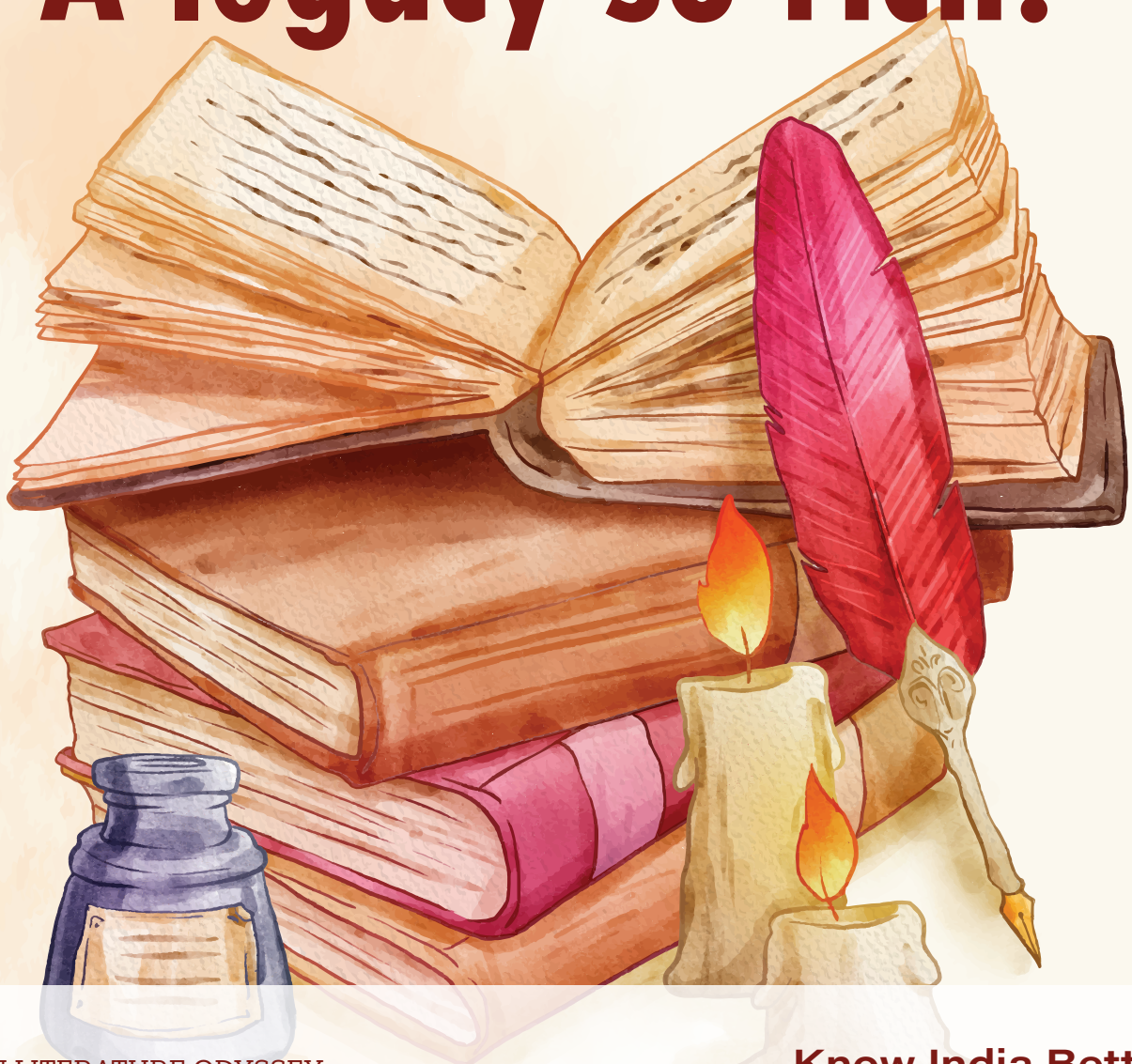


ONE INDIA ONE PEOPLE

Patriotism Redefined

Indian Literature: A legacy so rich!



THE INDIAN LITERATURE ODYSSEY

REPOSITORY OF KNOWLEDGE, VIRTUES

EMERGENCE OF BHAKTI, SUFI TRADITIONS

Know India Better

FOOTLOOSE IN DHARAMSHALA

THE HE(ART) OF TRAVEL

Face to Face

SIVASRI SKANDAPRASAD

Great Indians : Wing Commander Karun Krishna Majumdar DFC BAR | Peter Pereira | P R S Oberoi

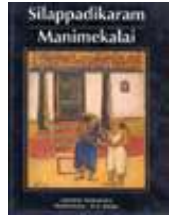


CONTENTS

May 2024

Vol. 25/02

THEME:
LITERATURE



Morparia's Page 02

The Indian literature odyssey
Anushka Singh 04

Repository of knowledge, virtues
Nandini Rao 06

Indian literature under colonial rule
Ruchi Verma 08

Emergence of Bhakti, Sufi traditions
Anushka Singh 10

Vedic hymns to contemporary verses
Kriti Kalra 12

Exploring regional literary kaleidoscope
Neeti Prakash 14

The rich heritage of Indian drama
Soumya Nair 16

Know India Better 17

Footloose in Dharamshala
Gustasp and Jeroo Irani 22

The He(art) of Travel
Gustasp and Jeroo Irani 22

Face to Face 27

Sivasri Skandaprasad
A. Radhakrishnan

General articles

Pinpricking Nature with trials and errors
Raju Korti 30

Man-Animal conflict at flashpoint
Tuhina Bannerji 32

Kitareba 2.0, an aria of Partition
Shoma A. Chatterji 34

Great Indians 36



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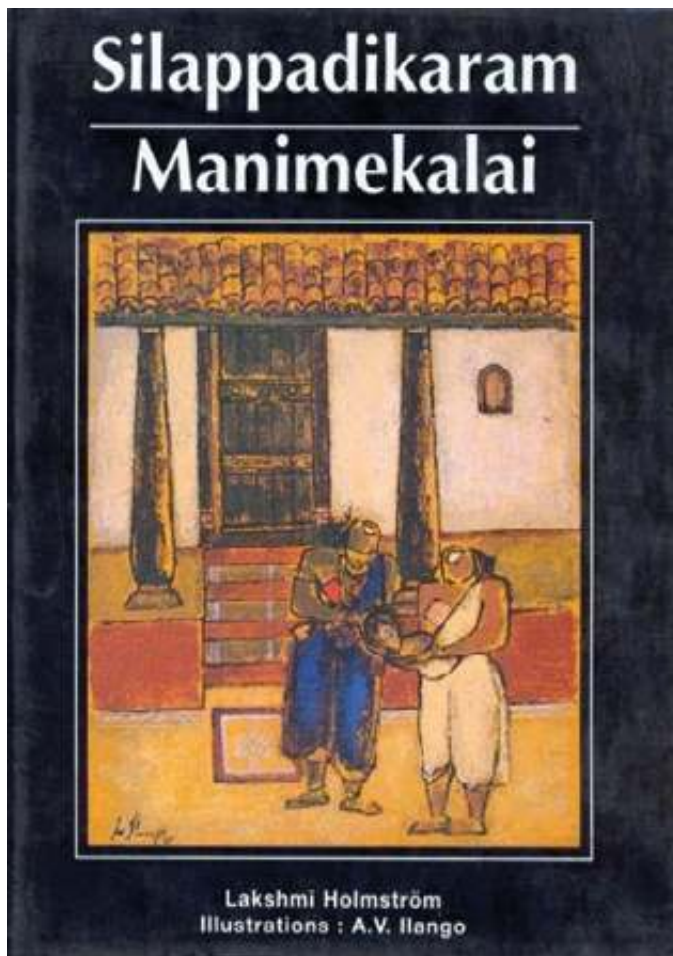
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The Indian literature odyssey

Tracing how Indian literature has trekked in its multi-splendoured form, **Anushka Singh** writes how -- from the soulful rhythms of Tamil Sangam poetry, which date back to the classical period of ancient South India, to the raw and unfiltered narratives of Marathi Dalit literature -- each corner of the sub-continent offers its own distinct hue to Indian letters. As she observes, Indian literature today thrives on the contributions of writers from diverse backgrounds and genres.

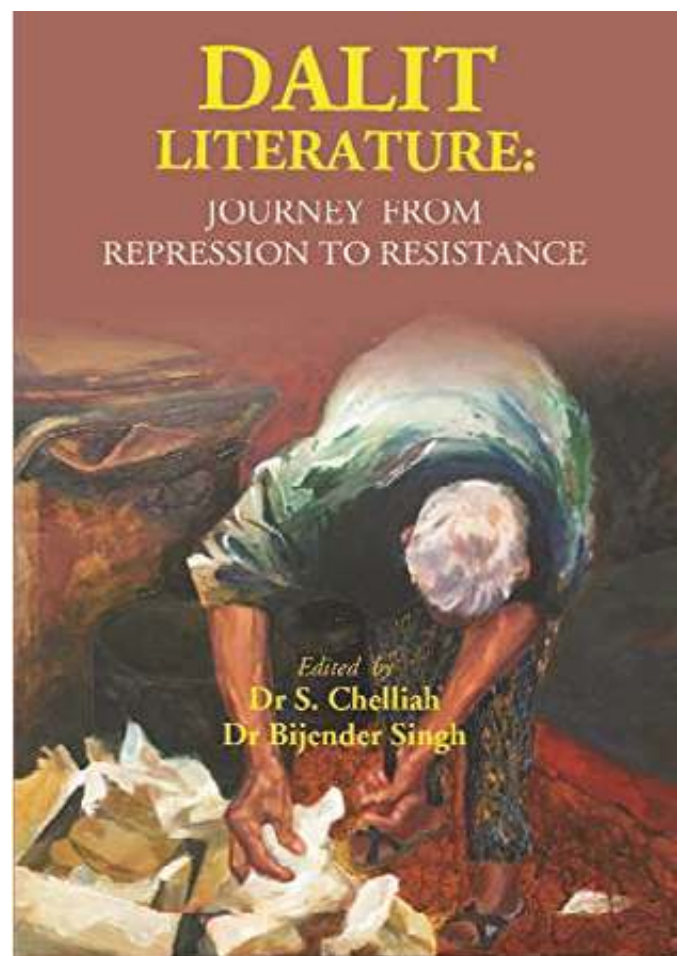


Tamil epic

In the ever-expanding realm of Indian literature, an intricate web of cultures, languages, and religions unfolds, spanning centuries of storytelling brilliance and cultural exchange. From the ancient Vedas to the contemporary masterpieces of acclaimed authors, Indian literature stands as a testament to the nation's rich heritage, diversity and dynamic spirit.

At the core of Indian literature beats a heart pulsating with remarkable diversity—an intricate mosaic of voices echoing across the sprawling landscapes of the subcontinent. With a population surpassing 1.4 billion souls and a linguistic mesh woven from over 1,500 languages and dialects, India's literary terrain unfolds as a kaleidoscope of regional traditions, themes, and styles.

From the soulful rhythms of Tamil Sangam poetry, which



Dalit literature

date back to the classical period of ancient South India, to the raw and unfiltered narratives of Marathi Dalit literature, each corner of the subcontinent offers its own distinct hue to Indian letters.

From the South to North

The lyrical verses of Sangam poetry, steeped in the rich traditions of Tamil culture and history, evoke a world of lush landscapes, passionate romance, and timeless wisdom, captivating readers with their exquisite imagery and emotional depth. Sangam epics *Silappathikaram* and *Manimegalai* and literature including *Tolkappiyam*, *Pattuppattu*, etc., are ancient works of literature.

In stark contrast, Dalit literature emerges as a powerful

voice of dissent and resistance, challenging entrenched hierarchies and giving voice to the marginalised and oppressed. Through its gripping narratives and searing social commentary, Dalit literature confronts the injustices of caste discrimination head-on, demanding recognition, equality, and dignity for all members of society.

Dalit literature came into existence in the medieval era. One of the first such writer was Kannada poet-activist Madara Chennaiah who came into prominence in the eleventh century. The works of Kalavee and Kabir furthered the movement in the country.

Modern Dalit literature evolved in Maharashtra in the vernacular language when, in the sixties, Maharashtra Dalit Sahitya Sangh came into existence. The literary work done by Jyotiba Phule and Dr B R Ambedkar in Maharashtra in highlighting the issues faced by the Dalits gave the right impetus to the Dalit movement. Another tall figure was Prof. Shripad Mahadev Mate, a social reformer and Marathi writer, who wrote extensively against caste discrimination and untouchability.

Indian literature's vastness extends far and beyond, encompassing a vast array of genres, themes, and storytelling techniques that reflect the myriad experiences and perspectives of its diverse inhabitants. From the epics Ramayan and Mahabharat to the timeless wisdom of the Panchatantra fables, from the mystical verses of Sufi poetry to the whimsical tales of regional folklore, Indian literature offers literary treasures waiting to be discovered and savoured.

Literary dynamism

Moreover, the dynamic nature of Indian literature is further enriched by its constant evolution and adaptation to changing times and circumstances. Writers and poets from across the country continue to explore new themes, experiment with different forms, and push the boundaries of artistic expression, ensuring that Indian literature remains a vibrant and ever-relevant reflection of the human experience.

The remarkable diversity of Indian literature serves as a testament to the resilience, creativity, and boundless imagination of the people. It underlines the innate power of storytelling to transcend boundaries, forge connections, and illuminate the human condition, uniting all in the shared quest for meaning, understanding, and belonging in this wondrous world.

The journey through India's literary tradition begins with the ancient Vedas, written in Sanskrit and dating back to 1,500 BCE. These sacred scriptures offer profound insight into the spiritual beliefs and practices of ancient India, laying the foundation for centuries of philosophical inquiry and literary exploration.

Ramayan and Mahabharat embody the essence of Indian storytelling tradition. Written in Sanskrit, these epic poems weave together tales that offer timeless lessons in morality, duty, and the eternal struggle between good and evil.

The Puranas, comprising stories and anecdotes derived from contemporary social and cultural norms, are important scriptures. These include Shiv Purana, Garuda Purana, Skanda Purana, Vishnu Purana, Matsya Purana, Varaha Purana, etc.

Exploring vibrance

Indian literature embraces a rich tradition of folklore, fables, and myths, passed down through generations via oral storytelling. From the enchanting folk songs of Bengal to the haunting ballads of Rajasthan, these stories are woven into the fabric of everyday life, preserving the cultural heritage and collective memory of diverse communities across the subcontinent.

Religion exerts a profound influence on Indian literature, shaping its themes, motifs, and moral values. The Bhagvad Gita, for example, explores the intricacies of dharma (duty) and karma (action). Gita is a 700-verse scripture and part of the epic Mahabharat.

Jain and Buddhist literature offer profound insights into the path to enlightenment and liberation from suffering. Buddhist literature forms one of the oldest written literary works in India. Written in Pali language, the Tripitaka - Sutta Pitaka, Vinaya Pitaka, Abhidhamma Pitaka – is the main scripture of Buddhism.

The main book of Jainism is Jain Agam or Agam Sutras, written in Prakrit and other regional languages such as Tamil. Jain literature has been derived from Lord Mahavir's teachings which were compiled by his disciples (ganadharas) and monks (srut-kevalis) into scriptures.

Embracing change

During the medieval era, under the patronage of the Mughal emperors, India witnessed a flourishing of Persian and Arabic literature. This period, marked by cultural exchange and intellectual ferment, saw the translation of Persian classics into Indian languages, and vice versa.

