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Addressing India`s Population Explosion

A BILLION PLUS OPPORTUNITIES

INFRA CHALLENGES WILL BE DAUNTING

RIPPLE EFFECT ON PUBLIC HEALTH

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Face to Face

SREERANG PANDIT

Great Indians : Virchand Dharamsey I Omprakash Valmiki I Lieutenant Navdeep Singh, Ashok Chakra

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A billion plus opportunities

Anushka Singh *points out that a country with the largest number of 'youth' (15 – 24 years), a staggering 254 million, is nothing but a source of opportunities if planned carefully. The young are energetic, productive and innovative. It's important to create an environment of growth and innovation and nurture it so that they can tap on the infinite possibilities.*

The population time bomb

A few weeks ago, India became the world's most populous country with a population of 1,425,775,850 people as per UN estimates. The estimates are made based on information and trends in mortality, fertility and migration acquired from records, surveys and administrative data.

As per the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) report - 25 per cent of India's people are below the age of 14 years, 18 per cent are in the 10 – 19 years age bracket and seven per cent are above the age of 65 years.

The debate is underway whether India's billion plus population is a boon or a bane. Several reports are floating in public domain examining the potential and / or the burden of the people of the most populated country in the world. Estimates also reveal that India's population will keep rising for three to four decades before it starts to decline.

Preparedness important

There is a huge responsibility on Indian legislators and policymakers to ensure there are enough resources and opportunities for India's people, now and in the future. Government agencies, research institutions, think tanks and several international organisations are already working and collaborating to generate scenarios and work out pathways and solutions for a progressive and self-reliant India.

For example, National Institution for Transforming India (NITI Aayog - Government of India's premier think tank) and the Government of India's Ministry of Health and Family Welfare including National Transfer Accounts (NTA) are already facilitating discussions and dialogue with UNFPA on various issues related to demographic dividend and population ageing in India.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as Global Goals, were adopted by the United Nations in 2015. SDGs are a collection of seventeen inter-linked objectives that are to serve as a blueprint to ensure peace and prosperity, now and in the future. The goals are a universal call to action to end poverty and protect the planet.

India is a key global player and critical in determining the success of the Sustainable Development Goals, globally. At the 2015 UN Sustainable Development Summit, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had said that 'Sustainable development of one-sixth of humanity will be of great consequence to the world and our beautiful planet.'

Tracking relevant SDG indicators is important to track progress and effectiveness of population-related policies. NITI Aayog has been mapping SDGs schemes and targets and coordinating with pertinent ministries. State governments also play a vital role in effectively implementing SDGs with their 'people first' motto – ensuring no one is left behind and there are enough resources and opportunities for the growing population.

The population dynamics

Within India, the population dynamics vary from one state to another and from region to region. Policies and schemes must be devised keeping these dynamics at the forefront. For example, while Uttar Pradesh and Bihar have a young population, Punjab and Kerala have more ageing people.

A country with the largest number of 'youth' (15 – 24 years), a staggering 254 million, is nothing but a source of opportunities if planned carefully. The young are energetic, productive and innovative. It's important to create an environment of growth and innovation and nurture it so that they can tap on the infinite possibilities.

Contrary to common notion, a larger population has several benefits. More people translate to a stronger and larger human capital. A large population that is productive can lead to higher economic growth, faster development, effective implementation of policies, a better quality of living and an overall improved and progressive society.

With an expanding youth segment in the population, there's a need to provide them with the right resources to make them an enviable human capital - quality education and access, access to technology especially digital, skill training and upgradation, innovation and global exposure, etc.

Ensuring gender equality in terms of educational and work opportunities and empowerment is also crucial for a productive and progressive India. Empowerment must be in the truest sense where young girls and women can not only uplift themselves but also contribute in nation building and social transformation towards a more inclusive society.

India has made significant progress in this regard. Teenage marriages have reduced from 47 per cent to 27 per cent and teenage fertility from 16 per cent to seven per cent. More and more women are now getting educated and participating in the workforce.

India's population is the highest in the world now but it also has a very large working age population and this works in her favour. A bigger working population group means there is more economic growth, primarily because there are more working people and less dependents leading to higher rate of economic activity.

The working age population in India has grown from 50 per to 65 per cent since Independence, so there is a decrease in the dependency ratio i.e., the number of children and elderly persons per working age population.

In the next three decades, the number of people working and 'independent' is only going to increase. This is a promising trend as it will boost economic growth and make sure there are ample opportunities for India's young brigade ready to jump in the economic cycle.

Proactive government

The government has been very active in terms of monitoring of policy effectiveness and planning to meet the demands of the growing population in the future. Steps are being taken to help India's youth achieve their potential and meet their aspirations, and at the same time contribute to nation's development. The motto of the government furthering Aatmanirbhar Bharat is 'no one is left behind.'

India is one of the world's fastest-growing economies. A major factor in sustaining and pushing economic expansion is India's demographic dividend, in this case a large segment of youth. Demographic dividend is the economic growth potential that can result from shifts in a population's age structure and is mainly manifested when the share of working-age population is larger than the non-working-age share of the population.

Policies are being made and missions established to make sure a self-reliant India of the future rests on the shoulders of an empowered youth. The government has rolled out several important initiatives to facilitate holistic development and involve the youth. Some examples are Start-Up India, Fit India, Make in India, Digital India, National Education Policy, Science Technology & Innovation Policy, etc.

Any progressive country is built on a healthy population. Growing population has growing healthcare needs as well. The Aspirational Districts Programme launched in 2018 aims to quickly and effectively transform 112 most under-developed districts across India and focuses on health, nutrition and education. It is an important development initiative with a futuristic approach.

To expand India's economy and create more jobs, the government's ambitious and successful 'Make in India' scheme launched in 2014 has been transforming the country into a global design and manufacturing hub.

Efforts are being made under 'Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas aur Sabka Vishwas' to improve living standards of people and ensure inclusive growth for all. In the near future, India's work-eligible population should be able to fully and productively participate in the expanding economy. The government is working on policies focusing on growth, inclusion and sustainability with the aim of population stabilisation and furtherance of India's developmental goals.

> There is a huge responsibility on Indian legislators and policymakers to ensure there are enough resources and opportunities for India's people, now and in the future.

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.

Infra challenges will be daunting

With an increase in population, the pressure on its infrastructure increases proportionately. Its burden can be felt more in bigger cities and towns, elucidates **Anushka Singh** *and spells out how government department and agencies are implementing development projects and devising holistic development policies with a futuristic approach.*

Mumbai's overcrowded local trains

In April 2023, India became the most populous country in the world. As per the data provided by the United Nations, India with 142.86 crore people has surpassed China, with a population of 142.57 crore, to become the world's most populous nation.

With an increase in population, the pressure on its infrastructure increases in direct proportion. The burden can be felt more in bigger cities and towns which are more densely populated and the dependence on these variables is already very high. Infrastructure challenges remain high in the areas of housing, transportation (roadways, railways, etc.) and basic amenities.

Government departments and agencies are constantly trying to keep up with the increasing demand by authorising and implementing development projects and devising holistic development policies with a futuristic approach.

India is the fifth largest economy in the world and all the economic indicators are in favour of a booming India. As per the International Monetary Fund, the Indian economy has a ten-year average growth rate of 6.49 per cent. The most populous nation in the world, India has the largest workforce in the world with a median age of 28.2 years, as per the World Population Prospect.

In any developing nation, the low rate of urbanisation is often caused by the lack of urban infrastructure. The problems are only compounded when there's more pressure on existing infrastructure because of rapid population growth. A lower rate of urbanisation hampers the potential of the urban sector to contribute progressively to the national gross domestic product.

Urban infrastructure

It's extremely important to develop necessary urban infrastructure in order to boost the economic indicators. A survey undertaken by the Asian Development Bank indicated that bigger cities in India such as Thiruvananthapuram, Kolkata,

Chennai, Mumbai, Bengaluru, etc., have better provision of infra facilities for their residents.

In November 2022, a new report issued by the World Bank - *Financing India's Urban Infrastructure Needs: Constraints to Commercial Financing and Prospects for Policy Action* - estimated that over the next decade and a half, India will need to invest USD 840 billion into urban infrastructure to effectively meet the needs of a fast-growing urban population. This amounts to an average investment of USD 55 billion per year.

In India, migration towards urban cities is happening at a fast rate. Estimates reveal that by 2036, more than 600 million people – 40 per cent of the total population of the country - will be living in urban centres or cities. So, the challenge is multi-headed. Not only is the rapid population growth presenting a challenge, the increasing number of people shifting to cities pose a different set of challenges for the country.

More people in the cities mean there's an additional pressure on the existing resources, urban infrastructure and natural resources as well. Increased rate of migration from rural to urban India translates to increase in the demand for proper sanitation, clean drinking water, safe and efficient transportation facilities and electricity or power supply, in cities.

Moving ahead, there is a need to involve diverse entities in the urban infrastructure financing process and experiment with the various partnership modes available. Presently, it's the state and central government agencies that are financing most of the urban infrastructure requirements in cities. The investment or financing by state and central government bodies amounts to about 75 per cent of the total cost. And, urban local bodies are financing about 15 per cent of the city infrastructure.

There has been an increasing demand that more private investment avenues must be explored for creating robust and futuristic city infrastructure - to meet the demands presented by rapid population growth and migration in cities. At the moment, a very small portion of urban infrastructure is financed by private sources, a meagre five per cent of the infrastructure needs of Indian cities.

Housing challenges

Overpopulation has put a lot of pressure on the housing sector in India. Affordable housing for all is a dream for any administration. It translates to housing which is affordable for the nation's low-income and moderate-income population groups. Rapid population growth and unplanned urbanisation has resulted in millions of people living in slums in cities in India.

As per the latest estimates, more than six and a half crore Indians live in slums. Of these, one crore each are living in slums in Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh where the population percentage living in slums is 10.54 per cent and 12.04 per cent, respectively.

Affordable housing in clean, hygienic conditions and available with basic amenities such as sanitation, water and power is critical for social and economic development. It helps in poverty alleviation and lowers the healthcare burden on the government. And, it has been a nightmare for every city in providing affordable housing to its people.

Other than the increasing population, it is rapid urbani-

sation that has led to an exponential rise in the demand for safe and affordable housing. Local administrations and governments are striving to reduce gentrification but serious hurdles exist in implementing policies and schemes – unsustainable development plans, flawed policies, less emphasis on long-term solutions, actual shortage of land in dense city centres, etc.

Sustainable solutions

In the years to come, existing cities growing bigger and more towns turning into cities, is inevitable. There are more resources and opportunities in cities which lead to migration from smaller towns and rural areas. The solution to problems in urbans areas emanating from population growth is dependent on smart urban planning with sustainable solutions and infrastructure development keeping future trend and demands in sight.

Additionally, emphasis must be paid on developing rural zones in a sustainable manner and creating enough employment opportunities to slow down migration from towns and villages to cities. This can be done by supporting and promoting cottage and small-scale industries, modernising agriculture and implementing reforms to empower the small farmer and making available credit mechanisms for farmers in an increasing unpredictable, climate-change driven agro-economy.

The government has been rolling out schemes and devising futuristic policies to ensure infrastructure demands of an increasing population are met. Demands of housing, healthcare, education, etc., are posing serious challenges. With increased awareness about sustainable living and sustainable development, local and state administrations are looking at alternatives to alleviate the pressure put on natural resources – land, water, forest, air - by an increasing population.

