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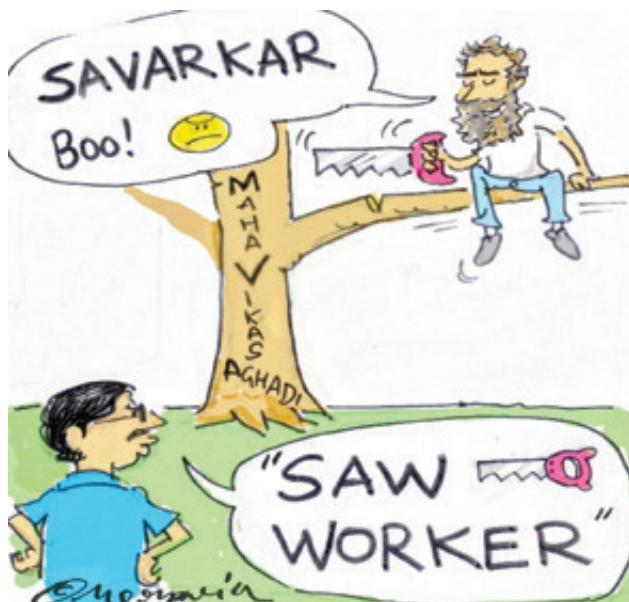
VINEET GAIROLA



IN RESPONSE, HOW ABOUT A WALK THROUGH NEPAL, PAKISTAN, AFGHANISTAN, SRI LANKA, BANGLADESH? AN AKHAND BHARAT JODO YATRA.



REMEMBER FILM FESTIVALS OF THE 70s? IF A FILM WAS DUBBED 'VULGAR' WE'D ALL RUSH TO SEE IT



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Oldest garment with an ageless appeal

Beyond being a fashion statement and a drape that defines elegance, the saree finds fame in history books too. This symbol of femininity dates back to more than 5000 years back and yet, hasn't lost its old-world charm even a bit. **Manu Shrivastava** delves into the origin of the saree and establishes that it continues to be a subject of experimentation and evolution. Her conclusion: Age hasn't withered the saree nor customs staled it.



Indian painter Raja Ravi Varma's portraits show women in exquisitely-draped sarees. The women of the royal families draped it in this style

What today many perceive as a garment making a fashion statement or traditional attire draped for auspicious occasions, the saree is a lot more than that. With more than 5,000 years of existence to its credit and what's considered to be among the oldest form of garment in the world still in existence, saree has continued to evolve, keeping its core characteristic intact, and stay relevant in the present time.

For Indian women, saree is a 'symbol of femininity' ... a garment so integral to their existence that despite thousands of years of invasion, cultural disruption and destruction, persecution, waves of emigration and immigration, wars and revolutions, saree continues to be as Indian as it could be.

Despite being an ancient garment, saree is still extremely popular and worn by women of all ages. It is deeply entrenched in India's cultural fabric; making it a rare piece of 'cultural

heritage' from India with universal acknowledgment and without theories of disputed origins. It is a versatile garment that is traditional and contemporary at the same time.

Marking the origin

The earliest record or mention of saree can be found in the Vedas - ancient Indian scriptures and among the oldest literature created by man. The woman attire was called 'satika' from which the word 'saree' came into existence. The mention goes back to the Indus Valley Civilisation that flourished in the north-western part of the Indian subcontinent between 3300-1300 B.C.E., indicating the usage of the garment then.

Around that time, man had started cultivating cotton and, on the Indian subcontinent, cotton weaving had begun as well. This was the one of the first steps to creating a fabric that



Mumbai-based fashion designer and politician Shaina Nana Chudasama, popularly known as Shaina NC, is known in the Indian fashion industry as the 'Queen of Drapes'. She is known to drape the saree in fifty-four different ways and holds a record in the Guinness Book of World Records for the fastest saree drape

later came to be known as the saree. To put things in perspective, silk weaving began around 2,450 to 2,000 BCE.

Saree is an 'evolved' version of an ensemble comprising three separate pieces of cloth. The lower garment called the 'antariya', the 'stanapatta' that covers the chest and the 'uttariya' that was the veil worn over the head or the shoulder.

In ancient Tamil Nadu, references to saree can be found in works such as *Silappadikaram* that mention a single piece of clothing covering the lower part of the body and the head. Sanskrit drama *Mrcchakatika*'s author Sudraka, from fifth century BCE, wrote that women did not wear '*avagaunthaha*', which is the Sanskrit term for a veil used by women, all the time. In fact, the married women were expected to wear it especially when in public.

Banabhatta's literature *Kadambari*, in Sanskrit, mentions women covered in what is an exquisitely-draped cloth. Other works mention that women wore cloth where the midriff would be uncovered. Indian painter Raja Ravi Varma who was closely related to the royal Travancore family, in present-day Kerala, is known as one of the greatest painters of Indian art. His numerous paintings displaying women document similar clothing.

Constantly evolving garment

Despite enduring thousands of years of evolution and diversification, the saree continues to be draped in a typical 'classical' manner. Even with the basic draping style, there are more than a hundred variations of the saree in the Indian sub-continent itself originating from religious, geographical and cultural diversity of the country.

Today, there are not just variations in saree styles but also fabric, length, accompanying accessories, etc. Sarees are

now found in different kinds of silk such as the Kanjeevaram silk saree, Banarasi silk saree, Tussar silk saree or cotton such as Chanderi cotton saree, Khadi saree, Sambalpuri saree, etc. Newer fabrics such as chiffon, georgette, crepe, etc. are also becoming popular.

Then there are handloom sarees with embroidery, ikkat, block-print, tie-n-dye, embellishments, etc. Some of the most popular sarees that saree-loving Indian women like to add to their collection are Banarasi, Paithani, Chanderi, Kanchipuram, Gadwal, Baluchuri, Mysore, Uppada, Marayan pet, Mekhela Chador, Leheriya, Bandhani, etc.

While the elaborate silk and heavy-work sarees are reserved for traditional occasions and religious ceremonies and demand utmost care and maintenance, there are those that offer comfort and convenience for the working women. The easy to drape and easy to wash daily-wear sarees can also be worn in all seasons. The most popular choice in this regard is Georgette saree that comes in a wide range of colours, prints and patterns and is economical too.

When Air India was nationalised in 1953 and came under the Government of India, the attire for the crew members was changed. The air hostesses were required to wear sarees, in a bid to showcase Indian culture and tradition.

Moving beyond tradition

Today, saree is one of the most versatile garments for women. Fashion designers continue to experiment with saree to make it fashionable and contemporary.

Mumbai-based fashion designer and politician Shaina Nana Chudasama, popularly known as Shaina NC, is known in the Indian fashion industry as the 'Queen of Drapes'. She is



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known to drape the saree in fifty-four different ways and holds a record in the Guinness Book of World Records for the fastest saree drape.

Shaina got involved in fashion designing at a young age. With an impressive clientele that includes film industry celebrities such as Aishwarya Rai Bachchan, Shaina's main interest is in sarees, particularly silk sarees, cotton sarees, chiffon sarees, Paithani sarees, Chanderi sarees, etc. She believes the saree is an amazing garment as it can really change a woman's looks and the younger generation needs to be introduced to it properly.

She believes there are no fixed rules regarding wearing a saree and has draped one over trousers, jeans, skirt, etc. She has also designed ready-to-wear sarees for the 'modern' woman who finds it difficult to drape the six-yard saree.

Another designer who has internationalised traditional Indian saree is Sanjukta Dutta. Assam-based Sanjukta is known to design beautiful Mekhela Chador and revive the Silk of Assam. Her collection 'Alphool' was showcased at the New York Fashion Week 2022.

Sanjukta is known for combining traditions and prints from different geographical regions to create a unique customised piece of garment with the traditional Assamese silk Mekhela Chador as a base. She is constantly striving to 'modernise' traditional garments and make them relevant to contemporary needs. Her creations, particularly the silk garments, are hand-made that may take up to a month to finish, depending on the intricacy of the works.

During the New York Fashion Week 2022, Consul General of India Randhir Jaiswal was highly impressed by the collection that showcased India's traditional attire with a modern touch. He said, "When you are celebrating Sanjukta you are celebrating India. Her designs are very rich, it represents all that Assam is, all that India is."

In India, today, several fashion designers are reinterpreting the saree. Their creations are infusing the traditional saree with contemporary elements. Renowned designer Tarun Tahiliani who has draped the saree on several Indian and international celebrities is also known to revive the saree in 'modern' ways. He feels that with the evolution of Indian woman, the saree has also metamorphosed.

Anavila Mishra has revived the most traditional Banarasi saree and created a niche for herself. She feels that the saree is an extension of a woman's personality and she has been working towards creating unique drapes for the urban Indian woman.



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Nine yards of cultural heritage

*Among Maharashtra's multifarious cultural splendours is the traditional 'Nauvari' saree. Contrary to perception, it is also steeped in modern history as women drape them on occasions that transcend orthodoxy. Longer than the usual six-yard attire, its nine-yard elegance suits all seasons. **Ruchi Verma** takes a look at this signature wear, its history and how it has retained its cultural flavour.*



Marathi actresses and their traditional Nauvari looks on the occasion of Gudi Padwa

The third-largest state by area in India, Maharashtra is a true blend of traditional and modern living. A region known to preserve its culture and whose people are known to uphold traditional values and rituals, Maharashtra is very rich in terms of the traditional attire especially the saree. Maharashtrian women commonly wear the saree, like in most parts of India, but that is draped in a modern, more convenient and practical manner for daily wear.

Earlier, women in Maharashtra would wear the traditional Nauvari saree that were also designed for specific occasions,

according to the prevailing local culture and customs. Today, the Nauvari is mostly worn on special occasions, festivals such as Ganesh Chaturthi, Gudi Padwa, etc., and during wedding ceremonies.

The distinct saree of Maharashtra is the Nauvari saree which means the nine-yard-long saree. Even in popular culture, such as in films and other visual mediums of art, a Maharashtrian woman can be easily identified because of the Nauvari saree and, concurrently, the Nauvari saree is used to depict a woman as one belonging to this region.



Koli women drape the saree in the above style

Draped in history

The Nauvari saree can be draped like a 'kacham' or like a 'dhoti'. This distinctive piece of clothing, a Maratha woman's apparel, is a single cloth nine yards in length and hence the name Nauvari. It is also called Navvari, Kacha, Sakacha, Lugade or Kaashta saree, because the manner in which it is draped or worn is similar to that of a Maharashtrian dhoti.

This saree was customarily worn by venerable Marathi women and Maharashtrian Brahmin women, accessorised with gold jewellery that includes gold necklace, nose pin or nath, earrings, green bangles and kamarband - derived from Maratha and Peshwa dynasties.

The Maharashtrian women, owing to their love for flowers, also put mogra flowers or gajra in their hair, around the low-buns. The look is further accessorised with the traditional half-moon style Bindi.

It is said that during the Maratha rule, in war time, the women, in order to showcase and strengthen their physical skills and abilities, developed this saree draping style that is like a dhoti. At the time, the women, to help the men of their family in battle, introduced the Nauvari saree that resembles a trouser making it convenient and suitable for the war-time chores then. Since then, however, it became traditional attire for the Maharashtrian women. The women of the royal families wore this saree and it was a mark of royalty.

Variations and styles

Nauvari sarees were originally made from cotton and worn without a petticoat. Even today, they normally come in cotton but are readily available in other textiles like silk and satin.



A Kunbi woman in traditional drape

Traditional nauvari sarees are embellished with beautiful floral prints, motifs and patterns.

The Nauvari saree of Maharashtra is draped in unique styles that have, over time, diversified into various sub-styles – according to the sub-group, community, topography, occupation, etc. Even the colours have evolved from the traditional variations of blue and green to bright colours like red, pink, orange, yellow even the pastels to fulfil contemporary demands.

The Kaashta saree is draped like the Maharashtrian dhoti where the saree is tucked at the back, hence the name Kaashta. The traditional Maharashtrian drape style doesn't require a petticoat and that's one thing common across all the different types of Nauvari saree.

There are many variations seen across Maharashtra. For example, the Peshwai Marathi saree is strictly worn by the Brahmin women who also wear it in a certain manner to depict their rich heritage and take pride in it. The draping style here is called the Brahmini Saree Style where the saree is draped just like the traditional Nauvari saree, the only difference being the front pleats. The border of the saree is displayed on the front side as well, in addition to the back side like in the kashta.

