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Patriotism Redefined

Leading the Inclusion bandwagon

SECULARISM AND SENSATIONALISM

INDIA AND THE TRUTH OF GENDER INCLUSION
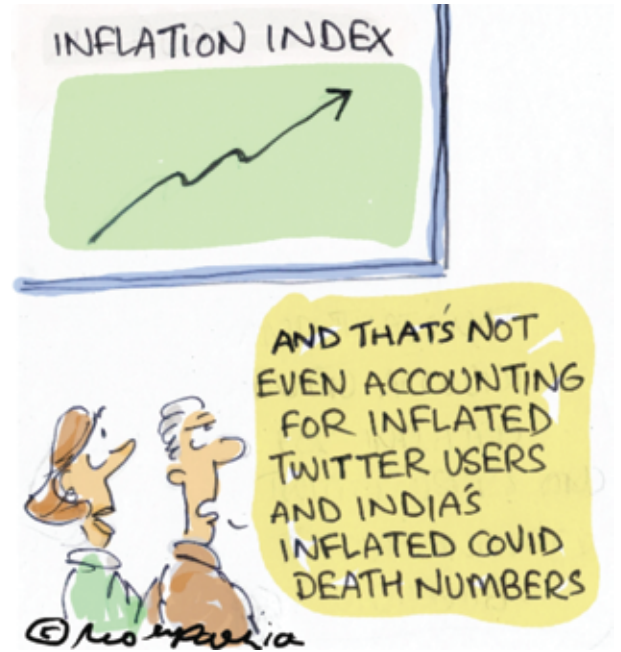
INCLUSION FOR THE 'DIVYANGJAN'

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BANARAS IS A CULTURE IN ITSELF!

Face to Face

SOMNATH KUNDU

Great Indians : Subedar JoginderSingh Pvc I Vanraj Bhatia I Shivkumar Sharma

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THEME:
INCLUSION

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Leading the Inclusion bandwagon

The current dispensation under PM Modi has made it clear that inclusive growth is inherent to the rise of New India. **Anushka Singh** *informs that the concept of 'Antyodya' i.e., the ideology of inclusiveness is decades old and forms the guiding light for the decisions and initiatives taken by the government to promote inclusion.*

Parliament of India

No country can grow without ensuring the growth of all sections of the society. The inclusion has to be on several fronts including social and financial inclusion. Social inclusion is a process where the terms on which individuals and groups partake in society and decision-making are strengthened and improved. This is done in order to improve and uplift the status of these individuals and groups - improve their ability to partake, ensure they have the opportunity to exercise their rights, ensure the dignity they are guaranteed by the constitution.

Financial inclusion, on the other hand, is the process where steps are taken to ensure access of financial services to those who are vulnerable and in need. Not just access, but ensure credit is given in a timely manner and adequately when needed by the vulnerable groups and individuals. And, that this is to be offered to the weaker sections and the low income groups of the society at an affordable cost with easy access.

Government emphasises on inclusion

The current government has made it clear that 'inclusive growth is inherent to the rise of New India'. At an event, the Plenary Session of the International Conference of 'Inclusive Tribal Congregation', Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) of the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER), MoS PMO, Personnel, Public Grievances & Pensions, Atomic Energy and Space, Dr Jitendra Singh reiterated the government's dream of a 'New India' that is inspired by 'equitable growth of each section of society, regardless of the socio-economic background'.

The Modi government has continuously worked towards attaining the objective of empowering the poor to

enable them to eradicate their own poverty. In a hyper-connect global world today, there are no obstacles of distance and time, and 'inclusiveness' is the one and only way to march ahead.

Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyay, an Indian politician and proponent of Integral humanism ideology, had defined the concept of 'Antyodya' i.e., the ideology of inclusiveness many decades ago and it forms the guiding light for the decisions and initiatives taken by the government to promote inclusion.

Humans at center stage

Pt Deen Dayal Upadhyay drafted a political programme what were a set of concepts forming integral humanism and that got incorporated in the official doctrine of the Jan Sangh. He believed it was of utmost importance for the country to develop an economic model of her own that will focus on the humans and keep them at center stage and not materialistic variables.

Integral Humanism was adopted as Jan Sangh's political doctrine and its new openness to other opposition forces made it possible for the Hindu nationalist movement to have an alliance in the early 1970s with the prominent Gandhian Sarvodaya movement going on under the leadership of J P Narayan.

The present government has initiated a series of new programmes that have been inspired by the idea of making every section of society a part of India's growth story and the most striking example of this are schemes like Jan Dhan Yojana, PM Krishi Vikas Yojana, etc. Other schemes such as Start-up India, Stand-up India, Mudra Yojana, etc., promote inclusion with an underlying fact that today in India more than 70 per cent of the population is below the age of 40 years.

The government is looking at a holistic approach of reforms where economic incentives go beyond economic factors and look at social and behavioral reforms as well for sustainability of these initiatives and maximum impact.

Using technology for inclusion

The several beneficiaries of the many schemes run by the government and its agencies run into tens of crores. Today, digital developments, technology and the internet have revolutionised the inclusion realm. These have opened up innumerable possibilities and opportunities for the beneficiaries and potential beneficiaries. It's also much easier now to keep track of progress and development owing to digital infusion in government record-keeping and implementation of schemes and incentives.

Also, the dependence on social networks for information and communication, has changed everything today. Today, governments and entities involved in promoting inclusion are talking about 'smart growth'. When there is inclusive growth, there is an environment for a high-employment economy that in turn promotes social inclusion and harmony.

Many countries today are employing technology to promote smart growth that can expedite the inclusion process. India is an emerging economy and the digital push that has ensured internet and technology penetration in the far interiors of the country is a big advantage.

India is constantly looking to leverage technology and digital infrastructure to facilitate faster economic development and simultaneously expedite social and financial inclusion. Such developments give way to innovation that in turn promotes

sustainability, efficiency in resource management, holistic development, employment, equality, harmony, etc.

Catalyst for inclusion

Technology, if used correctly, can be a great catalyst for social inclusion and financial inclusion. In India, digital reforms have paved the way to ensure access to tools of development. Today, it's much easier for people to learn new skills, upgrade their skill set, etc. And look for better employment opportunities.

The Skill India Mission that was started by PM Modi in 2015 is one of the six schemes aimed towards increasing skills across many disciplines thus providing better working opportunities to the candidates. It is an umbrella scheme with several others skilling schemes and programmes under it. The chief objective is to empower the youth of the country with adequate skill sets that will enable their employment in relevant sectors and also improve productivity.

With the emergence of edutech platforms, easy availability and access to content, new skills, open universities, professional courses, workshops, etc. Even education is more affordable and approachable thus bridging the social and financial gap further. With the digitisation of education, people in rural areas are also able to avail quality education thus improving their prospects.
So, technology is playing an important role in enabling successful integration of the many groups, communities, sects and tribes for holistic social inclusion.

Tribes and inclusion

Today, in North-east India, more than 200 tribes have members that have excelled themselves in their respective fields of activity and have today emerged as role models for other communities and so called mainstreams of society. Technology again has played a very important role in offering easy accessibility to information and easy connectivity with peers across the world.
The Institutional Support For Development and Marketing of Tribal Products/Produce scheme by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs releases grants-in-aid to State Tribal Development Cooperative Corporations (STDCCs) and Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India Ltd. (TRIFED) which is a multi-State Cooperative under MoTA.

The scheme 'gives comprehensive support for people belonging to various tribes in the entire range of production, product development, preservation of traditional heritage, support to both forest and agricultural produce of tribal people, support to institutions to carry the above activities, provisions of better infrastructure, development of designs, dissemination of information about price and the agencies which are buying the products, support to government agencies for sustainable marketing and thereby ensure a reasonable price regime.'

The objective of the scheme is 'to create institutions for the Scheduled Tribes to support marketing and development of activities they depend on for their livelihood by (i) market intervention; (ii) training and skill up-gradation of tribal artisans, craftsmen, MFP gatherers etc.; (iii) R&D/IPR activity; and (iv) Supply chain infrastructure development.

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.

Secularism and Sensationalism

In the Indian context, Secularism, in the truest meaning of the term, as was meant to be understood at its place of origin, could not be applied blindly to the Indian context. **Gajanan Khergamker** *reasons out that it was manifestly a Western intervention, specifically a product of the Protestant Reformation and the Enlightenment.*

Part III
Fundamental Rights

To understand the Right to Freedom of Religion, the best example would be to analyse the Sabarimala episode. The Sabarimala imbroglio was a populist bone of contention for political parties that aligned despite differences for fear of upsetting a sizeable religious faction. The issues here were primarily dual in nature.

The Right to Equality of women being compromised by an arguably 'patriarchal' custom barring those of menstrual age entry is in direct opposition to the Religious Freedom of the Sabarimala Temple authorities in conducting their internal affairs. The September 2018 Supreme Court verdict upholding the rights of women of all ages to enter Sabarimala Temple stirred a hornet's nest.

Despite the inclusion of the term 'Secularism' in the in the Preamble of the Constitution, the State has, even within the Indian Constitution itself, permitted intervention and legislated on issues that could, if applied in the strictest of senses, be in violation of the 'Secular' term. If followed strictly, the State would be not be permitted to intervene in any religious situation that would include the reservation system, protection of the Muslim personal law and the directive principle to protect cows, all of which the Constitution ultimately went ahead with.

Upholding democratic principles

For the State to follow the spirit of secularism while avoiding its inclusion in the Preamble, the chairman of the drafting committee of the Constitution B. R Ambedkar had, during the Constituent Assembly discussions, said, "what should be the policy of the State, how the Society should be

organised in its social and economic side are matters which must be decided by the people themselves according to time and circumstances. It cannot be laid down in the Constitution itself because that is destroying democracy altogether."

When the Preamble to the Constitution was discussed in the Constituent Assembly, there were huge debates over the incorporation of secularism on which all the members agreed yet through extensive debates in the Constituent Assembly revealed the ambiguity inherent in the terminology predominantly Western, when applied in the Indian context. Questions were raised regarding the nature of its application and to what extent it was even possible.

In the debate on December 6, 1948, Lokanath Misra had said, "Do we really believe that religion can be divorced from life, or is it our belief that in the midst of many religions we cannot decide which one to accept? If religion is beyond the ken of our State, let us clearly say so and delete all reference to rights relating to religion." Even vice president of the drafting committee H C Mookherjee had stated "are we really honest when we say that we are seeking to establish a secular state? If your idea is to have a secular state it follows inevitably that we cannot afford to recognise minorities based upon religion."

Secularism in Indian context

Secularism, in the truest meaning of the term, as was meant to be understood at its place of origin, could not be applied blindly to the Indian context. The term 'secularism' is known to have originated in late medieval Europe coined first by English secularist, co-operator, and newspaper editor George Jacob Holyoake was modelled on the theory that governments ought to have no religious connection, nor indeed anything to do with matters of religious belief or ritual.

It was manifestly a Western intervention, specifically a product of the Protestant Reformation and the Enlightenment. It went on to be treated as the ideal theoretical basis of nation-states utilised in lands outside the European continent, such as the United States even Turkey. It was only inevitable for the creators of free, modern India, shaped by European thoughts and practices, to be ardent supporters of secularism.

Consequently, the Constituent Assembly adopted Articles 25, 26 and 27 of the Indian Constitution in order to further secularism that, despite not being formally inserted in the document, was definitely embedded in the constitutional philosophy.

Secularism, as a concept, was introduced through the 42nd amendment which gave unprecedented powers to the Parliament. Almost all parts of the Constitution, including the preamble, was changed with this amendment. Thereafter the description of India in the preamble was changed from "sovereign, democratic republic' to a 'sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic republic."

India's secular fabric

Data on Population by Religious Communities of Census 2011 released by the Registrar General and Census Commissioner revealed the diversity of Indian demographics - six major religious communities namely Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Buddhist and Jain besides 'Other Religions and Persuasions' and 'Religion not stated'.

Of the total population of 121.09 crores in 2011, Hindus comprise 96.63 crores (79.8 per cent); Muslims comprise 17.22 crores (14.2 per cent); Christians comprise 2.78 crores (2.3 per cent); Sikhs comprise 2.08 crores (1.7 per cent); Buddhists comprise 0.84 crores (0.7 per cent); Jains comprise 0.45 crores (0.4 per cent); Other Religions & Persuasions (ORP) comprise 0.79 crores (0.7 per cent); and Religion Not Stated comprise 0.29 crores (0.2 per cent).