Political will also plays an important role in quick implementation of existing schemes. For example, one of the most significant and large-scale housing schemes recently undertaken by the Indian government – the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) implemented since June 2015 to provide all weather pucca houses to all eligible beneficiaries in the urban areas – has been very effective in providing affordable housing. The Union Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs has initiated Affordable Rental Housing Complexes (ARHCs), a sub-scheme under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana - Urban (PMAY-U) to provide ease of living to urban migrants in Industrial Sector as well as in non-formal urban economy to get access to dignified affordable rental housing close to their workplace.

The government of India's Jal Jeevan Mission initiated in 2019 aims to provide safe and adequate drinking water through individual household tap connections by 2024 to all households in rural India. The Jal Jeevan Mission (Urban) aims to provide universal coverage of water supply to all households through functional taps in all 4,378 statutory towns in accordance with Sustainable Development Goal 6. It will cover the 2.68 crore estimated gap in urban household tap connections.

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Educating a billion-strong India's young

Ritika Seth *says India has a booming youth group and it is the most productive section of a society presenting great potential for growth and development. If a country invests in its young in terms of education, guaranteeing their rights, healthcare, ample growth opportunities, equality, etc., they can go on to become future leaders and innovators.*

Higher education institutes in India provide quality education of global standards

In a population the size of India, some basic challenges assume astronomical proportions owing to the sheer numbers. Providing education in itself may not be a big challenge but making sure there is availability and access to quality education for India's young in a billion plus population is a serious challenge.

As per National Youth Policy 2003, 'youth' was defined as a person of age between 13-35 years. In the latest policy document - National Youth Policy 2014 – 'youth' is defined as a person of age between the age group of 15 and 29 years.

Home to the largest youth population in the world, India has more than 808 million people below the age of 35 years – making up 66 per cent of the total population. Nearly 40 per cent of the population of the country is between the age group of 13 – 35 years. India has the highest number of millennials and GenZ among all the nations in the world.

Today, India is a young nation and more than one-fourth of the population is below the age of 15 years. According to the National Family Health Survey-5 (2019-21), 27 per cent of the population is below the age of 15 years. And, 52 per cent of the total population is below the age of 30 years.

So, India has a booming youth group whose needs cannot be ignored. Youth is the most productive section of a society presenting great potential for growth and development. If a country invests in its young in terms of education, guaranteeing their rights, healthcare, ample growth opportunities, equality, etc., they can go on to become future leaders and innovators. Quality education is one of the primary needs that must be ensured for the youth to be productive and contribute in nation

building.

Addressing needs

Rapid population growth can hinder education and growth opportunities of the youth. They can be a positive force of development if their basic needs are addressed – education, skills, training and opportunities – so they can access the job market and become a part of the bustling economy.

In any country, there's economic growth when the working population is more than the dependent one. So, it's imperative to engage with the young in a manner their energy and potential can be channelised for growth and development. They can be future innovators, leaders, thinkers and change-makers. Education is a major challenge in India – primary and higher education and skill building and training. A survey report released by the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) revealed that only 59.5 per cent of India's young come under the 'literate' bracket.

Among these also, there is a vast gap in terms of quality education in urban and rural areas. The divide also exists within the socio-economic categories.

Under the National Education Policy which was revised in 2020, the government is working towards increasing the number of schools, colleges and universities to meet the demands of the growing youth population. Efforts are being made to build more holistic curricula in education institutes that is futuristic, career-oriented and at par with international standards of education.

New initiatives and efforts in the education sector are focussing on increasing education access, promoting equity by addressing gender and socio-economic discrimination, improving quality by enhancing teacher training and integrating technology and fostering a research-based environment and encouraging

The industry

India's education industry is the largest in the world – there are more than 250 million students, 15 lakh schools and 97 lakh teachers. With 580 million people in the age group of 5 – 24 years, the potential and opportunities are enormous.

Education in India is increasingly becoming technology-driven with the integration of artificial intelligence, machine learning and other tech gizmos making waves. There is more emphasis on quality vocational education, inclusive learning and developing education modules that are career oriented and increase employability.

Higher education institutes in India provide quality education of global standards. The Indian Institute of Science (IISc) in Bengaluru and eight Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) are nine institutes of higher education that are among the top 500 universities in the QS World University Rankings 2023.

It is a fast-growing sector as there's also an increase in the demand for more industry-specific specialised degree programmes. The sector is also seeing a growing demand for online education modules - with the new-found acceptance established during the COVID-19 pandemic. So, more education institutes in India are now shifting focus on online educational programmes, bringing them at par with existing physical-mode programmes.

India's education system is a highly competitive one, within the country and beyond as well. Indian students are enrolled in foreign universities across the world with an advantage they gained with education in India.

There's a large English-speaking population that makes it easy for dissemination of information, knowledge and educational products. In the English Proficiency Index 2022, India stood at 52nd position among 111 countries. India is a significant player in the global education arena with one of the largest networks of higher education institutions in the world.

Estimates are that the Indian education market will amount to USD 225 billion by FY25, from USD 117 billion in FY20. In FY22, edtech startups received a total investment of USD 3.94 billion. In fact, PhysicsWallah – an edtech platform – became India's 101st unicorn in June 2022 when it raised a hundred million US dollars.

In terms of global rankings, India stands first in the number of universities (In November 2022 there were 1,072 universities in India), second in terms of number of enrolments and third in the higher education system. The number of colleges in FY17 was over 40,000 which crossed the 42,000 mark in FY20.

There is an increase in private investment in the sector and more STEM-based edtech companies are now partnering with NITI Aayog and other government entities. This collaboration is creating a STEM ecosystem such as Atal Tinkering Labs to encourage more students into the science and technology sector.

Holistic approach

National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is based on India's rich heritage of ancient knowledge. Indian thought and philosophy consider the pursuit of knowledge (Jnan), wisdom (Pragyaa) and truth (Satya) as the highest human goal and this has been a driving force in the current education policy.

The aim of education is not just acquiring knowledge but also preparing for a life in the contemporary world. India boasts of world-class education institutions and knowledge centres such as Takshashila, Nalanda, etc., where multi-disciplinary approach was the foundation.

The new policy is laying a strong emphasis on high-quality vocational education. Under this policy, the government is set to establish regional and national institutes for virology, more than 15,000 schools, hundred new Sainik schools and 750 residential schools in tribal areas based on the Eklavya model. The policy also requires mother tongue to be the medium of instruction in schools and higher education institutions.

For uniform implementation and to make the most out of it, it's imperative to include all sections of the society and make sure all are benefitted from the initiatives. Women are a very important demographic component. Today, more young girls are surpassing boys in education and other opportunities.

The National Commission for Women has initiated a country-wide capacity building and personality development programme for women undergraduate and postgraduate students in order to prepare them for the new world – make them job-ready and independent.

> There is a vast gap in terms of quality education in urban and rural areas. The divide also exists within the socio-economic categories.

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Economic growth should be commensurate

Kriti Kalra *explains that with higher literacy rates and more Indians opting for higher education and vocational training, today's job seekers are not just looking for job but well-paying, decent jobs with provisions for career growth, social security, good working environment, etc, pointing out that the employment sector is transforming fast.*

The IT/BPO is one of the nine sectors contributing about 85 per cent of the total employment opportunities in India

A rapidly increasing population puts pressure on infrastructure and resources. Economic resources are impacted too as there's a constant need to generate employment opportunities for the youth and diversification for mid-level and senior-level professionals. The job market in a country is dynamic and global now with an array of variables, domestic and foreign, regulating it.

The employment sector is transforming fast, keeping up with the changing needs of a global society. The kind of jobs that were in demand and well-paying a decade ago are no more in the run. Several new channels of internal migration have opened in India as a result of development across states.

There's also a lot of migration from smaller cities and town to metro cities for better employment opportunities and career growth. Now, people are working for more years and women who were only relegated to household work before are now competing for jobs at all levels. Economic policies must be made keeping in mind the growing needs of the nation, its changing demographics and with a futuristic approach.

The Ministry of Labour and Employment released a report last year to showcase trends and facts of the sector. The report of the third quarter of Quarterly Employment Survey (QES) for the period October-December 2021 detailed employment and related variables of establishments in organised and unorganised segments – these comprise the majority of the total employment in India in the non-farm establishments. It is a good indicator of the employment scenario in India.

The survey focuses on the following sectors and on establishments employing 10 or more workers – Education, Construction, Manufacturing, Transport, Trade, Health, Accommodation / Restaurants, IT / BPOs, and Financial Services.

These nine sectors contribute about 85 per cent of the total employment opportunities in India. As per the report, there is an increasing employment trend in the organised segment with ten or more people in these nine sectors.

The largest employer which accounts for nearly 39 per cent of the total is the manufacturing sector followed by education sector which provides 22 per cent of employment of the kind defined above. Across these nine sectors, there were about 1.85 lakh vacancies available. And the workforce comprised around 83 per cent regular workers and almost nine per cent contract workers.

In India, the main sector of employment is agriculture. Even though the share is decreasing every year, it is still a prominent sector. In 2021, 43.96 per cent of India's workforce was employed in agriculture. The remaining workforce was engaged in other sectors and services.

Presently, it's the service sector that is generating the most economic opportunities and most of India's GDP. GDP distribution across economic sectors reveals that agriculture contributes 15 per cent. Service industries that are ruling the roost are software, telecommunications, textiles, chemicals, etc.

In April 2023, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) released its latest World Economic Outlook report which projected that India's economy will grow by 5.9 per cent in the current fiscal year, making it the fastest-growing economy in the world.

In June 2023, the World Bank stated that India will remain the fastest-growing major economy in terms of both aggregate and per capita GDP despite the slowdown in growth. It projected India's growth for FY24 at 6.3 per cent, 6.4 per cent in FY25 and for FY26 a growth of 6.5 per cent. The World Bank is attributing India's robust growth to resilience in private consumption and investment and robust growth in the services sector in India. India's economic growth is set to positively affect all of South Asia.

Employment challenges

India's employment landscape is changing fast. There are more women entering the workforce now. The gradual shift of more women working outside their homes now has, unfortunately, not translated into pay parity or gender pay gap, career growth, equal employment opportunity, etc. Employment opportunities and career growth avenues have been on the rise for women aided by more women seeking professional and higher education programmes, increase in technology and easy access to technology, government schemes and policies. To address the disparity, awareness and sensitisation is needed.

For decades, planners, policymakers and economists are working together to create an environment in India that is able to provide employment for all. Employment has remained one of their top challenges. With higher literacy rates and more Indians opting for higher education and vocational training, today job seekers are not just looking for job but well-paying, decent jobs with provisions for career growth, social security, good working environment, etc.

Another big challenge is availability of skilled workforce. There is a growing shortage of skilled workers in India. So, even if there are enough employment opportunities, there's a skill gap that exists that disrupts the economy. It leads to unemployment and industries end up with unskilled worker or vacancy either of which will result in losses.

In this case, it is important to recognise workers with a basic level of skills and enhance those to be able to absorb them in the productive workforce. Alternatively, more awareness must be created and provisions must be made for training programmes, off and on job, in all kinds of industries – large, small, micro, medium-sized – to increase the skilled workforce.

According to the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) done by the National Statistical Office (NSO), unemployment rate in urban areas in India for persons aged above 15 eased to 7.2 per cent in July - September 2022 from 9.8 per cent in July - September 2021. The unemployment rate was 6.6 per cent for men and 9.4 per cent for women for the same period, as opposed to 9.3 per cent and 11.6 per cent in July - September 2021.

Government initiatives

Keeping in mind the needs of India's growing population, government schemes and initiatives are focussing on generating employment or job opportunities at their end, providing opportunities for skill training and upgradation, and encouraging individuals to start business and enterprises that will further generate employment.

The Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) – a flagship scheme of the Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (MSDE) implemented by National Skill Development Corporation is a Skill Certification Scheme to enable a large number of Indian youth to take up industry-relevant skill training that will help them in securing a better livelihood.

Startup India is another flagship initiative of the Government of India that intends to catalyse start-up in India by building an all-encompassing and an inclusive ecosystem for innovation and entrepreneurship in India. It includes enhancing infrastructure like incubation centres; easier patent filing; providing a better regulatory environment including tax benefits, faster exit mechanisms, etc.; economic stimulus; and vast networking database for entrepreneurs.

The Aatmanirbhar Bharat Rojgar Yojana (ABRY) was launched in October 2020 as part of the Aatmanirbhar Bharat package 3.0. It aims to incentivise employers for generating new employment along with social security benefits. It also incentivised restoring employment for those who lost jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

National Career Service (NCS) Project provides a variety of career-related services like career counselling, job matching, skill development courses, internships, apprenticeship, etc.

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

Ripple effect on public health

*Citing a University of Cambridge study, **Nandini Rao** points out that unbridled population goes beyond burdening the economy, directly affects human health and the quality of life. There's a direct relation between an increase in population and degrading environment and increased public health risks.*

Uncontrolled increase in population can affect the quality of life,especially in densely populated urban areas

An increase in population poses a huge burden on the public health index of a country primarily because of the increased pressure on sanitation, health care and related infrastructure and pressure on environment variables - natural resources such as water, air, soil, etc.

Population can be an asset to a nation but an uncontrolled increase has a ripple effect that goes beyond burdening the economy and directly affects human health on a large scale, also affecting the quality of life. There's a direct relation between an increase in population and degrading environment and increased public health risks.

Recently, a study conducted by the University of Cambridge stated that 90 per cent of Indians are now more vulnerable and prone to public health issues and there's an increased risk of death due to climate change induced weather patterns and events especially the heat waves.

Climate change and public health

A high population in an area or people in a densely-populated area are more prone to such events and conditions because usually in such cases the administrative units lack the capacity to control, mitigate or adapt to such circumstances in a proper manner.

For example, if there's an unexpected heat wave or any other extreme weather event that increases the climate vulnerability of a population, then there's an increased risk to public health and the risk is compounded if the region is highly or densely populated – this is mainly because large populations are almost always associated with cramped spaces, lack of ameni-

ties, illiteracy, lower income groups, poor infrastructure, poor adaptability and mitigation capacity.

So, in this case, the scale of health impacts will depend on, among other factors such as intensity and duration of high temperatures, level of adaptation and acclimatisation of the local population, population size, available infrastructure and processes for adaptation and mitigation.

Heat waves are becoming increasingly frequent now in all parts of the world. In 2022, heat wave in the Indian subcontinent was declared an extreme weather event extending till April and it resulted in the hottest March of the subcontinent since 1901.

Hazardous impact of heat waves can be mitigated and prevented with appropriate public health initiatives and actions but will only be effective if these can be implemented on a large scale and can properly cover the entire population of the specified zone.

Heat exposure can have severe health impacts including death. Hotter than average temperatures affects human body's ability to regulate temperature and can lead to other physical impacts such as heat exhaustion, heat stroke, cramps and hypothermia.

It can also worsen existing conditions such as respiratory, cardiovascular and cerebrovascular disease and diabetes-related conditions. Heat waves also affect transmission of other diseases, air quality, delivery response particularly health service which directly affects public health response.

Population and sanitation

As per the World Health Organisation, in low and middle-income countries, more than eight lakh people die owing to inadequate sanitation which is also a major cause of deaths in several diseases such as trachoma, intestinal worms, etc. Poor sanitation is also one of the contributing factors in the occurrence of malnutrition.

Sanitation or lack of it is still a major cause of concern in most developing nations. In 2020, 54 per cent of the world's population that equals four billion people used safely-managed sanitation service. Those who used private sanitation facilities connected to sewers from which wastewater was treated totalled to 34 per cent that is nearly three billion people. Additionally, 20 per cent population used toilets with safe excreta disposal. And, more than six billion people which is about 78 per cent of the global population used at least a basic sanitation service.

In India, the percentage of households with access to improved water sources increased from 68 per cent in 1992-93 to 90.6 per cent in 2011-12. Also, about 59 per cent of the households in rural areas and eight per cent of the households in urban areas did not have access to improved sanitation facilities in India.

Sanitation was one of the primary areas of interest for Prime Minister Narendra Modi. In 2014, on his first Independence Day speech, PM Modi announced the launch of Swachh Bharat Mission that was formally launched on 2 October 2014. As part of this mission, the aim was eradication of open defecation in all statutory towns, a hundred per cent scientific management of municipal solid waste in all statutory towns and effecting behaviour change through Jan Andolan or public movement.

The mission has brought about revolutionary changes in the area of sanitation. Despite being the country with the highest population, today India boasts of a hundred per cent access to sanitation facilities in urban India. More than 70 lakh households, community and public toilets have been built in India since the launch of the Swachh Bharat Mission and these are providing sanitation to one and all. Interestingly, the mission has also sincerely considered the sanitation needs of women, members of the transgender communities and persons with disabilities (Divyangs).

Achieving something that seemed impossible to one and all, the mission is a roaring success. In 2019, Urban India was declared open defecation free (ODF) leading urban India to sustainable sanitation with over 3,000 cities and over 950 cities being certified ODF+ and ODF++ respectively.

Moving forward, today, Indian cities are focusing on wastewater treatment and optimum reuse of wastewater through Water+ certification under the Water+ Protocol.

Overpopulation and human health

There is a direct effect of overpopulation on human health as it decreases the quality of life. An increase in population leads to pollution, food insecurity and malnutrition, space issues, higher risk of communicable diseases, etc.

With more densely populated areas and congested living conditions, there's a higher chance of spread of communicable diseases specially air borne diseases. Other major problem is the increase in prevalence of infectious diseases with increasing human population or overpopulation.

Higher population leads to more vehicles or more human activity that increases air pollution and related diseases. There is a direct relation of pollution or poor air quality and respiratory diseases, asthma, cardiovascular diseases, lung cancer and more.

It's the children and the elderly who are more prone to such effects of pollution. Also those with suppressed immunity and other underlying conditions are highly vulnerable to slight change in air quality.

Tending to more people that the infrastructure can handle or natural processes can filter leads to pollution of water, for example, and a subsequent increase in water-borne diseases. Increase in population leads to poor sanitation, if not attended to, and leads to pollution of water bodies. That again is a major cause of diseases in humans.

Overpopulation puts pressure on human-generated and natural resources. It's the basic rule of demand and supply. It slows down progress on other fronts such as economy, education, etc.

In India, the health care costs are still affordable. And, more and more people are migrating from lower income to higher income groups with an increase in per capita income. It's important to maintain the equilibrium of demand and supply or public health is directly at stake with an increase in population.

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.

No overlooking country's seniors

Nimisha Lakhia *laments needs of senior citizens are not on the policymakers' radar. More and more seniors are shifting into old age homes, retirement homes, hospice, etc. With a growing population, their needs are not prioritised enough. According to her, a lot more has to be done in terms of social and financial inclusion and healthcare needs so they can live with dignity.*

With a growing population the needs of the elderly too need to be prioritized

A fast-growing nation in terms of economic development or population growth is mostly incompatible, highly fast-paced for the needs of the elderly. A new India which is a young India must not overlook its seniors. Their needs and aspirations must be taken into consideration as they form a significant demographic component.

India's population dynamics are changing fast. A young nation, today there are more 'young' people in the country than ever before. According to the Census 2011, over 58.3 per cent of the country's population is aged 29 years or below. And, people with age 30 years and above form 41.4 per cent of the total population of the country. As per the data provided by the last three censuses, the young in India have outnumbered those with ages 30 years and above.

Today, most of the policies aim at the 'youth' or the country's young as they form the largest percentage of the population. It will be today's young who will become future leaders and change-makers.

In the scheme of things, the needs of senior citizens such as old age homes, healthcare, mental health care and financial inclusion are not at the forefront of the policymakers. The priorities are different.

Ever-changing demographics

India's social landscape is changing very fast. More and more members of the younger population are now migrating from rural area to cities for jobs and better employment

opportunities. Even the urban youth with higher aspirations are migrating overseas to make a career and a living. This means the family structures are changing. The elderly who were earlier dependent on their children for their needs in old age now have to look outside.

More and more seniors are shifting into old age homes, retirement homes, hospice, etc. But, with a growing population their needs are not prioritised enough. A lot more has to be done in terms of social and financial inclusion, healthcare needs and ensuring the elderly have a decent quality of life and live with dignity.

As per a report titled *Youth in India 2022* released by the Government of India's Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) - by the year 2036 those above the age of 30 years will form the majority of the country's population.

The same report further states that the share of senior citizens – that is those above the age of 60 years - was projected to be 10.1 per cent of the total population in 2021, and then up to 15 per cent by 2036.

According to the National Commission on Population, the share of the elderly in India's population was about nine per cent in 2011. It is growing very fast and by 2036, it will reach 18 per cent.

With modernisation and advancements in science and technology, life expectancy of an average Indian has increased. In 2023, the life expectancy for an Indian stand at 70.42 years. This was 69.96 years in 2021 and in 1947 India's life expectancy was a mere 32 years. In the meantime, fertility rate of women has reduced from six children per woman to two which has a positive side that it reduces the population burden of the country but also means there will be a larger ageing population.

The needs of the elderly

Ageing is a natural process and most societies understand and appreciate the role the older people play as a valuable resource of knowledge and experience. India's 2011 Census reported there are 103.8 million older people (60+years) in the country, constituting 8.6 per cent of total population and of these – there were more females than males.

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) released a report in 2017 that stated that around 12.5 per cent of India's population will be 60 years and above by the year 2030. Simultaneously, the report projected that the share of older persons or senior citizens in India, those aged 60 years or above will increase to nearly 20 per cent by 2050.

As people age, their needs and aspirations change. In the absence of a job post retirement and sometimes because of the loss of the ability to work, for many seniors, financial dependence is a major issue. In old age, people are dependent on pensions and family members for financial needs. Physical dependence of the elderly on their children or family members for basic necessities is also demoralising.

Joint family structures are now rare in urban areas. In rural India too, more families are opting to live in a nuclear fashion. The changing social fabric is not very conducive for physical and mental health of the elderly. More and more senior citizens are now facing neglect, loneliness and suffering from mental illnesses such as depression.

In old age, health is a major concern. Health issues not only affect quality of life, they also impose financial burden which can be dilapidating. Most prevalent health issues among the elderly include mobility issues arising from locomotor disabilities, deafness, blindness, senility, neurosis, etc.

Health issues compounded with loneliness are a major cause of depression for many. Geriatric care facilities in hospitals and healthcare facilities are still a new concept and confined to certain urban pockets and that too for those who can afford it. In rural areas, the concept doesn't exist and with traditional support systems and social structures failing or vanishing, the situation is a cause of concern.

Support and inclusion

The Government of India's National Policy on Older Persons (NPOP) 1999, Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007 and National Policy for Senior Citizens 2011, among others, provide the legal framework for supporting the myriad needs of the seniors – adequate food, clean water, community help, social integration, access to healthcare for overall well-being and a dignified life. The older persons must be able to live in dignity with safety and security and free from any mental, physical, emotional or financial abuse or exploitation.

The National Programme for Health Care of Elderly (NPHCE) and the Ayushman Bharat - Health and Wellness Centres (AB-HWCs) provide dedicated healthcare to the elderly. The latter is an effort to move way from selective healthcare to a more comprehensive range of services ranging from preventive, promotive, curative, rehabilitative and palliative care for all age groups.

