

ONE INDIA ONE PEOPLE

Patriotism Redefined

Evolving through
'Inclusive Tourism'



MULTIPLE FACETS OF INDIAN TOURISM

CONNECTING PEOPLE WITH FOOD

THE CRADLE OF SPIRITUALITY

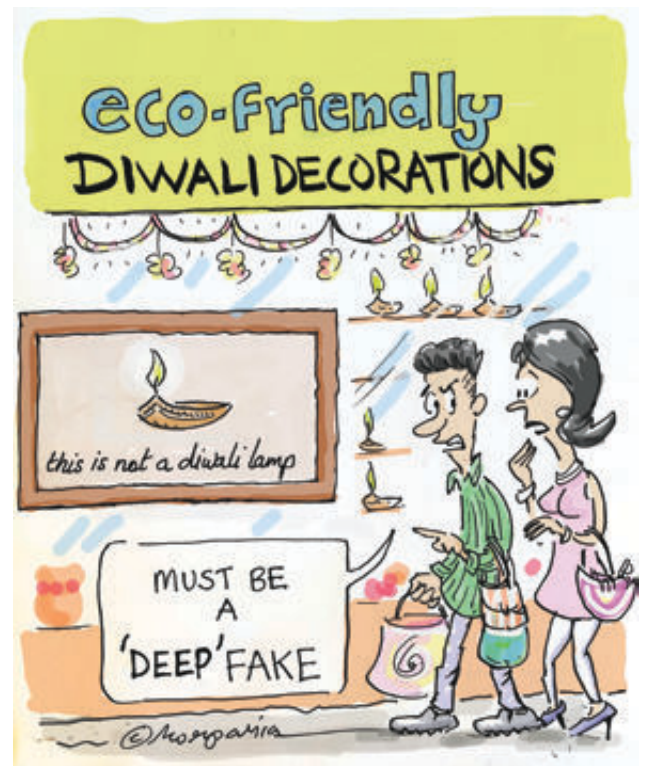
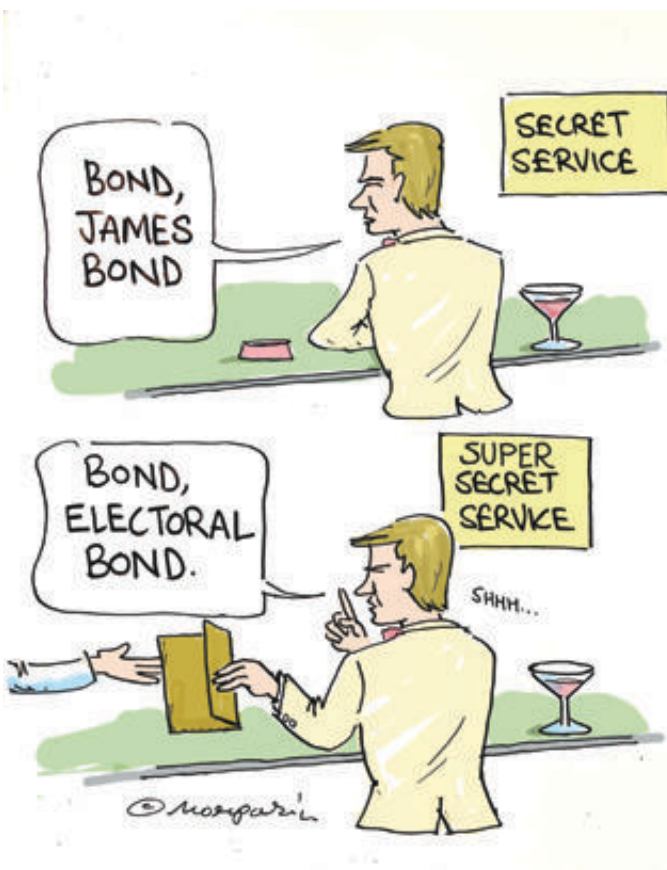


Know India Better

BENGALURU
WHERE MUSEUMS THRIVE AMIDST
GARDENS!

Face to Face

SHYAM BENEGAL



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INNOCENT



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Multiple facets of Indian Tourism

*Citing the country's history and culture, **Nandini Rao** shows how the tourism sector has evolved as a key driver of growth around the world and is becoming one in India as well, contributing to global GDP and employment. This year with its G20 Presidency and recognising the tremendous potential of the tourism sector, India facilitated four G20 Tourism Working Group Meetings.*



India is emerging as one of the fastest growing tourism destination in the world

In a world marked by increasing globalisation, the tourism industry plays a pivotal role in fostering cultural exchange and understanding. India, with its rich culture, traditions and landscapes, stands as a beacon for inclusive tourism.

The allure of India is impossible to resist. From the bustling markets of Delhi, where a symphony of colours and scents bewitch the senses, to the tranquil backwaters of Kerala, where time seems to slow down amidst the tree-lined waterways ... each region unfurls a distinctive facet of one of the most ancient civilisations of the world.

The tourism sector is a key driver of growth around the world and is becoming one in India as well, contributing to global GDP and employment. This year with its G20 Presidency and recognising the tremendous potential of the tourism sector, India facilitated four G20 Tourism Working Group Meetings.

In these deliberations, the focus was coordination and sharing of best practices, making policies to promote sustainable and inclusive tourism growth. Key strategic initiatives were identified in sync with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and included skilling, green tourism,

digitalisation, etc.

History, culture and more

India's resplendent festivals, such as Diwali with its luminous display of lights and Holi's riotous explosion of colours, to name a few, offer a gateway to the very heart of Indian culture, extending a warm invitation for visitors to partake in these joyous celebrations.

India's rich history, woven over millennia, is unmissable and imprinted on its cities and monuments. The Taj Mahal, a majestic ode to love, stands as an epitome of architectural grandeur. Ancient temples, with their intricate carvings and sacred aura, and the formidable forts of Rajasthan, silent sentinels of bygone empires, bear solemn testimony to the legacy of dynasties that have left an indelible mark on the subcontinent.

To wander through these hallowed halls and storied streets is to step back in time, immersing oneself in the narratives of eras long past.

The vibrant people

Yet, India's enchantment transcends the tangible, venturing into the realm of intangible cultural riches. The nation is an intricate mosaic of languages, religions, and traditions, where diversity is not merely acknowledged, but joyously celebrated.

Engaging with locals in their day-to-day lives offers a profound insight into the intricate social fabric that weaves this nation together, revealing the threads of unity that bind amidst the glorious diversity.

Inclusive tourism in India embraces the natural wonders that grace its expansive terrain. From the Himalayas, their snowy peaks piercing the heavens, to the sun-drenched shores of Goa, where waves caress the golden sands, the ecological diversity is nothing short of awe-inspiring.

National parks and wildlife sanctuaries serve as sanctuaries for a mesmerising array of biodiversity that calls India home, proudly showcasing magnificent creatures such as the regal Bengal tiger and the gentle Indian elephant.

Furthermore, the legendary hospitality of the Indian people is a hallmark of the nation's character. The genuine warmth and boundless generosity with which guests are welcomed leave an ineffaceable imprint, often forming cherished memories that endure long after the journey concludes.

The culinary landscape is equally diverse, with regional delicacies that tantalise the taste buds, offering a sensory journey through the distinct culinary heritage of each area.

Promoting inclusivity

Today, tourism has emerged as a potent instrument for promoting cross-cultural understanding, weaving connections among people of different backgrounds.

India's multifaceted culture, history and natural beauty, stands as a resounding testament to the transformative potential of tourism in bridging divides and nurturing a spirit of inclusivity.

As travellers embark on their odysseys through the enchanting land, they not only bear witness to the breath-taking beauty of India's physical landscapes, but also partake in the richness of its cultural heritage.

In turn, they emerge as ambassadors of shared experiences, carrying with them a piece of India's vibrant soul, contributing to world inclusivity and cross-cultural understanding.

As the sun rises over the misty hills of Himachal Pradesh, casting a golden glow on ancient temples and emerald valleys, travellers find themselves immersed in a world that seems suspended in time.

Diversity galore

Journeying southward, the architectural marvels of South India beckon with their intricate carvings and intricate stone temples. The rhythmic chants of priests and the heady aroma of jasmine blossoms create an atmosphere that transports visitors to an era where devotion and artistry was the mainstay of life.

These temples, seeped in history and steeped in devotion, offer a glimpse into the spiritual diversity that has defined this region for centuries.

In the heart of Rajasthan, where golden sands stretch to meet an endless horizon, the echoes of history reverberate within the walls of regal forts and palaces. The opulence and grandeur of these architectural masterpieces bear witness to the valour and indomitable spirit of the Rajput warriors.

As the wind whispers tales of bygone eras, travellers can almost feel the pulse of a time when kingdoms rose and fell, leaving behind a legacy of fortitude and grandeur.

In India's bustling metropolises, a different kind of narrative unfolds. Amid the cacophony of honking horns and the vibrant street life, modernity converges with tradition in a dynamic dance.

Skyscrapers rise beside ancient markets and gleaming malls coexist with age-old bazaars. The juxtaposition of old and new paints a vivid picture of a nation hurtling forward while remaining firmly rooted in its heritage.

The call of the wild echoes through India's protected areas and wildlife reserves. Here, in the heart of nature's sanctuary, the primal rhythms of life continue unabated.

From the elusive snow leopards of Ladakh to the graceful dance of peacocks in the jungles of Madhya Pradesh, the biodiversity of India is a testament to its commitment to preserving the natural world.

Leading the way

With its growing economic stature, India is being considered one of the fastest-emerging tourism destinations in the world. The country's rich heritage including cultural and natural heritage and geographical diversity has only added to its allure.

During a recently-concluded summit on tourism that was held in Goa, Prime Minister Narendra Modi stated the importance of the tourism sector in India's growth story. He said it is very important for economic progress, employment generation and for social inclusion.

India, with its myriad dimensions of culture, history, and natural beauty, stands as an invitation to all who seek to embark on a transformative journey. It is a land where the ancient and the contemporary coexist in harmonious resonance, where traditions are revered, and where the human spirit flourishes.

Through the lens of inclusive tourism, travellers not only explore the depths of this enchanting land, but also carry with them a piece of its soul, becoming ambassadors of unity and understanding in a world that craves connection and empathy.

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.

Connecting people with food

Food being a binding force, **Ruchi Verma** observes that India's cuisine is a living testament to the country's history of trade, migration and ancient knowledge. Food is not mere means of sustenance but is a universal language that unites people across cultures, languages, and geographies. This is so much evident in India, a land where culinary traditions mirror the country's astonishing cultural diversity.



Biryani



Kebabs



Rajasthani Thali



Gujarati Thali

Food transcends borders, bringing people together. From the spices of the north to the coconut-infused dishes of the south, India's cuisine reflects its cultural richness, heritage and traditions that have flourished over centuries.

Food is more than sustenance; it is a universal language that unites people across cultures, languages, and geographies. In no place is this more evident than in India, a land where culinary traditions mirror the country's astonishing cultural diversity.

Spices and customs

The regions of India, especially the North, with their fertile plains and robust agricultural traditions, have given birth to a cuisine characterised by an intricate interplay of spices. The aromatic biryanis of Hyderabad, the succulent kebabs of

Lucknow, and the rich gravies of Punjab exemplify the artistry of blending spices to create a symphony of flavours. Each dish tells a story, reflecting the history, geography, and culinary expertise of the region.

In the southern states of India, a contrasting culinary landscape unfolds. Coconut, with its creamy richness, takes centre stage, filling dishes with a unique flavour profile. From the fragrant rice dishes of Kerala to the tangy tamarind-laced curries of Tamil Nadu, southern cuisine pays homage to the bounties of the coastal regions. Seafood, fresh and abundant, plays a pivotal role, adding a distinctive character.

Food is an integral part of Indian rituals and celebrations, marking important life events and religious ceremonies. The intricacies of preparing and sharing a meal hold deep cultural

significance. For example, the elaborate *thali* meals of Gujarat, with their assortment of flavours and textures, symbolise the unity of diverse elements in Indian society.

India's cuisine is a living testament to the country's history of trade, migration and ancient knowledge. The influence of Persian, Mughal, British, and Portuguese cuisines can be discerned in various regional dishes. The biryani, a beloved dish of the subcontinent, showcases this amalgamation of culinary influences, evolving over centuries into a cherished delicacy enjoyed across the country.

Not just food

As a pioneer of ancient knowledge, India's excellence in Ayurveda and ayurvedic food is only understated. Ayurveda food is not only healthy, but also tasty. Which is why, in many regions in India, it is a big attraction for tourists. Also, many tourists coming to India for medical treatment and for wellness opt for programmes to rejuvenate the body through diet and nutrition. Here, food is used as medicine to treat common diseases, allergies, etc.

The vibrant street food culture provides a window into the everyday lives of its people. Chaat stalls in Delhi, dosa vendors in Chennai, and vada pav sellers in Mumbai serve as hubs of community interaction. Street food, with its bold flavours and affordable accessibility, transcends socio-economic boundaries, forming an essential part of India's culinary identity and a big attraction for tourists from all over the world.