The Census based on religion is an indicator of the religious diversity of Indian society and only adds to the fact that India has always been inclusive and tolerant of all religions, today and in the past.

It is pertinent to note here that Nationalist Congress Party president Sharad Pawar has recently demanded a caste-based census saying that such an exercise was necessary to ensure social equality. Pawar said that Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes had benefited from this and similar concessions were required for the Other Backward Classes. "To provide concessions, the government must know the exact OBC population and hence a caste-based census was needed," he felt.

Bihar's Chief Minister Nitish Kumar-led government recently gave its approval to a caste-based census. The state government has allocated a budget of ₹ 500 crore for the survey which will be completed by February next year. "Caste based survey approved, to be carried out by state. On state level it'll be carried out by General Administration department and on district level, DM will be nodal officer. Both of these will be in charge of panchayat level and block level," said Bihar Chief Secretary Amir Subhani. "During this, efforts would be made to take survey on economic basis. ₹ 500 crores will be given for the survey. An aim to complete it by 2023 has been set."

Judiciary upholds secularism

The State's intervention on the Instant Triple Talaq issue and its swift concurrence with the Supreme Court view followed by an ordinance, despite loud opposition in Parliament, wasn't perceived as being violative of Secularism or 'interference with religious affairs,' but instead positioned and lauded as a win for Women Rights.

Interestingly, it may be noted here that Congress MP Shashi Tharoor recently, in a written question in Parliament, asked the government to clarify its position on Female Genital Mutilation - a practice among the Bohra Muslims in India. The government had replied that it wasn't introducing any legislation to ban it and that, in case of any objections raised, the IPC and POCSO had provisions to tackle issues arising. An attempt in the future to legislate on the issue could be seen as an affront to the secular fabric of India and an interference in religious affairs.

Distinct from what 'is' right, sadly, it's what is 'seen as right' that matters in a democracy driven by populism and the vote of the majority.

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

India and the truth of gender inclusion

There is a general perception that only a few nations are inclusive of the diverse genders in society. Contrary to popular belief, modern-day definitions of gender, the LGBTQIA+ and its many types are not new to India. India, just like most native cultures, has always had several genders and has always been inclusive to the very core, says **Manu Shrivastava**.

The month of June happens to be the Pride Month for the LGBTQIA+ identities in many parts of the world, including in India. The eventful month is dedicated to celebrating the LGBTQIA+ community, their struggles and their victories. The movement had started in 1969 in the United States following the Stonewall Riots of 1969 that were a series of extemporaneous and sporadic demonstrations held by the LGBTQ community in and around New York.

During the Pride Month, one can see processions and rallies with members of the community donning colourful attire and accessories, particularly rainbow-coloured flags and banners. People also colour their faces, carry banners and posters and raise slogans to express their solidarity with the LGBTQIA+ community.

Today, there are several definitions of gender. There is also a general perception that only a few nations are inclusive of the diverse genders in society. Contrary to popular belief, modern-day definitions of gender, the LGBTQIA+ and its many types are not new to India. India, just like most native cultures, has always had several genders and has always been inclusive to the very core.

Debate rampant in 'Modern' societies

In 2021, American singer Demi Lovato opened up about her sexual identity saying she identifies herself as pansexual. For many years before that, Demi had already spoken about being bisexual and her search for 'a human connection' rather than a man or a woman. After her revelations, discussions on sexual fluidity once again picked up pace.

Lovato had shared the news on Instagram, writing, "Today is a day I'm so happy to share more of my life with you all - I am proud to let you know that I identify as non-binary and will

officially be changing my pronouns to they/them moving forward. This has come after a lot of healing and self-reflective work. I'm still learning and coming into myself, and I don't claim to be an expert or a spokesperson. Sharing this with you now opens another level of vulnerability for me. I'm doing this for those out there that haven't been able to share who they truly are with their loved ones."

The struggles in urban set-ups

Back home in India, of late, it's the coming out of celebrities that brings the much-needed focus on gender issues. Sadly, a few even had to fight violent battles on personal front and in public life. This kind of struggle is primarily an urban phenomenon.

Case in point being Dutee Chand who had to fight two battles and win them both, when most usually succumb to one. In June 2014, when Dutee won two gold medals at Asian Junior Athletics Championships in the 200 m and 4 x 400 m relays, she was expecting to qualify for the Commonwealth Games but was dropped at the last minute after the Athletics Federation of India said that hyperandrogenism made her ineligible to compete as a female athlete.

Chand appealed to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS). "I thought it was a routine dope test. I had no idea about the gender test. I had read in Odia newspapers about it. They said I was not a girl. I was shocked. Many advised medical remedies. But someone advised me to fight it legally. I appealed. The case went on for two years. I got a decree in my favour," recalls Chand who raised her voice against a discriminatory practice that banned women athletes with high testosterone levels.

But that wasn't all. A tougher battle was in store for Dutee and it was with regard to her sexual orientation and the derogation associated. So, when she first told her mother about it, she was not convinced. Her sister got hostile towards her.

Acceptance from 'modern' society

With the Supreme Court reading down Section 377 and announcing that consensual same-sex relationships were not illegal, she decided to come out and open up about her same-sex relationship. "It was easier for me as I am a celebrity. But for my partner who lives in my hometown, it was hard to face the world," recalls Dutee.

The fastest Indian woman today asks those in same-sex relationships to be courageous and stand firm. "My partner supported me every time and I have chosen her for my life. People may look at us differently or call us by any name like gay, lesbian etc. That does not matter so far as we get to spend our lives with each other," she says.

"For all who are in love but afraid of the world you must show courage because the world has always taken time to accept all good things," she maintains. "So, please do not be afraid because it is your life and happiness."

After her disclosure, Dutee went on to become the first Indian woman track and field athlete to clinch a gold in the World University Games. She is a national record holder in women's 100 m with a time of 11.26 seconds. She also won a silver each in 100 m and 200 m in the 2018 Asian Games.

The scriptures of inclusion

The concept of gender fluidity is prevalent in Vedic scriptures and the Upanishadas. The very name Ardhanarishvara

Dutee Chand had to fight a tough public battle with regard to her sexual orientation

that means 'the God who is half woman' says it all. Ardhanarishvara is also known by other names across India, over the ages, like Ardhanaranari (the half man-woman), Ammiappan in Tamil Nadu meaning mother-father), Ardhanarisha (the God who is half woman), Ardhanarinateshvara (the God of Dance, who is half-woman), Naranari (man-woman), and Ardhayuvatishvara in Assam, the God whose half is a young woman or girl.

Why, the concept of Ardhanarishvara symbolises the male and female principles are actually inseparable. The male half of Ardhanarishvara stands for Purusha—the male principle and passive force of the universe and Prakriti—the female active force, both of which are 'constantly drawn to embrace and fuse with each other, though… separated by the intervening axis'.

Sanskrit which is one of the oldest languages in the world uses three genders: Masculine, feminine and gender-neutral. The concept of 'tritiyaprakriti' or 'napumsaka' had been an integral part of the Hindu mythology, folklore and scriptures.

There are several Hindu deities that are shown to be gender-fluid. Also, same-sex relationships and gender variance have been integral to Hinduism as evident in Vedic scriptures, rituals, religious or narrative mythologies, sculptures, etc.

One of the earliest reference to transgender in ancient scriptures is that of Mohini - Lord Vishnu's female avatar. In Mahabharata, the first appearance of Mohini is described when the devas and asuras churned the ocean with the assistance of Vishnu as the Kurma (tortoise) avatar to acquire the elixir of immortality.

In post-colonial India, we have developed the unflinching concepts of gender and strict outlining of the sexes into compartments. Anything that transgresses its boundaries is immoral, looked down upon and borders on illegality. Which is why in pre-Independent India, a lot of gays were actually booked under Section 377 on flimsy grounds too, and punished. The recent Supreme Court reading of the section was necessitated owing to this faulty perception.

For every Demi Lovato, India, has a lot of celluloid icons like Rituparno Ghosh, whose works in the genres of womanhood, homosexuality and gender; Kalki Subramaniam - the first transgender in India to do a lead role in a motion picture; transgender actress Pakhi Sharma aka Bobby Darling and the genre of 'gay' films with 'homosexual' characterisation introduced by filmmaker Karan Johar have been truly immortalised beyond the proverbial 'coming out'. It is, in pseudo-traditional homes, that the hypocrisy be called out.

Manu Shrivastava is a journalist and lawyer with DraftCraft International and Co-Convenor of #TheWomanSurvivor, #MeTooAtHome and #MeTooBeyondBorders initiatives.

Inclusion for the 'divyangjan'

India continues to create an inclusive atmosphere for the empowerment of the divyangjan. It has been inclusive by accepting of all the marginalised groups, including the disabled. The disabled sections have merged with the mainstream through several governmental schemes and initiatives, points out **Nikita Shastri**.

Largest human image of a wheelchair accessibility symbol made in India

For a society to be inclusive, it has to be accepting of all the marginalised groups, including the disabled. When it comes to India, the disabled population is well integrated with the society. There are several government schemes and initiatives and brand new trends of social inclusion for the disabled.

Though the subject of 'Disability' figures in the State List in the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution, the Government of India has always been proactive towards the concerns of the disabled. The government runs seven National Institutes (NIs) dealing with various types on disabilities and seven Composite Regional Centers (CRCs) which provide rehabilitation services to PwDs.

There are several schemes that allow loans for the disabled at concession rates to promote self-employment through the National Handicapped Finance & Development Corporation (NHFDC).

A proactive government

It's important to note that the Government of India is party to the (i) 'Proclamation on the Full Participation and Equality of People with Disabilities in the Asian and the Pacific Region' that was adopted at Beijing in December, 1992 and (ii) The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) which came into effect in May 2008.

It was stated in the 11th Five Year Plan that the 'Disability Division' of the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment will be strengthened by converting it into a separate department so that it can liaise effectively with all the other concerned Ministries / Departments and fulfil its responsibilities towards the disabled.

The decision to create a separate Department of

Disability Affairs within the M/o SJ&E was taken up by the government in principle on 3 January 2012. This was also announced by the President before both the houses of Parliament on 12 March 2012.

So, the two departments were created under the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment vide notification dated 12 May 2012, namely: (i) Department of Social Justice and Empowerment (Samajik Nyaya and Adhikarita Vibhag) and (ii) Department of Disability Affairs since renamed as the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities.

It's all in the name

It was in 2015 when PM Narendra Modi suggested that the term 'divyang' (divine body) be used instead of 'viklang' for persons with disabilities. He was speaking on the occasion of the launch of the Accessible India initiative - an effort to make public places in the country accessible to all.

PM Modi said during one of his Mann Ki Baat addresses, "We see a person's disability with our eyes. But our interaction tells us the person has an extra power. Then I thought, in our country, instead of using the word 'viklang,' we should use the term 'divyang.' These are people who have a limb or several limbs with divine powers which we don't have."

As a result of this, in 2016, the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities was renamed to 'Divyangjan Sashaktikaran Vibhag' in Hindi, dropping the word 'viklangjan' from its previous nomenclature. In the English nomenclature too, the word 'Divyangan' has been suffixed now to the original name. The central government had proposed the change in name of the department by amending the Government of India (Allocation of Business) Rules, 1961, approved by President Pranab Mukherjee.

The renaming has changed the approach of the entire world towards the 'divyangs' as the nomenclature used earlier i.e., 'viklang' or handicap had a connotation that would trigger neglect, insult and weakness.

Legal and social aid for the 'divyangjan'

Indian government has undertaken several measures to make available affordable and speedy justice to all, including persons with disabilities. The Legal Services Authorities (LSA) Act, 1987 provides free and competent legal services to the weaker sections of the society including beneficiaries covered under Section 12 of the Act to ensure that opportunities for securing justice are not denied to any citizen by reason of economic or other disabilities and to organize Lok Adalats to secure that the operation of the legal system promotes justice on a basis of equal opportunities.

Between April 2018 to January 2022 months, 29,050 persons with disabilities had been provided legal services under LSA Act as per details given by Union Minister of Law and Justice Kiren Rijiju.

India is also party to the Incheon Strategy to 'Make the Right Real' for persons with disabilities (PwDs) in Asia and the Pacific. It sets out ten goals such as 'reduction in poverty and enhancing work and employment prospects, promoting participation in political process and decision making, creation of barrier free environment, strengthening social protection, promoting early intervention and education of children with disabilities, ensuring gender equality and women's empowerment, promoting disability-inclusive disaster risk reduction and management, improving the reliability and comparability of disability data, accelerating ratification and implementation of UNCRPD (United National

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability) and harmonise national laws and promoting sub regional, regional and inter-regional cooperation'.