The Koli women drape this saree in a different style. They cut it into two pieces - one piece is worn around the waist and the other piece is used to cover the upper part of the body. The cloth is then taken over the head, around the left shoulder in the traditional manner.

In Maharashtra's Konkan, the women of the native Aagri community wear the saree till the knee. Called the 'adwa patal', this style is worn by the Aagri women and bears close



Maharashtrian women performing lavani or traditional folk dance of Maharashtra wear the nine-yard saree. They, typically, make their hair in a bun and wear a lot of jewellery that includes bormaal, zumka or earrings, thushi or necklace, bangles, kamarpatta or waist belt and ghungru.

resemblance to the style draped by the women of the farming Kunbi community, especially in Raigad and Ratnagiri areas of Maharashtra.

The Kunbi women also wear the nine yard saree and it's called 'uprati' which means upside down, because the folds of the saree are upside down as compared to the traditional style. The women in the interiors of Maharashtra, in rural Ahmednagar, Kolhapur, Satara and Pune wear the saree till the ankles.

Keeping up with the times

Maharashtrian women performing lavani or traditional folk dance of Maharashtra wear the lavani nine-yard saree. They, typically, make their hair in a bun and wear a lot of jewellery that includes bormaal, zumka or earrings, *thushi* or necklace, bangles, *kamarpatta* or waist belt and *ghungru*.

The older women usually wear the five-yard saree. The Paithani five-yard saree is worn by younger women and also mostly by those in urban areas. Paithani is a hand-woven silk saree which has an intricate zari work, pallu and border. The unique saree is characterised by borders of an oblique square design and the pallu with a peacock design.

'Paithani' term indicates the origin of the saree – derived from Paithan near Aurangabad in Maharashtra, one of the oldest towns of the region. Paithani work is more than two thousand years old, originating in Pratishthan that was ruled by the Satavahanas ruler Shalivahana, now called Paithan in Marathwada region.

Owing to patronage from the Peshwas, the Paithani textiles developed and reached far and wide. There are several motifs used in the design, the oldest being vine and flowers (asavali), squarish floral motifs (akruti), petals (kalas pakli), fan (pankha), cocount (narali) and cotton bud (rui phul).

Over the years, Paithani too, like most other traditional attire, evolved from a cotton base to a silk base. In fact, in most Paithani sarees, silk is used in weft designs and borders and cotton comprises the main body of the cloth. In some, cotton is not used at all.

In Pune, readymade Nauvari sarees are available that have a mixed style of draping and are very popular among women. The Nauvari saree designs available today include Shahi Mastani, Shahi Brahmani, Mhalsa, Devsena, Devyani, Peshwai Brahmani, Kolhapuri, Kadambari, Lavani, Triveni, Mastani, Koli, Marathmoli, Fulwanti, etc.

The traditional nine-year Nauvari saree that was once very popular is now restricted to special occasions only. Today, most women in Maharashtra are wearing modern clothing and the Nauvari saree is either worn on festivals or bought as offerings to goddesses or used during wedding ceremonies.

Designers are trying to keep up with the times as women want to wear something that is convenient and quick and usually offered by modern attire such as skirts, trousers, shirts even salwar-kameez.

In order to keep the tradition alive and combining elegance with convenience, designers have created the ready-made nauvaris, that too, for women of all age groups. Going a step further, there are outlets where one can choose the nauvari of choice and the seller or the designer then stitches it into a ready-to-wear pyjama-cum-saree.

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Vibrance weaved in threads

*It is not without reason that Gujarat qualifies to be the textile state of the country. Its thriving textile industry has played a significant role in the diversity and popularity of the saree. It is to the credit of the state that even its young women proudly flaunt the saree, otherwise considered fit for only traditional wear. **Anushka Singh** brings to the fore the stories behind Gujarat's trademark fabrics.*



Patola, Bandhani and Ajrak print sarees are the popular traditional sarees of Gujarat

Gujarat is one of the most vibrant states in India known for its culture, food and, most importantly, its textiles. So much so, that it is also known as the textile state of India. The region has a flourishing textiles industry which contributes heavily to the arts and crafts of India.

It is these textiles that, owing to the variety offered and beauty, are very popular among the end consumers, not just in Gujarat or India but overseas as well. Each traditional textile in the state carries with it its distinct history and heritage that it has derived from belonging to different communities, tribes and regions in the state.

Saree is a commonly worn garment in Gujarat and is worn by adult women of all ages. It's a traditional piece of clothing worn by married and older women that has slowly made its way, from being 'traditional' attire to a 'fashionable' one that is worn by young women too.

The rich textiles

The state's rich textile history has played a significant role in the diversity and popularity of saree as well. In Gujarat, there's a wide variety of textiles that depend on factors such as the raw materials used, the combination of yarns, techniques used, as in modern or the age-old traditional techniques. Gujarat is popularly known as the Manchester of the East and the arid Kutch region is, interestingly, the richest in the state when it comes to cultural heritage of this nature.

One of the most famous fabrics from Gujarat is the Patola fabric. It is a very old textile and has a name in Sanskrit as well, known as Patta. It originated in Gujarat region in an area called Patan and by Salvi community.

Earlier, only these people would manufacture Patola – the community had migrated from Maharashtra and Karnataka

to Gujarat during the reign of Solanki dynasty's king, Kumar Pal, in the 12th century.

Stories behind fabrics

A hundred families had migrated then. But today, only three such families remain. The original place for manufacturing is Patan, however, now it is also manufactured in Khambat and Rajkot. Some weavers also settled in Pochampally and make 'ikat' design which is similar to Patola. Pochampally saree or Pochampalli ikat is a saree made in Bhodan Pochampally which is in Yadadri Bhuvanagiri district in India's Telangana State.

Patola is made from pure mulberry spun silk and so is less shiny. As far as colours are concerned, most Patola fabrics are coloured in red, green, yellow even white and black but in Patola sarees, maroon is the dominating colour.

The common motifs, also known as bhat, are: Elephant-Kunjar bhat, Tiger and Elephant - Vagh Kunjar bhat, Parrot and Elephant - Tota Kunjar bhat, Peacock and Parrot - Mor Tota bhat, Flower design - Phul bhat, Leaf design - Paan bhat, Walnut design - Akrot bhat, Diamond or Kite - Patang bhat and Gopi and Krishna - Raas bhat. Elephant is considered to be very auspicious and so, the most common among the designs.

Traditional textiles

Another popular textile that has made its mark in Gujarati sarees is the Bandhani. The mere mention of Bandhani brings to mind bright colours and beautiful patterns. Bandhani is a tie-n-dye technique that is used at the fabric stage. It is different from Patola because in the latter, the same tie-n-dye technique is used at the yarn stage.

Bandhani work was started by the Khatri community of Gujarat which is where it originated. Even today, the main centers are Kutch, Bhuj, Jamnagar and Rajkot. The term 'Bandhani' is derived from the word 'Bandhan' that translates to 'tying up'.

The Bandhani textile is made from a very old technique that is mainly used in Gujarat and Rajasthan. For this textile, traditionally fine cotton and fine silk is used but today, crepe silk, georgette even chiffon can be seen in tie-n-dye prints. Colours used are mostly bright hues and the popular designs include elephant, floral, kalash, swastik, dancing doll and geometrical designs.

Saree for auspicious occasions

Patola silk and Bandhani sarees, both traditional sarees, are very popular among Gujarati women even today. Among the Bandhani designs, there are two types that are very popular in Gujarat. The Chunnadi is brightly-coloured with white dots and golden border and then there's Gharchola which is generally green or red in colour.

Gharchola is derived from 'ghar' which means home and 'chola' which means clothing. Here, home is the bride's home, the new one, where she is married to. So, traditionally, a newly-married woman or the bride enters her new home wearing a Gharchola.

Gharchola originated in Khambat region of Gujarat, also known as Cambay - once a very busy port and trading centre of the Indian subcontinent, till the 16th century. They are typically made in the 'auspicious' red colour, and its many variations, and are widely used by women of the Hindu and Jain communities in Gujarat.

Gharcholas have a characteristic chequered pattern, formed in multiple combinations. The most popular permutation is that of the 9, 12 and 52 squares' patterns. So, the 12-squared grid is also known as bar bhag and the 52-squared one *bavan bhag*. In Gharchola, every box is tied and dyed to create Bandhani patterns.

Gharchola is closely associated with auspicious occasions and wedding ceremonies in Gujarat. In India, in many cultures, a piece of clothing holds tremendous significance and value in terms of customs and rituals and Gharchola is one such garment in Gujarat. It is the commonly-worn traditional attire in Gujarati weddings.

The traditional Gujarati wedding attire is called Panetar and is usually gifted to the bride by her maternal uncle. This bridal wedding ensemble is characteristically red and white in colour and the bride wears heavily embellished *Panetars*, draped in Gujarati style. The saree is pleated and tucked at the waist on one side so that the *pallu* falls over the shoulders and the loose end of the saree is tied to the groom's stole during the *pheras* (an important ritual in Hindu wedding, where the bride and groom circumambulate a consecrated fire seven times reciting specific vows with each round.)

One for every occasion

The Ajrakh fabric is created with wooden blocks of different designs, dipped in different colours, stamped on the fabric and then left to dry. Kutch is known to manufacture these fabrics that come in bright colours such as yellow, green, maroon, red and blue with tiny white or contrasting dots as patterns.

The traditional hand printing method dates back to 4,500 years ago. The Khatri community living on the banks of River Sindh initiated this and later, in the 16th century, migrated and settled in Kutch's Dhamadka due to its proximity to a river where they could wash their fabrics. Dhamadka lies in Anjar Taluka in the Rann of Kutch. After the 2001 Gujarat earthquake, many artisans moved to Ajrakhpur. Today, Ajrakh sarees come in a range of patterns and colours.

The Asavali saree has derived its name from Asha Bhil, the 11th century ruler of Ahmedabad. This saree has rich brocaded patterns that are embedded into the gold surface, similar to the Meenakari work done in jewellery. It is believed that this pattern is influenced from the brocade traditions of Benaras through the migration of Gujarati weavers. The Asavali were made by Khatri and Patels mainly for the royalty earlier.

Then there's Nagari saree, worn mostly by rural women in Gujarat. It is a coarse cotton saree with a maroon background and black dot designs printed on it.

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Embodying India's cultural diversity

*The sheer feminine grace of the saree unfurls in myriad ways – modern, fusion and what have you! They are not only symbols of culture and heritage, they reflect belief and practices, not to speak of status and position. **Neeti Prakash** dwells on the diverse finesse of this elegant attire that varies in its make and design from all nooks and corners of the country. Versatility in its legacy, it is good for all seasons.*



Indian celebs sporting sarees and drapes of different Indian states – Leharia (Rajasthan), Kasavu (Kerala), Mekhala Chador (Assam), Benares silk (Uttar Pradesh) and Kanjeevaram (Tamil Nadu)

One of the most popular Indian attires that has garnered attention across the world and has been worn by some of the most famous female celebrities and powerful global women leaders is the saree. Saree, the one-piece clothing that can be worn in hundreds of traditional and non-traditional ways is unique to India and is one of the most diverse garments as well.

The length of the saree usually lies between 3.5 to 9 yards; it can be worn on almost all occasions and ceremonies. But, in India, saree is also worn by millions of women on a daily basis.

Saree is known for its grace and versatility. The cultural diversity in the country can be gauged from the diversity of the traditional sarees available. Modern versions and fusions are innumerable and beyond count.

Saree is not just attire; it is also a symbol of one's culture and heritage. In fact, in some sarees, folk lore and tales

of yore are depicted so, the saree functions as a historical document or artefact.

In other areas, the saree reflects the belief and practices of the people of that zone. A saree is also the symbol of status and position in society. In some cases, the way a saree is draped reflects the person's position and status.

Diversity in drapes

In India, it is this cultural diversity that seeps into its foods, fabrics, attire, folklore, art, handicrafts and saree is not untouched. So, from north to south and east to west, the single piece of cloth, called the saree, is made in different ways and worn in distinct and unique manners, making it one of the most versatile garments of the country.

Saree is a symbol of femininity and it is one of the most sensual and graceful, at the same time, attires a woman can wear. The normal length of the saree, which is six yards, is



The Gujarati drape with the pallu in front

usually worn with a distinctive blouse and an underskirt called petticoat that helps in the tucking in of the pleats of the saree to hold them in place.