Immense potential

In recent years, culinary tourism has gained prominence as a means of experiencing a culture in a profound and immersive way. Travelers seek out authentic culinary experiences, such as cooking classes, food tours, and visits to local markets, to gain a deeper understanding of a region's history, traditions, and way of life.

Food acts as a powerful catalyst for forging connections between people from different backgrounds. Sharing a meal, whether in a local home or a bustling street corner, fosters a sense of camaraderie and mutual understanding. In India, where hospitality is revered, the act of offering food is a gesture of warmth and welcome. Through the artful combination of spices, the interplay of ingredients and the traditions surrounding food preparation and consumption, India's cuisine encapsulates the essence of its heritage.

Every region in India takes pride in its unique culinary specialties, often serving as a source of regional identity. The fiery seafood curries of Goa, the delectable sweets of Bengal, and the earthy dishes of Rajasthan are all emblematic of the diverse landscapes and cultural heritages that define each state.

Food diplomacy

India's culinary heritage has become a powerful tool for cultural diplomacy on the global stage. Indian restaurants and food festivals have proliferated worldwide, introducing people to the rich and diverse flavours of Indian cuisine.

Through culinary exchange programmes, chefs from India collaborate with their international counterparts, creating fusion dishes that bridge culinary traditions and spark cross-cultural dialogue.

Curry houses dot the streets of London, while dosa joints have become a common sight in New York City. The flavours of India have become an integral part of international cuisine, inspiring chefs and impressing diplomats.

For many individuals of Indian descent living abroad, food becomes a powerful link to their cultural heritage. It serves as a tangible connection to ancestral roots and a source of comfort in a foreign land.

With a growing awareness of the impact of food choices on the environment and animal welfare, a lot has changed. India's longstanding tradition of vegetarianism and plant-based diets has been at the forefront of promoting sustainable and ethical eating practices. The diversity of ingredients and regional specialties allows for a wide array of plant-based dishes that are not only delicious but also environmentally conscious.

With rapid urbanisation and globalisation, India's culinary landscape is only bound to change. Fast food chains, processed foods and Western dietary habits have found their way into urban centres. While these changes offer convenience, they also pose challenges to traditional culinary practices and dietary health. It becomes imperative to strike a balance between modernisation and the preservation of culinary heritage.

The culinary diversity has contributed significantly to India's economy, providing livelihoods for millions of people. From small-scale farmers and artisanal producers to street food vendors and restaurant owners, the food industry sustains a vast network of entrepreneurs and workers. By promoting culinary tourism and celebrating local specialties, there is an opportunity to empower communities and promote economic growth.

Bringing people together

Through the art of cooking and sharing meals, we not only nourish our bodies but also nurture our souls. India's cuisine, with myriad flavours, textures, and traditions, is a celebration of unity in diversity, a reflection of the shared human experience, and an invitation to embrace the richness of our global heritage.

There is a delicate dance between innovation and preservation in culinary landscape. While it is important to adapt to changing dietary preferences and modern lifestyles, it is equally crucial to safeguard the authenticity and integrity of traditional recipes and cooking techniques. This balance ensures that future generations of tourists can continue to experience the true essence of Indian cuisine.

Education plays a pivotal role in preserving and promoting culinary heritage. Culinary schools and workshops not only train aspiring chefs in the art of traditional Indian cooking but also instil an appreciation for the cultural significance of each dish. It is important to integrate this knowledge with tourism and related activities.

The country's agricultural diversity and rich culinary traditions provide a foundation for adapting to changing circumstances. By embracing sustainable practices and exploring innovative cooking methods, India's culinary landscape continues to evolve while staying true to its roots.

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

The cradle of spirituality

*Describing how the country serves as a robust example of spirituality throughout its length and breadth, **Anushka Singh** makes out a case that it is the land where the divine and the earthly converge in a dance of profound significance. India, the ancient subcontinent is replete with sacred sites and practices that have flourished for millennia, shaping the spiritual consciousness of humanity.*



The morning and evening Ganga aarti at the Varanasi ghats are a visual treat that draws domestic and international tourists in large numbers

India is often referred to as the cradle of spirituality. From the sacred ghats of Varanasi, where the Ganges River flows, to the meditative caves of Ajanta and Ellora, where ancient wisdom is etched in stone, India's spiritual heritage is a testament to the depth and diversity of human quest for transcendence.

A land where the divine and the earthly converge in a dance of profound significance, India, the ancient subcontinent is replete with sacred sites and practices that have flourished for millennia, shaping the spiritual consciousness of humanity.

The river of redemption

Varanasi, nestled along the banks of the sacred Ganges, is a city that breathes spirituality. Its ghats, stone steps that lead to the river, are where life and death converge in a continuous cycle of renewal.

Devotees gather at sunrise to witness the Ganga Aarti, a mesmerising ritual that pays homage to the river as a source of spiritual purification. The narrow alleys of Varanasi echo with the chants of pilgrims and the fragrance of incense, creating an

atmosphere that is charged with devotion and introspection.

The Ganges, believed to hold the power to cleanse one's soul, is more than a mere body of water. It is a symbol of transcendence, a physical manifestation of the spiritual journey towards liberation. Pilgrims from all walks of life come to Varanasi to bathe in its waters, seeking absolution and renewal. The belief in the sanctity of the Ganges is a testament to the deep spiritual connection that binds humanity to the natural world.

Sanctuaries of devotion

Like most ancient cities in India, Varanasi too is adorned with temples and ashrams, each with its own sacred resonance. The Kashi Vishwanath Temple, dedicated to Lord Shiva, stands as a beacon of devotion, drawing worshippers from around the world. Ashrams along the riverbank offer haven of contemplation, where seekers delve into the teachings of ancient scriptures and yogic practices.

Nestled in the heart of Maharashtra, the caves of Ajanta and Ellora stand as a testament to the artistic and spiritual prowess of ancient India. Carved into the solid rock, these caves house exquisite murals and sculptures that depict the life of the Buddha and various Hindu deities. The monastic cells of Ajanta and the grandeur of the Kailash Temple in Ellora serve as a physical representation of the spiritual journey towards enlightenment.

The frescoes of Ajanta, dating back over two thousand years, are a vivid portrayal of the spiritual ideals of their time. These intricate paintings, illuminated by natural light, depict scenes from the life of the Buddha and illustrate the concept of impermanence. The caves serve as a canvas that bridges the earthly realm with the spiritual, inviting contemplation and introspection.

Ellora's Kailash Temple, carved from a single massive rock, stands as a tribute to the divine. The scale and intricacy of the temple complex are a testament to the unwavering devotion of its creators. Every inch of the temple is adorned with intricate carvings that narrate the stories of Hindu mythology, invoking a sense of awe and reverence among devotees and tourists alike.

Ground of enlightenment

Bodh Gaya, in Bihar, where the Bodhi Tree stands, is revered as the site where Siddhartha Gautama attained enlightenment and became the Buddha. The Mahabodhi Temple, an architectural marvel, marks this sacred spot. Pilgrims and seekers from around the world come to Bodh Gaya in search of spiritual awakening and a deeper understanding of the path to liberation.

The Bodhi Tree, under which Buddha is said to have meditated, is a living symbol of enlightenment. Its branches provide shade to pilgrims and seekers, creating an atmosphere of tranquillity and contemplation. The tree, considered a direct descendent of the original, stands as a witness to the profound transformation that occurred beneath its boughs.

Here, the Mahabodhi Temple, a UNESCO World Heritage site, exudes an aura of serenity and reverence. Its intricately-carved spire and ancient architecture evoke a sense of timeless wisdom. Within its walls, devotees engage in meditation and prayer, seeking to connect with the spiritual energy that permeates the site.

Nestled in the foothills of the Himalayas, Rishikesh and Haridwar are revered as abodes of spiritual practice and pilgrimage. Rishikesh, known as the "Yoga Capital of the World," attracts practitioners and spiritual seekers from every corner of the globe. It is a sanctuary for seekers of spiritual wisdom and yogic practices.

Ashrams and yoga centres offer immersive experiences,

allowing individuals to delve into the ancient teachings of yoga and meditation. The presence of knowledgeable masters and serene natural surroundings create an environment conducive to spiritual growth and self-discovery.

The mighty Himalayas

The Himalayas are revered as the ultimate destination for spiritual seekers. From the snow-clad peaks of Uttarakhand to the serene valleys of Himachal Pradesh, the Himalayas exude a palpable energy that has drawn sages, yogis, and seekers for centuries.

The Char Dham Yatra, comprising Yamunotri, Gangotri, Kedarnath, and Badrinath, is considered one of the holiest pilgrimage circuits in Hinduism. Each site is nestled amidst breath-taking natural beauty, and the journey itself is an integral part of the spiritual experience. Pilgrims embark on arduous treks, often enduring challenging terrain and weather conditions, in pursuit of divine blessings and self-realisation.

The Himalayan foothills are dotted with ashrams and retreat centres that offer seekers a chance to immerse themselves in spiritual practices and contemplation. These spaces provide a refuge from the demands of modern life, allowing individuals to delve deep into meditation, introspection, and the study of ancient texts. The peaceful surroundings and the proximity to nature amplify the spiritual experience.

Amritsar, the spiritual and cultural heart of the Sikh faith, is home to the resplendent Golden Temple. This architectural marvel stands amidst a sacred pool, inviting pilgrims and visitors from all walks of life. The temple's golden facade shimmers in the sunlight, symbolising the radiance of spiritual enlightenment.

One of the most profound aspects of the Golden Temple is the langar, a community kitchen that serves free meals to all who enter. This practice embodies the Sikh principle of seva, or selfless service, and fosters a sense of equality and inclusivity. The Western Ghats, a UNESCO World Heritage site, are not only a treasure trove of biodiversity but also a blessing for spiritual seekers. The lush forests, cascading waterfalls, and mist-covered mountains create an environment conducive to introspection and communion with nature.

The Ghats offer seekers an opportunity to engage in silent retreats and meditative practices amidst nature. Whether through guided meditation sessions or solitary contemplation, individuals have the chance to experience a deep sense of interconnectedness with the earth and all its living beings.

The Andaman and Nicobar Islands, surrounded by the azure waters of the Bay of Bengal, exude a unique spiritual energy. These islands, far removed from the hustle and bustle of mainland India, provide a serene backdrop for seekers to delve into meditation, yoga, and self-reflection.

The islands' pristine marine ecosystems serve as a reminder of the interconnectedness of all life forms. Many spiritual retreat centres here emphasise not only inner transformation but also a sense of responsibility towards the environment. Practices of mindfulness and sustainability are woven into the fabric of these retreats, encouraging participants to cultivate a deeper sense of stewardship for the planet.

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

Wearing blue label on its sleeve!

*Beaches being integral to tourism, India has laboured to achieve a significant milestone by obtaining the prestigious Blue Flag certification for 12 of its pristine beaches. The Blue Flag designation is a globally-recognised eco-label awarded to beaches that meet and maintain rigorous standards for cleanliness, safety, and environmental conservation, points out **Ritika Seth**.*



Rushikonda Beach in Andhra Pradesh is one of the 12 beaches in India that has the blue flag certification as the cleanest beach

India now has 12 Blue Flag beaches, an eco-label given to the cleanest beaches in the world. In order to qualify for this prestigious award, a series of stringent environmental, educational, safety-related and access-related criteria must be met and maintained.

Known for its diverse landscapes and breath-taking coastlines, India has recently achieved a significant milestone by obtaining the prestigious Blue Flag certification for 12 of its pristine beaches. The Blue Flag designation is a globally-recognised eco-label awarded to beaches that meet and maintain rigorous standards for cleanliness, safety, and environmental conservation.

This accomplishment not only instils a sense of pride within local communities but also serves as a powerful magnet for tourism, bolstering India's reputation as a steward of its natural heritage.

Blue Flag certification is a testament to a beach's ecological health and sustainability. To qualify, beaches must meet stringent environmental criteria, including water quality standards, waste management practices, and conservation

efforts to protect local flora and fauna. This designation underscores India's commitment to preserving its coastal ecosystems.

Educating communities

In addition to the environmental criteria, Blue Flag beaches are required to offer educational programmes aimed at raising awareness about coastal conservation. These initiatives engage both residents and visitors, fostering a sense of responsibility towards the environment and creating a culture of environmental stewardship.

The attainment of Blue Flag status empowers local communities by involving them in the preservation and management of their coastline. This sense of ownership furthers a deeper connection between residents and their environment and increases their sense of responsibility towards the beach's well-being.

These eco-labelled beaches serve as catalysts for economic growth, as they tend to attract a higher influx of tourists. The increase in the number of visitors leads to increased economic activity, which in turn, benefits local

businesses, artisans, and service providers. Moreover, the revenue generated from tourism can be reinvested in further environmental conservation efforts.

The Blue Flag certification acts as a powerful draw for both domestic and international tourists seeking clean, safe, and environmentally-conscious beach destinations. Tourists are increasingly inclined to choose Blue Flag beaches for their vacations, thereby boosting the local tourism industry.

Achieving Blue Flag status places India in an elite group of countries renowned for their commitment to environmental conservation. This recognition not only enhances India's global reputation but also positions it as a leader in sustainable tourism practices.