The Mughal courts became centres of literary patronage, attracting poets, scholars, and intellectuals from across the Islamic world, who introduced their ideas, forms, and literary traditions.

At the same time, the medieval period witnessed the rise of devotional poetry in regional languages, spurred by the Bhakti and Sufi movements. These grassroots movements, which emerged in response to the rigid hierarchies of caste and religious orthodoxy, gave voice to the aspirations and spiritual yearnings of the common people.

Mir Taqi Mir, known for his exquisite ghazals in Urdu, captivated audiences with his lyrical expression of love, longing, and existential angst. Bhakti poets of South India, such as the eighth-century Tamil poet Andal (aka Nachiyar), composed religious hymns in praise of the divine, embodying the spirit of unconditional love and devoutness. Her verses, infused with fervent devotion, continue to inspire devotees and scholars.

Literature of a free India

Post-independence era witnessed a surge in regional literature, as writers across the linguistic spectrum sought to reclaim and celebrate their cultural heritage. Bengali authors like Mahasweta Devi explored themes of class struggle and indigenous rights, drawing inspiration from folk traditions and tribal folklore.

In the South, writer and independence activist Vaikom Muhammad Basheer (aka Beypore Sulthan) and writer and cartoonist O V Vijayan used Malayalam literature as a medium to critique social norms and political corruption.

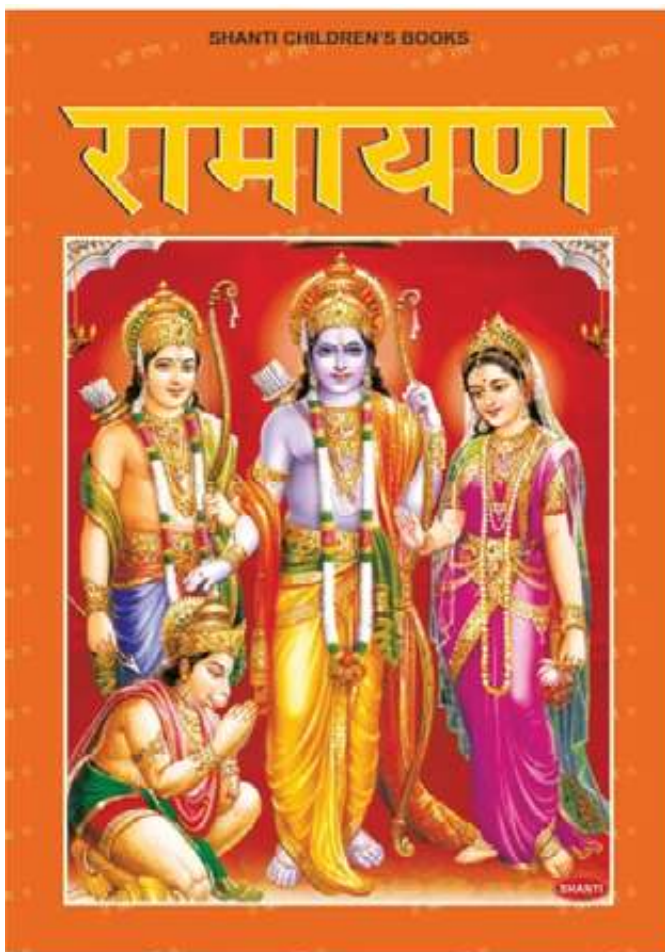
The global success of Indian authors writing in English, colloquially referred to as 'Indo-Anglian' literature, brought Indian narratives to the forefront of the international literary scene. Writers like Salman Rushdie and Vikram Seth captivated readers worldwide with their enchanting storytelling and incisive social commentary.

Today, Indian literature continues to thrive by the contributions of writers from diverse backgrounds and genres. From the enchanting realism of authors like Kiran Desai and Aravind Adiga to the gritty urban narratives of writers like Chetan Bhagat, Indian literature reflects the diversity and vibrancy of contemporary India.

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.

Repository of knowledge, virtues

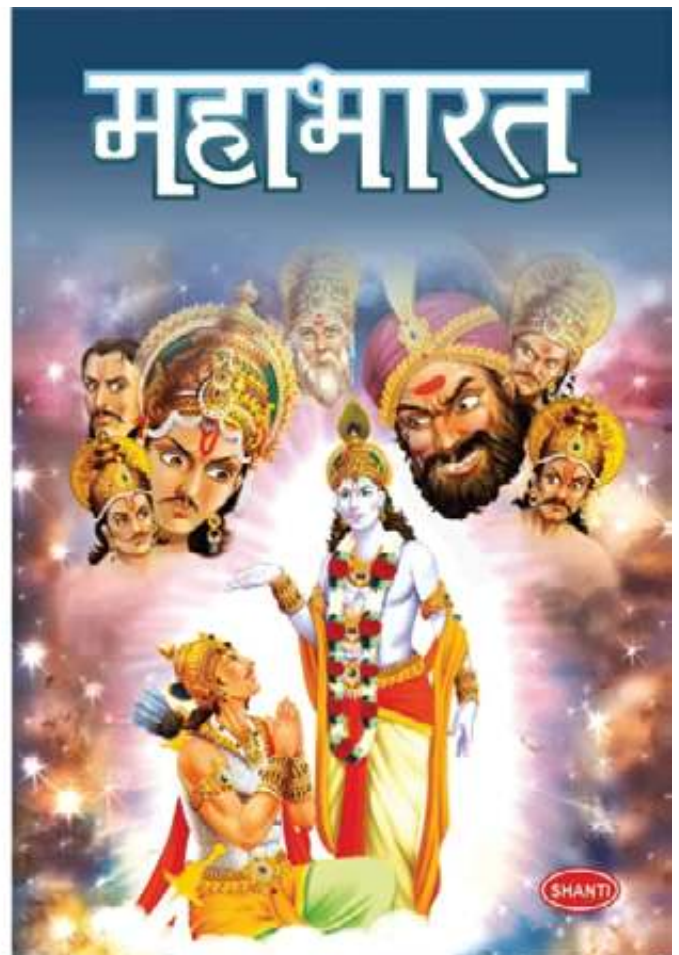
In her essay on *Ancient Indian Literature*, **Nandini Rao** dwells on how its rich legacy – both through recreation and shaping religion and guiding human lives – continues to thrive. In buttressing the point, she cites the epic *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, and *Vedas* and *Upanishads*, making out a case that literature in ancient India was not limited to religious and philosophical texts; but also included poetry, drama, and music.



Ramayana

Literature is the mirror of a society and its people as it reflects their beliefs and traditions. In ancient India, literature not only served as a form of recreation but also played a crucial role in shaping religion and guiding human lives. The rich and diverse literary tradition of ancient India can be traced back to thousands of years and has continued to thrive till today.

One of the most prominent examples of literature that has shaped religion in ancient India comprise the epics of *Mahabharat* and *Ramayan*. These, written in Sanskrit, have had a profound impact on Indian religion and culture. They are not just mere stories but are considered sacred texts by Hindus and have been passed down from one generation to the next.



Mahabharata

The longest poem

The *Mahabharat* stands as an illustrious monument in the literary and cultural landscape of humanity, revered as the longest epic poem in the world, with over 1,00,000 verses. Composed by the legendary sage Ved Vyas around 400 BCE, this magnum opus transcends mere storytelling; it encapsulates profound philosophical inquiries, moral dilemmas, and timeless wisdom that continue to resonate with readers across epochs and cultures.

At its core, the *Mahabharat* narrates the saga of the Kuru dynasty, chronicling the intricate webs of familial ties, political intrigues, and ultimately, the cataclysmic war between two

factions: the Pandavas and the Kauravas, both stemming from the same lineage. Amidst the backdrop of a grand cosmic narrative, the epic portrays the complexities of human existence, vividly illustrating the interplay of virtue and vice, righteousness and deception, loyalty and betrayal.

Mahabharat transcends the confines of a mere historical account or a chronicle of warfare. It grapples with existential questions that have intrigued mankind since time immemorial. Central to its narrative are the profound concepts of dharma (duty), karma (action), and moksha (liberation), which serve as guiding principles shaping the characters' destinies and moral dilemmas.

Dharma, often portrayed as the moral duty or righteous path one must adhere to, recurs throughout the epic. The characters are constantly confronted with dilemmas that pit familial obligations against responsibilities, personal ambitions against societal welfare. Whether it be Arjun's moral quandary on the battlefield or Yudhishtir's ethical struggles amidst political intrigues, the epic reflects the nuances of dharma in various contexts.

Karma, the law of cause and effect, serves as another foundational concept in Mahabharat. The epic elucidates the profound interconnectedness of human actions and their consequences, underscoring the inevitability of accountability and redemption in the drama of life.

Moreover, the Mahabharat offers insights into the quest for moksha, the ultimate liberation from the cycle of birth and death. Amidst the tumultuous events, the characters embark on spiritual journeys, seeking transcendence beyond the realm of worldly affairs. The Bhagavad Gita, a sacred scripture embedded within the Mahabharat serves as a spiritual discourse between Lord Krishna and Arjun. It encapsulates timeless wisdom on duty, devotion, and the path to liberation.

The enduring legacy of the Mahabharat lies not merely in its historical significance or narrative grandeur but in its timeless relevance to the human condition. Across cultures and civilisations, readers have found solace and enlightenment in its teachings, as a beacon of wisdom, guiding generations towards enlightenment and moral living.

Virtue over vice

The Ramayan stands as one of the most revered and cherished epics in the world - the eternal struggle between righteousness and malevolence, and the triumph of virtue over vice. Composed by sage Valmiki around 500 BCE, this ancient masterpiece transcends the boundaries of time and geography, as it weaves profound moral lessons, spiritual insights, and timeless wisdom.

At its heart, the Ramayan narrates the divine saga of Lord Ram, the embodiment of righteousness, and his arduous quest to rescue his beloved wife Sita from the clutches of Ravan. The epic unfolds with a captivating narrative that traverses through enchanted forests, and treacherous battles, showcasing the indomitable spirit of courage, sacrifice, and unwavering devotion.

Central to Ramayan is the overarching theme of *dharma*, the sacred duty and righteous path that governs the conduct of individuals in their lives. Lord Ram, the epitome of virtue and nobility, exemplifies the ideals of dharma through his steadfast adherence to truth, honour, and moral integrity, even in the face of formidable adversities. His unwavering commitment to upholding righteousness serves as a guiding light for mankind to embrace the path of righteousness.

Moreover, Ramayan serves as a poignant portrayal of the significance of relationships - the profound bonds that bind individuals. The sacred bond between husband and wife is exemplified through the enduring love and devotion shared

between Ram and Sita, which transcends the trials and tribulations they encounter throughout their journey. The relationship between father and son is epitomised through interactions between Ram and his father King Dashrath.

Furthermore, Ramayan delves into the complexities of fraternal relationships, portraying the unbreakable bond between Ram and his loyal brother Lakshman, who stands by his side through thick and thin, embodying the ideals of selfless service and unwavering loyalty.

The enduring appeal of Ramayan lies in its universal resonance and timeless relevance, transcending cultural and linguistic barriers to impart profound moral and spiritual guidance to millions of people worldwide. Adapted into various forms of literature, including poetry, drama, music, and visual arts, the epic continues to captivate mankind across generations, resonating with its portrayal of noble ideals, virtuous conduct, and the eternal triumph of good over evil.

Potions of knowledge

Apart from these epics, ancient Indian literature also includes the Vedas and Upanishads. The Vedas are a collection of hymns, prayers, and rituals that were passed down orally before being written down around 1,500 BCE. They are considered the most sacred texts in Hinduism and are believed to contain the knowledge revealed by gods to the ancient sages. They lay the foundation for Hindu beliefs and practices and have shaped the religion to a great extent.

The Upanishads, on the other hand, are philosophical texts that explore the nature of reality, consciousness, and the self. They were written between 800-500 BCE. The Upanishads focus on concepts such as Brahman (ultimate reality), Atman (soul), and Maya (illusion), providing insights into the nature of existence and human consciousness. These texts have had a significant influence on not just Hinduism but also Buddhism and Jainism.

Indian literature from ancient times also includes the Puranas, which are a collection of stories, myths, and legends. They were written between 300-1,000 CE and are considered to be a guidebook for religious rituals, customs, and practices. The Puranas contain stories of gods and goddesses, creation myths, and moral lessons.

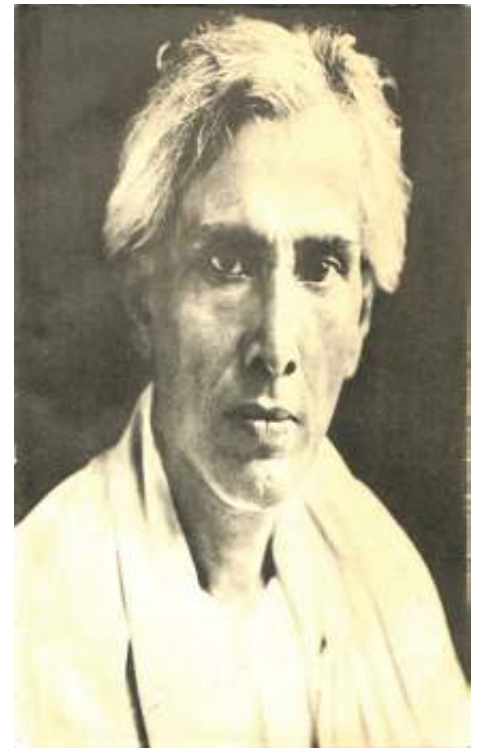
The impact of ancient Indian literature goes beyond religion; it has also guided human lives for thousands of years. For example, the Arthashastra, written by Chanakya around 300 BCE, is not just a treatise on politics and economics but also deals with ethics and governance, providing valuable lessons for rulers and citizens alike. Literature has also played a significant role in the development of languages in ancient India.

Furthermore, literature in ancient India was not limited to religious and philosophical texts; it also included poetry, drama, and music. The Natya Shastra, a Sanskrit text written by Sage Bharat around 200 BCE provides detailed instructions on various aspects of theatre including acting, music, and dance. Poet Kalidas' Meghaduta and Abhijnana Shakuntalam showcase his unparalleled skill in using language to evoke emotions and paint vivid imagery.

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.

Indian literature under colonial rule

Ruchi Verma discusses how indigenous literary traditions encountered Western influences as the Britishers imposed English as medium of education, and as a result, set forth a cultural exchange that transported Indian literature across the shores. Western literary techniques and forms were adopted by Indian writers, leading to the emergence of new literary genres that had a more global appeal and marking a shift from traditional storytelling and poetic forms that were prevalent at the time.