It's an interesting journey to see and understand the diversity of this traditional attire. So, in Rajasthan and Gujarat, it's the bandhani saree or tie-dye that is very popular among women. Made using the ancient technique of tying the cloth in patterns and dipping in colourful dyes, this saree is often worn by women during festivals and rituals. These days, these sarees also come with embellishments such as mirror and bead work.

One of the most popular and distinct sarees worn by the women in Rajasthan is Leheriya saree which is made using a traditional style of tie-dye practiced in Rajasthan. The result is a brightly-coloured cloth with distinctive and complex wave patterns, hence the name leheriya. Rajasthan's delicate and porous Kota Doria saree uses a fine-woven fabric that has a checked pattern in the weave itself.

Madhya Pradesh's Chanderi saree is made in fine cotton or silk. It's a light saree meant mainly for summers. Chanderi weaving is very old and dates back to the Koshti weavers of the 13th century who migrated from Jhansi to Chanderi.

The Scindia royal family of Gwalior, in 1910, revived the Chanderi art and these sarees had gold thread motifs. These sarees are usually made from chanderi cotton, silk cotton and pure silk. Common motifs used are geometrical designs, leaves, etc. and the zari work is very prominent.



The Bengali drape

Carrying legacy

Uttar Pradesh, owing to the influence of several dynasties, has a rich treasure of traditional clothing. The Banarasi saree, for example, that is a must for every festival and special occasion. It is also a must for the brides. The distinct feature of a Banarasi saree is the 'jhallar' – the narrow fringe-like pattern that runs along the inner and outer borders of the fabric.

Banaras or Varanasi was a renowned cotton-weaving hub during the early Buddhist period. The Banarasi silk, on the other hand, came to India during the Mughal reign. It was in the 14th century, during the Mughal rule, that the craftsmen began to develop silk fabrics woven using silver and gold zari yarns.

Brocade-weaving gained prominence in the region in the 17th century with the migration of weavers from Gujarat. And, the use of zari came with the influx of weavers from Central Asia and Persia. So, the Banarasi silk saree today is the result of the confluence of Indian and Mughal styles and fabrics.

One of the finest traditional sarees, Banarasi saree is heavy in weight as there's rich embroidery. It comes in four varieties - Organza (Kora), Georgette Saree, Shatir Saree and Pure Silk (Katan). There are several varieties of the Banarasi silk saree that include satin borders, jangla, brocades, tanchoi, cutwork, resham butidar, etc. The patterns in these sarees are inspired from nature and include designs of birds, animals, flowers, human figures and geometric patterns.



The Madisar or Koshavam is a typical way in which a saree is worn by Tamil Brahmin women of India

Another popular work in the northern region of the country is Lucknow's Chikan work. The chikan embroidery developed between the 16th and the 18th centuries and is also known as Lakhnavi Chikankari. It is so famous that people from not just across India but the world come to buy Lakhnavi chikankari sarees.

The spirit of the east

The Taant sarees of Bengal, also known as Bengal cotton sarees, are traditional sarees of the region. The name translates to 'made on the loom' and these sarees are woven from cotton threads. The Taant is apt for the climate of the region which is hot and humid. In this saree, the pallu is taken over the left shoulder.

Synonymous with Bengal's finest and oldest weaving technique, the Taant flourished between the 15th and 18th centuries in Bengal under the Mughals, along with the jamdani and muslin weaving techniques. Some of the common Taant weave categories are Fulia and Shantipur, Atpur, Begampur and Dhaniakhali.

The 200-year-old Baluchari saree of West Bengal is made of silk and woven on looms. There's no zari and the characteristic feature of this saree is that the pallu border depicts stories from Ramayan and Mahabharat and other mythological episodes. The Kantha saree of West Bengal is also very popular - characteristic decorative motifs with a running stitch.

In the eastern state of Assam, the traditional indigenous attire worn by the women is called Mekhela Chador. The top part of the attire, called Chador, is draped around the body and tucked into the upper part of the Mekhela. It is very similar to the saree. It is made from Assam silk, particularly the three types of indigenous wild silk from Assam, namely the golden muga, warm eri silk and the white pat.

The richness of the South

When it comes to sarees from India's south, one cannot but think about the Kanjeevaram silk sarees. Other than these, there are many popular traditional sarees from the South. These include the Mysore silk saree, Gadwal saree, Chettinad saree, Kasavu saree, Pochampally saree, Dharmavaram saree, etc.

The extremely popular Kanchipuram or Kanjeevaram silk sarees of Tamil Nadu are woven from pure mulberry silk with gold-dipped silver thread. These sarees are worn by women of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Karnataka for weddings, traditional ceremonies and special occasions. The most common motifs found in these are peacock and parrot. The saree has also been recognised as a Geographical indication by the Government of India.

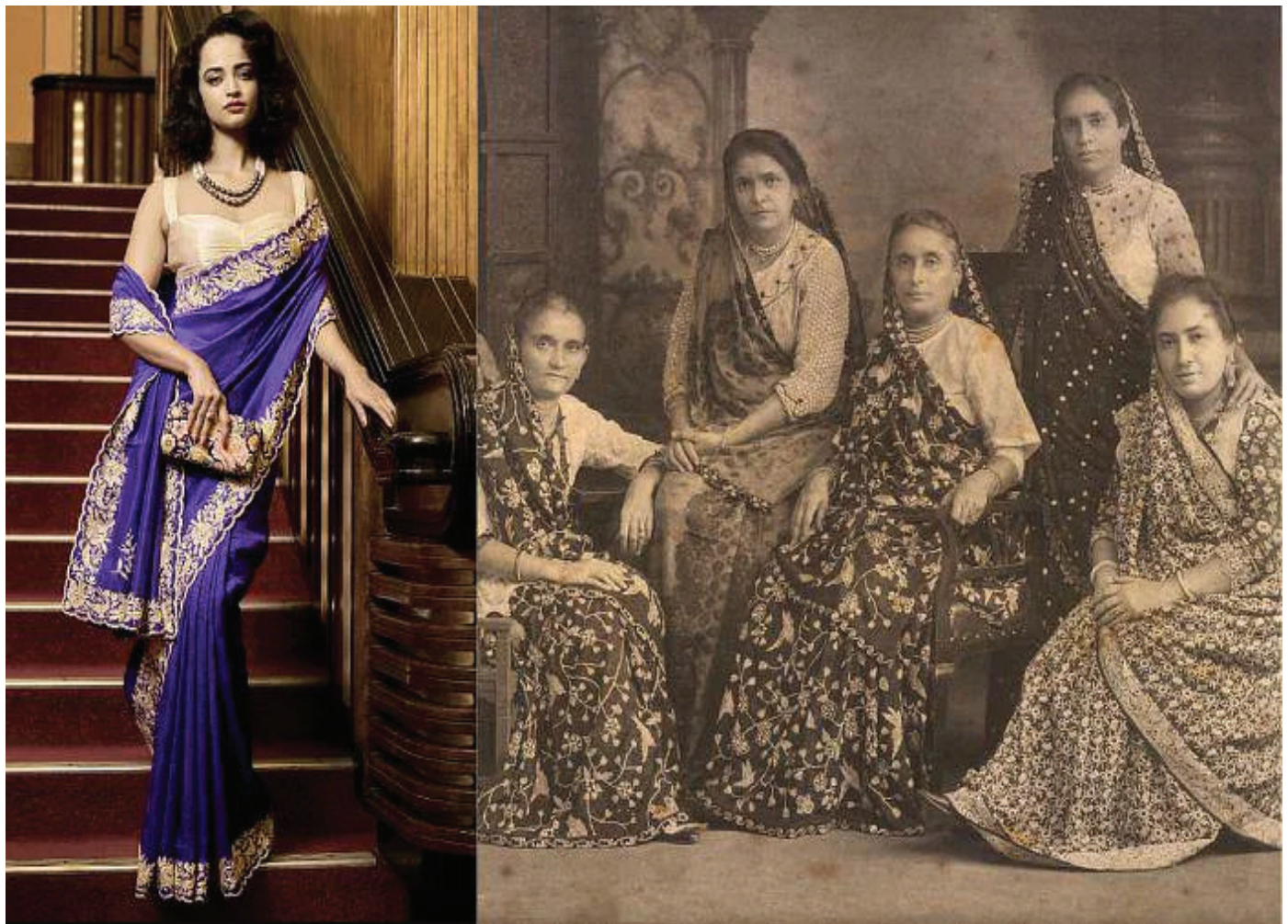
Tamil Nadu's Madisar saree is worn by the Brahmin community i.e. priestesses and scholars and has significance in the Iyengar and Iyer cultures. Madisar or Koshavam is a typical way in which the saree is worn by Tamil Brahmin women and dates back to ancient India (2nd century BC) and is nine yards in length. It's worn on occasions such as marriage, Seemandham, prayer rituals, death ceremonies.

Kerala's traditional Kasavu saree is known for its unique aesthetics and elegance – a white or off-white saree with a gold or silver-coloured border. The Malayali women wear it for weddings, temple visits and other special occasions and festivals.

Neeti Prakash 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.

Adopted by Persian refugees

Pointing out that India is one of the most important migrant destinations with five million immigrants in the country, **Manu Shrivastava** weaves a story about how the Parsis or Zoroastrians who, at the time, fled Persia, present-day Iran, to escape Islamic religious persecution took refuge off the coast in Gujarat in India and adopted its practices and culture. She explains that the Persian 'Gara' is actually a variant of the saree.



The distinct feature of a Parsi gara is the intricate embroidery on the fabric that lends it elegance and uniqueness. Zoroastrian Parsi and Irani women wear the gara on special occasions and is a family legacy passed down to generations

India has one of the most complex, diverse and vibrant migration histories in the world. Indians have travelled far and wide and, concurrently, millions of immigrants from other parts of the world have come to India and assimilated peacefully in the social fabric of the country.

When it comes to immigrants coming to India, one of the most important migrant destinations, there are five million immigrants in the country, as per the 2011 Census.

The United Nations' Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNHCR) estimates as per the January 2020 India Factsheet suggest that the number of refugees and asylum seekers in 2020 was 2,10,201.

India has been a safe and desired destination for immigrants for centuries. Today, the majority of India's immigrants are from neighbouring countries such as Bangladesh (3.2 million), Pakistan (1.1 million), Nepal (5,40,000) and Sri Lanka (1,60,000). But there are also the Afghans, Jews and the Parsis and Iranis.

The gara

One of the most significant immigrant groups that came to India was the Parsis or Zoroastrians who, at the time, fled Persia, present-day Iran, to escape Islamic religious persecution and were given refuge off the coast in Gujarat in India.

The refugees adopted the local language, which is Gujarati, and embraced local habits, cuisine and the Gujarati attire for women, the saree, which they call the Parsi Gara.

The word 'gara' comes from the Gujarati word 'garo' which means 'width' and is the Gujarati word for a saree. Today, the word 'gara' has come to mean the traditional saree worn by Indian Zoroastrian Parsi and Irani women. The women wear the gara on special occasions, weddings and festivals.

The distinct feature of a Parsi gara is the intricate embroidery on the fabric that lends it elegance and uniqueness. The embroidery work is known as Parsi embroidery.

The base fabric of the gara saree is a rich and thick silk, heavily and directly embellished with embroidery. The embroidered work on the gara can be found either through the entire width of the fabric or just along the borders.

The embroidery work can be hand-made or machine-made. Several designers are making efforts revive the traditional hand embroidery work in the gara.

The Chinese influence

During the 18th and 19th century, the Parsis were at the forefront of all major kinds of trade activities in India, especially with China. The Chinese province of Canton, now named Guangzhou, was a major hub of opium trade in China and had a significant presence of Parsis along with Europeans and Americans.

The opium produced in India was exported to China in large quantities and the Parsis had established a lucrative and profitable trade with China which played an important role in making wealthy merchants out of the Parsis. Renowned Parsi businessman Jamshetji Jeejeebhoy also made his fortune with the opium trade in China.

It was during this trade, the shipping vessels would return to India with all kinds of goods and antiques from China including tea, ceramics and embroidered silk textiles.

The Chinese silk fabric, woven on narrow looms, was not too wide and two separate pieces were stitched together to make the gara with the appropriate width. These were called the 'dor-pat' or 'do-patti' gara sarees.