Safety and accessibility

Blue Flag beaches must also provide a safe environment for visitors, with designated swimming areas, first aid facilities, and effective waste management systems. Additionally, the beach must be easily accessible to all, including those with disabilities, to promote inclusivity.

These designated beaches not only serve as sources of local pride but also attract a growing number of tourists seeking disabled-friendly and accessible tourist spots that are clean, safe, and eco-friendly at the same time. By meeting and maintaining stringent criteria, India demonstrates its commitment to protecting its coastal ecosystems and creating a culture of environmental consciousness.

Successful Blue Flag certification for its beaches serves as a shining example of India's environmental leadership on the global stage. It showcases the country's commitment to sustainable practices and the preservation of its natural treasures. This achievement not only benefits the local communities but also contributes to the broader global effort to combat climate change and protect coastal ecosystems.

The status sends a powerful message to the world about the importance of responsible tourism and environmental conservation. It inspires other nations to adopt similar measures to safeguard their own coastlines, triggering a collective global effort towards a more sustainable future.

Coastal conservation

India's success in this domain elevates the significance of coastal conservation in international discussions on environmental protection. It highlights the critical role that coastal areas play in the global ecosystem and underscores the need for collective action to preserve these vital habitats.

In the process of upholding the standards of the prestigious certification, India faces the challenge of maintaining and improving upon its environmental and safety measures. Ongoing efforts in waste management, water quality monitoring, and community engagement will be essential in sustaining the status of Blue Flag beaches.

Embracing technological advancements in waste treatment, renewable energy, and water conservation will be crucial in further enhancing the environmental sustainability of Blue Flag beaches. Implementing cutting-edge solutions can lead to more efficient and effective conservation efforts.

Continued community engagement and education programmes are vital for instilling a culture of environmental responsibility. By raising awareness about the significance of coastal conservation, local communities can play an active role in protecting and preserving their natural surroundings.

The 'blue' beaches

This certification is given by members of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), Denmark-based NGO

Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE), and International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

As of now, there are 12 such beaches in India. These include the Golden Beach in Odisha, Shivrajpur Beach in Gujarat, Kappad Beach in Kerala, Ghoghla Beach in Diu, Radhanagar Beach in Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Kasarkod Beach in Karnataka, Padubidri Beach in Karnataka, Rushikonda Beach in Andhra Pradesh, Kovalam Beach in Tamil Nadu, Eden Beach in Puducherry, Minicoy Thundi Beach in Lakshwadeep, and Kadmat Beach in Lakshadweep.

For permissible activities and facilities in the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) of beaches and islands, the Blue Flag certification requires maintaining a minimum distance of 10 meters from the High Tide Line (HTL). Permissible activities include a solid waste management plant, portable toilets and changing rooms, solar power plant, purified drinking water facility, beach access pathways, benches, parking area, watch towers, beach safety equipment, information boards, etc.

All such activities and facilities are exempt from prior clearance under the provisions of the CRZ Notification, Island Protection Zone Notification, etc. However, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has initiated the Beach Environment & Aesthetics Management Services (BEAMS) program owing to its commitment to sustainable development along India's coasts.

More beaches meet standards

Mangalore's Tannirbhavi Beach is in the process of becoming the 13th Blue Flag Beach in India. The development work is being undertaken by Pune-based BVG India Ltd. The idea is that large pine and acacia trees will be a big draw for tourists.

A waste processing unit is built to handle all the waste that generates on the one km long beach. This unit will segregate the waste. Dry waste will be given to the Mangaluru City Corporation (MCC), while the wet waste will be processed as compost and used as manure for plants and trees.

To handle sewage, a grey water treatment plant is being constructed and changing rooms and shower facilities for men and women are being constructed. For walkers, a km-long wood polymer composed pathway is being made across the beach as well. Other features include a first-aid room, cctv control room, an office, drinking water facility, watch towers, solar plant, dustbins, etc.

There is a ripple effect that comes into play when there is a successful Blue Flag beach that extends beyond the designated site. It encourages a broader shift towards eco-conscious tourism practices, prompting travellers and tourists to seek out destinations that prioritise environmental sustainability. This growing demand for responsible tourism contributes to a positive global impact.

The success of Blue Flag beaches in India is the result of collaborative efforts between various stakeholders, including government agencies, local communities, non-governmental organisations, and environmental activists. Continued cooperation and coordination will be essential in maintaining the high standards set by the Blue Flag certification.

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

Inclusive tourism, inclusive society

*Inclusive tourism provides a platform for local entrepreneurs and micro-enterprises to flourish, avers **Pallavi Ghosh**. Communities get to showcase their unique offerings, fostering a sense of pride and self-reliance. It also holds immense potential for driving socio-economic well-being through responsible practices, stories of empowerment, skill development, and economic growth.*



Inclusive tourism creates opportunities for meaningful cultural exchange between travellers and local communities

Inclusive tourism stands as a powerful force for positive change, offering enriching experiences for travellers while simultaneously uplifting the lives of local communities.

Across India, this form of tourism holds immense potential for driving socio-economic well-being. Through responsible practices, stories of empowerment, skill development, and economic growth emerge, demonstrating the transformative impact of inclusive tourism.

Being self-reliant

Inclusive tourism provides a platform for local entrepreneurs and micro-enterprises to flourish. From homestays to artisanal crafts, communities get to showcase their unique offerings, fostering a sense of pride and self-reliance.

Women often play pivotal roles in community-based tourism initiatives. Through skills training and employment opportunities, these programmes contribute to women's economic independence and social empowerment, breaking down barriers and fostering gender equality.

Tourism that has an underlying focus on inclusion often has inherent programmes to invest in training and capacity-building initiatives, equipping individuals with the skills needed to thrive in the hospitality and tourism industry and related sectors. This not only enhances employability but also ensures a high standard of service for visitors.

Preserving heritage

Communities engaged in inclusive tourism are often motivated to preserve and celebrate their cultural heritage. Traditional crafts, performing arts, and culinary traditions are passed down through generations, safeguarding a rich cultural legacy.

Inclusive tourism creates opportunities for meaningful cultural exchange between travellers and local communities. Both parties benefit from a deeper understanding of each other's customs, traditions, and ways of life, enabling mutual respect and appreciation.

By engaging with travellers, communities challenge

Inclusive tourism initiatives often incorporate sustainable practices that prioritise the protection of natural resources and biodiversity. Communities become stewards of their own environment, ensuring the longevity of their natural assets.

Through responsible tourism, locals and direct stakeholders are motivated to actively participate in conservation efforts, such as wildlife protection, reforestation, and waste management. These initiatives contribute to the overall ecological health of the region.

Not only are inclusive initiatives and practices sustainable, they provide an additional source of income for communities, reducing dependency on a single economic activity. This economic diversification is very important for communities that are directly affected by tourism as it increases resilience and stability, especially in regions vulnerable to external economic fluctuations.

The revenue generated from inclusive tourism often leads to improved infrastructure, benefiting the entire community. Investments in roads, healthcare facilities, education, and sanitation contribute to an enhanced quality of life and overall development of the zone.

Transformative experiences

The growth and diversification of inclusive tourism in India is now transcending the boundaries of traditional tourism, offering a transformative experience for both travellers and local communities. The stories of empowerment, skill development, and economic growth resulting from responsible tourism practices serve as a testament to the immense potential for positive impact.

Through inclusive tourism, communities are not only uplifted economically but also empowered culturally and socially. As this model of tourism continues to thrive, it stands as a beacon of hope, illuminating the path towards a more inclusive, sustainable, and harmonious future for local groups and indigenous communities across India.

Across India, several communities have embraced the concept of homestays, opening their homes to travellers seeking authentic cultural experiences. These initiatives allow visitors to immerse themselves in the daily lives of local families, forging meaningful connections and leaving a positive economic footprint.

On the other hand, communities rich in artistic traditions have capitalised on inclusive tourism by offering workshops and demonstrations. Travelers have the opportunity to learn traditional crafts such as pottery, weaving, and painting, providing a unique and educational experience while supporting local artisans.

Conservation is key

Environment protection and conservation is at the centre of community-based inclusive tourism programmes. For example, communities in Kerala have taken the lead in mangrove conservation efforts. Through inclusive tourism initiatives, visitors are educated about the vital role mangroves play in coastal ecosystems. This awareness has led to collaborative conservation efforts and the restoration of degraded mangrove areas.

Communities living near wildlife reserves and sanctuaries have become integral partners in conservation efforts. Through responsible wildlife tourism, communities are incentivised to protect natural habitats and coexist harmoniously with local wildlife, contributing to the overall well-being of the ecosystem.

While inclusive tourism brings forth numerous benefits, it is not without its challenges. Striking a balance between economic development and environmental conservation remains a persistent concern. Additionally, ensuring that the benefits of

regulations, waste management strategies, and conservation plans that prioritise the long-term well-being of both the environment and local communities.

Education and awareness

Continued education and awareness-building efforts are crucial in sustaining the positive impact of inclusive tourism. Enabling communities with knowledge about sustainable practices and responsible tourism principles ensures that they remain actively engaged in conservation efforts.

The success stories emerging from inclusive tourism initiatives in a zone serve as models for replication in other regions. By sharing best practices and providing support to communities interested in adopting similar approaches, they can be amplified on a larger scale.

Government agencies can play a pivotal role in supporting inclusive tourism initiatives through policies that prioritise community-led conservation and sustainable development. Incentives, grants, and technical assistance can be provided to encourage the adoption of responsible tourism practices.

Collaboration between government entities, non-governmental organisations, local communities, and private sector stakeholders is essential for the continued success of inclusive tourism. By working together, these stakeholders can leverage their collective resources and expertise to maximise the positive impact of tourism on communities.

Inspiring one and all

India's journey with inclusive tourism is now offering valuable lessons for communities worldwide. The success stories and challenges faced by Indian communities serve as a blueprint for other regions seeking to harness the potential of tourism while safeguarding their cultural and environmental heritage.

By actively engaging in cultural exchange, travellers and locals alike gain a deeper appreciation for the diversity of human expression. Responsible travellers play a crucial role in the success of inclusive tourism initiatives. By being mindful of their impact on local communities and environments, travellers can contribute to the sustainability and long-term viability of such programmes.

Just recently, Kerala won the Global Responsible Tourism Award 2023 recognising its sustainable and women-inclusive initiatives promoted by the State's Responsible Tourism Mission. Goa too is looking to diversify tourism experience beyond its beaches through initiatives such as caravan tourism, homestays, agro-tourism, spiritual circuits that will be highly dependent on and inclusive of local communities and women.

In several zones in India that have a dense tribal population, such tourism initiatives involving the local communities are giving positive results. Palghar in Maharashtra which has a majority tribal population, has tremendous potential of community-based tourism initiatives.

On the other hand, there's also a need to protect vulnerable groups and communities from the detrimental effect of tourism and related activities such as in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and other sensitives zones.

Pallavi Ghosh is a researcher with The Inclusive Tourism Project – a DraftCraft International initiative to research on activities associated with tourism and identify factors that affect inclusivity.

Upholding architectural legacy

Through examples, **Aniruddh Kamat** explains how the country's rich legacy is a proof of its multi-splendoured history. A travel experience in India amply unravels the awe-inspiring diversity of India's temples, forts, palaces, and monuments -- a collection of marvels that bear witness to the excellence in human craftsmanship, spiritual devotion, and regal grandeur where each edifice is a classic of human effort.



The caves of Ajanta are famous for their temple architecture

India's architectural legacy is a testament to its multifaceted history and the profound cultural exchanges that have shaped the subcontinent. Each travel experience in India unravels the awe-inspiring diversity of India's temples, forts, palaces, and monuments—a collection of marvels that bear witness to the zenith of human craftsmanship, spiritual devotion, and regal grandeur where each edifice stands as a masterwork of human endeavour.

Among such thousands, spread across the length and breadth of India are the Ajanta and Ellora Caves, Khajuraho, Taj Mahal, Sanchi Stupa, Golconda Fort, Konark Sun Temple, Hampi, Meenakshi Temple, etc.

The temples of Khajuraho, nestled in the heart of Madhya Pradesh, made during the Chandela dynasty, stand as authentic showcases of architectural intricacy. Their sandstone facades are adorned with an astonishing array of sculptures, each chiselled with a precision and artistry that speak volumes about the skill of ancient artisans.

Khajuraho temples are among the finest examples of temple architecture in India and across the world. The depictions in the temples, celebrating human sensuality, spirituality, and daily life, transcend time and offer a window into the cultural

milieu of their era.

Chola brilliance

The Brihadishvara Temple, a stunning gem of Chola architecture in Tamil Nadu, is an exemplar of structural audacity and aesthetic finesse. Its towering vimana, adorned with delicate carvings and crowned by a monolithic cupola, displays the engineering acumen of the time.

This temple, dedicated to Lord Shiva, not only serves as a spiritual sanctum but also echoes the grandeur of the Chola dynasty. Also called Rajarajesvaram by its builder and locally as Thanjai Periya Kovil and Peruvudaiyar Kovil, this temple is a Shaivite Hindu temple located on the south bank of the Cauvery River in Thanjavur.

