INDIA : PATHWAYS TO PROSPERITY

VISION FOR INDIA@2030

POST-POLL TRIUMPH: IMPLICATIONS, WAY FORWARD

GOVERNANCE IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Know India Better
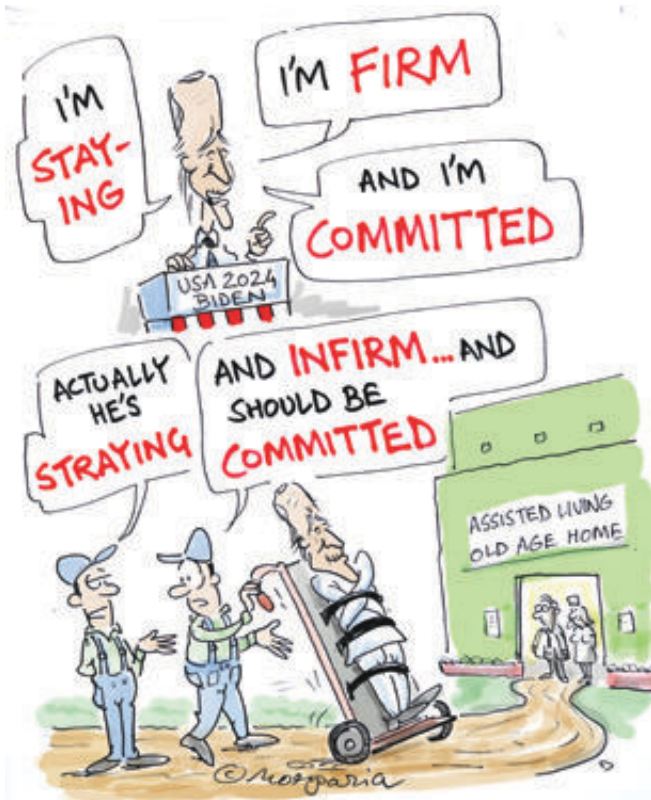ANCIENT TEMPLES OF RAIGAD
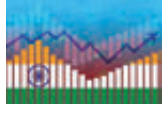
Face to Face
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THEME:
INDIA'S FUTURE TRAJECTORY

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A sneak preview of previous terms

With economic reforms taking centre-stage and the introduction of GST a landmark achievement, the Indian government has crossed significant milestones. Sahil Sharma says that the Make in India campaign which has catapulted the country into a global manufacturing hub and a number of welfare/governance schemes, are a god augury for socio-economic and political fabric, although challenges remain. Narendra Modi's charisma and strong leadership has guided these campaigns and how!

One of the cornerstones of the Modi government tenure has been the ambitious economic reforms

As Narendra Modi secures his third term as the Prime Minister of India, it is an opportune moment to reflect on the policies, achievements, and controversies during his previous terms in office. Since his ascent to the national stage in 2014, there have been significant changes in India's socio-economic and political landscape.

One of the cornerstones of the tenure has been the ambitious economic reforms. The introduction of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) in 2017 stands out as a landmark achievement. By unifying the country under a single tax regime, GST aimed to streamline tax compliance and boost revenue collection.

This move was seen as a monumental step towards creating a cohesive market across the nation, replacing a plethora of state and central taxes with one unified tax system. Despite initial implementation challenges, the GST has facilitated easier trade across state borders and is expected to enhance the efficiency of tax collection over the long term.

Global manufacturing hub

Launched in 2014, the government's 'Make in India' initiative sought to transform India into a global manufacturing hub by encouraging both domestic and international companies to manufacture their products within the country. This ambitious policy was designed to attract foreign investment, foster innovation, and build world-class manufacturing infrastructure. Over the years, the campaign has garnered significant attention and interest, marking India's emergence as a potential leader in global manufacturing.

The primary objectives of the Make in India initiative

were to boost the manufacturing sector and increase its share in India's GDP from 16 per cent to 25 per cent by 2025; generate employment opportunities for the burgeoning youth population; enhance skill development and improve the skill sets of the workforce to meet the demands of a modern manufacturing economy; attract foreign investment by facilitating foreign direct investment (FDI) in various sectors by easing regulatory barriers; and promote innovation, research, and development in manufacturing technologies.

For this ambitious initiative, 25 key sectors for potential growth and investment were identified and targeted. These include Automobiles and Auto components, Aerospace and Defence, Biotechnology, Chemicals, Construction, Electronic Systems, Food Processing, Information Technology and Business Process Management, Leather, Media and Entertainment, Mining, Oil and Gas, Pharmaceuticals, Ports and Shipping, Railways, Renewable Energy, Space, Textiles and Garments, Tourism and Hospitality, and Wellness.

Most of the objectives of the Make in India initiative were successfully achieved. The initiative has been instrumental in attracting substantial foreign direct investment. Between 2014 and 2019, India received over $286 billion in FDI, a testament to the campaign's effectiveness in positioning India as a favourable investment destination.

Several international companies have since established manufacturing plants in India. For instance, Apple started assembling iPhones in India, and Samsung opened one of the world's largest mobile phone manufacturing plants in Noida. Additionally, automobile giants like Kia Motors and Tesla have expressed interest in investing in the Indian market.

As part of the initiative, the Indian government undertook significant reforms to improve the ease of doing business. These included simplifying the regulatory framework, introducing the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), and implementing the Goods and Services Tax (GST). These measures helped India jump 79 positions in the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business rankings between 2014 and 2019.

The initiative has faced several challenges as well along the way that need to be addressed to fully realise its goals. Despite efforts to streamline processes, India's regulatory environment can still be complex and cumbersome. Investors often face difficulties navigating through multiple bureaucratic layers, leading to delays and increased costs.