Reviving the tradition

Today, the Parsi gara fabric is made of a variety of silk, crepe, lace, georgette, etc. The traditional gara motifs include 'kaanda papeta' meaning onion and potatoes, 'margha marghi' meaning rooster and hen, 'chakla chakli' meaning male and female sparrow, 'karoliya' meaning spider, etc. Among the Indian embroidery patterns, there are mango, peacock, etc.

The hand embroidery is done using satin, crewel, aari, stem stitches and specialised stitches such as the *jaali* technique and *khakha*. The threads used for the embroidery are mostly of violet and pink colour combinations. But, many variations can be seen now.

There are basically three patterns in a Parsi gara – The jaal work embroidery that is done all over the fabric; the motifs pattern also known as butis and border done on saree; and, a Parsi embroidered border which can be put in any saree. The motifs carry significance – for example, hundred-petalled rose is

for spirituality and lily symbolises health.

Parsi designer Ashdeen Lilaowala has been working on reviving the Parsi gara and the hand embroidery. Among the Parsis, the gara is now mostly worn for navjotes which is the initiation ceremony of the Zoroastrians, for weddings and special occasions or celebrations. He feels there's a need to keep the essence of the gara, which is the embroidery tradition, alive and innovate keeping modern needs and trends in mind.

More than a garment

For the Parsis, the Parsi Gara is a family legacy that is passed down to generations. Parsi women take pride in their gara that also signifies the beginning of a new phase in their lives. So the gara is an heirloom, an intricate embroidered pattern, famously known as 'Painting in thread'.

For the Parsis, buying a gara is akin to buying a piece of jewellery – because of its value, in money and tradition. It is something a woman will buy not just for herself but for someone who will inherit her belongings.

The authentic hand-embroidered Parsi gara, with the jaal work, beautiful pallu work in traditional motifs - inspired from Oriental, Indian and Persian cultures, is struggling for survival. At one time, a Parsi bride invariably had a gara in her trousseau; so much was its significance.

Wearing the gara

The gara is worn like the Gujarati saree – the saree or the cloth is draped around the body, first around the waist where it is tucked and finally over the shoulder. After the first drape around the body, the saree is taken from under the left arm, over the right shoulder like a Gujarati saree.

The leaf called 'pallav' or pallu is that part of the saree that is draped over the shoulder and the chest and the part that goes over the head is called the 'saur'.

After adjusting the drape of the pallu, the rest of the saree is pleated where one end of the saree is held between the index and middle fingers and other end by the thumb, pinky finger and ring finger. The pleats are then tucked into the center of the waist and pinned properly.

After the tucking of pleats and bringing the pallu in the front from behind the right shoulder, some women also tuck the corner of the pallu in the side on the waist.

The traditional Parsi gara embroidery is done by hands and can take days even weeks depending on the intricacy of the pattern. Recently, the patterns are being imitated using machines that makes the garment easier and quicker to make and cheaper as well.

New-age designers are innovating in fabric and design. So, in some Parsi gara, the embroideries are layered with various other heritage embroidery traditions and there's fusion, in others there's use of versatile cuts to create unique looks – to create something for every occasion.



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



Woof! Take me on a vacation with you

Pets work wonders for your body, soul, and mind. They stimulate your sense of well-being. They give you love, they give you laughter, but above all they provide a strong emotional bonding. Most people wanting to go for a vacation find it disconcerting that there are not many places where they can take their pets along. Gustasp and Jeroo Irani list some pet-friendly getaways where you can let your hair down with your furry soulmates.



A pet being carried by his owner on his morning walk at a pet-friendly resort

A comforting paw in your lap; that familiar look of unconditional love in those chocolate-puddle eyes and the world suddenly seems like a brighter place to live in. During the pandemic, lonely families and individuals turned to pets for emotional support, reveals Devendra Parulekar, founder of SaffronStays, a hospitality company that curates and has built a network of premium luxury homestays in India. There was time to nurture them as well. And, now, as the pandemic wanes, furry babies have become permanent members of the family. “Pet parents are taking shorter trips to pet-friendly resorts. Indeed, 40 percent of the bookings at Saffronstays are for pet-friendly villas that is one in every four bookings,” he adds.

“If you’re an avid pet lover, you’ll know that no holiday is quite complete without taking your family pet along”, “ states Amanpreet Bajaj, Airbnb General Manager for India, Southeast Asia, Hong Kong and Taiwan in a press release. He adds that when it comes to pet-friendly Airbnb stays, owners are seeking space, often in locations outside capital cities. “ With more than 25,000 pet-friendly Airbnb listings across India, we have something for even the fussiest four-legged family members,” he adds.

If you are considering taking your pet - cat, dog, bird in a cage – on a pet-friendly escape, there are now options in India where you can enjoy an idyll together. Some properties reportedly have pet-curated menus, pet beds and even adventure marshalls who baby-sit your furry baby while the rest of the family explores the environs. However, most have rules to be observed. Some allow pets after prior approval; some charge a fee, others don’t.

But certain rules are common to most properties... Pets are not allowed in lounges, restaurants, spa areas, near swimming pools and on furniture. They must be on a leash or in a carrier at all times when outdoors, and most resorts and home stays encourage pet parents to carry food, feeding bowl, and a pet bed for their four-legged proteges. Pet waste in the room and in the public areas has to be cleared by the owner. However, many will provide food from the kitchen if notified in advance. It’s best to check a hotel’s pet policy prior to booking.

Villas by Chandralok

The villas flooded our senses with shades of green and a post-monsoon wet-earth fragrance. A quick getaway to Lonavala, a two-hour drive from Mumbai, is a rite of passage for most Mumbaikars, at any time of the year. And Villas by Chandralok, a pet-friendly four-villa property, is ideal for family reunions and celebrations with (or without) your furry family in tow – be it dogs, cats or even birds. Indeed, get-togethers of any kind – with friends from overseas visiting their Motherland, even a romantic getaway for two.

“We love dogs, rescue dogs, live with dogs,” says Siddhi Ganatra who with her sister Heta owns and runs Villas by Chandralok. “There’s no way we would want our guests to feel/live differently,” she adds. Even as we checked in, Chaaya, a female canine, gazed at us with her liquid-brown eyes. She had been grossly abused in Mumbai and subsequently rescued, nurtured and healed with love by Siddhi and Heta in their



A pet canine at Rakkh resort accompanies guests on a trek

spacious Lonavala property. Three more gentle pooches dubbed M J, DJ and Tartuffi, eyed us curiously, and courteously escorted us to our four-room villa.

The design-led villas are a stand-out because the connection between the interiors and nature is so strong. The forest-like iridescent landscaping outside seems to fill the four-room villas (which come with cosy minuscule balconies) in a gentle haze of green. The luxury of space, greenery and its pet-paradise aura make this a retreat that your fur family would love to come home to. However, the luxurious edgy décor and vintage furniture encourage respect for the owners' impeccable tastes. Hence pets are discouraged from climbing onto the furniture.

Ultimately, boredom is not an option here. Relax with your pet on your private- pool-facing bench and bird watch; embark on a trek to one of the lakes; make forays into the forest, splash around in a stream en route, relax by your private pool at sundown ... And wake up to mornings filled with bird song and tender loving care for your pet family.

Rakkh

Rakkh resort is an eye-full, rimmed by mountains and valleys, where nature is the handmaiden, making it a perfect fit for a pet-friendly vacation.

Located in Palampur, Himachal Pradesh, the four and a half-acre resort, has 23 villas hewn into a hill along a pathway lined with forest-like vegetation. This makes Rakkh an ideal locale for a paw-some vacation as guests' furry family can gambol on a leash in the Great Outdoors, and when accompanied by their paw parents. The dining areas, spa and swimming pool, however, are out of bounds for pets.

What is likely to make pets feel right at home are Talli and Tina, two resident canines, who are akin to a reception committee, ready to nuzzle and befriend every guest on check in. Your pooch can hang out with these two canines while the other three resident ducks, three geese and three hens are also a convivial bunch. They waddle up to inspect new arrivals while a rooster crows his welcome.



Banjara Camps and Retreats property in the Himalayas surrounded by towering mountains can make for a paw-some vacation

Take your four-legged ward for a walk in the neighbouring village where locals welcome you with radiant smiles, or take off on a forest walk, splash in a stream or waterfall or merely star gaze at dusk in companionable silence. “After all, furry babies are family, too,” says Swati Makkar, resort manageress, “and deserve to be part of family vacations. Lots of outdoor space, activities and experiences, give us an opportunity to host pets as well,” she says.

Banjara Camps and Retreats

Located in the remote reaches of the Himalayas in Himachal Pradesh and Kumaon, Uttarakhand, and one in Punjab, Banjara Camps and Retreats could well be the paw-some vacation of your dreams.

Blessed with ample space and breath-taking environs for long leisurely walks and treks accompanied by friendly pooches from nearby villages, Banjara Camps and Retreats welcome four-legged family members of their guests. The flagship property, Banjara Camp and Retreat in Sangla, in the Kinnaur district of Himachal, is located in a lush apple orchard where plump red

orbs hang low in the season. Take in wrap-around views of towering mountains as you swing in a hammock, cuddling your pooch or feline. The only sound track is the gurgle of the river Baspa as it gushes through the valley. Camaraderie overflows in the evenings over cups of tea or later when dusk shrouds the soaring massifs and a bonfire crackles.

At their Banjara Orchard Retreat in Thanedar, a Himalayan market town, enfolded in apple and cherry orchards, the living is easy for a pet-friendly family. Located 80 km from Shimla at an altitude of 7,700 ft, Thanedar is the epicentre of the Himachali apple belt where apple trees are shrouded in netting to protect them from the occasional hail storms that happen in the monsoons.

With your furry ward in tow, embark on a walk in the village or a drive to Hatu Peak, 15 km away, via twisting roads edged with blue pines and shaded by sturdy muscled cedars, fir and spruce. Take in the sight of the eternal mountains needling the blue skies with their jagged peaks; and walk through dense forests with floors soft and mushy with pine needles and maple leaves... There's Tani Jubbar Lake with a Nag Devta temple and



A network of picturesque homestays, SaffronStays has 100 pet-friendly villas in India

the Saroga Forest for a refreshing morning walk with your pet.

Whenever you stay at any of the 11 Banjar mountain lodges in Himachal or Kumaon, or at Dera Bassi, gateway to Himachal, near Chandigarh, you will have the satisfaction of knowing that you did not leave a furry family member behind with a pet carer, and instead took your pet along to sequestered Himalayan locales where he or she could run free.

Saffron Stays

A network of picturesque homestays, SaffronStays has 100 pet-friendly villas in India enlisted in its system. Many are within driving distance from Mumbai and Pune. "More and more home owners are opening their hearts and homes to four-legged guests, post-pandemic. Canine and feline babies gave pet parents unconditional love and support at a time when they needed it the most and so demand for pet-friendly accommodation has risen," according to Devendra Parulekar, founder of SaffronStays. "Home owners are passionate about pets too," says Devendra. "The luxury of our estates is what draws pet parents. Large sunny lawns where pets can run around, private

spaces, azure pools and pet-friendly food, what's not to love about paw-cations?"

While the attitude of pet-friendly owners is that pets are like children and should be allowed to roam free in the estates, the usual restrictions apply within the homestay regarding pets and furniture. In homes where en suite facilities include bathtubs, pets are not allowed in the bathrooms and pet parents are encouraged to carry their own supplies in terms of food, water bowls, pet beds, pet hygiene products, poop bags, etc. Basic meals such as rice, boiled chicken veggies and rotis are provided for an extra charge.

The homestays are located in picturesque settings and ideal for families with pets and for large families with kids. Evocatively named, Birdsong on Madh Island in Mumbai, for instance, is a three-bedroom private home, 10 minutes from the beach where you and your buddy can frolic and play, go for a run or relax on a sit-out outdoors, lulled by a calming breeze.

The Cliff-edge Villa 270 Degrees is a homestay that fields ocean views in three directions. Located in Dapoli, 239 km from Mumbai, the five stunning sea-facing cottages are named after Dapoli's native flora – Jaswanti, Bakul, Aboli, Sugandhi, and



Sheru, the local canine takes a break in the meadows at Sangla

Shevanti – and can be booked individually.