NPHCE aims to – provide accessible, affordable and high-quality long-term, comprehensive and dedicated care services to the ageing population; create a new architecture for ageing; build a framework to create an enabling environment for a Society for all Ages; promote the concept of Active and Healthy Ageing; converge with National Rural Health Mission, AYUSH, etc.

There are several financial assistance schemes for the elderly. For example, the National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP) scheme provides non-contributory pensions or financial assistance for the elderly including widows and disabled persons and falling in the Below Poverty Line category. Then there is the Atal Pension Yojana focusing on those in the unorganised sector.

The National Policy on Older Persons ensures financial and food security, health care, shelter and other needs of older persons, etc. The overarching policy also focuses on social security, inter-generational bonding, role of NGOs, training of manpower, research and more towards the upliftment of the elderly.

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Population growth deters inclusion

Ruchi Verma *observes that the impact of population growth on financial inclusion of the marginalised communities varies from rural to urban set ups. In India, over 60% of the population still lives in rural areas. The world average is 40 per cent. This makes a huge difference in how the economic indicators changes with overpopulation and how it affects the weaker sections, economically.*

In urban India, there is an ever increasing population of migrant workers

There is a huge and direct impact of population dynamics on the poverty parameters and sustainable development. Poverty, absolute or relative, is highly sensitive to population growth patterns and demographics.

The myriad population variables such as rate of increase, the rural-urban divide, age demographics, gender demographics, stratification, etc., are all indicators of the economic prosperity of a society. These have an impact on the development prospects and associated markers indicating economic growth and stratification.

When there's an increase in population, there's a burden on the resources available and the economic opportunities at disposal for the common man. Overpopulation leads to an unfair divide of haves and have nots in the population spectrum. The rift or the gap may keep increasing if appropriate policies are not devised and implemented further leading to social unrest.

Also, among the have nots, the disabled, indigenous communities and the marginalised groups are highly vulnerable and first to be impacted in the increasing divide of the haves and the have nots. Their already marginalised existence is further jeopardised when an increase in population leads to economic stress.

Well-intended economic policies and administrative initiatives are needed to immunise such groups and communities from the economic impacts of rapid population growth.

The rural-urban divide

The impact of population growth on financial inclusion of the marginalised communities varies from rural to urban set ups. In India, more than 60 per cent of the population still lives in rural areas. The world average is 40 per cent. This makes a huge difference in how the economic indicators changes with overpopulation and how it affects the weaker sections of the society, economically.

In rural India, a large number of people are farmers engaged in sustenance farming. Agriculture is primarily dependent on the monsoon rains in India and owing to climate change; the unpredictable nature of weather events has already caused a lot of stress to the farmers.

In these circumstances, the pressure on agricultural resources increases a lot with rapid population growth. Land which is available for cultivation per person decreases because of increase in population. For sustenance farmers, smaller farming land means lesser income which is anyway dependent on the rains now unpredictable due to climate change. So, unsustained population growth can lead to poverty among the weaker sections in rural India.

Hyderabad

A brew of history and hi-tech!

Beyond its reputation as the fifth biggest city in the country and being the repository of culture with Nizam's affluent and influential history behind it, Hyderabad has travelled a long way. It is a majestic emblem of everything that symbolises urban trappings even as it wears its old-world charm on its sleeve. A fort, a museum, a film city, a zoological park, a sprawling lake – it has just about everything, but above all, it is also the country's throbbing IT hub.

Text & Photos : Katie Sahiar

The Golconda Fort was an important trade centre on the diamond route

"*The moving finger writes and having writ moves on…*"
Omar Khayam

As Hyderabad hurtles headlong towards megacity status the hand of destiny is clearly visible connecting the ancient to the modern. From the colossal fort of Golconda to the gargantuan Ramoji City, the genes of innovation have streamed forth.

Clap, clap, clap…

"You have to climb three hundred and eighty steps" warned our friend when we spoke of going to the Golconda Fort. Immediately, without climbing a single step we were breathless! But, visit the Fort we did and climbed all those steps as well, right to the top to look at the city of Hyderabad spread below.

Golconda Fort, was the precursor of Hyderabad city. Astonishingly, it originated as mud fort built by Rani Rudrama Devi in the eleventh century. A shepherd boy unearthed the statue of a deity on location and so it became Golla Kunda – Shepherd's Hill in Telegu.

Rudrama Devi's successor rebuilt it and thereafter, for the next sixty-two years the following Qutub Shahi Kings enlarged it into a massive edifice of stone and granite with three layers of defence, making it impenetrable and set it in a class apart with its extraordinary acoustic security system devised by Ibrahim Quli Qutb Shah. Such was the sound system, that a clap sounded at the base of the hill was clearly audible all the way up to the top of the hill. A clapping code was established to alert the king's guards at the palace to distinguish between foe and friend. This unique security system kept the fort secure from attack and protected its cache of diamonds as it was an important trade centre on the diamond route. Even today, clapping is the USP of Golconda as the guides hanging around will eagerly explain.

Patrons of art and architecture

Hyderabad, India's fifth largest city, was founded in 1590 by Muhammed Quli the fourth Qutub Shahi king and the Qutub Shahi dynasty ruled this part of the Deccan from 1512 -1687 when the last of their line was defeated by Aurangzeb. After Aurangzeb's death, Mughal control over this part of India declined and the Asaf Jah viceroys, placed here to protect Mughal interests, broke away to establish their own independent state and became Nizams.

Highly cultured, the Nizams were patrons of art and architecture. They excelled in building palaces, gardens and lakes that are spread all over the city. One of the most remarkable

A view of the city from the Golconda Fort

tributes to their love for beauty is the Salar Jung Museum.

This museum, situated on the southern bank of the river Musi was established in 1951 and owes its entire collection to the Salar Jung family, particularly Salar Jung III who relinquished his job as Prime Minister and for the next forty years devoted his life to collecting treasures of art and literature. He was famed as an art lover and his palace, the Dewan Deodi was thronged by sellers of art from all over the world. He continued to collect for forty years until he passed away on 2 March 1949 and the family decided to gift the entire collection to the nation. The collection in the form of a museum was opened to the public on 16th December, 1951 in Dewan Deodi, the home of Salar Jung but, in 1961, by an act of Parliament the Salar Jung Museum along with its library was declared an institution of national importance and was transferred to its current location.

The Salar Jung Museum

The entrance of this magnificent semi-circular building has elements of both the Eastern and Western architecture. It houses thirty-eight galleries spread over two floors and holds a one-man collection of over a million objects; forty-two thousand art objects, nine thousand manuscripts and sixty thousand printed books.

Almost in a daze we began our sojourn of the galleries containing paintings, manuscripts, weapons, daggers, sculptures, porcelain, furniture, chandeliers, clocks and innumerable other objects from all over the world. For a while we forgot the crowds while our cameras clicked constantly! Thoughtfully, the authorities have provided benches outside each

Salar Jung Museum

gallery and we sank gratefully on to the benches from time to time to rest our aching feet. There was so much to cover that we forgot all about food and at the end of the day, when it was closing time were still engrossed with the European paintings and had to be chased out of the gallery!

Not to be defeated, we went back the next day determined not to miss out a single gallery. Thirty- eight galleries are open to the public, but many more on the third floor are locked and the fabulous Nizam's jewels have been taken away by the government of India to rest in the vaults of the Reserve Bank of India.

Char Minar and Chowmalla Palace

In the vicinity of the Salar Jung Museum lies the great bazaar of the Char Minar and the Chowmalla Palace, as part of the old walled city.

The Char Minar, or the four minarets is a massive triumphal arch built by Muhammad Quli Shah in 1591. This square structure with four pillars and intricate carving was built in thanks giving when plague ended in the city. It has a mosque

Chowmahalla Palace interiors

on its top floor that is over five hundred years old. The Mecca Majid, adjacent to the Char Minar is one of the largest mosques in the world accommodating ten thousand people at a time, but the area is so congested that it is impossible to view the monuments. Avoiding the crowds, we crossed over from the Char Minar bazzar to the Chowmalla Palace.

Chowmalla Palace was the seat of power of the Asaf Jah Dynasty from 1720 – 1948. It was the official residence of the Nizams during their reign of Hyderabad and although converted into a museum the ownership of the palace still remains with the family. This palace was constructed by Nizam Ali Khan Asaf Jah II in 1769. He ordered four palaces to be built from which the name Chowmalla is derived.

Fortunately, it is set back from the overcrowded bazaar and stands in isolation amidst wide grounds that are serene and green. There is a fountain in the middle of the grounds which, although silent, is aesthetic. The four palaces on the outer lines form the quadrangle. Apart from the palaces, the most engaging exhibits were the numerous cars of the Nizam in large showcases.

A short distance from the Chowmalla Palace lies the Nizam's Museum, also a residence at one time, though smaller. It now holds the last Nizam's jubilee celebration gifts and the throne on which he sat during the celebration. The most unique object here was the wardrobe with hundred and twenty-four closets, each one meant to hold a new outfit for each day. No set of clothing was ever repeated and once worn, was given away. Marveling at this lifestyle we stepped into the hundred and fifty-year old, manually operated lift and descended from the wardrobe.

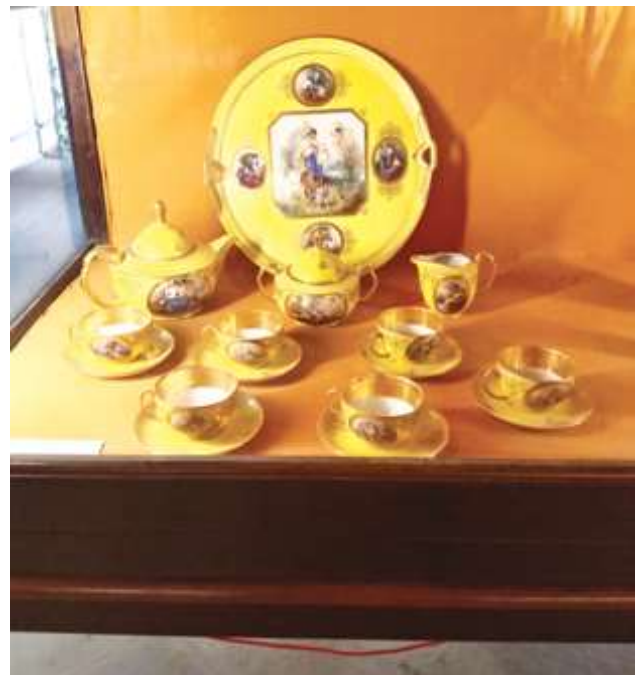*Belgian crystal chandeliers inside Chowmahalla Palace*

The Nizam`s golden throne

We had covered three museums during the day in the heat of June and by the evening we were exhausted. We headed back to the comfort of our temporary home, the Nizam Club to plan for the next day over dinner in their palatial dining room and when recovered from our exertions were ready for the zoo the next day.

Nehru Zoological Park

The Nehru Zoological Park, sixteen kilometers away from the city, is one of the largest zoological parks in India, spread over an area of three hundred and eighty acres, housing almost one thousand five hundred species of birds, mammals and reptiles. It is the first zoo to have lodged animals in their zoological order. Several exotic animals have been bred here, as the park aims to conserve and breed endangered species, specially the wildlife of the Deccan.

The zoo is well organised and there are hop on-hop off electric vehicles plying all over. Ironically, the zoo authorities have gone to the trouble of having soundless electric vehicles, but are unable to tame the raucous hordes that invade it every day. Wide open spaces are accorded to the animals and these are protected with a wide moat distancing man and animal. The animals move about freely, as if in their own natural habitat and ignore the boisterous crowds most of the times, but some do react. We saw the Sun bear rear up on its hind legs and snarl at the crowd that

Artefacts inside Nizam`s museum

Chowmahalla Palace

was screaming at it.

