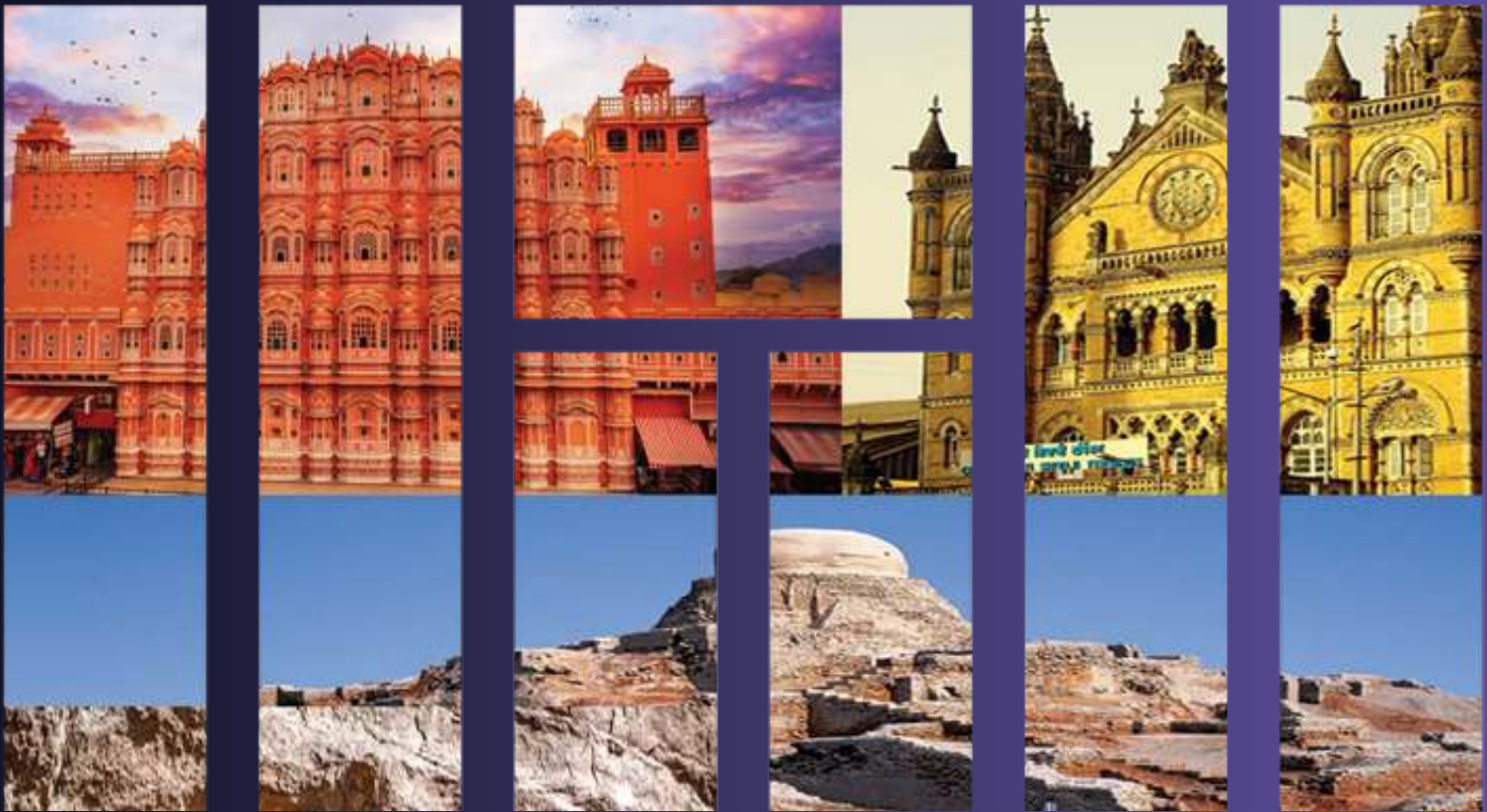


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HISTORY & HERITAGE



HISTORY IS THE HISTORIAN'S BELIEF

INDIAN HERITAGE: TIMELESS, INFINITE

THE RENAMING GAME

Know India Better

CHITKUL

A SLICE OF HEAVEN ON EARTH

Face to Face

ARVIND KAUL



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JEMADAR LALA RAM,
VICTORIA CROSS



H S DOREWAMY



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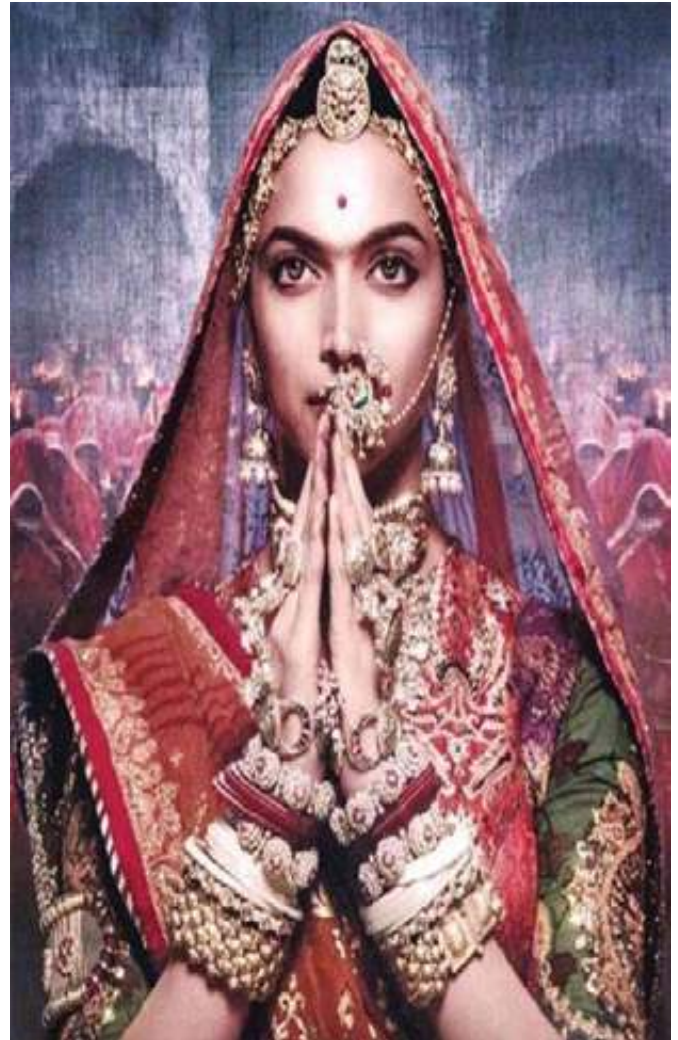
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History is the historian's belief

*Very often, history and its perception are used to manipulate public response to further commercial interests too. **Gajanan Khergamker** laments History and Heritage continue to remain the reins in the hands of the powerful and till those are not distributed by the state to reach and fulfil needs of all, even address them by sensitive censorship and timely nips, narratives will remain in the exclusive domain of the powerful few.*



The release of films based on 'true stories' and the responses they elicit depend almost entirely on the regime in power whose interests may be furthered by the strategic releases

Those in power are known to manipulate perceptions among masses in order to further their own interests; and, it's their manipulative processes that go on to create a narrative to their convenience. What's news today by way of reliable communication put down in a permanent format that becomes a source of fact for historians and researchers who go on to call it history.

In order to deflect public outrage over an issue, ruling regimes are known to trigger situations at parallel times in order to dull the impact if not deter it altogether. And it isn't that everyone falls for it either. There are sections in the informed strata of

society which calls the bluff of the ruling regime even questions it as and when it can while steering clear of systemic brickbats.

History used to manipulate response

Very often, history and its perception are used to manipulate public response to further commercial interests too. The release of films based on 'true stories' and the responses they elicit depend almost entirely on the regime in power whose interests may be furthered by the strategic releases.

To cite an example, the production of a film like Padmaavat was shrouded with controversy from the onset itself. Starting with its very name, the film had to be screened for the benefit of a section which felt outraged and threatened violence on release. It was a slice of history and one that wreaked havoc on being told again.

The choice of a history bound to rake up unpleasant memories for a film that claimed to be inspired and not a documentary claiming cent per cent truth, caused colossal damage but made news and grabbed headlines even if it were for all the wrong reasons.

For filmmakers, who thrive on documenting history for selective audiences and on platforms where they know censorship would simply not permit them to release their makes without cuts, the formula remains the same. They release a few cuts, make statements on a fact in history, stir up a controversy and all this even before approaching the censor board for a certification.

So much of history is now being relayed through medium such as film, even audio-visual content and constantly being promoted through myriad means such as social media campaigns and targeted coverage even calculated controversies, that it's nearly impossible to identify historians without an agenda.

Political parties and their bandwagons

Each political party in India now generates its own media through paid arrangements, advertorials, social media managers and spin doctors working in tandem not just to generate a narrative but also quash counter narratives or pitches that could add teeth to opponents. And, once the party loses power for whatever reason, a political opponent rises to obliterate the narrative generated by its predecessor, even change history starting with names of cities under the confidence of an opposition.

Now most regimes tend to camouflage their attempts with well-seeming acts and intentions to do public good even rectify another wrong, altogether. Whether an act is for public good or not isn't important. What remains the fact that it was perpetrated posing a public good in a particular regime and, swiftly dumped, when the regime loses power. It's usually a lobby that backs up selective political decisions and attempts, albeit temporarily, to create facts and pass it off as credible history by publishing reports, creating documentation even curriculum for academia and popularise a narrative.

And, with the change in regime is a corresponding change in the lobby that works parallel in the eco-system. In time, the narrative generated also changes drastically but over so much time that it's nearly impossible to see the shift. Right from reports to research-based documentation and curriculum for academia, everything changes in favour of the polity in power.

History is what is perceived

Heritage is what is perceived at the moment. Sometimes, it's also what is perceived by the powerful. But, almost always, the weak's version never ever gets to be classified as heritage which may, at best, form part of affirmative action and a spin-off that barely makes any material difference. So, the view of a powerful nation or one that owns the media or reins of populist indicators and lobbies is almost always of pivotal importance.

One good way to do so is to identify the platform on

which getting published or having one's views displayed, which decides the narrative...always. Ironically, in a democracy, the majority wins. A minority will never have the potential to catapult its view on populist platforms unless it's part of the lobby's alter ego and is playing bad cop, for a selective while, that is.

So, the struggle for control that lay mostly in the ownership of media, means of publication and production has now gone on to transcend to social media, academic narratives, political manipulations and state-sponsored entities. Now, sponsorship by the state and its entities has changed drastically over the years. With necessities and means made available and within easy reach of the masses, it's the sharing of power and processes to dominate and subjugate strategic groups that matter.

Impressing upon locals the need to weed out 'outsiders' to be able to govern themselves may seem a wee excessive even unconstitutional but works like magic, everywhere. Whether it's Goa, Karnataka, West Bengal, Rajasthan, Gujarat or Maharashtra, an insider-outsider rife and memories of a bloody incident from the past or a violent struggle etched in poetry, prose or film forms an integral part of a systematic history created to perpetrate the hatred; and, all this under the guise of freedom, and ironically, guaranteed by the very State under threat.

Judiciary attempts to correct

A judiciary attempts to nip the scourge in the bud, as and when possible, even taking up matters Suo Moto but the narrative must be furthered to ensure power remains in the hands of the few select united. History and heritage continue to be treated as weapons of mass management by the polity and those in power.

Whether it's a speech that may be inflammatory in content or a book of history that poses the threat of sparking violence or, lesser still, unrest and disgruntlement among a lot, it's in the quantum of people affected that decides its credibility. If there is a risk of violence or upheaval, the law will take its course and attempts at preventive action, either politically or by resorting to the judiciary, will act in time.

But, if the people affected are weak or less powerful, read inconsequential, a skewed depiction of history in favour of the powerful will continue to trample upon the truth even valid concerns with wild abandon.

History and Heritage continue to remain the reins in the hands of the powerful and till those are not distributed by the state to reach and fulfil needs of all, even address them by sensitive censorship and timely nips, narratives will remain in the exclusive domain of the powerful few.

It's in the progression of a free media, even social media, that history is being documented by all, the poorest, the weakest and the most fragile. It's important to identify this history and amplify its reach strategically and not succumb to the game of algorithms and numbers. If numbers of likes or followers on social media translated into real-time support, most of those sitting in the Opposition in India would be in power. And, that's a fact!



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

Indian heritage: Timeless, infinite

Soumya Nair describes how Indian subcontinent is one of the oldest continuously-inhabited regions of the world with civilisations dating more than 5,000 years old dwelling in planned towns and cities with water harvesting, distribution and management systems in place; flourishing trade and commerce; and dynamic knowledge centres.



The archaeological sites of Mohenjo Daro and Harappa

What is heritage? There are many definitions but the gist of all is that heritage is something inherited from the past. Heritage comprises structures, buildings, monuments, culture, customs, traditions, garments, textiles, wares, activities, nuances, behavioural patterns, languages, folklore, literature, folk art, dance, music, handicrafts, food and much more. At an individual level, heritage may even come to mean personal belongings of parents or ancestors going back several generations.