Jaswanti is a bright intimate room, perfect for a couple and their furry family, with landscaped gardens and a man-made pond where your four-legged buddy can laze around. Mornings are cosy and filled with light and there are plenty of excursions to choose from. Drive to Suvarnadurg Sea Fort, just a 15 minute drive away or to Murud beach (3.5 km away) or the turtle breeding centre at Velas (49 km way).

Or head to Parsi Manor in Matheran, the only pedestrian

hill resort in the country, a three-hour journey from Mumbai. The 20th century vintage villa has four bedrooms and recalls a sepia-tinted era of four-poster beds and vintage easy chairs in the verandah.

And there are home stays in Alibaug, Panchgani and Nashik as well as up north in Bhimtal, Shimla, Kasauli, Dehradun and Mukteshwar. Down South, there are picturesque villas in Waynad, Mysore, Coonoor, Coorg, Ooty that welcome pets – even the furry, feathery and frisky ones.



Villas by Chandralok in Lonavala is a pet-friendly resort

Airbnb

The dejected wag of a tail or a pitiful meow as the family heads out on vacation could prompt pet parents to immediately re-think holiday plans. The thought of leaving your pet behind while the family frolics in distant lands could bruise the most stoic heart.

In 2021, Indian hosts with pet-friendly listings earned INR 1 billion, according to a press release from Airbnb. As of June 2022, pet-friendly stays made up almost one-third of all Indian listings, a 95% increase compared to the same time period in 2019. In addition, the top ten destinations for pet-friendly travel in India as of the second quarter of 2022 are: Bangalore, New Delhi, Goa, Lonavala, Hyderabad, Dehradun, Mumbai, Pune, Manali and Pondicherry.



An abandoned dog finds a home at Villas by Chandralok



A pet on a vacay at Airbnb enjoying the view outside its room

“When it comes to pet-friendly Airbnb stays, owners are seeking space, often in locations outside capital cities,” stated Amanpreet Bajaj, Airbnb general manager for India, Southeast Asia, Hong Kong and Taiwan. For example, ForestValley Treehouse in Madikeri, Coorg, is wrapped in the scented embrace of coffee plantations and has treehouses with valley views and wood-panelled rooms with en suite facilities and a kitchenette. Meena Bagh, Shimla, with its Himachali-cum-Swiss chalet type aura has cosy wood-panelled and mud-plastered walls with floors livened with bright throw rugs. Travellers with pets are given a preference in this charming home, committed to eco-friendly practices. The fit and feisty can go hiking, birdwatching, picnic in apple orchards with their pet, and are free to roam around in the fragrant forested hills.

And there are many more (in Lonavala, Goa, Dehradun, Manali, Gurugram, etc) where host families are ready to unfurl a welcome mat for pets of all sizes and species.

Contacts

<https://villasbychandralok.com/>
<https://rakkh.com/>
<https://www.banjaracamps.com/>
<https://www.saffronstays.com/>
<https://www.airbnb.co.in/>



Gustasp and Jeroo Irani are travel companions for whom life is a never-ending journey. Over the last 25 years they have travelled extensively across India and the globe, taking the rough with the smooth; sampling different cultures and cuisines. In the process they have trekked in the Australian Outback, slurped snake soup in HongKong, have danced with the Samburus in Africa, stayed with a local family in a Malay village, cracked the Da Vinci Code in Paris... For them, writing and photography are more than just freezing moments of that journey; it's a passion.

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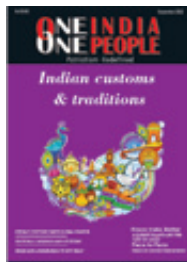
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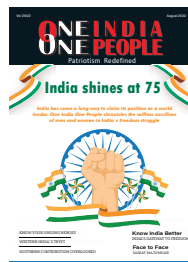
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“True knowledge liberates and keeps one’s arrogance in check.”

Vineet Gairola, a Ph.D. Scholar of Psychology at the Department of Liberal Arts, Indian Institute of Technology, Hyderabad, was recently awarded the Student Research Award 2021 by the American Psychological Association for his research into psychological meanings, origins, and patterns in spiritual ideation and practice in Uttarakhand Himalayas. He is also the winner of the Psychoanalytic Research Exceptional Contribution Award given by the International Psychoanalytical Association (IPA), London. He got the award for his research titled “Bhagavad Gita and Psychotherapy: A Cure for Soul?”

He speaks to **Tuhina Banerjee**. Excerpts:

You are the first from India to win the Student Research Award, 2021 given by American Psychological Association, and also the Psychoanalytical Research Exceptional Contribution Award conferred by the International Psychoanalytical Association, London. How does it feel like to get such widespread recognition?

It feels like a synchronous response from the universe. Every opportunity has a metaphysical basis to it. When you are working and enjoying doing what you do -- so much so that you start to live it -- it serves as ground zero of your work and establishes meaningful connections.

I recall in 2019 and 2020 when working as a Research Assistant at the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) and teaching final-year undergraduate students at Ambedkar University Delhi. I was working, going to the gym, playing music, presenting my paper at international conferences, and writing papers one after the other for which I have received these awards now. My main focus was on writing, and I enjoyed it thoroughly.

My Ph.D. proposal, ‘Analysis of the Psychological Meanings, Origins, and Patterns in Spiritual Ideation and Practice in Uttarakhand Himalayas’, explores the spiritual and mystical practices of the Uttarakhand Himalayas. It has received the Student Research Award 2021. It makes me happy. The work of my Ph.D. is in progress and I hope it will bring fresh insights into understanding our relationship with the sacred and about the ritual practices and processions of *devi-devtas* seen in the Uttarakhand Himalayas.



Vineet Gairola

So, your research covers the ritual worship practices and processions of the Uttarakhand Himalayas. Tell us about it.

For my recent fieldwork, I navigated a ritual procession of the goddess Chandika in the Rudraprayag district of Garhwal in Uttarakhand. It was a nine-month-long processional journey starting from October 15, 2021 to June 10, 2022. I participated in it for three months where I wore a *dhoti* as a part of the ritual protocol. I fasted for all those three months like the rest of the people who were walking with the *devi*. The palanquin of Chandika *devi* was a long pole made of bamboo which had a dome on top of it. On the top, it had yantras and idols of the *devi* along with numerous herbs which were ‘charged’ through the mantras. I walked about 750 km barefoot with the *devi*. I also met local healers known as *bakkiyas* and *pujaris* of various temples who experienced possession by the *devi* or a *devta* to whom the temple belonged. Their stories clearly demonstrate how *devi-devtas* are involved in the daily lives of the entire community.

How can Bhagavad Gita the soul cure? How do you think our old scriptures heal us psychologically?

It was one of the reasons why I curated the title of my book chapter like that. It is titled ‘Bhagavad Gita and Psychotherapy: A Cure for Soul?’, which is published in an edited book by Springer. It is not a text to be read, it is an experience to be realised. This is what precisely makes the Bhagavad Gita timeless. It addresses guilt, crisis, anxiety, sorrow, even cognitive distortions, and depression. It tells truly the ways of attaining harmony in the universe through action, knowledge, and bhakti. True knowledge is that which liberates and keeps one’s arrogance in check.



Vineet playing the dhol-damaun during the worship of the goddess Rajrajeshwari in Kandara village of Rudraprayag district, Uttarakhand

Dhol damun and devi devtas of Uttarakhand: From routes to roots. You presented this paper at a psychology conference at Fortis Hospital. Where does music figure in worship?

This was the first paper that I presented at an international conference organised by the National Academy of Psychology (NAOP) at Pondicherry University in 2019. Rhythmic instruments named *dhol-damaun* play a central role in various community ritual practices in Uttarakhand. Starting from birth, doing the *sanskaras*, marriage, to death, *dhol-damaun* are played together. The *dhol-damaun* and their sounds themselves are a repository of esoteric drumming knowledge known as *dholsagar*, literally, the ocean of drumming. There are different rhythms played for the deities out of which one is the rhythm of invoking the deity. I played it myself during the worship of the goddess Rajrajeshwari in Kandara village of Rudraprayag district in 2019. Without the music, the worship practices are understood as incomplete. It is something that the *devtas* long for. *Dhol* is understood as Shakti and *Damaun* is understood as Shiva. When *dhol-damaun* are played together, it is a cosmic assemblage of Shiva and Shakti which adds to the mystical power of the drumming practice.

How do you define mental well-being?

Mental and physical are two sides of the same coin just like the terms such as 'inside' and 'outside'. The 'and' between physical and mental, inside and outside are actually bridges, not silos. One must remember, the inner is the inner of the outer, and the outer is the outer of the inner. What we refer to as the body is the visible part of what we refer to as the mind and vice-versa. When we are feeling light and pleasant, there is certain exuberance around us,

isn't it? The word *swasthya* is important to understand this wholeness. The word denotes more than just healing and illness. *Swa* means "the Self" and *swasthya* then means one who is established in the Self. One who has to find the stillness within. The inner centering which the winds cannot move, which the blade cannot cut, and which the ocean cannot drown. Doing *dhyana* is one of the tenets of realising *swasthya*. It is a combination of our physical and mental capacities and capabilities, action, knowledge, and *bhakti*. True knowledge is that which liberates and keeps one's arrogance in check.

Many firms are giving importance to mental health. Some of them are giving their staff to unplug from work for 10 days twice a year. How do think the perception of mental health is changing in the corporate world?

The change is gradual and I hope it progresses in the right direction. I have also seen that the boom in catering to mental health during and after Covid-19 has resulted in some being self-proclaimed experts in psychology without proper training and experience. A deeper awareness is required to demystify what psychology really is and dispel the myths surrounding it. A single definition cannot encompass its depth. Broadly, it is about understanding our conscious and unconscious actions, patterns, and motivations in whatever we chose to do in our everyday life. To understand others, one must begin with oneself. One must start with "I don't know" rather than "I know" to delve deeper into the mysterious ordinariness of the everyday. As numerous surveys have demonstrated, corporate employees are prone to diabetes, heart disease, back pain, and blood pressure which also adversely affect their mental faculties. With respect to the corporate

world, yes, the change is there. People have started giving importance to their swasthya and that of their families. Through seminars, webinars, and interactive sessions which are increasing in the corporate world, people are learning about thoughts, emotions, patterns, how they transact in the everyday life, and how awareness of one's actions plays an important role.

How was the experience of teaching students about Yoga sutras by Patanjali and mystical practices in India?

This is something that I craved for a long time. I myself am interested in Yogasutra by Patanjali and perspectives from Upanishads and Bhagavad Gita which are profoundly psychological in nature. After I finished the course on Psychological Testing at Ambedkar University Delhi, 22 students approached me stating that they wanted to learn about perspectives on Indian psychology from me. It felt heart-warming that this enthusiastic bunch wants to learn psychological perspectives apart from what is expected of them. It clearly showed that they are intrinsically motivated in doing so. As it was the time of Covid during 2020, I taught them free of charge and online. We had a Google group where I used to distribute readings to the students.

What is your private research on Wilfred R Bion about? You won the Stephen Mitchell Award for it."

Wilfred Bion was born in India and he left India at the age of eight. That was striking for me as he left India but India never left

him. He was very fond of rain in India and his ayah who took care of him while he was in India. He participated in World War I. He is the only psychologist or psychoanalyst to participate in a World War! He worked with patients with psychosis. His writings are said to be profoundly mystical. He gave the concept of 'O' which he says is the absolutely unknowable and ultimate reality. It is also understood as a state. O as a state is without memory and without desire. Wilfred Bion suggested that the analyst or therapist must be in a state of O during the session. As I am a dancer and a musician as well, I tap into the music of one's writing. When I read the works of Wilfred Bion, I realised that his concept of O can be traced back to his experiences in India, specifically to the sound of Om that he used to hear in the temples. I wrote about this connection between his concept of O with Om in my paper 'On Wilfred R. Bion's Way of Being: Linking Truth, Thought, and Nostalgia' which received the Stephen Mitchell Award from the Society for Psychoanalysis and Psychoanalytic Psychology, Division 39 of the American Psychological Association (APA).



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



Countenance for all occasions

For all those who believe that the saree is the archetype of occasional wear, **Trisha Sharma** has an interesting dimension – that its decorum can break stereotypes and has the versatility to fit all circumstances. She explains how the apparel has refined itself for most Indian women by being integral to their daily lives and where they perform all the chores, they're supposed to, wearing a saree.



