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## *Indian customs & traditions*



INDIAN CUSTOMS HAVE GLOBAL FLAVOR

FESTIVALS, LEGENDS AND CUSTOMS

MERE LAW, AWARENESS WON'T HELP

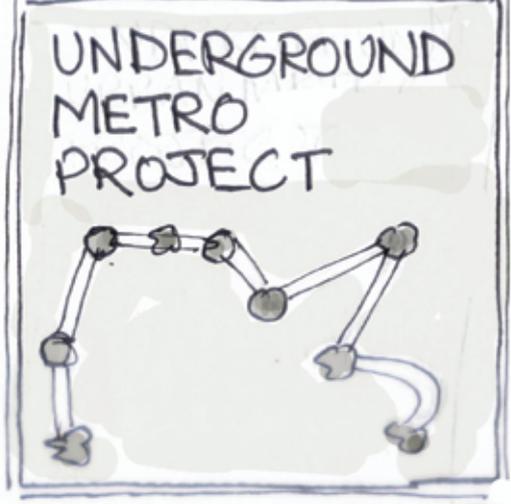
**Know India Better**

A QUAIN ISLAND AND THE  
'CITY OF CAVES'

**Face to Face**

PRAMOD JAGTAP BHAGINATH

## THE NEXT BIG THING



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## Indian customs have global flavour

Indian traditions are ripe with symbols each having a meaning and significance. **Anushka Singh** explains through relevant examples how these have acquired popularity the world over and how foreigners who come visiting to India are impressed by their vibrancy. The Indian culture and traditions are a takeaway for them.



**Indian culture, customs and traditions have great significance and have gained global popularity**

Indian culture and traditions are popular the world over. Foreign tourists visit India to get a taste of the vibrancy that defines this country. Customs and practices originate from religion, ancient scriptures, region, caste, trade, family, etc. They are a way of life for the one practising and intriguing for the outsider.

One of the most popular Indian customs that is popular among tourists coming to India is 'namaste'. It is so popular that now it's not restricted within the geographical boundaries of India. Former US President Barack Obama was seen doing it on various occasions and former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon was also seen greeting everyone with a Namaste on the first International Yoga Day at New York's Times Square.

Namaste or namaskar is one of the five forms of traditional greetings laid down in Hindu scriptures. The literal translation of Namaste is 'I bow to you' and greeting one another

with it is a way of saying 'May our minds meet'.

### Namaste India

This traditional way of greeting people has been in practice for very long across most local traditions in India. The custom entails joining both the palms together in a worshipful pose and say 'Namaste'.

Foreign tourists visiting India may not know much about the rich Indian heritage but are surely aware of this custom and are often seeing practising it themselves when they visit the country, that too with great enthusiasm.

The fact that there is no physical touching while greeting with a Namaste eliminates the risk of contracting diseases. So much so are the health advantages of this custom that during the Covid-19 pandemic it became a popular gesture

around the world.

The rampant spread of coronavirus and the huge death toll it accrued alarmed communities all over. Awareness around safe behaviour such as social distancing was being done to prevent the spread of the disease. This included re-evaluating customs, practices, beliefs, food habits and other aspects of personal and community living and social interactions.

In most cultures, greeting people is done by shaking hands. During the initial months of Covid-19 pandemic, experts revealed that shaking hands with people who could be carrying the microbes in their hands can lead to the spread of the disease. So, there were efforts to reinvent modes of greeting and Namaste was a clear winner.

Henceforth, many world leaders advocated for and popularised the Namaste mode of greeting people. So, the-then US President Donald Trump, French President Emmanuel Macron even British Prince Charles adopted Namaste as the preferred way to greet other dignitaries.

## Atithi Devo Bhavah

The saying 'Atithi Devo Bhavah' is also integral to India's culture. It is a Sanskrit phrase translating to 'the guest is equivalent to god'. Indian hospitality is renowned the world over. Tourist or not, any one coming to India is welcomed and Indians make very warm and hospitable hosts.

The host-guest relationship in India is truly one of the most revered relationships. This practice of giving utmost respect and importance to guests is unique to India. No distinction should be made based on the guests' colour or creed and he should be showered with love, care and affection, even at the expense of one's own discomfort.

This unique 'code of conduct' has been laid down in ancient Hindi scripture named 'Taittiriya Upanishad' that upholds Indian culture's values and heritage. The Taittiriya Upanishad is one of the primary Upanishads, as part of the Yajur Veda. What is more interesting it that despite the diversity of cultures and customs in India, this one stays the same throughout the country.

## Fashionable Indian attire

Indian attire is one of the most sought after across fashion corridors. Not just for the designs but textiles, motifs, prints and fabrics. Sari, that is worn by Indian women is a traditional attire that but has many takers around the world.

Women tourists visiting India don't leave the opportunity to wear a sari. The experience is personal and exhilarating for them. The sari is a single piece of fabric that is easy to make and comfortable to wear. It's also beautiful attire and that makes it attractive to women.

Although sari is traditional clothing, today, fashion designers and stylists use sari heavily for the desired fashion look. Many international celebrities have donned the sari too including Oprah Winfrey, Angelina Jolie, Halle Berry, Cameron Diaz, Jessica Alba, Lady Gaga, Liz Hurley, Pamela Anderson, Paris Hilton, Selena Gomez and many more.

## The custom of fasting

Integral to Indian culture, particularly the Hindus, fasting aka vrat or upvas is being practised in India for centuries for religious and cultural considerations primarily. Usually, a fast

is kept as a mark of one's devotion to a god or a goddess. Apart from that, festivals also call for fasts and the devout observe these in all sincerity.

The logic behind fasting is that by depriving the body of food and sometimes when water, one is cleansing off the sins committed. Also, by sacrificing certain pleasures, one shows his gratitude and devotion to the god. Fasting i.e., abstinence from all or some foods or drinks for a set period of time has innumerable health benefits too. The western world calls it intermittent fasting and it is a big fad at the moment. Many foreign celebrities and influencers swear by it and encourage everyone to follow it.

Fasting aids weight loss, reduces blood pressure, reduces inflammation, lowers cholesterol, reduces insulin resistance, boosts brain function among many other benefits and improves the quality of life.

Hindus fast on specific days of the month such as Purnima, which is the full moon or Ekadasi which is the eleventh day of the fortnight of the moon's cycle. Also, days of the week are marked for fasting for a specific god or goddess.

So, on Saturdays, people fast to appease Shani or Saturn, on Tuesdays they fast to show their devotion to Lord Hanuman, on Mondays it is for Lord Shiva and Fridays for Santoshi Mata. As far as festivals are concerned, some of the most difficult fasts are observed during Navratri (nine days), Karwa Chauth, etc.

## Other interesting customs

In India, there is a prevalent practice to take off shoes or other footwear before entering a place of worship. Also, in India there is a unique concept of marriage called the 'swayamvar' that the kings would organise for their daughters. Suitable matches from all over would be invited and the bride herself would choose her ideal husband.

The Indian traditions are ripe with symbols each having a meaning and significance. For example, Swastika in the Indian context signifies the four Vedas and the four constellations and holds a lot of religious significance. It was also the symbol of the Nazis in Germany.

Another tradition, Ramlila, is a set of performances across northern India during Navratri culminating on Dussera. The theatrical presentation celebrates the life of Rama, his strengths and struggles, episodes from his life and other instances from Ramayana. It is a combination of songs, dance, drama, etc., to spread the message of 'good over evil'.

During the months of October to November, Ramlila performances can be seen in villages and cities especially in Uttar Pradesh and town like Ayodhya, Ramnagar, Varanasi, Vrindavan, Madhubani, etc.

**Anushka Singh works with DraftCraft International as a Media Researcher and writes mostly on issues affecting the Fourth Estate. She likes reading contrarian literature and analysing sources of news**

## Festivals, legends and customs

**Ritika Seth** looks at the time of the year when festivals galore show the country in full vibrancy, and the customs, conventions and legends that punctuate them. She finds that there are many festivals that entail a set of customs to be followed and then there are customs and traditions that are festival in themselves.



**Diwali or the Festival of lights is celebrated over five days and has a number of myths, legends and beliefs associated with it**

It's time for the fanfare to begin with the approaching festival season. In India, festivals, customs and traditions are closely related and diverse at the same time. There are many festivals that entail a set of customs to be followed and then there are customs and traditions that are festival in themselves.

The festival of lights as Diwali is popularly known fetches with it a string of ceremonies that are religiously followed by every devout Hindu. This one, celebrated over five days, has a number of myths, legends and beliefs associated with it.

### Unique custom each day

Dhanteras or Dhantrayodashi, the first day of Diwali falls on the thirteenth day of Ashwin. This day is of immense importance to the business of western India – especially Gujaratis. Business premises are renovated and decorated with traditional rangolis made at the entrance to welcome the Goddess

of wealth and prosperity.

Naraka-Chaturdashi entails taking an early morning bath before sunrise with oil and a paste of gram flour and fragrant powder is a must with Maharashtrians and North Indians. Steamed vermicelli with milk and sugar or puffed rice with curd is served and consumed after this as part of the custom.

The biggest festival celebrated in India; Diwali is the festival of lights. So, while lighting diya are a tradition in one and all, there are different customs that are followed by diverse communities and groups.

During Diwali, all home entrances are lit up and decorated with brightly-coloured rangoli patterns to welcome Vishnu's consort, Lakshmi - the goddess of wealth. The last day

of the Hindu financial year in traditional business is celebrated with *Chopda Pujan* ushering in a new year of accounts.

The Laxmi Puja usually begins with the worship of Vighnaharta Lord Ganesha who is revered first on every auspicious occasion, followed by Mahalaxmi - the goddess of wealth and money, Mahasaraswati - the goddess of books and learning and Mahakali – the goddess of strength, the three forms of goddess Laxmi. At the end, Kubera, the treasurer of the gods, is also worshiped.

Bestavarsh or New Year Day is eagerly awaited by everyone. Celebrated by wearing new clothes, jewellery and visiting family members it's the first day of the new business year. Stock brokers do mahurat trading or symbolic auspicious business deals on this day. It is considered to be the ideal time to shop or new ventures.

Bhai Dhoj comes exactly two days after Diwali that falls on Amavasya. As per custom, it is imperative for the brother to go to his sister's house to celebrate the day on which a *teeka* is applied on the brother's forehead.

## Victory of good over evil

There is a string of legends associated with Dussehra, the festival of goddess Durga, representing two forms of female energy, one mild and protective and the other fierce and destructive. Incidentally, her warrior persona is revered more in Southern India than in the Northern parts, where Durga is regarded as the gentle bride epitomising familial unity.

According to Hindu mythology, goddess Durga is revered for having destroyed the monster-demon Mahishasur – whose powers were said to be greater than those of the gods - and restored heaven to the gods.

As the story goes, the evil powers of Mahishasur, the monstrous water-buffalo bull, had acquired such invincible strength that even Lord Vishnu or Shiv couldn't bring him to book! That's when the gods thought of bringing to life a form with the combined powers of the divine trinity Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh... Shakti personified as Durga.

Each of the gods endowed the divine warrior with a special weapon to combat the demon. That explains the reason for hand of the goddess carrying a deadly weapon of destruction. For instance, while the *kamandal* was Brahma's offering, Vishnu gave the *chakra* and the bow and arrow were from Vayu. Similarly, the trishul came from Shiva; the *kaladanda* from Yamraj, the *vajra* from Indra; the *kuthar* from Vishwakarma; the *nag* from Vasuki, the *kharga* and *dhal* from Surya.

Armed with all these divine weapons, mounting on her ferocious lion, there was no way Durga could have lost the battle against Mahishasur! Since that day, the goddess symbolises the victory of good over evil. And, till date, the image of Durga destroying the demon, Mahishasur stands for the final confrontation of the spiritual urge of man with his basic passions.

## Customs symbolising mythology

Another legend goes that Lord Ram had invoked the blessings of Durga to kill Ravana, the ten-headed king of Lanka, who had abducted Sita. And, it's only after killing Ravana that Ram, Sita and Laxman returned victorious to Ayodhya on the day of Diwali.

According to the Mahabharat, after the Pandavas had been in exile, wandering the forests for more than 12 years, they decided to spend the last year in the court of King Virat in disguise. And, to protect their true identity, before entering the court, the Pandavas tied their weapons in a white cloth, disguised it as a corpse and hung it on a Shami tree.

It was only after a year, on Vijaydashmi, the day of Dussehra that the warriors brought down the weapons from the Shami tree and revealed their true identity. Since that day the exchange of Shami leaves on Dussehra has become symbolic of goodwill and victory. This has been a tradition for all celebrating this festival.