Also a part of the zoo is the Mir Alam Tank built two hundred years ago, as a primary source of water for the city. It is remembered for its pure and sweet water that people carried away in containers.

Built during the reign of Asif Jah III it was named after Mir Alam Bahadur, the then prime minister who laid the foundation for it and was executed by a Frenchman, Michel Joachim Marie Raymond, a general in the Nizam's army. Raymond, a person of exceptional sensitivity, felt deeply for the people. When the Nizam rewarded him for winning the Mysore war, he used the

money to build the tank. He laid out the plans and commissioned the army to execute them; a piece of extraordinary engineering with twenty-one semi-circular masonry arches over an area of approximately one mile, forming a bund.

The 'Heart of the World'

As the population of Hyderabad grew, so did their need for water and the Husain Sagar Lake was created to meet this demand.

Excavated in 1562, it covers an area of over five and a

Toy train at the Zoo

half acres and is positioned on the tributary of the River Musi that feeds it. A heart shaped lake, thirty-two feet deep, it is the largest artificial lake in Asia. A bund was built on its banks to control the outflow of water and until 1930, was used solely for water supply to the city.

It was named the 'Heart of the World' by UNWTO – United Nations World Tourism Organisation on 27 September 2012 for being the largest heart shaped geographical feature on earth.

In the middle of the lake stands another monolithic monument – the standing Buddha. The brain child of the then chief minister, N.T Rama Rao, work on the project began in 1985 in Raigir, fifty kilometers from Hyderabad. It was completed in 1990 and this seventeen and a half meters high and three hundred and fifty-ton monolith was transported to Hyderabad and loaded onto a barge, to be installed upon the Rock of Gibraltar, a platform constructed in the middle of the lake, but fate intervened! An accident in mid-waters carried the statue to the bottom of the lake along with eight lives. There it remained for the next two years until in mid-1992 a Goanese company salvaged it from the lake, miraculously undamaged and raised it on its designated platform.

Hussain Sagar has a scenic setting, surrounded by vast gardens. The Sanjeeviah Park, the NTR Gardens and the Lumbini Park. We entered through one of the park gates, bought our entry ticket and walked in to a cacophony of sounds. Boisterous crowds were scattered around and to our utter astonishment were frolicking in the fountain set amidst the vast garden. It bothered us that children and adults jumped into the fountain's pond fully clad, shoes and all and we walked away to the edge of the lake to get on a ferry and go out to the Rock of Gibraltar to bow to the Buddha up close.

The semi-circular periphery of the lake has been named the 'necklace road'. It is the most happening part of the city with a boat club, restaurants, malls, entertainment parks and of course the famed Eat street. Paradise Restaurant being the most

Ramoji City

sought after for its acclaimed Biryani!

Visible from the lake, perched on a high hill is the Birla Mandir a recent landmark of the city, built by the Birlas in 1976. It is an edifice of white marble, located towards the southern end of the Hussain Sagar Lake and set atop a two hundred and eighty feet high hillock that stands on thirteen acres of land. It was consecrated by Swami Ranganathananda, the then head of the Ramakrishna Mission and is dedicated to Lord Vishnu in the form of Sri Venkateswara. Swami Ranganathananda had envisioned this temple as a place for meditation and in accordance with his wishes, the temple has no bells. The Rajagopuram is in the Southern architectural style while the tower over the main shrine, the Jagadananda Vimanam is in the Oriya style and the forty-two feet high sanctum sanctorum, the garbha gudi is a replica of the Venkateshwara temple at Tirumala.

The statue of Lord Venkateshwara, carved from a single granite piece eleven feet tall stands with a lotus canopy over His head. His consorts, Padmavati and Andal are worshipped in the adjoining shrines. The temple also has shrines dedicated to the Buddha, Shiva, Ganesh, Hanuman, Brahma, Lakshmi and Saibaba, signifying the unity of all religions.

Ramoji City, a visual treat

Sound has formed the connection through the ages. The genes of their ancestors who devised an acoustic security system five hundred years ago have flowed on and found their culmination in the reality of illusions created at Ramoji City. Moving ahead with its cutting edge VFX technology Ramoji City is the only place in India where multi-language filming happens with hi-tech technologies.

We signed up with Telangana Tourism to take a day trip to

Buddha statute inside Hussain Sagar Lake

Boat Club, Hyderabad

the film city which lies thirty kilometers away from the main city and is spread over one thousand, six hundred and sixty-six acres of land. The complex, built as a shooting location is now a frantically visited tourist haunt.

It was media baron Ramoji Rao's dream project. He wanted to build a studio similar to the ones in Hollywood where it would be "Walk in with the script and walk out with the canned film", according to a member of the film city's administration, "The idea was to help filmmakers save time and production costs."

Bus and car loads of people descend upon Ramoji City every day in spite of its rather steep ticket price, but once in, each person becomes a Tollywood star of their own script, posing for selfies, imitating their favourite actors against fake houses, railway stations, planes and destinations they have seen in films! As the city is immense the crowds get dispersed, there is room to walk around, and buses to hop on when tired. Additional entertainment comes from the bus attendant who keeps up a running commentary in a very 'filmy falsetto'. "Don't go through the door of the palace you see or you will fall into the ditch behind it...samje na" ...

The rides, the gardens, the butterfly park, the winged park, and the huge sets, particularly the ones from the blockbuster film Bahubali transports one into an illusory reality disconnected from time. It is easy to pass the day and as darkness descends, the magic of glitzy shows, dazzling lights and whirling rides takes over.
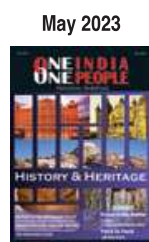
While nurturing the old, but embracing the new, Hyderabad has broken away from the old city with rapidity and has embraced within itself Hi Tech City and Ramoji City. Though the old rickshaws still ply, the preference is for the Metro Rail that zips through the city connecting far flung areas. Pearls endure, but it is no longer the 'city of pearls'. Hi Tech has taken over and the city pursues a new path, but as the poet says: "Though much is taken, much abides".

Widely travelled the author now heads the destination research division of ExoticaTraveller. She is also an environmentalist and the author of four coffee table books on nature and also contributes articles to newspapers and magazines.

In urban India, for that matter, there is an increasing population of migrant workers who come to cities in search of better opportunities for themselves and their children. A lot of these migrants come from rural India and smaller towns and cities.

There is a high level of competition for employment opportunities among the educated and the professionals but it is worse for the unskilled labourers. The situation worsens for the uneducated, migrant and unskilled labourers. With limited skills and shrinking employment opportunities because of growing population, more and more such workers are subjected to poverty and homelessness.

The lack of financial capacity leads to their children losing out on quality education and that further leads to lack of opportunities and the chain continues to propagate.

Financial inclusion

Financial inclusion can be defined as the process that ensures there is equal and ensured access to financial services and, when needed, availability of timely and adequate credit at affordable costs especially for the weaker sections of the society, low-income groups and the vulnerable groups.

It is a very important process as it provides economic support and credit when there is a need for investments such as education, agriculture or for contingencies such as medical even agricultural. These means of financial aid are crucial for weaker and marginalised groups.

Financial inclusion is a very important process in development. It includes integration of the financial services to aid and assist the poorest of the poor that are in the financial services circuit. Financial inclusion of the marginalised and weaker sections of the society helps in creating employment opportunities, creating skilled labour force and reducing poverty.

It also includes enabling enhanced participation of the citizens in the process to ensure informed decisions and increasing access of all groups, strong and weak, to banks.

In India, 80 per cent of the adults had a bank account in 2017 as opposed to the 53 per cent in 2014 and in 2017, 77 per cent of Indian women had bank accounts increased from 43 per cent in 2014 - as per the World Bank's Global Financial Inclusion Database or Global Findex report (2017).

Today, more and more financial institutions are focusing on 'poor' customers which were not the case earlier. There has been a constant increase in the last-mile connectivity when it comes to financial services.

Marginalised groups

One of the largest distress social groups in India today is that of the tribal communities. More than half of India's tribal population doesn't reside in their traditional habitats and have moved out to generate livelihood.

Tribal population is sensitive and fragile – easily impacted by demographic, economic and environmental changes. The migration of tribal groups is primarily triggered by economic distress because their traditional sources of income are now either extinct or difficult to procure or inaccessible due to some new law in effect. Rapid population growth further distresses these sources.

More than half of India's 104 million tribals are now living outside the nearly 900 blocks with a majority tribal population. The 2011 Census had also reported that between 2001 and 2011 there was a 32 per cent reduction in the number of villages with 100 per cent tribal population.

The tribals are primarily dependent on forest resources and agriculture. The livelihood crisis - that has been triggered by overpopulation, increased human activity, human-induced environmental degradation and 'non-tribals' intruding their habitats - is causing the distress and the migration. In the years between 2001 and 2011, as per the Census, the number of tribal cultivators reduced by ten per cent and the number of tribal agricultural labourers increased by nine per cent.

Another group that may severely be impacted with overpopulation is that of the disabled. As per the 2011 Census, of India's population of 121 crore, 2.68 crore were disabled – making up a little more than two per cent of the population. Of these, 56 per cent or 1.5 crore are males and 44 per cent or 1.18 crore are females. A majority of them, about 69 percent, live in rural India.

There is an existing gap in access to resources, education, employment opportunities to the disabled. India is one of the signatories to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) that focuses on the empowerment of Persons with Disabilities.

As part of this, India has to make sure that there are no hindrances for the persons with disabilities. There are several laws in India as well that protect the rights of the disabled. However, an increase in population only worsens situations by putting pressure on the limited resources available for the disabled.

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.

"I am more of a traditionalist when it comes to food, whatever the cuisine."

A foodie himself and a thoroughbred caterer, **Sreerang Pandit**, Founder, Food Panditz explains the nitty gritty of the catering business. His take: It's a lot of hard work, mentally and physically draining, but immensely rewarding. The compliments that come at the end of the day make it really worthwhile. Also, be prepared to forego your social life. Most events take place in evenings and on weekends. When everyone else enjoys, you work.

Sreerang Pandit

Describe yourself.

I grew up in a typical middle class Maharashtrian family. When in 9th class, I saw a TV interview with Thangam Philip, Principal, IHMCTAN a.k.a. Dadar Catering College and decided to pursue Hotel Management. Fortunately, my parents were supportive. Passing out in 1986, I worked in 5 star hotels, Fine Dine restaurants as well as QSRs for seven years before starting my own business in Pune. Thirty years *since* I still love food and my work and can't see myself doing anything else.

Are you a foodie?

Isn't everyone?! I explore different culinary styles and cuisines, and examine the value that various ingredients bring in, in terms of taste, flavour, aroma, texture etc. Professionally it helps to know the latest trends and new dishes. Personally, I am more of a traditionalist when it comes to food, whatever the cuisine, e.g., I think some of the fusion foods go too far for my liking.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 deskits. It is a big motivator for children.

What are the types of catering? What is its main function?

Catering refers to the preparation and service of food & beverages.

There are three types -

1. *Managing canteens of organisations.* Menus vary across organisation types. E.g., educational institutions need wholesome, nutritious food. Mess services also include the home based mess services that deliver dabbas to the client's house/office.

2. *Event Catering.* Personal events like weddings and house parties, and corporate events like seminars, conferences, annual days, etc. These have rich varied menus and a variety of cuisines.