Acquiring land for industrial projects remains a significant challenge due to fragmented land laws and opposition from local communities. Infrastructure in India has grown in a big way, still in certain zones transportation networks, logistics, and power supply need upgrades to support large-scale manufacturing.

Welfare schemes and governance

The Modi government in the previous terms had also prioritised social welfare schemes aimed at improving the quality of life for the underprivileged. The Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) has been particularly noteworthy, achieving financial inclusion by opening millions of bank accounts for the unbanked population. This initiative has facilitated direct benefit transfers, ensuring that subsidies and welfare payments reach the intended beneficiaries, thus reducing corruption and leakages in the system.

The Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (Clean India Mission) was launched in 2014, aimed to eliminate open defecation and improve sanitation across the country. The campaign's impact has been substantial, with millions of toilets constructed and a significant reduction in open defecation reported. This initiative has contributed to improved public health and hygiene standards, particularly in rural areas, and has fostered a broader socio-cultural shift towards cleanliness and sanitation.

The Prime Minister's leadership style has been characterised by a strong centralisation of power and a focus on decisive governance. His charismatic persona and effective communication skills have played a crucial role in maintaining his popularity.

The BJP's political strategy, including leveraging social media and fostering a robust grassroots network, have been instrumental in their electoral successes. Modi's ability to connect with the masses through his oratory skills and use of digital platforms has set a new standard in political campaigning in India.

Controversies and criticism

The abrogation of Article 370 in August 2019, which granted special autonomy to the region of Jammu and Kashmir, marked a significant policy decision. The move was celebrated by many as a step towards integrating the region fully with India, reflecting the government's commitment to national unity.

It aimed to bring administrative and economic reforms to the region, though it also led to heightened security measures and political tensions, which continue to be a topic of debate.

The Modi government faced unsurmountable challenges, including the Covid-19 pandemic, particularly during the second wave in 2021. At the time, the world's most advanced nations succumbed to the coronavirus-inflicted crisis, but India fared well.

There were voices that criticised India's handling of the Covid-19 pandemic specially the need for robust healthcare infrastructure and resources for better preparedness. On Ground Zero, India was not only protecting its people fiercely but also extending help to other nations in need.

Modi's previous tenures have seen debates about the balance between governance and democratic principles. Laws such as the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) sparked widespread protests and discussions about India's secular fabric. The CAA, which aims to provide citizenship to persecuted minorities from neighbouring countries, was viewed by some as discriminatory against Muslims.

As Narendra Modi embarks on his third term as Prime Minister, his legacy includes significant achievements and ongoing deliberations. His tenure has brought about transformative changes in India's economic and social landscape. His second term culminated with the building of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya - a centuries-old dispute that was taken to its logical and legal conclusion.

From ambitious economic reforms like GST and demonetisation to impactful social welfare schemes like PMJDY and Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, Modi's policies have sought to modernise and uplift the nation. His era has been a period of dynamic change, and its long-term impact on India's socio-economic and political fabric will continue to strengthen the nation.

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Vision for India@2030

Led by its all-round growth, India is billed to be the next superpower from economic, military and diplomatic or soft power perspectives. **Anushka Singh** *describes how the government is strategising economic growth to pitchfork the country into the world's top economic orbit. Listing steps across domains, she points out that the goals reflect the intent to sustain high economic growth rates, enhance productivity, and create a robust economic environment for both domestic and foreign investments.*

The government is strategising economic growth to pitchfork the country into the world's top economic orbit

As India strides into the third decade of the 21st century, the government's vision for India 2030 embodies a comprehensive blueprint for the country's development and progress. This vision is shaped by the ambition to transform India into a global economic powerhouse while addressing critical challenges in infrastructure, the economy, healthcare, education, and more.

The emphasis on economic growth and development cannot be stated enough given India is touted to be the next superpower from economic, military and diplomatic or soft power perspectives. The aspiration of becoming a ten-trillion-dollar economy is only a few determined, perseverant steps away.

The Indian government's vision for 2030 includes the ambitious goal of propelling India into the ranks of the world's top economies with a $10 trillion GDP. This goal reflects the intent to sustain high economic growth rates, enhance productivity, and create a robust economic environment for both domestic and foreign investments.

Strategising economic growth

Massive investments in infrastructure projects, including roads, highways, ports, and airports, aim to boost connectivity and facilitate economic activities. The Bharatmala Pariyojana and Sagarmala Programme are notable examples of this approach.

The Bharatmala Pariyojana 'envisages development of about 26,000 km length of Economic Corridors, which along with Golden Quadrilateral and North-South and East-West Corridors are expected to carry majority of the Freight Traffic on roads. It is being undertaken by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, Government of India. The project also comprises construction and development of bridges, tunnels, elevated corridors, overpass, flyovers, interchanges, etc., for decongested and optimised transport connectivity.

A flagship initiative of the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, the Sagarmala Programme represents the futuristic vision of the government of India 'to transform the country's

maritime sector'. Considering the rich natural maritime features in India such as the extensive coastline, navigation-friendly waterways, trade routes, etc., Sagarmala 'aims to unlock the untapped potential of these resources for port-led development and coastal community upliftment.' The programme is set to transform India's logistics prowess and impact the economy in a major way, syncing with the country's economic goals and making it future ready.

Initiatives such as the Startup India campaign and the Atal Innovation Mission focus on fostering entrepreneurship and technological advancements. The government plans to create a supportive ecosystem for startups through funding opportunities, incubators, and regulatory reforms. In terms of India's industrial policy, the Make in India initiative aims to strengthen the manufacturing sector by improving ease of doing business, encouraging foreign direct investment (FDI), and boosting domestic production.