One of the largest Hindu temples and part of the UNESCO World Heritage Site known as the 'Great Living Chola Temples', it was built by Chola king Rajaraja I between 1003 and 1010 CE. Other Chola-era temples Gangaikonda Cholapuram temple and Airavatesvara temple were also built in the same period.

Soaked in Dravidian architecture, the Airavatesvara

Temple is dedicated to Lord Shiva and located in Kumbakonam in Thanjavur District in Tamil Nadu. It was built by Chola emperor Rajaraja II and is part of the same cluster of 18 temples. The temple has a chariot structure and houses several deities such as Brahma, Surya, Varuna, Agni, Indra, Sri Devi (Lakshmi), Ganga, Yamuna, Ganesha, Rati, etc.

Bastions of history and power

Perched majestically on the rugged hills of Rajasthan, the Amer Fort impersonates the Rajput valour and architectural magnificence. Its imposing walls, adorned with delicate frescoes and mirrored mosaics, encapsulate the regal splendour of a bygone era. Constructed with red sandstone and marble, the fort boasts of the Sheesh Mahal, or Palace of Mirrors where a single candle's light can illuminate the entire room through thousands of tiny mirrors. The marble lattice work and the sprawling courtyards bear witness to the artistic flair that defined the Rajput architectural style.

On the other hand, the Golconda Fort, a citadel of the Deccan Sultanate, rises like an ancient sentinel in Hyderabad, Telangana. Its ingeniously-designed acoustic system, whispering galleries, and strategic layout attest to the engineering acumen of its builders. This fort, soaked in history, not only narrates the tales of dynasties but also of military engineering.

Agra Fort, is an imposing structure of red sandstone that witnessed the rise and fall of empires. Built by Emperor Akbar, it served as the seat of Mughal power for generations. The fort's palatial halls, lush gardens, and commanding views of the Taj Mahal are a testament to the strategic foresight of the Mughal dynasty.

Chittorgarh Fort is a shining example of the power and might of the rulers of the time. The fort's towering walls and imposing gates guard the stories of legendary queens like Rani Padmini and Rani Karnavati. The Vijay Stambh, or Tower of Victory, rises proudly, its intricately-carved reliefs narrating the tales of victory and defeat. Each stone within the fort bears witness to the indomitable spirit of its defenders, who chose honour over surrender.

Opulence, royalty, love

The City Palace of Udaipur, Rajasthan, is nothing but royal opulence of the Mewar dynasty. Its grand courtyards, ornate balconies, and mirrored chambers reflect the artistic mastery that defined the era. This palace, nestled on the banks of Lake Pichola, captures the ethereal beauty of Rajasthan's royal heritage.

Situated in the heart of Karnataka, the Mysore Palace is another masterpiece of the Indo-Saracenic architecture. With its domes, arches, and vibrant murals, it is sheer reflection of the refined taste of the Wadiyar or Wodeyer dynasty. Illuminated by thousands of bulbs during festivals, the palace transforms into a radiant jewel, captivating visitors with its resplendent aura.

The Taj Mahal, an iconic symbol of love and devotion, graces the banks of the Yamuna River in Agra. Commissioned by the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan in memory of his beloved wife Mumtaz Mahal, this architectural wonder is a fusion of Persian, Islamic, and Indian architectural styles. The immaculate white marble facade, adorned with floral motifs and calligraphy, evokes a sense of ethereal beauty. As the sun sets, casting a warm glow upon the mausoleum, it seems as though love itself permeates the air.



Golconda Fort - another engineering marvel

Elaborate and intricate

Located in the town of Patan, Gujarat, Rani Ki Vav is a subterranean structure that transcends mere architectural excellence. Built in the 11th century by Queen Udayamati, this stepwell is a symphony of elaborate carvings, showcasing the divine and the secular. As one descends into its depths, they are greeted by a gallery of sculptures, each telling a story of devotion, art, and societal norms of its time. Rani Ki Vav is an example of the architectural ingenuity of medieval India.

Mehrangarh Fort of Jodhpur is a behemoth of red sandstone, its walls standing tall against the sands of time. The fort's formidable presence is matched only by the intricacy of its inner palaces. The Moti Mahal, adorned with delicately-carved lattice screens, once served as the private chamber of the Maharaja. From its vantage points, one can gaze upon the Blue City, a sea of indigo-hued houses that stretches to the horizon.

On the shores of Odisha, the Sun Temple of Konark rises like a celestial chariot, dedicated to the sun god Surya. The temple's carvings depict not only religious motifs but also scenes of everyday life, offering a window into the society of its time. The wheels of the chariot, with their detailed spokes and engraved figures, are a marvel of engineering and artistry. As the sun casts its rays upon the temple, it seems to breathe life into the stone, illuminating the ancient craftsmanship for all to admire.

As we traverse through the architectural diversity of India, we are reminded of the need to preserve and protect these timeless marvels. They are not merely structures of stone and mortar; they are repositories of history, culture, and human ingenuity. Initiatives for restoration and conservation play a pivotal role in ensuring that future generations can experience the same beauty that has captivated us.

Aniruddh Kamat is a volunteer with The Inclusive Tourism Project – a DraftCraft International initiative to research on activities associated with tourism and identify factors that affect inclusivity.

Bolstered by tech-infused tourism

*In tune with the digital era, **Sahil Sharma** elaborates how India is redefining the tourism experience by embracing technology. From enchanting virtual tours to translation apps, India's utilisation of technology is transcending barriers, offering an unparalleled, enriching travel experience for all. He says it is an inclusive activity enabling people to connect with history and culture surpassing all limitations.*



Candolim Beach in Goa was the first to hold a wheel-chair accessible beach fest

In this digital age, where every facet of life is concealed in the embrace of technology, tourism is no exception. The convergence of innovation and exploration brings forth a symphony of possibilities, transforming the way we travel.

India is redefining the tourism experience by embracing technology. From enchanting virtual tours to translation apps, India's utilisation of technology is transcending barriers, offering an unparalleled, enriching travel experience for all.

Virtual tours are increasingly commonplace and are diversifying with each passing dat. These tours use augmented reality to transport visitors to different places. This is a very inclusive activity as it enables people with disabilities to experience historical sites. It's a way for everyone to connect with history and culture surpassing all limitations.

Smart destination management systems empowered by data analytics and IoT devices, monitor footfall and environmental parameters in real-time. These systems become the custodians of fragile ecosystems, ensuring that the footsteps of travellers do not disrupt the delicate balance of nature. Through these technologies, India is setting an example, demonstrating that the allure of exploration need not come at the

expense of the environment.

Accessible accommodations

India is working towards providing wheelchair-friendly accommodations. These places are designed with features like ramps and spacious interiors, ensuring comfort for all travellers. Travelling as a differently-abled person is not an easy task and often comes in the way of a fulfilling travel experience especially when the zone or the facility is not accommodative of their needs.

Kochi Fort in Kerala was the first tourist spot in India that was declared disabled-friendly. In 2016, Kerala took substantial steps to ensure there are special ramps, non-slippery tiles and other features for the elderly and the differently-abled persons. Over time, Kerala has made significant growth in terms of providing accessible and disabled-friendly tourism facilities such as special houseboats, etc.

There is an increased awareness among members of the industry to make tourism experience more inclusive and friendly for all. Candolim Beach in Goa was the first wheelchair-friendly

(Continue on pg 29)



BENGALURU

Where museums thrive amidst gardens!

Bengaluru's sobriquet as the "City of Gardens" has a competitor now! A not much publicized fact is that it boasts of a fair number of museums and galleries that have been in existence for centuries. Although the museums, dedicated to history and science are a big draw, there also are those that get billing in tourist guide books. As repositories of history and culture, museums showcase and amplify the city's character. **Usha Hariprasad** takes a look at the lesser-known ones that have kept the city's roots alive.



Kempegowda Museum in Bangalore was built as a tribute to Kempegowda I who founded the modern city

While Bengaluru is well known as the garden city for its beautiful landscaped gardens, it also has a good number of museums and galleries. While some are more than a century old, few have been opened to the public recently and rest are private. The little known museums are full of character like the vibrant city itself. Some of the museums are dedicated to history, science and technology while some reflect the city's past like those showcasing aircrafts and HMT watches. There is even a museum dedicated to brains.

But tourists often visit only the Vishweshwaraiah Industrial and Technological Museum (VIT) famous for its science and technology displays and the Government Archaeological Museum of Bangalore. These are popular tourist spots and are listed out in the tourist guide books. But there are plenty of other museums to see in the city for history and culture enthusiasts.

This article covers some of the lesser known but interesting museums in the city.

A brief history of the city

Kempegowda I was the founder of modern Bengaluru. In the 16th century he built a mud fort and invited traders to settle in the city. A moat was built around the fort that acted as a defense from enemies. He also built four watchtowers in the city to mark the North, South, East and West boundaries of the city. Besides, he built new temples and renovated old ones.

Though the mud fort of 1537 does not exist in the city, the old city still exists and some of the yesteryear trade continues till date. Century old communities thrive in the city and each community has their own temples and rituals.

The Kempegowda chieftains ruled for 100 years after which they moved to Magadi. Kempegowda's son, known as Kempegowda II was defeated by the Bahmani Sultans and had to shift his capital to Magadi. This dynasty continued to rule from Magadi and their rule ended when the last ruler Kempa



Inside Kempegowda Museum

Veerapagowda was imprisoned by the Mysore King Dodda Krishnaraja . He died in 1727 in the prison of Srirangapatna near Mysore.

Kempegowda Museum

The Kempegowda Museum was built as a tribute to Kempegowda I. It displays the achievements of the great ancestors of Kempegowda to his successors. The museum is located on the first floor of Mayo Hall on M. G. Road and was established in 2011. The Mayo Hall is a beautiful European building that is full of Tuscan columns, Corinthian pillars, wooden floors, pedimented windows, etc.

The museum was designed by Design Core . At the

entrance of the museum is a large statue of Kempegowda. There are panels all around you and through charts, prints and pictures the details of the life and times of Kempegowda, his family and ancestors are documented. The chieftain and his family built a number of forts and watchtowers for defense surrounding Bangalore. They repaired temples and created water tanks in the city. These are very nicely documented in the museum. The museum also gives detailed information about the markets, gardens, temples and tanks they had created during their rule. The forts atop hills like Savandurga, Shivgange, Huliurdurga etc., still exist and are good excursions from the city. The wooden floor of the museum also has an enlarged map of 19th century Bangalore.

The museum is open from 9 am - 5 pm and closed on Sundays.



Vimor Museum of Textiles showcases the story of silk, weavers, ancient weaves, designs and heirloom

Vimor Museum

Did you know that one of the prosperous industries in 19th century Bangalore was the cotton mills? The American civil war had led to the destruction of cotton fields and so European mills started looking at sourcing cotton from elsewhere. North Karnataka was the hub for cotton growing fields and a large quantity of cotton was exported from here. Many small spinning mills came up in the state because of this. One such modern mill - a steam mill dated 1884 was set up in Bangalore.

Bangalore was also the hub of silk. During the 18th century it used to supply cloth for the royals. During the reign of Mysore Wodeyars and also Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan, there was demand for silk and cotton garments. And Bangalore was a major centre for producing silk and cotton garments. Silk garments were churned out for the royals and also the nobles. In the old city there were numerous looms and weavers to testify this. Today due

to lack of public space and also lack of demand for indigenous silk, weavers have been forced to move out of the city.

The Vimor Museum of Living Textiles was built in 1974 by Chimy Nanjappa and Pavithra Muddaya to showcase the story of silk, about weavers, ancient weaves, designs and heirlooms. There are temple sarees, wedding sarees, Bangalore weaves, Mysore silks and sarees that have even automobile patterns. The designs and motifs - be it the mango, peacock or the cars teach you about the heritage of yesteryears.

The Vimor Museum is also a place to train weavers in traditional textiles and add to their skill set in creating innovative designs fit for the market. Visitors can also try their hand at weaving and also drape a saree or lungi during their visit. The museum is located in Austin town.

There is an entry fee of ₹ 250 and the museum is closed on Sundays.



Chitrasanthe, the annual art fair organised by Karnataka Chitrakala Parishath in Bengaluru

Karnataka Chitrakala Parishath

Bangalore is home to numerous art galleries. Some are modern art museums while some are traditional institutes having art colleges, museums and also space to host art workshops and exhibitions in its premises .Karnataka Chitrakala Parishath belongs to the latter category. It was established in 1960 by M Arya Murthy and Professor M.S Nanjunda Rao. It has a college of fine arts and undergraduate, post graduate and research programmes in Visual Arts; a permanent gallery to display its art collections and also ample space for art and exhibition events.

The permanent art gallery has 13 museums and holds an eclectic collection of paintings, sculpture and folk art by some well-known Indian artists. The gallery displays several paintings of Russian artists Nicholas Roerich and his son Svetoslav

Roerich, who had settled in India. These are a mix of Himalayan paintings, scenes from Kulu Valley, mountainscapes, landscapes and also portraits.