3. *Exhibitions & Expos.* I often take over the food court of such an event and put up stalls selling foods & beverages to the organisers, stall owners and visitors. This type comes with a risk of not making enough turnover.

What makes an ideal caterer? What are the most important factors in developing a successful catering business?

An ideal caterer takes on the role of a host, plans based on parameters like nature of event, client expectations, profile of diners, the time of the day, the climate of the period, etc.; has a variety in the menu in terms of ingredients, taste, colours, textures and flavours; ensures hygiene at all costs; has efficient and friendly professional staff and pays attention to detail - e.g., a good quality paper napkin may go unnoticed but a bad napkin that doesn't absorb oil or water is remembered!

I think the topmost success factor is the quality of food and

Pencil sketches of Pt. Bhimsen Joshi, Lata Mangeshkar and Rata Tata by Pandit who is also an artist

service. Nobody books a caterer by looking at ads or yellow pages.

Was catering line always in your mind?

I started with the name *Reds & Greens*. Post pandemic, I started Food Panditz. After all, after almost 35 years in the industry, I feel like a Pandit!

Some events that *Reds & Greens* catered to were noteworthy: big weddings, national sports events and national conferences. I also managed canteens of corporates like Fujitsu, Mphasis, IBM et al and educational institutions. *Food Panditz* caters to any and all events, personal, corporate or social, provided there are a minimum of 200 persons to be catered to. This year it managed the Food Court for Constro Expo in Pune, where we catered to more than 30,000 individuals.

In 2014, deciding to diversify I had started the brand *Masti Misal*. It had grown to a point where we were looking at exponential growth through franchising when Corona showed up…

In addition, *Food Panditz* is also into consultancy for restaurants & hotels.

What is the weakness and strength of catering? What are the five mainstays?

Weaknesses are service is required to be perfect in every aspect the first time and every time. (I cannot say, 'we are still giving finishing touches, please postpone your wedding by 2 days'!); it's a seasonal business and dealing with perishables.

Strengths are personal touch with clients and diners; unlimited scope to keep innovating and word of mouth selling.

At Food Panditz, our mainstays are our core staff that includes our chefs & managers; the quality of the raw material that we buy; focus on hygiene; focus on detail ad and guest/customer friendly approach.

How was your experience working in 5 star hotels?

It was exciting! One comes across the upper crust of the society and it was great to interact with them. But behind all the glamour is a lot of hard work and sweat. My biggest learning was to ensure that the guests/ customers got not just great food, but an experience to remember.

Catering v/s Dabbawalla…Your comments?

Technically both are catering services though there's a distinct difference. While both cook in bulk quantities, the caterer serves groups but the famous dabbawala in Mumbai serves individual meals and is a delivery service which picks food from individual homes and delivers to the individual's office.

How do you hire and train staff to run your business?

Catering services tend to have a core staff including chef(s), and the rest are outsourced from labour contractors. Food Panditz has retained some staff for more than 20 years.

Hiring new staff is usually through recommendations. Training them takes about 3 months to a year depending on their skill and experience.

Recall a time when you dealt with a thorny issue successfully.

I had an order for 600 people for an AGM. Eventually more than 1,100 people had food that day. Ensuring adequate quality food was a tough challenge, to say the least!

How did you feel getting official tags like National Games, etc.? Any other major tag?

I got the opportunity to be the official caterer to the National Games at Pune in 1994 by being in the right place at the right

A dining area gets ready for an event catered by Food Panditz

time. A friend from Mumbai contacted me because he wanted a local partner to execute the contract. It was an awesome feeling!

Another tag I cherish is when I catered is to the International Athletic Meet at Balewadi, Pune. Carl Lewis & Merlene Ottey, the then world champions & all-time greats had participated in the meet!

What is Masti Misal? What was different about it that made it so popular?

Masti Misal was started in 2014. The idea was to offer one of the most popular dishes in Maharashtra in a neat and clean setting and serve it in an eye-pleasing manner. We took feedback from around 300 people on the 4-5 different recipes that they tasted for seven days. The top rating which was unanimous decided for me THE Masti Misal! Adding more varieties and complementary items was a natural progression.

In Dec 2019- Jan 2020 we shifted to bigger premises in Kothrud & Baner in Pune and also came up with a franchise model. Unfortunately, Corona struck within three months and we had to shut down. We are considering plans to start anew.

Have you catered to celebrities?

Devendra Fadnavis, Sharad Pawar, Late Lata Mangeshkar, some Bollywood celebrities - all were guests at the orders that I executed.

Do you have a vision for each event? What kind of atmosphere do you create with the food and decor?

An event organiser or a host of a private party has ideas about what they want. I give my suggestions. This helps me develop a vision and a theme, based on which I plan not only the menu but the whole set-up including décor, display, staff uniforms, etc.

Decors usually have fancy buffet counters, lighting, salad decorations, and fruit & vegetable carvings. Other props like planters, statues and artificial flower arrangements are also used.

I emphasise service aspects like thematic relevance, easy-on-the-eye, people friendly aspects like access to counters, ease of maintaining cleanliness, etc.

What are your most popular dishes? What determines the price per plate?

I am into vegetarian, non-vegetarian, regional Indian and world cuisines.

I keep introducing new dishes, and every year a new favourite emerges. For example, this year *Vegetable Khasta* (a mixed veg dish cooked in cashew gravy with a dash of spinach & a hint of mint) is quite popular. *Broccoli & almond soup, corn velvet soup* are the current favourites. My live Pasta counters are always a hit. Biryanis and Barbeques too have always been favourite. And among desserts, *Trufle & Shahi tukda* are our specialties.

Pricing largely depends on the size of the buffet spread; the variety in food and cuisines; the desserts in the menu; the set-up of the food counters; and the kind of service – buffet/it-down, hostesses, fancy uniforms, etc.

What is the difference between a plated meal, buffet, sit-down style, etc.?

Plated meal is a pre-plated dish that has limited items in a limited quantity with no second helpings. More of a budget service.

Buffets are when the food is laid down in chaffing dishes or service bowls on buffet counters where the guests can help themselves to whatever they want and can come back for second or third helpings.

Sit-downs are where the guests are seated and served at tables. The typical Indian wedding opts for this style.
Another style is where individual tables (generally round), laid out with the necessary crockery, cutlery and glassware, get served. These are generally more leisure affairs.

Where do you source your food from?
We source our raw materials from the wholesale markets in Pune. Processed food: we buy only branded products.

What was the most surprising thing you learned about marketing?

That marketing people speak a lot of half-truths and white lies. As far as the catering service is concerned, the proof of the pudding lies in eating!

Do you provide insurance in case something goes wrong?

There are hazards like food going bad and even food poisoning. Or, things can go wrong during transport that can ruin an event. These pose risks to both caterers and clients. But there are no insurance policies to provide cover to such aspects in our industry. A comprehensive cover for the catering industry is needed. *Fortunately, at Food Panditz*, no such incident has happened so far.

Why did you not start your own restaurant instead?

I did not have the funds to start a restaurant when I began. My catering services did well. Later I did start the Masti Misal but Corona put paid to my plans.

Advice to someone wanting to enter this catering line?
It's a lot of hard work, mentally & physically draining, but immensely rewarding. The compliments that come at the end of the day make it really worthwhile. Also, be prepared to forego your social life. Most events take place in evenings and on weekends. When everyone else enjoys, you work.
Your other talents.

I love sketching portraits and playing the harmonica (mouth organ).

Contact : Food Panditz. Tel: 9823102210. Email: foodpanditz@gmail.com

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

Guru Dutt's cinematic elegy

Kaagaz Ke Phool (1959) is one of the most moving self-reflexive films made in India. It is a fine and subtle tribute to the glorious days of the studio era, using its history from about the 1930s to the 1940s as its backdrop. Drawing from film historian Feroze Rangoonwalla's monograph, **Shoma A. Chatterji,** *unspools memories of a landmark movie.*

Guru Dutt with Waheeda Rehman

Guru Dutt in Kaagaz ke Phool

Guru Dutt's first directorial film *Baazi* was released on 15 June 1951, at Mumbai's Swastik cinema. Navketan, a production company founded by ex-members of Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA), including Dev Anand, produced the film. In 1954, Guru Dutt Padukone started his own production company, Guru Dutt films. This was also the year in which Aar Paar was released. His last film was *Sahib, Bibi Aur Ghulam* (1962). He died by suicide on 10 October 1964, reportedly from an overdose of barbiturates.
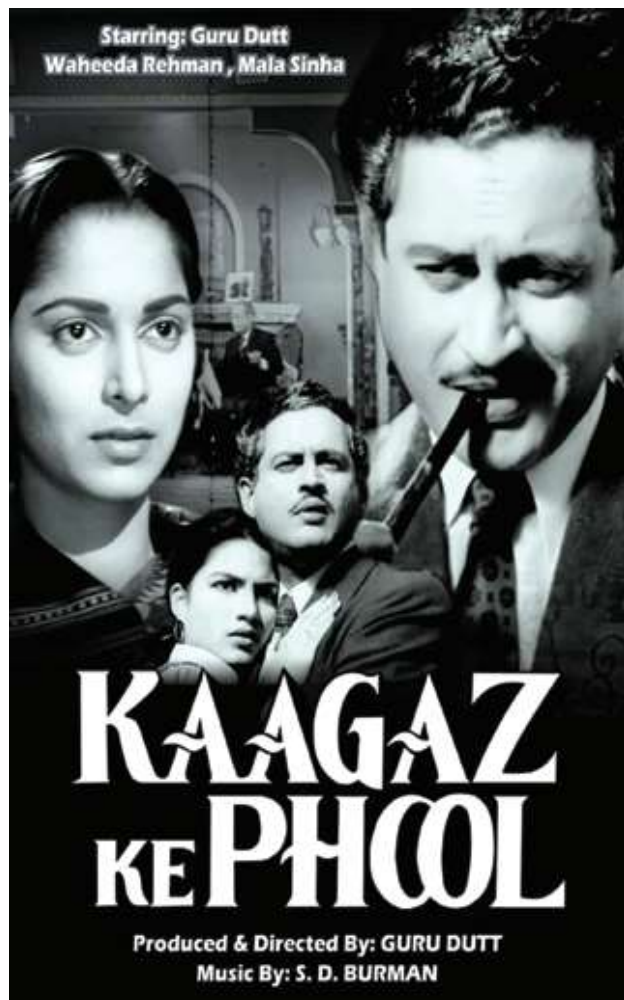
Apart from the telling lyrics and music, Guru Dutt's works are noted for his imaginative use of the close-up and rhythm in editing, signposts for the films he made after his first film *Baazi. Baazi* focused on Dutt's imaginative use of songs that did not intrude into the narrative but formed an integral part of the story and the film. At the same time, the songs defined an independent identity unto themselves, were an audiovisual delight for the audience, are timeless and have strong archival value. In *Jaal* (1952), boats at sea, village fairs, Sunday church services, fisher folk at work created an ambience enriched by the absence of the synthetic plasticity of a studio set. *Jaal*, shot in black-and-white by V.K. Murthy who cinematographed every Guru Dutt film after this, like many Guru Dutt films, evokes a sense of nostalgia of the period it was set in and made to this day. The multiple layers of music for the backdrop and for the songs (S.D. Burman), complemented by the rich lyrics (Sahir Ludhianvi) of *Pyaasa* (1957) turned out to be the hallmark of the film apart from the contributions of Guru Dutt, Waheeda Rehman, Mala Sinha, Rehman and Johnny Walker to the film.