Transforming digital economy

India@2030 envisions a digital economy where technology drives growth and innovation. The Digital India programme focuses on creating a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy. Some of the key digital initiatives include expansion of digital infrastructure where the government aims to increase internet penetration and digital literacy through projects like the National Optical Fiber Network and Digital Saksharta Abhiyan.

Another important step in the direction is the promotion of Fintech, so the Digital Payments ecosystem is being strengthened with initiatives like the Digital India Payments Ecosystem and the expansion of the Unified Payments Interface (UPI).

In this regard, modernisation of urban and rural infrastructure holds the key to growth. A key component of the vision for 2030 is the modernisation of both urban and rural infrastructure to support economic growth and improve quality of life.

As per industry experts, India's internet economy will touch USD one trillion by 2030 owing to e-commerce primarily which is expected to reach USD 325 billion. India, with an ever-growing digital economy and internet user base, is on its way to becoming an e-commerce powerhouse by 2030. And, will be the frontrunner with five hundred million shoppers.

Urban infrastructure projects

Several initiatives taken by the present government in its pervious terms are set to transform India@2030. For example, the Smart Cities Mission to develop 100 smart cities across India, focusing on sustainable urban development, efficient public services, and improved urban mobility. Then, the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban) that is providing affordable housing to all urban poor families.

The urban infrastructure commitments are very important to make India future ready, globally strong and sustainable. As per some reports, in order to spur desired economic growth India must invest USD 4.5 trillion in infrastructure development.

Notably, it was during the Conference of the Parties (COP26) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) held in Glasgow, UK that India announced its 'green' commitments – the Panchamrit of India's climate action. These include:

- Reaching 500 GW Non-fossil energy capacity by 2030
- Achieving 50 per cent of its energy requirements from renewable energy by 2030 i.e., achieving 50 per cent cumulative non-fossil fuel-based power capacities by 2030
- Reducing the total projected carbon emissions by one billion tonnes from now to 2030

- Reducing carbon intensity of the economy i.e., reducing the emissions intensity of its GDP by 45 per cent by 2030 compared to the 2005 levels
- Achieving the target of net zero emissions by 2070

And, India committed to propagating a 'healthy and sustainable way of life' to tackle climate change. All these targets and processes are heavily dependent on the infrastructure sector which is why it's important to ensure infra growth and development with a futuristic approach.

Rural development

The Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana aims to improve rural road connectivity to ensure better access to markets, education, and healthcare. The Jal Jeevan Mission aims to provide safe and adequate drinking water to all rural households by 2024, with continued efforts for sustainability through 2030.

A central pillar of India@2030 is the aim to achieve universal healthcare coverage and improve public health outcomes. In this regard, the Ayushman Bharat Yojana was launched to provide health insurance coverage for economically vulnerable sections of society and the scheme aims to improve access to quality healthcare services. The initiative is designed to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The National Health Policy 2017 outlines strategies for achieving universal health coverage, increasing public health expenditure, and addressing non-communicable diseases and is preparing India for challenges of the future. The government has been upgrading healthcare facilities and expanding the reach of health services.

There is a sustained emphasis on creation of Health and Wellness Centers that provide comprehensive primary healthcare services, focusing on preventive and promotive health measures. Additionally, there's been a constant expansion of medical education and research through investments in medical colleges, research institutions, and public health programmes to build a robust healthcare workforce and advance medical research.

Education and environment

The vision for 2030 emphasises the need to improve the quality of education and make it accessible to all sections of society. The National Education Policy 2020 has introduced reforms to make the education system more holistic, flexible, and aligned with global standards.

Several skill development programmes are being designed and executed focussing on vocational training to bridge the gap between education and employability. The government aims to train millions of youths in various trades and skills. Investment in research and innovation is seen as critical to India's future and for India@2030.

The vision for India@2030 includes a strong focus on environmental protection and sustainable development. The focus on clean energy transition can be seen from the government's efforts to increase the share of renewable energy in the energy mix, with targets for solar and wind energy generation under the National Solar Mission and National Wind Energy Mission.India@2030 envisions a proactive approach to climate change mitigation. The National Action Plan on Climate Change outlines strategies for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, promoting energy efficiency, and enhancing climate resilience.

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Post-poll triumph: Implications, way forward

As expected, Narendra Modi extended his decade-long tenure with a third consecutive term. **Ruchi Verma** *takes a look at the factors contributing to the victory, noteworthy among which was his charismatic leadership. Modi's ability to connect with the masses through compelling speeches, a relatable personal backstory, and a promise of strong governance played a crucial role. She surmises this will also help sustain and enhance friendly, mutually beneficial relations with other nations, ensuring that India continues to play a pivotal role in global affairs.*

PM Modi and President Droupadi Murmu with foreign dignitaries after assuming charge

The general elections in India are the world's largest democratic exercise. This time around, the world's largest election was a six-week long exercise where Indians voted for 543 members of the Lok Sabha, the lower house of the Indian Parliament, for a five-year term at the longest.

India is home to 968.8 million registered voters who exercised their power to vote and elect their leader. When the results of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections were announced, Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) emerged as the largest party which formed a coalition government under the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) with Narendra Modi as India's 14th Prime Minister.

With the historic third term, he is the longest-serving Indian Prime Minister outside the Indian National Congress. Despite the brouhaha over the BJP going "is baar char sau paar", the party managed to scrape through a majority, but barely, triggering ripples of criticism and sarcasm across opposition lines.

In an unprecedented political landscape, where most exit polls had projected Narendra Modi as poised to extend his decade-long tenure with a third consecutive term, the Prime Minister fulfilled a pivotal promise of his party's Hindu nationalist agenda by inaugurating the Ram Temple in Ayodhya in January 2024.