A 56-year-old woman working out in a gym in a saree became an internet sensation

A few weeks ago, in November 2022, a 56-year-old woman from Chennai became an internet sensation when a video of her working out in a gym wearing a saree went viral. She is seen working out with her daughter-in-law.

In the video that was shared on Instagram, jointly by Humans of Madras and Madras Barbell, the woman is seen working out in the gym - seen lifting heavy weights and dumbbells and working out on other gym machines and equipment – all wearing a saree.

The viral video carried captions that read: "I'm 56 now and still continue to work out. Even your attire shouldn't stop you from doing what you wish to do! My daughter-in-law and I work out regularly. I was 52 when I first hit the gym. It all started when I was diagnosed with severe knee and leg pain."

Breaking stereotypes

The video not only garnered great response from netizens who congratulated the woman for working out at that age in a gym, it was also a shout out to women breaking stereotypes, in this case, working out wearing a saree.

The video was captioned: "She's 56. So what? She wears a saree and casually does powerlifting & pushups! Age is just a number - rightly proves one of the powerful, (young by heart), inspiring mothers-in-law. Her dedicated & supportive daughter-in-law works out with her regularly too. Isn't this called 'growing with each other'? How inspiring is this to watch!" The video had received more than a million views and inspired many women, even the young, to be healthy and confident.

Not too long ago, Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer Awanish Sharan shared a video on his Twitter handle that went viral within minutes. It was of women playing the physically-demanding Indian sport of *kabaddi*... wearing saree...even covering their heads with the pallu!

The video, from Chhattisgarh, became an instant hit on social media and garnered a lot of positive response from netizens who were thrilled to see these women playing amid a crowd supporting and cheering them. The tweet read: "Are we less than anyone!!! Women's Kabaddi in Chhattisgarh Olympics."

The video was a display of women empowerment, said one user. Another responded, "Very good recreational activity, every (one) should follow this." Praising the women, one user commented, "Hum kisise kum nahi Village women playing #Kabaddi #Chhattisgarh."

Challenging norms

The initiative taken by these women, what some may call challenging 'traditions' was actually being themselves. For most Indian women, a saree is integral to their daily lives, where they perform all the chores, they're supposed to, wearing a saree.

So, a working woman rushing to office, or a homemaker pacing to the market buy groceries, or a woman farmer walking to the fields to perform the most difficult tasks – all do wearing a saree, and without a complain.

For the non-versed and the close-minded, the saree and the women wearing it are put into boxes...into clichéd roles of a housewife, a traditional woman, a bride - a demure woman who will be timid in mannerisms, dutiful and obedient.

For others, a saree is a symbol of sensuality and is often used to accentuate a woman's body for appeal. In fact, in the West, saree is seen as a 'pretty' garment that makes a woman look beautiful. The Indian women living outside of India, use saree as a traditional outfit, wearing it only on special occasions, wedding functions, temple visits, during festivals such as Diwali, Navratri, etc., and family gatherings.

What most forget in that, for Indian women, saree is a garment that they wear, comfortably, easily and can do almost anything draping one.

How many of you can remember your mother, grandmother, aunt or neighbour 'always' wearing a saree, no matter what time of the day it is and what season, working incessantly, completing the daily chores of the house and beyond. She can perform any indoor or outdoor activity, effortlessly, wearing a saree.

What may look like a complex and very long garment, that requires fine draping skills and even finer skills to keep in intact while doing 'anything', is but a simple piece of clothing for these 'superwomen'. They won't think for a second before indulging in what might be a physically-demanding activity. The rest will only judge and draw boundaries for what women in saree can and must do.

The extremes

A few months ago, a video of a young woman went viral.

She was performing acrobatics wearing a saree. The jaw-dropping video showed the young woman performing somersaults, where she aced the forward roll and landed on her feet, effortlessly, in the saree. The performer was an influencer and gymnast from Haryana who, on her social media profile, pronounces herself to be a 'National Gold Medallist Gymnast.'

In another incident that erased the 'restrictions' that come with saree and smashed gender stereotypes, two men in Chicago (USA) wore sarees to their friend's wedding who was an Indian. While women have often worn *male* clothing over the years and even made it into fashion choices, the reverse is still in nascent stages and has rare acceptability.

The wedding videographers who were covering the event shared the video on their social media handles and wrote: "Just a typical wedding morning with the groom's two best men walking down Michigan Ave in sarees." The video also shows a woman assisting the men in wearing the saree as they get ready for the wedding. They even completed the traditional look by

The exceptions

Saree has a global appeal and acceptance where, not just the Indians abroad, but foreigners also embrace it as a gesture of their respect for Indian culture. On the other hand, there are those who consider saree as traditional attire not suitable for all occasions.

In September of last year, a south Delhi restaurant drew heavy flak when it allegedly denied entry to a woman wearing a saree. Apparently, the woman was denied entry into the restaurant because her attire did not fall under the restaurant's category of 'smart casuals' and they could only allow people wearing these into the restaurant.

The woman who was denied entry posted her ordeal on social media. She wrote, "Listen carefully to this video as there is a restaurant in Delhi where saree is not a smart outfit. The humiliation that happened because of my saree yesterday was bigger and heart-wrenching than any other insult that happened to me till now."

She added, "Saree is not allowed in the restaurant as Indian Saree is now not a smart outfit. What is the concrete definition of Smart outfit please tell me."

Shocked at the incident, one user wrote, "The problem is not Saree. It is the mentality of an Indian slave protecting the right of entry to some exclusive, whites only pre-1947 club. If it is western, it's admirable." Another commented, "Denying entry because the patron is dressed in torn, shredded jeans or is wearing inappropriate footwear is perfectly understandable, but refusing entry for being draped in a saree is absolute stupidity."

Trisha Sharma 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.

India's global ambassador

*The magic of the Indian saree has crossed the shores and has an enduring appeal for women across the world. **Nandini Rao** cites a number of examples where international celebrities across all spheres have been charmed and swept off their feet by the saree which has emerged as a true global ambassador of Indian culture.*



Samantha Cameron looks radiant in a stunning scarlet saree as she joins her husband for the Indian PM's rally at a packed Wembley Stadium

The Indian saree has a global appeal. The magic of this ethnic Indian garment is eternal and far-reaching and has enamoured one and all. The saree has evolved from traditional attire worn by Indian women to a fashion statement and a global ambassador, representing India worldwide and symbolising Indian culture.

The beautiful, delicate garment transcends social status and vocation. Women from all walks of life wear the saree – homemaker, politician, teacher, celebrity and more. Even foreigners who visit India don't miss a chance to wear the saree. The saree has become a symbol of Indian culture and the exquisite garment has many takers, even beyond Indian borders.

Powerful women across the world such as politicians, celebrities, socialites, singers and performers Hollywood celebrities, for example, have donned the saree on multiple occasions



The queen of pop, Lady Gaga looked like a queen in an ivory saree designed by Indian fashion designer Tarun Tahiliani

and embraced the elegant Indian wear. Pamela Anderson, Ashley Judd, Jessica Alba, Halle Berry, Paris Hilton, Oprah Winfrey and many more have worn sarees and surprised their fans.

International celebrities don saree

Music sensation Lady Gaga, known for her quirky looks and bold fashion statements, created ripples across social media the world over and left her fans in awe when she wore the Indian garment, the saree, to an event earlier in 2022.

The saree was designed by famous Indian fashion designer Tarun Tahiliani. The queen of pop, Lady Gaga looked like a queen in the ivory saree and brought back saree in the limelight worldwide. The designer says, "The saree gives you license to be as revealing or covered up as you want. It can inhabit your grandmother's world or the world of a Versace dress."

Canadian-American actress and model Pamela Anderson also made waves, in India and across the world, when she wore Indian clothes during the famous appearance in reality television show Big Boss in 2010. The diva wore a saree inside the Big Boss house and captivated one and all with her appearance. The iconic desi look by Anderson who is famous for her role in Baywatch is one for the books. She pulled off the saree look with grace and style and even accessorised her saree with silver bangles and a bindi.

Popular English model and actress Elizabeth Jane Hurley aka Liz Hurley has been one of the biggest endorsers of the elegant Indian attire. Most recently, in 2019, the ‘Bedazzled’ actress celebrated Christmas in a unique style by wearing a stunning off-white saree with a heavily-embellished border.

She was earlier married to Indian businessman Arun Nayar. Their wedding was an elaborate affair and took place at the Umaid Bhawan Palace where Liz wore a pink silk saree that was heavily encrusted with jewels and made her look like the perfect ‘Indian’ bride. A lover of sarees, Liz, in one of her trips to Mumbai for a charity event embraced the saree again. She wore a white georgette saree embellished with mukaish work complete with a metallic bindi and a pair of glittering earrings.

Other celebrities who have aced the saree look include socialite and model Paris Hilton who wore it when she visited India to promote her luxury brand; tennis sensation and model Anna Kournikova who wore a baby blue saree with white embroidery at a tennis exhibition in Dubai; Hollywood actress Ashley Judd wore a purple saree at the YouthAIDS Benefit Gala in Virginia, USA; Brazilian model Giselle Bundchen set the mercury rising when she wore a sequined saree by Suneet Verma for a magazine photoshoot.

Powerful women love saree

One of the most influential and powerful women in the world, Oprah Winfrey, once draped an orange and gold saree when she visited India and attended a party hosted by socialite Parmeshwar Godrej in Mumbai. Oprah is an American talk show host, television producer, actress, author and philanthropist, best known for her talk show ‘The Oprah Winfrey Show,’ broadcast from Chicago, which ran in national syndication for 25 years, from 1986 to 2011.

Media mogul Oprah’s love for saree began when, in 2005, Indian actor Aishwarya Rai Bachchan appeared as the guest on her show as part of ‘Women Across the Globe’ segment and Aishwarya draped the traditional Indian outfit, the saree, on Oprah during the show. Oprah remarked that she felt ‘sensual’ after wearing the light-pink coloured saree.

In 2014, former British Prime Minister David Cameron’s wife Samantha attended a Diwali party in London wearing a beautiful flowing royal blue saree with a detailed gold trim. The PM gave a speech on the contribution of eight million Hindus in the UK to the country and launched the new Encyclopaedia of Hinduism – an 11-volume project involving 1000 contributors.

When Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited UK in 2015, Samantha Cameron wore a saree for a rally at Wembley Stadium for the PM’s speech. In fact, in 2013, Samantha had worn a russet-coloured saree for a visit to the Swaminarayan Mandir at Neasden in north-west London. It was former British PM Tony Blair’s wife Cherie Blair who started the trend of dressing up in sarees and salwar suits for meetings with the South Asian community in Britain, and what came to be known as saree diplomacy.

American socialite, media personality and business-woman Kimberly Noel Kardashian or Kim Kardashian, as she is popularly known, has expressed her love for Indian attire time and again. One of the biggest celebrities of her time, with fan following across the world and more than 336 million followers on Instagram, Kim wore a Sabyasachi saree and other ethnic outfits for a magazine photoshoot recently.



Media mogul Oprah’s love for saree began when, in 2005, Indian actor Aishwarya Rai Bachchan appeared as the guest on her show. Here she is seen with Aishwarya and Abhishek Bachchan

She posted on her social media handle: “The sarees, the jewellery, the clothes — everything was so beautiful! I told my show (Keeping Up With the Kardashians) that we have to figure out how to get to India.”

Indian designers take saree global

Late Indian costume designer Bhanu Athaiya had an illustrious career spanning over a hundred 100 films where she worked with legendary Indian filmmakers such as Guru Dutt, Raj Kapoor, B.R. Chopra, Vijay Anand, etc. and international directors such Conrad Rooks and Richard Attenborough (of ‘Gandhi’ fame). She had won the Academy Award for the Best Costume Design in 1983 at the 55th Academy Awards for the epic film ‘Gandhi’ by Attenborough.

Bhanumati Annasaheb Rajopadhye was born on 28 April 1929 in Kolhapur, Maharashtra – a city known for art. Born to Annasaheb Rajopadhye, a painter and photographer from a wealthy family and Shantabai Rajopadhye, she was the third of the seven children.

Her antique textile collection was up for auction after her death. It comprised a silky bridal Banarasi, a pink brocade kunchi of Maharashtrian tradition, heirloom textiles, zari Paithanis, South-style silk sarees, etc.