There's another popular legend associated with Kautsa, the son of Devdatt, who is said to have insisted on his Guru Varatantu to accept *gurudakshina*, after he completed his education. After much persistence, the Guru asked for 14 crore gold coins - one crore for each of the 14 sciences that he taught his student.

To fulfil his guru's wish, Kautsa approached King Raghuraj, known for his generosity. Unfortunately, the king had just bestowed his entire treasury on the Brahmins, after performing the Vishvajit sacrifice. Determined not to send Kautsa empty-handed, the king went to Lord Indra to request for the gold coins.

At Indra's behest, Kubera - the god of wealth – poured the gold coins on the shami and apati trees round Raghuraja's city of Ayodhya. The king gladly gave all the coins to Kautsa, who in turn gave 14 crore gold coins to his guru as his *gurudakshina*. And, the remaining coins were distributed to the people of Ayodhya.

This incident is believed to have taken place on the day of Dussehra. Since then, there has been the custom of people presenting each other the leaves of apati tree – also called sona or gold – on this auspicious day.

## Best time for a start

It's considered the most auspicious day to commence a new business or enterprise after a host of rites and rituals. As legend goes, according to the Puranas, on one occasion Ved Vyas requested Lord Ganesha to help compose the Mahabharata. After all, it was a huge epic that just couldn't be penned down by anyone other than the prolific Lord Ganesha known for his capability to write voluminous amounts of literature with ease.

On this, Lord Ganesha consented to do so but only after laying down his own terms. He told Ved Vyas that he would write the shlokas down only if Vyas would match his speed (Incidentally, Lord Ganesha was known to write very fast). The condition being, if he (Lord Ganesha) would have to pause due to any delay or slowdown in Vyas' recitation, he would discontinue writing the Mahabharata.

To this, Vyas – being shrewd himself – accepted but added that Lord Ganesha would have to first comprehend the meaning of the shloka before penning it down. Once Vyas began composing the epic, he used very complex shlokas that took a little while for Lord Ganesha to comprehend subsequently giving Vyas enough time to compose new ones.

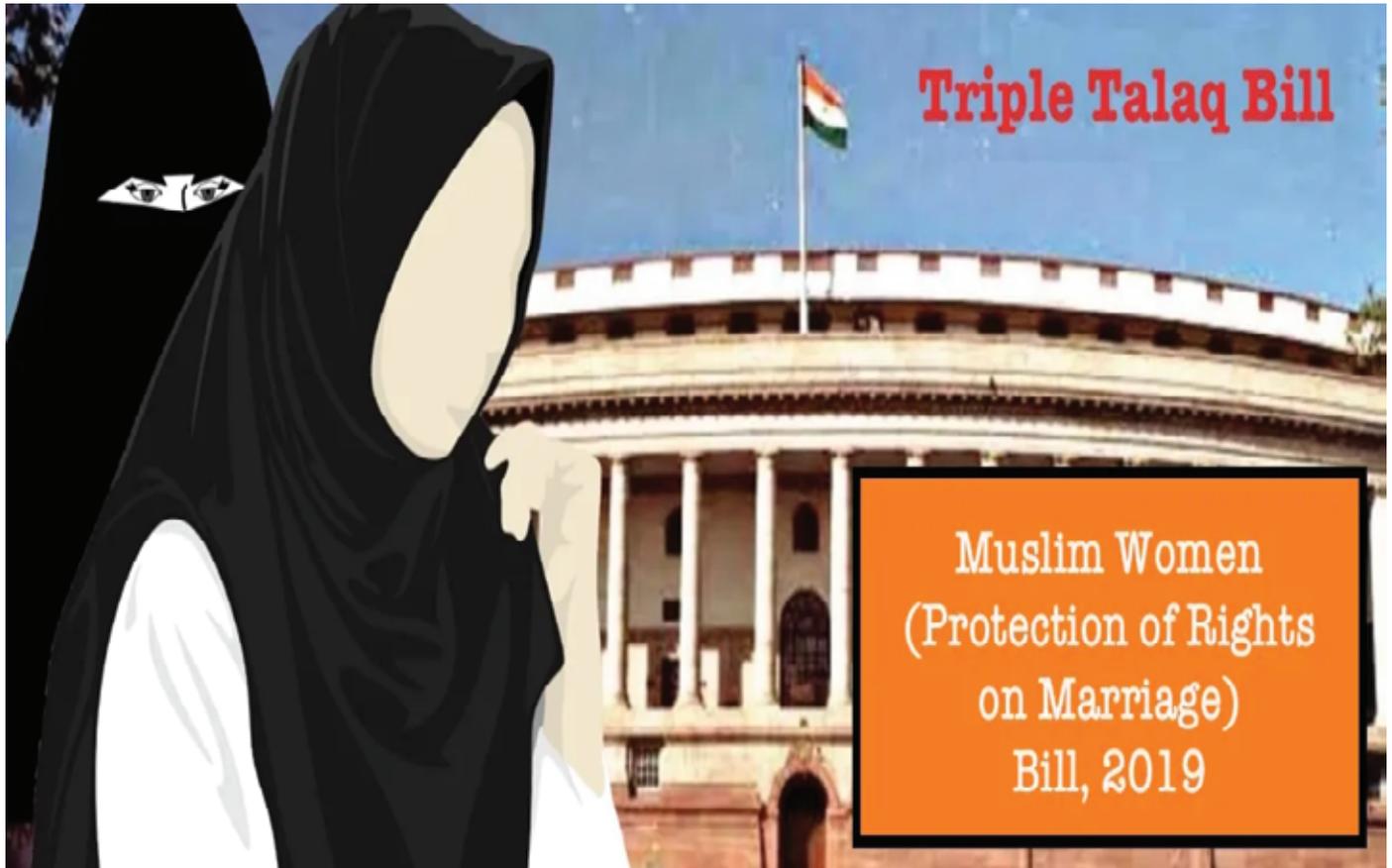
It was on Akshay Tritiya that Ved Vyas began reciting the Mahabharata that was penned down by Lord Ganesha.

On this day, women and unmarried girls worship goddess Gauri and distribute fruits, sweets and other offerings to the deity. Lord Parshuram's birthday also coincides with this holy day when devout Hindus initiate key activities such as land purchases, jewellery buys, interior renovations and other acts on this all-auspicious day.

**Ritika Seth works with DraftCraft International as a Media Researcher and writes mostly on issues affecting the Fourth Estate. She likes reading contrarian literature and analysing sources of news.**

## Customs must uphold fundamental rights

*In the absence of a law, it's difficult to stop a prevalent social practice till there is awareness and sensitisation. Following the Supreme Court order, the government first promulgated the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Ordinance, 2018 on 19 September 2018 and two more Ordinances were promulgated thereafter, points out **Manu Shrivastava**.*



***In a landmark judgment declared in August 2017, the Supreme Court set aside the practice of divorce by pronouncing instant Triple Talaq as 'violative of Article 14 of the Constitution'***

**O**n 22 August 2017, the Supreme Court of India, in a historic judgment, declared instant triple talaq (talaq-e-biddat) unconstitutional. The division bench comprised five judges of which two ruled stating the practice is constitutional and three said that instant triple talaq is unconstitutional.

It is important to note here that, among the 23 nations across the world that have banned the practice of instant triple talaq, three are India's neighbours namely Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

In the historic case of Shayara Bano v/s Union of India & Others, the bench comprised members of different faiths - Chief Justice J S Khehar (a Sikh), Justice Kurian Joseph (a Christian), Justice R F Nariman (a Parsi), Justice UU Lalit (a Hindu) and Justice Abdul Nazeer (a Muslim).

The apex court had also directed the government to promulgate legislation within six months to this effect and said

that until the government formulates a law regarding instant triple talaq, there would be an injunction against husbands pronouncing instant triple talaq on their wives.

The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act, 2019 declares the instant divorce granted by pronouncement of talaq three times as void and illegal. It provides for imprisonment for a term up to three years and fine to the husband who practiced instant Triple Talaq.

### The custom in question

Triple Talaq is a form of divorce practiced in Islam, whereby a Muslim man could divorce his wife by pronouncing 'talaq' three times. The man need not cite any reason for the divorce and the wife need not be present at the time of pronouncement of talaq.

The pronouncement could be oral or written, or, in recent times, delivered by electronic means such as telephone,

SMS, email or social media. In Islam, the main source of law is the written form of the sayings of the Prophet i.e., the Quran.

It is of three kinds: Talaq-e-Ahsan, Talaq-e-Hasan and Talaq-e-Biddat. The first one, Talaq- e-Ahsan, is the one where once the husband pronounces talaq, there has to be a three-month *iddat* period to factor in three menstrual cycles of the woman. This time is meant for reconciliation and arbitration.

During this period, if any kind of cohabitation occurs, the talaq is considered to have been revoked. After a period of *iddat*, during which it is ascertained whether the wife is pregnant, the divorce becomes irrevocable.

Talaq-e-Hasan also has a provision for revocation. Here, the words 'Talaq' are to be pronounced three times in the successive periods after menstrual cycles. This means, the husband makes the first declaration of Talaq and then waits for the next menstrual cycle to pronounce the next declaration.

The first and second pronouncements may be revoked by the husband. This can be done either expressly or by resuming conjugal relations. By doing so, the words Talaq become ineffective as it were not initiated in the first place at all.

However, if no revocation is made after the first or the second pronouncement, after the third the Talaq becomes irrevocable and the marriage dissolves.

Talaq-e-Biddat aka instant triple talaq, and the one that was challenged by Shayara Bano in the landmark petition, allows men to pronounce talaq thrice in one sitting or instantly, sometimes with a written talaqnama, a phone call or a text message. After the pronouncement, there is no room for revocation even if the man himself wants to. The divorce remains irrevocable.

This kind of triple talaq originated in the second century of the Islamic-era. It is a disapproved mode of divorce. In its judgment, the Supreme Court described instant triple talaq as 'manifestly arbitrary' and said that it allows a man to 'break down marriage whimsically and capriciously'.

A divorced woman cannot remarry her divorced husband in a ceremony as is allowed in most other religions. She can remarry her divorced husband only after she marries another man and then divorces him, through a practice called the *nikah halala*.

## Challenging the custom

Muslim women had, for long, been demanding a ban on the evil practice of instant triple talaq. It was Uttarakhand's Shayara Bano who approached the courts in 2016 when her husband divorced her by instant triple talaq. She was the original petitioner in the case and said that it was an "unfair practice" and demanded its abolition in India. Shayara Bano challenged this practice before the Supreme Court on the ground that it is discriminatory and against the dignity of women.

She said she was duped into accepting a letter that summarily broke her home. A marriage was dissolved, in minutes, unilaterally when her husband dispatching a 'talaqnama' to her while she was at her parent's place in Kashipur, Uttarakhand recuperating from an illness. Shayara also suffered mental and physical torture at the hands of her husband who, after the divorce, denied her the custody of their two children.

In its verdict, the Apex Court found the said practice of

divorce to be manifestly arbitrary, in the sense that, the marital tie can be broken 'capriciously and whimsically' by a Muslim husband without any attempt to reconcile to save the marriage.

In a landmark judgment declared on 22 August 2017, the Supreme Court set aside the practice of divorce by pronouncing instant Triple Talaq as 'violative of Article 14 of the Constitution'.

Supreme Court judgment vindicated the position taken by the Government of India that instant triple talaq or talaq-e-biddat is against constitutional morality, dignity of women and against gender equity as guaranteed by the Constitution of India.

## Bridging the gap

The Supreme Court in its order had directed the government to promulgate legislation within six months to this effect. In the absence of a law, it's difficult to stop a prevalent social practice till there is awareness and sensitisation.

So, even after the apex court order on 22 August 2017 till the time the bill was introduced in the Parliament on 28 December 2017, around 100 instances of pronouncing of instant triple talaq were reported in India.

Following the Supreme Court order, the government first promulgated the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Ordinance, 2018 on 19 September 2018 and two more Ordinances were promulgated thereafter.

Lok Sabha passed the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill, 2019 on 25 July 2019 and the Rajya Sabha passed it on 30 July 2019. After receiving the assent of the President of India, the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act, 2019 came into force with retrospective effect from the 19 September 2018 giving continued effect to the first ordinance promulgated on 19 September 2018.