The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (RPwD Act), 2016 provides for reservation for 'divyangjan' in government employment, inclusive education, participation in decision making process through Central and State Advisory boards on Disability, etc. As part of this Act, the types of disabilities have been increased from seven to 21 and special courts have been set up in every district for faster adjudication of cases.

Section 12 of this Act particularly deals with access to justice, which inter alia mandates the appropriate Government 'to provide for recording of testimonies, arguments or opinion given by person with disabilities in their preferred language and means of communication.'

Safety and security of the disabled

Persons with disabilities are at high risk of accidents and mishaps in public places, mass gatherings, while using public transportation, etc. It's very important to make sure they are safe and secure in such places and situations.

In this regard, distribution of and access to aids and assistive devices to 'Divyangjan' under the ADIP Scheme of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India is very important.

A wide range of aids and assistive devices are made available to the divyangjan through camps, etc. These include – wheelchairs, crutches, walking sticks, tricycles, rollators, knee braces, spinal support, Braille Cane, Braille Kit, Smart Phone, Smart Cane, hearing aids, artificial limbs, dentures, spectacles, etc.

Because of the forthcoming attitude of the government, several initiatives and facilities have been made available to the divyangjan. Under the Accessible India Campaign, about 585 buildings of the States / Union Territories and 1,030 central government buildings have been made barrier-free with the release of ₹ 553.59 crores.

Also, 35 International Airports and 55 Domestic Airports are provided with features of accessibility now. More than 700 railway stations have been made accessible. The campaign was launched in December 2015 for the creation of a barrier-free environment in public buildings, transportation and ICT (Information and Communications Technology) ecosystem. Also, as part of the Unique Disability Identity Card Project launched in 2016-17 with the aim to create a national database of persons with disabilities, as of 1 June 2022, as many as 73.89 lakh Unique Disability ID cards were generated in 716 districts across all States and union Territories.

India continues to create an inclusive atmosphere for the empowerment of the divyangjan. In June 2022, the world's biggest wheelchair logo / image was created by 1,000 divyangjan creating a world record. Also, this was the highest ever participation of 1,445 persons with hearing impairment in a sign language session at a single venue while performing the national anthem.

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

Steps ensure well-being of the elderly

Citing statistics, Kriti Kalra observes that the Indian society has traditionally been inclusive of its elderly where the senior members of the family are integral to the unit and play an important role in decision-making, counselling and even in providing financial support. With changing times and 'modern' lifestyle, she sees a gradual shift in the role of the elderly.

Indian society has traditionally been inclusive of its elderly

The elderly play a very important role in society, especially in terms of holding families together and guiding the youth. Indian society has traditionally been inclusive of its elderly where the senior members of the family are integral to the unit and play an important role as a matriarch or a patriarch in discussions, decision-making, counselling even in providing financial support to the family. With changing times, however, and 'modern' lifestyle being adopted by more and more families today, in urban zones primarily but in rural India as well, the role of the elderly is changing too.

According to the 2011 Population Census, there are nearly 104 million elderly persons (aged 60 years or above) in India of which 53 million are females and 51 million happen to be males. A report released by the United Nations Population Fund indicates that, in India, the number of elderly persons is expected to grow to 173 million by 2026.

The number game

The Report of the Technical Group on Population Projections for India and States 2011-2036 suggests that there are nearly 138 million elderly persons in India in 2021 (67 million males and 71 million females) - this number is expected to increase further by around 56 million in the next decade, i.e., by 2031.

The number of elderly people in India is increasing - in share and by size too. So, in 1961 the proportion of the elderly was 5.6 per cent and that rose to 8.6 per cent in 2011. This proportion further increased to 10.1 per cent in the year 2021 and is touted to increase to 13.1 per cent in 2031. Of these, the percentage for males stands at 8.2 per cent while that for the females at 9.0 per cent.

Another interesting trend is that as per the 1991 Population Census, the number of elderly that were females exceeded the number of elderly that were males. This, however, has changed in the last two decades. In fact, the trend has reversed and today the number of elderly that are males are more than the number of elderly females. Moreover, future projections reveal the trend will reverse again and in 2031 the number of elderly females will exceed the number of elderly males. As per 2011 Population Census, 71 per cent (73 million) of the elderly population resides in rural areas while only 29 per cent (31

million) resides in urban areas.

The Report of the Technical Group on Population Projections for India and States 2011-2036 reveals that in 2021, Kerala had the maximum proportion of elderly people in its population (16.5 per cent) followed by Tamil Nadu (13.6 per cent), Himachal Pradesh (13.1 per cent), Punjab (12.6 per cent) and Andhra Pradesh (12.4 per cent). And, this proportion is the least in Bihar (7.7 per cent) followed by Uttar Pradesh (8.1 per cent) and Assam (8.2 per cent).

Policy focusing on the elderly

The National Elderly Policy defines person who has attained the age of 60 years as elderly. The National Policy on Older Persons was announced by the Government of India in 1999 and was a concrete step in the right direction in pursuance of the UN General Assembly Resolution 47/5 to observe 1999 as International Year of Older Persons.

It was also in furtherance of the assurances made to the elderly in the Indian Constitution under Article 41 that mandates the well-being of senior citizens. In India, the social security is the concurrent responsibility of the central and state governments.

The implementation of the National Policy on Older Persons was further strengthened by international commitments. The Madrid Plan of Action and the United Nations Principles for Senior Citizens adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2002, the Proclamation on Ageing and the global targets on ageing for the Year 2001 adopted by the General Assembly in 1992, the Shanghai Plan of Action 2002 and the Macau Outcome document 2007 adopted by UNESCAP form the basis for the global policy guidelines to encourage governments to design and implement their own policies from time to time. India is a signatory to all the aforementioned documents and proclamations that is a strong indication of the nation's resolve to care for and address the concerns of its elderly.

As part of this, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment takes care of the pensions, travel concessions, income tax relief, medical benefit, extra interest on savings, security of older persons, etc. The ministry's landmark legislation 'Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens' Act 2007 was a big step in ensuring the rights of the elderly are secured.

New policy addresses new challenges

The 'National Policy for Senior Citizens 2011' has taken into consideration the rapid increase in the elderly population among other factors. The changes in the Indian economy, transforming social fabric in the country, privatisation of health sector also have been considered. The new policy addresses issues concerning the elderly or the senior citizens living in rural and urban areas, those with special needs and the older women in particular.

One of the primary goals of the new policy has been 'to mainstream senior citizens, especially older women, and bring their concerns into the national development debate with priority to implement mechanisms already set by governments and supported by civil society and senior citizens' associations and promote such associations especially for older women.'

The main areas of intervention under this policy are: Income security in old age; Healthcare; Safety and Security; Housing; Productive Ageing; Welfare; Multi-generational bond-

Senior citizens need care

ing; and awareness. Also, several implementation mechanisms have been developed at multiple levels to further the goals of the policy.

Healthcare, housing and financial security

Healthcare needs of senior citizens are given high priority with the goal of providing good, affordable health service that is subsidised for the poor. Under the Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana, coverage has been increased in all districts and efforts are being made to include senior citizens to a large extent.

The other basic need, housing, is also given a priority for senior citizens and housing schemes of the government have specially earmarked provisions for the elderly promoting age-friendly facilities and standards of universal design by Bureau of Indian Standards.

The Integrated Programme for Older Persons (IPOP) through the Mo/ SJ&E aims to improve the quality of life of older persons by providing shelter, food, medical care and entertainment opportunities, etc. Other schemes include the Rashtriya Vayoshri Yojana (RVY) where assistance is offered to those elderly who fall in the BPL (Below Poverty Line) category and suffer from age-related disabilities.

Varishtha Pension Bima Yojana (VPBY) run by the Ministry of Finance is a social security scheme for senior citizens. The Pradhan Mantri Vaya Vandana Yojana (PNVVY) launched in 2017 also provides social security implemented by the Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) of India.

The Vayoshreshtha Samman is a national award given by the President of India to eminent senior citizens and institutions rendering distinguished services for the cause of elderly persons especially indigent senior citizens. These awards are presented as part of the celebration of the International Day of Older Persons (IDOP) on 1 October.

Kriti Kalra is an activist and field researcher with 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.

Inclusion firmly rooted in mythology

Nandini Rao *cites plenty of sources in mythology that symbolise inclusion of everything reflective in rituals, customs and festivals. Making a pointed reference to ancient scriptures, she avers that Hindu mythology has a special place for animals and elements of nature, proving that Inclusion is accepted and proven.*

Ardhanarishvara

Indian mythology is one of the most diverse and inclusive of all. Some of the primary sources of Indian mythology, that is basically synonymous with Hindu mythology owing to the prevalence of the ancient religion on this land for centuries, are Vedic literature, Puranas, epics Mahabharat and Ramayan, regional literature of significance such as Periya Puranam and Naalayira Divya Prabandham, and even fables of popular texts such as Panchatantra and the Hitopadesha.

The sources of information are aplenty and all point in one direction that regional mythology is replete with stories and tales and legends that symbolise inclusion of anything and everything. Even an insect, a tree, a stone, a bird, an animal, etc., has a place in society. It's interesting to note that even today, there are remnants of these beliefs that can be seen in rituals, customs, festivals, folklore, etc.

Gender inclusion in mythology

Hindu scriptures have always spoken of the third gender. One of the earliest references of transgender in mythology was Mohini - the female avatar of Lord Vishnu. Mohini, which translates to the one who enchants, played a big role in settling the duel between devas(*Gods*) and asuras(*demons*) for the amrut(*nectar*). In Mahabharat, Mohini comes when the gods and the demons were churning the ocean (*samudramanthan*) - with the help of Lord Vishnu who is in a tortoise avatar or *kurma* - to acquire elixir of immortality or amrut.

Mohini makes a reappearance in the Vishnu Purana when she used slyness to save Lord Shiva who had just given a boon to a demon Bhasmasura that he could incinerate anyone whose head he touches. Bhasmasura wanted to test his new power by placing his hand on Shiva, who then went to Lord Vishnu for help. It was then Vishnu appears as Mohini, the enchantress, who tricks Bhasmasura to turn himself into ashes.

Not just this, the origins of Shankara – Narayanan (Hariharan) in the Linga Purana is also attributed to the merging of Shiva and Mohini (Vishnu). This legend is associated with the procreation of Shiva and Vishnu resulting in the creation of Ayyappa (who is also referred to as Hariharaputra – son of Shiva and Vishnu). Also called Dharmasastha and Manikandan, Ayyappa is a Hindu deity popular in Southern

India and considered to be the epitome of dharma, truth and righteousness and is often called upon to obliterate evil.

Supreme status of transgenders

Ardhanarishvara form is an androgynous composite of Lord Shiva and goddess Parvati. Various Puranas transcending timelines have attributed different reasons behind this perfect combination of Purusha and Prakriti that symbolises that the male and female principles are actually inseparable and two sides of the same coin. A similar union between Goddess of wealth and prosperity, Goddess Lakshmi, and her husband Lord Vishnu forms the androgynous composite Lakshmi–Narayan.

In Ramayan, transgenders play an important role when Lord Ram is sent to exile. Upon his banishment from the kingdom, Lord Rama was asked to spend 14 years in the forest, in exile. His followers followed him to the forest but he requested all the 'men and women' to return back to the city of Ayodhya. It was then that the transgenders (hijras) stayed back and waited for his return. Moved by their devotion, Ram took them all by their hands and led them into Ayodhya. Lord Ram was greatly moved by love and devotion and blessed them with the power to confer blessings on to others on auspicious occasions such as child birth, marriage, etc. In the Ram Rajya (Ram's rule) that came to be, it was inclusive to the core and had a place for the third gender as well.

In Mahabharat, when Arjun rejects the sexual advances of Urvashi, the nymph, she curses him that he will lose his manhood. Lord Indra limits the curse and says it will only last for a year and the year will depend on Arjuna's choice itself. So, during the thirteenth year of exile, Arjuna hides as a eunuch dancer in the women's quarters in the palace he king of the Matsya Kingdom, Virata. Virata is the titular character of the Virata Parva - the fourth book of Mahabharat.

A place for one and all

Lord Jagannath who is the incarnation of Lord Krishna or Lord Vishnu is worshipped in the Indian states of Odisha, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Bihar, Gujarat, Assam, Manipur and Tripura. The Rath Yatra is a huge event that witnesses millions of devotees, marked by the pulling the carriages or the Rath.