To document century-old exquisite heirloom textiles, the auction house brought in another avid lover and collector of sarees, the Maharani of Baroda Radhikaraje Gaekwad, who has an inspiring collection of handlooms and heirlooms herself. The royal is an active social media user and regularly posts images of herself draped in lovely sarees from her exquisite collection. She is one of the most influential brand ambassadors of sarees in the country presently.

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

A wholesome entertainer

Hrishikesh Mukherjee belonged to the rare breed of film-makers who made films that touched the common chord of masses. Himself an editor par excellence, his films did not have larger-than-life characters but were peppered by quality music. From a tear jerker like Anand to a humorous Chupke Chupke, he could straddle all genres with equal expertise. Shoma A. Chatterji writes a centenary tribute.



Film maker Hrishikesh Mukherjee

Hrishikesh Mukherjee, who migrated from Kolkata to Mumbai to find his footing in films, celebrates 100 years this year. Mukherjee began his career in 1945, where he learnt editing on the job at New Theatres in Calcutta (now Kolkata). “There was no FTII then and we learnt mostly through observing others at work, or while working ourselves. Those who could have taught us did not. World War II brought a slump in film production and then, those who were willing to teach, could not.” His first independent work as editor was for the Bengali film *Tathapi*. “I then came down to Bombay in 1951 to team up with Bimal Roy who too, had just migrated.” He edited films like *Maa*, *Do Bigha Zamin*, *Parineeta*, etc. By then, he was bent on getting into direction seriously and his first effort at producing and directing his own film was *Musafir*, composed of three short stories conceived by Mukherjee himself while Ritwik Ghatak collaborated on the script.

“I think I am the only director to have directed the triumvirate of Hindi cinema – Dilip Kumar, Dev Anand and Raj Kapoor,” he would proudly recall. “My first film *Musafir*, shot in Black-and-White, released in 1957, was released all over India for a meager ₹ six lakh. Today, the ambience has changed. Our times have come to an end. We must make way for the new generation of cinema culture being redefined by the new entertainment symbols like MTV, rap, uncensored video on which a child can watch a blue film for ten rupees. I am no part of this scene and I don’t wish to be one. Besides, in my seventies, I do not have the patience to work with an entire team that one needs to make a film. I am easily annoyed and irritated.”

Following a chronic arthritis that restricted his movements severely towards the last years of his life, Mukherjee went on undaunted to work as long as he could and continued to enter-

tain with wholesome family entertainment enriched by rich performances, beautiful musical score and a powerful story.

He not only gave break to absolutely new faces, but he could also extract completely out-of-the-box performances from actors who already were slotted into their own genre of films. Dharmendra for instance, gave his best performance as a poet and a lover in *Anupama* opposite Sharmila Tagore. Sharmila too, had the rare opportunity of doing a very low-key character who hardly speaks. Dharmendra's most outstanding performance was in Mukherjee's film *Satyakaam* which, however, turned out to be a commercial flop. In *Chupke Chupke*, Amitabh Bachchan came out of his angry-young-man type and added spice with his comic take in an interesting role pretending to be a professor of Botany. Bachchan gave mind-blowing performances in *Alaap* and *Namak Haraam*. *Alaap* had flopped but it was one of Mukherjee's best-made films exploring the multiple layers that make a father-son relationship.

Khubsoorat gave a completely different perspective to the talents that lay hidden in Rekha while veteran Ashok Kumar marked one of his milestone performances in *Aashirwad*. *Mili* presented Bachchan as a character that evolves from a pessimistic, unfriendly man who hates kids and avoids socialising to an empathetic and enlightened lover while Jaya complimented him only as she could. *Arjun Pandit* presented Sanjeev Kumar in a very unusual role on the story based on a novel by the noted Bengali littérateur Banaphool. Rajesh Khanna could hardly repeat his performance in *Anand* where, dying of cancer, he spreads hope and cheer among people who have a long life ahead of them. Johnny Walker perhaps got his greatest break in a small cameo in the film. Rajesh Khanna did a completely against-the-grain character in *Bawarchi* adapted from Tapan Sinha's *Golpo Holeo Shatti*.

Like most talented filmmakers, Mukherjee had a wonderful ear and feel for music and chose his music directors and lyricists with great care. Almost all music directors of his time scored the music for his films. *Alaap* had music by Jaidev while Rahi Masoom Raza wrote the lyrics and the dialogue. *Bawarchi*'s music was scored by Madan Mohan while *Chupke Chupke* and *Mili*'s music was by S.D. Burman. *Bemisaaal* which did not do well but had melodious songs had the score done by R.D. Burman. *Naram Garam* did not do well commercially but it was a hilarious film with a mind-blowing music track by R.D. Burman. Lakshmikanth-Pyarelal composed for *Satyakam* while Hemant Kumar wrote the music for *Majhli Didi* and *Anupama*. *Anupama* was edited by Das Dhaimade instead of Mukherjee himself who is one of the best editors Indian cinema has ever produced. The best of all these is Pandit Ravi Shankar who wrote the music tracks for *Anupama* with lyrics penned by Shailendra. This film was also edited by Das Dhaimade.

His first film *Musafir*, has Salil Chowdhury's name as music director while Ritwik Ghatak is credited with the three stories in the film. Dilip Kumar interestingly, sang his only song in *Musafir* lending his own voice. Salil Chowdhury is also responsible for several other films of Mukherjee such as *Chhaya* and *Mem-didi*. *Anari*, *Aashiq* and *Asli Naqli* had music by Shankar Jaikishan. Incidentally, Motilal, one of the most outstanding 'gentleman' actors of Indian cinema, portrayed a memorable cameo in *Asli Naqli*. Vasant Desai scored the music for *Aashirwad* which has the unforgettable *railgadi* song – actually a poem – recited to rhythmic beats by Ashok Kumar to kids in a park.

Among the younger generation of filmmakers, Hrishikesh Mukherjee admired the work of Gautam Ghosh. In television when satellite channels did not rule your daily time-table, he liked Nalini Singh's *Hello Zindagi*. He admired Mani Ratnam and



Hrishkesh Mukherjee not only gave break to absolutely new faces, but he could also extract completely out-of-the-box performances from actors who already were slotted into their own genre of films

About the state of television in the country at the time, he said, "today's television programmes are 90 per cent entertainment. It is a *pot pourri* of everything. There are current affairs, there is MTV, and there are chat shows, game shows, serials, and soaps. Television has offered me the opportunity of working with some of the best talents on the small screen from Neena Gupta to Alok Nath, from Pankaj Kapoor to Renuka Israni, from Rajendra Gupta to Harish Patel, actors from the National School of Drama I might never have got to work with had I not got into television. I might want to make a serial tomorrow. I might not want to; I do not know. I am too tired. There is talk about a feature film too. And at this point, all I can say is – let's wait and watch."

Honesty has marked all his works no matter whether it was a sentimental tear-jerker like *Anand*, or offered an interesting insight into adolescent hero-worship like *Guddi*. Neat entertainment with lovely music enriched with rich lyrics often penned by brilliant lyricists have been the hallmark of his films from *Namak Haram* to *Khoobsoorat*, from *Abhimaan* to *Anupama*.

He drew heavily from Bengali literature, which made his films very "humane", as Gulzar puts it. Each film had a subtle of social message be it the neglect of the girl child in *Anupama* or the unscrupulous capitalist vs. the toiling, starving worker in *Namak Haram*. "Your art is your attitude to life," he'd admitted once. But he always rated the national award-winner *Satyakam* as his best film, which was produced and acted in by Dharmendra who also rates it as his best.



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.

Transgenders

Fighting to be counted

*The transgender community in India has been battling heroically to be treated like equal citizens. While the victories are remarkable what is shameful is that the community is forced to struggle for what is rightfully theirs. **Lina Mathias** observes that the momentum of public partnership in these struggles must gather pace.*



As the transgender community struggles to demand its rightful place as citizens there are many difficulties and obstacles that they have to face on account of their identity.

India's transgender community has had a long history in the country's various spheres and has contributed in various facets of life. Its trajectory has witnessed periods of acceptance, brutal rejection, stigmatisation and heroic efforts to claim its rightful place. The COVID-19 pandemic which has still not loosened its grip completely was particularly harsh on the community.

Recently there were two news reports about transgender persons in India that were indicative of the contradictory perceptions about the community.

On 9 December 2022, the Bombay High Court had expressed its displeasure at the state government not implementing the Supreme Court's directions that recognised the rights of transgender persons. These include reservations in educational institutions and government jobs. Two transgender persons had petitioned the Maharashtra Administrative Tribunal (MAT) seeking the option of "third gender" in the application forms for the post of police constables.

The Maharashtra Police's recruitment drive in December has now received 10 applications from transgender persons (eight for posts of police constables and two for drivers). The state government has told the court that it will frame the rules setting the standards for the physical tests by February 2023. This outcome was a result of a tenacious battle by transgender Arya Pujari who is also one of the 10 applicants. Pujari's efforts to gain this right are truly noteworthy and spanned four years.

Wanting meaning and acceptance

What the 22-year-old Pujari told *Newslandry* is poignant and incredibly brave: "I want to make my life meaningful. That's why I want to become a police official. The most important thing is that my parents shouldn't think they were cursed by giving birth to me. I want them to hold their heads high."

A few days before this development, newspapers reported that a transwoman from Delhi had complained that she was coerced into resigning as a teacher from a private school in Kheri

(Uttar Pradesh) because of her identity. The National Commission for Women (NCW) took cognisance of her complaint and notified the local police to inquire into the issue. The police report is now awaited. While the teacher Jane Kaushik has complained of harassment at the school from colleagues and students and being forced to leave, the school authorities have said the teacher's incompetency was the cause. Kaushik has pointed out that she has a Master's degree along with a BEd degree and was employed by the school after four rounds of interviews. However, she was asked to leave within a week of joining.

Right to choose gender

It was in 2014 that the Supreme Court ruled that since it is the right of every human being to choose their gender, it was granting the right to those who do not identify as male or female to be recognised as the third gender. The SC directed the government to ensure quotas for transgender persons in jobs and educational institutions like those for other minorities.

Gender justice activists put the number of transgender persons in India at approximately five million. The term '*hijra*' is a catchall phrase in India for transgender, transsexuals, cross-dressers, transvestites and eunuchs.

However, there are distinctions that need to be understood and appropriately named. The SC in its 15 April judgement had defined the terms used for the different transgender communities.

As the transgender community struggles to demand its rightful place as citizens there are many difficulties and obstacles that they have to face on account of their identity.

One aspect that is crucial and needs urgent attention is how the lack of official documentation hampers the community's access to social and other public benefits. As news reports pointed out during the pandemic lockdown period the government announced that each transgender person would receive a direct transfer of ₹ 1,500 along with ration provisions. However, only a miniscule section actually received these benefits because a larger section did not have bank

Lack of official documentation

Like other severely marginalised communities, this community suffers due to lack of documentation that is needed in almost every sphere of public life. In 2009, the Election Commission allowed transgenders to choose their gender as "other" on ballot forms. The Census 2011 offered the option of 'Other' to declare a citizen's sex apart from male and female. While this was a first and a welcome one the either male or female only ways followed in so many other identification processes in the public domain continue.

The harassment and discrimination suffered by the transgender community in almost every field including health services is well known. The socially accepted binary of male or female forces them to choose either. The trauma of sexual

bullying, assaults, mockery in public and other forms of harassment is the lot of most transgender persons right from birth.

Despite the fact that their blessings are considered auspicious at wedding and birth ceremonies, their sources of livelihood have been severely restricted. World history is replete with how royal courts were familiar with members of the transgender communities and the important roles they played therein. Closer to our times however begging, singing and dancing and prostitution have been traditionally considered the two sources to eke out a rather uncertain living income.

Tamil Nadu as pioneer

A number of states in India have over the past decades made attempts to ensure that the transgender community is able to exercise its rights and primarily equip themselves to seek employment. Among these states are Tamil Nadu, Karnataka (announced a third gender reservation in police recruitment in September 2022) and a few others. In fact, the Tamil Nadu Aravanigal (Transgender) Welfare Board was formed in 2008 to coordinate social programmes and help the community's access to public schemes. A UNDP report titled *The Case of Tamil Nadu Transgender Welfare Board 2012* attributes it to "factors (that) ranged from gain in the political support as a legitimate minority, increase in the acceptance of the general public and mass media, and advocacy efforts of transgender community leaders and activists and civil society."

