her slowly joining the dance along with the gathered crowds with the Indian flag painted on her cheeks. These are some happy moments in an otherwise sad film filled with the tragedy of forced migration.

Mahajan very effectively captures on camera the characters peopling his film who have never faced a movie camera before and yet makes them talk about the radical changes in their lives. Noor is shown talking about her life as a traffic victim and the torture she faced as a virtual prisoner of those who had trafficked her. She managed to rise above her captive identity, learnt to play the ukulele, and formed a music band. The song of this band "aami tomaye bhalobashi" is used



**Another shot from the film *Borderlands***

to close the film on an optimistic note. Noor is often captured with her back to the camera to protect her privacy. She now lives in Kolkata and performs with her band at functions. We do not see her face clearly. Music is used very imaginatively through the film, placed exactly where wanted. The film begins with the melody of a Bengali folk number to establish the mood of the film.

Kavita is a young girl wearing a pink salwar kameez as uniform from Birgunj in Nepal works with an NGO appointed to check infiltration of young girls trafficked into India at one of the borders. She checks the documents of those passing through and if she smells anything suspicious, she at once notifies the police through telephone. She appears to be a very confident girl but does not wear her confidence on her kurta though she confesses that she has a disability in her leg with a nonchalance derived from her confidence.

Deepa, with who the director opens the film after the credit titles are over, is the most confident among all. She is from Pakistan and has now migrated to a border town in Rajasthan where she failed to get admission in a high school because she studied in Urdu and the school demanded either English or Hindi which she did not know. Then, she learnt it and went back to join school. She shows an all-purpose rough book to the interviewer filled with a drawing and some farewell notes from her best friend. On another page, she has written down the names of the bones in the human body beginning from the head down to the nether regions and happily offers to quote them from memory. "I want to realise my dreams in life" she says and we see her groping for hope and happiness as she cooks on the roadside and shares her chores with her mother where they live in a shelter made for these displaced people. She adds that she finds herself free to move around alone, wear what she wishes to wear and more freedom than she had in Pakistan.

Deepa wants to be a nurse and midwife and when she wishes to rehearse trying to treat a pregnant woman, a female crew member pretends to be her patient and approaches her for an examination along with another male member of the team.

But the 'drama' turns into a comic act as the "patient" begins to laugh and the other two join her. These warm moments invest the film with a spirit of cheer though the subject spills over with the sadness of 'rootless' people who did not choose to be so.

Interestingly, Surajkanta is the sole male who features among the characters Mahajan discovered among the people belonging to the borders trapped between two countries, one to which they once belonged and one in which they are struggling to create their identity once again. He is a filmmaker from Imphal in Manipur. He laments that his film on the militancy in Manipur offering the perspective of both sides which led to his arrest before even watching the film. But he invited the CM to at least watch the film once and then decide which solved his problem. The CM liked his film and his arrest was waived.

*Borderlands* is Samarth's second feature documentary, his first, *The Unreserved*, on passengers travelling in the general compartment of the Indian Railways, won him a National Award. Samarth's journey to filmmaking was as arduous, through the portals of IIT- Kharagpur, a corporate job and a post-graduate degree in the liberal arts. "I had made an ad film when in college and ended up getting addicted to filmmaking. I like to step away from the mainstream and tell non-fiction, invisible stories."

Work on the documentary began in October 2018 and finished in March 2021 with a core crew comprising Samarth, associate director Nupur Agrawal and cinematographer Omkar Divekar. "We had local associate directors to help us converse in Bengali, Nepali and Manipuri," says Samarth, "the project was partly crowd-funded with one of the largest campaigns for an Indian film."

Dhauli, a Bengali housewife who is from Bangladesh says that she has never met her natal family after she got married and migrated to Nargaon in West Bengal close to Kolkata. "I got married more than 15 years ago. I heard my mother had given birth to a little sister but I could never see her as I cannot visit my home country now, it being across the border on the other side." Later, when the film crew visits her again, she happily shares her experience of meeting her natal family on Milan Mela where Bangladeshis come to meet their family in India across the barbed wire fencing on either side with a wide gap between. She seems content in her current world though the home and her living conditions leave much room for improvement.