Sometime during the late 70s and early 80s, his films began to draw international attention. Henri Micciollo, a French

Kaagaz Ke Phool poster

critic, during his posting at the Alliance Francaise in Mumbai, happened to attend a morning screening of *Pyaasa*. Though the film was without sub-titles, Micciollo was moved and intrigued by both the film and its director. He wrote an excellent study of Guru Dutt's films. It was Micciollo's writings that sparked off interest in Guru Dutt in the West much before they had a chance to see his films.

Kaagaz Ke Phool

Kaagaz Ke Phool (1959) is one of the most moving self-reflexive films made in India. It is a fine and subtle tribute to the glorious days of the studio era, using its history from about the 1930s to the 1940s as its backdrop. An early shot in the film reveals Suresh leaning from the balcony of a cinema hall where *Vidyapati*, a film of 1937, an unforgettable musical romance with Pahari Sanyal and Kanan Debi directed by the legendary Debaki Bose, enacting the classic lovers, playing to a full house. The films that Suresh is shown making or having made in the film are films that actually exist in the archives of Indian cinema.

The film is an introspective and retrospective journey of Suresh, a once-celebrated film director currently going through a bad patch both professionally and personally. He is estranged from his wife and daughter, while Shanti, the leading lady who he had groomed to fame and glory, and had subsequently fallen in love with, has drifted away. He discovers that the studio floors are his last recourse, and seeks refuge there, tracing back his journey. He finally comes to terms with the reality that fame and success are

Kaagaz Ke Phool was India's first cinemascope film with brilliant cinematography by V.K. Murthy. The cinematographer had multiple responsibilities. One, he had to shoot the film as the audience would see it. Two, he had to shoot the 'indoor studio sets' where Suresh shot his films with the right touch of light and shade and chiaroscuro it needed to reflect the time-setting of filmmaking the film represented – 1930-1940, approximately. Three, he had to maintain clear lines of division between the surface film to create the holistic effect it needed, and the make-believe structure of the studio-within-the-film. Four, he had to present the simulated indoor studio 'sets' to portray two different moods – the mood of success with bright lights and busy technicians, director, actors, in the earlier scenes, and the mood of failure when Suresh, sad, alone, an enlarged figure of tragedy and failure personified, steps into the studio again as the film, very slowly, almost regretfully, yet inevitably, moves towards its tragic climax. The tragedy is like a paean to filmmaking as an ephemeral phase in the life of its creator, the filmmaker, the films-within-the-film and the larger film itself.

The most telling metaphor in *Kaagaz Ke Phool* is the act of knitting sweaters that Shanti (Waheeda Rehman) indulges in. It is introduced as an innocent time-filler when she begins knitting on the sets during breaks in the shooting. Later, when Pammi's insults force her to retreat into the village and turn into a recluse from films and fame, Shanti presents Suresh with a sweater, the only one she could manage to give him. Years later, during the shooting of a film, as the female lead, in a scene she is supposed to do with a bit player, Shanti recognises Suresh from the sweater he is wearing when he removes his costume. It is full of holes now, but he still wears it, almost like a second skin. We last see Shanti as a doomed Penelope figure obsessively knitting sweaters for her Odysseus who will never return to claim them or exchange them for the one with the holes. Her cupboard is spilling over with sweaters. But now, it is no longer an innocent exercise to kill time. It is an obsessive act indulged in by a woman who is insanely in love with a man who is both afraid and incapable of loving her in return. It is an act of hope too. It is an escape route for a woman who is aware of the futility of her act. She is like the proverbial 'dying man clutching at a straw' that cannot and will not save her in the end. "A dying woman knits them for a man who refuses to die in her memory."

Shanti's life, after she comes in contact with Suresh, is defined by intermittent phases of waiting. The first time she appears in the frame, one finds her waiting under a tree in a park to save herself from getting wet in a sudden burst of rain. As an actress, she spends a lot of time waiting on the sets as the lighting and props are being prepared for the next shot. She arrives in the studio much ahead of the others and waits within the darkness of the studio waiting for her love to profess his love for her. It never happens. When Suresh has an accident, Shanti keeps awake all night by his side, waiting for him to regain consciousness. But instead of being thanked for this, Suresh asks her to leave the minute he regains consciousness. Maddened by Suresh's dogged refusal to acknowledge their mutual love and need, she takes refuge in her bedroom, strewn with a hundred sweaters, "knitting for a man who will never wear them. She is condemned to continue waiting."

Interestingly, Dutt weaves his film-within-a-film story with *Devdas*, the film being directed by Suresh. He manages to persuade his producer to cast Shanti, an orphan girl he had met in a park one day to play Parvati in the film. The entire sub-text happens in a series of coincidences and accidents. Not once does one get to see *Devdas* actually being shot in this film. But there is this strong sense of intercutting between Devdas and Suresh with Suresh taking to the bottle and losing out on life, family, and love.

Towards the end, the only retreat for Suresh is the studio where he shot many successful films. Here, with his cameras, his arc lamps, his backdrops, his sets, his technicians and his actors, he can create and control his own world of make-believe and beauty. But the space grants him only metaphorical consolations of a fictitious universe. When he loses his favourite actress in this space and his daughter in the courtroom, he begins to drink, as if with a vengeance, and becomes homeless. He returns to the space all over again after having lost his family, his career and his audience. By now, he defines the space as an indoor space that has evolved into a private sepulchre for himself.

Conclusion

Kaagaz Ke Phool has strong autobiographical elements. It is almost like a celluloid elegy Dutt wrote for himself with his screenplay and his images, his music and his lyrical pacing of the film. He is said to have had an intense relationship with one of his leading ladies, as shown in the film. He was the one who introduced the lady to the world of cinema. This brought about phases of estrangement with his wife Geeta Dutt and the children from time to time. He began to indulge in drinking during periods when he was not working. He suffered from long periods of depression. And he continued to be a chronic insomniac. It is said that his premature death by suicide was foreshadowed in the film. The film was a failure in every sense of the term. In some cities, the film ran for only a week. Only years later did it receive the acclaim it deserved and now it enjoys a cult following in India and other countries such as France where it was commercially released in the 1980s.

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.

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

Earth...

Grow indigenous trees for edible oil

Bharat Dogra *makes a strong case for growing indigenous trees which provide edible oils instead of promoting palm oil that can be ecologically disruptive.*

Mahua tree

Tribals gathering Mahua fruit

In recent times, the government of India has been largely promoting plantation of exotic palm oil trees to end edible oil shortage in the country. However this comes at an ecological cost as experienced by several countries. Palm oil trees need heavy rainfall and if there is a shortage it will lead to extraction of already scarce groundwater.

A better option would be to explore the potential of several indigenous trees in India, which yield oilseeds from which edible oil can be obtained. There are many indigenous trees which can provide edible oils, such as mahua, karanj, sal, kokum, kusum etc. (not to mention coconut, which is already well established as a supplier of edible oil). Some of these trees are known and some are not so well-known and need to be explored further. The edible oil obtained from some of these trees is known to have high nutritional value as they are rich in poly unsaturated fats.

Availability of edible oils can increase significantly even from existing trees. Efforts have to be made to increase their numbers so as to increase the availability of edible oil for domestic use as well as for export markets.

However it may not be a good idea to grow these trees as plantation crops as it will be harmful for biodiversity, environment and food security. It will be better for all families in a tribal community to grow two additional such trees each on their land. This way about 200 to 400 oilseed trees can grow in each village. As almost all of these trees have multiple uses for their fruits, flowers, seeds, leaves etc., benefits for the farmers and villagers will be multiple.

Cooperatives of farmers and villagers to collect oilseeds can be set up to ensure fair price. Instead of selling the seeds to big processors, they should be processed locally. Processing units should be set up in villages as it will generate sustainable livelihoods, while the residue (after oil extraction) will provide nutritive feed for animals and organic fertilizer for farms.

There are also trees like neem whose oil may not be used for cooking but has important medicinal uses. Then there are other trees which provide non-edible oil like soapnut trees; the oil from its berries (reetha) can be used for making soap.

Isn't it irrational that the authorities are ignoring this potential but instead going in for the ecologically disruptive option of palm oil plantation?

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

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VIRCHAND DHARAMSEY (1935-2023)
A heritage all by himself

Lanky, tall, an untucked shirt always open, a book in hand, a shoulder bag full of books, straight hair, black framed glasses, and excessively media-averse and simple.

That was Virchand Dharamsey , a selftaught Gujarati scholar who amassed a great body of knowledge on art topics, including archaeology, anthropology, architecture, etc., acquired merely through discussion, collaboration, and a gentle, sincere inquiry.

Books were his genuine buddies and he became a scholar dilettante. His favourite hangout was the Asiatic Society of Mumbai's TownHall, Horniman Circle library, where he would spend entire days.

Dharamsey uncovered the historical crumbs that escaped notice. Providing detached directions for interested researchers to the appropriate newspapers and bulletins, he would then shuffle over to his corner and lean over his notes.

He loved visiting museums and libraries and buying books as a child. He quit school before matriculation and struck out on his own, learning from public libraries and making friends with people passionate about the arts and literature, while sipping coffee in Iranian eateries.

After his father's business failed and his subsequent death, Dharmasey spent 20 years working for an export-import company. But in the evenings, he frequented Kala Ghoda's cultural district, mingling with the best artists of the time. In his twenties, in 1956 he founded Ajanta Arts, a group for the arts and culture and coedited the magazine Ajanta, for a few years before money ran out. But it gave him a foothold in the many cultural circles that Bombay teemed with.

With little knowledge of cinema, apart from his father's monthly purchase of one movie ticket, he collaborated closely with the Amateur Cine Society, planning film screenings and talks, which put him in touch with some of the top avant-garde cinema directors. As a self-taught modernist in the 1950s, he accumulated posters, show cards, letters, contracts, articles from leading film publications, and other archival information while conducting extensive research on the period.

This piqued his interest in Indian cinema's mostly unknown silent era (pre-1934). He updated and significantly expanded its filmography in the 1980s. His mental map of its entire landscape allowed him to confidently pick up any thread and lead you through the maze. With time, film historians began to acknowledge him as the custodian of Indian silent films.

Dharamsey by age 40, left his employment and began working as a consultant for archaeologists; served as an interlocutor for visiting foreign experts and focused on research. He also got involved in several field investigations in Gujarat between 1980 and 1994 as a member of an archaeological team from the University of Pennsylvania. He also made extensive travels throughout Sri Lanka and India to study temple building.

Before Google even existed, he was Google. He was the tireless self-taught polymath on whom even experts relied; a mobile library of information and a renowned researcher who could recognise obscure stills and long-forgotten historical figures by sight. A contrarian at heart, he enjoyed a good debate, and nothing gave him greater glee than debunking urban legends and upsetting conventional thought. Academic theory had to be supported by empirical data.

Drawing from every aspect of his life, delving deeply into Mumbai's cultural landscape, he snatched up minute nuances that many scholars would overlook. He had a bag full of tales from Mumbai. A biography of the great first Indian archaeologist Bhagwanlal Indraji (1839 –88) was Dharamsey's significant contribution to literature He also left a priceless collection of movie memorabilia. He belatedly received the Film Heritage Foundation's Lifetime Achievement Award in 2021 and a silver medallion.

Just a small portion of his vision was published. With a trouble expressing himself in Gujarati and English and poor public speaking skills, he frequently urged others to write and collaborated with numerous people over the years. Dharamsey passed away in Navi Mumbai aged 88. Indian cinema lost a significant portion of its early history, which had only survived in his remarkable imagination.

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

OMPRAKASH VALMIKI (1950-2013)

Oppressed turned crusader!

Omprakash Valmiki, a poet and pioneer of Dalit literature, (30 June 1950 - 17 November 2013) was born in Barla village of Muzzafarnagar district, U.P.