There are a number of paintings donated by Dr. H.K Kejriwal, Founding Member and Vice President of Chitrakala Parishath. A renowned art philanthropist, he has donated a large part of his prestigious personal collection to the institution. The collection comprises folk paintings, Kalighat paintings, works of Rabindranath Tagore, etc. There are also traditional mural paintings of Srikanta Shastry Kukke and also displays of 19th century Mysore and Tanjore paintings. Various graphic prints by Dr Krishna Reddy also occupy the permanent gallery collection. Beautiful sculptures, leather and string puppets, leather dolls, and folk art paintings from various parts of the country are also on display.



Agricultural Science Museum

Every year in the month of January, the space around the Parishath is converted into art grounds where several artists, aspiring and professionals display their work. The event is called the annual Chitra santhe , a meeting ground for artists and art collectors.

The museum is open on all days. A nominal entry fee of ₹ 50 is charged for viewing the permanent art collection.

Agricultural Science Museum

The University of Agricultural Sciences (UAS) in Bangalore started out as a research farm in 1899, and grew to be a full-fledged university in 1964. Subsequently, it had numerous colleges and departments like College of Agriculture at Hebbal, Dharwad, VET college at Hebbal, Fisheries college at Mangalore, Agricultural Institute at Raichur etc.

With so many programmes to offer UAS opened up an

agricultural science museum for the public in 2013 in the present Gandhi Krishi Vigyana Kendra (GKVK) campus. Through displays and models the museum tells the history of agriculture in the state and country and also about the growth of UAS. It gives information about various technological advancements done in the field of agriculture while also summarising about cropping systems, plant diseases, seed technology and biotechnology. There are also displays of stamps related to farming and its techniques. There is a room dedicated for sericulture and apiculture as well. Information is also given about agricultural marketing, farm mechanisation, fisheries etc. The museum serves as a useful space for students of agriculture and also school kids who wish to know about India`s rich history of agriculture and its growth.

The museum is closed on Sundays. Rest of the days it is open from 9 am to 4 pm barring Saturday where it is open only for half a day.



Sandesh Museum outlines the history of the postal department in the country and its journey post-Independence

HAL aerospace

Bangalore has an intimate connection with aerospace. After all, Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), one of the oldest defense and aerospace public sector company had its headquarters here. HAL started out in 1940 with a different name -- Hindustan Aircraft Limited and was set up in association with Mysore Kings and industrialist Walchand Hirachand to manufacture aircrafts.

During war times it acted as a centre for repairs of American aircrafts. In 1951 the control of the company was handed over to the Defense Ministry of the Indian government. In 1964 HAL and AIL (Aeronautics India Limited) joined hands to form Hindustan Aeronautics Limited, the HAL of today.

To showcase its growth and technological advancements in the aviation field, HAL set up the HAL Heritage Center and Aerospace museum in 2001 in the city on the old airport road. There are various models of aero engines that are used in aircrafts such as Jaguar and Kiran, aircraft displays of both vintage and modern, like Ajeet and Lakshya, radars and space models such as PSLV and its heat shield. It serves as an educational space for children teaching them the history of aerospace through charts

and models. There is also a flight simulator to experience piloting of planes.

The museum has an entry fee of ₹ 50 and is open throughout the year.

Sandesh Museum

Postal service in Karnataka was started by the Mysore kings. In the 18th century, during the reign of Chikkadevaraya Wodeyar, a postal department called the Bevina Chavadi was set up in the state. Back then the postal department also worked as espionage. The department was only meant for official dispatches. There were runners, mail carriers to carry the mail. In 1889 this department merged with the Imperial department and began to carry out services throughout the country.

The Sandesh Postal and Communication Museum in the city was started in 2019. It is a tribute to the postal department. It outlines the history of the postal department in the country and its journey post Independence.

The museum focuses on the men and technology behind



Sandesh Museum

the department.

Due homage is given to the mail runners; their uniforms, lanterns and leather belts well displayed. There are a number of technological instruments on display like the cash counting machine, fake note detection, barcode scanners, bomb detector, analog, digital typewriters, ammonia printers for creating blueprints and VSAT models to transfer money electronically.

There is also information about stamps here. On display are commemorative stamps, definitive stamps and collective stamps and also omnibus series. Some unique items to be checked out here include the Netaji Bose resignation letter of 1921 wherein he resigned from civil services and wished to join in the freedom struggle of the country.

The museum building itself is a heritage structure. It has had various avatars over the years; it served as a residence, then jail superintendent quarters, then museum, later bank and finally

it came under the General Post Office. The museum has five rooms dedicated to the postal and communication department.

The museum is open on all days except Sundays. An entry fee of ₹ 25 needs to be paid.

HMT Heritage Centre and Museum

Hindustan Machine Tools (HMT) started out in 1953 in Bangalore as a machine tool factory. Their motto was simple “To build mother machines, to build a modern industrial India.” What started out as a single company slowly grew and at the turn of 20th century had markets in 38 countries. HMT started out as a machine tool company but soon added a watch factory in 1961 in collaboration with Citizen Watch Company, Japan and forayed into tractors in 1971. It opened up machine tool factories in Pinjore, Kalamassary, Hyderabad etc., and also watch factories in Bangalore, Tumkur, Srinagar, etc. It celebrated its silver jubilee in 1978 and its golden jubilee in 2003.



HMT Heritage Centre and Museum

The museum housed in HMT House, which was earlier the residence of HMT Chairman, opened in 2019. It occupies two floors. The ground floor gives information about HMT, then there is description about the watch manufacturing process, its various parts, the different tools used for manufacturing and testing the watches. Visitors get to see the how watches are assembled with minute care, learn about the evolution of different type of dials like coined, printed, screened etc., and view complex machines used in different stages of watch making be it the Technographe to check the torque of spring or Spirometric machines to cut hairspring etc.

There is also a display section that shows iconic watches of HMT from hand wound to automatic and then to quartz watch series, special watches like the gold biscuit watches, pilot watches , moon phase watches that display the current phases of the moon. There is also a Braille watch section. HMT heavy machinery like lathe machine, power press are also showcased in

a room.

The first floor is dedicated for HMT machine tools, and tractors. The 4.17 acre green landscape surrounding the museum apart from housing a museum also has a souvenir shop, nursery, children's park and a cafeteria. There are also tractor rides available for children.

The museum is open from 10 am to 6:30 pm and closed on Tuesdays. There is an entry fee of ₹ 30 for adults.

Museums are repositories of the past. They talk about a bygone era, the heritage and culture of the city. When a growing city like Bangalore is slowly losing its heritage structures and homes, it is these museums which are keeping the roots of the city alive. It may be educational for students, inspirational for artists, as museums are full of ideas and creativity and it may be a spiritual journey for people who are seeking the past. Muse-



HMT Clock



HMT Machines

ums in that sense are just like libraries that enrich our mind. As Jeanie Kahnke puts it "It's not a museum. It's not a place of artifacts; it's a place of ideas." So if you are a tourist or a localite, make some time to visit the city's museums and learn from them.

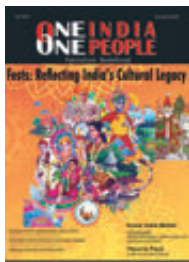


Usha Hariprasad is a freelancer who is fond of travelling, discovering new places and writing about travel related destinations around Bangalore at Citizen Matters. Currently, she works in a trekking organisation.

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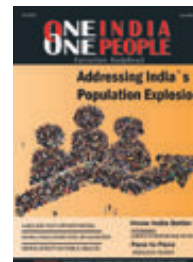
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“When you are making a film, the audience is no one else but you”

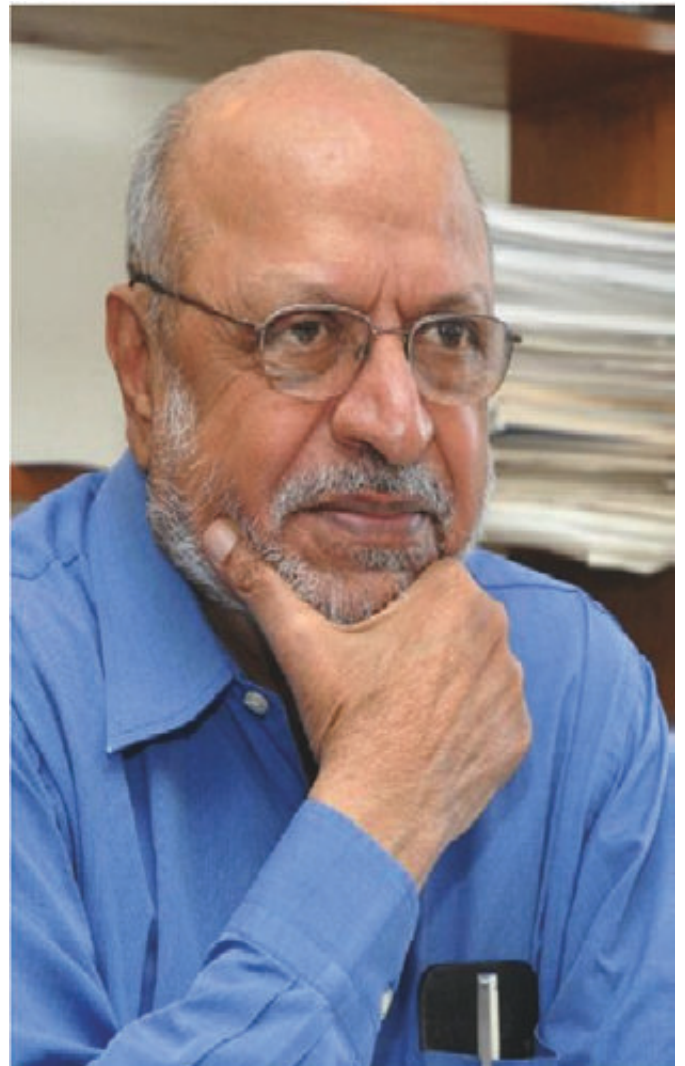
As a film director, screenwriter and documentary filmmaker, Shyam Benegal is often regarded as the pioneer of parallel cinema. Widely considered as one of the greatest filmmakers post-1970s, Benegal, in a comprehensive interview with **Shoma A. Chatterji**, makes out a case that creative artistic expression must be culture-specific. He also quotes Hollywood, saying it has acquired the ability to communicate with the world audience. So, Hollywood films have a world market.

His latest film *Mujib – The Making of a Nation* is a BFDC-NFDC collaboration between India and Bangladesh to place on record, the life, and tragic death of Sheikh Mujibur Rehman, the first Prime Minister and President of Bangladesh. The film released in September 2023 opened to mixed reviews but has hit the box office in Bangladesh. Citing *Mujib – The Making of a Nation*, he insists on eliminating native prejudices.

Benegal has won many prestigious awards in his long career including the Dadasaheb Phalke Award for his rich and long-standing contribution to cinema. After a long hiatus, he attended the gala premiere of the film held in Mumbai.

What is it about cinema as a medium of expression that attracts you?

Cinema uses elements practically from all the different arts – literature, painting, music, photography, dance, mime, movement



Shyam Benegal

and poetry. This is what attracts me to cinema. It allows you to explore all the arts while you are actually making a film, or, while you are working towards making a film.

Do you have a specific audience in mind – Indian, international, - when you are making a film? Is there a difference in approach if you have a special audience in mind?

When you are making a film, the primary audience of the film is no one else but you. At that point of time therefore, you do not think in terms of an international audience. But a film is complete only when the audience sees it. If you are thinking of an audience before you make a film, you are turning your film into a commodity even before you have made it. You are looking at it as a saleable commodity and this will bring along its own compulsions. I do not care for the kind of film where market factors manipulate my creative expression. There is certainly a difference between an Indian and an international audience. There are cultural and linguistic differences apart from differences in body language, manner of communications and so on. Semiotics, signs and symbols differ from culture to culture. But at another level, cinema also creates uniformity in communication that can be understood by



Poster of Benegal`s latest film ‘Mujib- the making of a Nation’

all. Hollywood for instance has acquired the ability to communicate with the world audience. So, Hollywood films have a world market.

Given a choice, what would you choose?

I believe that the essential source of creativity and or art lies in the specificity of the culture it is born into and belongs to. Creative artistic expression must be culture-specific. Exceptions to this are masters of cinema like Charlie Chaplin, Akira Kurasawa and Satyajit Ray who could communicate with everybody through their films. Standardization and uniformity in my opinion, militate against true artistic expression.

Given that we live in a developing economy, do you feel that a filmmaker should play a direct, social role like Eisenstein did in Russia? Or do you believe that since a filmmaker is essentially a creative artist, he should be free to pursue his art the way he likes?

Whether creative people play a social role or not depends on the kind of compulsions society forces on them. Under certain social conditions, as a filmmaker, you find yourself reacting to those conditions whether you like to react to them or not. Artistic inclinations sometimes have to do with individual compulsions. At other times, they have to do with social compulsions while there are historical compulsions sometimes that propel a filmmaker to move in a certain direction. Lenin for example, thought and believed cinema to have an important revolutionary role to play. Early Soviet filmmakers like Eisentein used cinema as a means of social and militant transformation as a given part of thinking of Soviet Communism. In Brazil on the other hand, the new cinema used cinema as a means to destroy the Establishment. So, at the end of the day, a filmmaker acts according to what his compulsions are at a given point of time. He is not just a reactive individual. Being creative is being more than just a reactive person.

Many of your films offer an empathetic insight into the conditions of women. What triggers this empathy?