Every story in the film is filled with the pain of loss, the violence of forced displacement in different ways but Samarth manages to punch it with many other moods to make the film alive, dynamic and throbbing with a life of its own. Explaining how he and his crew made this possible, he says, "We focussed on hyper-local, unusual stories rather than the macho images of the border, identities, or the nostalgia of shared history. We focussed on hope."



**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.**



## BRIGADIER SHER JUNG THAPA MVC

COMMITMENT AND SERVICE! (1907—1999)

**S**her Jung Thapa was born in Abbottabad, Punjab, (now Pakistan) on 15 April 1907. His grandfather, Subedar Balkrishna Thapa, part of the 5th Gorkha Rifles (Frontier Force) (5 GR(FF)), had moved from his ancestral home at Tapke Gaun, Gorkha District, Nepal to India. Sher Jung's father, Arjun Thapa, was an Honorary Captain (2/5 GR(FF)) in the Indian Army.

During his childhood, his family moved from Abbottabad to Dharamsala where Thapa graduated from Government Post Graduate College. He was an excellent hockey player in college and played frequently with stalwarts of 1 Gorkha Rifles, Regimental Centre, Dharamsala. He became a close friend of Captain Douglas Gracy, Adjutant of 1 GR RC, who encouraged him to join the forces of J&K state as an officer. Thapa took his advice and was commissioned on Sept 1, 1932.

Thapa married Dhan Shobha Thapa and his children are Kamala Pradhan, Prem Jung Thapa, Hem Jung Thapa, Bikram Thapa, Sarla Thapa, Ninni Thakur, Amar Jung Thapa, and Kokila Gurung.

Thapa held the rank of major in the Jammu and Kashmir State Forces at the time of the princely state's accession to India in October 1947. He was stationed in Leh in Ladakh. His commanding officer, Col. Abdul Majid was based at Bunji bordering the Gilgit Agency.

On Oct 30, Col. Majid went to Gilgit along with forces to support Governor Ghansara Singh, who was apprehensive of the loyalty of the British-officered Gilgit Scouts based there. Unfortunately, the Muslim officers of the regiment mutinied under the leadership of Captain Mirza Hassan Khan and joined the Gilgit Scouts. Governor Ghansara Singh was arrested and Col. Majid was also taken prisoner. Most of the loyal soldiers were massacred while few could manage to escape to Ladakh.

The Indian Army considered it essential to hold the Skardu garrison for the defence of Leh. Major Thapa was promoted to lieutenant colonel and asked to take charge of the remaining 6th Infantry at Skardu. He left Leh on Nov 23 and reached Skardu by Dec 2, walking through heavy snowfall. It prepared him for the operation.

Meanwhile, the Pakistani commander at Gilgit reorganised the Gilgit Scouts and the 6th Infantry rebels into three forces of 400 men each. The 'Ibex Force', one among the three, commanded by Major Ehsan Ali, was tasked with capturing Skardu. Thapa deployed two forward posts near the Tsari pass thirty miles away. However, Captain Nek Alam, commanding one of the platoons, joined the rebels, and the other platoon got massacred. On 11 February 1948, the attack commenced on Skardu. For over six months Thapa withstood the attack with dwindling ammunition and food.

Reinforcements by ground were ambushed en route and reinforcements by air were considered infeasible due to the high mountains and inclement weather. Attempts were made to airdrop supplies but the drops often landed outside the garrison. Eventually, on Aug 14, Thapa succumbed to the invaders, having exhausted all supplies. He was taken prisoner and repatriated after the war ended.

General Sir Douglas Gracy was the Commander-in-Chief of the Pakistan Army. Lieutenant Colonel Thapa's earlier association with General Gracy came to his rescue otherwise he would have met the fate of other prisoners of war who were killed by the Pakistani Army. He was commissioned into the Indian Army in 1957 and eventually rose to become a brigadier. He retired from the Army on 18 June 1960.

Brigadier Sher Jung Thapa displayed inspiring leadership, indomitable courage, initiative and exceptional devotion to duty in the highest traditions of the Indian Army and was awarded Mahavir Chakra.

Brigadier Sher Jung Thapa bought a bungalow in Mcleodganj, Himachal Pradesh and spent his last years there. Brigadier Thapa was a person of commitments and service. He breathed his last on 25 February 1999 at Army Hospital, New Delhi.