India's Chief Election Commissioner, Rajiv Kumar, declared that 642 million voters participating in the election was a world record. Contesting the Lok Sabha election from Varanasi

for the third time, Modi secured his seat with a margin of 1,52,513 votes, defeating Ajay Rai of the Indian National Congress, who represented the SP-INC alliance. Notably, this victory margin was the second narrowest for a sitting Prime Minister in Indian history.

The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) emerged victorious with a total of 292 seats, surpassing the simple majority by 20 seats, while the BJP alone secured 240 seats. Expressing his gratitude, Modi thanked the electorate for their continued trust in his leadership for a third term. The feat of registering nearly a billion voters across India's diverse linguistic and cultural landscape is a testament to the unwavering dedication of the Election Commission of India (ECI).

The factors

One of the most significant factors contributing to the victory is his charismatic leadership. Modi's ability to connect with the electorate through compelling speeches, a relatable personal backstory, and a promise of strong governance has played a crucial role. His image as a decisive leader who is unafraid to tackle tough issues resonates with a wide array of voters. From his speeches highlighting national security to his promises of economic growth, he has successfully crafted a narrative of progress and strength.

The BJP's campaign strategy was meticulous and well-orchestrated. Leveraging modern technology and social media platforms, the party reached voters across the country with targeted messages. The campaign's focus on nationalistic sentiments, economic achievements, and a vision for a "New India" captured the imagination of many voters. The BJP's ability to mobilise grassroots support and manage a high-octane campaign further cemented its electoral dominance.

The administration implemented several high-profile economic policies that played a role in the election. Initiatives such as the Goods and Services Tax (GST), the Make in India programme, and welfare schemes like the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) have had mixed results but were marketed as steps towards national development. These policies were presented as part of a larger vision for economic modernisation and inclusive growth, which resonated with voters seeking progress and stability.

The fragmented state of the opposition also contributed to the victory. The Indian National Congress and other opposition parties struggled to present a unified front or a compelling alternative vision. The lack of a strong, cohesive opposition allowed the BJP to dominate the political narrative and avoid effective challenges to its policies and performance.

The implications

With a commanding majority, the government has the political capital to pursue its policy agenda with greater freedom. This mandate offers the opportunity for bold initiatives in areas such as economic reform, infrastructure development, and national security. However, the distribution of power raises questions about the potential for overreach and the need for maintaining democratic checks and balances. The government will need to balance ambitious goals with the expectations of effective and inclusive governance.

The victory also poses a significant challenge for the opposition. To remain relevant, opposition parties must reevaluate their strategies, rebuild their organisations, and find a way to present a unified and credible alternative to the BJP. This may involve forging new alliances, rethinking policy positions, and engaging more effectively with the electorate. The future of India's democratic discourse will depend on the ability of the opposition to offer meaningful critiques and alternatives.

With a decisive mandate, public expectations are at an all-time high. Voters will be looking for tangible improvements in areas such as job creation, economic stability, and social welfare. The success of this government will be judged not just on its policy achievements but also on its ability to deliver on campaign promises and manage public grievances effectively.

On a positive note, the electorate's decision to re-elect the same government for a third term bodes well for the efficient and swift implementation of economic programmes, infrastructure projects, and welfare schemes. The continuity in governance ensures that ongoing policies can be pursued with greater consistency and momentum.

This stability also extends to India's diplomatic engagements and international relations. With the same leadership at the helm, diplomatic channels can be further strengthened, and foreign policies refined and advanced as envisioned in the previous term. The continuity allows for seamless progress in nurturing bilateral and multilateral ties.

The road ahead

While the election victory has provided a strong mandate, the possibility of newer alliances cannot be ruled out in the future. Should there be such a scenario, the dynamics of governance would shift from a centralised approach to a more collaborative model.

This would require navigating diverse interests, managing political bargaining, and maintaining unity among partners. The effectiveness of governance in a new setting will depend on the ability of the leaders to balance these dynamics while continuing to project a vision for India's future.

In the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, the victory indicates the effectiveness of the BJP's campaign strategy. The factors behind this triumph include Modi's charismatic appeal, strategic use of economic policies, and a fragmented opposition.

However, the implications of this mandate are multifaceted. While it offers the opportunity for bold governance and significant policy advancements, it also brings with it heightened public expectations and the need for careful management of democratic processes.

India's stature on the global stage across various domains—economy, defence, technology, humanitarian aid—remains robust. With the re-elected government, it will be easier to sustain and enhance friendly, mutually beneficial relations with other nations, ensuring that India continues to play a pivotal role in global affairs.

As the Modi administration moves forward, the ability to meet these expectations and navigate the complexities will be crucial. The future of Indian governance will hinge on how well the government can balance ambitious reforms with inclusive policies and how effectively the opposition can regroup to provide a counterbalance in the democratic process.

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Governance in the Digital Age

Describing the rapid strides the country has taken in getting into the digital era, Vedika Jain says e-governance is well on its way to make it into an empowered nation. The scenario on this front has been witnessing a transformation from 2014 when a mere 14 per cent population had access to the internet. With more people gaining access to digital services, there has been a notable increase in efficiency and transparency in government processes as Modi government promotes apps and digital education.

One of the biggest achievements of Digital India has been the rapid increase in internet penetration in the country

In recent years, India has made significant strides in embracing technology and digital governance to improve the way it functions. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, initiatives such as Digital India, Smart Cities, and e-governance reforms have been launched, aiming to transform India into a digitally empowered nation.

Digital India is a flagship programme launched by the Indian government in 2015 with the vision of transforming the country into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy. The programme aims to provide access to digital services to all citizens, promote digital literacy, and create a digitally enabled infrastructure.