The provisions in the new law state that:

Any pronouncement of talaq by a Muslim husband upon his wife, by words, either spoken or written or in electronic form or in any other manner whatsoever, shall be void and illegal; Any Muslim husband who pronounces instant triple talaq upon his wife shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to three years, and shall also be liable to fine; A married Muslim woman upon whom talaq is pronounced shall be entitled to receive from her husband such amount of subsistence allowance, for her and dependent children; A married Muslim woman shall be entitled to custody of her minor children in the event of pronouncement of talaq by her husband.



**Manu Shrivastava is a journalist and lawyer with DraftCraft International and Co-Convenor of #TheWomanSurvivor, #MeTooAtHome and #MeTooBeyond-Borders initiatives**

## Customs symbolic of religious beliefs

*Each religious group has its own set of customs symbolising their beliefs originating from scriptures and practices. These customs, however, adorn local colour and flavour over time, in the process acquiring a unique character. India, being a vibrant democracy, is tolerant to all religions and their customs and practices, avers **Vedika Jain**.*



**Sikh men in traditional attire**

India is one of the most diverse societies of the world. Not only are there multiple religions but a large number of ethnic groups, communities, tribes, etc. The customs followed by a certain group of people are the result of an interplay between these variables and more.

The Indian subcontinent is the birthplace of four of the world's major religions – Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. According to the 2011 census, 79.8 per cent of the population of India practices Hinduism, 14.2 per cent practices Islam, 2.3 per cent adheres to Christianity, 1.7 per cent follows Sikhism, 0.7 per cent adheres to Buddhism and 0.4 per cent follows Jainism.

Other religions such as Zoroastrianism, Sanamahism and Judaism also have followers in India and have been practiced for centuries. India has the largest population in the world of people who follow Zoroastrianism (Parsis and Iranis) and the Bahá'í Faith, despite the fact that both these originated in Persia. Each religious group has its own set of customs symbolising their beliefs originating from scriptures and practices. These customs, however, adorn local colour and flavor over time, in the process

acquiring a unique character.

India, being a vibrant democracy, is tolerant to all religions and their customs and practices. The Constitution of India provides all citizens the right to freedom of religion as a fundamental right and this is extended to their customs and practices as well.

### Sikh customs and bias

Among the Sikhs, one of the most distinct customs is that of keeping long, uncut hair. Most Sikh women do not cut the hair on their head, while some don't even trim them at all. The extent to which one follows a custom is a derivative of an individual's comfort level. Very often a custom becomes more about keeping the members of the community happy rather than about the religion itself.

The tradition of keeping hair (kes) goes back to the birth of the Khalsa tradition that was initiated in 1699. It was the tenth Sikh guru, Guru Gobind Singh who established a code of conduct for his followers. This included the establishment of the five Ks - Kes (hair), Kanga (comb), Kara (iron bracelet),

Kirpan (small dagger) and Kachera (underwear). The significance is as follows:

- Kes – uncut hair to keep and preserve the human form given by God;
- Kanga – to comb hair in a tidy manner for clarity of mind and discipline;
- Kara – an iron or steel bracelet to remind of God's strength and infinity;
- Kirpan – a sword that symbolizes freedom and justice;
- Kachera – short breeches that emphasise on the commitment to purity

Guru Gobind Singh had initiated the Khalsa tradition after his father, Guru Teg Bahadur, was beheaded during the Islamic sharia rule of Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb. Khalsa was created to protect the innocent from Islamic religious persecution.

He also asked the followers to start wearing a turban, which many Sikhs at the time had already started wearing. The turban was a symbol of aristocracy at the time and by allowing women and lower-caste people to wear the turban was an act to challenge the existing system.

Modern-day living has posed its own set of challenges for such customs. Today, many Sikh women feel that the policing, from the community, in terms of customs to be followed is harsher for them as compared to that for men. Many Amritdhari (baptised) women who wear a turban are, for example, frowned upon when they wear modern clothes but the same people are okay with Amritdhari men wearing shorts.

Also, Sikh women who want to cut their hair are 'policed' for not being religious enough and, on the contrary, those who do keep their hair including their facial and body hair, are seen as not feminine.

## Christian practices derived from Bible

The Christian inheritance practices have links to canon law. The Book of Genesis in the Bible says - *That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.* So, among the Christians there is a tradition of the male heirs distributing intestate properties among themselves.

This practice was outlawed long back, in 1986, through the Supreme Court's landmark judgment in *Mary Roy v. State of Kerala* where the apex court repealed the Travancore Christian Succession Act, 1916 and brought all Christians under the Indian Succession Act of 1925. However, the practice is still hugely prevalent in the community.

The Indian Succession Act states that intestate properties (properties where the owner fails to leave behind a written will) shall be distributed equally among all the children after deducting the one-third share of the widow. However, if the father left a will giving the property to only the sons, it cannot be contested in court. According to the Travancore Christian Succession Act, the intestate property passes on to son or sons equally; there is no mention of daughters.

Christianity in Kerala began in 52 AD with the landing of St Thomas at Maliankara near Cranganore on the Malabar Coast of India. He primarily travelled to central and southern Kerala and established seven churches. That's where a majority

of the Christians live today and follow the older practices. Here, he preached the gospels and converted many Hindu, including some upper-caste Brahmins.

Christian weddings in India conform to the traditional white wedding. However, local influence can be seen at such events. So, for example, a Christian bride in Kerala will wear a traditional white wedding saree instead of a gown. In a Goan Christian wedding, largely Portuguese influence can be seen. Most Protestant women and Catholic women do not wear a bindi on the forehead.

The early Christians or the foremost converts did not completely relinquish the Hindu customs. There were a lot of similarities especially in celebrations in terms of ceremonies for birth, naming, initiation, marriage, death, etc.

## Parsi practices under SC scanner

The Parsis are an ethno-religious group of the Indian subcontinent and followers of Zoroastrianism. Their ancestors migrated to India from Sassanid Iran following its conquest by Arab Muslims under the Rashidun Caliphate in the 7th century CE. They are the first of two such groups, the other being Indian Iranis who migrated many centuries later following the rise to power of the Qajar dynasty in 18th-century Iran.

Today, India is home to 57,264 Parsis according to the 2011 Census of India. Zoroastrians are the smallest community in India constituting only 0.006 per cent of the total population, mainly concentrated in Gujarat and Mumbai.

Parsis are a close-knit community and, generally, disallow conversion. Basically, one cannot convert to become a Parsi with the ease that most other religions permit. Zoroastrians are not initiated by infant baptism and a child is initiated into the faith after seven years of age in a ceremony called Navjote. After the ceremony, the child is given the sacred items associated with Zoroastrianism - *Sudreh* (sacred shirt) and *Kushti* (sacred thread).

The children of a Parsi Zoroastrian man married outside the community can become Parsi, but the same is not true of the children of a Parsi woman married to a non-Parsi. The issue is presently under contention in the Supreme Court in India. A Parsi woman married to a non-Parsi man also loses access to places held sacred by the Zoroastrian faith.

The Parsi community, traditionally, does not bury or cremate its dead; instead, the dead are laid out in a Dakhma, or Tower of Silence, for carrion birds like vultures to consume.

**Vedika Jain is a legal 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.**

# Mere law, awareness won't help

*It's imperative to identify that, where widows are concerned, the domination of males, ironically even females of the family and society insisting on adhering to cruel customs, is excessive to say the least. When women comply with coercive demands and cruel acts, in life, marriage and in widowhood, there's poor little that can change for them, argues **Gajanan Khergamker**.*



**Widows breaking bangles**

**T**here is a general perception when it comes to the plight of widows. Bereft of their husbands, an Indian widow is perceived as losing her 'unique' social status too. And, in this regard, there have been innumerable instances in history, mythology, movies and art to underline the pain. And, if that's not bad enough, there's Sati, Johar and more by way of social practice that amplify the exacerbated position of the widow – read the Hindu widow - in particular.

In the formulation of a resolution to the issue, the British initiated a legislation under their East India Company rule legalising the remarriage of widows in all jurisdictions of India and passed The Hindu Widows' Remarriage Act 1856, also Act XV, 1856 on 16 July 1856. Drafted by Lord Dalhousie and passed by Lord Cannings before the Indian Rebellion of 1857, it is said to be the first major social reform legislation after the abolition of Sati Pratha in 1829 by Lord William Bentinck.

## Personal laws damage cause

That the reality of widows, other than Hindus, in India has been in the control of personal laws and kept beyond the reach of legislation is indicative of a narrative that has been processed selectively and suggests that all is well for widows of religious denominations other than Hindus. Also, a legislation like The Hindu Widow Remarriage Act or Dowry Prohibition Laws only provide legal answers again only to those who resort to legal processes for a resolution.

Needless to say, those who seek and procure answers from within society – however archaic or closed it may seem to others 'out' of that society – usually will not opt for legal solutions provided by legislation. They opt for familial consultation, conciliation, and modes of resolution alternative to

strait-laced legal processes. And, in that lies the impotence of a system that provides selective solutions available, and sadly, only to those to whom they are available. For the poor, unversed and weak, opting for a lengthy legal battle is just not an option and the solution, concurrently, is kept strategically out of reach. As for those of communities beyond the reach of the legislation by sheer definition, either the going's great or simply not covered by legislation upon owing to the absence of a code in the regard. Either way, legislation isn't the solution.

The law on property for Christian and Parsi women, some bereaved after being married 'out' of their community, is ambiguous and under contention. In the absence of legislation in this regard, the onus of laying down the law on it rests upon the judiciary that has to bell the cat. While it may seem unjust to abdicate the responsibility of legislation on the part of the judiciary when the onus should, and rightly so, lie upon the legislature to legislate on the issue. But the legislature is, as is usually the case, politically correct in avoiding or delaying tackling the issue in question.

## Resolution to end malpractice

In context here would be the more-recent resolution adopted on 5 May 2022 by Herwad village in Kolhapur district in India banning widow malpractices and, concurrently, being replicated across Maharashtra's villages. The attempt to 'end' widow malpractices by adopting a resolution through the Gram Panchayat and campaigning for a 'law' in this regard sounds commendable, at least in principle. There is an attempt to 'boost awareness' on the issue of widow malpractices such as breaking bangles, wiping off sindoor and restricting participation in social events and that too is needed. Also, the need for a law in this regard laying down penal action is being advocated widely.

Now, there are a few issues that need to be addressed here: First, an examination of whether there 'is' an issue to be tackled and, if so, is it restricted to 'a' community, group, denomination or state. Secondly: Is there a provision in existing law in this regard to censure such acts and/or penalise perpetrators and then. Finally, is there the need for a separate legislation in this regard, as is being insisted upon, to help resolve things? Can a resolution change one's mindset?

When the issue is of personal honour, prestige and pratha, one must identify if there is, indeed, a legal right invested in the victim that is being infringed. Also, in case of the infringement, the onus of initiating the legal process usually lie upon the 'victim' of the said infringement. Can a society, 'panchayat' or social entity take it upon itself to raise a complaint or a dispute and initiate a criminal proceeding without the consent of the party affected? Herein lies the issue in contention. The issue of locus standi will come into play as a rule.

## Legislation provides safeguards to few

Legislation provides legal safeguards against losses but when brought in to affect select communities, will only create strife and discord. It was Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar who had campaigned for Widow Remarriage by petitioning the Legislative

Council then. And, despite a counter petition against the proposal with nearly four times more signatures by Radhakanta Deb and the Dharma Sabha, Lord Dalhousie personally finalised the bill. This, despite the opposition and it being considered a flagrant breach of custom as prevalent then.

That the legislature must be representative of the people who form it is, a given in a democracy. Anything above and beyond the consent of the people it aims to govern defeats the very purpose of its existence, however politically correct it may seem. Also, laws formed by the legislature must, concurrently, pass the test of Constitutionality as laid down by the Judiciary. The media, in all its wisdom, must – ideally - be balanced and refrain from falling prey to populist trend. That said, for a media to stay fair, be objective and boast of numbers as a prerequisite to qualify for its success is a paradox of sorts. And then, there's the burden of being politically correct too, in the age of Social Media platforms, failing which there's the risk of being trolled and virtually destroyed.

## Merely passing a law won't help

Simply passing a law permitting Widow Remarriage that too for 'a' select community will not solve anything. Also, calling for reforms by way of creating laws in the regard and passing resolutions at a Panchayat doesn't really change things at grassroots level. The loss of her husband for a widow is a personal one. The process of grieving must be left entirely to the one who has suffered the loss and, at best, her immediate family. Where transgression of personal rights is concerned, there are provisions within the existing Indian Penal Code to address issues of 'Cruelty', 'Criminal Intimidation,' 'Simple and Grievous Hurts' and attempts to do so as and when applied.