Heritage gives an individual a sense of identity. Heritage that is valued in the present is conserved by custodians for the following generations. It can be classified into several categories - Tangible, Intangible, Natural, Cultural, etc.

Diversity in heritage

Tangible includes physical structures such as historical wares, artefacts, archives, archaeological sites, cave dwellings, buildings and monuments. Intangible, on the other hand, comprise traditions, customs, art and craft, language, etc.

Cultural heritage is an asset of a community, tribe or group inherited from the past generations and holds outstanding value from the point of view of history, art or science. Also, works which are of historical and anthropological value are also part of cultural heritage. It could be tangible, intangible or natural.

So, cultural heritage may include intangible elements such as traditions, language, dance and music; tangible items such as artefacts, buildings, books, documents, scriptures, artwork, etc.; and, natural heritage such as biodiversity or geographical landscapes that are hold cultural or religious significance.

The most common form of cultural heritage is the non-physical or the intangible one. Apart from customs, traditions and practices, this category also includes beliefs, languages, activities and the aesthetics. This category of heritage is more difficult to be preserved as it goes beyond the purview of law and has to be understood and tackled at

behavioural level.

India's rich heritage

Indian subcontinent is one of the oldest continuously-inhabited regions of the world with civilisations dating more than 5,000 years old dwelling in planned towns and cities with water harvesting, distribution and management systems in place; flourishing trade and commerce; and dynamic knowledge centres.

Ancient India was the cradle of human civilisation that began along the Indus River. India's strategic location in the region, at the intersections of trade and knowledge routes between China and Europe and Asia and Africa, also made it an important centre of commerce and education.

Other than being home to one of the oldest human civilisations, India is also the place where some of the most ancient scriptures, epics and religious writings of the world have originated.

The written heritage

The main texts include the Vedas, Puranas, the two epics Ramayan and Mahabharat, etc. Vedas are divided into four namely the Rig Veda, the Yajur Veda, the Sama Veda and the Atharva Veda. They are religious texts composed in Vedic Sanskrit and are the oldest Hinduism scriptures. Vedas are considered to be timeless revelation. In the Vedas are four types of subtexts - the Samhitas, the Brahmanas, the Aranyakas and the early Upanishads.

The enormous genre of literature focusing on traditional lore and legends is called the Puranas. The key feature of Puranas is that the stories have layers of symbolism and moral lessons. The Puranas are named after Hindu gods such as Vishnu, Shiva, Brahma and Adi Shakti. Puranas are categorised as Smriti and are not considered scriptures. They are like an encyclopaedia of topics ranging from cosmology to medicine and love to philosophy.

Ancient Indian Sanskrit epic Ramayana, narrating the exile and return of Lord Ram to Ayodhya, was composed around the 5th century BCE. Composed by Sage Valmiki, Ramayan is about 24,000 verses long and is also known as the Adi Kavya i.e., original or first poem.

Mahabharat is the also an ancient Indian epic that with 1,00,000 verses is the longest epic of the world. It is believed to be composed in the fourth century BCE and written by Lord Ganesha.

Preserving, conserving

A very important aspect of heritage of any kind is ensuring its preservation and conservation. There are several ways of ensuring this including many academic and professional lines and disciplines, such as Conservation (Archaeological, Art, Architectural, Structural, etc.), Film Preservation, Archiving, Digital Preservation, Language Preservation, Oral History, Folklore, Literature, Multimedia, etc.

Heritage Conservation and Preservation is done by many departments and agencies that work at different levels of administration. Some of these include Government of India's Ministry of Culture, Archaeological Survey of India, National Archives of India, Anthropological Survey of India, Indian National Trust for

Art and Cultural Heritage, National Museum Institute of the History of Art, Conservation and Museology, etc.

Government of India's National Archives of India, established first as the Imperial Record Department in 1891 in Calcutta (now Kolkata), is a repository of the non-current records of the government. The repository serves scholars and administrators. It is the custodian of the records of enduring value and the biggest archival repository in South Asia. The collection which is an invaluable source of information comprises public records, cartographic records, microfilms, etc.

Ministry of Culture's Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) is meant for archaeological research and conservation and protection of India's cultural heritage. One of the most important tasks of ASI is the maintenance of ancient monuments and archaeological sites. It was founded in 1861 by Alexander Cunningham.

The challenges

The process of protecting and conserving tangible and intangible heritage reminds one of the roots and legacy that have been left behind. Other than government organisations and agencies, it is the duty of every individual and citizen of the country to safeguard, nurture and promote the unique cultural heritage of India.

There are several challenges that undermine the process of preservation and protection of heritage especially in countries with limited means to do so. One of the biggest challenges to this process is lack of documentation or record keeping and inventory. Lack of funds or experts is often the reason why identification and documentation isn't up to speed. Another obstacle that hinders effective protection of heritage is lack of cultural awareness among the people. The process of enlightening masses about cultural heritage is a difficult one. Instilling in them the appreciation for traditions, customs, indigenous knowledge, folklore, etc., is also very challenging.

In this regard, educational institutes or the academia has a very important role to play to make the youth understand and appreciate India's glorious history and rich heritage. It's only when one appreciates cultural heritage will he preserve and conserve it. Until and unless there is a sense of belonging, it is very difficult to achieve the desired results.

To survive the modern, global world, new approaches will have to be identified and implemented to preserve heritage. Effective partnerships are the need of the hour for holistic approach towards conservation.

The stakeholders need to come together and act as one unit. So, local communities, civil society, governments, legislators, private players, academicians, researchers, industry experts and professionals must all come together to overcome the existing challenges.

Soumya Nair is a field 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.

The renaming game

Gajanan Khergamker *delves deep into history and archives to explain the loyalties and perceptions behind attributing names to places. History, historically, has been named, written and rewritten by the ones in power. And, with every change in power, the first casualty would be history as the ruler would want to set the record right, read to his convenience, he observes.*



Victoria Terminus was renamed Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus in a move to shed the Victorian hangover

If there's anything controversial about history and heritage, on the face of things, it lies in the attribution. Dig a little deeper and you'll realise that the issue is the intent of the attributor, the timing and the political will behind it. Yet if you move away from the issue and adopt a larger and wider perspective of things, you realise that naming, shaming and attributions correct, false or maliciously done are all tenable facets of the nature of history itself.

In the resistance to change, as is the way of development, there is a significant amount of defiance to an older regime and in favour of a newer one. Defiance or compliance, however, is not independent of populist trends.

The renaming of Jabalpur from the British-spelt

Jubbulpore, respelled in 1947, Jajmau from Jajmesow, respelled in 1948 and Kanpur from Cawnpore, respelled in 1948, was met with least resistance owing to the very timing of the attempt.

Also, on the face of things, the original names were spelt by the British to suit their terminology and had a distinct ring of Victorian touch to them. The British were, owing to their linguistic upbringing, simply unable to pronounce traditionally Indian names and would hence create adaptations to suit their sensibilities. Reverting to original names was an inevitable given and happened without much resistance.

Opposition to anti-national trends

Any opposition then, for whatever reasons, would be construed as being 'anti-national' and in affront to a much-awaited-

ed freedom. Now, cut to sixty years later in 2017 when Victoria Terminus was renamed Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus in a move to shed the Victorian hangover, it was met with resistance from some quarters who felt that the UNESCO World Heritage Site named after the reigning queen should be retained. Needless to say, the opposition was struck down decisively and the new name stuck. Shiv Sena, the Nationalist Party in Maharashtra, was firm in its resolution to dump all that was British and bring back the State's lost glory.

History, historically, has been named, written and rewritten by the ones in power. And, with every change in power, the first casualty would be history as the ruler would want to set the record right, read to his convenience. Now, whether the record would be right or not, wasn't of importance. What was is that it was set in the tone that matched his own.

States of India whose names were changed after Independence were Travancore-Cochin which became Kerala on 1 November 1956, Madhya Bharat that became Madhya Pradesh on 1 November 1959, Bombay State became Gujarat and Maharashtra on 1 May 1960, Madras State that became Tamil Nadu on 14 January 1969, Mysore State that became Karnataka on 1 November 1973, Uttaranchal became Uttarakhand on 1 January 2007, Orissa became Odisha on 4 November 2011 and North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA) became Arunachal Pradesh on 20 January 1972.

The formation of Gujarat and Maharashtra, for instance, followed protests of Samyukta Maharashtra Movement in which 107 people were killed by the police and Bombay State was reorganised on linguistic lines. Gujarati-speaking areas of Bombay State were partitioned into the State of Gujarat following Mahagujarat Movement.

Demand on linguistic lines

It may be recalled that the demand for States to be organised on a linguistic basis was developed even before India achieved Independence from British rule. It was in now-Odisha that a first-of-its-kind linguistic movement was initiated in 1895 which gained momentum many years later with the demand for a separate Orissa Province to be formed by bifurcating the existing Bihar and Orissa Province.

Following efforts by the Father of Odia nationalism, Madhusudan Das, in 1936, Orissa Province became the first Indian state in Pre-Independent India to be organised on the basis of common languages.

Following Independence, there was an ascent of political movements for the creation of new states developed on linguistic lines. The concept of a Telugu-speaking state out of the northern portion of Madras State began to find acceptance after Independence, and in 1953, 16 northern Telugu-speaking districts of Madras State became the new State of Andhra.

Also, small changes were made to state boundaries: the small state of Bilaspur was merged with Himachal Pradesh on 1 July 1954; and Chandernagore, a former enclave of French India, was incorporated into West Bengal in 1955.

The purpose of naming or renaming places is sometimes to match the colour of local culture. Like a more Gujarati Vadodara from an anglicised Baroda renamed in 1974; Thiruvananthapuram from Trivandrum in 1991, Mumbai on Mumbadevi the Goddess after which the city was named from Bombay in 1995, Kochi from Cochin in 1996, Chennai from Madras in 1996 and Kolkata from Calcutta respelled in 2001.

Myriad theories on originals

There are myriad theories that surround the origin of a name. Kolkata for instance has four theories to the origin of its name.

An early theory maintains that after the settlement of British in the zone comprising three villages, they were assimilated into one and named 'Kalikata' - a marketing strategy used by the British who stamped 'Kalikata' on their export goods to compete with the Portuguese trade in Calico from Calicut in Southern India.

According to another, the city might also have been due to its location next to Ganga. The first half of the name 'kol' bears reference to a particular feature of indentation in river banks; thus, the place was named 'Kolikata'.

The third, and the more popular one which begins the name was the result of a miscommunication between an Englishman and a local grass-cutter. When the Englishman asked the Bengali villager for the name of his village, he answered 'kal-kata' ('I cut it yesterday') thinking the question referred to his bundle of grass; Hence the name.

According to another theory the city was named after the Goddess Kali, known to be the most worshipped deity of the region. The different versions of the city's name went on to be further anglicised by the British and called Calcutta. In 2001, Buddhadeb Bhattacharya the-then Chief Minister of West Bengal re-named the city and called it 'Kolkata'.

Theory of miscommunication

The miscommunication theory bears resemblance to the origin of the name Matheran - Asia's only non-motorable hill station near Neral in Maharashtra. According to legend, when a Britisher approached a villager lady at the base of the Matheran hill and asked her what lay on top, she replied 'Mathe Raan' indicating that there was a forest at the top of the hill. Hence the name Matheran that stuck.

As historians have it, the hill station is called Matheran but is said to be 'discovered' by Hugh Poyntz Malet, the-then district governor of Thane in May 1850 and the description is engraved on a plaque in the middle of Matheran market right outside the railway station.

Ironically, at a meagre distance of 3.5 km from Matheran Railway Station, lies Shivaji's Ladder - one of the top places to visit in Matheran situated on the way to One Tree Hill Point. The pathway was used, according to historians, by Chhatrapati Shivaji often used this pathway for hunting in the Matheran hills.

This was in regular use sometime between 1630 and 1680 Chhatrapati Shivaji's tenure, a good two hundred years before Hugh Malet even arrived to Matheran in 1850, forget discovering anything new.

But for all quoting British historians who would prefer to gloss over the Maratha king and his life's works and instead claim ownership of discoveries across India, Matheran continues to have been 'discovered' by Hugh Malet. Perceiving history and heritage is a matter of convenient interpretation and persisting loyalties.



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

India's precious heritage sites

April being the month of World Heritage Day, Anushka Singh dwells on how India is home to 40 properties that have been inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. Other than these, there are more than 3,600 centrally-protected monuments which are administered by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI). Interestingly, most of these monuments are in India's northern and western states.



Bhimbetka Rock Shelters and cave paintings - A UNESCO world heritage site in Madhya Pradesh

India's cultural heritage is one of the oldest and richest in the world. Home to ancient civilisations and ancient cities that were centres of trade, religion and knowledge like Nalanda, Varanasi, Dholavira, etc., India has always been a world leader and frontrunner.

Every year, on April 18th, the world observes World Heritage Day, also known as International Day for Monuments and Sites. The day is observed to raise awareness among the masses about the significance of protecting cultural heritage. The World Heritage Day is also important as it celebrates the immense diversity of heritage around the world that has been captivating human imagination and explorations for centuries.