Lord Jagannath's deity has no hands and no feet and the deity is a reminder that all forms of gods are acceptable. In this religion, all forms of gods, deities and beliefs have a space, and a sacred space. Lord Jagannath's idol is a carved and decorated wooden stump with a symmetrical face, large round eyes and a conspicuous absence of hands or legs.

The Jagannath Temple at Puri, Odisha is regarded as one of the Char Dham pilgrimage sites in India. The temple is a massive 61 meter structure and one of the best surviving specimens of Kalinga architecture and has been one of the major pilgrimage destinations for Hindus for centuries.

Inclusion and wealth of knowledge

Mythology has taken its current form owing to thousands of scriptures. The Vedas that are a rich source of knowledge are divided into four parts with hundreds or thousands of hymns and prose passages.

Hinduism is the only religion with a vast wealth of scriptures and that too in several ancient languages. Then there are several Puranas (ancient legends), the two epics Ramayan

Godess Saraswati riding a peacock

and Mahabharat, six Vedangas (ancillary Vedas), Sutras (summary texts), Agamas (tantric texts), Gitas (songs or poems), Itihasas (histories), Bhashyas (commentaries) and Dharma Shastras (law books).

Hindu mythology has a special place for animals and elements of nature. The ancient religion has recognised the rights of the animals to co-exist with humans. Animals, trees, other elements of nature are worshiped in Hinduism, even given the status of gods and goddesses.

The Dashavatara are the ten primary avatars of Lord Vishnu who is said to descend in the form of an avatar to restore cosmic order. The word Dashavatara is derived from dasa (meaning ten) and avatara (means incarnation). The ten avatars are Matsya (fish); Kurma (turtle); Varaha (boar); Narasimha (man-lion); Wamana (dwarf god); Parashurama (warrior); Rama; Krishna or Balarama; Buddha or Krishna or Vithoba or Jagannath; and Kalki.

Two-thousand-year old Panchatantra has a special place for animals. It contains numerous stories in which the animals have been given prominence. It is an ancient Indian collection of interrelated animal fables in Sanskrit verse and prose.

Hindu deities have a vehicle (vahan) they travel on and it's mostly an animal or a bird. There are several legends and stories associated with these animals and birds as well. They are very important to the existence of the God or the Goddess.

Goddess Saraswati's vehicle is a peacock, Lord Shiva rides the Nandi bull, Lord Vishnu sits on Sheshnaag, the serpent, Parvati or Durga or Kali rides the lion, Ganesha sits on a mouse, etc.

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.

Inclusion and the Law

The freedom of religion is laid down extensively in the Indian Constitution. In a country of the size of India, religious harmony is critical and when social shackles fail, the law comes into play to ensure that. India has always been an inclusive society. Time and again, new laws have been made and old ones amended to keep up with the requirements of the society at the time, avers **Manu Shrivastava***.*
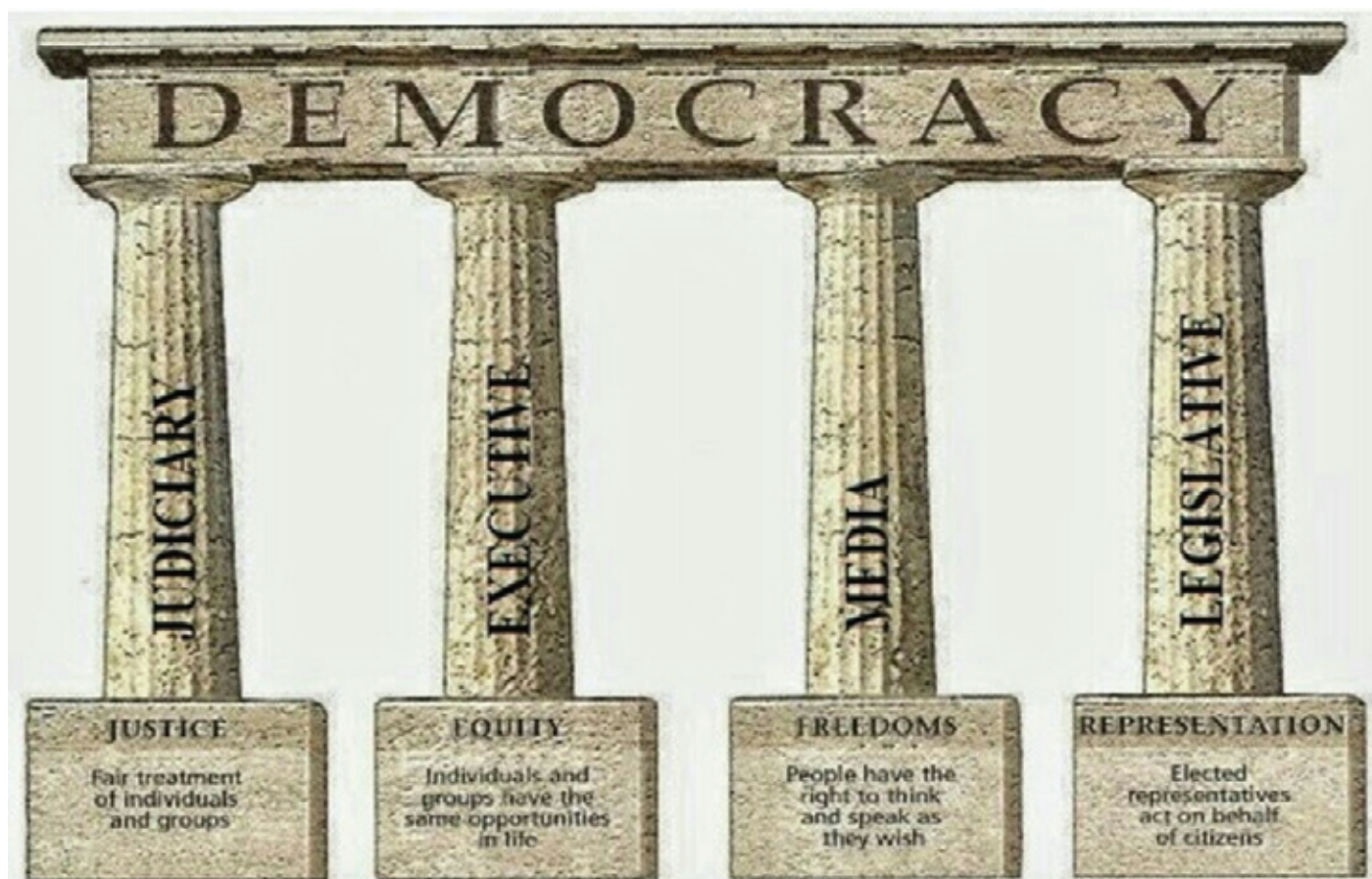
Two of the four pillars of democracy, judiciary and the legislature, play an important role in creating laws for inclusion

To be able to implement any principle or policy effectively and on a large scale, it's important to bring into effect a law that upholds that intention or decision. India is an inclusive society and a democracy where not only is the voice important but also the means to express or amplify it.

A vibrant democracy and a diverse society, India is an eclectic mix of cultures, ethnicities, religions, traditions, genders, etc. There are several laws in place that ensure all sections of the society enjoy an equal status and are able to exercise their rights in a constitutional manner and avail whatever privileges they deserve. Two of the four pillars of democracy, judiciary and the legislature, play an important role in creating laws for inclusion and upholding the same.

Constitutional provisions on inclusion

The freedom of religion is laid down extensively in the Indian Constitution. In a country of the size of India, religious harmony is critical and when social shackles fail, the law comes into play to ensure that. Article 15 ensures 'Prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth'. The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, and place of birth or any of them.

No citizen shall, on ground only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them, be subject to any disability, liability, restriction or condition with regard to - access to shops, public restaurants, hotels and places of public entertainment; or the use of wells, tanks, bathing ghats, roads and places of public resort maintained whole or partly out of State funds or dedicated to the use of general public.

The Article further states that provisions in this Article or elsewhere shall not prevent the State from making any special provision for women and children, or for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens or for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes, or from making any special provision, by law, for the advance-

ODISHA

Your place under the Sun!

If you are thinking of a great concoct of adventure, relaxation and culture and pilgrimage, Odisha is the place for you. The iconic Konark Temple, Jagannath Temple, Puri Rathyatra, exotic beaches, Konark Dance festival, Chilika lake, Buddhist caves, Stupa, Patachitra painting, food, saris dot the eastern state compelling landscape. Its trappings reveal a canvas that is unique to the state's ethos, writes Manjira Majumdar.

Puri Rath Yatra

My several visits to Odisha or Orissa are always reminiscent of the sound of foamy waves crashing along the beach at Puri, the dolphins dancing in the Chilika Lake, the stunning Sun temple in Konark, followed by visits to temples, Buddhist caves and the region's rich handicrafts.

There is much more as you keep discovering the hidden nuggets of its culture, culinary diversity and creators of exquisite textiles.

The bright hot sun remains your constant companion.

Walking on the Sea

Orissa can be very hot in summer; but again, Puri or Gopalpur or even the smaller seaside in Chandipur, along the Orissa coast are the spots to visit for the spectacular sunrises, sunsets and sea bathing. In Chandipur (Balasore district) there is a quiet sea that disappears for some time leaving you to walk on its bed. The sea retreats in the morning and afternoon during low tide, when you can safely walk on the seabed.

The sea breeze along the coast, especially during the early mornings and late evenings, almost blows you off your feet. With the sea salt brushing your face, and the soft sand beneath your naked feet as they are washed by the thin line of frothy white waves that strike the shore to recede again, you feel truly relaxed, especially during the late evenings under a clear star-studded sky.

The beaches can get crowded but there is always a secluded spot. Visiting during the rainy months is a no-no as parts of the state are prone to cyclones. We decided to give Chandipur a pass this time and chose the famous golden triangle – Chilika, Konark and Puri – to enjoy this eastern state.

A well-known Hindu pilgrimage spot, Puri is a must for several reasons. Not just the beach, the Lord Jagannath Mandir attracts devotees all time of the year. It holds a festival in which the three deities of the temple, Jagannath, (considered to be an avatar of Lord Vishnu) Balaram and Subhadra are brought out in a chariot for a procession along the temple route. Known as the *rathyatra*, it happens during July-August and attracts millions.

Or you may like to visit the place during the first week of December during the Konark Dance Festival. To cover a few places in Orissa, keep either Bhubaneswar or Cuttack as the entry point, which can be accessed by rail, air and road from anywhere in India.

Lingaraja Temple surrounded by other smaller temples in Bhubaneswar

Bhubaneswar delights

For me, the options were touching down at Bhubaneswar airport, or travelling on the chair car from Kolkata. I chose the latter to enable me to enjoy the verdant countryside and catch up on some reading. Reading up about the place one goes to visit makes sense. Then go knock yourself out and soak in the colour, smell and our rich heritage.

Bhubaneswar, a well-laid out metro offers an array of local dishes and plenty of shops to cater to your taste. We tasted some local cuisine, a fish curry made with *khenga* fish from the sea, followed by the dessert of *channapora*.

The Lingaraja temple in Bhubaneswar, dedicated to Lord Shiva, is one of the oldest of the region. The temple represents the features of Kalinga architecture; that is, a structure of four layers or the *deula* style that has four components – the inner sanctum, the assembly, festival and the making of the offerings

Chanapora delicacy

The Buddhist ruins at Sisupalgarh once the capital of ancient Kalinga

After a couple of days, we set out one early morning for Puri, en route Chilika. In between, we squeezed a day's visit to the Buddhist caves. To back-track a bit into history, it was earlier in the third century that the Mauryan Emperor Ashoka of Patliputra (grandson of Chandragupta Maurya), waged a bloody battle with Kalinga that left thousands dead. He subsequently converted to Buddhism and sent emissaries to Sri Lanka and South-east Asia to espouse non-violence. The Kalinga region therefore has many relics of Buddhism.

Buddhist relics

The Buddhist influences are strong in ancient Odisha. There are numerous Buddhist caves and monasteries. Ratnagiri, (not the one in Maharashtra) is an ancient site of what was once a Buddhist monastery. It is located on a hill wedged between rivers Brahmani and Birupa.

Sisupalgarh is another Buddhist site in the Kharda district, carved out of Puri. It was the capital of ancient Kalinga and during the Buddhist phase, the ruins are remnants of the *vihara* or Buddhist monasteries; the brick edifices have been removed and only the pillars now remain. These are in contrasting shades of blue-green and plum.