It's imperative to identify that, where widows are concerned, the domination of males, ironically even females of the family and society insisting on adhering to cruel customs, is excessive to say the least. When women comply with coercive demands and cruel acts, in life, marriage and in widowhood, there's poor little that can change for them. Passing resolutions, politicising situations, even playing on populist sentiments, may only make things seem better. Issues of awareness can be resolved by way of education and well-sounding laws can be promulgated by populist legislators but at the core of all this lies...sensitisation. The Hindu Widows Remarriage Act was passed in 1856 and that we are, today after 166 years, in 2022, talking of a law banning social customs such as breaking bangles, wiping off her *sindoor* and stopping her from partaking in social events, says it all.

We're missing the point.

The attempt to 'end' widow malpractices by adopting a resolution through the Gram Panchayat and campaigning for a 'law' in this regard sounds commendable, at least in principle. There is an attempt to 'boost awareness' on the issue of widow malpractices such as breaking bangles, wiping off sindoor and restricting participation in social events and that too is needed. Also, the need for a law in this regard laying down penal action is being advocated.



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## Hindu customs source of law

*Customs are the main source for the development of the Hindu Law. Even among Hindus, customs differ from one family to another, one geographical area to the next, one community to another and from one congregation to other. They keep changing and evolving over time, absorbing and incorporating new influences that exist at the time, says **Ruchi Verma**.*



**The annual Pandharpur Wari (pilgrimage) on Ashadhi Ekadashi has been held without break for more than seven centuries**

**H**induism or Sanatan Dharma is the oldest religion in the world and it originated in India. Its existence predates any recorded history and has no human founder. Even Vedic records dating back as long as 6,000 to 10,000 years reveal that, at the time, Hinduism was considered an ancient religion. With a religion that old spread across the world, the diversity and complexity of how it manifests within its followers is beyond comparison.

The Vedas are the foundational scriptures to all branches of Hinduism. Devotees worship in different modes – some are ardent followers and highly ritualistic, for others it's a personal affair and restricted to worshipping at home, then there are those who attend mass congregations and religious gatherings such as the Kumbh Mela, while a few are at peace with visiting shrines and temples.

### Source of Hindu customs

Customs are the principal source for the development of the Hindu Law. Even among Hindus, customs differ from one family to another, one geographical area to the next, one commu-

nity to another and from one congregation to other. And, customs do not remain the same too; they keep changing and evolving over time, absorbing and incorporating new influences that exist at the time. In Hinduism, the highest of all 'dharma' is 'achara' or conduct of a person.

A custom, in common parlance, is an act or behaviour which is repetitive or is traditionally accepted or can also be defined as a habitual practice that a person or a community is uniformly following for a long period of time. Customs can be defined as 'Rule of Conduct'.

Customs are primarily of four types as follows - Local Customs, General Customs, Family Customs, Class or Caste Customs. Local customs or practices are practised by people belonging to a particular geographical area or region. These customs have similarities with the culture of the region or the zone owing to proximity and geographical isolation.

General customs are practices that are prevalent in a country as a whole. Here, the common factor is the country and these customs surpass other barriers such as that of

religion, language, caste, etc. These customs are unique to a country and integral to a country's cultural fabric.

Family customs, as the name suggests, are those that are practised within a family as part of a family tradition. These are followed over a long period of time, originating from their ancestors at some point in the family lineage.

Customs followed by a class or caste are those for a particular caste or sector or class of people. These may include those practised by a certain caste or those followed by a community such as traders, farmers, labourers, jewellers, etc.

## Codification of Hindu customs

It was the Hindu customs that were the first to be codified in India. Ancient sources of Hindu law include shruti, smriti, customs and usages. Modern sources include judgements and precedents, legislation, etc. Of all these, customs and usages are considered the most important and the foremost sources of Hindu law.

Section 3 of Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 defines custom as a 'rule which is followed for a long time and has obtained the force of law among people of the Hindu community'. It also stated that custom must be ancient, must be reasonable, and it should not be in derogation to the laws of the country.

Under the codified Hindu Law, the words "custom" and "usage" are defined to suggest any rule which, having been continuously and uniformly observed for a long time, has obtained the force of law among Hindus 'in any local range, tribe, community, group or family'.

It's expressly provided by all the four major enactments of Hindu law (namely, the Hindu Marriage Act 1955, the Hindu Succession Act 1956, the Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act 1956 and thus the Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act 1956) that, unless otherwise so provided expressly in any of these enactments, any custom or usage effective immediately before the commencement of the respective enactments is to cease to possess effect with regard to any matter that a provision has been made within the said Acts.

Section 29 (2) of the Hindu Marriage Act 1955, which lays down that nothing there in the Act is to be deemed to affect any right recognised by custom to urge the dissolution of a Hindu marriage, solemnised either before or after the commencement of the Hindu Marriage Act.

## Manu Smriti moderates conduct

Manu Smriti or Manava-Dharmasastra or Laws of Manu, is one of the many legal texts and constitution, among the many Dharmasastras of Hinduism. It's a Hindu scripture authored by an ascetic named Manu. Serving as a foundational work on Hindu law and jurisprudence in ancient India for at least at least 1,500 years, Manusmriti was a standard reference for adjudicating civil and criminal cases by both the rulers who patronised Vedic faith and the people who practiced Hinduism.

According to Manu Smriti, if the custom is proved, it will overpower and prevail over written text or laws. It projects an ideal society and ideal human conduct as the basis to establish an orderly society. The scripture further states how to promote these ideals by proposing law to govern all aspects of human life, as closely and minutely as possible.

It also proposes how an individual should conduct



### **The annual Kumbh Mela is held at Prayag Triveni Sangam on the banks of the Ganges**

according to his or her duties, responsibilities and social class, to ensure discipline and to offer a framework to enforce lawful conduct for maintaining order in society. It further details the conduct of the ruler as well.

According to Manu Smriti, the power to enforce the laws is carefully distributed among the rulers and those who assist him in decision making. It recognises how power can corrupt the mind and influence fair decision-making. So, it cautions the king to exercise any judgment with great care.

## Women rights and customs

With the codification of the Hindu law, many customs that existed earlier were abolished, such as the sati system. With the codification of Hindu law and the enactment of the Hindu Succession Act 1956, equal rights were given to both sons and daughters in matters of succession.

Custom under Hindu Marriage Act 1955 has been used in three situations. Firstly, the marriages can be solicited as per the customary tradition which is followed by the party. Secondly, divorce can be obtained by parties on the prevailing custom and usages. Thirdly, adoption can be done as per the customary rules.

As per various commentaries, *Stridhan* includes gifts which a woman received from her father, mother, brother, gifts or property which a woman has expressly accepted, the property which she has obtained through partition or sale, etc.

Before the Hindu law was codified, *stridhan* and women's estate were distinguished from each other. After the codification, all the property which a Hindu female acquired before the commencement of the act or even subsequent, she will be the absolute owner of such property and the difference was wiped off between the *stridhan* and women's estate after the codification of the Hindu Law.

**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.**

## Social reformers play major role

**Nandini Rao** says India has produced innumerable social reformers who have contributed immensely in making India a more progressive and inclusive country. They not only fought against social evils such as Sati, widow remarriage, child remarriage, casteism, etc., but also sought to end the sufferings of the weaker sections of the society by sensitising masses.



**Baba Amte dedicated his life in rehabilitating and empowering people suffering from leprosy**

A social reformer improves the society and rids it of the ills that prevails such as discrimination based on religion, caste, gender, race, etc. India is a land of great thinkers and reformers who changed the society, for good. To name a few...Swami Vivekananda, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar, Jyotiba Phule, Vinoba Bhave, Dayanand Saraswati, Baba Amte and many more.

They say, the only constant in the world is change. And, rightly so, even in societies, transformation is constant. Customs and practices that were once prevalent in a community or a group, sometimes change overtime, other times they become extinct and in due course of time, new ones emerge too.

India has produced innumerable social reformers who have contributed immensely in making India a more progressive and inclusive country. They fought against social evils such as Sati, widow remarriage, child remarriage, casteism, etc.

Discriminatory and exploitative practices, if not checked

in time, become social evils and are detrimental to the healthy growth of any civilised society. Here, the role of a social reformer can be explained the best. He is the one who works and stands tall to end the sufferings of the weaker sections of the society by sensitising the masses.

In India, social reformers such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Swami Vivekankanda, Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar, Jyotiba Phule, Anne Besant, Vinoba Bhave, and many others worked till their last breath for the awakening of the masses and to abolish practices and customs berating of a civilised society.

### Abolishing social evils

Any mention of social reform and reformers in India cannot be done without highlighting the work of Raja Ram Mohan Roy. Born on 22 May 1772 in Radhanagar in the-then Bengal Presidency, Raja Ram Mohan Roy is also known as the

(Continued on page 30)



## *A quaint island and the ‘city of caves’*

*Located tantalisingly close to the hustle bustle of Mumbai, Elephanta Island is a hugely popular tourist destination listed as UNESCO heritage site but that alone is not its stake to fame. The tourism-predominant place boasts of treasure trove of history that reflects in the plethora of architectural marvels/ruins. **Manu Shrivastava** sketches the beauty of the getaway that can be accessed by a ferry.*

*Photos : Manu Shrivastava*



**Tourists lining up at Gateway of India to board a launch to ferry them to Elephanta Island**

Located at a distance of barely ten kilometers from India's financial capital is a quaint, hilly Elephanta Island. Accessible only through a boat ride from mainland Maharashtra, Elephanta Island aka Gharapuri is one of the most popular destinations for tourists, both domestic and foreign, visiting Mumbai.

Surrounded by the sea from all sides, Elephanta Island offers picturesque landscape for nature lovers, a breathtaking view of Mumbai's skyline across the waters and a unique experience, only minutes away from the hustle-bustle of India's financial capital. The most famous attraction on the island and the one tourist's throng to see are the Elephanta Caves which are listed as the UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Before the Covid-19 lockdown, Elephanta Island was recording more than one million footfalls every year. Elephanta Caves are on the must-visit list of most tourists visiting Mumbai. The pandemic led to a complete and total shutdown of all kinds of tourist activities on the island that affected the livelihood of many locals who were completely dependent on tourism for a living.

With the easing of the lockdown and travel guidelines, tourist activities resumed across India and Elephanta Island too began to clock in visitors. Today, once again, tourists are coming

in huge numbers to enjoy a perfect get-away located only an hour away off the south-east coast of Mumbai.

## Offering a unique experience

Unknown to many, Elephanta Island or Gharapuri, that lies about ten kilometers from Apollo Bunder (Gateway of India), is home to three villages with a total population of about 1,200 people. Gharapuri Gram Panchayat falls in Uran Tehsil in Raigad district of Maharashtra and comprises three villages - namely Shetbunder, Morabunder and Rajbunder. Shetbunder village lies in the north-west of the island, Rajbunder in the south while Morabunder in the north-east of the island.

Most islanders are dependent on tourism and related activities and belong to the Agri and Kunbi communities. The Agris are mainly found in Mumbai, Thane District, Raigad District and Palghar district in the state of Maharashtra. They are involved in fishing, salt making and rice farming. They speak the Agri dialect of Maharashtrian Konkani. In Elephanta Island, the Agris, a traditionally fishing community are now engaged in tourism and related works.

Another tribal community that is not a native of the island but its members can be seen in and around the caves is the Wadar community. Whenever there is restoration work



***The rock sculptures at Elephanta Island lie in ruin owing to the shooting practice by the Portuguese***

undertaken on the island, the Wadars, a stone-carving community, live and work on the island to restore the ancient stone structures. These tribals have historically been associated with creating temple structures and cave rock carvings.

The island covers about ten sq km at high tide and about 16 sq km at low tide. The length of the island is about 2.5 kilometers. It comprises two hills with a height of about 150 meters and a narrow valley, a ravine to be specific, separating the two hills as it runs from the north to the south. The west side of the island is marked by a hill that rises from the sea and stretches east across the ravine and rises gradually to the extreme east to a height of 173 meters.

The periphery of the island is marked with sand and mangroves while the interior with a variety of trees such as tamarind, karanj, mango, palm trees, etc. Monkeys are a common sight on the island and are friendly with the tourists who can be seen feeding them corn, biscuits, etc.



***The launch that ferries tourists from Mumbai's Gateway of India to the Elephanta Island aka Gharapuri Island about an hour by sea away***



### ***The entrance to Rajbunder Village - one of the three villages at Elephanta Island***

Elephanta Island is well connected to Mumbai through boat ferry services that ply from the Gateway of India in South Mumbai's Colaba area. The ferry service regularly plies boats every day with a one-way ride lasting about an hour. The service is closed on Mondays which is when the caves are also closed for tourists.