**Brigadier Suresh Chandra Sharma (retd.)**

## T. N. SHANBHAG

### A LIFE DEDICATED TO BOOKS (1925 - 2009)

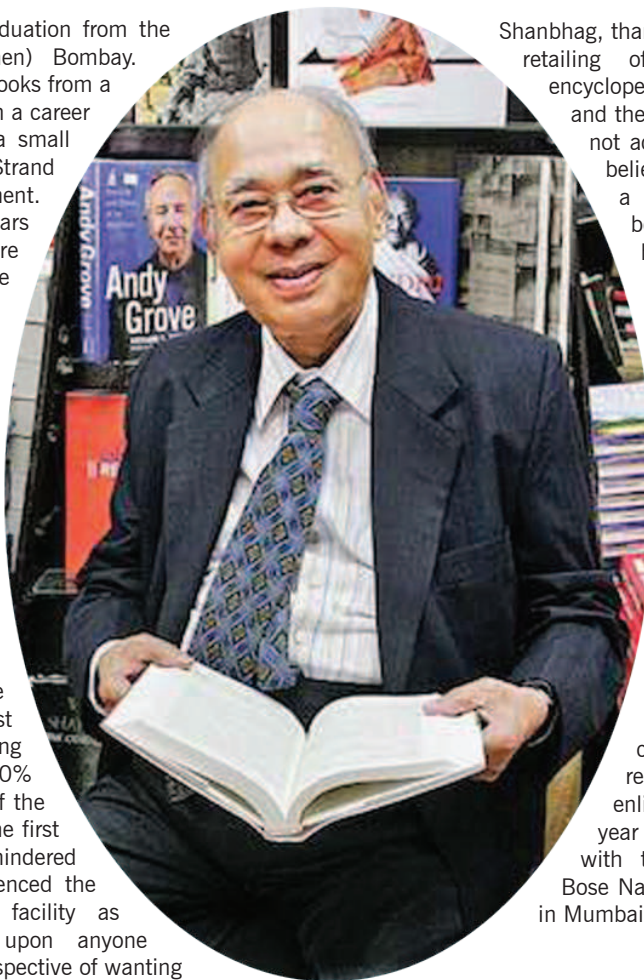
**T**ekkatte Narayan Shanbhag was born in Tekkatte in 1925, a hamlet near Mangalore to a wealthy grocer farmer. He lost his father when he was barely two. The family turned destitute soon after and Shanbhag had to continue his studies on scholarships. Once he reached adulthood he also had to do part-time jobs to fend the family.

He completed his graduation from the St. Xavier's College in (then) Bombay. Shanbhag had a passion for books from a young age. He embarked upon a career as a bookseller by opening a small shop in 1948 at the famous Strand Cinema with meagre investment. It was profitable and five years later, he could shift to a more spacious location in the bustling Fort area in Bombay. He interacted with his clients at a personal level which enabled him to widen his customer base through word of mouth. The Strand Book Stall soon became a household name.

Shanbhag was the first bookseller in India to break the Net Book Agreement of 1900 whereby books could not be sold at a discount to the cost price. Right from the beginning Shanbhag offered a 20% discount on the cover price of the books. Strand also became the first book shop to permit unhindered browsing. Those who experienced the luxury gushed about this facility as Shanbhag never frowned upon anyone browsing through a book, irrespective of wanting to buy it. Shanbhag was instrumental in spreading the reading habit among the youth. Many a time, he would offer hefty discount when buyers, especially students, had restricted budget.

The Strand Book Stall earned popularity once VVIPs began to patronise it and at one point of time Shanbhag could count among his clients famous personalities like Sri Ambalal Sarabhai, Mirza Ismail then Diwan of Mysore, India's first Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and former Union Ministers T T Krishnamachari and Y B Chavan and industrialists like J R D Tata. In later years Shanbhag's Book Stall hosted luminaries like author and Editor Khushwant Singh, jurist Nani Palkhivala, Nobel Laureate S Naipaul and

V S Naipaul and entrepreneur Keshub Mahindra. India's late President Bharat Ratna A P J Abdul Kalam made it a point to drop in at Strand's every time he set foot in Mumbai. IT czars Azim Premji of Wipro and N R Narayana Murthy, both avid readers were also regulars. Azim Premji of Wipro and N R Narayana Murthy, both avid readers were also regulars.