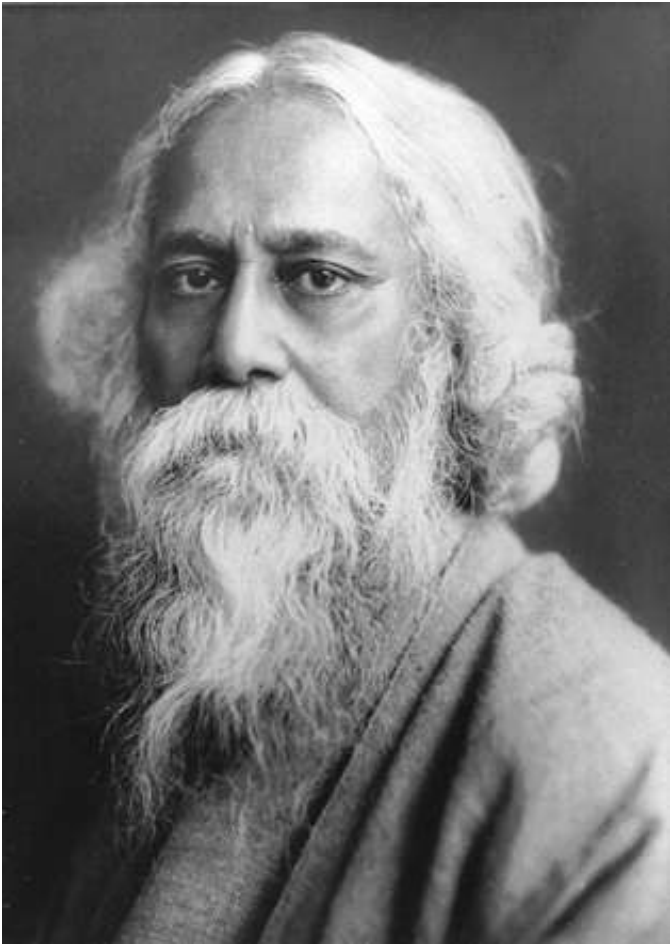
Foremost visionary thinkers and writers from Bengal included Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay

India, a land known for its rich cultural heritage and diverse literary traditions, witnessed a long period of colonialism. The colonial influence on Indian literature in this time ushered in new elements in literature as indigenous literary traditions encountered Western influences. British colonialism not only imposed English as the language of administration and education but also sparked a cultural exchange that took Indian literature to other parts of the world.

The period, which lasted for over 200 years, brought about significant changes in society, economy, politics, and literature. This exchange gave rise to a new genre of writing –

Indo-Anglian literature – which was the original literary creation in English language by Indians. This new literary form was a fusion of indigenous cultural elements and Western literary techniques.

One of the most notable impacts of colonialism on literature was the introduction of the English language which the Indian writers soon began to adopt as the foreign language infiltrated education and administrative sectors. These writers were often referred to as 'native writers' and their works reflected their struggle to reconcile their identity with the language imposed by the colonisers.



Rabindranath Tagore - First non-European to win the Nobel Prize in Literature

Conflict and hope

Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, considered as the Father of Modern Indian Literature, was one of the most prolific writers. His novel 'Anandamath' illustrates how colonialism influenced Indian literature. The novel not only depicts the socio-political conditions of India under the British rule but also showcases the struggle for independence and the spirit of nationalism. Through his writing, Chattopadhyay criticised foreign rule and highlighted the importance of preserving Indian culture and traditions.

Apart from English, the British also introduced printing press in India. This enabled the dissemination of literature on a larger scale and led to the emergence of a new reading culture in India. The printing presses provided a platform for Indian writers to publish their works, giving rise to a new wave of literary magazines and journals which facilitated the growth of the new genre of literature.

The encounter with Western literature also had a profound impact on the content and style of Indian writing. Western literary techniques and forms were adopted by Indian writers, leading to the emergence of new literary genres that had a more global appeal and marking a shift from traditional storytelling and poetic forms that were prevalent at the time.

The influence of colonialism on Indian literature was not limited to just the language or literary forms. It also had an impact on the themes and subject matters. With the spread of Western education, Indian writers were exposed to new ideas and philosophies.

Rediscovering India

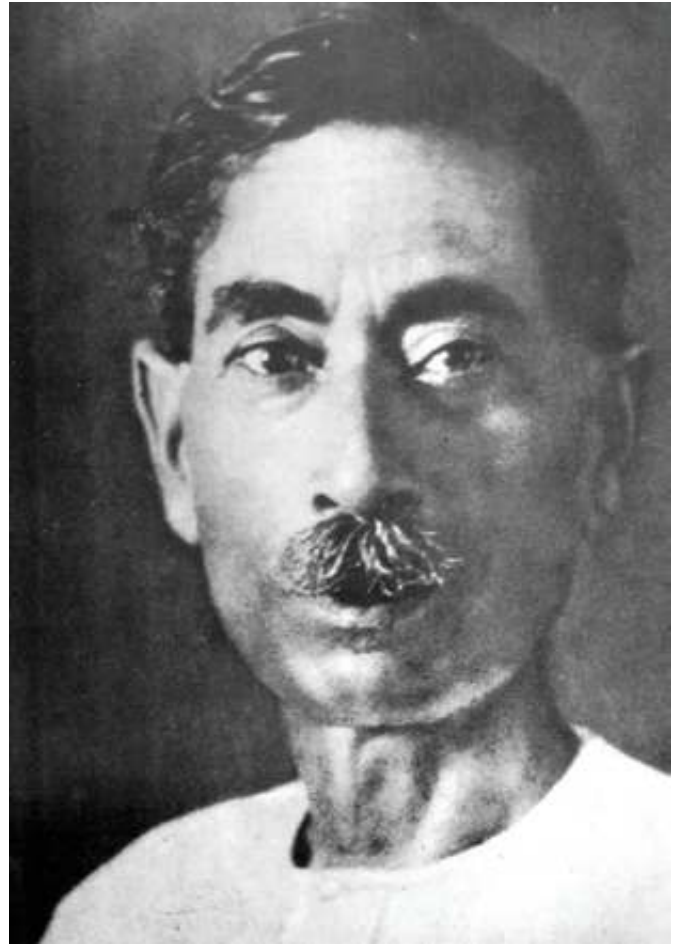
One of the most significant contributions of colonialism to Indian literature was the rediscovery and re-evaluation of India's ancient texts and scriptures, which, in turn, inspired a generation of writers to incorporate elements from these classical sources into their works.

With the imposition of Western education systems by the colonial administration, more literature was being generated in English language. Indian writers were interpreting or translating ancient Indian texts such as the Vedas, Upanishads, Ramayan, Mahabharat, etc. And now, more of them were using English as the medium of literary works which led to the popularisation of ancient Indian scriptures around the world. This exposure sparked a sense of curiosity and reverence for India's cultural heritage among the educated elite, who sought to delve deeper.

A towering figure in Indian literature and the first non-European to win the Nobel Prize in Literature, Rabindranath Tagore's works including his poetry, novels, and plays, often drew inspiration from ancient Indian literature and philosophy. He wrote in his native Bengali (Bangla) language and translated into English himself. His translated works soon garnered interest among readers in Western countries where he became very popular.

Tagore's profound engagement with texts such as the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita imbued his writing with a sense of spiritual depth and universal wisdom. Tagore's poetic vision reflected the timeless themes of love, nature, and spirituality found in classical Indian literature, resonating with readers both within and beyond India's borders.

Similarly, writers like Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay and Premchand also made significant contributions to Indian literature by incorporating elements from ancient Indian texts into their works. Sarat Chandra, often regarded as one of the greatest novelists in Bengali literature, drew upon themes of love, sacrifice, and social justice, echoing the moral dilemmas and ethical conflicts found in classical epics such as the Mahabharat.



Munshi Premchand – A pioneering figure in Hindi literature

His novels, such as 'Devdas' and 'Parineeta', explored the intricacies of human relationships against the backdrop of colonial India, blending realism with elements of romance and tragedy.

Premchand, on the other hand, emerged as a pioneering figure in Hindi literature, known for his realistic portrayal of rural life and social inequality. While his stories were grounded in the socio-economic realities of colonial India, Premchand also delved into the moral and ethical dilemmas faced by his characters, drawing inspiration from ancient Indian philosophical texts such as the Panchatantra and the teachings of Buddha. His emphasis on empathy, compassion, and social justice reflected the enduring ethical values espoused by classical Indian literature.

The revival

The Bengal Renaissance stands as a testament to the resilience and dynamism of Indian culture, undergoing a profound transformation during the colonial period. This intellectual and cultural awakening, centred in the Bengal region of eastern India, represented a fervent quest for self-discovery, renewal, and regeneration in the face of colonial domination. The Bengal Renaissance transcended the confines of literature to encompass various spheres of human endeavour, including art, music, philosophy, and social reform, thereby leaving an indelible imprint on the cultural landscape of the country.

At the heart of the Bengal Renaissance were visionary thinkers, writers, and social reformers who sought to revitalise Indian culture and identity by drawing upon the rich legacy of India's ancient texts and traditions. Foremost among these luminaries was Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, who wrote India's national song "Vande Mataram." Bankim Chandra's literary works, including novels such as 'Anandamath' and 'Devi Chaudhurani,' served as catalysts for the resurgence of national consciousness and pride. His exploration of themes such as patriotism, spirituality, and social reform reflected a deep engagement with India's cultural heritage and its potential for renewal in the face of colonial hegemony.

Another pivotal figure of the Bengal Renaissance was Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, a scholar, educator, and social reformer whose contributions spanned multiple disciplines. Vidyasagar's efforts to reform the Hindu society, particularly in the areas of education, women's rights, and caste discrimination, were grounded in a profound commitment to the ethical and humanitarian values of India's ancient texts.

Furthermore, the Bengal Renaissance witnessed the emergence of spiritual leaders and philosophers who played instrumental roles in shaping the cultural and intellectual landscape of India. Swami Vivekananda, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, emerged as a global ambassador of Indian spirituality and philosophy, advocating for the universal message of Vedanta and the harmony of religions.

Vivekananda's teachings, grounded in the Advaita Vedanta tradition, emphasised the inherent divinity of all beings and the pursuit of self-realisation as the ultimate goal of human life. His call for a renaissance of India, rooted in spiritual values and social service, inspired generations of Indians to reclaim their cultural heritage and assert their identity in the face of colonial oppression.

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.

Emergence of Bhakti, Sufi traditions

Drawing their roots from Hinduism and Islam, the two traditions brought in devotional ferment conducive to India's spiritual landscape. Anushka Singh explains how 'Bhakti' became an essential element of literature and showed a marked digression from orthodoxy of ritualistic worship and hierarchical structures. These devotional movements provided a platform to express their faith and emotions, breaking free from the rigid religious traditions of the time.



The emergence of Bhakti and Sufi traditions in medieval Indian literature brought about a significant shift in the literary landscape

Indian literature has a long and rich history, dating back to ancient times. However, it was during the medieval period that two significant literary traditions emerged - Bhakti and Sufi. Rooted in Hinduism and Islam respectively, these traditions witnessed a surge of devotional movements characterised by fervent expressions of devotion. Great poets and saints like Kabir, Mirabai, Tulsidas, and many Sufi saints' works came to prominence that continue to inspire and resonate with people even today.

The concept of Bhakti or devotion has been deeply rooted in Hinduism, permeating the spiritual landscape with its profound significance and philosophical underpinnings. However, it was during the medieval period, particularly during and after the seventh century, that Bhakti literature flourished and evolved into

a prominent form of expression for devotees.

Characterised by ardent emphasis on personal devotion (bhakti), transcending the barriers of caste, creed, and societal distinctions, the Bhakti movement sought to democratise spirituality and redefine the conventional norms of religious practice, advocating for a direct and intimate relationship between the devotee and the divine.

This shift marked a departure from the orthodoxy of ritualistic worship and hierarchical structures, placing individual faith and heartfelt devotion at the forefront of religious experience. The Bhakti movement, a transformative socio-religious phenomenon, left an indelible mark on the fabric of Indian society.

Inclusion and compassion

Central to the Bhakti movement was the rejection of the rigid caste system, relegating certain communities to the margins of social and religious life. Bhakti saints and poets, known as Bhaktas, challenged the notion of caste-based discrimination and hierarchy, proclaiming the inherent equality of all beings in the eyes of the divine. Through their devotional songs, poems, and teachings, they espoused a message of inclusivity, compassion, and universal love.

One of the most notable features of the Bhakti movement was its diversity and plurality of expressions. It manifested in various regional languages, including Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Bengali, Hindi, and Gujarati. Each linguistic tradition produced its own body of Bhakti literature, comprising devotional hymns, songs, narratives, and philosophical discourses, all praising the virtues of divine love and surrender.

The Bhakti movement also witnessed the rise of charismatic saint-poets who served as beacons of spiritual wisdom and social reform. Figures such as Mirabai, Kabir, Tulsidas, Surdas, Sant Tukaram, and Guru Nanak, among others, became revered for their profound devotion, and uncompromising advocacy for social justice. Through their lyrical compositions and sermons, they inspired masses to cultivate a deeper connection with the divine and to lead lives guided by moral integrity.

Moreover, the Bhakti movement catalysed significant changes in the religious landscape of India, nurturing religious tolerance. It facilitated the cross-fertilisation of ideas and practices among different religious traditions. It played a pivotal role in the democratisation of religious authority and access to sacred knowledge. By emphasising the direct experience of the divine through personal devotion, it empowered individuals from all walks of life to engage with spiritual teachings.

Oneness of the divine

One of the most influential Bhakti poets of medieval India was Kabir. He was born in the late 14th century in what is now known as Uttar Pradesh. Kabir's poems, known as 'dohas', were simple yet powerful expressions of devotion to the divine. He rejected the idea of idol worship and emphasised on the oneness of God. His dohas were written in a language that was accessible to common people, making his teachings widely popular. Even today, his dohas are sung and recited by people from all walks of life.

Another prominent figure in the Bhakti movement was Mirabai. She was a Rajput princess who renounced her royal life to devote herself entirely to Lord Krishna. Her devotional songs or 'bhajans' expressed her intense love and longing for Krishna. Through her poems, she challenged societal norms to follow her path of devotion. Mirabai's bhajans continue to be sung and celebrated by devotees of Lord Krishna.

Tulsidas, a 16th-century poet and saint, was another significant figure in the Bhakti movement. He was a devotee of Lord Ram and is best known for his epic poem 'Ramcharitmanas', which narrates the story of Lord Rama in the local language of Awadhi. The poem not only became immensely popular among the masses but also played a significant role in popularising the ideals of devotion and righteousness.

Inner spiritual richness

While the Bhakti movement was gaining momentum in the Hindu community, a similar devotional movement was taking shape in Islamic circles - the Sufi movement. Sufism is a mystical

branch of Islam that emphasises on the inner spiritual experience rather than external religious practices. The Sufi saints, known as 'pirs' or 'sufis', spread their teachings through devotional songs or qawwalis.

Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti, fondly remembered as Khwaja Garib Nawaz, occupies a significant place in the annals of Sufi history, particularly in the context of medieval India. Born in the 12th century in Persia, Khwaja Chishti embarked on a spiritual journey marked by profound love and devotion towards the divine. His arrival in India marked the beginning of a transformative era in the country's spiritual landscape, as he became one of the foremost proponents of Sufism - rooted in the pursuit of spiritual enlightenment.

Upon settling in Ajmer, Khwaja Chishti established a Sufi order and his teachings transcended the confines of religious orthodoxy, emphasising the primacy of love (ishq) and devotion (ibadat) as the means to attain closeness to God. Unlike many religious leaders of his time, Khwaja Chishti welcomed people from all walks of life, irrespective of their social or economic status. The dargah (shrine) of Khwaja Chishti in Ajmer emerged as a sacred space of pilgrimage and spiritual solace, attracting millions of devotees from diverse religious backgrounds.

Another influential Sufi saint was Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya, who lived in Delhi during the 13th century. He believed in the power of music to connect with God and popularised qawwalis as a form of devotional expression. His teachings focused on love and compassion for all beings, and his dargah in Delhi remains a popular pilgrimage site for people of all faiths.

The works of these Sufi saints and their followers were not limited to spiritual teachings but also had a profound impact on the literature of the time. Their poems and songs, known as 'kalam', were not just expressions of devotion but also reflected the social, cultural, and political realities of the period. They used imagery and metaphors to convey their mystical experiences and spread their message of love and unity.