Elephanta Island is also connected to mainland Maharashtra through Uran, which is where most islanders go to get groceries and other supplies, avail medical facilities, etc. Many locals who are not engaged in tourism-based activity on the island, work in the near-by town of Uran.

## **The rich history**

Elephanta Island is known around the world for the famous Elephanta Caves. Inscribed as UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1987, the rock-cut Elephanta Caves were constructed in the mid-5th to 6th centuries AD. The small island is peppered with several other archaeological remains that speak of the rich history of the zone. The archaeological specimens recovered from the island provide evidence of human settlement dating back to as old as second century BC.

According to some experts, the island was first occupied by Hinayana Buddhists who raised a large stupa to the Buddha with seven smaller stupas around it. Coins of the Kshatrapas (Western Satraps) dating to fourth century CE were found on the island too. Some historians suggest that the caves were built by the Rashtrakutas in seventh century.

The most convincing theory of the origin of the caves on the island suggest that the caves were made between the period 450 - 750 AD that coincides with the era when Buddhism was on the decline and Brahmanical traditions were reviving in India.

Pulakesin II of the Chalukyas of Badami dynasty has been attributed with the commissioning of a significant portion of the caves. Gharapuri came under the rule of several dynasties that ruled the area. These include the Mauryas of Konkan, Trikutakas, Chalukyas of Badami, Silaharas, Rashtrakutas, Kalyani Chalukyas, Yadavas of Deogiri, Shahi dynasty of Gujarat, the Portuguese, the Marathas and also the British.

The name Gharapuri literally translates to 'the city of caves'. Elephanta Caves are a collection of cave temples



***The three-headed Shiva at the Centre at the main cave in Elephanta Island , now a World Heritage Site***

predominantly dedicated to Lord Shiva. The caves and the sculptures within suffered immense damage under the Portuguese whose soldiers used the stone sculptures for target practice. The caves are presently under the protection of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) - responsible for the continuous maintenance and upkeep of the historic caves.

The appellation Elephanta was given to Gharapuri by the Portuguese after they discovered a huge black stone sculpture of an elephant near the old landing place. When the British took over the region from the Portuguese, the new colonisers i.e., the British tried to take the elephant to England.

In 1864, they got a crane to lift the elephant and transport it to a ship to be taken to a museum in England. The crane snapped and the priceless elephant sculpture broke into pieces. The pieces were later joined back under the supervision of the curator of the Victoria & Albert Museum of Bombay Sir George Birdwood, and today, the sculpture is housed outside Dr Bhau Daji Lad Museum at the Jijamata Udyan Zoo in Mumbai.

Most of the sculptures in the caves are damaged today but a few still remain intact. There is evidence that the caves were once painted but that most of the paintings have peeled off over time owing to the corroding effect of nature and human activity.



***A Wadar tribal breaking stones as part of the ASI's refurbishing works of the caves' adjoining stone structures***



*The narrow strip of land from the Elephanta jetty leading to the base of the caves. A railway track to ferry tourists in a mini-train runs alongside*

## Reaching the caves

The hour-long boat ride from Gateway of India to Elephanta Island is an experience in itself. The ferry service is shut for tourists during the monsoon months as the water gets choppy and dangerous. In the other months, the boat making its way through the vastness of the Arabian Sea overwhelms first-time visitors. If you're visiting the island in the winter months, you may even see the migratory sea gulls that hover around the boat for the entire ride. Over-excited tourists can be seen offering food to the birds and posing for that perfect picture.

After getting off the boat on to the jetty, a long road takes you to the central square which is also the base of the hill on which the caves are located. One can either walk this distance or take a mini-train ride especially if travelling with children. The five-minute walk offers a breathtaking view of the island's forested hills and the mangroves on the shore. Fishing boats can be seen anchored to the island or venturing into the sea for the day's catch. One might also catch a local or two throwing a fishing net to catch fish for personal consumption.

All along this road are locals selling all kinds of wares such as hats, umbrellas, toys, jewellery, fruits, berries, corn, etc. Upon



*An Elephanta islander selling vada pav as Indian 'Burgur' at a stall along the way to the caves on the Island*



*A few tourists prefer to walk along the stretch adjoining the mini train track to and fro the jetty*

reaching the central square or the base, one has to buy a ticket with a nominal fee to enter Gharapuri. Here, there are a few restaurants and eateries where visitors can sit and eat food or have tea and snacks.

To reach the caves, one has to walk 120-odd steps from the base of the island to the top of the hill. While most tourists walk their way up to the caves, the infirm and the elderly sit in palanquins carried by locals to the top of the hill. All along the 120 steps are small shops selling rare stones, jewellery, wares, artefacts and merchandise - rare and exquisite, these items are a shopper's paradise. Those looking to take memorabilia for friends and family, these shops offer a wide variety of options. There are a few restaurants as well along these steps where tired tourists can sit to take a bite or freshen up. The caves are a few steps away from the top of the steps.

## The grandeur in stone

Elephanta Caves contain rock cut stone sculptures displaying a union of ideas of Hindu and Buddhist philosophies. The carvings, narrating events from Hindu mythology, are made from solid basalt rock. In western India, most of the cave temples are located on the Sahyadri hills as the rock formation here is conducive for intricate and fine carving.

The island has two groups of rock-cut caves. The larger group of caves, which consists of five caves on the western hill of the island, is well known for its Hindu sculptures. The primary cave, numbered as Cave 1, is about one km up a hillside facing Mumbai harbour. Caves 2 through 5 are next to Cave 1 further southeast arranged in a row. Caves 6 and 7 are about



**A stone structure provides shelter for tourists to take a break and shield themselves from the scorching sun and grab a snack or two while visiting the caves**

200-meter northeast of Caves 1 and 2, but geologically on the edge of the eastern hill, also known as Stupa Hill. The western hill is called Canon Hill as it also houses the Portuguese-era firing canons. Both are connected by a walkway.

All the caves are rock-cut and together have an area of 5,600 sq meters or 60,000 sq ft. The most elaborate ones have a main chamber, two lateral chambers, courtyards and subsidiary shrines.

The most important among the caves on Elephanta Island is the great Cave 1 measuring 39 meters from the front entrance to the back. This cave is very similar, in plan, with the Dumar Lena cave at Ellora. The main body of the cave, excluding the porticos on the three open sides and the back aisle, is 27 square meter in area and is supported by rows of six columns each.

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The first thing that catches one's attention in this cave is the seven-meter-high masterpiece called 'Sadashiva' representing the three aspects of Shiva - the Creator, the Preserver and the Destroyer. So, the masterpiece represents Aghora or Bhairava, Taptapurusha or Mahadeva (central full face) and Vamadeva or Uma.

A figure of Ardhanarisvara, a form of Shiva with male and female energy, is carved on the east panel and representations of Shiva and Parvati playing *chausar* are sculpted on the west panel. Andhakasuravada murti, the cosmic dance of Nataraja, Kalyanasundaram murti, Gangadhara murti, Ravana shaking Kailasa and Shiva as Lakulisa are among the other famous panels in the main cave.

The main temple's orientation and the relative location of other temples are in a mandala pattern. The main cave (Cave 1 or the Great Cave) was a Hindu place of worship until the Portuguese arrived when the island ceased to be an active place of worship.

Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation's (MTDC) logo is the 20 feet high monolith of the three-headed Trimurti Sadashiva representing the three aspects of Shiva - life and creativity, a destructive force and the protector of humanity.



A fashion show held at an event at Elephanta Island before the COVID lockdown.

## Tourism potential and preservation

The island is also famous for Elephanta Festival, a popular and celebrated festival organised by the MTDC. Held at Elephanta Island, right next to Elephanta Caves, the festival promotes tourism and culture. The festival is dedicated to the diverse classical music and dance forms of India and is celebrated in February every year.

Main events during the two-day festival include - classical dance performances, plays, skits, instrumental and vocal performances, live music, folk dance performances by local fishermen, etc.

The zone is protected primarily by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), which also undertakes the management of the Elephanta Caves with the assistance of other departments, including the Forest Department, Tourism Department, MMRDA, Urban Development Department, Town Planning Department and the Gram Panchayat of the Government of Maharashtra, all acting under the various legislations of the respective departments.

The ancient caves need constant care through restoration and conservation works. They need to be protected from corrosive saline waters and from nearby industrial activities too. Elephanta Island is a delicate tourist spot, not just environmentally but culturally as well. Presently, tourists can only visit the island during the day and have to leave by evening. The locals are heavily dependent on tourism for their livelihoods. A sustainable and sensible approach is the only way ahead to maintain the tourism potential of the island.

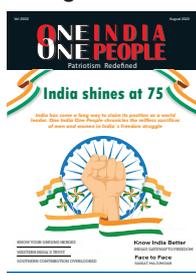


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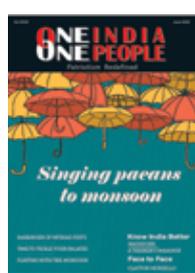
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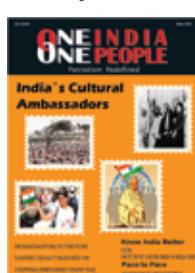
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## “Art is the most appropriate way to reach salvation”

**Pramod Jagtap Bhaginath (35)**, is an Ahmednagar-based award-winning artist, presently into portraits and landscapes. An art teacher, he writes poems, has written and recorded some songs, likes to write plays, has directed a short film ‘Zing’ and done art direction for many plays.

Here he talks about art and life in a candid conversation with **A. Radhakrishnan**.



*Pramod Bhaginath*

### How did your journey begin?

Born and brought up in Ahmednagar city, in a police officer's family with no artistic background, I used to take interest in sign and election board painting. I did my ATD (Art Teacher Diploma) and Government Diploma in Arts from Rachana Kala Mahavidyalaya, Dip.A. Ed from the J.J. School of Arts and a Diploma in Animation from IACR, Pune.

### How much has Mother Nature influenced you?

We lived in a remote part of the main city, which was less populated and where farmlands would start. So, I enjoyed both urban and rural landscapes as a child. While I played games like cricket and football in school; at home I used to go to the adjacent fields to pick sugarcane, groundnuts and also go for swimming.

The taste of sour green mangoes still lingers. I have sweet memories of sleeping in the dark shadow of a tree. Later, we shifted to a new house, and when I visited the fields after sometime, I saw there were buildings all over the area. "Is it the same mango farm where we used to play?" I wondered.

I missed the place the fields where I played. I thought, how nice it would be if I could paint a picture of my favorite place in my own colours. The change in landscape propelled me towards painting. Hence the dark shadows are always a major part of my paintings.

I was attracted towards landscapes. The pleasure you derive painting close to Nature can't be experienced in an air-conditioned studio. The inspiration and energy she exudes is unmatched. Every single thing, single place has its own vibes and parameters but an artist should be able to capture the mood of the place. If a painter has painted an evening scene, it should look like evening. Similarly if it is afternoon it should look like afternoon.

### How important is colour, light and space in a painting? And solitude?

All three are complementary. Without light, a painting is lifeless. Colours give life and meaning to a painting. E.g., you can convey intense emotions by just filling up a circle with red colour on a canvas. If you fill the same circle with blue it emotes certain calmness and pleasantness...the colour green conveys another emotion, so on and so forth. Space division is an important element of a painting which a good artist will always use it to enhance his/her work. I enjoy the company of people while painting, as it energises me. I don't look for solitude.

### Do you need to show light and dark in a landscape, including the trees? Should you always add clouds in a landscape?

Painting cannot be done without bringing in the light and dark elements; you can only adjust the ratio between them depending upon what and when you are painting, be it trees, houses, mountains, water, etc.

More clouds give your painting a larger perspective and more space for the land and other scenery makes it mysterious. Dark colours add depth to a painting and can be used to create shadows.

### Do you teach landscape painting? Any particular method you use for teaching? Do you use photos and photoshop filters?

It is difficult to summarise an exact teaching method. There are various steps from basics to advance. Generally, though landscape is not a part of syllabus of any art curriculum, it does include outlines and perceptions from portraits, still-life and nature drawing. Students need to understand simple and basic outlines of Nature first. To achieve this, I start teaching with



***A vegetable and fruit market in acrylic medium from his Breathing Lights series***

outdoor sketching.

Depth is another important aspect of a painting which is created with lines, figures and colours. Once, I teach basic techniques, I let my students work freely. Realism is an inherent part of landscapes and choosing a medium – watercolours, oil, acrylic, charcoal, pastels, pencils etc., is an individual choice once you learn and master various techniques.

Yes, I use photos for reference, but without filters.