It encompasses various projects such as BharatNet, which aims to provide high-speed broadband connectivity to all rural areas, and Common Services Centers, which provide various government services at the grassroots level. The programme also focuses on promoting digital payments, e-governance, and digital education.

Internet reach

One of the biggest achievements of Digital India has been the rapid increase in internet penetration in the country. According to a report by the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI), India had over 560 million internet users as of September 2018, making it the second-largest online market in the world.

This is a significant improvement from 2014 when only about 14 per cent of the Indian population had access to the internet. With more people gaining access to digital services, there has been a notable increase in efficiency and transparency

in government processes.

In 2024, India's internet penetration rate surpassed 52 per cent and there are over 820 million active internet users. Notably, more than half of these users, about 442 million are in rural India. In 2023, internet penetration increased by eight percent compared to the previous year.

Rural India now has more active internet users than urban areas. Although the number of inactive internet users is decreasing, about half of rural residents remain offline. On average, urban users spend slightly more time online each day than those in rural regions.

Digital governance

E-governance reforms have been another crucial aspect of the government's efforts towards digital governance. Under Modi's leadership, several e-governance initiatives have been implemented to improve service delivery and make government processes more accessible to citizens.

The use of technology has helped reduce the time and cost involved in obtaining government services, making it more convenient for citizens. For instance, the introduction of the Aadhaar card system has streamlined the process of identification and authentication, making it easier for citizens to access various government services.

In addition to Digital India and e-governance reforms, the Indian government has also launched the Smart Cities Mission. This initiative aims to develop 100 smart cities across the country, with a focus on sustainability and technology-driven solutions.

These cities are equipped with modern infrastructure, digital services, and efficient governance mechanisms to improve the quality of life for citizens. The Smart Cities Mission also promotes the use of technology to address urban challenges such as traffic management, waste management, and public safety.

One of the most significant impacts of the Smart Cities Mission has been the development of digital infrastructure in these cities. High-speed internet connectivity, smart grids, and digital payment systems are some of the key elements that have been integrated into these cities.

This has not only improved the quality of services but has also made these cities more attractive for investments, promoting economic growth and development.

India's internet economy is projected to hit USD one trillion by 2030, driven mainly by e-commerce, which is expected to reach USD 325 billion and rank third globally, according to industry analysts. The previous year was pivotal for India's e-commerce landscape, featuring significant shifts in consumer behaviour, technology, and regulations.

In 2023, a prominent corporate governance advisory firm named InGovern Research Services held a virtual roundtable to discuss key developments in India's e-commerce sector, emphasising the crucial role of customer trust in supporting its growth and expansion. This is an indicator of the significance of e-commerce in Indian economy.

Smart apps

Another notable achievement of digital governance under Modi's leadership has been the adoption of various mobile applications for citizen engagement and service delivery. For instance, the MyGov app allows citizens to participate in policy formulation and share their ideas and suggestions with the government.

The BHIM (Bharat Interface for Money) app promotes digital payments and enables citizens to make cashless transactions easily. These apps have not only made it more convenient for citizens to engage with the government but have also increased transparency in governance.

Today, in India, UPI is being used from the smallest street vendor to luxurious shops. It's no surprise that India is a global frontrunner in digital payments. According to 2022 data, India has the highest number of digital transactions in the world,

accounting for nearly 46 per cent of the global share. It is expected to be the number one country till 2028. Presently, India is followed by Brazil, China, Thailand, and South Korea in terms of digital transactions.

While there have been significant achievements in digital governance under Modi's leadership, there have also been challenges that need to be addressed. One of the main concerns is ensuring data security and privacy in a digital ecosystem. Another challenge is ensuring digital literacy and access to technology for all citizens, especially in rural areas. As digital services expand, safeguarding against cyber threats becomes paramount.

Technology and digital governance have played a crucial role in shaping India's future under Modi's leadership. The various initiatives such as Digital India, e-governance reforms, and Smart Cities have not only improved efficiency and transparency in governance but have also promoted economic growth and development.

There are challenges that need to be addressed to ensure that the benefits of technology reach all citizens and contribute to India's overall progress. With the right policies and a continued focus on harnessing the power of technology, India can truly transform into a digitally empowered nation.

Bridging the digital divide

The Common Service Centers (CSCs) act as digital hubs, providing various government services to citizens. CSCs offer services like Aadhaar enrolment, utility bill payments, and online forms submission which have significantly boosted India's digital footprint.

India's mobile revolution has played a crucial role in ensuring connectivity and has democratised internet access, enabling millions to come online. The digital literacy campaign has focussed on ensuring that citizens could navigate online platforms effectively.

The challenges posed by rapid urbanisation such as traffic congestion, waste management, and environmental degradation have been taken into consideration in the Smart City Mission with a futuristic approach.

Smart cities are investing in robust infrastructure, including smart grids, efficient transportation systems, and waste management. Cities are collecting data on traffic patterns, energy consumption, and citizen behaviour to optimise services.

Platforms like MyGov are facilitating citizen participation in governance, allowing them to voice concerns and suggest improvements. Bhubaneswar, Pune, and Surat are notable examples of cities adopting smart solutions.

Through e-Governance portals, services like passport applications, income tax filings, and land records have moved online, reducing paperwork and processing time. The Unified Payments Interface (UPI) has revolutionised digital payments, making transactions seamless.

The government has harnessed data analytics for evidence-based policymaking. Insights from this data are helping close gaps and improve service delivery. India is already preparing for the next innovation phase that involves leveraging emerging technologies like AI, blockchain, and IoT for better governance.