Most Sufi saints wrote in local languages, and not Persian, such as in Hindi, Bengali, Punjabi, etc. For example, Baba Farid used Punjabi for religious writings. Syed Gesu Daraz wrote in Deccani Hindi and Shaikh Hamiduddin expressed in Hindawi.

The emergence of Bhakti and Sufi traditions in medieval Indian literature brought about a significant shift in the literary landscape. These devotional movements provided a platform for common people to express their faith and emotions, breaking free from the rigid religious traditions of the time. Moreover, their teachings of love, equality, and inclusivity continue to inspire people even today, making them relevant in modern times.

Sufi poet and scholar and spiritual disciple of Nizamuddin Auliya, Amir Khusrau was one of the most notable writers of the time. He lived during the period of the Delhi Sultanate, wrote in Hindi (Hindawi) and Persian and created a new style known as sabaq-i-hindi. Regarded as the 'father of qawwali', he also introduced the ghazal style of songs to India.

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Vedic hymns to contemporary verses

Gliding through eons, Indian Literature has encompassed in its fold diverse genres, themes and voices. **Kriti Kalra** finds that it continues to occupy a niche in a globalised world, with a diverse range of genres and forms gaining recognition and acclaim. Many of these works have also been translated into other languages and other media such as films, television, etc.



Sant Kabir



Meerabai



Women writers such as Mahasweta Devi, Ismat Chughtai challenged patriarchal norms and gave voice to the weak through their insightful works

Chitra Mudgal is the recipient of the prestigious Sahitya Akademi for her novel 'Post Box No. 203, Naalasopara'

Spanning millennia, Indian literature has evolved through various epochs, reflecting the ethos, beliefs, and aspirations of successive generations. From the sacred hymns of the Vedas to the contemporary novels of renowned authors, Indian literature has traversed a magnificent journey, encompassing diverse genres, themes, and voices.

The earliest known form of Indian literature dates back to the Vedic period, around 1,500 BCE, with the composition of the sacred hymns known as the Vedas. These hymns, written in Sanskrit, were recited during religious ceremonies and rituals.

The origin

The four Vedas - Rigveda, Samaveda, Yajurveda, and Atharvaveda form the basis of Hinduism. The Rig Veda, the oldest of the Vedas, contains a collection of 1,028 hymns known as sukta, ten books known as mandalas and more than ten thousand verses. It is dedicated to various deities and natural forces, embodying the reverence and awe of the contemporary civilisation towards the divine.

The Samaveda, a collection of melodious chants, has the



R K Narayan's novels depicted the everyday struggles, aspirations, and dilemmas of ordinary individuals navigating the complexities of life in a rapidly changing society

earliest reference to singing and is considered to be the origin of Indian classical music. It dates back to 1,200 - 800 BCE and comprises two Upanishads, namely Chandogya Upanishad and Kena Upanishad.

Corresponding to the time of Samaveda is Yajurveda which is a compilation of prayers. The prayers or the chants are spoken by the priests while performing rituals and traditional ceremonies. And, lastly, Atharvaveda, which has twenty books, elaborates the practices and procedures of day-to-day life. It comprises over 700 hymns with about six thousand mantras compiled in the twenty books.

As time progressed, so did literary tradition, with the epic poems of Ramayan and Mahabharat emerging as monumental works of Indian literature. Composed around 500 BCE, they narrate timeless tales of heroism, love, and ethical dilemmas, embodying the moral and philosophical ideals of ancient Indian society.

The medieval period witnessed the flourishing of regional languages and literature in India, with Persian and Urdu literature gaining prominence under the patronage of Mughal rulers. Concurrently, regional languages such as Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and Bengali (Bangla) began to develop and produce notable works of poetry, prose, and drama.

The Bhakti movement, which swept across India during this period, gave rise to a new form of devotional literature, characterised by the heartfelt expressions of love and devotion towards the divine. Poets such as Kabir and Mirabai composed timeless verses that continue to resonate with spiritual seekers to this day. Later, writers like Rabindranath Tagore, Premchand, Aurobindo, etc., bridged the gap between India and the West.

Transforming literary landscape

The 20th century marked a significant turning point in the trajectory of Indian literature with the emergence of pioneering writers who brought the complexities of Indian society to the forefront of literary discourse. Among these were R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, and Raja Rao, whose works garnered international acclaim.

R.K. Narayan, often hailed as one of the greatest Indian novelists writing in English, is best known for his evocative portrayal of Indian life in the fictional town of Malgudi. Through 'Malgudi' series, comprising novels such as 'Swami and Friends', 'The Bachelor of Arts', and 'The Guide', Narayan captured the essence of Indian small-town life with unparalleled authenticity and depth.

Set against the backdrop of British colonial rule and post-independence India, Narayan's novels depict the everyday struggles, aspirations, and dilemmas of ordinary individuals navigating the complexities of life in a rapidly changing society. With his keen insight into human nature and his masterful storytelling, he created a vivid and enduring portrait of Indian society that continues to interest readers worldwide.

Another luminary of Indian English fiction, Mulk Raj Anand, used his literary prowess to highlight the social injustices and inequalities plaguing contemporary society. In, 'Untouchable', Anand exposed the impact of caste discrimination on the lives of Dalits. Through the character of Bakha, a young sweeper struggling to escape the confines of his social status, Anand confronted readers with the harsh realities of untouchability.

Raja Rao, on the other hand, utilised his novels as a vehicle to delve into profound themes of spirituality, identity, and cultural heritage against the backdrop of colonial India. His debut novel 'Kanthapura' captures the tumultuous period of India's struggle for independence and delves into the intricate fabric of Indian society through a fictional South Indian village.



Mulk Raj Anand, used his literary prowess to highlight the social injustices and inequalities plaguing contemporary society

At the heart of the novel is the character of Moorthy, a young and idealistic villager deeply inspired by Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of non-violent resistance. Through Moorthy's journey, Rao offers a poignant exploration of the transformative power of Gandhian ideals and their impact on the collective consciousness of the village.

One of the novel's most striking features is its portrayal of the symbiotic relationship between spirituality and political activism, as embodied by Moorthy and his fellow villagers. Drawing upon the rich spiritual traditions of India, Rao infuses the narrative with themes of dharma (duty), karma (action), and ahimsa (nonviolence), highlighting the moral and ethical underpinnings of the freedom struggle.

Visionary women writers

The feminist movement in India has not only been a social and political force but has also found a powerful expression in literature through the works of visionary women writers such as Mahasweta Devi, Ismat Chughtai, etc. These writers challenged patriarchal norms and gave voice to the weak through their insightful works.

Often regarded as one of India's foremost feminist writers, Mahasweta Devi used her writings to shine a light on the plight of the tribal and indigenous people. Through her powerful tales of tribal life, Devi exposed the systemic injustices and social inequalities faced by these communities, shedding light on issues such as land rights, displacement, and exploitation.

Her works, such as 'Mother of 1084' (Hajar Churashir Maa) and 'Chotti Munda and His Arrow' (Chotti Munda Ebong Tar Tir), are characterised by their raw realism, vivid characterisations, and unflinching portrayal of social injustice. Hajar Churashir Maa, written in 1974, focussed on the Naxalite movement in the country.

Ismat Chughtai, another iconic figure in Indian literature, challenged societal taboos and norms through her bold exploration of female sexuality and empowerment. In her ground-breaking stories, she fearlessly tackled taboo subjects such as female desire, sexual autonomy, etc. Some of her trailblazing works include 'Lihaaf', 'Amar Bail', etc.

Another renowned figure of modern Indian literature is Chitra Mudgal who writes in Hindi. She is a recipient of the prestigious Sahitya Akademi – India's highest literary award – for her novel 'Post Box No. 203, Naalasopara'. She became the first Indian woman to receive Vyas Samman for her novel 'Avaan'. This novel showcased the trade union movement focussing on Datta Samant leading lakhs of workers of Mumbai's textile mills.

Their enduring legacy serves as a beacon of inspiration for future generations of writers and activists, reminding us of the transformative power of literature to effect social change and foster empathy, understanding, and solidarity.

Today, Indian literature continues to thrive in a globalised world, with a diverse range of genres and forms gaining recognition and acclaim. Many of these works have also been translated into other languages and other media such as films, television, etc.

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Exploring regional literary kaleidoscope

In a land that is marked by diversity, the Indian canvas has a unique richness of cultural expressions that transcend beyond its geographical boundaries. Neeti Prakash asserts it specifically stands out as a reflection of the country's linguistic and cultural heritage. Regional literature in India presents a kaleidoscopic view of this diversity in terms of customs, traditions and beliefs.



Pu La Deshpande, V.S. Khandekar, and Govind Karandikar (aka Vinda) - towering figures of Marathi literature

Rightly referred to as the land of diversity, India has a unique richness of cultural expressions that extend beyond its geographical boundaries. Indian literature specifically stands out as a reflection of the country's linguistic and cultural heritage.

From the ancient Tamil Sangam poetry of the South to the oral traditions of tribal communities in the North-East, regional literature in India offers a kaleidoscopic view of the country's diversity, in terms of customs, traditions and beliefs.

India's linguistic diversity is perhaps one of its most defining features, with the country being home to 22 officially-recognised languages and over 1,500 dialects. Each region has its own unique language, dialect, and literary tradition that have evolved over centuries, reflecting the cultural nuances and societal dynamics of that particular region. These regional literatures serve as repositories of indigenous knowledge and heritage, offering a window into the hearts and minds of the people.

The roots of regional literature are deeply intertwined with ancient civilisations that flourished. Dating back to antiquity,

these literary traditions have been instrumental in shaping the cultural, social, and philosophical landscape of the region.

Repository of knowledge

The Tamil Sangam literature, holds a venerable position in the annals of Indian literature as one of the oldest and most illustrious literary traditions. The term 'Sangam' refers to gatherings or assemblies of Tamil poets and scholars, where literary works were composed, recited, and preserved. These poetic compositions, collectively known as Sangam poetry, encompass a wide range of themes, including love, war and nature, providing a vivid portrayal of ancient Tamil society and culture.

The Sangam comprises poems attributed to numerous poets, both male and female, who hailed from different strata of society. Through their lyrical verses, the poets painted a vibrant picture of ancient Tamil life, depicting the customs, rituals, and social mores of the time.

One of the most notable features of Sangam literature is its emphasis on the concept of 'tinai' or landscape, which



Iconic figures of Punjabi literature Bulleh Shah, Waris Shah and Shiv Kumar Batalvi

served as the thematic framework for many poems. Each tinai, such as kurinji (mountainous regions), mullai (forests), and marutam (agricultural lands), was associated with specific emotions, seasons, and cultural practices, reflecting the deep symbiotic relationship between humans and the natural environment.

Furthermore, Sangam literature played a crucial role in shaping the Tamil literary tradition and language, serving as a foundation for subsequent literary movements and developments. The poets not only contributed to the enrichment of Tamil vocabulary and grammar but also established literary conventions and poetic forms that continue to influence Tamil literature to this day. Ettuthokai or the Eight Anthologies, is classical Tamil poetic work comprising more than two thousand poems including Narrinai, Ainkurunuru, Paripatal, Kalitokai, Akananuru, etc.

Oral traditions and heritage

Sanskrit literary tradition, epitomised by epic poems such as the Ramayan and Mahabharat, offers a panoramic view of ancient Indian civilisation, its values, beliefs, and philosophical insights. Composed over millennia ago, these are not only monumental works of literature but also profound reflections on the human condition and the moral dilemmas faced by individuals in their quest for righteousness and truth.

These form the foundational pillars of Indian regional literature, offering invaluable insights into the civilisation. Through their timeless verses and captivating narratives, these literary traditions continue to inspire and enrich the lives of millions, over centuries.

India's rich diversity extends beyond its mainstream literary traditions to encompass oral literature, particularly among its indigenous tribal communities. The oral traditions of tribes such as the Gonds, Santhals, and Bheels represent a living repository of cultural wisdom and indigenous knowledge, offering unique insights into their spiritual beliefs and customs.

Folklore, songs, and legends form the backbone of oral literature and these are often intricately woven with elements of nature, reflecting the close relationship of tribal communities with their natural environment and their deep spiritual connection to the land. Through stories of mythical beings, animal spirits, and ancestral heroes, tribal storytellers impart moral lessons, celebrate cultural identity, and instil a sense of pride and belonging among their people.

Resilience and sustainability

These oral traditions are characterised by their participatory nature, often taking the form of communal gatherings, festivals, and ritual performances, and not merely passive forms of entertainment. Through the act of storytelling, members pass on ancestral knowledge, traditional practices, and survival skills to younger generations, ensuring the continuity of their cultural heritage in an ever-changing world.

Moreover, oral literature serves as a means of resistance and resilience for marginalised tribal communities, enabling them to assert their distinct cultural identity in the face of external pressures and encroachments. In a rapidly modernising world, where traditional ways of life are increasingly threatened, oral literature serves as a powerful tool for preserving and revitalising indigenous languages, cultural practices, and ecological knowledge.

Tribal myths and folktales are imbued with ecological wisdom and reverence for the natural world, offering valuable insights into sustainable living practices and traditional ecological knowledge. By promoting a deeper understanding of the

interconnectedness of all living beings and the importance of preserving biodiversity, oral literature contributes to efforts aimed at mitigating the adverse impacts of climate change and environmental degradation as well.

Vernacular richness

States such as Maharashtra, Karnataka, West Bengal, Punjab, etc., have produced many literary luminaries that have inspired generations of readers. The rich and illustrious literary tradition of Marathi language has contributed significantly to India's literary heritage.

Marathi literature, with its diverse genres, themes, and styles, has been shaped by a multitude of talented writers who have left an indelible mark on the literary world. Among these luminaries, Pu La Deshpande, V.S. Khandekar, and Govind Karandikar (aka Vinda) stand out as towering figures of Marathi literature.

Born in 1919, Pu La Deshpande was not only a prolific writer but also a renowned humourist, playwright, actor, and musician. His works, characterised by wit, satire, and keen observation of human nature, have earned him a revered place in Marathi literature. Some of his famous works include Batatyachi Chaal, Asa Mi Asami, Tuzhe Ahe Tujpashi, etc. Vishnu Khandekar was a prolific writer who excelled in various genres, including novels, short stories, essays, and literary criticism. His literary masterpiece 'Yayati', a retelling of the ancient Indian mythological tale, won him the prestigious Jnanpith Award in 1974, making him the first Marathi writer to receive this honour.

Vinda Karandikar, widely regarded as one of the greatest poets of modern Marathi literature, was born in 1918. His poetry is marked by its lyrical elegance, philosophical depth, and keen sensitivity to the human condition. His works include Dhrupad, Svedganga, Jatak, Ranicha Bag, Pari Ga Pari, etc., and received the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1985.

Punjabi literature is deeply rooted in Sufi mysticism and folk traditions, and has produced iconic figures such as Bulleh Shah, Waris Shah, Shiv Kumar Batalvi, etc., whose poetry reflect the spiritual and cultural ethos of the Punjab region.

Kerala, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh also have vibrant literary traditions in their respective languages. MT Vasudevan Nair (aka MT) is a versatile writer of modern Malayalam literature and one of the most renowned names of post-Independence Indian literature. Kuppalli Venkatappa Puttappa (pen name Kuvempu) is known as one of the greatest Kannada poets and playwright. He became the first Kannada recipient of the prestigious Jnanpith Award.