It was in 1982 when the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) sowed the seed of 'Heritage Day' when it proposed the idea of celebrating World Heritage Day. The idea was approved by the United Nations General Assembly in

1983 and April 18th was picked as the day when the world will celebrate the diversity in heritage.

This day was chosen as it is when the Convention Concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage was adopted by UNESCO in 1982. UNESCO designates World Heritage Sites to those sites that are of outstanding universal value to cultural or natural heritage which have been nominated by countries which are signatories to the UNESCO World Heritage Convention, established in 1972.

Heritage and funds

India is home to 40 properties that have been inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. Other than these, there are more than 3,600 centrally-protected monuments which are administered by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI). Interestingly, most of these monuments are in India's

northern and western states. Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Tamil Nadu are home to more than 50 percent of the centrally-protected monuments in India.

In February 2023, as part of the Union Budget, the government of India allotted INR 2,400 crore to the tourism sector. This was much higher than the INR 1,343 crore revised estimate for the year before that. The government of India's 'Dekho Apna Desh' programme is aimed to boost tourism and as part of the programme, fifty destinations are to be developed and promoted to boost domestic tourism.

Maharashtra's Ajanta, Ellora and Elephanta caves received the highest amount of funding among all of India's world heritage sites. These received INR 32.50 crore followed by Red Fort, Qutub Minar and Humayun's Tomb in Delhi that received 30 crore funding.

Famous world heritage sites

Presently, India has 40 World Heritage Sites - 32 cultural, seven natural and one, Sikkim's Khangchendzonga National Park or Kanchenjunga Biosphere Reserve, is a 'mixed heritage' site.

Other heritage sites include Odisha's Sun Temple at Konark, Assam's Kaziranga National Park, Bihar's Mahabodhi Temple and Nalanda, Madhya Pradesh's Bhimbetka Rock Shelters, Mumbai's Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus and Victorian Gothic and Art Deco Ensembles, The Pink City and Jantar Mantar in Jaipur, Churches and Convents of Goa, Mahabalipuram monuments in Tamil Nadu, Monuments of Hampi in Karnataka, Hill Forts of Rajasthan, etc.

Globally, India has the sixth largest number of such sites. Maharashtra's Ajanta Caves, Ellora Caves and Uttar Pradesh's Agra Fort and Taj Mahal were the first to be listed in 1983. Dholavira in Gujarat and Ramappa Temple in Telangana are the latest addition to the heritage site list under the 'Cultural' category.

The ancient Harappan city of Dholavira, inhabited between ca. 3000-1500 BCE and situated in present-day Gujarat on the arid island of Khadir, was named India's 40th site on UNESCO's World Heritage list on 27 July 2021. The distinct features of one of the best-preserved archaeological sites are a fortified city and cemetery. The ruins reflect that a graded social order existed in the city. A sophisticated water management system found in Dholavira is indicative of the engineering acumen of the people.

Other findings indicate a flourishing trade with other Harappan cities and contemporary civilisations such as the Mesopotamian. Archaeological excavations also confirmed presence of artefacts and wares made of stone, copper and jewellery made of ivory and gold.

Rudreshwara, commonly known as Ramappa Temple, is situated in Telangana's Palampet village and is dedicated to Lord Shiva. It was declared a UNESCO world heritage site on 25 July 2021, as 'Kakatiya Rudreshwara (Ramappa) Temple, Telangana.' Built during the Kakatiyan period, the construction of the sandstone temple began in 1213 CE and lasted for about 40 years.

Temple highlights include decorated beams and carved granite and dolerite pillars. Another unique feature is the pyramidal horizontally-stepped tower called the 'Vimana' made of lightweight porous bricks. The sculptures in the temple are inspired from Kakatiyan culture and regional customs and dances.

Maharashtra's rich heritage

Maharashtra's Ajanta and Ellora Caves were among the first in India to be introduced to UNESCO world heritage list in

1983. The 29 rock-cut Buddhist cave monuments of Ajanta Caves and the rock-cut Hindu temple cave complex at Ellora Caves are situated in Aurangabad district, now known as Chhatrapati Sambhaji Nagar, the largest city of the Marathwada region.

Ajanta Caves are primarily home to *Chaityas* or ancient monasteries and *Viharas* i.e., worshipping halls carved into a rock wall. There are several paintings in the caves depicting Buddha's life and tales from Jatakamala (a book by Arya Surā on Buddha's teachings).

Ellora Caves, on the other hand, are a cluster of about 100 caves in the Charanandri Hills made of basalt rock. Of the 34 caves that can be visited, 17 are Hindu caves, 12 are Buddhist and 5 are Jain caves. The monuments were built during the Rashtrakuta dynasty, known for several architectural marvels during their rule.

Natural heritage sites

In India, there are seven Natural UNESCO World Heritage Sites. These include Himachal Pradesh's Great Himalayan National Park Conservation Area (2014), Assam's Kaziranga National Park (1985), Rajasthan's Keoladeo National Park (1985), Assam's Manas Wildlife Sanctuary (1985), Uttarakhand's Nanda Devi and Valley of Flowers National Park (1988, 2005), West Bengal's Sundarbans National Park (1987) and the Western Ghats (2012) spreading across Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra.

Uttarakhand's Valley of Flowers National Park is known for its breath-taking natural beauty and meadows of alpine flowers. The zone is also renowned for rich biological diversity and has many endangered and rare species of animals such as blue sheep, snow leopard, Asiatic black bear, etc.

The Sundarbans in West Bengal are spread across India and Bangladesh covering about 10,000 sq km of land and water in the delta formed on the Ganges. It not only shelters the largest mangrove forests of the world, but many rare and endangered species of mammals, reptiles and birds call the Sundarbans their home.

Assam's Kaziranga National Park is one of the last remaining sanctuaries with minimal human presence and protecting the world's largest population of one-horned rhinoceroses.

Keoladeo National Park spread over 2,800 hectares in Rajasthan's Bharatpur is one of the biggest wintering areas of migratory aquatic birds coming from Siberia, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan and China and Siberia.

Inscribed in 2016 as a UNESCO world heritage site in the 'mixed' category, Khangchendzonga National Park located in the Himalayan state of Sikkim is an ecologically diverse landscape. Other than the world's third highest peak Mount Khangchendzonga, it has glaciers, lakes, caves, rivers and plains. The elements of nature are highly revered and worshipped by the indigenous communities of the region.

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.

Documenting history all their lives

*Noting that the job of a historian is tough, since it involves processing and verifying past events, **Ruchi Verma** likens it to that of a journalist except that a historian documents or reports on past events. It is a work fraught with risk and responsibility as reliability emerges as a key factor while confirming records and a historian ought to exercise due diligence.*

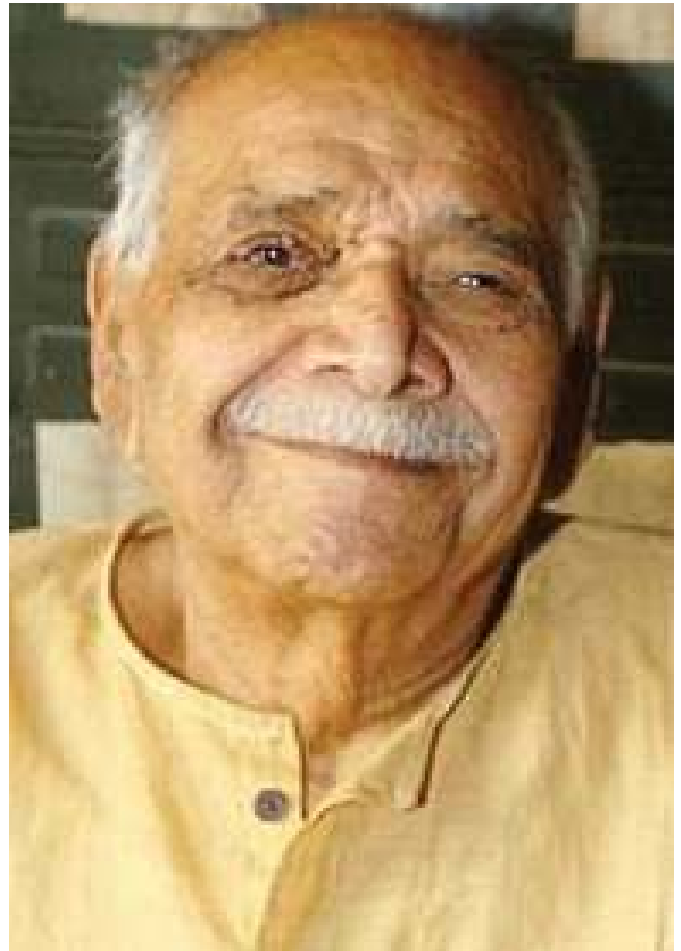


M G S Narayanan is an Indian historian and academician

The role of historians in documenting and recording events, lives of people even correcting history is a very important one. Often, historians work for government agencies, research organisations, think tanks, publishing houses, academic institutions, etc., and sometimes they are self-employed or freelancers but in all these circumstances, their role remains the same – documenting, recording or reporting events that have occurred in the past.

The role of a historian is similar to that of a journalist except that a historian documents or reports on past events. Some even like to summarise the role of a historian as one who records or documents, researches, analyses, interprets and narrates or tells events from the past timeline.

The job of a historian is not an easy one as the process



Indologist Ram Sharan Sharma contributed significantly to Indian history

of recording and verifying events from the past is challenging and fraught with obstacles such as information gaps, unverified sources, lack of verifiable documents, etc. A historian is supposed to perform a lot of research with due diligence.

The challenging role

Sources of information are many but the tricky part is to find out which one is reliable. Also, special skills and a lot of experience and knowledge are needed to interpret data to churn out any relevant and sensible piece of information. A historian usually spends hours, weeks and days to read documents or any data set to verify and confirm a fact from history. Also, more often than not, pertinent information has to be verified from multiple sources, cross-checked with corresponding and contemporary documents from other sources to make it fool proof and reliable.

Only a trained historian or a person with decades of experience can ensure that correct facts go in the records. These records eventually pass on to the next generation making the role of a historian even more important. Historians often use multiple sources to verify a fact.

These may include court records, public records, municipal files, journals of travellers and other historians, newspapers, books, etc. Basically, anything that will verify a piece of information through a corresponding fact.

It is because of the lives and works of stalwarts, leaders and great personalities that India is what it is today. These men and women have contributed in every aspect of national growth and development, in the reformation of the society and in putting India on a global pedestal.

Again, historians have a very important role to play in recording the works of leaders who have shaped the nation, in ensuring misinformation is contained and facts are presented to public.

In today's day and age, when mobile and internet access has empowered the common man even the poorest and the illiterate to access information, it's the historian who can sift correct information, facts and truth from propaganda.

Important personalities

Barun De was a well-known Indian historian. He was the Founder-Director of the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences in Kolkata and the Chairman of the West Bengal Heritage Commission.

He wrote Development and Political Culture: Bangladesh and India, Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, etc. The focus of his research was mainly early to late-modern periods of Indian history.

The Founding Chairman of the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR) and historian Ram Sharan Sharma contributed significantly to Indian history. He was an Indologist and specialised in ancient and early-medieval Indian history. He was also an acclaimed academician and taught at universities in Delhi, Patna, Toronto, etc.

Ram Charan Sharma was born in Barauni in Bihar and Orissa Province of British India and in his lifetime, he authored 115 books that were published in fifteen different languages.

Some of his works include Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India, India's Ancient Past, Perspectives in Social and Economic History of Ancient India, Urban Decay in India, etc.

Well-known Indian historian Sarvepalli Gopal and author of Radhakrishnan: A Biography, Jawaharlal Nehru: A Biography, Modern India, etc., was the son of independent India's first Vice President and second President Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan. He was awarded the Padma Vibhushan in 1999 for his contribution to Indian history.

Muttayil Govindamenon Sankara Narayanan or M G S Narayanan is an Indian historian and academician who also served as the Chairman of the ICHR and headed the Department of History at Calicut University in Kerala.

He was born at Ponnani in Malabar district of Madras Presidency and pursued his education at Ponnani, Calicut and Thrissur. He obtained his Master's degree in History from Madras Christian College and was awarded the Ph.D. by the University of Kerala.

He has authored several books and research papers such as Cultural Symbiosis in Kerala, Calicut: The City of Truth Revisited, etc. He is known to bring fresh perspective to history writing as he has heavily relied on archaeological evidence and written evidence.

Rajendralal Mitra, an expert in ancient Indian heritage was among the first Indian historian who wrote in English. He published Vedic text and wrote a book called Indo-Aryans. He was a significant figure in the Bengal Renaissance and the first Indian president of the Asiatic Society of Bengal.

A stalwart, Mitra was instrumental in discovering and deciphering historical texts, inscriptions and coins. His other major contribution is the study of Indian sculptures which he did while leading an expedition to Odisha's Bhubaneswar region. The findings were compiled into The Antiquities of Orissa which is a masterpiece work on Odissi architecture.

Great responsibility

A major role that a historian plays is analysing facts once they have been verified. This is where objectivity takes a backseat as the process is subjective and often leads to biased analysis. At this stage, a historian basically analyses the cause and effect of an event whose facts were established.

The historian then has to interpret the facts related to an event. Events of history are not just important for record-keeping but also to predict the future events. Historical events if interpreted correctly and with the right intention can help evade disasters and mishaps of the future.