The site of Sisupalgarh excavated in 1948, revealed post-Gupta period style sculptures in bronze and brass. The architecture of the various monasteries during this period was marked by the stupa, courtyard, the cells in which lived the monks, and a huge statue of Buddha right at the centre. The Buddha statues are large and are crafted out of brass. The Gupta dynasty was Hindu but under it, both Buddhism and Jainism flourished. In these monasteries lived the Buddhist scholars just as they did in Nalanda, Bihar.

For it was in Bihar that the religion of Buddhism started and spread to elsewhere in the country. The various monasteries in Orissa were constructed between the fifth century and the thirteenth century, peaking between seventh and tenth centuries.

The religion, thereafter, underwent several changes and branched into various sects and sub sects and ceased to be the primary Indian religion that it had become. The lotus motifs were very common on the carvings on the pillars they can be discerned even today on temple panels, textiles and handicrafts, as a throwback of that period.

So after alternating between Hindu temples and

Intricate carvings on the walls of the monuments in the Sun Temple premises

Gajasimha mounted on the elephant at the entrance of the Nata Mandir

Buddhist caves, marveling at our religious diversity, we set off early next morning for Chilika. After about a couple of hours, stopping only for some refreshing sweet green coconut water and *malai*, the pristine sight of the boats anchored looked like a painting out of a frame. A few hours of boating on the lake, towards which much bargaining had to be done (despite of rates being fixed by Odisha Tourism Department) left us hungry for lunch, so we headed towards Puri.

Puri potpourri

Puri never disappoints. The pandemic notwithstanding, this seaside town which suffered great damage in the severe cyclone Fani has now been rebuilt with a few changes. The Lord Jagannath Temple's open arcade has been widened, but taking the help of a *panda* or a pandit is necessary and helpful because he knows the ropes and leads you to the right places to help you place the offerings and collect *prasad*. The temple once referred to as the White Pagoda by seamen sailing over Bay of Bengal, was built in the 12 th century. This was much later than the Lingaraja temple in Bhubaneswar, one of the oldest temples in the state.

So after a hearty lunch of prawn curry and rice at the iconic BNR Hotel, we went to greet the sea. There are several hotels -- big and small -- to suit all pockets. There are newer restaurant options to choose from as well. We planned a day each to pay our obeisance to Lord Jagannath and visit to nearby Konark, both over in a few hours in the morning, leaving us to enjoy the beach for the rest of the day.

The Sun God

The Konark Temple dedicated to Lord Surya or Sun, is just about an hour's drive from Puri. The temple gets its name from *kona* – corner and *arka* or sun. It was constructed in way to receive the sun's rays, like a lamp. Carved out of a single stone it was built in the thirteenth century by King Narsimhadeva 1 of the Ganga dynasty. It is in the shape of a chariot pulled by horses. Referred to as Black Pagoda by European sailors (for its high *shikara* or main tower), the temple acted as a pointer to seamen over Bay of Bengal. The erotic sculptures and reliefs on the temple panels co-exist with the *gajasimha* figures in stone.

It is shaped like a chariot with wheels and driven by horses. Undoubtedly, a piece of engineering marvel, the temple was salvaged in bits and pieces and put together by ASI. In fact the temple today is said to be the entrance to the real temple as it existed then.

The gajasimha is a recurring motif in Odisha. Since the region was part of the Kalinga Empire, a historical region straddling northern Orissa with parts of Andhra Pradesh, Hinduism and Buddhism ruled here in turns. While Buddhism reigned in the fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth centuries, Hinduism made a comeback and started dominating so its animal sign, the

Fishermen casting their net at Chilika Lake

lion *(simha)* is depicted striding the elephant *(gaja)*, which signifies the Buddhist animal symbol. The *gajasimha* figure is found in the premises of Konark Sun Temple, as it was, after all, a Hindu temple. It also features on saris, known today as the *gajasimha* sari.

Rich Culture

Orissa has a very rich culture. Its culture is an influence of the devoutness of Hinduism and the gentle ways of Buddhism. The classical dance form of *Odissi* showcases, apart from the performing art, the State's rich silks accompanying filigreed silver jewellery. Odissi originated in the temples of Orissa and traditionally is a part of a dance drama, with music, devotional poems to convey a spiritual message through various movements of the torso, eyes and hands.

Hopefully after these two years of the pandemic, the Konark Dance Festival will be held in the first week of December. And if you time your visit with the Konark Dance Festival, you will be in for a treat. Held in an open auditorium that overlooks the Konark Sun Temple, the Festival was started in 1986 and the last one was held in 2019. Well-known classical musicians and dancers from the rest of the country perform here too during this time. The entire heritage of Orissa is displayed through its beautiful handicrafts and souvenirs at the International Sand Art Festival, usually held at the Chandrabhaga Beach nearby.

Apart from stone carvings of deities and *patachitra* in vivid
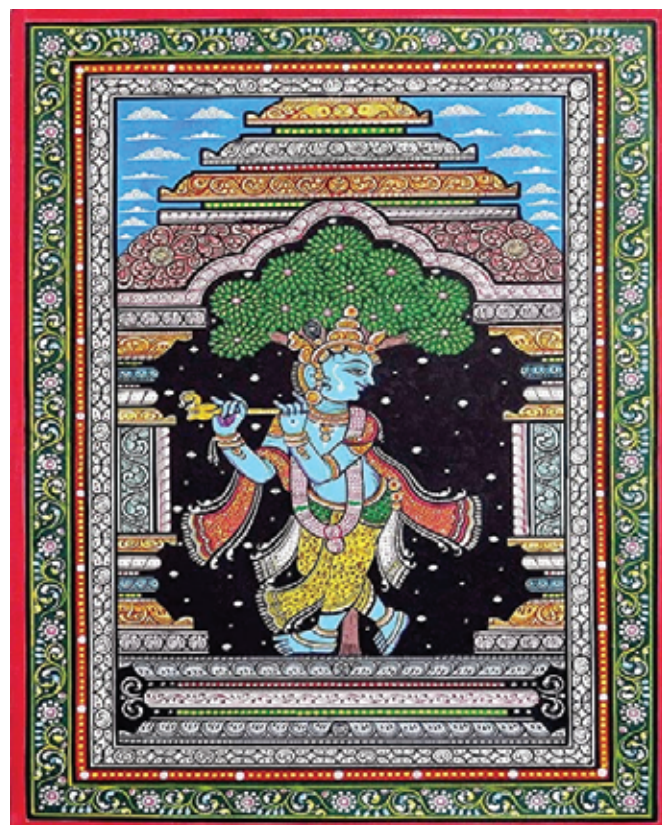
Patachitra depicting folk art

Khandua silk - fit for the gods (sari pix by Manjira Manjumdar)

colours depicting folk art, the state is known for palm leaf paintings, papier mache work, wooden toys that are results of a very creative and artistic people. The beautiful lacquer work – coasters and jewellery boxes - are crafted by the Hindu women of Nowrangpur and Baleshwar districts.

Patachitra on clay wall plates, delicate filigreed silver jewellery and attractive metal (dokra) tribal jewellery are definitely worth buying to take some home. If the silver jewelry is very refined, the tribal metal jewelry is ethnic class. Beautifully strung, they almost resemble antique gold.

Every state has its own special cuisine to boast. The *chanapora* is one of its signature delicacies. This cottage cheese cake type of sweet dish is melt-in-the mouth, with a slight burnt taste. Thus the name *chana* (cottage cheese) and *pora* (burnt), almost giving it a *crème brule* type of taste. There is of course a variety of fish and prawn preparations that reign supreme; the catch from the rivers and sea is as fresh as it can get, before getting prepared into curries.

Poetry in textiles

Indian textile and fabric of each state is unique. The sheer texture and feel is seductive. Handloom saris whether woven with cotton, silk, tussar and sometimes, all three, are available in a mind-boggling range in Orissa. So go ahead and plan your itinerary. You may wish to visit the natural parks, forests and

The Bichitrapuri sari is known for its chessboard designs

Orissa is famous for its hand-woven sarees in cotton, silk and tussar

waterfalls. But once you have visited, it will gently beckon you to return.

There are a variety of local weaves which have different names depending on the way these are woven and dyed. The colours are all very striking with beautiful contrasting borders and *pallu*. These two are woven as well. But what makes the saris stand out are the beautiful motifs which are woven in as well.

In addition to the *buttis* on saris there are the popular motifs -- flowers, birds and animals. The saris represent the local culture. For instance, the *chakra* of the Konark temple that was also on Ashoka's edicts, is popular, and so is the *gajasimha* motif. The skilfully woven borders and *pallu* have other wonderful motifs such as birds, peacocks, sun, moon, lotus flower, the conch shell and also temple spires. Each piece can become a collector's item.

The *ikat* sari of Orissa is very popular too. It has an elaborate dying process that is also popular as *pochampalli* in neighbouring Andhra Pradesh. In Orissa, the different patterns are dyed and binded into thread before it is woven.

Another popular weave is the *Bomkoi* saris woven in a village in *Bomkoi* in Ganjam district. So depending on the village or region, these saris take on the name such as *Sambalpuri, Bichitrapuri*, etc. *Bomkoi* saris are of thick weave, perhaps

because an extra warp in border and an extra weft in body. The *pallu* of the Bomkoi is extraordinarily intricate and beautiful. The *Bichitrapuri* sari is known for its chessboard designs. The saris are also tied-dyed are now woven in various parts of the State. The *pasapali* handloom among this weave stands out for their gambling or square chess board patterns.

What actually stands out among all the weaves and are a must buy from Orissa is the *khandua* sari. This is the actual "kataki" sari. It is worn by women during weddings and often have zari work on it. What is unique is that Lord Jagannath is adorned with this fabric and it sometimes, has texts and illustrations and verses from Geeta Gobinda on it. These are known as *kenduli khandua*. The colour is mostly an auspicious red or orange but today various designs and colours are experimented with. The *khandua* is woven mostly in all of Orissa today but the ones woven in Nuapatana, near Cuttack, stand out for certain specific motifs like the elephant which again shows Buddhist influence. The borders of these saris are usually plain.

Manjira Majumdar is an independent journalist & researcher. She combines writing with teaching journalism and is the author of three children's books.

Banaras is a culture in itself!

Varanasi, or Banaras as it is sometimes still called, has a unique charm with a blend of mystic and mythology. A city of rituals that hold great religious significance for the Hindus, everything that one does in the city has a spiritual feel to it. Enchanted by the city and its culture, Jeremy Oltmann an American adopted Banaras as his home in 2001. Today, he conducts heritage walks for tourists and also teaches hath yoga.

Text : Tirtho Banerjee

Ganga aarti on the ghats – a sight to behold

The city of Varanasi has a mystical and mythical charm. Its temples and ashrams do not cease to amaze. The oldest Lord Shiva shrine – Kashi Vishwanath – which houses the first of the Jyotirlingas -- is pious to the core. Sankat Mochan Mandir – established by famous Hindu preacher and poet-saint Goswami Tulsidas, is the seat of Lord Hanuman. The holy Ganga flows majestically here.

Along its banks are a number of pulsating ghats: Manikarnika Ghat being accorded the highest position since it is believed that those who are cremated here get immediate moksha (salvation). Each ghat has a gripping mythological story and has a history of its own. The evening *aarti* offered to River Ganga is breathtakingly divine. The *diyas* (lamps) that float in the river present a shimmering view of the sacred waters. The rituals are soul- stirring. The labyrinthine alleyways create a maze, a puzzle, and form an integral part of the city. There are *akhadas* where wrestlers vie against each other, keeping a tradition alive. The Banarasi silk sarees are hand-crafted and hold fascination for the women. The classical music of Banaras characterizes the city and echoes in every nook and corner. To cap it all is the *Banarasi paan* – you chew it and know the difference!

So, when Jeremy Oltmann, an American, decided to start city walks in Varanasi, he didn't know where to begin. He says, "It took me some time to understand the city. I explored it on my own and developed four routes: Southern temples and sacred ponds; the pilgrims' riverside walk; the city of light walk and northern bazaars and hidden alleys walk."

Jeremy first visited Varanasi amid Maha Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj (then Allahabad) in early 2001 for a few weeks but by September of the same year he had returned, with the aim of living in the city and participating in a social service project involving widows and children. He had moved to Delhi in 1997 and was volunteering in a drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre while exploring social service options. During the summers he went to Landour Language School, Mussoorie to learn Hindi and also to Kumbh Mela in Haridwar in 1998 at the age of 26.