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Equitable growth, community integration

Among the significant shifts that Shalini Mehta *observes is the Modi government's endeavour to prioritise growth that encompasses all sections of the society. The 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas' mantra has been the bottom line for comprehensive policies and initiatives aimed at fostering social cohesion and equitable development. Through affirmative action and comprehensive social welfare programs, the government reiterates it remains committed to social justice.*

Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas, Sabka Prayaas

India's development model has undergone a remarkable transformation, evolving to prioritise inclusive growth that benefits all segments of society. Central to this vision is the philosophy encapsulated in the mantra *'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas, Sabka Prayas'* (Collective Effort, Inclusive Development, Mutual Trust, and Everyone's Participation).

This guiding principle has inspired a comprehensive array of government policies and initiatives aimed at fostering social cohesion and equitable development across the country.

At the heart of this inclusive agenda is a commitment to empowering marginalised communities. Recognising the historical disadvantages faced by certain groups, the government has implemented robust affirmative action programmes. These initiatives include reservations in educational institutions and public employment for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes.

By ensuring that these historically marginalised communities have access to educational and employment opportunities, these measures aim to level the playing field and rectify longstanding social and economic imbalances.

Affirmative action

Affirmative action in India is more than a policy; it is a commitment to social justice. By reserving seats in educational institutions, the government provides opportunities for higher education to those who might otherwise be excluded due to socio-economic barriers.

Similarly, reservations in public employment ensure that these communities have representation in government jobs, which can significantly impact their socio-economic status and mobility.

Furthermore, the government has launched numerous schemes and programmes designed to uplift these communities beyond just reservations. For instance, scholarships and financial aid are provided to students from marginalised backgrounds to support their education and reduce dropout rates.

Skill development programmes aim to enhance the employability of individuals from these communities, providing them with the necessary skills to compete in the job market.

The impact of these policies extends beyond individual beneficiaries. By promoting social equity and reducing disparities, these measures contribute to the overall development and stability of society.

When marginalised communities are empowered, they participate better in the economy, contribute to growth, and help build a more inclusive and cohesive nation.

The Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (Save the Daughter, Educate the Daughter) campaign addresses gender disparities by promoting the education and empowerment of girls.

Welfare programmes

Additionally, these efforts are complemented by broader social welfare programmes aimed at ensuring that all citizens have access to basic necessities such as healthcare, housing, and financial services.

Initiatives like the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) provide employment opportunities to rural households, improving their standard of living and reducing poverty.

The Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana aims to increase financial inclusion by providing bank accounts to millions of unbanked households, enabling them to save money securely and access credit.

India's development model now embraces a vision of inclusive growth, driven by the philosophy of collective effort, inclusive development, mutual trust, and everyone's participation. Through affirmative action and comprehensive social welfare programmes, the government aims to empower marginalised communities, rectify historical imbalances, and foster a more equitable and cohesive society.

These efforts are not only about providing opportunities but also about building a foundation for sustainable and inclusive development that benefit all segments of society.

Significant strides have been made in expanding social welfare programmes, ensuring that the basic needs of the population are met. Schemes like the National Health Mission have created a vital safety net, improving access to healthcare, education, and financial inclusion.

Environment protection

Environmental sustainability is another key focus. Recognising the importance of long-term sustainable development, the government has launched initiatives such as the Swachh Bharat Mission, which has notably improved sanitation and waste management.

Additionally, India has set ambitious targets for renewable energy and has taken proactive measures to combat climate change, underscoring its commitment to green growth. Alongside economic and social development, fostering social cohesion and inclusive governance has been a priority. The creation of commissions and councils dedicated to the welfare of women, minorities, and other marginalised groups ensures their voices are heard and their needs addressed.

Moreover, decentralisation and community participation in development planning empower local communities to shape their futures.

To measure the progress of these inclusive development efforts, the Indian government employs frameworks like the Inclusive Development Index (IDI) and the Social Progress Index (SPI). These tools provide comprehensive assessments of growth, inclusion, and sustainability, helping policymakers identify areas needing further improvement.

India's journey towards inclusive development and social cohesion is ongoing, presenting both challenges and opportunities. However, the holistic approach combining economic growth, social welfare, environmental sustainability,

and inclusive governance has laid a robust foundation for a more equitable and prosperous future for all citizens.

Livelihood security

MGNREGA and the Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP) are crucial in reducing poverty and unemployment. MGNREGA, by guaranteeing 100 days of employment per year to rural households, has enhanced livelihood security, reduced poverty by 32 per cent, and prevented 14 million people from falling below the poverty line. The programme has also narrowed the gender wage gap and empowered women economically. Additionally, it has created environmental benefits by supporting rural development.

PMEGP targets the non-farm sector, providing financial aid for micro-enterprises to reduce poverty and promote entrepreneurship. Despite their successes, these programmes face criticisms, such as low wage rates in MGNREGA, insufficient budget allocation, payment delays, poor asset quality, centralisation issues, and fraudulent practices. Addressing these challenges is essential to improve the effectiveness and credibility of these schemes.

Domestic security is another important issue that affects all aspects of development. India is addressing both traditional and non-traditional security issues such as border disputes and regional conflicts while tackling terrorism, cyber threats, climate change, and pandemics. Initiatives like the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT) at the UN and commitments to the Paris Agreement highlight India's multifaceted security approach.

Sabka saath, sabka vikas

The notion of collective effort emphasises the importance of unity and collaboration among various sectors of society, including the government, private sector, and civil society. This approach is evident in the push for cooperative federalism, where states and the central government work together to implement policies that are tailored to regional needs.

Inclusive development ensures that the benefits of economic growth reach all sections of society, particularly the marginalised and disadvantaged. Initiatives such as the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) aim to promote financial inclusion by providing bank accounts to millions of unbanked citizens, thereby integrating them into the formal economy. Similarly, the Ayushman Bharat scheme seeks to provide accessible and affordable healthcare to the poor, significantly enhancing their quality of life.