There may not be a definite trigger every time. It is not as if I want to always present women as victims. There is something very interesting about women, particularly in India, because the social pressures on them are so much more than on men due to the way Indian society is. What I intend to show is the ability of Indian women to handle the situations they have been placed in.

You have also been quite empathetic to secular modes of thinking looking at the way you have treated minorities in some of your films. Right?

Right. The demolition of the Babri Masjid in December 1992 and the Mumbai riots that followed in its wake in January 1993 motivated me to respond to my feelings for the minority community. My empathy for the minority was triggered mainly by the violence I was personally witness to at the crowded streets of Tardeo where my office stands. I saw a Muslim bakery being set on

fire by an angry mob. I made three films in quick succession – Mammo, Sardari Begum and Zubeidaa, a family trilogy relating to the stories and journeys of three women from Muslim families. The first of these, Mammo, was in response to an article penned by Khalid Mohamed, then-editor of Filmfare and film critic of Times of India. It was about a great aunt of Mohamed that moved me. I sought Mohamed out and thus began a strikingly unusual collaboration between a filmmaker and a film critic, leading to the making of not one, but three films. I have not done anything consciously. These choices simply happened as I was not brought up on ideas of discrimination be it gender or communal beliefs.

Tell us something more about Mujib – The Making of a Nation.

We have our own native prejudices. You must open up to all these things and eliminate the prejudices. You must wipe out or keep behind you, these prejudices you have built across time and space, how things happened, what positions were taken, what made India finally go to war with Pakistan and so on. Was it because Bangladesh was fighting for its freedom? Or were we helping them so that they could help us? The subject is filled with political connotations and interpretations. We must always remember that we had 10 million refugees across our border. It was not our problem to begin with but over time, we realized that it had actually become our problem as they had crossed the borders and were now living in India. I did not expect the film to have such a hyped and huge release in Bangladesh. So it felt like a miracle when it opened to 170 theatres in Bangladesh each show running to a full house and then opening more screenings and more theatres. It was incredible to me.

How did you manage the language barrier considering you are not a Bengali and do not know the language, specially the Bangladeshi dialect which has its own cadences and accents differing from place to place?

I had a lot of help from Bangladeshis both from films and from the world out there. Bangladeshi Bangla is quite different from the Bengali people speak in India. But the locals helped me in overcoming issues with language. I also decided to use the narrative voice-over by the actress who played the role of Mujib’s wife Renu though she was not present or even an eye-witness to many events. Above all, I found the music to be more varied in nature than in this part of Bengal. Besides, since Bangladesh is full of rivers, the lives of the people are inevitably and irretrievably linked to their lives, their culture, their music and dance and everything else. For me, it was quite an enriching and learning experience.



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.

beach in India and it also hosted a wheelchair-accessible beach festival that included several activities such as wheelchair cricket, kite-flying, beach bowling, etc.

In 2010, the Ministry of Tourism initiated steps towards making travel destinations friendly for the persons with disability including making suitable toilets and ramps and assistance for those using sign language. Later, guidelines were issued to the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and four- and five-star hotels on how to be more accessible and inclusive.

Guiding by light

The Ministry of Tourism’s Accessible Tourism Guidelines for India has identified key barriers to accessible tourism. Some of these include:

- Appropriate signage and wayfinding systems
- Digital and alternative systems for conveying information for transportation, sightseeing, services, equipment, rentals
- Language barrier
- Maps in visual, tactile and audio formats
- Readability of text in signage
- Poor visual contrast in signage
- Absence of rails, ramps
- Steep slope, slippery surface, faulty ramp, broken sidewalks
- Lack of accessibility in public toilets
- First and last mile connectivity
- Boarding / Alighting various modes of transport
- Insufficient lighting and illumination at railway stations or bus terminals
- Inaccessible booking portals (websites/apps)
- Untrained staff
- Access to tourism resources (natural and cultural attractions, among others) and to general resources (shops, pharmaceuticals)
- Maintenance and periodic check of accessibility features

Multi-pronged approach

Tactile signs help those with visual impairments explore tourist sites. This technology has been making India's cultural heritage accessible to all and India has been pioneering it. Additionally, other technology programmes and features are being used to make tourism accessible for everyone.

India's diverse culture can be a linguistic challenge, but translation apps bridge that gap. Conversations flow smoothly, unburdened by language differences. India's use of technology creates an inclusive and harmonious travel experience.

Virtual tours, accessible accommodations, tactile signs, and translation apps erase barriers. India invites travellers of all kinds, transcending ability and language.

India's tech-driven travel is not just about inclusivity, but also sustainability - innovation harmonises travel with nature. In busy Indian cities, eco-friendly transportation is a priority. Electric vehicles in ride-sharing platforms lead this green revolution. Preserving ecosystems, while allowing exploration, is important. Technology helps monitor and protect fragile environments.

India's commitment to sustainable travel offers a model for nations worldwide. Collaborative efforts in research and development can lead to breakthroughs in sustainable technologies.

Bridging gaps

Technology brings India's rich culture to life. Augmented reality makes ancient sculptures vivid, and interactive exhibits invite participation in traditional crafts.

India's tech-driven travel isn't just for India—it's a call for global collaboration. Together, nations can harness technology for inclusive, sustainable, and culturally-rich travel experiences worldwide.

Technology bridges cultures. Virtual exhibitions and interactive experiences bring people from different parts of the world closer together, fostering mutual understanding and appreciation and promoting inclusive tourism at the same time.

It's clear that technology will continue to shape the way we explore the world. The advancements seen in India serve as



Fort Kochi in Ernakulam

a beacon, illuminating the path towards a more inclusive and accessible travel experience.

Education plays a pivotal role in ensuring that these technological advancements benefit all. By raising awareness about accessible travel options and sustainable practices, travellers are empowered to make informed choices. As part of a collective effort, governments, businesses, communities, and travellers all have an important role to play.

Research and development

Continued investment in research and development is essential. This will drive innovation in areas like sustainable transportation, conservation technology, and inclusive design, ensuring that the travel experiences of tomorrow are even more enriching and accessible for the differently-abled.

There's a need to invest in accessible infrastructure, embracing universal design principles, and leveraging technology, to create destinations where every traveller feels welcomed.

In India, several tourist destinations are already welcoming for all. The Qutub Minar in Delhi and other monuments in the vicinity are all well-equipped with ramps. These include Humayun Tomb, Indian Air Force Museum and the National Gallery of Modern Art, etc.

Same goes for the Jagannath Temple in Odisha's Puri which is accessible by wheelchairs. The Sanchi Stupa in Madhya Pradesh is also well equipped for differently-abled persons. There are tactile walkways at the venue, maps in Braille and all paths are accessible by a wheelchair. Even the Taj Mahal in Agra now has several ramps that help the differently-abled or those in a wheelchair which are also available at the venue.

Digital storytelling

In the labyrinthine bylanes of Varanasi, where the Ganga flows with timeless grace, and in the vibrant markets of Chennai, where the scent of spices lingers in the air, cultural heritage stands as an immutable treasure. Here, technology steps forth as a modern-day bard, amplifying the stories woven into the fabric of India's diverse tapestry.

Through immersive digital experiences, travellers become protagonists in the unfolding narrative of India's cultural legacy. Augmented reality installations with 3-D, 4-D and holographic features breathe life into ancient sculptures, allowing visitors to witness the stories that have withstood the test of time. Interactive exhibits beckon, inviting participants to partake in traditional crafts and rituals, forging a connection that transcends the boundaries of time and space.

Sahil Sharma is a volunteer with The Inclusive Tourism Project – a DraftCraft International initiative to research on activities associated with tourism and identify factors that affect inclusivity.

The 'Influence' factor

*Dwelling on the overwhelming number of influencers inundating the virtual space **Shalini Mehta** says, there is a lot of potential to channelise and utilise their reach and promote inclusive tourism. Social media and mobile phones have virtually revolutionised every industry and the way it reaches out to its customers. It has also effectively changed the travel algorithm.*



Harish Bali is a travel vlogger and an influencer on Instagram. His channel Visa2explore on Youtube is one of the most popular among food and travel enthusiasts

The role of social media influencers and celebrities is an important variable in understanding the dynamics of the tourism sector in India today. With an overwhelming number of influencers inundating the virtual space, there is a lot of potential to channelise and utilise their reach and promote inclusive tourism.

While influencers and celebrities play a pivotal role in promoting India's tourism, it is equally crucial to recognise the significance of empowering local communities. Their active participation and engagement in the tourism sector not only enriches the travel experience but also drives inclusive economic growth.

Social media and mobile phones have virtually revolutionised every industry and how it reaches out to its customers. It has also changed how people travel, where they go, the duration of travel and what activities they undertake at a travel destination. Influencers, at the click of a button on their phones, decide and influence thousands even millions what places are a 'hit' and what don't 'click'.

Alternatively, it has become very easy for the eager tourist to find out the best places to eat, stay and shop in a zone. Reviews, opinions, etc., have never been so easily available for those looking for feedback, scoop, photos and videos and for that little nudge to travel to their dream destination.

The Indian landscape

Tourism is a booming industry in India that is expanding at a positive rate and so are the influencers who are treading along leaving digital footprints everywhere. Travel and tourism are two of the largest industries in India, with a total contribution of about USD 178 billion to the country's GDP, as per IBEF's report on Growth of Tourism and Hospitality Industry.

The industry is projected to reach the mark of USD 125 billion by 2027 and the footfall of international tourists in India is set to touch 30.5 million people by the year 2028. Needless to say, technology especially digital and the social media marketing segment are some of the biggest growth enablers of

the travel and tourism industry in India.

There has been significant innovation in this economic sector owing to technological advancements and inclusion. Global distribution system (GDS), online travel portals and agencies and the extent of outreach through social media and internet has changed the landscape of the travel industry in India.

The adoption of cloud solutions and the development of Software as a Service (SaaS) technologies have been a significant driver of tech-oriented growth for travel and hospitality companies in India.

India is the most populous and the youngest country in the world with more than 50 per cent of its population below the age of 25 years and more than 65 per cent people below the age of 35 years. The numbers are astronomical as they signify the number of people who have access to mobile phones, internet, and social media and are tech-savvy and use social media as the primary source of information and are more likely to be 'influenced' by an 'influencer'.

India is a huge market with a very diverse tourism and travel portfolio that includes medical tourism, adventure tourism, cruises, sports tourism, wellness and spiritual tourism, eco-tourism, religious tourism, film tourism, etc. In a report published by the World Economic Forum, India ranked 34th in the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness in 2019.

Discovering trends

With the booming tourism industry, more influencers are getting an opportunity to create content for themselves that, in turn, helps those looking for information. Influencers are playing an important role in discovering new travel destinations, even creating trends of the kind of travel one should do and how to do it.

Social media as a whole and the influencer community particularly have become very important for the tourism sector. They're ruling the game and have become major driving force in the travel and hospitality segments. More and more companies and brands on ground are now roping in the services of influencers and partnering with them to increase their sales and visibility and to capitalise a niche market.

The stakeholder is benefited with this association because influencers offer a direct connection, a wider and targeted reach to the potential customer. Brands are partnering with influencers to showcase their products, services, venues, etc., and to develop a trusted connect with the audience.

The challenges

The synergy between influencers, celebrities, the tourism sector, and people forms the cornerstone of India's dynamic and inclusive tourism industry. Through strategic collaborations, community interaction and involvement, and a shared commitment to preserving cultural and natural heritage, India's tourism sector is poised for sustained growth and global recognition.

There are however intrinsic challenges that come into play while dealing with influencers to promote tourism and travel

activities and events. The most important being mismatch between the value offered by a brand or a company and those hailed by the influencer or celebrity in question. It can be very difficult to pick the right person to represent your brand or service and to endorse it in the right manner.

It can be quite challenging to find just the right person or influencer to represent or promote a brand. There is also a risk of the influencer not understanding completely what the brand represents and the entire exercise may then be futile.

The other big problem is the sheer number of influencers that are creating content and vlogging on travel. In the sea of such content creators, the viewer may get confused, overwhelmed and even lose interest in a particular travel destination or experience. Trust issues, financial discrepancies and unprofessional behaviour are also some of the issues that deter brands from reaching out to influencers.

Using technology

In the ever-evolving landscape of tourism, technological advancements continue to shape the way travellers engage with destinations and influencers are using this to their advantage as well.

Virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technologies have revolutionised the way travellers wish to experience a place. Many influencers are using these to grab the attention of their followers and promote travel and tourism brands in a more effective manner.

VR headsets or AR-enabled devices and other enhanced experience gadgets are being used widely to encourage visitors to embark on virtual tours, allowing them to experience iconic landmarks and cultural sites in an unforgettable manner.

For example, a virtual tour of the ancient temples of Hampi can transport travellers back in time, providing a sense of awe and wonder that transcends the physical constraints of the present.

Artificial intelligence (AI) too has enabled the customisation of travel experiences, tailoring recommendations and suggestions based on individual preferences. From personalised itinerary planning to intelligent chatbots that offer real-time assistance, AI enhances the efficiency and personalisation of the travel process and the influencers are using it to their advantage.