Shanbhag, thanks to his involvement with the retailing of books, was a walking encyclopedia when it came to authors and their works whose oeuvres he had not accessed. His philosophy was 'I believe a book is man's best friend, a bookseller acts as a catalyst between a book and the reading habit.' Shanbhag was held in high esteem by book lovers and had a stellar reputation as one who would even be willing to scale down his profits if he could add more customers and thereby spread the reading habit. Eulogising the Strand Book Stall in one of his interviews on BBC, celebrated author Khushwant Singh opined that it was the only personal book shop in India.

The Indian government honoured Shanbhag with the Padma Shri, the fourth highest civilian award citing his unique record of fifty four years of enlightened book selling. In the year 2006 he was also honoured with the Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose National Award. He passed away in Mumbai on 27 February 2009 at 85.

For nearly ten years thereafter his daughter Vidya Virkar who had a fund of experience of managing book stores in Bangalore continued Shanbhag's legacy along with her brother Arun but with the competition from online booksellers heating up the Strand

Book Stall was forced to down its shutters in the year 2018.

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

## SHAKUNTALA BHAGAT

DEFYING TRADITIONS, BUILDING BRIDGES (1933—2012)

**S**hakuntala A Bhagat, nee Joshi was the first woman civil engineer in India who specialised and pioneered innovative designs in construction of bridges.

Her father, himself a master bridge engineer S B Joshi mentored her. Radical for a conservative upper-caste family, he gave her all the financial, emotional and logistical support and was even prepared for her not to marry to pursue her dreams.

In 1953, she took a degree in civil engineering from the Veermata Jijabai Technological Institute (VJTI) in Mumbai. Starting as a factory trainee, she suffered minor injuries in an on-site explosion. To boost her spirits, her father sent her to Germany to work as a design engineer. She gained two years of practical training in West Germany, and the UK from 1954 to 1956. She returned in 1957 to break another tradition by marrying her love Aniruddha Shivprasad Bhagat, a fellow civil engineer

She taught as an assistant professor of civil engineering and head of the heavy structures laboratory at the Bombay IIT from 1959 to 1970, taking a two year sabbatical in 1964 to do her Masters in Civil and Structural Engineering from University of Pennsylvania. In 1970, the couple founded their own firm, Bhagat Engineering. Their innovations originated through observations of society's critical needs. Evaluating the scope for improvements, they were able to make overall developments in the field.

They raised funds mortgaging their apartment and pawning family jewellery when investors, including government departments and firms were reluctant because the company was involved in a complex R&D that even advanced countries desisted. She pioneered R&D in bridge superstructures, jointly evolving the first-ever total systems approach in this field. She worked on design and construction of hundreds of bridges around the world, including in the United States, Germany, and the UK. The duo also invented an unusual towable bridge, which could be wheeled under a weaker one for support when heavy cargo was passing.

She researched concrete for the Cement and Concrete Association of London and was a member of the Indian Road Congress and a Fellow of India's Institute of Engineers. The couple later also founded their own bridge-building firm, Quadricon, in 1970 in Bombay to create low-cost bridges. The duo designed over 200 Quadricon steel bridges, worldwide of spans ranging from 18m to 138m. By 1978, the company had built 69 bridges across India's north and north-east in terrains that confound engineers even today.

Shakuntala developed formulae for designing any capacity of Bhagat Unishear Connector from 20T to 500T in tension and up to 100 per cent additional capacity when used in compression. A concept of designing was developed through 11 prototypes, perfected through applications.