**Who has influenced you in portrait and landscape painting?**

Growing up in the company of a great painter like A.G. Shekatkar taught me a lot. In college, we students mostly painted with water colours. He would give us a demo and would be very upset to see dried up colours in our paint boxes. He would say a colour box should always be “wet”. We misconstrued his words and would pour water on the colours to make it wet.

When he saw us doing that he explained: "What I meant is you

should be painting regularly, i.e. every day. Then you don't need to add water to your box." That lesson of 'continuous working' has remained with me throughout my life.

My work is not influenced specifically by any one artist, but is a combination of what I learn from all.

**What's the difference between a landscape, a genre painting and an environmental or land art?**

Landscapes earlier considered paintings of Nature, have evolved over years and are now categorised under various genres like seascapes, moonscapes, mountainscapes, cityscapes, nightscapes, etc.

Different painting styles from different states and regions have also evolved into various genres over -- e.g., Miniature,



**Pearl in hand (acrylic)**

Madhubani, Warli, Gond, etc. In western culture, genre painting is termed as 'hyper realistic' art style that includes subjects like banquets, assemblies, workers and day to day life of people.

In last 50-60 years, numerous artists have started supporting environmental causes, and use massive land fields and natural objects to create huge art pieces which are called land art.

**How important is travel for landscape painters?**

Very important. Experiencing the actual places adds various perspectives to your painting. Though a lot of painters paint with the help of photographs, it does not help incorporate the feel of the place.

**Define portrait, still life painting and portraiture?**

I think the major difference between portrait and portraiture is that the former is devoid of emotions and the latter brings out emotions.

Portraits are mostly done by artists on demand from customers for commercial reasons. On the other hand, when an artist paints a

model inculcating all his/her emotional features and personal traits, it is called portraiture.

Still life is painting inanimate objects whether they are manmade or natural.

**What size should a portrait be? How to avoid a portrait look like a photo? Can the artist correct flaws or depict a person exactly as they are?**

Paintings should not be restricted to sizes. A portrait not only includes faces or figures, but can use various objects too. Done in various mediums, which have their own characteristics, artists have to master the skills involved. Every painter develops his own style like patch work, flow work, outlining etc., which always helps a painting to be different from a photograph.

The purpose behind a portrait decides whether an artist can overlook the flaws or paint the model as they look. Only an ace painter can achieve the likeness.

**What about self-portrait?**

An artist starts knowing himself when he starts doing self-portraits, and gains self-confidence. Some artists have done it in a depressed state and yet their paintings have become immortal, for e.g Vincent Van Gogh.

**What are the various styles of portrait painting?**

There is realism, surrealism, impressionism, photorealism, expressionism, cubism, divisionism, etc., which have become popular. Portraits can also be classified by colouring methods and mediums like water colours, oil colours, opaque, fresco, sfumato, ink wash, etc.

**Explain your foray into nude life painting? What does it entail?**

It is a very sensitive subject in our country. A lot of painters do not consider it as nudity, but an important form of anatomy art where you can highlight the deepest emotions of a human being.

I have attended several private sessions for studying nudes. Here this art form is only taught at Sir J.J. School of Arts. Lot of people study it through books or photographs, but the real time model experience is unmatched.

**Have you done any series of portraits and landscapes? Exhibitions?**

Art is a journey of different stages. Presently I am into profile and nature painting, as also subjective paintings in portraits. Earlier, I have done a series featuring historical temples, including Hampi and Varanasi. I am also working on old buildings in both the city as well as village where people's memories linger. The light falling on the dilapidated buildings illuminates every moment of their lives and feels alive. Hence, I have named the series, 'Breathing Lights'.

I have done group shows at art galleries in Ahmednagar, Pune and also at various art festivals.

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



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(contd. from Pg 16)

father of modern India. He was one of the founders of Brahma Sabha which is the precursor of socio-religious reform movement, Brahma Samaj.

A great scholar and an independent thinker, Raja Ram Mohan Roy's efforts led to the abolishing of Sati practice in India. He tirelessly worked towards eradicating the ills that surrounded Hindus at the time. He started questioning the Sati practice when his elder brother died and his sister-in-law had to perform Sati. He persuaded the British government to abolish the practice and his efforts bore fruit when in 1829 the Bengal Sati Regulation Act was passed by the then Governor General of Bengal Lord William Bentinck.

Roy founded the Atmiya Sabha and the Unitarian Community to fight social evils and to propagate social and educational reforms in India. He crusaded against customs prevalent at the time such as sati, polygamy, child marriage, caste system and demanded property inheritance rights for women that was absent at the time.

## Uplifting status of women

One of the most remarkable reformers of the 19th century, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar was born 26 September 1820 in Paschim Midnapur district of Bengal. Raised in poverty, he was a brilliant student who performed exceptionally in school and college.

His biggest contribution to the society as a reformer was his unflinching support for widow remarriages. He believed in uplifting the status of women and worked to strengthen their status.

He pursued the British government of the time to make a law legalising widow remarriages and so came the Widow Remarriage Act of 1856. This law gave widows the legal sanction to marry again and legal rights to children born out of such marriages.

He was an educator and a reformer and furthered reform processes started by Roy through Brahma Samaj activities. He also argued against polygamy and child marriage and said that there is no sanction in Hindu religious texts for these practices.

Social reformer, scholar and writer from British India's Madras Presidency, Kandukuri Veeresalingam strongly fought for equal rights for women. He supported widow remarriage, abolishing child marriage, etc. and is known as the father of renaissance movement in Telugu.

Born in an orthodox Brahmin family in 1848 at Rajahmundry, Andhra Pradesh, Kandukuri Veeresalingam wrote extensively for the emancipation of women. In his lifetime, he helped marry off about 40 widows.

He often used ancient scriptures to support his thoughts on how women should be treated. He wrote about how, in Ramayana, Lord Ram was always accompanied by Sita in the assembly by his side. He also said that Indian society will plunge towards destruction if the condition of women continued to deteriorate. He also set up schools for girls and women.

## Thinking minds reform societies

One of the greatest thinkers of all times, Swami Vivekananda, the chief disciple of Ramakrishna Paramahansa and the founder of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, was a living example of a selfless reformer. He was

born as Narendranath Datta on 12 January 1863 in Calcutta, Bengal Presidency, British India.

He focussed heavily on removing the weakness of India's youth, both physical and mental. According to him, for all the problems of India, whether social or political, the solution is self-respect in India's culture and philosophy. He was against superstitions. He proclaimed that with the help of 50 women, he could transform India into a modern, forward-looking nation. Vivekananda's biggest contribution, however, was reviving the true meaning of Hinduism and he propagated the real philosophy and culture of India to the world at the Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago in 1893. He introduced Hinduism to the world as a religion not inferior to any other.

A radical social reformer, Dayanand Saraswati was the founder of Arya Samaj and propagated egalitarian approach of the Vedas at a time when widespread casteism was prevalent in the society. He was against idolatry and empty ritualism. He was the one who first gave the call for Swaraj 'India for Indians' in 1876, a call later taken up by Lokmanya Tilak.

Maharishi Dayanand was fully convinced that it was lack of knowledge that was responsible for the adulteration of a great religion - Hinduism. He set up a number of gurukuls to enable access to Vedas and spread knowledge.

## Challenging the caste system

Born into a low caste Mahar family who were treated as untouchables, Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar came a long way in life. He not only took the caste system by the horns but as the father of the Indian Constitution, ensured constitutional safeguards for the downtrodden – women, SCs, STs and OBCs – by adding special provisions for their upliftment.

Chhatrapati Rajarshi Shahu aka Rajarshi Shahu of the Bhonsle dynasty of Marathas, the first Maharaja of the Indian princely state of Kolhapur was a social reformer. During his rule, he implemented many progressive policies such as an embryonic reservation system for lower caste and non-caste groups and expanding access to education regardless of caste and creed.

Realising the importance of education, he made primary education compulsory and free in his rule. He also made schools for girls' education and issued a royal decree to spread women's education and legalised widow remarriage in 1917.

He worked for the Dalits and abolished the practice of setting up separate schools for upper castes and untouchables. On 26 July 1902, at the age of 28, he issued a historic document in the gazette of the Karveer (Kolhapur) state - a notification that reserved 50 per cent of government posts for backward class candidates.

**Nandini Rao 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.**

# A rich legacy of inspiration

The Bombay High Court recently remarked on popularising the writings of Maharashtra's social reformers. **Lina Mathias** looks at the broader issues herein and the need to bring to public attention the state's extraordinary number of reformers and their work.



**Bombay high court**

**O**n 22nd July this year a division bench of the Bombay High Court remarked on creating awareness about writings of Maharashtra's social reformers. The judges' observations opened up many rich veins of thought and impetus for action, well beyond the immediate subject.

The bench of Justices PB Varale and Kishore Sant was hearing a suo moto petition which took cognizance of a report in the daily *Loksatta* saying that the project of publishing the literature of Babasaheb Ambedkar with an estimated cost of ₹ 5.45 crore, had been stalled.

The comments of the bench touched upon many aspects that deserve public attention and a larger discussion. This includes the need to popularise the books on social reformers that the government publishes, make the public aware of where and how these books can be bought and read, the very habit of reading itself and importantly, the urgent need to preserve and house the original writings and manuscripts of these reformers in a safe place.

## Maharashtra's contribution

In an interview to the Economic Times published in July, 2010, historian Ramachandra Guha pointed out, "Maharashtra was the crucible of political activism and social reforms from the late 19th century till the 1950s." But what is remarkably noteworthy is Guha's assertion that, "Objectively, I would say Maharashtra's contribution (to social reforms and political thinking) has been equal or even greater than that of Bengal. The more I read and researched, I was sure Maharashtra had contributed to social and political reforms much more than any other part of the country."

This is high praise indeed but also a further confirmation of the incredibly rich legacy that Maharashtra has of a lineage of reformers. This is a lineage that reflects the contributions of both men and women. The more well known among the latter are Savitribai Phule, Tarabai Shinde, Ramabai Ranade and the lesser known educationist and activist, Fatima Sheikh. We also have Cornelia Sorabjee, lawyer, social reformer and writer who was the first woman graduate of the Bombay University and

the first woman to study law at the Oxford University. Among the many well known male social reformers are also those who may not be familiar names to young Indians. Among these are Gopal Ganesh Agarkar (educationist, journalist and social reformer), Balshastri Jambhekar (father of Marathi journalism) and numerous others including Lokmanya Tilak's son Shridhar Balwant Tilak.

The Bombay HC remarked that the government has published books on Rajarshi Shahu Maharaj, Mahatma Jyotiba Phule and other great reformers but the public has remained largely unaware about this. Not many people are aware of the existence of government book shops. "Earlier, people used to go to bookshops but now it is all available at your doorstep. Publishers have to bring people to the shops," added Justice Varale.

The HC appointed advocate Swaraj Jadhav, to assist it on this petition. Jadhav informed the HC that most of the original handwritten manuscripts of Dr. Ambedkar and Jyotiba Phule were stored in an old building in south Mumbai and the monsoons would only add to the possibility of the papers suffering damage.

Earlier, the HC had directed the state government to inform it about the Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Source Material Publication Committee with details about resources provided to it to do its work. According to newspaper reports the judges pointed out that no such details had been provided.

On a broader note, the HC's remarks asking the government to take "concrete and positive" steps to popularise the writings of these reformers must also be seen in the context of people, especially the young, being encouraged to read. We often hear and read about complaints that the attention span of the young covers fleeting seconds and that they are loath to read anything that is even remotely lengthy. The young want everything in bullet points and in snippets is a constant refrain of those above 40 years.

Instead of ruing what is perhaps inevitable in a world of rapidly leapfrogging technology, the emphasis should be on popularising Maharashtra's rich intellectual and reform oriented legacy. How this can be done in ways and means that will appeal to readers across ages, generations and interests should be the central point of public discussions and debate. The social reformers that we so proudly look up to were nothing if not innovators who dared to think beyond conventional beliefs. The best tribute we can pay them is to emulate them in order to spread their message far and wide.



Lina Mathias is a senior Mumbai-based journalist and former executive editor, Economic and Political Weekly



## Menacing addiction in kids

**Shoma A. Chatterji** discusses, with frightening examples, how youngsters are getting hooked to Internet and Mobile Gaming and are ruining their life and careers. It is like any other addiction such as smoking, drinking and gambling but much more dangerous. A fair blame should go to the parents who give phones to their kids to get them out of their hair.