With power comes responsibility and historians are no different. Recently, member of the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister, Sanjeev Sanyal said that the history of India's struggle for freedom must be re-linked because the role of forgotten heroes and revolutionaries has not been documented properly.

What is set in paper once through the works of historians, remains as such, often unchallenged and accepted without resistance for years even centuries, impacting masses and generations and deciding discourse and actions at many levels. Works of history or historical writings when challenged or questioned, often lead to friction even violence. For instance, on several occasions the history of India's freedom struggle has been questioned.

It is a well-known fact that the official narrative of India's freedom struggle that is floating around in journals, mainstream media, academics, research, etc. is tainted. It states that the freedom struggle was non-violent and the colonial British vacated their prized colony, India, peacefully.

The armed rebellion that was led by factions across India such as those during the Revolt of 1857, the Marathas and more has been conveniently side-lined including the roles of Chandrashekhar Azad, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and many more. It was an equally powerful force that led to India's freedom.

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

Education crucial in preserving history

Harshita Singh emphasises that the role of academia and educational institutions is important. Education is like a safeguarding measure that is very effective in conserving heritage. As she explains with examples, education can enable and strengthen individuals and institutions to ensure transmission of history and heritage to the next generation.



Elephanta Caves

Recently, a debate took the country by storm when news spread like wildfire that the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) has decided to remove certain chapters from CBSE Class XII History textbooks on the Mughal Empire in India. As would be the case, the move immediately drew a lot of flak and soon became a political issue.

Soon after, the NCERT Director Dinesh Saklani, in an attempt to dispel all rumours and misconceptions, issued a statement clarifying that the chapters on Mughal Empire in India were not dropped from CBSE books and the news was in fact a lie. He further added that NCERT conducted a syllabus rationalisation process last year due to the pressures exerted by the Covid-19 pandemic on students. As part of this exercise, certain portions from the syllabus were dropped in Class XII History textbooks, which also included some portion on Mughal courts.

Education and history

This was not the first time that such an issue took national prominence and became a political one. In 2019, NCERT textbooks were set for revision to come into effect once the New Education Policy (NEP) was finalised and National Curriculum Framework (NCF) was set in place.

Before this, a revision was made in 2017 and that was after a gap of fifteen years. It was due to the suggestions that came in from members of the public, as part of the exercise where NCERT invited suggestions from teachers, parents, experts and other stakeholders. The 2017 revisions added a chapter on Maharana Pratap in Class VII History textbook and on Yoga and Ayurveda in books of Classes VI till X.

Another controversy erupted when claims were made that in the new NCERT Class XI Political Science textbooks, references to India's first education minister Maulana Abul Kalam Azad were removed and this was an attempt to rewrite history and distort it for future generations.

The claims were refuted by NCERT that stated that as part of syllabus rationalisation exercise certain portions were omitted that included Cold War, Naxalite Movement, Mughal courts, etc., but there was no change made in this regard.

Role of academia

Through centuries, communities themselves have been carrying the knowledge and traditions with them. They create a culture and then carry it with them wherever they move. With modernisation and changing ways of life, development of urban centres, people moving to cities or migrating to far-away regions for livelihoods, the culture pool has been changing and so are the values associated with preserving it.

There are many countries and administrations that take special care in preserving and propagating their history. Then there are international organisations that processes that strive to protect cultural heritage of communities to be carried over to the next generation.

In all this, the role of academia and educational institutions is an important one. Education is like a safeguarding measure that is very effective in conserving heritage. The transmission of knowledge and heritage through formal and non-formals means of education is very effective. Education can enable and strengthen individuals and institutions to ensure transmission of history and heritage to the next generation.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) - a specialised agency of the United Nations aimed at promoting world peace and security through international cooperation in education, arts, sciences and culture took a very important step in 1972 to protect cultural heritage of communities and tribes.

The 1972 World Heritage Convention held under the aegis of UNESCO initiated steps to preserve unique cultural and historical values of different societies, in order to bequeath the heritage to the future generations. It was also understood that education will play a very important role in the implementation and teachers have a lot of responsibility in making it happen.

Conserving history, heritage

Several institutions such as museums, libraries, etc. conserve history in various forms and preserve the sources of history as well. They conserve documents, artefacts and specimens and exhibit them for public viewing and awareness. Then, these entities also publish information in various forms for public consumption and propagation of knowledge – through journals, books, pamphlets, etc.

It is also important for education institutes such as schools, colleges, universities and research organisations to disseminate information in a language that is integral to that culture. Language in itself is a form of identity, a cultural heritage and multi-lingual education is must to further it.

Linguistic diversity origination from various ethnicities, communities and tribes is in jeopardy due to globalisation that is slowly and steadily destroying multiculturalism. When a language dies, it takes away many things with it such as traditions, thinking, folklore, traditional knowledge, etc., and with it goes the intellectual and cultural heritage of a group.



Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya formerly known as the Prince of Wales museum

Heritage sites and education

Many educational institutes especially schools, around the world, regularly make trips to heritage sites and places of historical importance to further education for the children. In many countries, it is a regular exercise to take children to such places as part of history education. So, students are taken to tombs, palaces, museums, forts, old places of worship to introduce them to the rich world of heritage.

Additionally, children are exposed to various facets of cultural heritage even made to participate in folk dances, music, storytelling, plays, book reading, etc. to sensitise them to cultural diversity and make them aware of the rich history of a region or country.

Going a little further, today, there are many entities beyond educational institutes that have taken up the role of educators and are furthering heritage knowledge through various means, even commercial ones. Many tour and travel agencies and guides are now conducting heritage walks and heritage tours for those who would like to know more about a place or a city or a monument.

In such events, people from all walks of life willingly participate to know more about the history and heritage of a cultural group or a region. In most historic towns and cities popular among tourists like Mumbai, heritage walks and tours are conducted by individuals and organisations where foreign and domestic tourists even locals gather to know more about their city. It's a great way to further history and heritage of the zone.

In this regard, innovative steps have been taken by the central government and many state governments to create educational avenues where interested members can learn history and take a dive into the rich heritage of India. Online and offline courses on history, film screenings, cultural festivals, tours and trips, photography and essay competitions, seminars and conferences, etc. are all ways to further this goal.

India has been known the world over for its quest for knowledge. Education is a very important medium to conserve history, traditions and cultures. It ensures that the masses have access to traditional knowledge and rich heritage of the country, which is integral to their identity. Ancient Indian scriptures are a great source of information about the civilisations that existed, their way of life, customs and beliefs. Again, education is a medium that can propagate this knowledge to the masses.

Harshita Singh 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.

Nature must form the basis of heritage

With India being home to some very ancient heritage structures, Nandini Rao argues it won't be wrong to say that the country's rich history and heritage is closely intertwined with nature and its elements, so much so that many such practices and designs are still used today and adopted for contemporary use, in architecture, landscaping, design, construction, etc.



Rani ki Vav (The Queen`s Stepwell) in Patan, Gujarat -- one of the largest and finest example of stepwell architecture

In India, some of the most ancient heritage structures and elements have incorporated elements of nature in concept, construction, design and sustenance. Nature and sustainability, as we know now, have always been at the core of India's rich heritage and seen in various forms through history.

Heritage buildings in India have traditionally been environment friendly and heavily dependent on natural systems creating sustainable spaces and structures. Additionally, closer study of structures has revealed that they incorporated sustainable practices and resource management.

Among almost all ancient cultures, including in India, peaceful coexistence with nature and other living beings has been integral and is evident from the practices, folklores and scriptures.

It won't be wrong to say that India's rich history and heritage is closely intertwined with nature and its elements, so much so that many such practices and designs are still used today, adopted for contemporary use, in architecture, landscaping, design, construction, etc.

Planning spaces, resources

The ancient cities and settlements in India such as those of the Indus Valley Civilisation discovered in Harappa, Dholavira and Lothal and elsewhere such as in Nalanda, Jaipur, Patan, etc. demonstrated high level of town planning and natural resources management. Not only were these cities planned in sync with the environment, but they were also designed in a manner that utilised natural resources in the most optimal and sustainable fashion.

For example, the construction of roads in a straight pattern here meant the adjoining structures and building received maximum wind or air and the sun. Most modern-day structures are environment unfriendly, unsustainable and energy intensive. With new-found awareness on sustainability, city planners and architects are taking cues from ancient Indian architecture and heritage sites. In fact, most water conservation techniques used earlier can be practically and easily implemented even today.

Water is essential for human survival. Provisions for
(Continued on page 30)



CHITKUL

A slice of heaven on Earth

*Chitkul is a sheer token of Mother Nature's blessing, away from the cacophony of maddening, bustling city life. The serenity that its scenic locales offer is just the solace one craves for. A mesmerised **Shikha Hazarika** sketches the majesty of a place that is not just about the regulation landscapes and tranquility but also about its people. The credit is to its responsible and hospitable inhabitants who jealously guard its glory.*

Text : Shikha Hazarika

Photos : Jagrit Anand & Shikha Hazarika



View of the landscape after sunrise in Chitkul

After two years of being cooped up inside the four walls of the house, the intensity of people travelling with a vengeance – ‘revenge travel’, as the phenomenon is called, is at a threshold of a new age of move. The rage for solo trips and workations has soared up being parallel to family or group trips exploring and endorsing the roads and destinations less taken. And if you’re planning for such escapism, then a trip to Chitkul will never disappoint you.

For those who don’t know, Chitkul nestled in Sangla Valley of Kinnaur district in Himachal Pradesh is the last motorable settlement on the old Indo-Tibetan trade route and the last point in the country people can travel to without permit. With Kinner Kailash in the backdrop, Chitkul boasts its unparalleled beauty on the banks of Baspa River which runs through the valley for 95 km before merging with River Sutlej at Karcham.

Embarking on a soul-stirring trail...

The best time to visit this picturesque village is between May and October but the travel bug inside me insisted I take up a little more challenge and experience the churlish winter. So, I along with two of my friends; ended up reaching the hamlet

during a minus 15 degree Celsius. It was after decades that the valley had so little snowfall in December. Usually, the roads during December are covered with thick snow, making it almost impossible to maneuver.

As we diverted for Sangla from Karcham, the roads became rougher and narrower. The weather-beaten road has potholes and for long stretches it allows only one vehicle to pass. Meanwhile, it was also thrilling to move in that bumpy and greasy way with the motorable road ending right at the village. It was almost night when we reached Chitkul. The silence in the hills was haunting but one glance at the star-studded sky lifted up our mood despite the tiresome journey.

Sojourn in the village...

After experiencing a bone-chilling cold night, we woke up to a bright sunny morning. What could be a better start to a day, when one is amidst a range of ice-cladded mountains complemented by the cobalt blue skies with pointed peaks busting the clouds. Little wonder, the village has the cleanest air and makes one forget the treacherous roads to this paradise!

Also, by making the choice of staying at ‘Traveller’s Homestay’ on the main roadside, we felt fortunate to see



Captivating view of the mountains

everything at an altitude of 11,320 feet: majestic mountains, babbling river, large boulders and the exquisite meadows. The homestay run by Hansraj Negi, a local who gave up his engineering career to come back to his native village, can serve as a perfect halt for backpackers. One might not find extravagance here but it gives you a comfortable stay, great local experiences, awesome food and a memorable time. So, having doubled the energy with an appetizing breakfast, we headed out to explore the raw but pristine area.

Caught in the captivating views...

There is so much to do in the village itself and even more to cover around it! It is worth mentioning that the organic and unadulterated atmosphere of Chitkul makes it a popular site for backpackers, hikers and explorers.



Baspa river as it flows

The first thing we decided was to walk to the pebble-strewn river side. The Baspa River, also known as the Angler's Paradise, is an attraction, reminding you how blissful it is to be in the mountains. The pleasure of watching the sun rising from behind the peak making the mountains look like wearing a golden crown; will etch in your mind. As one gets closer to the Baspa River, you see a heavenly beauty which flows through the narrow valleys covered with nearly whiteout pine trees and snow-capped Himalayan peaks. The crystal-clear water almost in the verge of getting frozen is a treat to the eyes and in summers, one can experience trout fishing (especially, brown trouts) as one of the best activities in the valley. We also learned that some of the famous trekking routes in the region begin here. The Borassa Pass trek, at a height of nearly 18,000 feet, is one of the toughest. The Lamkhaga Pass trek takes at least 15 days. The Rani Kanda Meadows is just 10 km from Chitkul and this trek is of medium difficulty. For beginners, Nagari ITBP trek is the best.

The Sangla (Baspa) Valley is perhaps the most romantic valley in the state and is believed to have been descended from the Kinnars, the mythological musician-lovers of the human-bird kind. Kinnaur is surrounded by Garhwal in the south, Tibet in the east, Spiti Valley in the north and Kullu Valley in the west.

Weaving through the hamlet....

Having spent enough leisure time near the river, we decided to explore the village learning more about the life there and there couldn't have been a better choice than Hansraj, owner Homestay. Unlike other property owners, he was humble and approachable. Without hesitation; he accompanied us through the area narrating all important facts and beliefs about the place.