Building mutual trust involves creating a transparent and accountable governance framework that instils confidence among citizens and investors. The introduction of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) has streamlined the resolution of corporate insolvencies, thus fostering a more reliable business environment. Additionally, the Digital India initiative has improved governmental transparency and efficiency by leveraging technology to deliver services and information more effectively to the public.

The implementation of these guiding principles is reflected in a wide range of government policies and programmes. For example, the 'Make in India' initiative aims to transform India into a global manufacturing hub, thereby creating job opportunities and boosting economic growth. The 'Smart Cities Mission' focuses on urban renewal and retrofitting, with the objective of creating sustainable and inclusive urban spaces.

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

A robust foreign policy in place

Neeti Prakash *asserts how India has transformed global equations with substantive policies that aim at catapulting it into a global leader. Under the Modi administration, there has been a remarkable emphasis on India assuming a prominent role in global governance, reflective of its growing economic and strategic influence. It is also evident in India's active participation in various international fora and its initiatives to leave its mark on global agenda.*

Indian diplomacy is poised for continued evolution, shaped by geopolitical shifts, technological advancements, and global challenges

India's foreign policy has seen profound transformations in recent years, mirroring the nation's expanding ambitions for global leadership. Amid shifting geopolitical landscapes, India has prioritised regional cooperation and forged strategic partnerships to bolster its influence and security.

Transitioning from a passive stance to a proactive and assertive approach, India has come a long way and is now asserting its leadership. Under the Modi administration, there has been a pronounced emphasis on India assuming a larger role in global governance, reflective of its growing economic and strategic influence.

This shift is evident in India's active participation in various international organisations and its initiatives to shape global agenda. For instance, the Vaccine Maitri initiative, which provided critical medical supplies to neighbouring countries during the Covid-19 pandemic, underscores India's commitment to contributing to global solutions.

Regional cooperation

The 'Neighbourhood First' policy has been central to India's regional engagement strategy. This policy aims to foster stability and prosperity in South Asia, acknowledging the

significance of a secure and cooperative neighbourhood for India's overall development and security. As a result, India has strengthened ties with countries like Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal, enhancing economic and strategic cooperation.

India's 'Look East Policy,' initiated in 1992 to strengthen relationships with South-East Asian nations, evolved into the 'Act East Policy' in 2014 under the Modi government. This upgraded approach emphasises proactive engagement with the broader Indo-Pacific region, focusing on enhancing economic cooperation, cultural connections, and strategic partnerships.

In 2015, the Prime Minister had introduced the 'Security and Growth for All in the Region' (SAGAR) concept in Mauritius. This vision aims for a 'free, open, inclusive, peaceful, and prosperous Indo-Pacific region', grounded in a rules-based international framework. SAGAR promotes sustainable infrastructure investment, freedom of navigation, lawful trade, mutual respect for sovereignty, peaceful dispute resolution, and equality among nations.

As part of this initiative, India is actively contributing to connectivity, capacity building, disaster management, sustainable development, maritime safety and security, and strengthening underwater domain awareness in the Indian Ocean Region.

In addition, India has fortified its partnerships with major global powers such as the United States and Russia. While maintaining a strategic relationship with Russia, India has also collaborated closely with the US on various fronts, including counter-terrorism and defence cooperation. This pragmatic approach enables India to balance its interests without aligning too closely with any single power bloc.

Geopolitical dynamics

India aims to attract foreign investments and technology to support domestic development initiatives like the Make in India and Skill India programmes. Engagement with the US, particularly in technology and innovation, is vital for India's economic growth. The Modi administration has also stressed the importance of Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) to boost exports and attract foreign direct investments.

Navigating complex geopolitical dynamics, particularly in its relations with China, is a crucial task. Ongoing border disputes and China's growing regional influence pose substantial security threats to India. The government's response has been a combination of strong military pushback and diplomatic engagement with China, while simultaneously deepening ties with other regional powers such as the US and Japan.

Looking ahead, India's foreign policy will continue to adapt to changing global dynamics. The country's aspirations for global leadership will depend on its ability to balance strategic interests with moral values and regional cooperation. A focus on economic diplomacy and technological advancements will be pivotal in driving India's growth and influence on the global stage.

India's foreign policy has undergone a significant transformation in the last decade, underscoring the country's growing aspirations for global leadership. In the Modi government's third term, one can expect further efforts to align India's domestic development with its foreign policy, fostering a more cohesive and effective approach to global engagement.

By prioritising regional cooperation, strategic partnerships, and economic diplomacy, India is poised to assume a more prominent role in global governance. The challenges ahead will demand a nuanced approach that balances India's strategic interests with its moral values and regional commitments, ultimately shaping the country's future as a leading world power.

Multilateral organisations

India's growing assertiveness in its foreign policy is also evident in its participation in multilateral organisations. India has taken on a more active role in forums such as the United Nations, G20, BRICS, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO).

As a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, India has advocated for reforms to make the institution more representative and effective, particularly pushing for a permanent seat on the council. Its leadership in the International Solar Alliance and the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure demonstrates India's commitment to addressing global challenges like climate change and disaster management.

Defence and security cooperation has been another key area of focus for India's foreign policy. India has expanded its defence partnerships through bilateral and multilateral agreements.

The signing of foundational defence agreements with the United States, such as the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) and the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA), has enhanced interoperability and defence collaboration.

India has also increased defence cooperation with other countries like France, Israel, and Japan, and has actively participated in joint military exercises to strengthen its strategic alliances and enhance its defence capabilities.

In the era of rapid technological advancement, India has recognised the importance of technological and cyber diplomacy. India aims to be a global leader in emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and space exploration. Collaborations with countries like the US, Japan, and Israel in technology and innovation are crucial for India's progress in these fields.