Valmiki's early years were marked by social, psychological, and financial challenges. He struggled with caste prejudice while attending Barla's Inter College. He was not permitted to sit with upper class classmates. Because he was a Dalit, his headmaster made him sweep the schoolyard when he was a boy. He was made to feel debased. His chemistry teacher failed him in his 12th grade by giving him poor marks in practical and viva; yet he managed to finish his education.

In his autobiography, Valmiki described his school library, where he first encountered literature. He had read Premchand, Rabindranath Tagore, and Sharat Chandra by the time he was in his eighth grade.

He developed Hindi Dalit literature significantly. His creative writing used straightforward, factual, spontaneous language with a thick, obvious overlay of sarcasm.

He gave the reader many hitherto unexplored facets of Indian society by vividly illustrating caste-insult and tyranny. These analyses were based on actual experiences. His short stories highlighted the prejudice and exploitation Dalits endured by focusing on aspects of their daily lives.

He concentrated on areas of Dalit life that had been neglected by well-known Hindi authors who, for the most part, had downplayed the caste issue. He believed that in addition to dividing individuals, caste and varna also forced a sizeable portion of the population - women in particular - to the bottom of the social ladder, robbing them of fundamental freedoms and even depriving them of the dignity as human beings.

This master of short stories was dedicated to equality, had a strong distaste for the caste system and Brahmanism, and was a strong supporter of social justice. He felt that the society's elite had been unable to escape caste consideration even in the twenty-first century. Even the educated were powerless in the face of the priests, who resisted change despite the wishes of the younger generation.

He described the brutal treatment Dalits bore, in a poem. Instead of being given meaningful employment, they were abused, forced to crush stones in the sweltering midday sun, and dig canals and large drains even though their bodies smelled and their hands were sore. Given scraps to eat, they were instructed to pull animal corpses, remove the filth of entire families, given hand-me-down clothes to wear, and kept far away from books and the entrance to the temple of learning.

Forced into slavery, deprived of their rights, the pages of their history were torn to shreds. They had to send their newlywed women on the first night to the landlord's mansion. Their women were told to become devdasis and turned into prostitutes. Even their fair faces were darkened. What would you do if you had to endure such a life for all time, like I did? he queried.

His autobiography *Joothan*, published in 1997, is regarded as a key work of Dalit writing. His other books and anthologies include *Bass! Bahut Ho Chuka, Ab Aur Nahin, Savion Ka Santaap, Salaam, Ghuspaithiye,* the history of the Valmiki community *Safai Devta, Dalit Sahitya Ka Saundaryashastra, Main Brahman Nahin Hoon, Yah Ant Nahin, Dinesh Jatav Urf Digdarshan and Brahmastra.*

Sadly, his college library did not retain even one of his books. His surviving family members were disappointed because he did nothing to help them or the Valmiki community, despite being well known.

He was honoured with the Sahitya Bhushan Award in addition to receiving the Dr. Ambedkar National Award in 1993 and the Parivesh Samman in 1995. He died of stomach cancer in 2013 in Dehradun.

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

LIEUTENANT NAVDEEP SINGH, ASHOK CHAKRA (1985-2011)

Hero of the Gurez encounter

Navneet Singh was born on 8 June 1985 in Gurdaspur, Punjab. He was a third-generation soldier to serve in the Indian Army. His grandfather was a junior commissioned officer while his father Joginder Singh served as Subedar-major in the Bengal Sappers for 30 years and retired as Honorary Captain. He completed his schooling from Army Public School, Tibri and completed his graduation in B.Sc. in Hotel Management in 2006 from Institute of Hotel Management (IHM) Gurdaspur and post-graduation in the Army Institute of Management, Kolkata in 2009, where he received his MBA degree.

Singh shunned a corporate career and instead joined the Officers Training Academy as a gentleman cadet. He was commissioned into the Army Ordnance Corps, on 19 March 2011. For the duration of these two years, the officer, for all practical purposes, belongs to the said infantry battalion. Lieutenant Singh was attached to the 15 Maratha Light Infantry in J&K in his first posting as Commissioned Officer. He was Ghatak Platoon Commander of 15 Maratha Light Infantry deployed in Gurez sector in the high altitude area near the Line of Control (LOC).

Gurez is a valley located in Himalayas, about 123 kilometres from Srinagar. The valley lies near the Line of Control and has been an area of insurgency. High mountains and closeness to the LoC enable Pakistani terrorists to infiltrate.

At about 0030 hours on 20 August 2011, the Surveillance teams of 15 Maratha Light Infantry spotted some terrorists. For Lt. Navdeep Singh Bains this was barely five months after his commissioning into the army. It was the biggest-ever infiltration attempt in J&K that year. Twelve terrorists dressed in black commando combat dresses armed with AK-47 rifles, Chinese-made 7.62 mm pistols and communication devices attempted to infiltrate the LoC using inflatable rubber boats on Kishnaganga river, considered the de facto LoC between India and Pakistan. Singh was made in charge of an ambush party. When the terrorists were in the range, exchange of fire ensued. Leading from the front, the lieutenant eliminated three terrorists.

On seeing another terrorist approaching their position, with utter disregard to his personal safety, Singh changed his firing position. While doing so, he got hit by a bullet on his head. He still managed to eliminate the fourth terrorist. He pulled an injured fellow soldier to safety and kept firing till he became unconscious due to excessive blood loss. The encounter lasted about eight minutes in which six terrorists fell into the river and were swept away, while the bodies of the remaining six were recovered. Singh was airlifted to the unit hospital. But he was already dead by then.

Lieutenant Navdeep Singh who was only 26-year-old displayed his indomitable spirit, determination, and exceptional bravery while putting down the terrorists and making the supreme sacrifice for the nation.
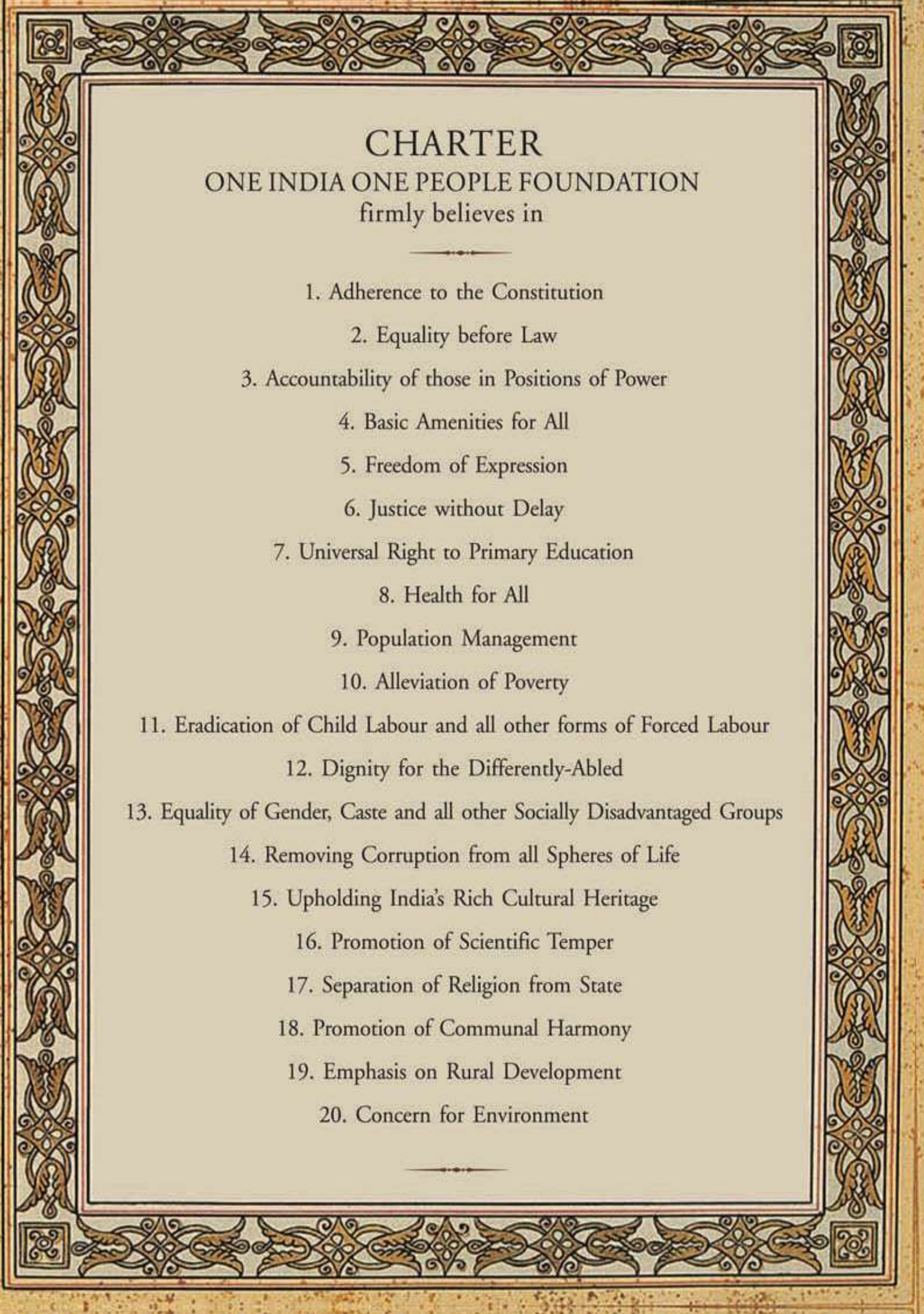
His body was brought to Gurdaspur the next day. Mourners included people of his hometown, personnel from civil and army officers and soldiers from his regiment who gave him a guard of honour and the final salute. A state cabinet minister representing the chief minister laid a wreath on his body. He was cremated with full state and army honours amid crowd showering flowers and chanting "Navdeep Singh amar rahe". The roads were so crowded with mourners, the cremation was delayed by two hours. The 16, J&K Light Infantry regiment paid a gun salute in his honour.

Navdeep`s death has not weakened his father Joginder Singh who said, "Though he won the battle with terrorists, he offered his life for the nation. He is a great martyr. I would feel proud to send my younger son Sandeep Singh too, to serve in Indian Army."

Lt. Navdeep Singh was awarded the Ashoka Chakra posthumously which was received by his father on the 63rd Republic Day.

Brigadier Suresh Chandra Sharma (retd.)

CHARTER
ONE INDIA ONE PEOPLE FOUNDATION
firmly believes in

1. Adherence to the Constitution

2. Equality before Law

3. Accountability of those in Positions of Power

4. Basic Amenities for All

5. Freedom of Expression

6. Justice without Delay

7. Universal Right to Primary Education

8. Health for All

9. Population Management

10. Alleviation of Poverty

11. Eradication of Child Labour and all other forms of Forced Labour

12. Dignity for the Differently-Abled

13. Equality of Gender, Caste and all other Socially Disadvantaged Groups

14. Removing Corruption from all Spheres of Life

15. Upholding India's Rich Cultural Heritage

16. Promotion of Scientific Temper

17. Separation of Religion from State

18. Promotion of Communal Harmony

19. Emphasis on Rural Development

20. Concern for Environment

WHO AM I?

Am I a Hindu first or an Indian first?

Am I a Muslim first or an Indian first?

Am I a Christian first or an Indian first?

Am I a Buddhist first or an Indian first?

Am I a Brahmin first or an Indian first?

Am I a Dalit first or an Indian first?

Am I a South Indian first or an Indian first?

Am I a North Indian first or an Indian first?

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

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

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

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

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

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

In all cases you are Indian First, Last and Always.
Be a Proud Indian. Make this country Great, Strong and United.

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