### Most Indians okay with moderate online gaming for kids

**A** 16-year-old boy, addicted to the Players Unknown's Battlegrounds game on the Internet, faked his own kidnapping and demanded ransom from his own parents because they had taken away his mobile phone.

A 21-year-old mobile game addict from Kakati village in Belagavi, Karnataka, killed his father and sliced his limbs because he was stopped from playing PUBG.

A class XI student, son of a deceased police officer, was addicted to a dangerous internet game. The boy used the bank accounts of his mother to make the payments for online games. When his mother went to the State Bank of India (SBI) to withdraw the money, she was shocked to learn that there is no money left in the account. A total of ₹ 27 lakh was spent from

the account. She then checked her account with HDFC bank and found that ₹ 9 lakh had disappeared. Her entire life's savings and the money her late husband had left behind for the family had vanished without trace.

A 19-year-old boy from Wanaparthy, Keshavardhan, was admitted to a corporate hospital in Hyderabad after he revealed symptoms of a stroke following playing PUBG unstopped for many hours.

A 14-year-old allegedly committed suicide by consuming poison at his residence after he got a scolding from his family members for playing PUBG. A 15-year-old who was "quiet and good" suddenly smashed his grandfather's expensive laptop to

smithereens as the older man had snatched his mobile from him. The boy, an orphan was being taken care of by his paternal grandparents.

These real-life cases are much more dangerous than they appear to be when you see your growing child or grandchild glued to his/her cell phone for hours, not talking to anyone in the family, keeping aloof from friends and relatives, refusing to attend family functions or participating in sports or other cultural activities. These are symptoms that call for immediate psychological counselling and attention by a trained doctor also. But adults do not find all this alarming except that they get irritated because the child is not paying attention to school work or to studies at home or at tuitions. Not paying attention to studies is just the tip of a dangerous iceberg where the top layer of ice might break at any time and literally swallow the addicted child into the deep ice-cold waters of the sea, never to return.

Every technical and scientific invention brings along with it, associated socio-psychological problems, especially for children. Parents, knowingly or unknowingly, contribute to the child's addiction to cartoon shows and videos on television or on the Internet. This happens because among the urban middle-class, parents mostly have just one child and both partners have jobs to attend to. The child is left with a nanny or a maid. As the child begins to grow, the parents hand him a cell phone to play with, not knowing it may bring calamity to the family and destruction for the child.

Zee News Editor-in-Chief Sudhir Chaudhary had about six-months back analysed how the Indian youth is falling prey to online gaming. Nearly 41 percent of India's population i.e., around 55 crore people are below 20 years of age, which means that online gaming addiction will ruin an entire generation.

Last year, the WHO defined Gaming Disorder as a pattern of gaming behaviour characterised by impaired control over gaming, increasing priority given to gaming over other activities and continuation or escalation of gaming despite occurrence of negative consequences.

In a survey conducted in India in 2020, 65 percent of children under the age of 20 said that they were ready to give up food and sleep to play online games. Many confessed they were ready to steal their parents' money to play online games. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the addiction to online gaming apps has increased tremendously among children across the country, leading to adverse physical and mental health effects.

In a survey conducted by Subha Das Mullick, a filmmaker and a consultant-cum-teacher, who asked whether students should be allowed to bring mobile phones to school, the children who said "Yes" explained that a mobile phone was a substitute for a dictionary, they could do quick fact-checking

during class and many interesting activities could be done with the mobile phone. Some teachers said that if students have mobile phones with them, they can be taught netiquette using the gadget. They can also be familiarised with useful sites and taught to glean useful information. Those students who responded with a "no" to students bringing mobile phones to school said that it was too much of a distraction, parents called up, they kept messaging each other, they cheated during exams, and they were constantly on Instagram or Facebook while class was going on. Some teachers said that smart phones were status symbols. Those who do not have smart phones or cannot afford them, will begin to suffer from an inferiority complex.

It is largely felt that gaming addiction affects a given age-group of growing children but this is not exactly true. Today, the addiction has percolated above to reach higher age groups to affect university students and occasionally, even working adults. It is like any other addiction such as smoking, drinking and gambling but much more dangerous as it begins first to affect the very young who are often handed a mobile by their own parents to get irritating children out of their hair.

Conventionally, we connect addictions with substances such as alcohol and drugs but with the increased use of technology in our regular routine addictions to similar things such as the internet, smartphone and gaming are becoming more ordinary. Unlike alcohol and drugs, individuals are not warned about the dangers of spending additional time in gaming or realize the warning signs of such addictions.

Gaming through mobile and internet-ready games for cash, or for kind, or even intangible and abstract gifts and coupons, is much more dangerous than it may appear to be at first instance. Parents of gaming-addiction children are not even aware that rehabilitation is available and necessary in extreme cases.

Residential treatment programmes for gaming addiction works by removing a patient from their triggers. It allows them around the clock professional treatment and supervision. But, should parents be counselled first and then children? Think about 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.**

## Poignant chronicle emotively told



It's a robust belief that our ancients were the inheritors of a primitive disclosure from God. This was also seemingly the basis of what their physicians did, or said, by decree, so to speak. This belief holds good in this, our high-tech age, also time, although most thinkers — including scientists — would want to give deft pictures of our supplementary, also profuse, yet diverse nature.

The association of disease with death, as inevitability, as G. Venkatesh, Assistant Professor at Karlstad University, Sweden, writes in his poignant, riveting, book, “Till Death Do Us Reunite” is not as much associated, as our ancients thought, to elemental fault, or deviant happening. It relates more to healing attempts with medical intervention as much as supernatural entities, prayer, visualisation, and so on. It pertains to hindsight too — “What if the diagnosis was established early, or if doctors were pre-emptive, or aggressive, enough to nip the cancer ‘bug’ in its bud? — in terms of a simple distinction between matter and spirit, where the two elements could be intangibly dissected within and outside of the cultural context of humanity. Or, as George Santayana said, “Life is neither a spectacle nor a feast, but a predicament” — that is, so long as one lives.

The book chronicles heart-rending events from the time Varshita, Venkatesh's dotting wife, showing hidden signs of something

“Till Death Do Us Reunite” (Locksley Hall, 2022; pp 160; INR325), author G. Venkatesh

The book chronicles heart-rending events from the time Varshita, Venkatesh's dotting wife, showing hidden signs of something being wrong with her health. That it did not take them long to ‘smell’ trouble, as it were, is not the point in context. They reached out to the best available medical facility, also specialist doctors, in the quickest time possible was also another thing. It was all predictable. There was a strong sense of deferment in the air — the song of everyone's burden in life-threatening illness. “This just can't happen to me, or us.”

Venkatesh recalls how they met in 2007 on a matrimony website, and got to know each other — and, that everything was hunky-dory from the word go. They got married at 36. To paraphrase Venkatesh's perspective: “The honeymoon in Kerala. Varshita had organised everything. All by herself. We hopped from one location to the other, enjoying our new-found closeness, overcoming any ‘icicle’ between us that may not have melted, learning to shed our inhibitions, and being in close communion with Mother Nature in God's Own Country. Backwaters, forest-trails, mountains — we took them all in.”

It's just five years later that Varshita was diagnosed with breast cancer and other negative paraphernalia — a sequel that no one would want, or wish, in one's lifetime.

As Venkatesh reminisces, there was all darkness - with not even a silver dot, in the gloomy cloud: “I noticed that Varshita was finding it difficult to breathe. The nurse told me that nothing could be done (It was soon the last ten minutes of her life). I sat beside her; I held her hand. I hoped she would recognise my touch. I was not sure whether she'd hear what I said, or feel my touch. She'd not opened her eyes for two full days. I told her she'd always live in my heart... (I thought) she would be safe in god's hands, away from the pain and suffering. That she must bless me from heaven as an angel. She opened her eyes wide, one last time, and saw me. I'd never know what she wanted to tell me and I would also never know if she had seen me, felt my touch and heard what I said. It was a Full Moon Day when she ascended to Heaven.” It had rained early in the morning — in consonance with her name, Varshita, meaning rain.

Venkatesh's heart-breaking book is not just about suffering, pathos, or death be not proud. It's about Varshita echoing Yvonne Woon's transcendent metaphor, “I'm not afraid of death... I'm afraid of life without you.”



Jawahar Nidamboor is a marketing and communications professional, registered pharmacist, independent researcher, teacher, life coach, scientific and popular writer, and co-author of four books on natural health and wellness. He is, at present, Senior Manager-Scientific Content (Pharmaceuticals/Medicine/Healthcare) with MediaMedic Communications.

## PALLONJI SHAPOORJI MISTRY (1929-2022)

### Pioneering construction tycoon

**P**allonji Shapoorji Mistry who inherited his father's construction behemoth Shapoorji Pallonji Constructions (SP Constructions) at the age of 18 was born on 1 June 1929 to Shapoorji Pallonji Mistry in a traditional Parsi family that had its roots in Bombay. He completed his school and college education in Mumbai (then Bombay) before plunging headlong into the construction business.

During his 65-year-old association with the company, Pallonji embarked on a business expansion drive that witnessed the company spreading into the overseas markets as well. The 156-year-old firm registered an exponential increase in its business turnover with Pallonji's father being instrumental in the construction of several iconic structures in and around Bombay.

Many of the landmarks in the megapolis were constructed by Shapoorji's firm and many of them were centred around the Fort area in the city. These included the Hongkong & Shanghai Bank, Grindlays Bank, The Standard Chartered Bank, State Bank of India and the Reserve Bank of India.

The young Pallonji mastered the nuances of the construction business in no time and he took over the reins of the firm in 1975 after his father's death and as the Chairman of S P Constructions exercised complete control over the enterprise. The company also diversified into several other business avenues and acquired controlling stakes in firms like Forbes Textiles and Eureka Forbes.

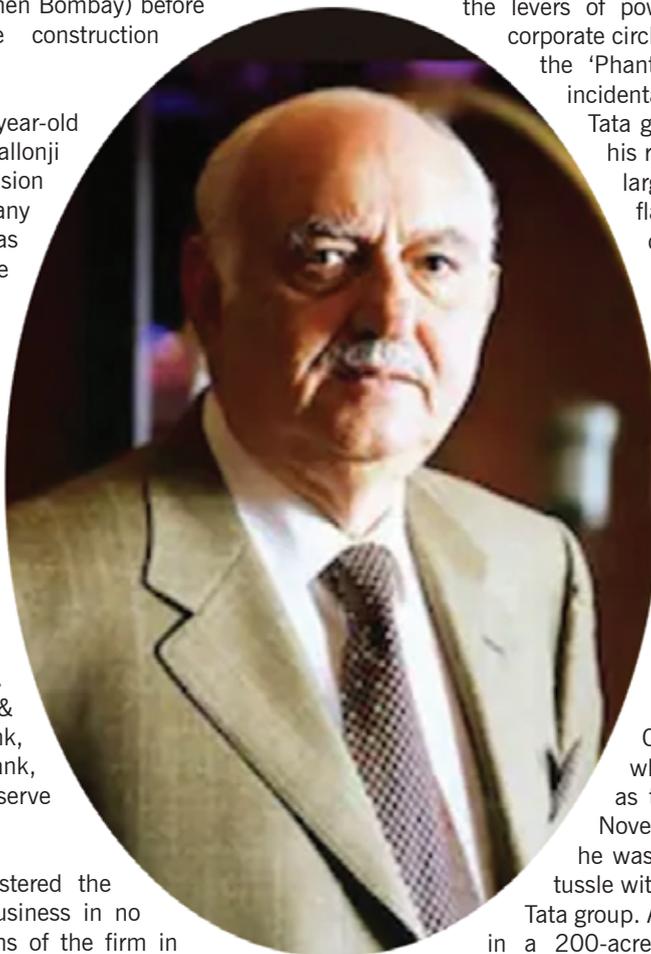
Pallonji Mistry also served as the Chairman of the Associated Cement Company (ACC). During his tenure as the head of the construction company he was instrumental in the company taking on international projects and creating iconic structures like the President's office in Ghana, the Ebene IT Park in Mauritius and the Palace of the Sultan of Oman. It would be no exaggeration to say that Pallonji and his firm constructed most of the structures in Muscat. Pallonji's construction ventures included the iconic Taj Mahal Palace Hotel and the Oberoi Hotel in Mumbai. The construction tycoon was quick to spot new vistas and opportunities and in

harnessing the rapidly growing Indian economy to further his business interests.

The business baron was known to keep a low profile and was publicity shy even though he could work the levers of power with consummate ease. In corporate circles in Mumbai, he was dubbed as the 'Phantom of Bombay House' (which incidentally was the headquarters of the Tata group) for his near invisibility and his reticence. Pallonji Mistry was the largest shareholder in Tata Sons, the flagship concern of the Tata conglomerate and held as much as 18.4% of the shares.