There is a wealth of significance in this succinct statement in the report's executive summary. For example, the *Indian Express* wrote about the Ektara Collective's latest film *Ek Jagah Apni*. It shows the experience of two trans women and their search for a house. This is not a lone effort of course. Several non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working among the community and activists have used all forms of media to ensure that public awareness of its issues grows.

As the UNDP report mentioned above says public awareness and acceptance has grown but much more needs to be done. As the testimonies of many of the transgender persons show let alone societal acceptance, they are not accepted within their immediate families.

The transgender community has shown remarkable resilience. The advocacy and struggles of many among them are bearing fruit. But it is not merely the community's duty to ensure that the authorities treat them like citizens with rights. It is society at large that must join in the efforts and examine its own complicity.

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

PUPUL JAYAKAR (1915-1997)

The craft catalyst

Pupul Jayakar nee Mehta was an Indian writer, social worker, philanthropist, revivalist, cultural consultant and activist, known for putting traditional Indian arts, crafts and textiles on the global platform and making sustainable weaving, handlooms and handicrafts in post-independent India.

Pupul was a combination of disarming honesty, blithe spirits, wide-ranging erudition and articulation. Her unconventional ideas earned her criticism and even abuse but she refused to budge. She believed in the credibility of working with smaller groups.

Born in a middle class Gujarati Brahmin family, in Etawah, UP, the transferrable job of her ICS father enabled her to absorb early the local crafts and traditions and nuances of India, its contradictions, disparities, and inherent strengths. Her proximity to three successive prime ministers, Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi, and appointment as cultural adviser to latter two, established her cultural suzerainty. She presided over the country's cultural scene for nearly 40 years.

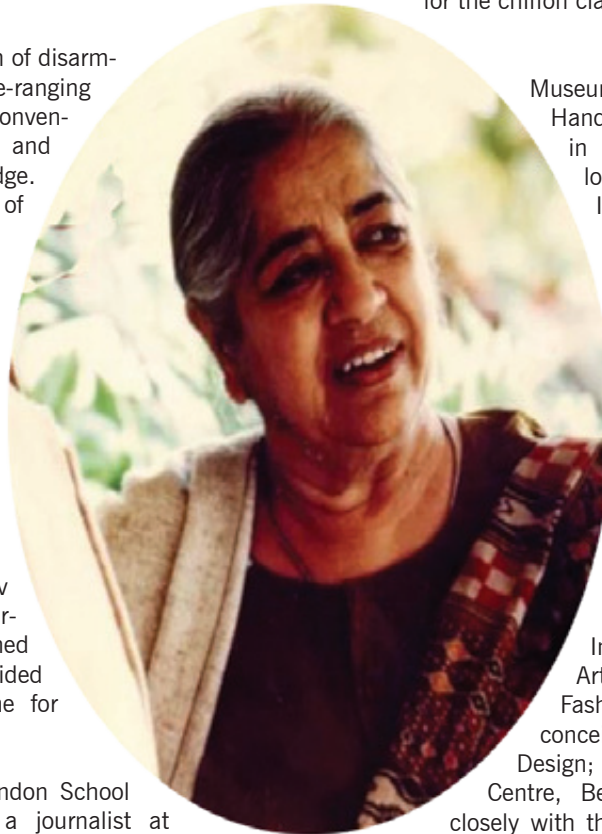
Graduating from the London School of Economics, she trained as a journalist at Bedford College, London in 1936, but was denied a job with the Times of India being a woman. In 1937 she married Manmohan Jayakar, a barrister and settled in Bombay where she launched Toy Cart, an English-language children's magazine.

Her personal life was full of emotional upheavals. In 1948, she met J. Krishnamurti, the philosopher and helped establish the Krishnamurti Foundation in India and abroad. Assistant to Congress activist Mridula Sarabhai of the Kasturba Trust, she was also Assistant Secretary of women's affairs in the National Planning Committee.

To her, a piece of fabric was a synthesis of texture, colour and design. She collaborated with international designers, inviting French designer Pierre Cardin to India to explore and incorporate traditional Indian fabrics in his designs.

Thereafter, many leading European and American fashion designers delved into the trove of Indian textiles,

creating high fashion. It set the stage for establishing institutions of design and fashion in India. Her regenerating India's second largest economic sector after agriculture, brought about, possibly inadvertently, a radical change in the dress and style of the urban woman in India. It became fashionable for the chiffon clad elite to wear handloom sarees!



She founded the National Crafts Museum in 1956; the Handloom and Handicrafts Export Corporation of India in 1958; the Handicrafts and Handlooms Corporation of India and the All India Handicrafts Board. In the 1980s, she organised a number of Indian arts festivals in France, USA and Japan and during Rajiv Gandhi's tenure, the Apna Utsav Festivals.

Pupul was associated with the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage, which worked for restoration of monuments, their management, and advocacy of heritage property conservation; the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, and the National Institute of Fashion Technology in New Delhi. She conceived the idea of a National School of Design; established the Weavers' Service Centre, Besant Nagar, in Madras; worked closely with the Crafts Museum, New Delhi and the Calico Museums of Textile, Ahmedabad and chaired the Bharat Bhavan in Bhopal.

Author of 17 books on textiles, terracotta and rural crafts, her two biographies: J. Krishnamurti: A Biography and Indira Gandhi: An Intimate Biography were acclaimed. She also co-authored the catalogue introduction for a Museum of Modern Art exhibition titled The Textiles and Ornamental Arts of India.

Pupul was awarded the Padma Bhushan in 1967 for social service. A biopic titled Emergency, with actress Mahima Chaudhary as Pupul, and Kangana Ranaut as Indira Gandhi based on the 1975 chapter is slated to be released in 2023.

Pupul passed into the ages in her artefact-studded flat in Mumbai, dying of cardiac arrest aged 82.



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

VIKRAM GOKHALE (1945-2022)

The actor who didn't have to act

Vikram Gokhale (14 November 1945 - 26 November 2022) was a well-known Indian film, television and stage actor, director and writer, noted for his roles in Marathi theatre, and Marathi and Hindi films.

An actor beyond boundaries, his skills were legendary. Oscillating between the many worlds of entertainment, he was a creative and versatile actor. He was so much into his characters that one never saw Vikram Gokhale, but only the characters he portrayed.

With an ever-smiling countenance, he was also a person with a big heart and broad social consciousness. He was unmatched in skills with body language and eye expression and confidence was second to none. Slipping into diverse roles, he was known for his voice, diction, and dialogue delivery. A master of the dramatic pause and the grand-master of dialogue delivery, he lent dignity to all his roles.

He felt that an actor should not hard-sell skills. Acting did not have to be about peddling abilities. To him, acting was the art of creating the illusion of the truth.

As a fourth-generation artiste of a family of performers, his great-grand-mother, Durgabai Kamat, was a trailblazer as the first Marathi female actor to have acted in the Hindi film industry. Her daughter Kamlabai was the first female actor to act as a child artiste. One of her three sons was Chandrakant Gokhale, Marathi theater singer and film actor who was also a senior journalist and Editor of the weekly Swarajya and Assistant Editor of Sakal in Pune. His younger brother Mohan was also an Indian film, television and theater actor.

His four-decade career started with Marathi stage. He made his mark in films like Natsamrat, Lapandav, Kalat Nakalat, Vazir, Bala Gau Kashi Angar, Anumati and Mukta, Mee Shivaji Park and AB Aani CD, etc. He was last seen in the 2021 Godavari. In February 2016, due to a throat ailment, Vikram quit the stage, but continued to work in films.

His Hindi films began with his debut in 1971 with Amitabh Bachchan's Parwana. Others include Hum Dil De

Chuke Sanam, Agneepath, Khuda Gawah, Insaaf, Salim Langde Pe Mat Ro, Bhool Bhulaiyaa, Mission Mangal, Aiyaary, Hichki, Bang Bang, De Dana Dan, AB Aani CD, etc. His last release was Nikamma, in June 2022.

His popular TV shows included Ghar Aaja Pardesi, Alpaviraam, Jaana Na Dil Se Door, Sanjeevani and Indradhanush. Vikram had one unfulfilled dream – that of playing a blind old man, like Naseeruddin Shah in Sparsh.

Vikram debuted in direction with the 2010 Marathi movie Aaghaat, in which he also starred. His mentor was the doyen of Marathi theatre Vijaya Mehta. He had built a library of performances because of her and was eternally indebted to her. Her suggestions of the areas he could have improved in its story gave him the idea of making her his official consultant with a proper fee.

He was awarded the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award for acting in theatre in 2011. He won the National Award for Best Actor at the 60th National Film Awards for the Marathi movie Anumati in 2013, for his portrayal of a man's desperate attempts to save his wife on life support.

He a Samaritan and director of an acting school in Pune also ventured into real estate business. The social activist in him oversaw a foundation that aided underprivileged kids, wounded veterans, children of lepers and the education of orphan children.

The Natsamrat took his last flight in Pune due to multi-organ failure. He is survived by his wife Vrushali and two daughters.



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

LT CDR FIRDAUS DARABSHAH MOGAL SC (1974-2011)

Brave son of Indian Navy

Firdaus Mogal was born on 15 October 1974 to Darabshah and Armin Mogal in Ahmedabad. Eldest of three sons, he completed his schooling from Maneckji Cooper Educational Trust and joined the National Defence Academy in 1992. He was commissioned into the Indian Navy on 1 Jan 1998.

Adventurous, he volunteered for the submarine arm and qualified the Basic Submariner course with flying colours. His illustrious career included appointments as Anti Submarine Warfare Officer on-board INS Shalki, the Training Coordinator at Submarine School, INS Satvahana, Vishakhapatnam and the Executive Officer of INS Shankush. For his professional competence and devotion to duty, he was commended by the Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Western Naval Command in 2007.

He assumed duties as Executive Officer of INS Shankush, a naval submarine on May 26, 2010. On August 29, whilst the submarine was en-route for a deployment, a defect was observed. The authorities decided to surface the submarine in the exercise area after sunrise to attempt external repairs on the starboard flap to enable it to continue her mission. At that time, the submarine was experiencing heavy seas and rough weather.

At around 6.55 am on August 30, 2010, when a team of three sailors, led by the Engineering Officer, was working on repairs, a strong wave swept two of them. The Engineering Officer overboard, Lt Cdr (Lieutenant Commander) Mogal immediately swung into action. The third sailor hanging from the aft casing was required to be rescued. He was completely immobilised due to leg injury. Disregarding personal safety, Mogal carried the sailor from aft casing to the bridge. His strength and fortitude drove him to attempt the task in the prevailing weather condition.

After about 20 minutes of frantic struggle, the officer reached the ladder on the fin that had to be climbed for handing over the injured sailor to bridge. This was again seemingly impossible as it involved climbing a narrow ladder with no strong foothold. He was equal to it.

The recovery of the first casualty infused hope in the overboard men to hang on and they looked at their Executive

Officer for their rescue. Lt Cdr Mogal displayed supreme bravery to assist the divers. He managed to pull overboard men close to the submarine. However, in the attempt, a huge wave submerged them completely. It broke all six personnel, including Lt Cdr Mogal. Lt Cdr Mogal was unfazed and gathered all overboard men in one huddle. He then signalled bridge that he would get this huddle to climb on-board. Led by Lt Cdr Mogal, the huddle closed the submarines casing. He then started helping others in the huddle to climb on-board.

He swam tirelessly and even made others stand on his shoulders so that they could climb on-board. His concern for his men was such that he ordered all men to climb on-board before him. Once all were on-board, Lt Cdr Mogal attempted to climb up. As he was about to reach, another wave swept him overboard. Apparently, he sustained head injuries due to this wave.

The Anti Submarine Warfare Officer (ASWO) of the submarine called for the assistance of a Search and Rescue (SAR) helicopter and he was transferred to the Naval Hospital INHS Ashwini. He succumbed to his injuries and was martyred after saving the lives of six of his shipmates.

Lt Cdr Mogal was awarded the 'Shaurya Chakra', posthumously on the Independence Day 2011 Honours List for his gallant deed beyond the call of duty, leadership and supreme sacrifice in the highest traditions of Indian Navy.

Lt Cdr Firdaus Darabshah Mogal is survived by his parents, wife Kerzin and son Yashaan. The submariners training centre at Visakhapatnam was renamed as 'The Firdaus Mogal simulator complex building' in 2012 in his memory.



Brigadier Suresh Chandra Sharma (retd.)



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Sadanand A. Shetty, Founder Editor
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