Born in Visakhapatnam, Gurajada Venkata Apparao was an Indian poet, playwright and dramatist, who wrote the play Kanyasulkam in 1892 – considered to be the greatest play in the Telugu language.

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The rich heritage of Indian drama

Soumya Nair takes a long look at the bustling realm of Indian theatre and points out how from the golden period of the Sanskrit era to the present theatrical excellence, Indian drama has retained its flavour and finesse through generations. She explains that through the changes that obtained, the literary traditions in theatre remain guarded, and points out, many contemporary plays are adaptations or interpretations of ancient texts.



Abhijnanasakuntalam by Kalidas

Dating back to the ancient times, Indian drama and theatre have evolved through centuries, inspiring art forms and literature around the world and leaving a lasting impact on the world of performing arts. The dawn of Indian drama heralds a golden age of theatrical excellence, with the Sanskrit plays of Kalidas, Bhasa, and Shudraka serving as the timeless pillars of artistic brilliance.

It was in the classical period between the fifth century BC and the fourth century AD, these works were created and even today continue to captivate audiences with their intricate narratives, lyrical beauty, and profound insights into the human condition.

One of the defining features of these Sanskrit dramas is their incorporation of mythology and religious themes. As a result, they not only entertained the audience but also served as a medium for conveying moral and spiritual lessons.



Mrichchhakatika by Shudraka

The characters in these plays were often larger than life, with their actions and dialogues reflecting the ideals of Hindu Puranas and philosophy. This tradition of using drama as a means to educate and enlighten the masses has continued till date in Indian theatre.

Masters of storytelling

Kalidas, one of the greatest playwright and poet of ancient India, stands as a towering figure in the annals of world literature. His magnum opus *Abhijnanasakuntalam*, a Sanskrit play of seven acts based on Mahabharat's legend Shakuntala, remains a masterpiece of poetic storytelling, weaving together themes of love, destiny, and redemption against the backdrop of ancient India.

(Continue on pg 29)



Footloose in Dharamshala

Known for its stunning natural beauty and dramatic landscapes, Dharamshala lies in the shadow of the Dhauladhar range of the Himalayas. The picturesque hill town is much more than a paradise for tourists seeking peace, tranquillity and breath-taking cameos. There is a gamut of activities that tourists can enjoy from dawn to dusk. Beyond Mcleodganj, the epicentre, a world replete with jaw-dropping sights and adventure awaits.

Text and photographs: Gustasp and Jeroo Irani



A prayer hall in the Dalai Lama Temple Complex

We were lead actors in a fairy tale, we felt, as we woke up to a new dawn at the juSTa Birding Resort and Spa, a half hour drive from Dharamshala. The scenic hill town of Dharamshala that languishes in the shadow of the mighty snow-dusted Dhauladhar range of the Himalayas in Himachal Pradesh sprawled in the distance, beyond our private balcony.

Just then the plaintive strains of a flute rode on the soft mountain breeze even as a flautist serenaded early risers at our hotel who had headed to the restaurant for breakfast. Those sweet moments were the stuff of our magical stay in Dharmshala, located at 1,457 metres in the Kangra valley.

Fun things to do in Dharamshala and its surrounds

- If you want that sweet sense of peace to continue to cling to you, head for St. John in the Wilderness Church, an Anglican church built in 1852 and dedicated to St John the Baptist. Mighty cedar trees soar above and that green glade where the

church stands is an island of peace unto itself. Built as a place of worship for British soldiers who lived here, the church is replete with memorials to those who died in Dharamshala from natural causes as well as not-so-natural ones like a bear attack! The most elaborate memorial belongs to Lord Elgin who was the viceroy of India (1862-63). Two magnificent Belgian stained-glass panels allow golden sunlight to stream into the church which is built in the neo-Gothic style.

- Five kilometres up hill and north of Dharamshala proper lies McLeodganj. Home of his Holiness, the Dalai Lama, this is an important Buddhist centre and the site of the Tibetan government in exile since the time of the Tibetan uprising of 1959 when His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama fled Lhasa, Tibet.

- For a dash of colour and retail therapy, amble around McLeodganj market, specifically Temple Road, where tourists on a combo of retail and spiritual therapy mill around. Buy a thangka or two, Tibetan jewellery, prayer wheels, singing bowls, lucky birth stones and Tibetan attire at the market. This is where Tibetan refugees, local Indians and nirvana-seeking tourists



Entrance to Norbulingka Institute

mingle in comfortable amity ... Motley groups chill in cosy Tibetan restaurants that brim with camaraderie and the fragrance of epicurean delights. *Golgappa* and *papdi chaat* stalls rub shoulders with cafes hawking coffee and *momos* and hole-in-the-wall outfits that sell adventure tourism – trekking, mountaineering, para gliding, river rafting etc.

- Stop by the Dalai Lama Temple Complex nearby, a capsule of Tibetan culture, built in 1959. It is linked to the out-of-bounds private residence of the Dalai Lama and consists of a monastery and temple. Everywhere burgundy-robed monks, eyes downcast, heads bowed in prayer and meditation, pass one by or sit on benches encased in the green of deodar trees that soar beyond like totem poles. The main shrine houses an enormous gilded statue of the Buddha, surrounded by murals that describe his life and teachings. Outside the main shrine, monks spin giant prayer wheels and prayer flags flutter their prayers to the wind. Fragments of Buddhist chants float on the



Statue of the Buddha at the Norbulingka Institute



The picturesque Church of St John in the Wilderness

air, often drowned out by the beeps and groans of traffic and tourist chatter that emanate from outside the complex.

- Located 6 km southeast of Dharamshala, the Norbul- ingka Institute, is suffused with the sound of rushing water emanating from multiple cascades and fountains. Stop and meditate in a quiet little nook which has the quality of a held breath. At the Institute, we felt like we had stumbled on little Tibet; shaded by bamboo stands and soaring trees, where serene-faced monks passed by, prayer wheels in hand. This soothing sanctuary was established in 1988 to teach and preserve Tibetan art forms.

- Check out the doll museum and watch artisans work their magic on metal statues, wood carving and thangkas (except on Sundays). Tourists may apply for these workshops, too. Shop for handcrafted products at the shop. The spiritual core of the complex, however, is the Seat of Happiness temple, smothered in



The scenic hilltown backdropped by the Dhauladhars

murals including likenesses of all 14 Dalai Lamas and 1,173 images of the Buddha which adorn the 13 m high temple hall. The gilded copper Buddha Sakyamuni is one of the largest of its kind outside Tibet and wows visitors with its sheer size and girth. A charming restaurant serves Tibetan delicacies and a cosy wood-panelled guest house offers accommodation to tourists.

- The Himachal Cricket Association Stadium, located at 1,457 m, is backdropped by the jagged peaks of the Dhauladhars. Constructed in colourful Tibetan style, the bright hues contrast with the stark, cloud-snagged whiteness of the peaks that encircle the highest cricket venue in the world.

- Perched on a crest of a hill near McLeodganj is the mountain village of Dharamkot where you can base yourself for a day or two and hunker up Triund Hill (2,850 m), which is a four-to-five-hour trek.



The Himachal Cricket Association Stadium – highest cricket venue in the world

- A short walk away from McLeodganj is the little village of Bhagsu, famed for its waterfall and crammed with cafes, shops and restaurants. The uphill route to the cascade is strung with prayer flags and engaging mountain views.
- Around 17 km away from Dharamshala is the Chamunda Devi Temple which reels in glorious views of the mountains.
- About 45 km away from Dharamshala are the eighth century Masroor rock-cut temples, a cluster of 15 shrines in the Indo-Aryan style. Said to have been built by the Pandavas when they were traversing this region, the temples awe as much by their size and other-worldly aura as the intricate carvings they contain. Sculptures of various deities including Surya, Shiva, Kartikeya and Indra adorn the shrines.
- Paraglide in Bir Billing, 50 km from Dharamshala. These are in reality two villages – Billing is the take-off site and



Masroor rock-cut temples built in Indo-Aryan style

Bir is for landing.

- Set some time aside to just hang loose and enjoy the ambiance at the 44-room juSta Birding Resort and Spa whose wood-panelled interiors have a vintage vibe and an aura of charming rusticity. Kickback and relax in the private balcony of your room with mountain views an arm's stretch away. Click photos of the feathered beauties that flit and swoop in the blue skies above.
- Or dine in the hotel's Sabor restaurant whose woody setting complemented by large windows invite the outdoors into the charmed space. Dip into global flavours and local Himachali delicacies that meld and create delightful duets for the palate. Ingredients are locally sourced and organic, and the menu spans the spectrum from grilled meats to vegetarian and gluten-free options.



The He(art) of Travel

Deft strokes, breath-taking colour palettes and an outpouring of creativity were the hallmarks of Chitrashaala 2024, an annual art residency held near scenic Dharamshala, Himachal Pradesh. The setting proved, if at all it was required, that art is a bridge between cultures, civilizations and perspectives.



Art brings the walls to life; (inset)A portrait of a beautiful Himachal maiden

He painted like a man possessed – long, sweeping strokes – looking up occasionally to embrace the eternal mountains that reared on the horizon. In two days, artist Sangjam Yarangsee, from North Thailand, had created 15 canvases at Chitrashaala 2024, an international art residency held at juSTa Birding Resort & Spa near Dharamshala.

A total of 45 artists (Indian and international) gathered for the annual art residency, hosted by the luxury boutique hotel, located a 30-minute drive away from Dharamshala in Himachal Pradesh. Indeed, it was an ideal setting for Chitrashaala, an art fete where artists are invited and hosted for a week at any one of 22 juSTa Hotels & Resorts in India, to create monumental canvasses that are then displayed at juSTa hotels across the country.

This is a destination where the snow-dusted Himalayas spook the skies and the landscape is threaded by streams and waterfalls. On our first day, the wrap-around vistas of the soft, moulded Dhauladhar range that unravelled beyond our resort, took our breath away. So did the first sight of the canvasses that had been propped on easels in a vast hall-like space. There, artists sat

absorbed in an alternate reality that they had conjured with their paint brushes that moved like magic wands across the canvas. Their palettes daubed with acrylic paint glowed as much as the paintings that were slowly taking shape – a hill woman with hypnotic eyes; a diptych of the mountains that thrust upward beyond our resort; an abstract that flamed with colour, pulling the viewer into a bottomless vortex...

A woman with Medusa-like hair that seemed to swirl around her face; another visage with shadowed eyes that gazed into your soul; a mysterious glowing forest; a canvas with gradations of green colour riven by blood-red lines in the middle; a bunch of snake-like roots of a tree that seemed to have a stranglehold on the canvas; a mixed media canvas with embroidery; a woman's face in a wreath of flowers... Creative juices flowed like a river in spate, often coursing along because of the inspiring landscape that un-folded on the horizon like an ancient scroll.

“Since the beginning of time, beauty in any form has attracted human beings,” says Ashish Vohra, founder and CEO of juSTa Hotels & Resorts, who describes himself as an artist hotelier. The conclave is a joint initiative of juSTa Hotels &



Anirudh Chari, well-known critic and curator and artist Amal Nasr pose with a spectrum of canvasses



Rumana Rahman from Bangladesh works on her opus



Giovanna Caruso stands next to her creations

Resorts and Deepika Govind, fashion designer and spouse of Ashish Vohra.

“And art is a bridge between cultures, civilizations and perspectives,” he adds. “For instance, a Polish person’s interpretation of the Himalayas is different from a Thai artist’s perspective.” Indeed, most of the artists we spoke to said that the art residency had been a transformative experience. They felt a deep connect with nature because of the hotel’s scenic location.

“Art is the ultimate expression of India’s culture and art fetes help to showcase international and Indian art. We are the only hotel group that consistently holds art residencies,” says Vohra. “We like to encourage emerging artists as well.”

The event was orchestrated by Ms Govind with the help of well-known curator and art critic Anirudh Chari and Avijit Mukherjee. (Mukherjee is a talented artist, known for his delicate and minutely rendered work who was due to head to Japan for a solo show of his own.) The trio coordinated the entire affair from choosing the artists who would participate from over a hundred aspirants, and once they arrived, inspiring them with words of encouragement and advice and even jollying them along.

“ I can identify with the emotions of the artists, “ says Ms Govind. Indeed, the artists call her “didi” with affection as she is very supportive of their moods, foibles and endeavours. “The sensitivity of the artists is very special; I can empathise when they have a creative block and a deadline is creeping up on them. Plus, they have the weight of expectation on their shoulders.”

“Some artists are young and jittery about stepping out



Ashish Vohra and Deepika Govind present certificates to the participants

into an adult world. Ours is the perfect platform to showcase their work and talk about it. We give them seven days of happiness, with Anirudh and Avijit to guide them,” she added.

The pool of talented artists included Indian artists from Mumbai, Baroda, Delhi and Kolkata while the foreign artists were from Poland, Egypt, Bangladesh, Thailand, Jordan, Malaysia, Italy and Mauritius.

Giovanna Caruso from Italy sat absorbed in front of her painting of thick roots of a tree symbolising creation, and another of a Himalayan Breakfast in which she herself figured in front of a luscious breakfast spread, with the outlines of the Himalayas in the distance.

Rumana Rahman from Bangladesh had sketched a vibrant banana flower, leaf and a hilsa fish on a black background. Hilsa is our national fish, she explained. A multi-media artist who uses both water colours and acrylic, the eye-searing hues seemed to warm up a misty chilly morning.

Suman Das, an artist from Kolkata, displayed his canvas daubed in gradations of grey, blues, greens and in the centre were red vertical lines which he said could be interpreted as human intervention in a natural landscape. Or could it be a representation of a hilltop temple in the distance which at night glowed with an other-worldly red light?

Tomasz Wiktor, a Polish painter displayed two portraits of ‘people he had met in imagination,’ as he said. One face was blurred, in the other, the eyes were arresting. The portraits were inspired by the fact that people in India are happy to have eye contact, he explained. “Art is happier here,” he added. A sculptor who paints occasionally, Tomasz observes that Indian art is very detailed and the colours are very vibrant.



A painting by Sumaya Sanjin Shanta, inspired by rickshaw art



Tomasz Wiktor poses with his art works



Artists and their creations

Dr Nagat Farouk from Egypt is an unassuming award-winning visual artist who has exhibited her work in Egypt as well as internationally and her canvasses are held in private collections in Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United States. Dr Farouk’s muse are women in folk lore and in ancient Egypt and she is also inspired by folk art. Indeed, her body of work - mixed media and embroidery on canvas - reveals a world of ancient symbols.

She and other Egyptian artists did not know each other personally when they arrived but forged a lasting relationship with each other. “My art reflects my state of mind,” said Mariam Hagar, a young Egyptian artist who confessed that she had been having spells of depression but felt uplifted thanks to the ambiance at Chitrashaala and new friendships cemented at the art fete. Indeed, art residencies are therapeutic for artists and may well become mental playgrounds for them. Enveloped by landscapes dolloped with colour, the handiwork of nature fills them with an unmatched sense of peace. And so it was for Ragia Belal, also from Egypt, who froze on canvas a sun-warmed, timeless forest scape that she had stumbled on in the course of a hike near Dharamshala.

While art residencies may spawn an outstanding collec-



Mountainscapes inspired by Nature’s handiwork

tion of art and showcase the work of a new wave of creators, they also help to channel energy and deep-rooted feelings, both negative and positive. “If there is pain, an artist can reinterpret, reimagine and reinvent himself or herself,” observed Ms Govind.