With a population below 1000, the layout of this place



Fort built on Vernacular architectural style

is typical of the region – a clustered hillside village pattern with narrow, steep and meandering footpaths, some made of concrete or stone while others are of mud, just wide enough for two people to walk. The most appealing feature of Chitkul is its old wooden houses exhibiting the finest vernacular architecture. However, there is a variation in the styles of the houses. No two houses are alike or in same scale even though they are close together.

The uniqueness in architecture is also reflected in the famous Chitkul Fort that towers over the village which is locally

referred as '*quila*', but is actually a shrine. This is a three-storey tower-like structure made of stone and wood with a small shrine on the topmost storey. The unusual wooden construction of Mathi Devi Temple is another architectural gem. Set in the middle of the village, the temple has intricate wooden carvings and distinctive roof profile. These distinctive structures dot the landscape, as do the abundant apple, walnut and apricot orchards which boost the vibrancy of the village in summers.

To our surprise, it was noticed that the villagers still use centuries-old '*gharat*' or water mill for grinding grains. The entire



Gompa, a Buddhist Temple inside the village

village depends on the *gharats* established along the perennial stream that flows from a spring in the upper most mountains of the village.

Walking through the narrow trails, it was easy to perceive that the culture here is also diverse. A blend of Hinduism, Buddhism and Animism could be seen in the population with a Tibeto-Burman dialect spoken locally known as 'Kinnauri'. Locals could be seen wearing their ubiquitous green Kinnauri (*Pahadi*) caps. Interestingly, to this date, people believe in the tales that have been going rounds for centuries. Unlike the people in the other towns of Kinnaur district, the original inhabitants of Chitkul and neighbouring villages have no trace of mongoloid features. As per the legends, the people of Chitkul were known as Kinnaras as they were believed to be halfway between a mortal and a deity. Some researchers have traced their ethnicity to the Khamba tribe of eastern Tibet and some associate them to the dards of Northern Himalayas but the true origin remains a mystery.

Unfolding the fascinating folktales...

The remarkable aspect of this village lies in its legends. The more you try to dig out the deep-rooted history of this heavenly abode, the more you fall. There is no authentic historical record of the earlier times of the village but there are fascinating folktales narrated by the locals that give you dim



Water Mill aka Gharat as locally called to grind grains in the village



The centuries-old Mathi Devi Temple

glimpses of the history.

Such goes the legendary tale about the 500-year-old Mathi Devi Temple which is located in the centre of the village and is one main attraction for the tourist. It is believed that, Mathi Devi, the local deity of Chitkul, started her quest along with her family from Vrindavan via Mathura and later reached Tibet. On the way, she encountered the seven provinces in the valley of Barua Khad where the land was divided into seven parts. After deploying her nephews and husband as guards in the various provinces, she finally decided to settle here in Chitkul. It is also said that after her arrival, the village had begun prospering and

growing in abundance with food and grass to graze for the cattle. The folklore also tells that the presiding deity of the neighbouring village of Kamru, Lord Badrinath, is her husband and the Nag Devta of Sangla and Shamshare Devta of Rakcham are her nephews.

All this made the villagers worship her and till date, the belief keeps getting firmer each passing day making the temple a prominent place for the locals to come and seek her blessings to overcome their miseries and shortcomings. Not only this, each year, during local festivals, villagers tell tales of yore celebrating the Goddess and the legends surrounding her.



Hindustaan Ka Aakhri Dhaba – the last eatery on the Indian side of the border

Hindustan ka Aakhri Dhaba...

Relishing the beauty of the peaceful settlement, we could not restrain our taste buds craving for some Maggi – the all-time favourite in the mountains. So, with an aim to beat the curiosity, we geared up to an entrance with a sign board saying – Hindustan ka Aakhri Dhaba, located just opposite to our homestay. Regrettably, it came out to be a mischance! The locals informed that it's usually closed during December due to the snowfall. Based on the reviewers' opinions, this place is known to be quite famous for perfectly cooked Rajma and tea.

However, mountains never disappoint one with Maggi and our hunger was satiated at a different eating point. Well, one need not worry to find food as the hamlet is full of various eateries offering momos, thukpa, paranthas etc. Notably, time is the main factor to keep in mind here because shops and eating spots close



Inhabitants of Chitkul in the unique green Kinnauri cap



Wintry beauty of Chitkul after the snowfall

early between 7pm to 8pm during the winters.

Smiling despite struggles...

Chitkul is a sheer token of Mother Nature's blessing, away from the cacophony of bustling city life. The serenity that the place offers is the solace one can crave for. It is worth mentioning here that the magnificence of a place is not just the landscapes and tranquility but also its people. The glory of a place remains intact only in the hands of responsible inhabitants and their hospitality.

Meanwhile, in case of Chitkul, it is something you cannot overlook. Our visit being in winter also brought us closer to the challenges faced by these modest dwellers. From road conditions to food supply; water crisis to lack of tourist for several wintry months are some major issues existing at such locations. In fact, experiencing the shortage of water due to frozen water pipes and newly purchased water bottles freezing overnight distressed us thinking about the people who face this every winter. On being asked, Hansraj smiled and shared that people here are habituated to this and have been managing lives amid all such



View of the landscape after sunrise in Chitkul



Traveller's Homestay run by Hansraj Negi

crisis. But it undoubtedly melted our hearts to see how without a single complaint we were facilitated with everything from food to hot water making our stay completely home-like that too at a very reasonable charge.

Promising to the paradise...

Well, this visit has left us wanting for more. We just couldn't get enough of the unparalleled beauty of this valley. With the sunset and temperature dropping down, our trip also came to an end and a sudden blow of chilly wind on my face made me promise to this paradise on the earth for another visit to experience the ecstasy again.



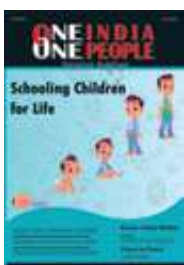
Shikha J Hazarika is a seasoned communication professional, avid traveller, nature enthusiast, photographer and someone who thrives in making destinations desirable through the sights and stories she captures during her travel.

She hails from one of the most picturesque states in northeast India- Assam and her interest lies in exploring the offbeat places, knowing the local people, learning about their lifestyles, culture and relishing the cuisine. A zeal for exploring the nooks and new tastes is what keeps this writer going!

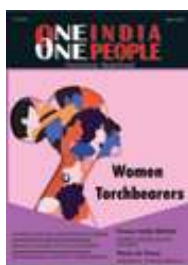
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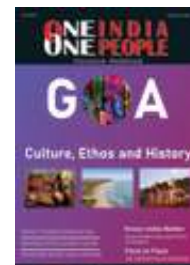
February 2023



January 2023



December 2022



November 2022



“Education ought to be geared towards sustainability”

Arvind Kaul is instilling the Quality Circle (QC) spirit in villagers of Uttar Pradesh by opening Shiksha Kendras in the rural areas. An innovative methodology is adopted in imparting education to the village kids. Besides this, he is also promoting organic farming. **Tuhina Banerjee** speaks to him and finds out about his campaign.

You started Quality Circles in Imamganj in the late 1990s. What difficulties did you face initially and how did you surmount them?

My first exploratory visit to Imamganj was on January 26, 1993. The initial challenge was gaining personal acceptance by the villagers. The question in their minds was what do I stand to gain at their cost.

What helped here was the initial introduction provided by a factory worker Sant Saran (himself a QC Member) who came from the same village. I spent six months socialising and spending time with the villagers. This helped gain personal acceptance.

The initial challenges were that unlike the city folk who live in a digital world, (world of opposites) e.g. day – night, problem – solution, the rural folk see life as a continuum. It took me a while to understand this and see that the ‘problem after next’ may arise once the initial solution is installed. I saw wisdom lay in putting in seeds in the initial solution so that the ‘problem after next’ did not arise.

I got time from them to conduct training in the concept and operation of quality circles. Once I had gained their acceptance, we willingly met for four consecutive days from 10.00 p.m. till 2:00 a.m. for the training. As a significant number was illiterate; all notes/reading material was cast in pictorial form. It was tough to pictorially represent “prosperity”.



Arvind Kaul

What made you discontinue the initiative? When did you resume it?

I had worked in Imamganj from '93 to '99. By that time, my son Kartik had turned a teenager. He is speech and hearing impaired and hence, he was worried that he may not find employment and therefore, I ought to provide for him in place of spending my earnings on rural quality circle activities. This is what made me discontinue.

I resumed in Nov/Dec 2015. Kartik graduated in 2011 and got employed immediately thereafter. By 2013, he was married and settled. In Nov-Dec 2015, when I happened to visit Imamganj I found it radically different. In place of progressing, it had regressed. Village politics had taken its toll. The village folk were split along every conceivable line. The biggest split was around politics (Mayawati's supporters vs. Mulayam's supporters).

How did you reinvent your campaign? How forthcoming were the villagers?

I appealed to volunteers to come forward. Folks from 50 out of the 70 households came forward. However, when the occasion arose to put in effort and time, the volunteers started dwindling. By April 2017, only one volunteer was left. The choice was whether I quit or continue. It was at this time that I came across a quote that the only difference between winners and losers is



Arvind Kaul interacting with villagers

is that winners don't quit. I decided to continue. Fortunately, a kid of the erstwhile Quality Circle Shiksha Kendra of Imamganj, came forward to volunteer. He was now a grown-up farmer. These two volunteers recreated the erstwhile Quality Circle Shiksha Kendra. By 2018, another ex-student of the erstwhile Quality Circle Shiksha Kendra, created a Shiksha Kendra in the village where she was married and is now resident. The movement has since grown organically and now covers nearly 14 villages with one Quality Circle Shiksha Kendra each run by about 40 volunteers.

Why did you focus on education this time? What have been your achievements and accomplishments? How do you motivate the kids?

The focus was kept on education as the school kids came from homes across social and political divide. It was beginning to patch the divide. The school progressed steadily in terms of getting children more interested in studies. Instilling the Quality Circle concept, spirit, philosophy in children is easier. There are chances that it will stay with them when they grow up as opposed to imparting the concept to grown-ups.

Our education philosophy was: All education ought to be environmental education geared towards sustainability. The purpose of education is to leave the world a better place. In the long run, the only way to win is to ensure that there are no losers. Competition has to give way to cooperation/collaboration now. There is also love for nature and environment. The volunteers have been able to wean away children from learning by rote and the habit of mindless copying. We have nurtured talent of children in arts and crafts using local material and been able to sow seeds of love for the environment (nature)/love for trees.

How do volunteers get motivated?

The volunteers joined because they love to teach and love children. That is their essential qualification. The volunteers share the same belief, that the purpose of education is to leave the world a better place than what one found. Further, they believe that they can and need to do their bit. Volunteers render selfless service and play a crucial role for society. All volunteers meet at least quarterly to discuss and decide the forthcoming joint events. Yet each volunteer has complete autonomy to run his / her Kendra. It is great for promoting innovation. There is no fee. No admission formalities either. Children can and do get admitted on their own. There's no requirement of text books.

Tell us about Safalta, the monthly newsletter. How is the teaching carried out?

I publish Safalta every month. It is for, of and by the kids, volunteers and the folk of these 10 villages. It carries news, articles, pictures and links to videos about them/by them. Seeing ones work or reading about oneself or ones work in glossy print has its own charm for all of us. The volunteers and the kids are no exception.

Safalta serves as the text in the class. Safalta is used for reading aloud in class, dictation, comprehension, Environmental Science, learning Hindi etc. Children have a 40-minute period daily where if any person from the village voluntarily wishes to teach a trick or skill and the local volunteer is agreeable, I provide the material equipment and the interested children get started. If this is not happening, the children play during this period either on their own



or games led by the volunteers. They get to enjoy a lot at school. This serves to attract them to the school. Most of the teaching is through games invented or innovated by the volunteers. It could be maths, tables, English, spelling, EVS, Hindi, General Knowledge etc. It keeps the children glued. They have tons of fun and laughter while learning.

One of the big attractions is a Deskit. It is a very light weight schoolbag integrated with a writing table. When the child has over 80% attendance consecutively for two months, they receive desksits. It is a big a motivator for children.

Do volunteers take them out?

Yes. Children get excursions based on attendance. It could be the Zoo, or the Airport or the science museum at Lucknow or a visit to Ayodhya. It is very exciting as many of the kids haven't travelled more than a few kilometers from their homes. Most had their first train rides on such an excursion. Kids are granted attendance in school for serving as helping hands in the fields of their school mates' parents at harvest time or paddy transplantation. This is one of the erstwhile QC projects being emulated by children.

Does technology figure in?

Yes. Children get excursions based on attendance. It could be the Ofcourse. We have a big WhatsApp group. Good work done by kids / volunteers gets appreciation from the WhatsApp members. There are others (besides the rural volunteers,) who are well-wishers of the movement. Many of these people are based outside India too. Appreciation coming from them is very meaningful. This happens on a daily basis.

Children get to use the computer and the internet at the QC Shiksha Kendra. The Kendras have state of the art computers (8 GB RAM and 1 TB HDD with internet, colour monitors, sound facilities and printers).

Four Shiksha Kendra's are equipped with state-of-the-art LCD Projectors. Children get to watch movies of their choice. The videos they perhaps enjoy the most are videos shot by the local volunteers where the children get to see and hear themselves. Such facilities are not available elsewhere locally.