Jeremy got interested in the daily involvement of Hindus in spirituality. "It was quite intriguing for me since it was pretty different from my upbringing. I knew nothing about Banaras when I stepped into it. But somewhere deep inside, I felt it was a good fit for me," he points out.

Jeremy gradually moved away from social work and got involved in academic administrative projects. "It was a slow process," he underlines. Over the course of a few years, he became an administrator for a US-based study abroad programme and managed to complete his MA in Sociology through IGNOU (Indira Gandhi National Open University).

Jeremy explains, "I started understanding the social structure of India's spiritual capital and took boat rides while pouring over books written about the city. Diana Eck's 'The City of Light' and books by a local author Prof Dr Rana PB Singh began to unfold the mysteries related to Banaras. Singh's books explained the cultural landscape of Varanasi in an academic but

very enjoyable manner."

He got pally with Singh and the people in-charge of the key sites in the town. While frequenting these places, he noticed people stumbled over the pronunciation of his name, and eventually Jeremy got the nickname 'Jai'.

"The geo-sacredness of the city is fantastic. It helped me conceptualize the walks. To get more familiar with the city, I used to get up early in the morning and travel across the town to find certain temples or sites," he says. In the night, Jeremy braved going out to spend time in the cremation grounds, considered an out-of-bounds area. "I explored why certain temples were built and who patronised them and also the significance of the sites."

Initially, 'Jai' took his friends and acquaintances on the walks for free – even volunteering 2-3 times a week. It was informal. Later, after he met a person at a roadside tea shop in Manali in 2007 who used to organise similar walks in Kolkata, Jeremy decided to give a new shape to his walking tours and registered his firm 'Varanasi Walks'.

"I ventured deeper into the old city and its network of gulleys, or alleyways. I learned local folklore from the residents themselves. I combined all that I was learning in chalking out my walks – curating them in a way I thought someone would want to experience Banaras. I first cut the city into south, mid-south, center and north. Kashi Vishwanath, the myriadt emples, ghats and hidden alleyways were the central sites."

"Do you know that there's a stepwell named Lolark Kund, mentioned in the Skanda Purana, which was built by the maharaja of Cooch Behar, possibly in the 15 th century, and restored by Rani Bhawani of Natore around mid-1700s. Another site I found was a hidden garden in Gopal Mandir where Goswami Tulsidas hid after he was thrown out of the city by the Brahmins when he translated the original Ramayana text from Sanskrit into Awadhi. He took shelter in a limestone cave, before Gopal Mandir was even built and wrote his second book 'Vinay Patrika' while he hid there. I also found that the Kabir Math in Kabir Chaura houses the great trishul (trident) of Gorakhnath, the founder of the Nath sect. These nuggets of facts were the basis of my tours. I made the walks experimental, rather than locational, so that the guests may interact with locals and priests rather than just visiting the sites and temples."

Jeremy talks about the great American humourist Mark Twain, who was taken to a sadhu living in Anand Bagh named Swami Bhaskarananda Saraswati, (located near the Durga temple built also by Rani Bhawani of Natore) and wrote in his book 'Following the Equator: A Journey Around the World' about how the ascetic had got magical powers. So much so that the

I am a proud Indian, citizen of the world community, inhabiting this lonely .... but lovely little ... planet...

Earth...

Manikarnika ghat

king of Banaras would visit him. He has dedicated 12 pages to Banaras in his book. "All of these connections were fascinating to me as I hadn't really seen anyone tying these ideas together to tell a story about the city of Varanasi."

Jeremy says, "The 'death and rebirth walk' was created after a prestigious 135-year-old Swiss company, named Kuoni, said its clients wanted to visit Varanasi, but they wanted something surreal and exquisite. He adds, "I made a specialised walk route for a night tour, something that hadn't been done before in Varanasi. It included Baba Kinaram's ashram, and little-known places around Manikarnika cremation ghat, such as Masan Baba Vishwanath, also mentioned in the Skanda Purana and the Kali Badi and Tarapith of Rani Bhawani of Natore, located in Bengali Tola, the area where ace filmmaker Satyajit Ray filmed *Aparajito* incidentally. I ensured they didn't miss the *aartis* from place to place by visiting at the right moments. Touring these places offers insight into unique practices and enigmatic rituals carried out by particular sects of sadhus. I narrate stories about death and rebirth while visiting these places."

The Panchkoshi Yatra – the 13 th century pilgrimage route that circumnavigates the city -- offers an immersive experience, while covering the outer ring of Kashi where 108 old temples are situated. Jeremy has followed in his unofficial mentor Prof Singh's footsteps by visiting foreigners on these yatras.

Are the walks customized? "On special requests, we do accommodate the client's wishes. Recently, a British person, who was researching on Twain, wanted to visit all the sites related to the famous author. So, I took him around to places Twain had been to in Varanasi. I also organise colonial history tours, though I often joke that I am not *Angrez*, meaning English, but rather American and anti-colonial," he says with a wink. "Once I drove a guest to Lord Cornwallis' grave near Ghazipur, 30km from Varanasi, which also has the old Opium Factory buildings of the East India Company."

Jeremy connects his guests to yoga too, providing them more avenues. He took teacher's training in yoga in Mysore. He practices hatha yoga as well. Interested clients are offered yoga classes. There are three yoga walks currently, including a walk that unravels hidden, uncelebrated yogis of Banaras, like Lahiri Mahasaya, who believed Lord Shiva taught him. The guests learn pranayama and meditation. "We tell them stories related to yoga and yogis."

Jeremy has a team of six. All of them are local residents, with a passion for the unexplored and having a knack for discovering offbeat routes, stories and sites of interest. 'Jai' shares half of the earnings made from each walk with his team members.

Each walk is priced at Rs 2,000 for one person for 2- 3 hours.

Panchkoshi Yatra

It's Rs 1,600 per person for a group of two; ₹ 1,400 per person for a group of four and for groups of six and above, it's ₹ 1,200.

Jeremy reveals that since mid-March 2020 when Covid-19 pandemic struck, the business has been "horrible". "We have lost 90 per cent of our clients. From March 2020 to December 2021, there was only one client a month. Usually, during the peak season from September to March, we have 6-7 clients a day," he says. Jeremy has restructured his firm with his Italian and Canadian partners as Indoverse Experiences and Tours, which currently oversees varanasiwalks.com and banarasyoga.com.

Earlier, there were more British, Australian and American people coming for the walks. Jeremy tied up with an agency in Goa, owned by a Swiss guy, and his clients wanted boat rides and walks. All of them were either German or Swiss. Today, Jeremy`s clients are 80 per cent foreigners and 20 per cent Indians – mostly the wealthy ones. The government of India has also highlighted heritage walks over the years, which has brought renewed interest into the city's unique heritage. "Clients are often awestruck at what they see. They say the sites hold power. Recently, I took some foreign photographers on a walk and they were amazed at the encounters with locals that reflected the generosity of the Banarsis. The locals would invite them into their house and offer sweets. Some even took them around their house and showed them tiny temples tucked away in their aangans (courtyards)," says 'Jai'.

Jeremy Oltmann, an American who settled in Varanasi and conducts heritage walks in the city

Kedar Ghat, Varanasi

Jeremy`s friend from Chicago landed in Varanasi on Shivratri on March 1 this year. "We were walking near Kedar Ghat – where the second oldest Shiva lingam – is located. Suddenly, two figures dressed as Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati appeared out of nowhere. With music playing in the background, the man decked up as Lord Shiva shot fire from his hands and *Bam Bam Bhole chants* resonated. My friend was flabbergasted."

Jeremy is multi-talented and versatile. He also works as a DJ in a bar in Surya Hotel in Varanasi Cantt. He plays techno dance music and Kabir bhajans, "Techno and House music, fused to local rhythms, have become hugely popular in Delhi, Goa and Bengaluru."

"I love the city of Banaras. It is my adopted home. The city has been good to me socially, spiritually and financially. I hope the walks continue and that's the legacy I wish to leave behind," Jeremy says.
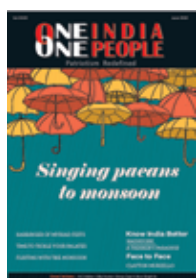
Tirtho Banerjee is a poet and journalist who specializes in environmental issues.

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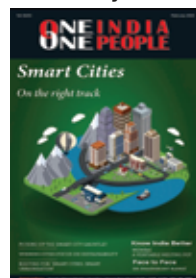
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"With make-up, you can create a face that doesn't exist"

Doing a make-up is a routine regimen for many. Conventionally, it is meant to correct appearance flaws. From an alternative perspective, face can serve as a canvas for work of art -- to accentuate one's natural beauty and create marvels beyond belief. Something that Somnath Kundu does with consummate ease.

Kundu is a prominent name in the Bengali film industry. He has the ability to overhaul the appearance of any actor with deft strokes. He is now trending as the man who miraculously transformed a lesser known TV actor Jeetu Kamal to look like the young Satyajit Ray in Anik Datta's super box office hit Aparajito.

He talks to **Shoma A. Chatterji** on his journey as a makeup artist.

Somnath Kundu

When and how did your unusual career as make-up artist in Bengali cinema begin?

I have been in the Bengali film industry for over 25 years. I began young. My grandfather Jyotirindranath Kundu was a much-in-demand costume designer. He died before I was born but he earned lot of respect and appreciation for his work in Bengal. He designed the costumes for classics such as *Morutirtha Hinglaj*, featuring top stars of the time, apart from being a regular for Tapan Sinha's and Tarun Majumdar's films. My father Shyam Kundu picked up when Dadu died, beginning his career with *Sagina Mahato*. He was good at sculpting models, and I think I inherited this trait. He was hard-working and he is the one who told me to take up make-up as an art form and as a profession instead of becoming a costume designer. All the pot-shots my school mates took at me when they heard my father worked in films were wiped out at one go, when I saw his name in the credits of the film.

What was your first experience of the film industry like?

My father would sometimes take me along to the studios with him. As a lad I was mesmerised to see big actors like Tapas Pal, Prosenjit Chatterjee, George Baker and Geeta Dey without any inkling that I would one day make up their faces.

But work during your grandfather's and father's time was very irregular. So how was the financial condition of your family?

Very bad. My father worked on contract. His work would begin at least two months before shooting and end after the film was shot. There would be no work thereafter for months on end. We would make do on the previous earnings. He took to stitching and tailoring with help from my mother. But we siblings were never told about this. Once, he had no work for three years and we really were in a soup. This taught us about the uncertainties of the profession.

You are a graduate with honours in Bengali. What made you opt for a career as a make-up artist?

I dreamt of becoming a teacher. Situation forced me to pay for my higher education by giving tuitions. However, a teaching job meant I do B.Ed. which I could not afford. I took my father's advice of becoming a make-up man. It was tough as no one wanted to appoint a costume designer's son as a make-up man. But my father was confident of my talent in drawing/sculpting models and believed I could become a good make-up artist. I worked as an apprentice to the main make-up man for three films for six months without payment. My boss, Subrata Sinha gradually began to have faith in me. I knew the basics of the craft having watched my father work. My superiors noticed my knack for the work. This wasn't before I had to knock doors before I got work from Subrata Sinha. However, I have no regrets. Today, film directors count on me for challenging assignments. Subratada has been a mentor.

The very concept, practice and schism in make-up have changed over the years. How do you explain the evolution?