And there could be unintended outcomes as well – two artists from Thailand, who had attended a previous art conclave, fell in love, got married and returned as a couple for Chitrashaala 2024!



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

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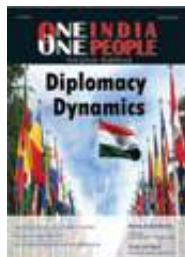
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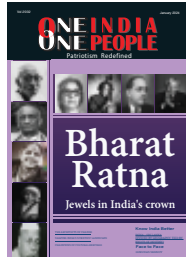
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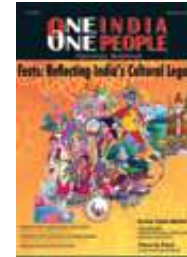
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“Improvisation in Carnatic music is a widely misunderstood concept. It is unfortunate that people have started to think that improvisation has to be complex.”

Chennai-based **Sivasri Skandaprasad** (27) is multifaceted -- a professional Carnatic vocalist, Bharatanatyam dancer, engineer, choreographer, art activist, playback singer, etc., she has also lent her voice to various TV commercials. She started singing at three and has given playback for the films *Ponniyin Selvan 1* and *2*, which has A R Rahman as composer. She won plaudits from Prime Minister Narendra Modi for her Kannada rendition of a devotional song.

In a free-wheeling interview with **A. Radhakrishnan** she talks about her plans to train the next generation in the 64 Indian art forms through her foundation Ahuti.

Can you tell us briefly about yourself?

I'm an Indian classical musician, Bharatanatyam dancer and art proponent. I have a bachelor's degree in bioengineering from Sastra University (Thanjavur) and a Master's degree in Bharatanatyam from the University of Madras. I am also a student of Sanskrit and did a certification course in Ayurvedic cosmetology.

That's a pretty diverse portfolio. How do you define music? Is silence music?

Music is that which is not. It is both sound and silence. The very *Aadhara* of life force is music. Music cannot be defined or confined to mere words, but can be experienced as the *Nadha* manifestation of the ultimate *Sookshma Swaroopa*.

Tell us about your training in music and dance. How did you become proficient in Carnatic music?

I started learning music from my father, Shri J Skanda Prasad. I underwent formal training in Carnatic music under Guru Sri AS Murali. I'm currently learning Hindustani music from Guru Shree Mahesh Kale. I have trained under Guru Shrimathi Roja Kannan



Sivasri Skandaswamy

for Bharatanatyam.

My training in music has been the same as anybody else's. My father ensured I practiced every day. He made sure I had breakfast after my session every morning. Considering he has accompanied veterans in Bharatanatyam, he asked me to practice as much as I did for music.

There cannot be a complete proficiency in Carnatic music. It is a linearly progressing learning curve where we are lifelong students who aim to be a better version of ourselves every day.

How difficult is Carnatic classical music?

Any subject with elaborate grammar is difficult. It requires constant practice, application and internalisation for making it seem less difficult. This holds good for anybody.

Who are your major musical influences within the Carnatic tradition?

As aspiring musicians, we try to learn from every artiste. More than the artiste, I have been open to getting influenced by the Bhava in their music. If a particular rendition touches my soul, I allow myself to get influenced by it. It does not necessarily have to

be any specific artiste.

What are the key elements that distinguish Carnatic music from other classical music traditions?

Carnatic music grammar has an exhaustive Mela Karta and janya ragas. It has scope for vast number of permutation and combination of ragas and swaras. It also flaunts an extremely complex laya system.

The most distinguishing element of Carnatic music compared to other classical music traditions is that there is a lot of emphasis on Sahitya and the Bhava. The concept of bhakti, which contextually translates to surrender rather than devotion, present in every single Carnatic rendition, is not necessarily present in other classical music forms.

How do you select the ragas and compositions for your performances?

Initially I would prepare a list of songs for concerts. But as I started engaging with the audience, I gradually stopped preparing lists and started to analyse the pulse of the audience and sing accordingly.

Explain the significance of improvisation in Carnatic music?

It is a widely misunderstood concept. It is unfortunate that people have started to think that improvisation has to be complex. It has lost its original meaning. For example, the word, Manodharma, meaning, one's own will, where an artiste has the freedom to create art from the depth of their understanding of that art, well within the boundaries laid by its grammar.

But today Manodharma is a segment that the rasikas or even the artistes expect to be rendered in a certain way which is acceptable to them. For some reason, the artiste has been confined to certain expectations of people and has lost the right to Manodharma.

How do you maintain the purity and authenticity of Carnatic music while incorporating modern influences?

Carnatic music or music in general is pure in its own form. We do not have the capacity to make something as complete as Carnatic music, impure. As for authenticity, we have all learnt from our gurus in a certain Bani, and sticking to that as far as possible is more than enough.

What challenges do you face as a Carnatic singer in today's music industry?

Any art, like anything else, changes with time. A challenge I face as an artiste in today's world is to make the previous generation understand that adding new elements to the tradition is not wrong if it sounds good, and making the next generation understand the age-old tradition and cultural depths that this art takes us to.

How do you engage with your audience during your performances to convey the essence of Carnatic music?

It's very simple. Instead of making them sit and listen to us in silence, we just make them sing along. It is very important that we share the joy and bliss that we experience while doing music, with the people. Since it might be a large gathering, simple phrases can be sung together to experience an entirely new dimension of bliss.

What motivated you to start performing Namasankeerthanam? Do you like bhajans?

To me, Carnatic music and Namasankeerthanam are not different. Even today in my concerts, I sing Dikshitar kriti, Tiruppugazhs, and Tyagaraja kritis along with songs by various other composers across India. Sangeetha Pita Maha Purandaradasa did Namasankeerthana and composed so many bhakti poems for us to cherish and experience today.

What is your daily schedule like? How do you juggle your several roles?

As an artiste, I need to give a certain time for my vocal chords every day. I do not sit and sing for hours together. As my gurus always tell me, practice not only involves singing, but internalising a lot of other factors, and listening to numerous kinds of music and learning from everywhere.

How has Bharatanatyam helped you shape your career?

Bharatanatyam has opened up the dancer in me, and today when I perform on stage, I dance through my music.

What was it like singing for A.R. Rahman? Should a singer have expectations?

It was a great learning experience to work with a very senior music director like A R Rahman for the films Ponnin Selvan 1 and 2. I generally do not have expectations before any new experience as it will curtail my learning curve.

What did you feel about Modiji and his tweet on your Kannada rendition of devotion to Shri Ram?

It is a blessing to live in the same era as greats like Modi ji. To be mentioned by such people is a great encouragement for young artistes like me and to understand the value of culture and responsibility that every citizen holds in carrying this legacy forward.

What languages do you sing in? Are you a polyglot?

I wouldn't call myself one. But I love to learn new languages and try to sing songs in as many languages as possible. One such attempt was when I tried to sing an Odia song on Lord Jagannatha.

Tell us about Ahuti and its objectives.

Ahuti is an organisation founded by me. I believe that through it, I can offer the students a rare opportunity that will foster artistic, professional and personal growth to prepare them for a successful and responsible life as citizens and artists.

Ahuti is devoted to the 64 Indian art forms and we plan to nourish and enrich the next generation in these art forms so that they grow as holistic individuals and experience the Indic/ Bharatiya tradition and learn to acquire the vidya or knowledge to pass it on to future generations.

Ahuti, to me is all about serving God and the country. From singing to dancing, to oration and poetry, to nation and nationalism, it empowers you to touch the soul of nature with your art.

What are the awards that you have been honoured with? What do they mean to you?

I have received a few awards including the Yuva Kala Bharati All Rounder award from Bharat Kalachar and Ustad Bismillah Khan award from Swarajya at Pondy Literature Festival. Awards are definitely encouraging for artistes. Recognitions are an age-old tradition, which is like a pat on the back and a nudge to do more. Your message to artistes Art is not just a performance. It's an offering to the almighty. So, let's all do it with utmost devotion.



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

(Continued from pg 16)

Similarly, Malavikagnimitram enchants readers with its tale of star-crossed lovers and courtly intrigue, showcasing Kalidas' unparalleled skill in crafting evocative imagery and memorable characters. It is the story of King Agnimitra and Malavika, and how the king falls in love with a picture of this girl. Another play, *Vikramorvasiya*, is the love story of King Pururavas and Urvasi, a celestial nymph.

Bhasa, the pioneering playwright or dramatist of ancient India, even before Kalidas, contributed a wealth of theatrical gems. His plays, also in Sanskrit, including *Uru Bhangam* – a tragic play - and *Swapnavasavadatta* are distinguished by their bold themes, dynamic characterisation, and rich dramatic tension. Through his exploration of mythological and historical themes, Bhasa breathed new life into the theatrical landscape of ancient India, leaving an indelible mark on subsequent generations of playwrights.

Shudraka, renowned for delightful comedies, brought a touch of levity and charm to the world of Sanskrit drama. In *Mrichchhakatika*, Shudraka spins a tale of romance and intrigue, peppered with humour and social commentary. His nuanced portrayal of everyday life in ancient India offers a window into the joys and sorrows of ordinary people, adding depth and richness to the classical repertoire. Other works include *Vinavasavadatta* and *Padmaprabhritaka*, the latter being a bhana meaning a short monologue.

The enduring legacy of these playwrights extends far beyond the boundaries of time and space, their works transcending linguistic and cultural barriers to resonate with audiences around the world. Through the artistry of translation, Kalidas' plays have found new life in countless languages, enchanting readers and theatre-goers with their timeless themes and universal appeal.

Folk traditions

Apart from Sanskrit dramas, Indian theatre also draws inspiration from folk and oral traditions. These forms have been an integral part of Indian culture since ancient times. In fact, many folklores have been adapted into plays, keeping them alive in the hearts of the people.

In the bustling realm of Indian theatre, few productions shine as brightly as 'Charandas Chor,' a play by Urdu and Hindi theatre pioneer Habib Tanvir, based on a Rajasthani folktale by Vijaydan Detha, with universal themes of humanity and redemption. The play was also adapted into a film with the same name by noted filmmaker Shyam Benegal.

At its heart lies the enigmatic figure of Charandas, a thief whose exploits are as legendary as they are infamous. Yet, beneath his rough exterior beats a heart of gold, driven by a sense of justice and compassion that sets him apart from his peers. As the story unfolds, Charandas travels on a quest for redemption, navigating a world fraught with peril, deception, and unexpected twists of fate.

What sets 'Charandas Chor' apart is its ability to seamlessly blend the whimsical charm of folk storytelling with profound insights into the human condition. Through its colourful cast of characters and spirited dialogue, the play transports audiences to a bygone era, where honour, duty, and morality collide in a dazzling display of theatrical magic.

A collusion of artforms

Indian drama and theatre stand out for their profound integration of music and dance. This symbiotic relationship between theatre, music, and dance has deep roots in the country's rich cultural heritage.

At the heart of this artistic fusion are classical dance

forms such as Bharatanatyam, Kathakali, Odissi, Kuchipudi, and Manipuri, each with its own distinct style, repertoire, and aesthetic sensibility.

These ancient dance traditions, honed over centuries, serve as pillars of Indian classical arts, embodying grace, precision, and storytelling prowess. Most of these enact stories and episodes from ancient Indian literature and scriptures.

Indian theatre also draws inspiration from folk dances that reflect the cultural diversity and vibrancy of the subcontinent. From the exuberant leaps of Bhangra in Punjab to the graceful twirls of Garba in Gujarat, folk dances infuse performances with a sense of local flavour and authenticity, transporting audiences to the heart of rural India.

In the ever-evolving landscape of Indian theatre, the influence of Western theatrical techniques has become increasingly pronounced in recent times, leading to a fascinating fusion of traditional and modern elements.

This convergence has spurred the emergence of experimental forms of theatre that challenge conventions, blur boundaries, and push the limits of artistic expression. At the forefront of this movement stands the acclaimed playwright Girish Karnad, whose 13-scene Kannada play *Tughlaq* (1964) epitomises the synthesis of Indian classical theatre with contemporary sensibilities. It is set against the backdrop of the tumultuous reign of the 14th-century Delhi Sultan Muhammad bin Tughlaq.

What sets it apart is its innovative blend of theatrical techniques drawn from both Eastern and Western traditions. Karnad deftly incorporates elements of Indian classical theatre, such as stylised dialogue and rhythmic recitation, like ancient Sanskrit dramas.

At the same time, he incorporates modernist sensibilities such as non-linear storytelling. The result is a multi-layered and intellectually stimulating work that challenges audiences to question conventional notions of history, truth and identity.

Beyond art

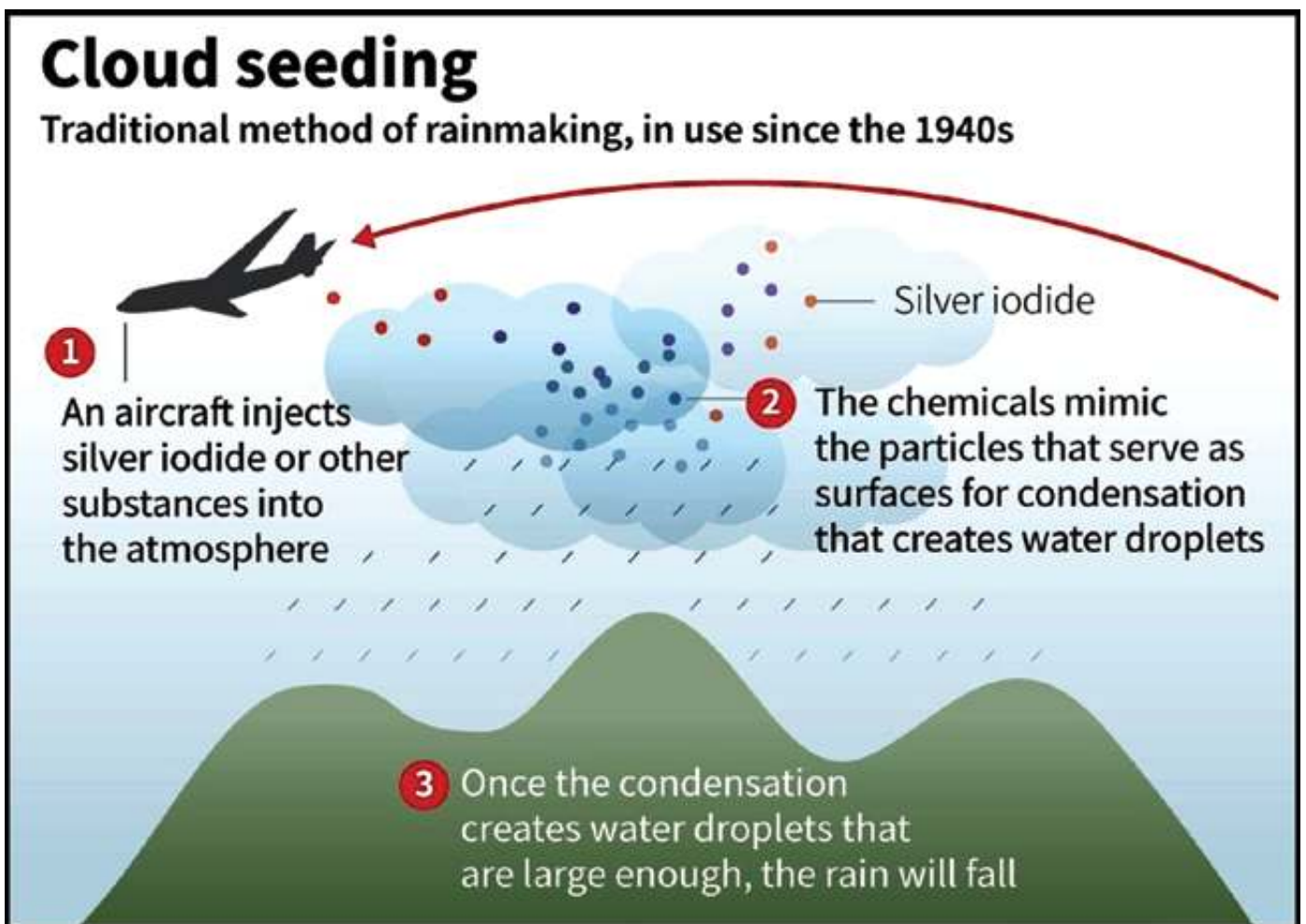
Indian theatre has also witnessed a rise in political and social commentary in recent years. Plays have increasingly addressed issues such as gender inequality, corruption, and social injustices, making a powerful statement through the medium of drama. It is not just in terms of themes and techniques that Indian drama and theatre have evolved; it has also seen a shift in its approach to storytelling. Traditional linear narratives have given way to non-linear forms, using flashbacks, multiple perspectives, and other techniques to create a more engaging experience for the audience.