A deeply religious individual and a devoted family man, Pallonji was known to be gracious, humble and charitable and was a philanthropist who never believed in trumpeting his contribution to social causes. Along with his wife, Patsy Pallonji, he set up and founded a home for senior citizens in Mumbai. The elder of his two sons, Shapoorji took over the mantle of S P Constructions from his father while his younger son Cyrus served as the Chairman of Tata Sons from November 2011 to October 2016 till, he was ousted from office after a bitter tussle with Ratan Tata, the patriarch of the Tata group. A lover of horses, Pallonji invested in a 200-acre stud farm in Pune. A short biography that encapsulated the success story of the magnate titled 'The Moghuls of Real Estate' authored by Manoj Naruburu was released in 2006.

Mistry who was awarded a Padma Bhushan by the Government of India in 2016 in the field of trade and industry passed away in Mumbai on 28 June 2022. Paying rich tributes to the departed soul Prime Minister Narendra Modi observed that Pallonji Mistry made monumental contributions to the world of commerce and industry. Many of his contemporaries too paid lavish tributes to the memory of the late industrialist all of which were richly deserved.



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## BHUPINDER SINGH (1940-2022)

### Voice of wintry afternoons

**B**hupinder Singh nee Bhupi was an Indian guitarist, who sang ghazals, bhajans and Bollywood songs.

Guitar in hand, a cigarette on his lips, this 5'8" handsome, jovial man was happy-go-lucky, but if something got on his wrong side, he would swear in earthy Punjabi. A limited-edition he was a master of soulful singing in a brooding voice, creating magic. Gifted with an original, rich voice, his oeuvre was eclectic, drawing inspiration from Western music and Indian classical idioms.

A multi-faceted composer, he understood lyrics and never took liberties with poetic sentiment. The mainstay of his film music output was the languorous, romantic or sad melody, which gave him the space to play with words and the rhythm of the poetry.

Getting his early musical training from his father Nathu Singh, a trained vocalist, he worked with All India Radio and Doordarshan in Delhi. Music director Madan Mohan heard him at a dinner party in 1962 and invited him to Mumbai. He sang the poignant *Ho ke majboor mujhe usne bhulaya hoga*, matching his vocals with stalwarts Mohammed Rafi, Talat Mahmood and Manna Dey in *Haqeeqat* (1964). Then came a solo *Rut jawan jawan raat meherbaan* in *Aakhri Khat* (1966) and famous duets like *Duniya chhute yaar na chhute* and *Aane se uske aaye bahar*.

Coming into his own during the 1970s and 1980s, apart from Jaidev, Khayyam, R.D Burman and the other mainstream musicians of the previous decade, he sang for specialist or art film music directors.

Bhupinder also took on the odd light and peppy numbers like *Jaan-e-jaan meri kasam tujhko*, and *Dekho hum dono ki yaari kya kehna*. Then came *Thodi si zameen*, *Kabhi kisiko mukammal java nahi milta*, and *Karoge yaad tho har baat yaad ayegi*.

Other popular songs include *Do diwane shahar mein*, *Naam gum jayega*, *Meethe bol bole*, *Kisi nazar ko tera intezaar aaj bhi*, *Ek akela iss shehar mein*, *Beeti na beetai raina*, *Huzoor iss kadar bhi na itra ke chaliye*, *Baadalon se kaat kaat ke*; *Dil doondta has phir wah!*; *Zindagi zindagi mere ghar*. His last film song was for *Maharana Pratap* in 2012.

A sought-after guitarist for films, his guitar gave each melody its indistinguishable character. Starting out as a Hawaiian guitarist, he learned the Spanish guitar and had an in-born comfort with variants of the guitar.

With *Abhilasha* (1968), he entered composer R.D Burman's team. His Bollywood guitar debut began in 1971, with the rebel anthem *Dum maaro dum* in *Hare Ram Hare Krishna*. The signature guitar riff ran like a motif throughout the film. In the prelude of *Chura liya* from *Yaadon Ki Baaraat*, the clinking of glasses resonated with his strumming that kicked off the Nasir Hussain one-upmanship game between future lovers. He used it to mesmerising effect in the *Phoolon ka taaron ka*. By late 1960s, Bhupinder was the team's lead guitarist.

His first private LP in 1968, had three self-composed songs; a second LP in 1978 had ghazals wherein he introduced the Spanish guitar, bass and drums to the ghazal style, and his third LP in 1980, titled *Woh jo shair tha: Poetry of Gulzar* had lyrics written by Gulzar.

Bhupinder opted for non-film ghazal albums in the mid-1980s. The general standards of Bollywood music had sunk to abysmal depths, leaving him unmotivated. Further despite his exceptional guitar skills, the end output always belonged to the music director, with his name featuring nowhere in the credits. With his Bangladeshi singer wife Mitali, he blended the ghazal with the guitar. The charismatic duo recorded a number of ghazal albums, with original tunes. He got the long-due Sangeet Natak Akademi Award in 2016 and also Mirchi Music Awards for Lifetime Achievement award.

The singer passed away in Mumbai at 82 of a cardiac arrest. He is survived by Mitali and musician son Nihal.



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## LANCE NAIK MOHAN NATH GOSWAMI AC ( - 2015)

### Counter-terrorism expert

Lance Naik (L/Nk) Mohan Nath Goswami was born in Lalkuan in Nainital District in Uttarakhand. His father had served in the Assam Rifles. Mohan volunteered to serve in the Parachute Regiment in 2002. He joined the elite 9 Para, the Special Forces (SF) unit of the army trained specifically for quick engagements in mountain areas.

He gained reputation as one of the toughest soldiers. In August 2015, he was posted in Kashmir as part of counter-terrorism operations. On 23 August, he participated in the operation in Khurmur region of Handwara in which three Lashkar-e Taiba operatives were killed.

Of the five Pakistani militants infiltrating in the Uri sector, one was shot by 35 Rashtriya Rifles while the remaining four hid in a mountain cave. A squad of 12 under Major Anurag Kumar took off in a helicopter to hunt them. Another squad under Captain Mehra had taken off to hunt for three terrorists. In the fire fight, Capt. Mehra was hit. On Goswami's suggestion, Major Kumar rushed to the site of Capt. Mehra to help him and Capt. Mehra was pulled to safety.

Major Kumar cordoned off the area of the cave where the militants hid. Three militants were shot and only one remained. It was decided to offer him a chance to surrender. The last Lashkar-e-Taiba militant, Sajjad Ahmad alias Abu Ubed Ullah hobbled out. Major Kumar was awarded Shaurya Chakra for leading this operation. Three militants were killed in this mission and one captured alive. Udhampur based Defence spokesman Colonel S D Goswami said "The apprehending of a terrorist has proved to be a shot in the arm to prove Pakistan's complicity in abetting terrorism in J&K (Jammu and Kashmir)."

Kumar again volunteered for a mission on 2 September. There was intelligence report of a group of six militants infiltrating in the Sutalyar forest in Kupwara District in Jammu and Kashmir. This was one among the densest jungles of Kashmir with visibility of not more than three metres. The task of Goswami's unit was to ambush the militants. The squad split

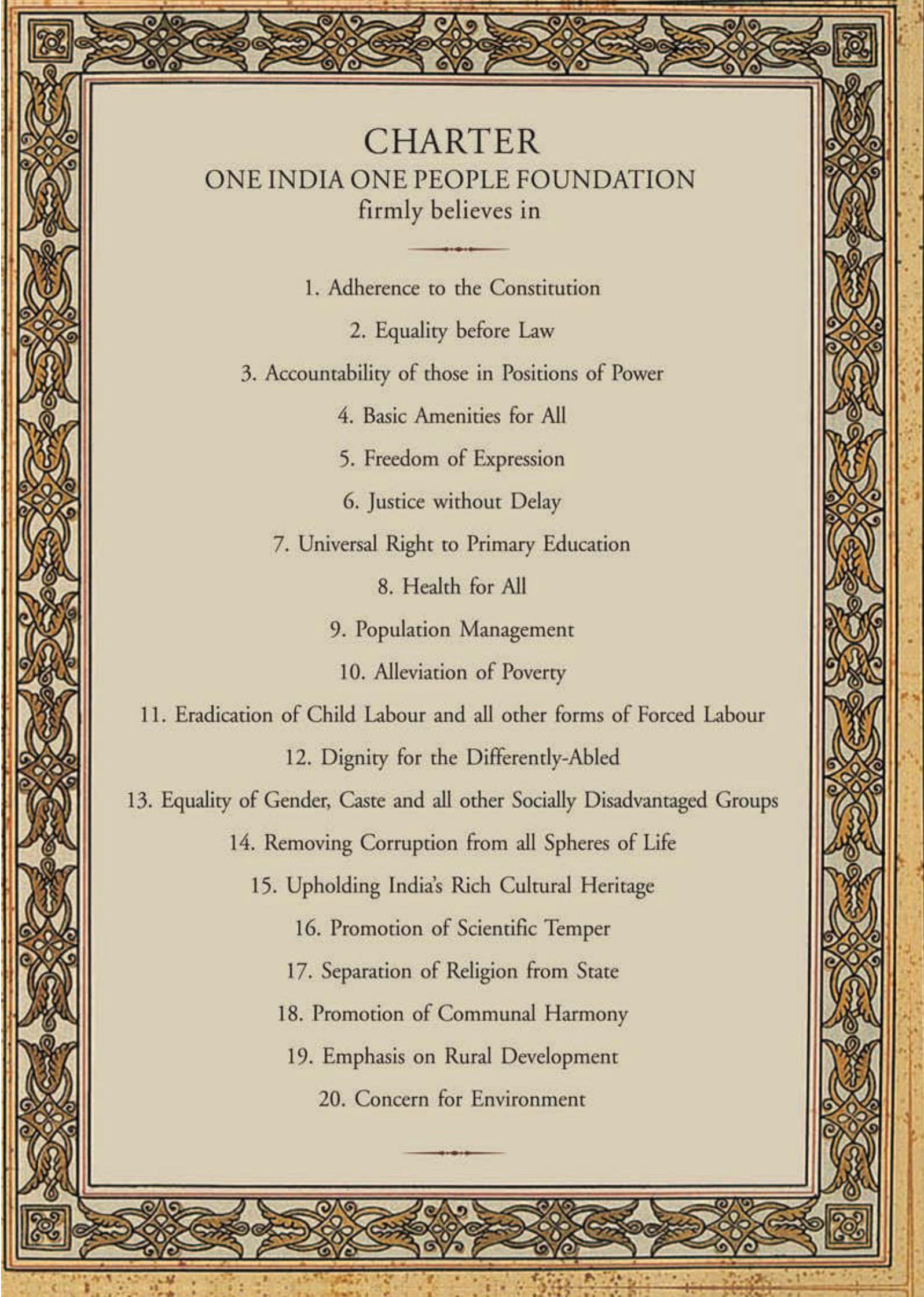
into six teams of six men each. They deployed on two sides of a mountain stream. Four militants were detected and had to be challenged first in order to make sure that no civilian labourer or own comrade was killed. Goswami offered to challenge them. In the ensuing gun fight one terrorist was shot but not killed. The gunfight continued for some minutes but ceased when it started to drizzle. The terrorists had fired from a grenade launcher. Two commandos were wounded and Goswami and his buddy Havaladar Mahendra Singh rushed to their help. The terrorists opened fire cutting down Goswami and Singh. A bullet tore through Singh's abdomen while two bullets tore through Goswami's waist. As he fell, he kept his weapon pointed towards the advancing militants and killed the two of them. With cover fire from Major Kumar, Goswami crawled towards the fallen figure of Mahendra Singh. He was secured and pulled to safety. Goswami breathed his last before he could be taken to a vehicle.

Next day, the unit held a Bada Khana. Through mourning, there was pride. He had passed away doing what he loved most - hunting terrorists. Officers and soldiers of the unit raised their glasses to Goswami, hailing him for his courage skill in battle. He is survived by his wife Bhawna and daughter Bhumika.

His mortal remains travelled by road to his village. Through tears, his mother, Radha Devi, appealed to the government to build a school or playground in his name. His wife decided not to build a bigger house that they had been planning. Goswami was cremated with full military honours in his native village. He was posthumously awarded Ashok Chakra which was received by his wife from President Pranab Mukherjee on 26 January 2016.



Brigadier Suresh Chandra Sharma (retd.)



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<sup>th</sup>, 1930 – February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2007)

ONE INDIA ONE PEOPLE