There have been revolutionary changed in the art and science of make-up in films or in any other media. Earlier, the concept was limited to making women look beautiful. Not so with the males. Today, we concentrate on building up and fleshing out the characters not necessarily to make them look beautiful but to make them look the characters they are playing. This entails challenges. I made Prosenjit Chatterjee look as much like Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose in Srijit Mukherjee's film *Gumnaami*. That was tough as he does not look even remotely close to Netaji.
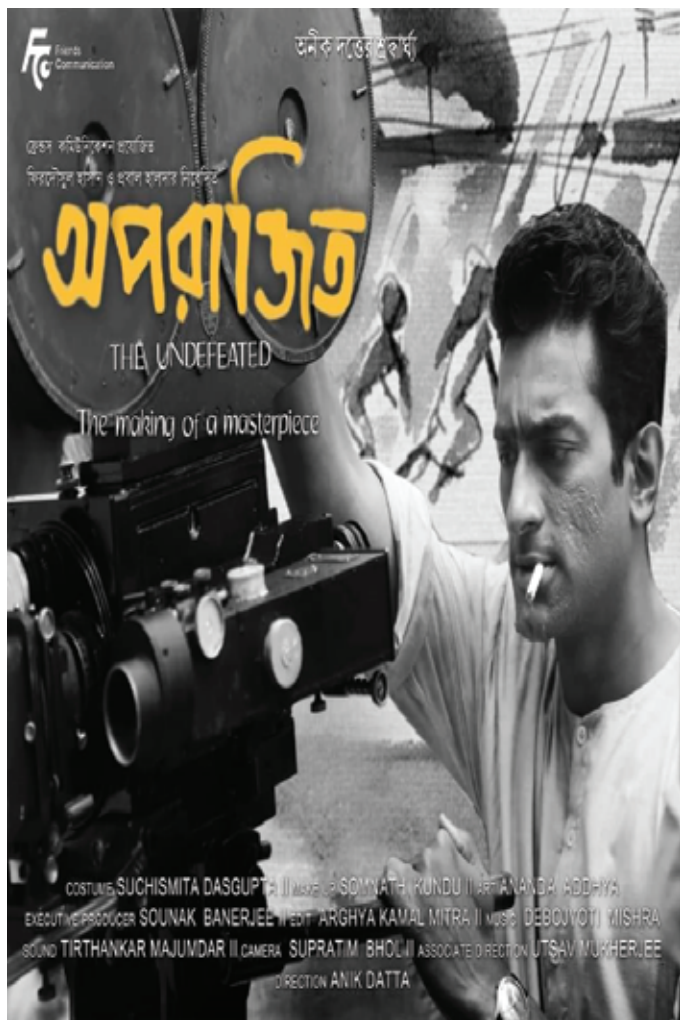
Actor Jeetu Kamal as the young Satyajit Ray

Prosenjit Chatterjee as Subhash Chandra Bose in Gumnaami

How has the introduction of prosthetics changed in the world of make-up today?

Prosthetics have come a long way after being tried in the French film *A Trip to the Moon* in 1902. Look at Amitabh Bachchan in the film *Paa*. Other classic examples are *Planet of the Apes, Frankenstein* and *Terminator*. Prosthetics have revolutionised the entire concept and practice of make-up. You can actually 'create' an artificial face with prosthetics. Just like creating artificial limbs for non-existent limbs. You can actually 'create' a face that does not exist only through make-up. It is incredible the way an expert make-up artist can make a person look completely different from the way he/she looks without make-up. An ordinary face can be made to look beautiful on screen. This also opens up opportunities for talented artists who are not attractive in the conventional way as the film industry demands. The best example of prosthetics lies in how a young Jeetu Kamal is made to look like a young Satyajit Ray. A film that made a great impact on me was *Chachi 420* where Kamal Hasan`s looks were dramatically transformed to make him look like a woman. Earlier, Bengali filmmakers had to hire make-up artists from Mumbai for work. Today, they no longer have to do this.

You became independent in 2000. Which films would you like to mention as your biggest challenges?

For *Jamaibabu Zindabad*, the fight master Shantanu Pal said he

wanted a severed hand in the frame. I did it with whatever materials available and it did look like a severed hand! Technical innovations with more powerful cameras present bigger challenges as even minute mistakes get captured. I enjoyed doing so many changes in Srijit Mukherjee's horror thriller *Vincida* which revolves around a very talented make-up man. But Srijit Da objected to one of my changes in make-up as he felt it might scare off the audiences. Add to this changing Jeetu Kamal to a young Satyajjit Ray with the mole on his chin, the pimple scars on his cheeks, his slightly dark skin and even his hair, dating back to the mid-1940s. This has been appreciated by the industry and audience alike. What more could I ask for?

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.

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ment of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens or for the Scheduled Castes or the Scheduled Tribes in so far as such special provisions relate to their admission to educational institutions including private educational institutions, whether aided or unaided by the State, other than the minority educational institutions referred to in clause (1) of article 30.

Religious inclusion a priority

Article 26 of the Indian Constitution deals with the 'Freedom to manage religious affairs' and states that 'Subject to public order, morality and health, every religious denomination or any section thereof shall have the right: to establish and maintain institutions for religious and charitable purposes; to manage its own affairs in matters of religion; to own and acquire movable and immovable property; and to administer such property in accordance with law.'

The next article, Article 27 deals with 'freedom as to payment of taxes for promotion of any particular religion' and reads that 'No person shall be compelled to pay any taxes, the proceeds of which are specifically appropriated in payment of expenses for the promotion or maintenance of any particular religion or religious denomination.'

Article 28 ensures the 'Freedom as to attendance at religious instruction or religious worship in certain educational institutions' and states that 'No religious instruction shall be provided in any educational institution wholly maintained out of State funds.

Article 25 ensures 'Freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion' and states that 'Subject to public order, morality and health and to the other provisions of this Part, all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practice and propagate religion.'

Laws curbing hate speech, behaviour

The Constitution of India and its hate speech laws aim to prevent discord among its many ethnic and religious communities. The laws allow a citizen to seek the punishment of anyone who shows the citizen disrespect "on grounds of religion, race, place of birth, residence, language, caste or community or any other ground whatsoever".

The laws specifically forbid anyone from outraging someone's "religious feelings". The laws allow authorities to prohibit any means of expression which someone finds insulting. Then there are laws that restrict the freedom of expression. India prohibits hate speech by several sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), the Code of Criminal Procedure and by other laws which put limitations on the freedom of expression.

Section 95 of the Code of Criminal Procedure gives the government the right to declare certain publications "forfeited" if the "publication ... appears to the State Government to contain any matter the publication of which is punishable under Section 124A or Section 153A or Section 153B or Section 292 or Section 293 or Section 295A of the Indian Penal Code".

Section 295(A) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) enacted in 1927 says: Whoever, with deliberate and malicious intention of outraging the religious feelings of any class of [citizens of India], [by words, either spoken or written, or by signs or by visible representations or otherwise], insults or attempts to insult the religion or the religious beliefs of that class, shall be punished with

Parliament of India

imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to [three years], or with fine, or with both.

The stringent Atrocities Act or The Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 prevents atrocities and hate crimes against scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. The objectives of the Act remain to enable delivery of justice to the SC/ST communities through affirmative action in order to enable them to live in society with dignity and self-esteem and without fear, violence or suppression from the dominant castes.

Laws for gender inclusion

The Constitution of India has several provisions that prevent discrimination on the basis of gender. This includes Articles 14,15,16,39 and 42 of the Constitution. Article 14 provides for equality before the law, or for the equal protection of laws. It reads 'The State shall not deny to any person equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India.'

Article15 (1) explicitly prohibits any discrimination on the basis of sex. Under Article 15(3), the state is provided with the power to make special provisions for women and children. Article 16 provides for equality of opportunity of all in matters relating to public employment or appointment to any office, it specifically forbids discrimination on the ground of sex. Article 39 provides for securing the right to an equal means of livelihood for both men and women and that both men and women have the right to equal pay.

The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019 is an act of the Parliament of India with the objective to provide for the protection of rights of transgender people, their welfare, and other related matters. Contrary to perception, Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code protects the LGBTQIA+ community.

India has always been an inclusive society. Time and again, new laws have been made and old ones amended to keep up with the requirements of the society at the time. Simultaneously, the judiciary passes orders to uphold the spirit of the law in cases when it's threatened.

Manu Shrivastava is a journalist and lawyer with DraftCraft International and Co-Convenor of #TheWomanSurvivor, #MeTooAtHome and #MeTooBeyondBorders initiatives.

Humanity losing its endearing friends

Bharat Dogra *regrets we no longer wake up to the sweet chirping of birds as the bird population has dwindled rapidly across the world. Listing the reasons for the decline, he points out the situation can be reversed if forests, wetlands, grasslands are protected and organic farming is adopted.*

Birds are the most endearing friends of humanity and waking up to their calls is such a delight. But we are hearing less often the Good Morning call of sparrows and seeing a dancing peacock is now a rare sight.

A recent study on bird population states that in the last five decades the bird population has declined by about three billion, or almost 30% in just two countries – the USA and Canada. The situation is not much better in Europe.

In India there have been several reports of large-scale deaths of birds in recent times. Thousands of birds were found dead in Sambhar Lake of Rajasthan in 2019. In 2021 we witnessed mass deaths of parrots in Faridkot, Punjab. In Thar Desert, power lines alone cause nearly a hundred thousand deaths of birds in a year.

Different factors are responsible for bird deaths in different places, but the increasing threat to the winged creatures and the overall decline in their numbers is alarming.

Birds are endearing friends of humans and we can watch them for hours with delight. But more important is their usefulness to humanity and their role in maintaining ecological balance. Their role in pollination, dispersal of seeds and helping to control harmful pests by gobbling millions of them is invaluable, which we need to recognize. Even the less endearing birds perform the useful role as scavengers. So it is distressing to learn from the recently released annual report on State of the World's Birds that out of the total number of about 11,000 known surviving species of birds in the entire world, nearly 48% or 5,245 are now believed to be experiencing a decline in their population. About 1481 or about 14% species face the threat of extinction.

A major reason for decline of birds is said to be the overall fast declining natural forests, grasslands and wetlands. Monocultures, often of exotic trees, that are taking the place of natural forests cannot provide the same conducive conditions for a diversity of birds as provided by natural forests.

Ever since Rachel Carson sounded her grim warnings in 1962 in her classic book 'Silent Spring' regarding the terribly disastrous impact of chemical pesticides on birds, more and more evidence of the massive distress and mass deaths of birds due to toxic impacts of chemical pesticides are coming to light.

It has been found that impact of pesticides makes it difficult for several migratory birds to negotiate the long distances which they could earlier cover as a routine.

Another form of cruelty suffered by tens of millions of birds daily is being caught and trapped in small, narrow cages. Many poultry farms are known to keep birds in congested cages where some birds turn self-destructive.

Beautiful birds, living happily in nature, are trapped in very cruel ways and sometimes killed for meat. Trafficking of birds is quite common.

Human beings need to more kinder and protective towards birds and let them enjoy their freedom and their natural habitats.

Protection of wetlands, grasslands and natural forests; a big shift towards organic and natural farming; prevention of poaching and hunting and a huge reduction in the use of chemical pesticides can contribute to protecting birds.

The author is Honorary Convener, Campaign to Save Earth Now. His recent books include Planet in Peril and India's Quest for Sustainable Farming and Healthy Food.

SUBEDAR JOGINDER SINGH PVC (1921-1962)

PVC of the China war

Joginder Singh was born on 26 September 1921 in Mahla Kalan, Moga district, Punjab. His father Sher Singh Sahnan belonged to an agricultural Saini Sikh family. Joginder went to primary school in Nathu Ala village and went to middle school in Daroli village.

Joginder joined the army for "identity and purpose". He was posted to 1 Sikh Regiment on 28 September 1936. He soon passed the Army Education Examination and was subsequently appointed as the Unit Education Instructor. He served at various places on the Burma Front and won many laurels. After Independence, he served at Srinagar in 1948 when Pakistani tribals attacked Kashmir.

To counter the increasing Chinese intrusions into the disputed territory, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru sought counter strategies. The proposal put forward by the Indian Army was rejected. He approved a plan proposed by a bureaucrat called the "Forward Policy". This called for the establishment of a number of small posts facing the Chinese positions. Following rise in public criticism against Chinese intrusions, Nehru implemented the "Forward Policy" against the advice of the army. The army's concern was that the Chinese had a geographical advantage. Additionally, maintaining numerous small posts would be untenable if the superior Chinese forces attacked. Nehru believed the Chinese won't attack but attack they did.

On 9 September 1962, Defence Minister Krishna Menon decided to evict the Chinese troops south of Thala Ridge and 7 Infantry Brigade. 1 Sikh, was ordered to move to Namka Chu, which was considered as militarily unsound and was strongly criticised by the Indian media.

The Chinese attacked the unprepared Indian post at Namka Chu. Soon after, the Chinese advanced to Tawang, midway to be encountered by an Indian post at the Bum La Pass, held by a platoon of 1 Sikh under the command of Subedar Joginder Singh.

On 23 October 1962, the Chinese attacked the post in three waves, each comprising 200 men. Joginder Singh and his men mowed down the first wave and the enemy was stopped by the heavy losses. A second wave came soon and was similarly dealt with. The platoon had by then lost half its men.

Subedar Joginder Singh was wounded in the thigh but refused to be evacuated. Under his leadership the platoon held its ground. In the third attack, Singh himself manned a light machine gun and shot down several of the enemy. The Chinese continued to advance in spite of heavy losses.