Despite these changes, one thing that remains constant is the importance given to preserving and promoting Indian literary traditions in theatre. Many contemporary plays are adaptations or interpretations of ancient texts, keeping them relevant and alive for generations to come.

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

Pinpricking Nature with trials and errors

The recent flash floods that brought Dubai to its knees once again put the spotlight on cloud seeding and its effectiveness in controlling pollution or increasing rainfall. Worse still, there is a raging debate whether it was because of cloud seeding or climate change – one a desperate measure, and the other, majorly a fallout of human indiscretion. **Raju Korti** analyses.



Process of Cloud Seeding

You just do not tinker with Nature. It is simply what it is and not what it ought to be. For all its famed resilience, it has an uncanny knack of getting back at you hard, and though gradual, it can have disastrous consequences for the human race. The fact that Nature exists in all its myriad and multi-splendoured forms, is as much dangerous as it is fascinating.

In the guise of creativity and innovation, humans have been messing up with the genes and plants, and although most of us did not know that genes existed, we still had our brains figuring out that selective breeding could ensure that desirable traits would end up being prevalent in our crops and livestock.

Tinkering with Nature, as in Environment, is a process that has started long back and it will be just a matter of time before its consequences are irreversible. One does not have to be a doomsday prophet to say this. The results are there to be seen. The cloud seeding experiment in Dubai is an example in point.

The Gulf country witnessed a downpour -- a luxury in a

parched desert -- like it never did. There have been suggestions that the intense rains were triggered by cloud seeding, which is usually known to cause, at best, 25% extra rainfall. Cloud seeding, as it were, does not guarantee rains in the first place to the extent expected, but look at the magnitude of the havoc in Dubai (For Mumbai it is an annual phenomenon). The Nature returned with compound interest.

Nature is a universal force and can have far-reaching consequences in every sense of the word. Little wonder, experts are weighing in whether cloud seeding was the actual cause. A particularly remarkable perspective comes from Johan Jaques, a senior meteorologist at KISTERS, warning of "potential unintended consequences of meddling with weather patterns". The Newsweek quoted him as saying that its ramifications can also have a "diplomatic fallout" leading to weather wars. As if other unethical forms of warfare like the biological and chemical warfare were not enough.

Jaques explains that although cloud seeding aims to enhance and accelerate the precipitation process -- especially in

areas which have seen very less rains, there is always the threat of excessive precipitation that can lead to excess infiltration flow with potential flash floods as result. He believes that the Dubai floods act as a stark warning of the unintended consequences we can unleash when we use such technology to alter the weather. For the record, there is no concrete evidence linking the Dubai rains to cloud seeding but the common chord is the tampering with natural weather process. Climate Physics, deserves to be a separate curriculum in our education and taught as such in universities. There cannot be any two opinions on Mr Jaques' views.

Mr Jaques makes an irrefutable argument that anytime we interfere with natural precipitation patterns we set off a chain of events over which we have little control and "if we are not careful, unrestrained use of this technology could end up causing diplomatic instabilities with neighbouring countries engaging in tit-for-tat weather wars." Nature does not recognise international borders.

High cost, less gain

Cloud seeding is a costly experiment with no lucrative returns. In a country like India where budgets struggle to meet populist and genuine needs, such steps are not even considered expedient. It costs almost Rs one lakh for every square km of cloud and involves spraying of salt mixtures in clouds from the air that would result in condensation of the cloud and eventually cause rainfall. A fringe benefit comes as it also washes away pollutants in the atmosphere. Just like the natural rainfall that cleanses the air. Last December, Chief Minister Eknath Shinde had mulled artificial rains as a solution to tackle air pollution -- a robbing-Peter-to-pay-Paul solution. You tamper with the Nature to cause pollution and you also tamper with it to correct it. How self-defeating is that? There is more pain and less gain!

As much as it is touted, cloud seeding hasn't actually been statistically proven to work. After the method was first tested 70 years ago, enthusiasm for cloud seeding led to experiments that claimed annual precipitation increases of 10% or more. But the studies lacked statistical rigor. It is not just about the financial implications of the experiment; it is also about being able to control its after-effects. Given the Nature's vagaries, this can be a challenge: Once a cloud is treated, you can't measure how much it would have rained or snowed if left unseeded. Even the basic mechanics underlying the crystallization of water molecules on seeding agents remains mysterious.

Even if cloud seeding does succeed at increasing precipitation, environmental activists are concerned about its impact. The flood havoc in Dubai is an example, and although, some experts are attributing it to climate change -- a phenomenon that gets mere lip service by most nations, the timing of the experiment is bound to leave people confused about its efficacy. At present, making it rain is still more of an art than a science.

With advanced countries increasingly spending hundreds of millions of dollars on weather modification, more research is needed to understand if the practice works and what its environmental, social, and governance impacts will be.

In India, cloud seeding technology has been mulled to clean poisonous smog with rain. Last year, the Delhi government considered it to wash away the deadly smog that engulfed it and threatened catastrophic health consequences. Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde too suggested artificial rains to control air and dust pollution and advised the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) accordingly but the hefty price tags attached to them was a dampener. As it is, the BMC used 1000 tankers of water to wash the city roads clean and the citizens, fearing an impending water crisis in the gruelling summer months, wondered it made sense under the circumstances. There is no authentic word about how much it helped in ridding the metro of its pollution.

When the experts themselves are not convinced about cloud seeding and its purported advantages, one can well understand the quandary of the common man who pays towards these as taxes. That environmental critics fear it as an expensive distraction from tackling root causes is quite another story.

The more man tries to exercise his control over the Nature, the more vengeance with which it bounces back. It is a complex algorithm which remains uncracked yet and your options as a researcher or a scientist remain restricted to studying patterns that are by no means fully conclusive. The very esoteric characteristic of Nature is to keep the trump card to itself and sometimes, it does not know itself when it unleashes it. You intrude/encroach upon one of its many parameters and you disturb the entire equation that has many imponderable unknowns whose value cannot be deduced correctly.

Humans will do a lot of damage, some irretrievable, before we ultimately destroy ourselves. In our infinite wisdom, we fail to discern that life will continue without humans. New forms of intelligence will emerge long after human experiments are over. And then who will remain to experiment what?



Raju Korti is a senior journalist with over four-decade experience of working in media institutions.

Man-Animal conflict at flashpoint

*Citing a number of instances from the affected states as also the concern expressed by the World Wildlife Fund for Nature and UN, **Tuhina Bannerji** points out how the man-animal conflict is fast spiralling out of control and suggests what can be done to ensure that both remain in their natural habitats and co-exist peacefully as they should.*



A man and woman run for their life as the elephants charge towards them

It was never such an “uneasy coexistence” between humans and wildlife. Worse still, nobody knows where it’s headed. A recent spate of man-animal conflicts – mostly reported from Kerala and Uttarakhand – have jolted the policymakers out of their slumber and left environmental groups perplexed.

Humans attacked by wild animals, mauled or killed, retaliatory killings, animals being trapped, compensation to the victims, call for action against law-breakers, protests to amend forest laws, cry to give up knee-jerk reactions and political slugfest – it’s all happening out there.

In February, wild elephant attacks resulted in the killing of 42-year-old Mananthavady resident Ajish in Wayanad and an employee of Eco Tourism Centre in Pulpally. These put the locals on the warpath against the administration. Things turned ugly when hundreds of people vandalised and attacked a jeep belonging to the Kerala forest department at Pulpally. There was a dusk to dawn strike, prompting Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan to devise a comprehensive plan to tackle the situation.

In Uttarakhand, 80 children coming to study in Government Inter College were provided security by the forest department after locals in Dhela range in Corbett Tiger Reserve (CTR) upped their ante against the Pushkar Singh Dhama-led government. A day earlier, a woman gone to collect wood from the forest, was killed by a tiger. This was close on the heels of five

women getting injured in a leopard attack in Tehri Garhwal region. Pressure is also being mounted by Sanyukta Sangharsh Samiti, a local community group, to check the spate of attacks by big cats else they would shut down the reserve indefinitely.

The group is vociferously campaigning to strike off tigers, leopards and wild boars from the protected species list of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1973 and relocate wildlife from the region. The Corbett Tiger Reserve currently houses around 600 tigers and more than 3,000 leopards. CM Dhama, like Vijayan, has instructed the Forest Secretary and Wildlife Warden to chalk out an effective plan.

The conflict throws up some unsettling questions: Why has the situation become alarming; what next and the consequences; the solutions; and if the steps are enough?

To understand the entire issue we must take a closer look at the statistics – even though figures tell us only half the story.

Telling figures

In July 2021, a joint report by the UN Environment Programme and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) said: “No country in the world would be as affected by human-animal conflict in the upcoming years as India.” It warned that India’s

“burgeoning human population” is “reaching the threshold of tolerance” regarding people’s coexistence with wild animals. A Centre for Wildlife Studies (CWS) research said that India is a high-wildlife, high-conflict country, with an average of 80,000 incidents reported per year.

Ironically, while we hail the rising number of big cats – 200 in the last four years – attributing it to the success of ‘Project Tiger’, we are also grappling with the increasing incidents of man-animal confrontations.

A Kerala Forest Department data of March 2022 says the state has, since 2011, reported 34,875 cases of wildlife attacks, leaving 1,233 dead , 6,803 injured and 621 cases of crop destruction. The loss is more than ₹ 3 crore. In Uttarakhand, 444 people got killed in wild animal attacks since 2017 till now while 1,396 leopards died from 2000–2020. In 2022, the conflict peaked in Maharashtra when 105 humans lost their lives. In 2021, 84 people died mostly involving tigers.

In Karnataka, between 2018 and 2023, 155 people were killed and around 5000 injured in attacks by wild animals. In 2023-24, in nine months, 14 elephants have died, most due to electrocution. The problem has spilled onto urban pockets in Bengaluru where leopard attacks have spiked in the outskirts.

In 2018, seven elephants were electrocuted in Odisha — notoriously called “graveyard” for elephants. In UP and MP the situation is equally bad. The Pilibhit Tiger Reserve (PTR), Dudhwa Tiger Reserve (DTR) and the upcoming Amangarh Tiger Reserve (ATR) have reported more than three dozen deaths due to big cats. West Bengal topped the number of killed by tigers and the second-highest by elephants between 2014 and 2019.

An RTI query reveals 3,310 people have died in India due to attacks by wild elephants in the last seven years.

The surge and its impact

Deforestation due to population growth and lopsided urbanisation goes a long way in driving up this crisis. Shrinking habitats force the wild animals to venture out into human habitations in search of food, causing them to confront people living close by. In many places, populated human settlements and farmlands can be found near protected forests which results in man-animal interaction.

A 2021 WWF-N and UN joint report pointed out that India has currently more than 700, mostly disjointed, protected areas. Seventy per cent of elephant ranges, 40 per cent of lion ranges and 35 per cent of tiger ranges are outside protected areas. This multiplies the confrontations.

On 3 June 2022, the Supreme Court mandated a minimum of 1 km ecologically sensitive zone, or buffer zone, around all protected forests in the country, but it was opposed vigorously by many villagers.

Crores go into compensation for the victims and their kin. In Uttarakhand alone, from 2017 to December 2023, over ₹ 21.38 crore were disbursed as compensation. This ex-gratia is earmarked in the budget but no provisions exist to curb the man-animal conflicts. The forest department in most states is too under-staffed to check tree felling which reduces forest cover, forcing wild animals to move out of their habitats.

With rising human population, pressure on wild habitats has increased. Earlier, all wildlands used to be forests good for grazing, but now they have been turned into agriculture and horticulture lands, and at some places into industries.

Climate changes are also disturbing floral biodiversity, which creates a dearth of food in the forests. Since 2000, 54,800 hectares of forest cover in Uttarakhand has been destroyed by wildfires. Their natural habitats getting destroyed, animals move into semi-urban and urban areas for food, water and shelter. Both humans and animals jostle for space.

India has lost nearly 10 % of its elephant population since the last census in 2012 – thanks to the gradual loss of their corridors.

The way out

After the February elephant attack incidents, Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan called for the deployment of 250 advanced cameras along forest borders and wildlife corridors to monitor wildlife movements. He also ordered round-the-clock patrolling of state forests. He asked to create neighbourhood WhatsApp groups and use public address systems to alert residents about wildlife movements.

Similarly, Uttarakhand CM directed to install wire (solar) fencing to prevent wildlife intrusion. For immediate medicare post attacks, veterinarians should be deployed 24x7 in areas prone to such conflicts, he suggested.

But are these steps adequate? Shouldn’t there be a Special Task Force to ensure these conflicts are controlled and the losses mitigated? It is imperative that wildlife corridors are safeguarded from human intrusion. Stakeholders need to be sensitised about the community-based conservation programmes that can reduce man-animal conflict. Programmes like ‘The Living with Leopards programme’, need to be emulated. More power needs to be given to the local communities.

The type of crops too have to be changed. In Karnataka, the government has advised farmers to plant crops that elephants don’t like eating, such as chillies, lemons and ginger. Digging trenches and setting up alarm systems to warn people when elephants are nearby could help. Railway track fencing can check the elephants entering human settlements. It is costly proposition though.

Raising the compensation is fine, but such ad-hocism isn’t advisable in the long run. The problem has to be approached professionally and at the source. Apart from rescue units, correctional facilities, veterinarians, tranquilizing guns and well-equipped staff, there is an urgent need to go to the root of it all – human encroachment on wildlife. It needs to be tackled on a war-footing.



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

Kitareba 2.0, an aria of Partition

Kitareba 2.0, a dance performance by Sapphire production creates a wonderful tribute to the women and children of the newly formed East Pakistan who suffered the impact of forced, political migration, writes Shoma A. Chatterji.



Kitareba 2.0 dance performances enriched with dramatic background and lighting

Kitareba 2.0 is a stage performance presented as the annual performance by Sapphire, a post-modern dance company founded and directed by the ever-enthusiastic Sudarshan Chakraborty. Kitareba is a word in Sylheti dialect which indigenously means ‘How do you do?’.

Sylhet is a metropolitan city in the northeastern region of Bangladesh. It is situated on the banks of the Surma River. The city has a population of approximately 700,000 people, making it the fifth-largest city in Bangladesh.