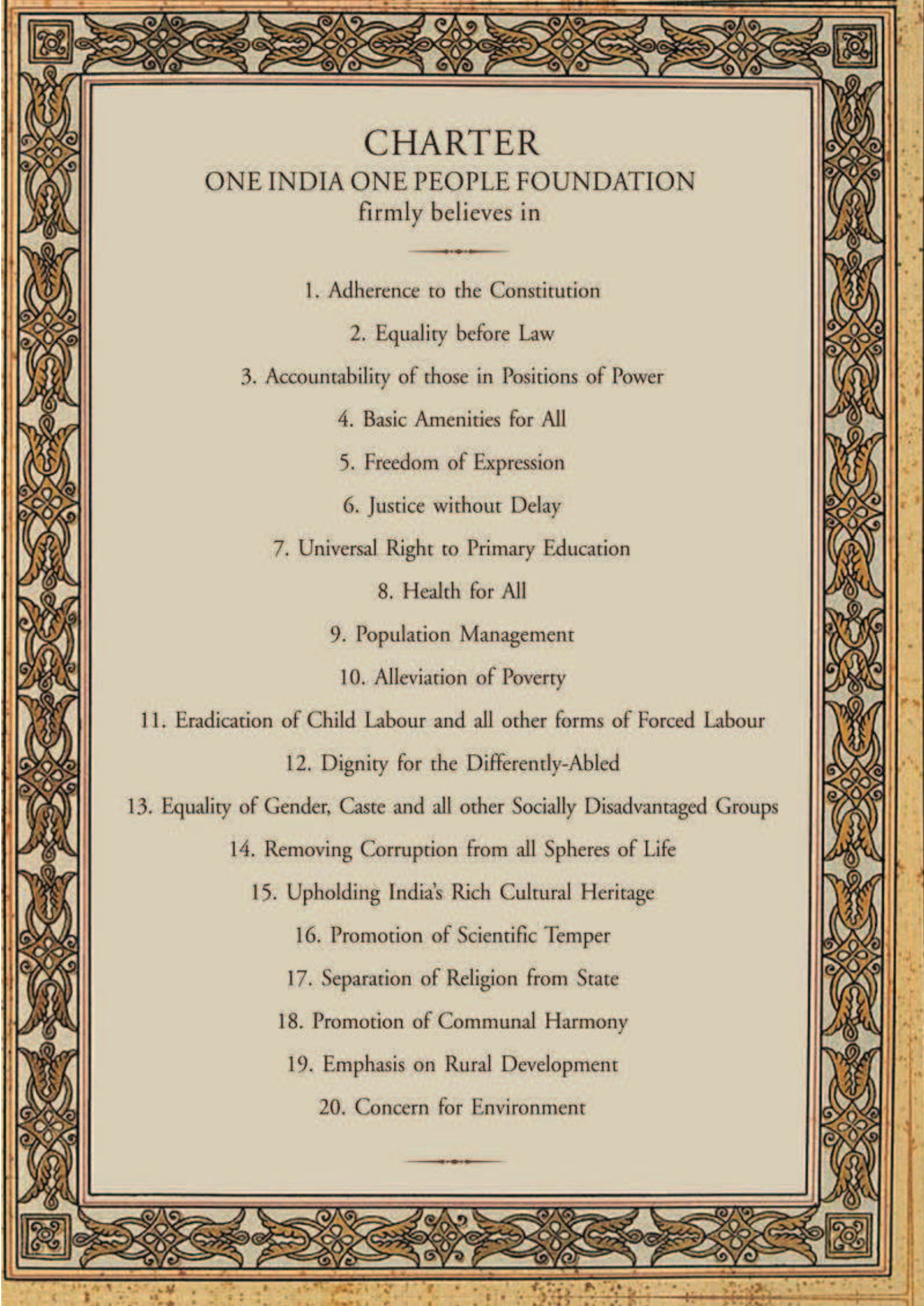
In 1972, the Bhagats received the highest award from the Invention Promotion Board, for their Unishear connectors. In 1993, she was recognised as the Woman Engineer of the Year. The spark in both came from having a strong will. At home, at the dining table, conversations were loud, long spirited exchanges and revolved around risk versus reward, but it was not a fight and they would converse later as friends, like nothing had happened.

Shakuntala did it all while raising two sons and a daughter, and retaining a love for Western classical symphonies from her time in Germany. A mother different from other homemakers, a co-founder in a field with almost no women, she methodically worked the slide rule and filled up notebooks with calculations in an age before computers. Despite several chances to emigrate, they rooted for India. She passed away aged 79.

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







# CHARTER

## ONE INDIA ONE PEOPLE FOUNDATION

firmly believes in

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



# 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 9 1930 – February 23 2007)  
ONE INDIA ONE PEOPLE