The Sikh soldiers then charged, shouting the war cry "Waheguru Ji Ka Khalsa, Waheguru Ji Ki Fateh". The Chinese lines were scattered at this sight and many were bayoneted. Due to heavy numbers and superior weapons, the Chinese were able to withstand the last charge by Joginder Singh and his remaining soldiers.

Singh displayed devotion to duty, inspiring leadership and bravery of the highest order. He died in Chinese captivity on 23 October 1962. The Chinese performed his last rites and sent his ashes with full military honours on 17 May 1963. He was awarded the highest gallantry award Param Vir Chakra posthumously.

Singh's statue was placed at Param Yodha Sthal, National War Memorial, New Delhi. In the 1980s, the Shipping Corporation of India , a Government of India enterprise under the aegis of the Ministry of Shipping, named fifteen of its crude oil tankers in honour of the PVC recipients. The tanker MT Subedar Joginder Singh, PVC was delivered to SCI in 1984, and served for 25 years before being phased out. In Singh's honour, a memorial statue has been built near the Office of District Collector in Moga, and a monument has been built at IB Ridge by the Indian Army. The 2018 biopic Subedar Joginder Singh is based on Singh's life and his action during Sino-Indian War. The lead role was played by Punjabi actor and singer Gippy Grewal.

Brigadier Suresh Chandra Sharma (retd.)

VANRAJ BHATIA (1927-2021)
The sound of music

Among India's most gifted music composers, Vanraj Bhatia, was born in a Kutchi businessman's family on the 31 May, 1927. He had his schooling at the New Era School in Mumbai (then Bombay) and exhibited a flair for music. He continued his education further and earned a post-graduate honours degree in English from the prestigious Elphinstone College. His interest in western classical music was sparked off after he heard a piano concert performed by Tchaikovsky, as a teenager. Later Bhatia picked up the rudiments of Hindustani classical music as a student of the Deodhar School of Music in Mumbai. He honed his talents by studying music composition with Howard Ferguson, Alan Bush and William Allwyn, all celebrated composers at the Royal Academy, London and passed out with flying colours in 1954 securing a Gold Medal.

Two coveted scholarships came the way of Vanraj Bhatia and the first was the Rockfeller Scholarship (1954-58) followed by the French Government Scholarship (1957-58). After fulfilling his commitments vide the scholarships Bhatia returned to India and soon found himself besieged with offers. He earned the distinction of becoming the first music composer to score music for an ad film and after tasting success in his maiden venture went on to compose a mindboggling 7000 jingles.

From the ad world to the celluloid world was but a short step for the composer and he landed his first feature film when celebrated director Shyam Benegal assigned him the music director's job for 'Ankur' in 1974. Such was the rapport between the auteur and the composer that Bhatia went on to score music for 16 of Benegal's directorial ventures including *Bhumika, Sardari Begum* and *Manthan*.

This was the time that the advent of a new wave in cinema was creating ripples and several young directors were jumping on to the bandwagon and acquitting themselves creditably. Cinematographer-turned-director Govind Nihalini too placed his faith in Bhatia and their collaboration produced a riveting score in the TV serial 'Tamas.' Bhatia was also honoured with a National Award for Best Music Director in 1988 as well.

Having earned a reputation as the go-to-man where the found excellent opportunities to hone his craft and some of his memorable compositions were showcased in films like *Jaane Bhi Do Yaaro* (Kundan Shah), *36 Chowringhee Lane* (Aparna Sen), *Mohan Joshi Haazir Ho* (Saeed Akhtar Mirza). *Tarang* (Kumar Shahani), *Khamoshi* (Vidhu Vinod Chopra), *Pestonjee* (Vijaya Mehta) and *Hip Hip Hurray* (Prakash Jha). His commitment to avant garde films however did not come in the way of his accepting offers that came to him from mainstream cinema and he also wielded the baton for potboilers like *Ajooba, Damini and Pardes* among others.

Bhatia also kept himself busy with assignments on the small screen as well and Shyam Benegal's popular tele-series *Bharat Ek Khoj*, an adaptation of Jawaharlal Nehru's bestselling tome 'Discovery of India'. Other TV mega serials to which he lent his magic touch were *Khandaan, Yatra, Wagle Ki Duniya* and *Banegi Apni Baat*. Bhatia also came out with albums of spiritual music which further enhanced his reputation. Some of these albums that became extremely popular were 'The Elements' 'Earth' 'Bhoomika' and 'Bhagwad Gita'. His forte however was western classical music and he was regarded as the finest exponent of that genre.

The maestro also worked as a Reader in Western Musicology at the University of Delhi between 1960-65. Bhatia was the recipient of the Sahitya Natak Akademi Award for creative and experimental music in 1989 and was also honoured by the Government of India with a Padma Shri in 2012. He completed his magnum opus named 'Agnivarsha'at the fag end of his life.

Vanraj Bhatia passed away in Mumbai on the 6 May, 2021 at 93. An under-rated composer Bhatia's demise was widely mourned.

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

SHIVKUMAR SHARMA (1938-2022)

The Sultan of strings!

"Classical music is not for entertainment. It is to take you on a meditative journey, *ye toh mehsoos karne ki cheez hai (it needs to be felt)"*. Pandit Shivkumar Sharma was an Indian maestro who straddled classical and popular music and adapted the Indian santoor (hammered dulcimer), into a major instrument of Indian classical music, giving it pride of place from the misty hills of Kashmir to esteemed concert halls across the world.

Shivkumar hailed from a musical priestly family. When five, he learnt the tabla and vocals from his father, Uma Dutt Sharma, an accomplished Hindustani vocalist. He performed on radio, aged 12.

In the early 1950s, his father researched the santoor, with roots in ancient Persia that integrated Sufi notes with traditional Kashmiri folk music, but was foreign to Hindustani tradition. He bought a 100-string santoor and encouraged his son to try playing it as he saw an opportunity to master an instrument new to North Indian classical music. Initially Shivkumar had reservations, but his father assured him his name and the santoor would become synonymous.

In February 1955, a dreamy-eyed 17-year-old Shivkumar made his maiden visit to Bombay, looking for music-based jobs in the film industry. Participating in his first major public performance at the Haridas Sangeet Sammelan, he played the tabla for half an hour, winning instant appreciation and then played the santoor for another hour, leading to wide applause.

Traditionalists however believed that the percussive fixed-pitch instrument was ill-suited to the melodic nuances of Hindustani music. Shivkumar persevered.

But the path to fit it into the complex world of ragas, riyaaz and relentless critique, while creating slides and embellishments like other string instruments but not imitating them, was arduous.

Playing the santoor wasn't easy given its small mallets created out of walnut wood. It was harder to produce the exactness of microtones, the hallmark of classical music unlike other classical string instruments.

But he was the first to play the instrument, weighing eight kilograms, on his lap for hours at a time. He proved that tradition was not set in stone, but was dynamic and accepted new contributions, experiments and forms from those able to wear down orthodoxy walls.

Shivkumar struggled before he recorded his first solo album in 1960. He provided the background music for one scene in V. Shantaram's Jhanak Jhanak Payal Baje (1955) with Gopi Krishna doing a seminal Kathak dance piece.

For years, Shivkumar was a sessions musician in films. He played the tabla for the popular song *Mo Se Chhal Kiye Jaaye* in the 1965 film Guide. He later teamed up with flautist Pt. Hari Prasad Chaurasia for an album, Call of the Valley (1967), a unique experiment because santoor and flute were considered lower down in the classical music pecking order.
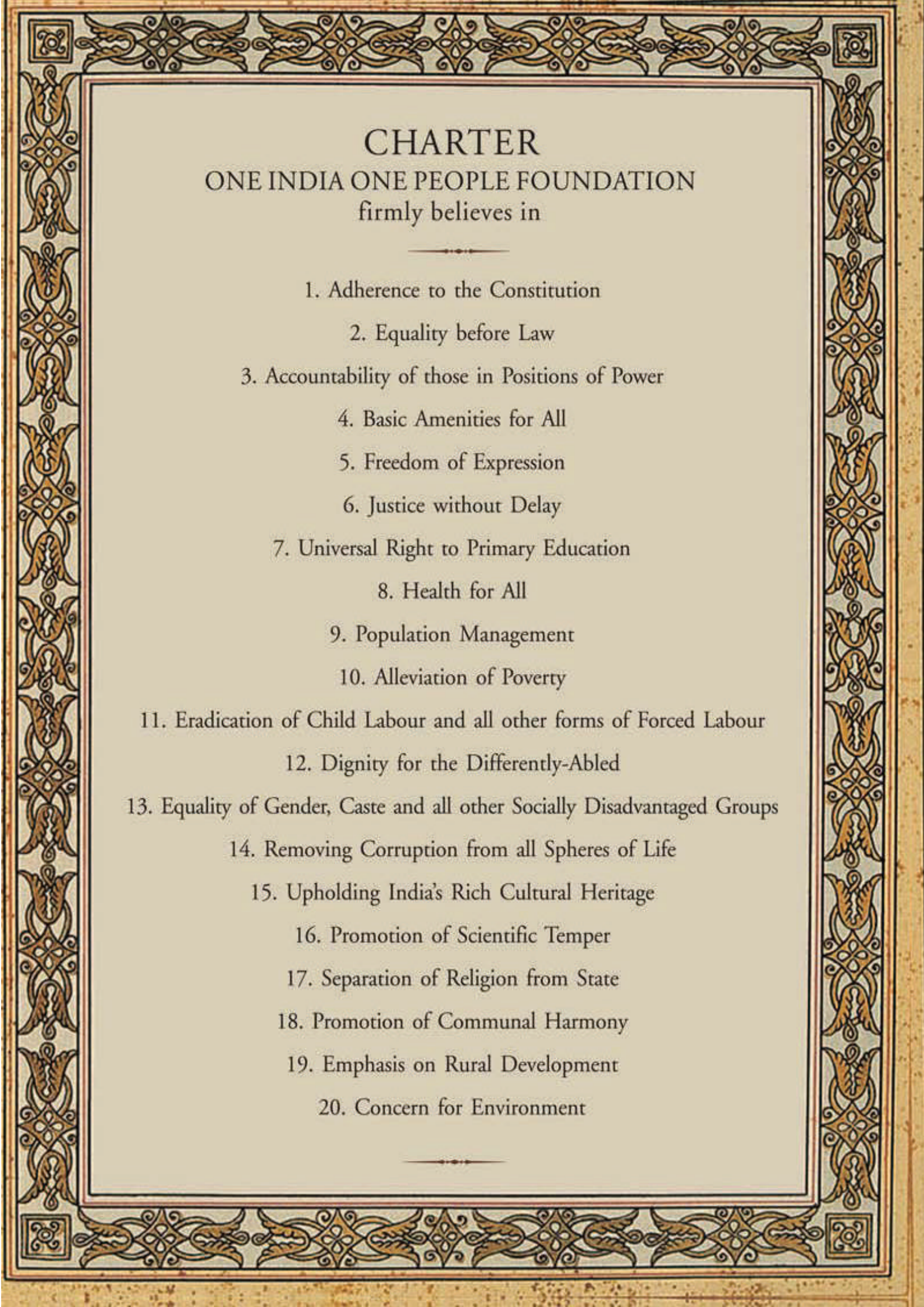
Under the professional name Shiv-Hari, the duo then scored music for films like *Silsila, Faasle, Chandni, Lamhe*, and *Darr*, and were nominated five times for Filmfare award.

In 1967, with Chaurasia and guitarist Brij Bhushan Kabra, he produced a highly atmospheric and evocative concept album, Call of the Valley. In 1998, the duo became the first Indian musicians to play at a Nobel Prize ceremony in Oslo. They also performed in the Central Hall of India's Parliament. Shivkumar released numerous albums of Hindustani santoor music, such as The Last Word in Santoor (2009), as well as many experimental works, including The Elements: Water (1995).

He was the recipient of national and international awards, including an honorary citizenship of the city of Baltimore, USA (1985), the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award (1986), the Padma Shri (1991), the Padma Bhushan (2001) and the Pandit Chatur Lal Excellence Award (2015). He published his autobiography, Journey with a Hundred Strings: My Life in Music (with Ina Puri), in 2002.

Shivkumar died of cardiac arrest in Mumbai aged 84 and was given a state funeral! He is survived by his wife Manorama, and sons Rahul and Rohit.

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

CHARTER

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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?

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