Lord Mountbatten’s partition plan announced on 3 June 1947, provided inter-alia for a referendum to be held in the Sylhet district of Assam to decide whether it should remain a part of the Indian province of Assam or go to East Pakistan. The Sylhet referendum was held on 6 July 1947 and the result went in favour of a merger with Pakistan. Broadly following the Hindu-Muslim population break-up of the district, Sylhet voted to join East Bengal. Other than a small Hindu-majority pocket, most of the district was transferred to Pakistan.

But what happened to the people directly affected by this sudden division of their homeland into two different nations? It created a storm in the lives of those who preferred to stay back,

but were forced to become Pakistani citizens.

What happened to the huge number of men, women and children who were forced to identify with a new nation? The very word “Partition” within India immediately associates us with the forced migration of masses into Punjab and from Punjab which was now divided. But Bengal was not focused on too much. Kitareba attempts to do this by focusing on what happened to women and children in Sylhet.

Just after Partition, large numbers of Hindu Bangalis started to migrate across the border back to Assam, allowing politicians in Assam to eventually frame the pre-1947 question of cultural homogeneity as one of infiltration by foreigners.

Sapphire, through its annual performance Kitareba 2.0, has created a wonderful tribute to the women and children of the newly formed East Pakistan who suffered the impact of forced, political migration.

Sudarshan Chakraborty says, “Although I or my family never experienced the impact of partition, I grew up hearing stories from my parents about the struggle and the memories that were edged in their minds about East Pakistan and



Different props used during the performance

atrocities faced by their forefathers, friends or relatives. I too carry these emotions in my DNA which made me wonder about this and the idea of the play developed through an osmotic process year after year.”

Sudarshan decided to visit Sylhet taking a road trip on the same path taken by migrants in 1947 and later in 1971. “This journey to Sylhet and touching the soil of my forefathers in Bousi village made this production complete and emotionally anchored with the true sense of questioning the futility of physical borders and investigating the shared cultural and social history of the two parts of a river/mountain (Jantia Khasi Hills) which suddenly became two nations! I was involved in this concept over the last ten years.”

Sudarshan thanks dancer Lubna Mariam, based in Dhaka who connected him to a dance organisation based in Sylhet named Nritya Shailly run by a Hindu dancer which made his story more relevant as a role reversal of looking into the idea of being a ‘minority’.

About the dance performances enriched with a dynamically moving backdrop with a sound track filled with the impact of rushing trains as the passengers seated on the stage swing this way indicates the movement of the train carrying the sad and abused commuters away from their homeland.

For years together, Sapphire attempted to narrate a story integrating with many art forms but without diluting the concept or the vocabulary of Sapphire known for cautiously layering it with ritualistic folksy moves and body language that concretises and addresses the aesthetics of the songs and the stories.

“At the same time, it depicted the integration of day-to-day material we see as props like newspapers or fences but reinventing them in a way to be used in dance to narrate the story and at the same time, demonstrate the power of contemporary dance in such situations”, Sudarshan elaborates.

The songs were very carefully selected from the heritage songs of Sylhet such as “sona bondhu re”, “Ami tomar naam loiyya Kaandhi” because these songs express the pathos and pain of separation and isolation between lovers/kin that transcends borders of geography. The solo song by Joy Sankar

that goes Habiganjer jalali kabutor, Sunamgunjer Kura’ by Hemango Biswas known for his songs/poetry on his immense sense of loss of identity in a new city where he was among strangers!

The dance performances however, framed out of modern dance forms appeared a bit repetitive over a period of time where facial expressions tended to be overshadowed by the slightly acrobatic dance postures. Sudarshan gave the opportunity to students of dance of his academy to participate in the performance without exception and he explains that this may have led to the apparent repetition.

The costumes were ethnically designed to keep to the tradition of the poor village folk, mainly women and children – on one hand comprising the red-and-white checkered traditional “gamcha” and on the other, in keeping with the East Bengal colours of the *Dhonekhali* and even *ikkat*.

“The lighting by Dinesh Poddar used red and amber, traversing from violence, warmth and dream, creating a constant negotiation for the dancers and the audience to find their state of mind and situation as nothing remained constant. In some scenes, we used pastel colours and blue signifying innocence and flow of life immediately succumbing to threat, fear and bloodshed!” Sudarshan sums up.

In his directorial statement, Sudarshan says, “KITAREBA is aimed at narrating the plight of the migrants of different parts of the world and how decades of political fiasco kept separating communities but failed to separate people from a mutual love for their homeland. The spirit of KITAREBA celebrates these stories of hope and conviction using dance, multimedia and spoken words/poems.”



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.

WING COMMANDER KARUN KRISHNA MAJUMDAR DFC BAR (1913- 1945)

Hero of Burma Campaign

Wing Commander Karun Krishna Majumdar was born in Kolkata on 6 September 1913. His maternal grandfather, Womesh Chunder Bannerjee was the first president of the Indian National Congress. As Karun was over six feet tall and well-built, he acquired the nickname Jumbo. Jumbo gave the fledgling Indian Air Force its first war hero in World War II. He was the only pilot in the IAF (Indian Air Force) to be decorated with the DFC (Distinguished Flying Cross), twice, that is DFC with Bar.

He completed his schooling at St Pauls School in Darjeeling. In 1932, he took admission in Royal Air Force College, Cranwell, UK. In 1934, he returned to India as a trained pilot.

On commissioning he joined No.1 Squadron (The Tigers) as Flying Officer in the Mid 1930s. Flying the Wapiti, then the Hart, he rapidly rose to the rank of Squadron Leader and took over command of No.1 Squadron in June 1941, when it was based at Miranshah, NWFP (North West Frontier Province, Pakistan). The squadron was upgraded to Westland Lysanders planes in August 1941. The squadron was moved to Drigh Road (near Karachi, Pakistan) for training and then onto Taungoo (East of Prome on the Sittoung river, Myanmar) on 1 Feb 1942.

The Japanese Army Air Force attacked Taungoo the very next day, destroying allied airfield installations and aircraft, only 1 Squadron's aircraft were unscathed. Jumbo immediately planned a retaliatory attack on Mae-Haung the Japanese airfield at Mae-Haungsan (west of Chiangmai, Thailand).

The next day, Majumdar took off in a solitary Lysander armed with two 250-pound bombs. The Lysander had never been used for bombing. The New Zealanders of the No.67 RAF (Royal Air Force) Squadron who shared Taungoo, sent an escort of two Buffalo fighters for the Lysander. Majumdar flew low, just about skimming tree tops to achieve complete surprise at the Japanese airfield. He dropped his bombs with accuracy on an aircraft hangar at the airfield, destroying it as well as the aircraft in the hanger.

Majumdar was in the thick of the action again next day. This time he led the entire squadron on a bombing mission on the same airfield, destroying several buildings, wireless installations and aircraft on the ground. On one occasion, he was forced down in the Shan jungles (Myanmar) due to engine

failure and managed to return to Lashio after a harrowing journey through dense forests.

Majumdar was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross in 1942 for his leadership of the squadron during the Burma Campaign. He then volunteered for a posting to the European theatre. Though promoted to Wing Commander, he took a demotion to Squadron Leader to fly again. Majumdar joined No. 268 Squadron RAF, a photo-reconnaissance squadron, at Gatwick, UK, in June 1944.

He was the sole volunteer for a reconnaissance mission in bad weather over the Falaise gap, Europe. On one occasion he got shot up and force-landed in enemy territory, but was luckily rescued. The Bar to his DFC was awarded on 23 January 1945, citing the missions over Sienne, France.

Upon return to India, Majumdar joined the Indian Air Force Display Flight. On 17 February 1945, whilst practicing low-level aerobatics, his plane malfunctioned and crashed, killing him instantaneously in Faisalabad, Pakistan.

His alma mater St Paul's, Darjeeling, instituted the Karun Majumdar General Knowledge Quiz in 1945. A plaque in his memory was also placed in the school chapel. Life magazine featured him in its issue of 15 May 1944 among twelve of the world's most outstanding airmen. His portrait was painted by the artist William Dring, Royal Academy.

In 2014, his son and heir planned to auction his DFC and other memorabilia. On hearing this, retired Air Marshall Anil Chopra offered his pension funds of Rs 20 lakh to buy the medals for India. The IAF intervened and bought the items for the IAF museum.



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

PETER PEREIRA (1929-2023)

Cinematographer par excellence

One of the earliest Hindi films to be recognised for the quality of its special effects was the super duper hit 'Mr India' directed by acclaimed international director Shekhar Kapoor. The film was released on 25 May 1987 and had a phenomenal run at the box office. The cinematographer who cranked the camera for the film was Peter Pereira and he was the brain behind the special effects scenes as well.

Peter was the mainstay of several films directed by successful commercial film-maker Manmohan Desai. Peter, whose father had an abiding interest in photography, was born in 1929 and inherited his father's traits. He evolved on his own with innovations. After completing his education, Peter served as apprentice at the famous Basant Studios in Mumbai (then Bombay) owned by movie mogul Homi Wadia.

He had no regular job in the studio but had the room to do other odd jobs including setting up cameras, aiding the production unit etc.

It was here that he had the advantage of assisting special effects wizard, Babubhai Mistry, who kindled in him an urge to master the nuances involved in creating special effects.

Pereira whose first effort as a cinematographer was 'Parasmani' last worked in the film 'Bhagmati' which was released in 2005. He was a favourite of Manmohan Desai, the man with the Midas touch who often used to quip that Amitabh Bachchan, composers Laxmikant-Pyarelal and Peter Pereira were the kingpins of his films and that without them, he would be lost. Peter excelled behind the camera in Desai's hit films like 'Sacha Jhutha' 'Roti' 'Ajooba' (where the special effects were extraordinary), 'Shahenshah' 'Mard' 'Coolie' 'Toofan' and the highly popular 'Amar Akbar Antony.'

Manmohan Desai was known to give Peter a free hand and the talented cinematographer lived up to the trust placed in him. J P Dutta's silver jubilee hit 'Border' starring Sunny Deol too was embellished with Pereira's cinematographic genius. He also worked in films with the new breed of stars like Akshay Kumar and 'Khiladiyon Ka Khiladi.' 'Sheshnaag' was another film where the lensman exhibited his mastery over his craft. Critics hailed the special effects in the thriller.

Peter Pereira was part of the Hindi film industry for over six decades before he called it quits. He was one of the fourteen cameramen who were featured in a documentary titled

cameramen who were featured in a documentary titled 'Chaayankan' directed by Hemant Chaturvedi. The latter had a very high regard for Peter and the documentary carried some of Peter's memorable work.

Peter had few other preoccupations apart from cinematography and remained a bachelor all his life. He, however, had a passion for comedy films and was an unabashed fan of the great Charlie Chaplin. Unfortunately, his vision was totally impaired after he got into his seventies.

For the last twenty years of his life, darkness was his only companion. The Hindi film industry known for its lack of empathy for veterans, however popular they might have been in their heyday, never had any concern for Peter who led a reclusive life till his death on 10 January 2023.

Peter Pereira will however be remembered as a cinematographer par excellence and one who utilised the limited technology at his disposal to create riveting frames which were highly appreciated by audiences across the country and abroad as well.

At a time when technology was yet to make its presence felt in various disciplines in the film industry, Pereira was one of the early pioneers who carved his own niche and was in high demand.

Film makers were aware of his commitment for cinema and his capacity to excel in his sphere of work. In an obituary reference Shekhar Kapoor mourned his passing and praised Pereira's patience, technique and perseverance.



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

P R S OBEROI (1929-2023)

Titan of hospitality industry

Prithvi Raj Singh Oberoi was born to hotelier Rai Bahadur M S Oberoi on 3 February 1929 and had his early schooling at the St Paul's High School in Darjeeling. He pursued his advanced education in UK and Switzerland. Although his father was keen that his son should become a Chartered Accountant, P R S Oberoi opted instead for a career in the hotel industry and graduated in Hotel Management from Lausanne in Switzerland.

Thereafter, there was no stopping Oberoi who established his first hotel and then went on to open a chain of hotels all with the Oberoi tag. Soon enough the hotels picked up business well and earned name and fame for providing the finest in luxury, service and quality.

Oberoi took over as the Chairman of the East India Hotels after the passing away of his father M S Oberoi in 2002 and remained at the helm of the group till 2013.

The Oberoi Hotels and Resorts expanded with the opening of the Trident Hotel Chain and Oberoi who was 'Biki' to his wide circle of friends and acquaintances placed a good amount of stress on man management and was known to frequently emphasise the theory that people are the most valuable asset of any organisation. The Oberoi hotel chain also expanded abroad to countries like Mauritius, Indonesia and Egypt.

One of the early entrepreneurs in the industry Oberoi established the first star hotel on the global map and all his hotels both in India and abroad boasted of very good occupancy rates. As a global leader in the industry he was often called upon to provide leadership for the management of luxury hotels in several countries. The Oberoi group had the distinction of being the third largest hospitality chain in the country and Oberoi served as the Executive Chairman of the group.

Oberoi established a number of organisations where training in hotel management was imparted and among them was the Oberoi Centre of Learning and Development which commenced operations in 1967.

A number of laurels and distinctions came the way of the suave and articulate hotelier who ensured that his hotels

never slipped down the hospitality index. In the year 2010 Oberoi was awarded the Corporate Hotelier of the Year title by the Hotels Magazine.

The Indian Government conferred on him the Padma Vibhushan, the second highest civilian honour for his exceptional service to the country.

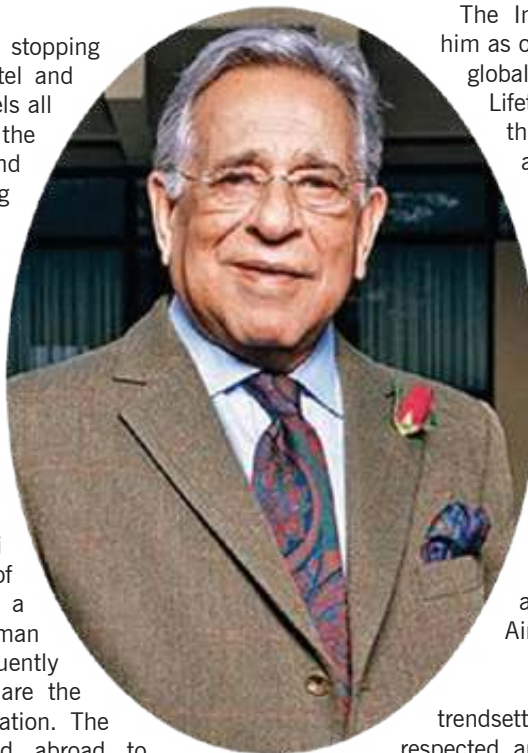
The International Hospitality Institute hailed him as one of the 100 most influential people in global hospitality. Oberoi also received the Lifetime Achievement Award at ILTM and the Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year award as well. The leading financial newspaper in the country, the Economic Times too conferred on him a Lifetime Achievement Award.

His son Karan Deep Singh Oberoi took over the reins of the group as CEO of the East India Hotels after P R S Oberoi called it a day.

Oberoi lived a full, eventful life and passed away at the age of 94. He had however remained active in public life and even at the time of his death he was a director in several companies and also had a stint as a director of the Jet Airways.

The doyen of the hotel industry was a trendsetter in many ways and was a highly respected and revered figure in the industry with many followers who picked up the nuances of hotel management from the pioneer.

'Biki' Oberoi's passing was mourned by a very large cross section of the hotel industry and several laudatory references were made to him by stalwarts in the field who hailed his invaluable contribution to the hospitality industry.



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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?

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

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