What is Plant Hope and Happiness scheme, which became so popular?

Children, who had 80% attendance during pre-monsoon months of May and June 22, became eligible to take part in Plant Hope and Happiness. The objective of this scheme was to plant the seeds of love for trees in the child's heart. The scheme was posted on the web and anyone who wanted to get a tree planted by a kid could request for the same. About 150 trees have got planted by children. The children learnt lessons on measurement and geometry in making the bamboo tree guards. It was great fun for them. Those kids who are able to protect and nurture their trees will receive token amount of ₹ 75/- every quarter. The local volunteer is supposed to take a geotagged photo of the sapling as it grows and it can be viewed in the Plantation Gallery.

The kids get to interact with the people who requested for trees, through video messages and feel happy as appreciation is coming

to them from people they never knew.

What about sport and other extra-curricular activities?

Children have free access to lots of indoor and outdoor games. They can form their own small groups and play simultaneously. We have started an annual cricket tournament (named after a friend Jal Khodaiji). Serves to enthuse the young lads.

We have an annual singing competition. The children enjoy practicing and participating. The token material reward goes to the individual winner but the monetary award is shared in the form of a utility item for all the kids of the Kendra or a picnic or party. We plan to start an annual chess tournament.

You have also involved the villagers in organic farming. What has been the results like?

Two farmers of Imamganj have ventured. I have indemnified one farmer against any loss that he may incur. Many farmers of Imamgang are watching and all volunteers from other villages are also watching. The organically farmed paddy crop is doing very well. It was done under the guidance of Shoor Vir, an organic farmer from Binjor.

How do you carry out the entire project?

The simple answer is I work very hard, through the 40 odd volunteers in the villages and some outside the village. I hold quarterly meetings with them and chalk out plans.

What are the other development works you have undertaken in the villages?

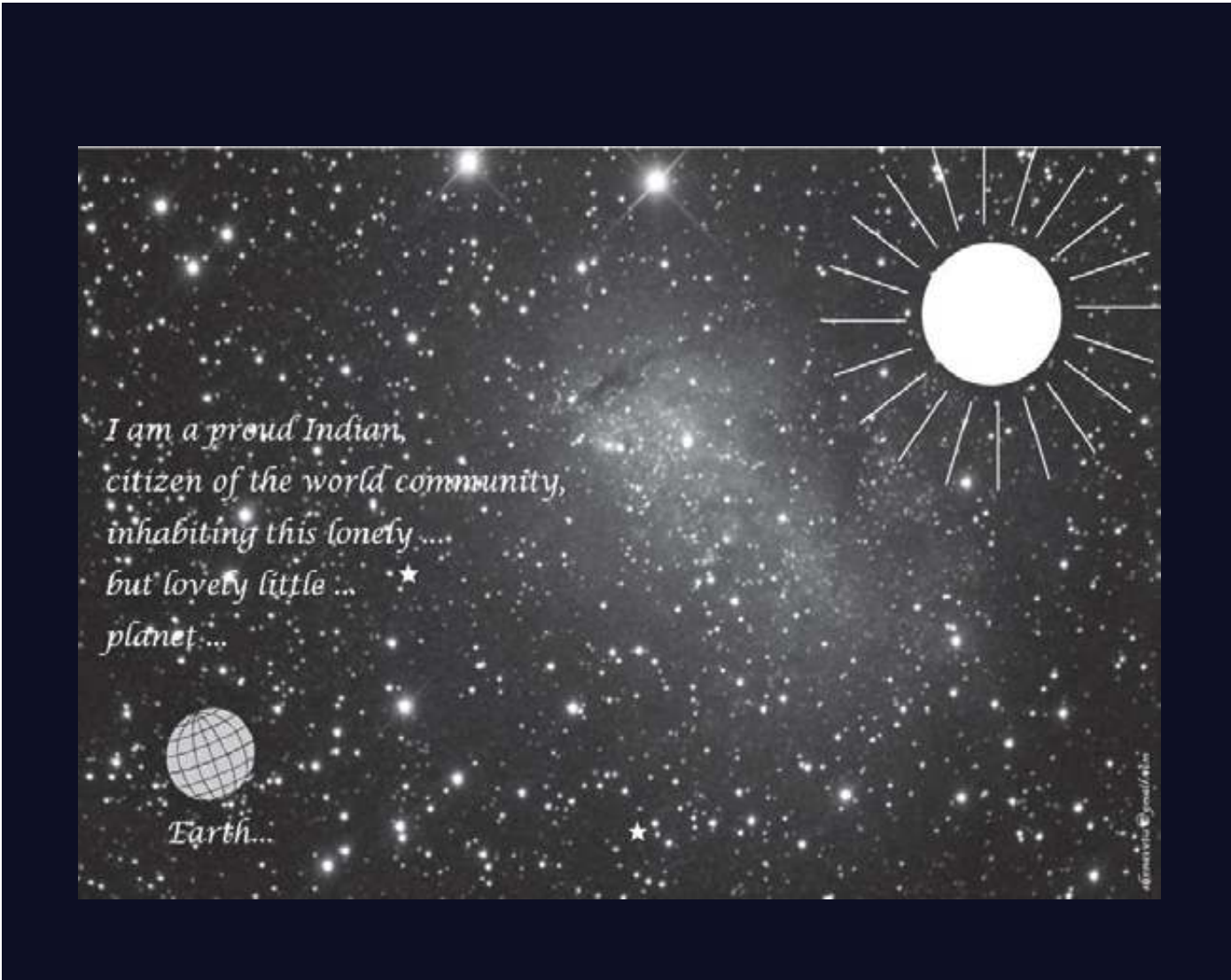
Besides the QC Shiksha Kendras, we have skill training that any volunteer or village folk can give on voluntary basis. Tailoring classes for girls/young women. Telemedicine and additional income generation through card board box making.

What's your roadmap for the future?

Leave an endowment and try to see that a council emerges. And have Education sevak or mentor/ Agriculture sevak or mentor/ Women Affairs sevak or mentor/ Environment sevak or mentor.



The writer is a freelancer who specialises in lifestyle and wellness issues.



(contd. from Pg 16)

water harvesting, conservation and management too have been found in almost all ancient cities. Water has also been very integral to holy sites and places of worship.

In almost all the ancient cities in India such as Lothal, Dholavira, Kalibangan, Banawali, etc., one can see the understanding and implementation of water management system. Excavations found reservoirs, tanks, interconnected bodies, wells, dams and docks. Indus Valley Civilisation people were also among the first to utilise ground water.

More recently, in Gujarat, for example, 11th century Rani-ki-Vav stepwells situated in the town of Patan, demonstrate how water conservation was so important for ancient cultures. UNESCO recognised Rani-ki-Vav as an exceptional example of technological development in utilising ground water resources and of water management system. The intricately-designed stepwells are seven storied and laden with ornamented panels of sculptures representing the height of the Maru-Gurjara style.

Similarly, the Abhaneri Vav or Chand Baori in Rajasthan located about 95 km from Jaipur in Abhaneri Village, Dausa is a complex structure of steps, beautifully designed and carved, around the water tank at the bottom. The structure, built by King Chanda of the Nikumbha Dynasty between 800 and 900 AD, is part of the Harshat Mata Temple and considered the deepest stepwell in the world – there are more than 3,500 narrow steps that look like an illusion run about 13 stories deep. The architectural marvel works conserves water, aids in restoring groundwater levels and provides a ‘cool’ shelter as the bottom of the stepwells is about six degrees cooler than the top.

Sustainable living

Structures and buildings in ancient India were not only aesthetically designed but also served strategic purposes. They were also designed to ensure that there was maximum utilisation of natural resources.

The Hawa Mahal, for example, there are smaller openings on the outside of the structure for cooler air. The spaces on the backside i.e., behind the screen, were used for viewing processions and events by the women of the royal family. These functional spaces also served as cooler pockets protecting them from the strong sun and hot air.

Other structures and spaces such as corridors, verandahs, windows, balconies, overhangings, gardens, ponds, jhulas, jharokhas, etc. were also heavily used to control the ambience and facilitate passage of nature in a manner conducive and amenable. This stands in sharp contrast to urban architectural patterns that confabulate and pontificate reams on natural processes yet fail drastically to provide viable solutions.

The one mistake that is regularly made is the blind adoption of modern technology specially from the West. For example, the use of air conditioning is primarily a Western concept triggered by designs, colours and products that aren't Indian. The use of natural colours, local material and adherence to traditional and scientifically-proven practices like Vaastu go a long way in providing sustainable solutions to modern-day needs.

Elements of nature

Hinduism is very close to nature and its elements. Mythology and scriptures are ripe with tales and legends of humans worshipping trees, mountains, rivers, animals and birds. Tribal culture also reveres and worships the many elements of nature.

Ancient Indian heritage comprises many temples, caves



Chidambaram Nataraja Temple, located in Chidambaram (Tamil Nadu) is dedicated to Nataraja - the dancing form of Shiva

and structures that are devoted to nature or have incorporated its elements in one way or another. This can be seen in their design, architecture, carving even legends associated with these structures and places.

One of the most prominent symbols of Indian heritage, the Konark Sun Temple situated in Odisha is a popular tourist destination and an example of magnificent architectural design and construction. The temple, situated in Puri, is dedicated to Surya Dev or the Sun God.

The temple, also known as Black Pagoda, Arka khetra, Padma Khetra, was built by King Narasimhadeva I of Eastern Ganga dynasty in 1250 AD and took 12 years to complete. The king worshipped the Sun God ‘Surya’ and the temple was considered his chariot. So, the temple was designed as a 30-metre high heavily-decorated chariot on 24 wheels, each about ten feet in diameter, drawn by seven horses. Among the many designs and motifs are those of animals and foliage around the base of the temple.

In South India, there are five temples dedicated to Lord Shiva, called the Pancha Bhoota Sthalam (pancha means five, bhoota means element and sthalam means place). Each represents a manifestation of the five elements of nature – Earth, Fire, Air, Water and Ether. Four of these are located in Tamil Nadu and one in Andhra Pradesh.

In Ekambareswarar Temple in Kanchipuram (Tamil Nadu), Shiva is worshipped as Ekambareswarar or Ekambaranathar in the form of Prithvi or Bhumi Lingam representing Earth. Jambukeshwarar Temple in Thiruvanaikaval or Thiruvanaikaval Paadal Petra Sthalam near Trichy (Tamil Nadu) has Varuna Lingam or Jambu Lingam representing Water. In Arunachaleswara Temple in Thiruvannamalai (Tamil Nadu), Shiva is worshipped as Arunachalesvara or Annamalaiyar, where his idol is referred to as Agni Lingam or Jyothi Lingam representing Fire.

Thillai Nataraja Temple, also known as Chidambaram Nataraja Temple, located in Chidambaram (Tamil Nadu) is dedicated to Nataraja - the dancing form of Shiva – and the Indra Lingam or Akasha Lingam represents Ether. Srikalahasti temple in Kalahasthi (Andhra Pradesh) houses the Vayu Lingam representing Air.

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.

Rangakarmee does Usha Ganguly proud with two brilliant plays

Shoma A. Chatterji says *'Abhi Raat Baki Hai'* and *'Pashmina'* not only keep the audience riveted, they also have the potential to make viewers introspect with their spell-binding and powerful themes. With the staging of these two plays, the Hindi theatre group lives up to the reputation of its founder-mentor.



Scenes from the play *Abhi Raat Baki Hai*

Rangakarmee has been among the very few Hindi theatre groups performing in Kolkata and beyond for over four decades with great success. Founded by the late Usha Ganguly, the group has come together with determination, passion and discipline that their mentor and guru passed on to them after she passed away. In their newly renovated performing space at Usha Ganguly Mancha and Keya Mancha in the city, they proved this again.

These plays also move beyond to other performing spaces within the city and then beyond and is getting critical and commercial success with every successive performance. The first play is called *Abhi Raat Baki Hai*, an original play in Marathi authored by Jayant Pawar called *Adhantar*.



Abhi Raat Baki Hai

Jayant Pawar is a noted playwright and many of his plays have been made into films in Marathi. *Abhi Raat Baki Hai* unfolds the story of how the textile strike in Mumbai in 1980 impacted a single, low-middle-class Marathi family living in a working class area in the city. Translated into Hindi by Kailash Sengar, it throws light on the socio-economic and political situation of Bombay in the last two decades of the last century. It was a time when globalisation was taking the world by storm and all the other industries were being shut. It was adapted to a film by Mahesh Manjrekar titled *City of Gold*. This family offers a microscopic example of hundreds of similar families that were fragmented, broken, disturbed, destroyed during and following



Scenes from the play Pashmina

the long textile strike in Mumbai.

It is directed by Souti Chakraborti who has won the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award and was also awarded the 'Manohar Singh Smriti Puraskar' for his contribution to Light Design. The stage opens on a low middle class family where the mother is the sole bread earner who provides home cooked food to families in the neighbourhood. She suffers from arthritic leg. The daughter is separated from her husband though the husband wants her back.