Instagram has been the game-changer when it comes to 'influencing' and it has affected many industries across spectrum including the tourism industry. Instagram has more than one billion active users and being a very visual platform, it has managed to reach people of all ages even the unlettered. It is being used widely by influencers to create content and engage effectively with travel lovers and wanderers.

Shalini Mehta is a volunteer with The Inclusive Tourism Project – a DraftCraft International initiative to research on activities associated with tourism and identify factors that affect inclusivity.

Vision Donor: Chintamani Hasabnis

Chintamani Hasabnis, a consummate portrait artist from Pune, is perhaps the only person in India who has accomplished the unique and seemingly impossible task of making the blind not only “see” but also engage them in aesthetic appreciation of his paintings. What is more, he has done this while at the same time keeping intact such appreciation of the same painting by the sighted. He has taken immense pains, through 12 years of trial, error, and a wide range of studies and experimentation, to develop this composite style of painting technique which is earning him rich dividends in terms of personal fulfilment, through this unique ‘vision donation’ to those deprived of it.



Chintamani Hasabnis

“**W**here is the long-off fielder?” she whispered, moving her fingertips slowly, carefully all over the painting of a cricket match, after successfully identifying the bowler, batsmen, wicket keeper and several other players on the field. Dozens of spectators around her gaped in silence.

Mani was stumped too but he stepped up nevertheless and explained to her the reason for the absence of such a fielder from the painting. She nodded but said nothing. Before leaving, she told Mani, “Your painting made me feel as if I was a spectator watching a live cricket match being played in the ground in front of me.” And then added assertively, “Still, I would have liked a long-off fielder there.”

She was Komal Gavas, 20, congenitally, totally blind. She had come to see an exhibition of Mani’s paintings at Fergusson College in Pune, along with her classmates -- also blind.

Chintamani Hasabnis -- Mani for family and friends -- 57, is likely the only person in India who is fired with the idea of creating paintings that the blind can see. Or rather, paintings that the blind too can see, for, making the blind “see” a painting is too restrictive an aspiration for him. “My goal is to create paintings that the blind and the sighted can together see and help each other in appreciating their aesthetic merit,” he says. An accomplished portrait artist, Hasabnis is a recipient of this year’s prestigious Ravi Paranjape Gunijan Award, which he shared with Charuhas Pandit, whose child cartoon character *Chintoo* is now a household name in Maharashtra. The annual award has been instituted by the Ravi Paranjape Foundation to recognise outstanding and sustained



A visually impaired lady feeling the strings of sitar maestro Ravi Shankar’s portrait by Hasabnis

achievement in fine arts.

Hasabnis had always wanted to harness his artistic prowess to create not only something unique, but also something socially relevant and meaningful. After seeing blind individuals going about in life with remarkable confidence, he began to wonder whether aesthetic appreciation of painting, an exclusively visual two dimensional art, could be brought within their reach. That led him to the realisation that even the sighted cannot be engaged in an aesthetic appreciation of painting because they do not have any artistic perspective, they cannot “see” a painting the way it deserves to be seen. Here was born the path breaking idea of addressing both these categories of viewers together, which also met both of Hasabnis’ preconditions for carrying out further work in his chosen field.

“My attempts to create a composite form of painting, which began as a seemingly impossible challenge of making the blind “see”, transformed my life and that of my family too, by 360 degrees. As a means to dissolve the barrier between the blind and the sighted, it has been as liberating to my blind friends as it has been to me and they are now integral to my mission of designing a profound, wholesome and fulfilling aesthetic experience for both the blind and the sighted in a collaborative and symbiotic initiative,” he says.

Creating such a composite medium was indeed a multidimensional challenge, and started with acquiring a primary understanding of the physiological aspect of “seeing” and of how exactly a visually impaired person is biologically



Hasabnis makes use of audio clips for those blind who cannot read braille

equipped for compensating this lacuna. He learned that the visual cortex located in the occipital lobe of the brain gets activated even when the source of the stimulation is a sense organ *other than the eye*, which in turn triggers its interpretation by the brain. This prompted him to wonder if this complex process could be harnessed to make the blind “see” exactly, or almost so, as the sighted do. If yes, then it should be possible to further develop this ability into aesthetic appreciation of a painting. This was an epiphany! Hasabnis began to spend hours outside schools and hostels for the blind, silently observing them conversing with each other and with the sighted. He made a detailed study of their body language, their interests, which were topped by cricket, their facial expressions, their perceptions and responses, their concept of “seeing” . . .

He learnt English and Marathi braille, to read as well as to write. He moved around blindfolded in his house to experience the challenges that the blind constantly face with architectural hurdles and furniture. As mundane activities turned into great challenges, his frustration fuelled his urge to meet them headlong.

Observation and experience told Hasabnis that the blind cannot visualise the size of huge objects such as trees, trains or buses. Nor can they understand that objects at a distance appear small. They can only get an approximate idea of a shape but not its details. Flat, 2-dimensional art is inaccessible to the blind, but texture could be included to be perceptible to both blind and sighted persons.

But just learning was not enough. Hasabnis strove to unlearn the skills of sighted people, to erase memories of a seeable world, which awakened him to the comparative strengths and weaknesses of the blind and the sighted. Armed with this consciousness, he went ahead to identify six steps by which a person, whether blind or sighted, arrives at aesthetic appreciation of an art object. He became obsessed with the idea of empowering the blind with the tools required for aesthetic appreciation of paintings, seeing his work as his own contribution towards a more humane, egalitarian and non-discriminatory world.

“Painting is inherently an abstract art form, a medium which conveys the artist’s feelings to the viewer. An artist uses



The visually impaired as well as sighted trying to explore and appreciate art by Hasabnis

his own language, his own grammar and his own tools to express himself on canvas. Each viewer in his own way and by his own effort decodes all these components and tries to appreciate them. This is an intricate process and a positive outcome of it depends as much on the intellectual capability and skill of the artist as it does on the receptivity of the viewer. I have tried to understand this intricate process in every possible detail in order to arrive at my goal,” he reveals.

The unique tapestry of Hasabnis’ endeavour is woven with two strains of his perception. One, that the sighted must be stimulated into “seeing” a painting with a higher level of mindfulness and two, if the blind are given appropriate tools, they could transcend the visible aspects of the same painting and explore and grasp the deeper meanings and emotions that the artist has hoped to convey.

Hasabnis crafted his strategy to not only address both his target viewers together, but to also develop an interdependence between them for a mutually rewarding outcome, by harnessing the strengths of one to cover the weaknesses of the other. He decided that tactile and auditory components must be introduced into a painting and that the blind must be allowed to touch the paintings to diminish the distance between the painting and the blind viewer and foster a dialogue. He made use of raised lines, textures, and actual objects, such as the strings of a sitar, a cricket ball and a bicycle bell in the paintings. He devised an emotional decoder by arranging text matter consisting of supportive analysis and even poetry, in braille in certain specific patterns on the canvas, which would add an extra dimension to the painting and would appeal to the sighted too. He also made use of audio clips for those blind who could not read braille.

After being bitten by the bug for ‘painting for the blind’ twelve years ago, Hasabnis burnt the midnight oil for three years, frantically wielding his brush to create twenty five large, composite paintings which were displayed at a special exhibition, his first such with the visually impaired as his targeted viewers, in 2015 at the Nehru Centre, Mumbai. Significantly titled, **“Closed Eyes and Open Minds”**, this unique show was visited by over 600 blind people from different parts of Maharashtra, as also by about a 1000 sighted individuals simultaneously. The outcome was truly astonishing.



Visually impaired students “seeing” the portrait of Santoor maestro Shivkumar Sharma by feeling it

No less than 355 sighted visitors filled up the form for eye donation, and 17 did so for organ and body donation.

Within three months another exhibition was put up in Pune which was keenly visited by 1300 odd blind people. This snowballed over the next ten years into a series of 14 such exhibitions that progressively brought more and more insights for Hasabnis to fine tune his craft. But more than that it brought him the satisfaction of the endorsement of his bold, pioneering initiative – intuitive, well-grounded and purposeful.

The moment of triumph came when Hasabnis saw student after blind student of Fergusson College explaining his paintings exhibited there, to the sighted people, who clearly looked gobsmacked at their own visual inadequacies! The blind had captured accurately and were articulating clearly the emotions that he, as the creator of the art form, had hoped to convey to the sighted. It was indeed a fascinating, joyous and deeply satisfying finale to the artist’s labour of love that had been his obsession for close to twelve years.

Not satisfied with the blind individuals’ testimony that they could “see” his paintings, Hasabnis organised a survey wherein a common questionnaire was given to the blind and the sighted visitors. The responses were indeed revealing and thought provoking.

When asked, “What thought came into your mind after seeing this painting?” a sighted person replied, “Had I seen this painting unaided by a blind person, the finer nuances placed

position of the pitch. Also, I found all the fielders, except long-off.”

The sighted person confessed that he could not grasp the real meaning of the painting.

But the most astonishing insight emerged when the blind as well as the sighted were asked to list all the objects and their locations shown in the painting. To this, 73% sighted people replied, “Don’t know,” whereas 59% of the blind persons were able to accurately name all the objects and their placement on the canvas!

With his tried and tested approach of “Closed Eyes and Open Minds,” Hasabnis has demonstrated that the visually impaired can successfully rise in the role of a friend-philosopher-teacher-guide to the sighted, in accessing and sharing the deeper meaning of art, specifically painting, which had so far eluded the latter’s visual apparatus. He is often invited to exhibit all across the state and beyond, but regrets that it is not always possible for the visually impaired to travel to visit the exhibition due to distances and expense. He is now working on a book of paintings for them and on building an ‘art understanding kit’ using braille with audio-visual tools.

“This work, as a way forward towards a more responsible, humanitarian, egalitarian and discrimination-free world is, I believe, the most urgent need today and will forever remain a source of immense joy and gratification for me,” he smiles.

Mani used to fight shy of autographing his paintings, insisting that the work itself should be his signature. That has come true quite literally. If you see the blind and the sighted flocked together around a painting in its appreciation, you can rest assured it is the work of Chintamani Hasabnis.

More power to your brush, and to your braille slate too, Mani!

(PS: He started signing his paintings on the insistence of renowned tabla player Ustad Zakir Hussain, who commissioned Hasabnis to make a portrait of his illustrious father Ustad Alla Rakha.)





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MAJOR VETRI NATHAN VIR CHAKRA (1941-1971)

Exceptional soldier and an officer par excellence

Vetri Nathan was born to Commander N K Nathan on 24 February 1941 in Mumbai. He joined the army and was commissioned into Second Battalion of Eleven Gorkha Rifles (2/11 GR) in December 1962. The second battalion of the regiment was inducted into Mizoram to quell the Mizo uprising in the 1960s. Major Vetri led many counter-insurgency operations leading the terrorists to dub him 'Black Pearl' and place a price on his head.

The Indo-Pak war of 1947-1948 concluded with the Line of Control bisecting the Ladakh district, with the Skardu tehsil going to Pakistan. There was political tension between East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) and West Pakistan. The East Bengal protests in 1969 led to the resignation of President Ayub Khan. He invited army chief General Yahya Khan to take over Pakistan government.

Later elections were declared and the Awami League of East Pakistan gained a majority. The Pakistan army rejected this victory. The Awami League called for strikes leading into an insurrection. The Pakistan government reacted with cruel suppression.

Hoping to prevent any Indian support to East Pakistan (subsequently Bangladesh), on 3 December 1971, the Pakistan Air Force (PAF) launched surprise pre-emptive strikes on eleven airfields in north-western India. The Indian Air Force responded with initial air strikes the same night. These expanded to massive retaliatory air strikes. Next morning India launched a full-scale invasion of Pakistan.

During the 1971 war 2/11 GR, was deployed in the Kargil Sector of J&K (Jammu and Kashmir). A series of hill features ran along the LoC (Line of Control) in this sector and held considerable importance for military operations. One such hill feature Point 13620, dominating the Srinagar-Leh highway was under the control of Pakistani forces. The Indian forces had captured this Point during the 1965 war but had to return it as part of the Tashkent Agreement signed on 10 January 1966.

The hill feature posed a serious threat to the movement of troops along the highway and it was necessary to dislodge the enemy forces from Point 13620. 2/11 GR was assigned this task. The task involved overrunning many enemy-held posts along the slopes leading to Point 13620. Major Vetri

Nathan was commanding one of the companies that took on this challenging task and launched the attack on 6 December 1971. Major Nathan displaying courage and leadership skills successfully managed to capture the enemy held post 'Black Rocks'.

Subsequently, the Company marched towards their objective of capturing Point 13620. However, the advance was stalled by the enemy's Medium Machine Gun (MMG) post on the summit. After analyzing the gravity of the situation, Major Nathan realised that the enemy MMG post had to be neutralised at any cost. Disregarding his personal safety, he called for the handheld Rocket Launcher and personally rose up to take aim and neutralise the enemy MMG bunker. While he shot off the rocket which knocked off the MMG post, he at the same time took an enemy bullet through his head and was martyred.