The older of the two sons, lives in a dream world fantasizing about an ideal Marxist, pseudo-intellectual world. He is angry with the entire world because it cannot understand his writings although he does not write a single word but languishes on his bed or walks out to get drunk on country liquor. The youngest son has lost his job and vents his anger on his helpless mother and the separated sister, accusing her for breaking bread in her mother's home.

The members of the family with outsiders stepping in from time to time, keep temperatures flared every now and the ambience in the home almost violent. At times it surfaces when the second brother, an anti-social, happens to stab a fellow gangster of another party and gets hurt himself, about to be arrested. The closure is open where the family comes together symbolically to light a fire and then stoke it out. The daughter ends everything with a beautiful lullaby. The curtains drop leaving a disturbed audience. The costume designing keeps to the characters and to their lifestyle -- the eldest son in kurta-pyjamas before stepping out, the second, violent one in milk-white churidar and tight-collared shirt and the youngest wearing shorts and a tee.

The set design is imaginative and beautiful, combining the cooking space and the bed on one side with the grocery cabinet in the centre and a chair thrown in for visitors. The dead father's picture is on the wall behind with a garland on it as it is his death/birth anniversary. The acting of the outsiders who walk in and out of the only room is as natural and organic like they too are part of the nuclear family. The sounds of firing and bomb blasts outside gives an idea of the disturbing environment.

Pashmina

The second play Pashmina, authored by Mrinal Thakur and directed by Sajida who is a graduate and a member of the National School of Drama, Delhi, is an emotionally moving story about loss, grief and finally, how grief can rise above communal conflict between two families, one Muslim who runs a business in Pashmina shawls and one Hindu, a middle-aged couple desperately trying to live with the memory of their only son who is killed by PoK (Pak Occupied Kashmir) terrorists when he is returning home with a Pashmina shawl for his mother.

The play opens with the middle-aged couple, Amar and Vibha Saxena who travel every year but keep putting off their long-cherished dream of visiting Kashmir. We are slowly revealed the reason for Vibha's resistance to the long-cherished vacation because it reminds her of her dead son. Finally, they draw courage married to their dream and set off for a luxury tour of Kashmir. Amar is determined to buy a Pashmina shawl for his wife and the wife finally agrees. Another Sikh couple, very loud and demonstrative and fun-seeking, meets them on the holiday and says they are also looking for a Pashmina shawl. This offers us a glimpse into the nature of different kinds of people making for a colourful India.



Both couples visit the home of a Pashmina shawl seller, a Muslim, who lives with his grown daughter and has also lost his young son to the communal clashes in the state. This is a journey for the Hindu parents and the Muslim father and daughter to open up their emotional wounds and come to terms with both loss – the loss of their sons, and gain – the knowledge that parents cannot be divided by the caste they are born into but can be united in the grief they share of having lost their only son.

The play makes imaginative use of surreal images of the young Hindu boy who is throttled with the same shawl he is bringing for his mother after having been shot. He floats in with a whole bouquet of balloons and dances around his mother very gracefully but does not talk. There is also a scene showing the dead Muslim boy seeking comfort in his father's lap. The Pashmina shawl seller gives away his precious shawl at a throwaway price to this Hindu couple to celebrate their friendship bonded by their personal loss. The final scene shows the two dead young men facing each other, smiling away and exchanging their caps, the Hindu boy places his cap on the head of the Muslim boy and the Muslim boy places his skull cap on the older boy's head and the play closes on this beautiful note. There is a colourful chorus dancing group that steps in to add to the entertainment value of the play without disturbing the tenor or the mood. It also establishes the changing scenario of the play as it moves from Lucknow to Kashmir.

Pashmina is also symbolic and metaphorical and may be interpreted as the invisible protagonist of the story that we see and hear only towards the end. The entire cast has imaginatively used the limited space with different set pieces changed within the absolute darkness where the actors step in and out to move pieces of furniture to change the scene and the situation. The discipline put in by the actors and other assistants is remarkable and so is the use of the surreal actions by the two dead young men who float in and out without a line to speak.

The acting by the cast, including the security guards in full uniform holding rifles, the waiter in the restaurant of the hotel and the Sikh couple, is mesmerising enough to avoid even a second's blink.

Tripti Mitra, who manages the new young team of Rangakarmee, says the group had to put in three long months of rigorous rehearsals for each play and was very punctual. Rangakarmee is certainly raising its own bar on the footsteps of the late Usha Ganguly.



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.

Mid-day meal cooks suffer exploitation

Bharat Dogra asserts that the government does not walk the talk when it comes to empowering poor women. He cites the relentless exploitation of mid-day meal cooks, most of whom are women who are not only grossly underpaid, but also asked to do other menial work.



School children having meals served under the Mid-Day Meals scheme

Government authorities frequently talk about the urgent need to empower women, especially those in India's hinterland. However, they turn a Nelson's eye to the continual exploitation within the government system of over two million mid-day cooks. Most of these are women from poor households. Many are single; several widows with no option but to suffer these exploitative conditions.

The exploitation of the mid-meal cooks is not unknown to authorities as their problems have been highlighted in the national dailies many times. A report in the Tribune in 2019 had stated that about 44,000 mid-day meal cooks in Punjab had demanded an increment in their wages from ₹ 1700 to ₹ 3000 per month (even the increased amount would have been much below the minimum legal wage, but instead they got an order asking them to also clean the utensils in which children eat their meals. In December 2022, another report from Uttar Pradesh stated that nearly 377,000 mid-day meal cooks in the state had not received their wages for the over six months after their wages were raised from ₹1500 to ₹ 2000.

The Mid-Day Meal Scheme has been regarded as an important nutrition scheme of India. Despite the lip-sympathy by the government, its allocations have been declining in real terms, after accounting for inflationary impact, and the cooks are exploited.

Some time back, dozens of teachers, mid-day meal cooks and members of school management committees in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar spoke in one voice that mid-day meal cooks are denied fair wages, and even the highly inadequate wages are not paid in time.

At present the wage of a mid-day meal cook in vast areas of the country is way below the legal minimum wage for the area. There should be a campaign to raise the wages. An average MDM worker cooks for 50 to 100 children in a day. Apart from cooking and serving meals for children the big cooking vessels have to be washed and kitchen cleaned before she leaves for home. In the morning while cleaning kitchen sometimes, she has to lend a hand in other cleaning work also. So, it is more or less a full-time job of great responsibility, and a wage which is as low as about ₹ 70 to ₹100 per day is clearly unjust.

Another issue is in most states mid-day meal cooks are denied wages during summer vacations when schools are closed. This means they are paid for only 10 months of a year. Recently this aspect was highlighted by a union of mid-day meal workers in Himachal Pradesh which also alleged that under the pretext of declining number of students in some government schools, several mid-day meal cooks are being retrenched.

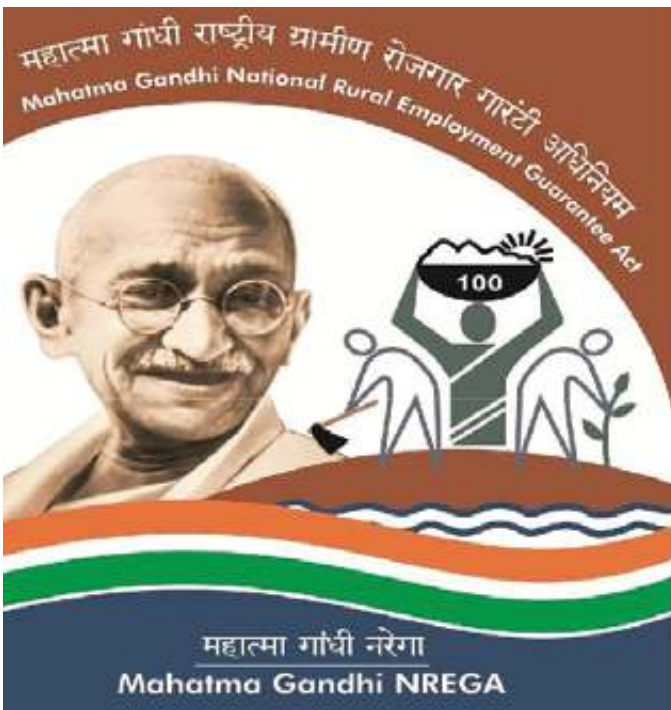
In many places safe and clean cooking conditions are not provided; as a result, there are chances of food contamination. Nearly 979 food poisoning cases were reported in mid-day meals in 2022 from across the country while 9646 such cases were reported in the last 13 years.

Keeping in view the cooks have almost a full working day job they should get the legal minimum wage. There should be adequate provision in the budget for this. As an immediate step, at least the existing wage should be doubled.

The writer is Honorary Convener, Campaign to Save Earth Now. His recent books include India's Quest for Sustainable Farming and Healthy Food, When the Two Streams Met and Navjeevan.

NREGA workers in dire straits

Bharat Dogra finds that the scheme meant to benefit rural poor is not meeting its avowed purpose with wage cuts and delays, and the authorities showing callous neglect.



National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005 (MGNREGA), earlier known as the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) stands disrupted in its present form. The Act aimed to provide at least 100 days of wage employment in a financial year to at least one member of every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work.

NREGA has seen frequent disruptions due to budget cuts and the arbitrary introduction of attendance and payments systems (NNMS and ABPS). Pro-worker and weaker section outfits in the country including NREGA Sangharsh Morcha, have staged a dharna (protest sit-in) at Jantar Mantar, Delhi since February 2023. Workers from Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Chhattisgarh and Himachal Pradesh have congregated here to narrate the injustices.

On April 13 last, the dharna completed 50 days. Initially, assurances were given by the officials concerned but protesters believe there is no further action. Despite presenting documented evidence of their problems, the authorities have maintained a 'stony silence'.

Political leaders are known to urge the youth in nation building. Here young activists, including some highly educated, have been toiling for weeks to help the weaker sections. They have been collecting data and evidence to seek attention to the problems of the poor.

There are instances of faulty implementation. Sulochana Devi from Kangra district (Himachal Pradesh) recently worked for seven days at a NREGA work site, but due to faulty NNMS attendance, her work was recorded for only two days. Instead of being paid at the rate of ₹ 212 she was paid ₹ 80. Dharamsai from Sarguja (Chhattisgarh) has not been paid for four weeks of work due to Aadhar card not being linked to job card. Mannu Ram of same district toiled for 10 days in March at a NREGA site, but due to faulty NNMS app was listed for payment for only two days and received payment for only a day.

Lalitaben Badla of Panchmahal district has testified about eight women of her village whose wage payments got misdirected under ABPS (Aadhaar-Based Payment System) and who went around for months to get them. Finally, they got only part amount of what they had lost. There have even been cases of workers losing previous savings due to the new system of wage payment.

Rejection, misdirection and diversion are the three major problems encountered by the ABPS payment system, made mandatory since January despite evidence that equally effective and speedy payments are possible by ordinary bank accounts transfer system which was the norm earlier. The issue is compounded by budget inadequacy, delays in wage payments. A review of 1.8 million transactions revealed that there were delays beyond the stipulated 15 days in 44% cases.

Protesters want that ABPS isn't mandatory and resumption of bank account payments, stop NNMS app attendance system, ensure adequate budgeting and expeditious payment of arrears. The workers' struggle exemplifies the injustice done to the working class. Eminent economist Jean Dreze has shown that rural real wages have stagnated and may even have suffered some decline.

Interactions with construction and domestic workers in Delhi earlier this year revealed that after considering the impact of inflationary trends and higher days of unemployment, their overall earnings have declined in recent times. A review of actual expenditure data for those government departments which deal with weaker sections revealed that for many schemes the actual spending has lagged far behind original budget allocations. Hence the NREGA struggle should also be seen as a part of the wider ongoing struggle for justice of the working class and the weaker sections of society.

The writer is Honorary Convener, Campaign to Save Earth Now. His recent books include India's Quest for Sustainable Farming and Healthy Food, When the Two Streams Met and Navjeevan.



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INDIA.

JEMADAR LALA RAM, VICTORIA CROSS (1876-1927)

A true blue Dogra

Lala Ram was born in Parol near Jullundur in Punjab on 20 April 1876. As there were no schools in that area then, he had no formal education. However, he could read and write Hindi. He enlisted in the newly raised 41st Dogra Regiment in 1901. He was a good sportsman.

He served initially on the Suez Canal defences and then went to France, where he was wounded and was nursed in the converted Brighton Pavilion, adapted as a hospital for Indian soldiers. On recovery, he joined his regiment in Mesopotamia. British and Indian forces had landed in the Persian Gulf in November 1914. Due to large losses, the force retreated to Kut-al-Amara. While the siege lasted, British and Indian reinforcements on a large scale were dispatched to Mesopotamia but ultimately futile attempts to relieve the besieged garrison.

41 Dogras were part of the force which, along with the 2nd Black Watch, 9th Bhopals, 37th Dogras and 6th Jats, assaulted the Turkish entrenchments near the ruins of Al Orah on the Tigris. The relief force (reduced to just 10,000 men) encountered 30,000 men of the Ottoman Sixth Army. The British force was beaten back sustaining 2,700 casualties. There was a freezing wind and the wounded lay in pools of rain and flooded marsh. It was typical of Dogra to strip himself and make a shield of his body for his Adjutant and the Adjutant was only one of five officers whom Lala saved that day.

Lance Naik Lala came across a Major in his regiment, 150 yards from the enemy line, completely exposed and trying to bandage a grievous wound. Lala dragged him a few yards only a few inches deep, and there bound up the Major's wounds. Meanwhile, he heard other cries for help and dragged four more of his comrades to bind their wounds. Lala heard another voice calling for help. He recognised the voice and said to the Major: "That is my Adjutant Sahib calling. I must go out to help him". "No, Lala, it is quite useless", said the Major; "You will certainly be shot dead".

Seeing Lala was determined to go, the Major said: I order you not to go; lie down". Lala lay still for a while and then

hearing the voice again, jumped up. This officer, before being taken to hospital, where he died, narrated his account to a brother officer: "I was shot down in the open about a hundred yards from the enemy. At the slightest movement, bullets whistled past. Then came a Sepoy to my assistance and he was also shot dead. Then it came on to rain and a bitter wind sprang up. Then, as I lay in great pain, suddenly appeared Lala and lay down beside me with cheering words. First, he bound up my wounds and then taking off his own coat spread it over me. He then lay down lengthways so as to protect me from the enemy's bullets. At length, when it grew dark, he crept off and brought up some stretcher-bearers."

Next morning, he was hale and cheerful as ever. He was granted Victoria Cross. Lala was also awarded the 1st Class of the Russian Cross of St. George and Mentioned in Dispatches (L.G. 17 Oct. 1916). Lala returned to India in 1917. The Governor-General of India, Lord Chelmsford, at a special parade on 30 January 1917, at the vice-regal lodge, Delhi, India, presented medals and orders to 200 Indian officers and men including the Victoria Cross to Lance-Naik Lala, 41 Dogras, and two other Indian soldiers.

Lala saw further action as a Havildar with the 41 Dogras in the Third Afghan War in 1919. He was later awarded the Meritorious Service Medal. He was promoted to the rank of Jemadar in 1923. He retired after 25 years' service in 1926 and returned to his home in Parol. He contracted polio and died in March 1927. It is said that his last words were "We fought true".



Brigadier Suresh Chandra Sharma (retd.)

H S DORESWAMY (1918-2021)

Freedom fighter and activist

Freedom fighter and activist H S Doreswamy was born on the 10 April 1918 in a village named Harohalli in the erstwhile kingdom of Mysore. He lost his parents at five and was raised by his grandfather. After finishing his primary education in his village, he set forth to Bangalore to pursue his higher education at the Government Intermediate College and completed his graduation from the Central College of Bangalore earning a Bachelor of Science degree. His interest in teaching saw him seek employment as a teacher in a high school in Bangalore where he taught Mathematics and Physics.

A young Doreswamy was drawn to the freedom movement inspired by the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi and plunged into the Quit India movement organising protests and general strikes in the then Mysore state and was promptly arrested and sent to jail. He collaborated with N D Shankar, freedom fighter and communist in organising a massive 14-day strike in three textile mills. Later, influenced by Acharya Vinoba Bhave in the 1950s, he participated in the Bhoodan movement and in the struggle for unification of Karnataka. Later, he took to journalism and brought out a Kannada newspaper 'Pauravani' under the aegis of a publication house named Sahitya Mandira during the British Raj and thereafter.

Doreswamy was a virulent critic of the Emergency in 1975 and dashed off a letter to Indira Gandhi threatening to launch an agitation. This resulted in his being imprisoned for four months. He was active in the movement launched by Jayaprakash Narayan that waged a grim battle against the Emergency.

During the 80s, Doreswamy was involved in various movements for the rights of farmers and other marginalised communities and later participated actively in Anna Hazare's 'India against corruption' movement that was launched with a laudable motive of eradicating corruption from public life.

Later, Doreswamy plunged headlong into several agitations and was a member of a number of committees working against the encroachment of water bodies in Bangalore. His activism and never say die approach to issues resulted in the construction of six new waste processing plants in Bangalore. His activism and never say die approach to

issues resulted in the construction of six new waste processing plants in Bangalore in the year 2014. Doreswamy also launched an agitation in Kodagu District in Karnataka against the eviction of Adivasis from their lands.

Doreswamy's critics never took kindly to his propensity to agitate and he was even labelled as a Pakistani sympathiser and an anti-national. Undeterred the freedom fighter continued to fight for what he thought was right and even the threat of violence against him never deterred him or forced him to give up his fight for the rights of the poor and the downtrodden. Doreswamy continued as an indomitable fighter for human rights even after he turned centenarian and it was a familiar sight to witness him in the forefront of agitations and protests in Townhall in Bangalore, holding a placard, braving the merciless sun beating down his back.

The indefatigable crusader never ceased to contribute to the social upliftment and continued to espouse causes dear to his heart. He had many admirers and author and historian Ramachandra Guha described him as the conscience of the state of Karnataka. Several awards and recognitions too came his way including the prestigious Ramnath Goenka Award for Lifetime Achievement. In 2017 he was also given the Gandhi Seva Award. H S Doreswamy who enjoyed robust health right through his long and eventful life breathed his last in Bangalore due to cardiac arrest on the 26 May 2021.

Doreswamy was peerless when it came to taking up civic causes and despite a barrage of criticism and threats from politicians whose shenanigans he never hesitated to expose, the activist never once flinched from his chosen path. A selfless individual who never sought any awards or compensation for himself, Doreswamy always placed society above himself and this was a quality that endeared him to one and all.



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LALITA LAJMI (1932-2023)

A sensitive and self-taught artist

“Freedom that came too late, has come to me now. There is no age to love or to be loved. To make art you must have passion, you must fall in love and somewhere in the exuberance feel the pain of what love brings to life” – Lalita Lajmi

Indian painter Lalita Lajmi whose family included her brother, the Hindi film director, producer, and actor Guru Dutt; her late filmmaker daughter Kalpana Lajmi, and her cousin Shyam Benegal, a film director, was born in Calcutta (now Kolkata), West Bengal.

Lajmi developed interest in arts, and in 1960, participated in a Progressive Artists Group exhibition at the Artist's Centre, Bombay. She had her first solo show a year later under the direction of her mentor K.H. Ara. To make ends meet, she taught for over 20 years at Campion and Convent of Jesus and Mary schools. Later, she enrolled in the J.J. School of Art to finish her Master's degree in art. While teaching, she worked with disabled and underprivileged children.

Lajmi was primarily self-taught who lacked direction. Until late 1970s, her work was influenced by Indian films. Her initial works, shaped by her personal experiences and observations, were melancholic, whereas her later works were more upbeat.

She expanded into etchings, oils, and water colours by the mid-1980s, constantly reinventing herself. Her works depicted the hidden conflicts between men and women. However, her women were not docile but assertive, individualistic, and aggressive. She also portrayed the mother-daughter bond. Her flawless water colours typically told a multilayered history of the modern Indian woman, post-Independence. Her work majorly featured figurative characters - men, women, children, and clowns - that were strongly autobiographical, creating a visual biography, her viewers were free to interpret.

A seasonal artist, she didn't let the pandemic slow her down, but used the resources at her disposal. With pencil, water colour, and crayon, two 21-footer long Japanese scrolls told stories about family, ageing, bonds, relationships, birds, flowers, hybrid animals, embryos, human anatomy and vertebrae. Lajmi used the sepia tone of the old scrolls' tube as

a foundation for her monochrome paintings.

Through psychoanalysis she had her dreams read and explained. To overcome her existential fears, she confronted them by painting surreal nightmares and fantasies. Lajmi's works were exceptional in their capacity to address the complexities of our minds at a time when mental health issues were pressing and widespread.

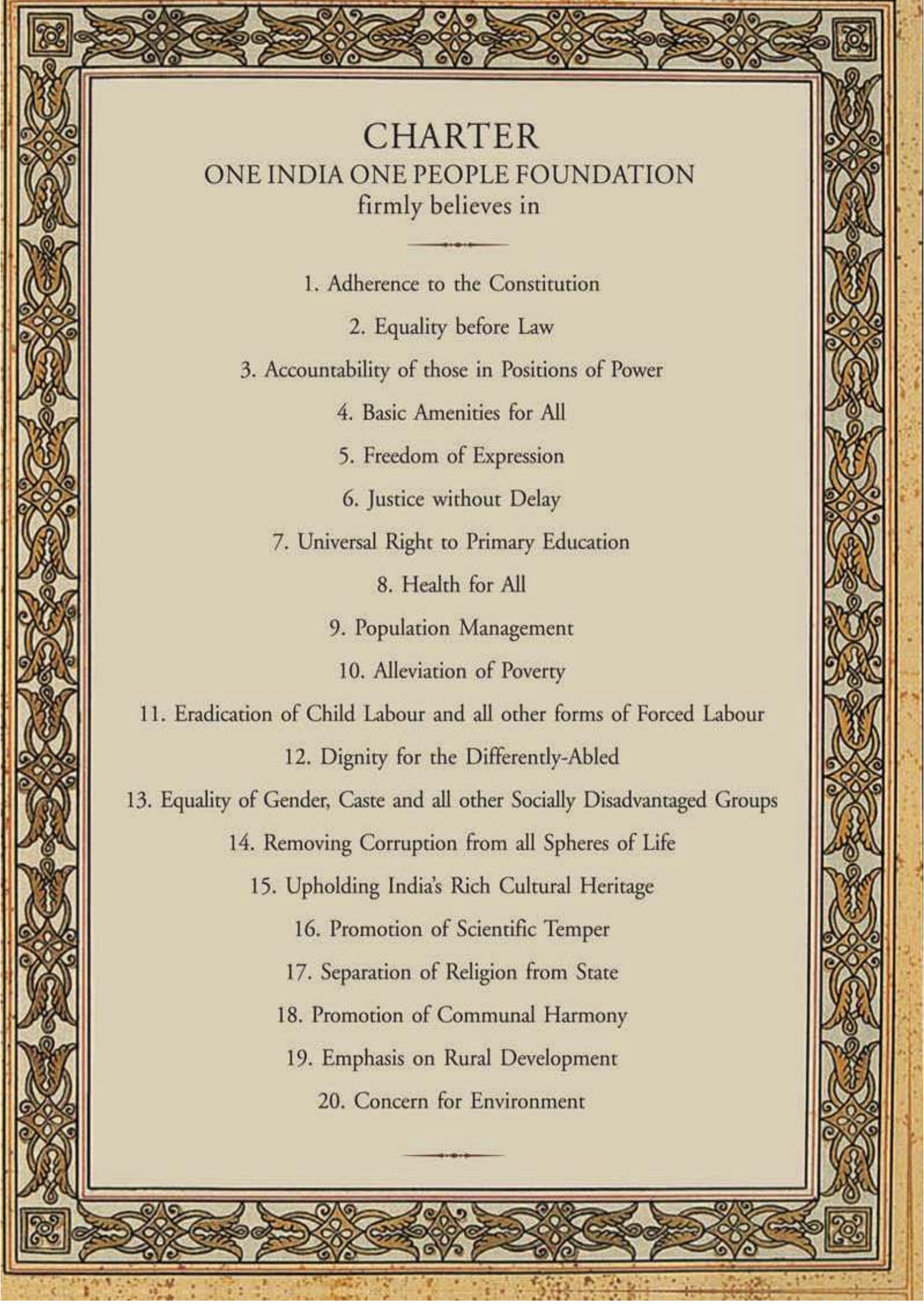


Lajmi set up a press in her kitchen after completing a government-funded programme that taught intaglio and etching in evening classes at the Sir J.J. School of Art from 1973 to 1976. Working around evening time utilizing electrical light, through a fascinating utilization of grisaille and sepia tones, she made prints that later were displayed, supported by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, in both West and East Germany in 1983. She had exhibitions at national and international art gallery platforms in a five-decade career. Her works can be found at the National Gallery of Modern Art, the British Museum and CSMVS Museum, Mumbai. On January 12, 1983, the N.G.M.A presented The Minds Cupboard, a retrospective of her extensive body of work. Before her, male painters had only depicted women as naked anatomical studies.

Her face, like a canvas, with deep lines, told the story of her turbulent life. After Guru Dutt's death, she went through depression. It was art that helped her cope. She made a cameo appearance in the 2007 movie *Taare Zameen Par*, worked as a graphic artist on the Hindi film *Aghaat* in 1985, and designed the costumes for a play by Amol Palekar. Lajmi was always mindful that artists should bear the responsibility for social change. She died in Mumbai aged ninety. Her art depicted her life in its rawness. As a seasoned lady craftsman and printmaker, she left a conclusive stamp on the historical backdrop of workmanship in India. She leaves behind a son, Capt. Devdas.



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CHARTER

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 16. Promotion of Scientific Temper
 17. Separation of Religion from State
 18. Promotion of Communal Harmony
 19. Emphasis on Rural Development
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-

WHO AM I?



Am I a Hindu first or an Indian first?

Am I a Muslim first or an Indian first?

Am I a Christian first or an Indian first?

Am I a Buddhist first or an Indian first?

Am I a Brahmin first or an Indian first?

Am I a Dalit first or an Indian first?

Am I a South Indian first or an Indian first?

Am I a North Indian first or an Indian first?

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

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

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

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

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

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



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