His martyrdom infuriated his troops who unsheathed their khukris (daggers) and went on a rampage against the enemy beheading many soldiers. The daredevil attack by Gorkha soldiers forced the enemy to flee evacuating all the posts before first light and Point 13620 was captured. The post, 14,000 feet above the sea was named as 'Vetri Post' in his honour and a memorial was erected at this place.

Major Vetri Nathan was a committed soldier and an officer par excellence who laid down his life in the highest traditions of the Indian Army. Before going to battle, he had paid his mess charges, as he was aware of the possibility of not returning.

He was given the gallantry award, 'Vir Chakra' for his exceptional courage, determination, unflinching leadership, and supreme sacrifice. The Pilot Bunder Road in Navy Nagar, Mumbai was renamed as Major Vetri Nathan Vir Chakra Road.



Contributed by Renu Prakash from the data bank of Late Brig. Suresh Chandra Sharma.

OOMMEN CHANDY (1943-2023)

Politician who put people first

“My mantra has always been to work hard, to stay humble, and to never forget that public service is a privilege.”

Oommen Chandy nee Kunjoonju was a member of the Indian National Congress (INS) and was Chief Minister of Kerala, for two terms from 2004 to 2006 and 2011 to 2016 and the Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Assembly from 2006 to 2011.

Born in Kumarakom, Puthuppally, Kottayam district in a Syrian Christian family, he graduated from CMS College, Kottayam and did BA in Economics from St. Berchmans College, Changanassery and LLB from Law College, Ernakulam.

VJ. Oommen, his grandfather was a Travancore Legislative Council member. Chandy entered politics as an activist of Kerala Students Union (KSU), the student wing of the INC. He went on to become the State President in 1967 and was elected President of the State Youth Congress in 1970.

Just 27 years when elected first, he represented the Puthuppally constituency for five decades from 1970 until his death, making him the longest-serving member of the Assembly. He handled as Minister, the portfolios of Labour, Home and Finance, and was Chairman, Public Accounts Committee 1996–1998.

During his stints as Chief Minister, he was instrumental in implementing several infrastructure projects in the State, once thought impossible. These included the Vizhinjam Container Transshipment Terminal project, Kochi Metro Rail, Smart City, Kannur Airport, Medical colleges, Development of road bypasses, etc.

He was absolved of involvement in controversies like the 2013 Kerala solar panel scam, Vizhinjam Port corruption accusation, the Pattoor land case and the Palmolein oil import scam.

His slogans *Athivegam bahudooram* (Fast and Far) and *Vikasanavum karuthalaum* (Development and Care) gained traction. His innovative approach to ensure transparency and accountability in governance, particularly the web-streaming of the entire functioning of CM's office was lauded.

Chandy named his residence in Thiruvananthapuram 'Puthuppally'. He would visit his ancestral home

Karottu-Vallakkalil in Puthuppally constituency on Saturday night and leave on Sunday night, a schedule he never broke. He conducted his weekly *darbar*.

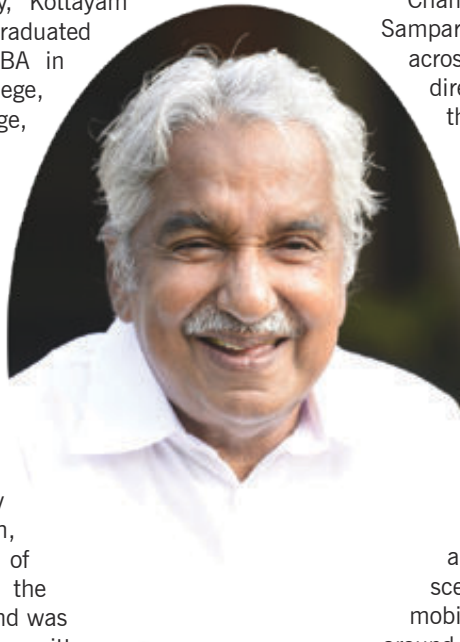
He was arguably the only legislator and chief minister from Kerala who widely travelled across the state, making the maximum use of the public transport system, cutting his dependence only when he aged.

Chandy organised the widely-popular *Jana Samparka Paripadi* (mass contact programme) across districts to listen to public grievances directly and resolve them on the spot. It was the first of its kind to ensure the right to direct access to leaders and senior civil servants of the government. The programme received the United Nations global award for Public Service award programme in 2013, the only Indian chief minister to achieve it.

Chandy led a sacramental life serving the people. A philanthropist who did not allow his sense of empathy dry up until his last moments, compassion was the theme of his life. The ultimate people's leader, his commitment and visionary leadership left an indelible mark on Kerala's development scenario. Interestingly, he never used a mobile phone but used the phones of those around him as well as his security officials.

Chandy died at Chinmaya Mission Hospital, Bengaluru aged 79 due to complications from throat cancer. After being airlifted to Thiruvananthapuram, the funeral procession to Kottayam and his burial in a special tomb alongside departed priests at St George Orthodox Church, Puthuppally took 30 hours.

As per his last wishes, the funeral was conducted with only religious rituals and without any official state honours. In fact, his tomb is now part of travel packages by tour operators. The Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, to which Chandy belonged, left the question on possible sainthood for the political stalwart open. He is survived by his spouse, Mariamma and three children.



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INNOCENT (1948-2023)

A versatile actor and brilliant comedian

One of Malayalam cinema's most versatile comedians, Innocent Vareed Thekkethala was born in Irinjalakuda in Kerala on February, 28, 1948 as the third of eight children. He was not academically inclined and during the Emergency, he shifted base to Davanagere in Karnataka where he along with his cousins ventured into business. He later tried his hand at several businesses and came a cropper. That was when he had a brainwave and decided to chance his luck in the film industry. And the rest, as they say, is history. Innocent joined a film production company as a production executive and having had a little experience in theatre landed his first role in the film *Nrithasala* in the year 1972.

The doyen of Malayalam film comedy was famous for his use of the Trissurian flavour laced with a native slang. The failed businessman would soon turn into a household name and with a string of brilliant performances in highly successful movies. Top-notch directors in the eighties and nineties like Priyadarshan, Sathyan Anthikad, Fazil and Kamal among several others repeated him in almost all their films him with meaty roles. He won over audiences with his brand of humour which involved not just body language but a few set mannerisms and flawless dialogue delivery.

In a five-decade career, Innocent portrayed a whole gamut of roles in megahits like *Godfather*, *Vietnam Colony*, *Manichithrathazhu*, *Devasuram* etc. He also donned the villain's cap in films like *Mazhavilkavadi*, *Ponmuttaidunna Tharavu* and *Ganamela*. Films like *Ramji Rao Speaking*, *Kathodu Kathoram* and *Kilukkam* had phenomenal runs at the box office largely due to brilliant performances by Innocent. He teamed up with another versatile comedian Jagathi Sreekumar in several films but the one that the audiences lapped up was *Kabooliwala*, a laugh riot.

The comedian also essayed serious character roles with consummate ease worked in 700 films and shared an excellent rapport with matinee idols like Mammooty, Mohanlal, Suresh Gopi and even with new generation stars like Prithviraj, Asif Ali, Jayasurya, Tovino Thomas and Indrajit. He also acted in a good number of films with well-known actors like Jayaram, Dileep, Manoj K Jayan and others.

Innocent won three Kerala state awards and also several other awards from TV channels. Later in his career he also dabbled in TV and being an avid conversationalist, became the life and soul of reality shows. While he confined himself mostly to Malayalam films he also acted in a few Tamil, Kannada, Hindi and even English films. The last film where he acted was *'Pachuvum Alpudavilakkum* released in 2023.



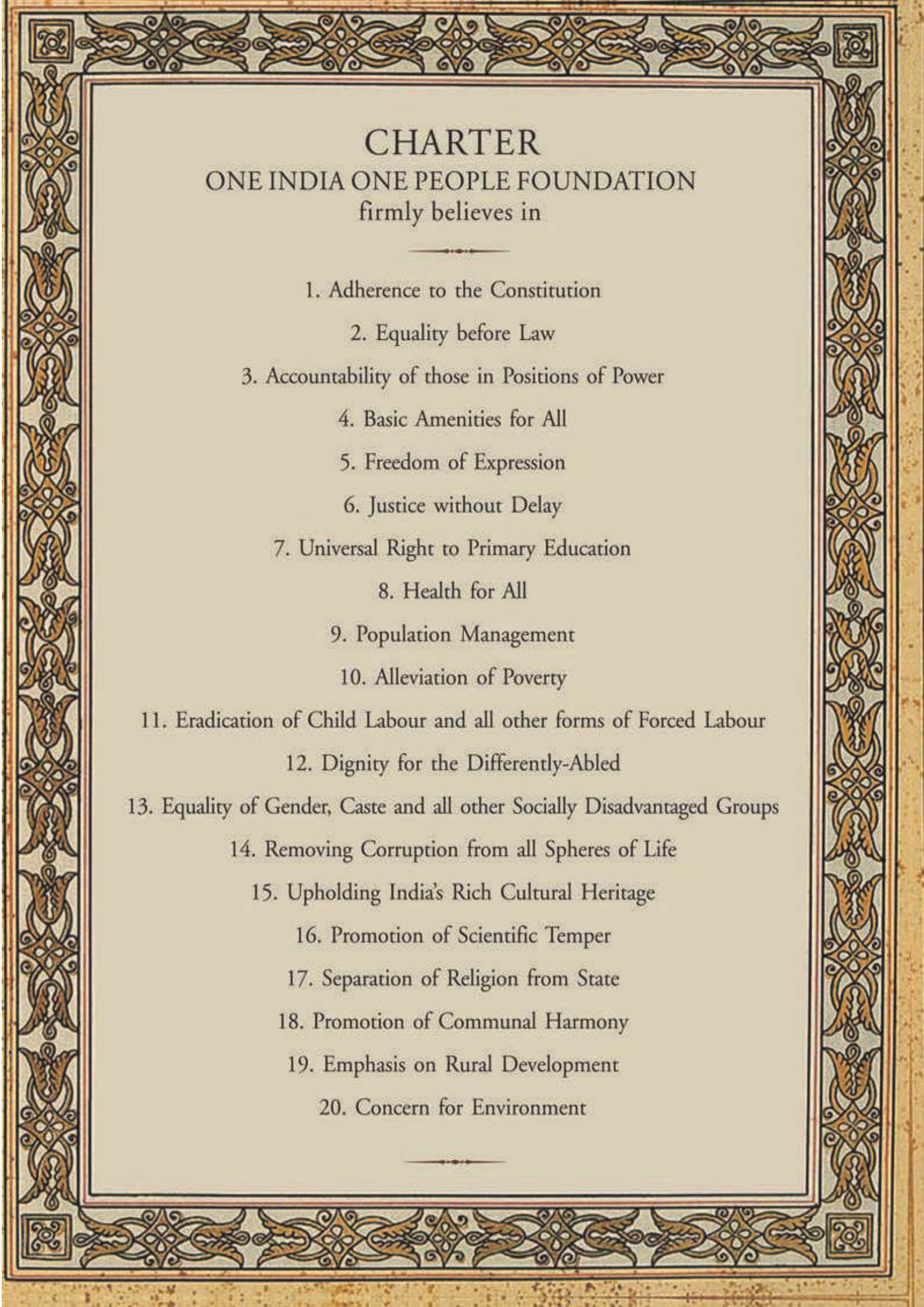
Inclined towards politics, he was elected to the Lok Sabha in 2014 as an independent backed by the Left Democratic Front from the Chalakudy constituency in Kerala. Unfortunately, he was diagnosed with throat cancer. A relapse made it difficult to discharge his obligations as an MP. Innocent however unsuccessfully contested the Lok Sabha elections in 2019. He served as the President of the film artiste's body AMMA (Association of Malayalam Movie Actors) for several years and played a pivotal role in turning the organisation into a highly beneficial one for artistes, especially those who had fallen on bad times.

Innocent was also revered by a generation of stars who often availed his wise counsel. He also authored seven books including one titled *'Cancer Wardile Chiri'* (Laughter in the Cancer Ward) reminiscing on the days he spent in the hospital. His autobiography *'Njan Innocent'* (I am Innocent) turned out to be a best seller. *'Irinjalakudakku Chuttum'* another of his books won him the Kerala Sahitya Academy Award.

Although Innocent recovered from cancer, he suffered from an attack of Covid and complications thereof. The actor was hospitalised in a critical condition and passed away on the 26 March, 2023. His departure has left a void in Malayalam cinema that can never be filled.



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CHARTER

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 2. Equality before Law
 3. Accountability of those in Positions of Power
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 5. Freedom of Expression
 6. Justice without Delay
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 8. Health for All
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 14. Removing Corruption from all Spheres of Life
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 16. Promotion of Scientific Temper
 17. Separation of Religion from State
 18. Promotion of Communal Harmony
 19. Emphasis on Rural Development
 20. Concern for Environment
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WHO AM I?



Am I a Hindu first or an Indian first?

Am I a Muslim first or an Indian first?

Am I a Christian first or an Indian first?

Am I a Buddhist first or an Indian first?

Am I a Brahmin first or an Indian first?

Am I a Dalit first or an Indian first?

Am I a South Indian first or an Indian first?

Am I a North Indian first or an Indian first?

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

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

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

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

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

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



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Be a Proud Indian. Make this country Great, Strong and United.



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