India's space programme, led by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), has achieved significant milestones, including missions to the Moon and Mars, showcasing India's capabilities in space technology and exploration.

Soft power

India has also leveraged its rich cultural heritage and soft power to enhance its global standing. The Modi government's promotion of yoga internationally, Ayurveda, and Indian cinema has helped India build a positive image worldwide.Initiatives like the International Day of Yoga, celebrated annually on June 21st, have gained global recognition and participation. India's cultural diplomacy efforts, through organisations like the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), aim to strengthen cultural ties and promote mutual understanding with other countries.

Humanitarian and development assistance is another important aspect of India's foreign policy. India has provided aid and support to countries facing natural disasters, conflicts, and humanitarian crises. India's contributions to disaster relief efforts in Nepal, the Maldives, and Sri Lanka, as well as its support to African nations in areas like healthcare, education, and infrastructure, reflect its commitment to global humanitarian efforts. The Development Partnership Administration (DPA) within the Ministry of External Affairs coordinates India's development assistance programmes, fostering goodwill and strengthening bilateral relations.

India's engagement with its diaspora has also been a key element of its foreign policy. With one of the largest diaspora populations in the world, India has sought to strengthen its connections with Indian communities abroad. The Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) convention, held biennially, celebrates the contributions of the Indian diaspora and facilitates dialogue between the diaspora and the Indian government. India's efforts to engage the diaspora aim to leverage their skills, investments, and influence to support India's development and enhance its global presence.

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Navigating challenges, seizing opportunities

With facts and figures, Kriti Kalra explains how Modi's third term plans to negotiate challenges and embrace opportunities for a strong future. Through policy impact that addresses employment and growth rate challenges head-on, it reiterates its commitment to creating a robust and inclusive job market, ensuring that economic growth translates into tangible employment opportunities for its citizens. It also warns against use of selective data as portrayed by Citigroup.

An important challenge for the government in its third term would be to create more job opportunities

India has always been a country with immense potential and resources, but it has also faced its share of challenges. With its third term under the NDA, the country has a new set of challenges and opportunities that the present regime will have to tackle deftly for a stronger future.

One of the most important issues has been that of employment and growth rate. The Indian government has strongly rebutted a recent report by Citigroup that claimed India will struggle to create sufficient employment opportunities even with a seven per cent growth rate.

According to the government, data from official sources such as the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) and the Reserve Bank of India's KLEMS data show that India has generated an average number of jobs of over 20 million per year through generation of over 80 million employment opportunities from 2017-18 to 2021-22. This contradicts Citigroup's assertion of India's inability to generate sufficient employment.

The government cited significant improvements in key labour market indicators based on PLFS data. The Worker Population Ratio (WPR) increased from 46.8 per cent in 2017-18 to 56 per cent in 2022-23, indicating a larger proportion of the working-age population is now employed. The Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) rose from 49.8 per cent to 57.9 per cent over the same period, reflecting more people actively participating in the labour market. Additionally, the Unemployment Rate declined significantly from 6.0 per cent to 3.2 per cent, showing a substantial reduction in joblessness.

Shree Suvarna Ganesh Temple

Ancient temples of Raigad

Nestled within the serene landscapes of Raigad division in Konkan, ancient temples stand as timeless witnesses to the region's rich cultural tapestry. Each temple mentioned echoes stories of devotion and architectural marvel, offering a glimpse into the spiritual legacy of ancient times. From the intricately carved sculptures to the tranquil sanctuaries, these temples not only serve as places of worship but also as cultural landmarks steeped in history. Nandini Rao explores their legendary mystic and charm.

Photos : Draft Craft

The Varadvinayak Temple at Mahad is one of the eight Ashtavinayak temples dedicated to Lord Ganesh in Maharashtra

One of Maharashtra's most visited regions, Raigad, located in the state's Konkan division, has a rich religious and mythological heritage. Previously known as Kulaba (Colaba) district, Raigad got its name from the iconic Raigad Fort which was the capital of the Maratha Empire. In 1674 AD, Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj renovated the hill fort and made it his capital. Apart from the many forts, Raigad is also known for its ancient and exquisite temples that draw devotees and tourists from far and beyond. The region is peppered with shrines and places of religious importance bearing testimony to Raigad's significance in Hindu mythology and history.

In Mahad, for example, the Varadvinayak Temple which was restored in 1725 AD is one of the eight Ashtavinayak temples dedicated to Lord Ganesh in Maharashtra. Located in Mahad region of Raigad, the ancient temple is believed to have been restored by Peshwa General / Subedar Ramji Mahadev Biwalkar. Situated in Mahad's Khalapur taluka near Karjat, the temple also houses a mushak, shivlinga and the navagraha devas (nine planetary deities). It is an important landmark in the Ashtavinayak pilgrimage circuit and the Ganesh idol here is self-manifested or self-originated, known as a *swayambhu*. It was found in the lake adjoining the premises.

The Ganesh idol at Varadvinayak Temple

Ballaleshwar Temple in Pali

The temple structure is relatively simple, with a tiled roof, a 25-foot high dome with a golden pinnacle, and a golden summit i.e. the *kalas* carved on top. The *sanctum sanctorum* is eight feet long and eight feet wide, made of stone and surrounded by beautifully carved elephant sculptures. The iconic temple is home to two Ganesh idols - the original weathered idol is placed outside the sanctum, while a new consecrated idol resides within. A *gaumukh* on the north side of the temple provides the holy *tirtham* (water). A sacred pond is also located on the western side of the temple making the zone picturesque and tourist-friendly.

Legends and mythology

The Varadvinayak Temple is believed to be the site where Lord Ganesh, as Varad Vinayak (the giver of boons and prosperity), resides. Legend says King Bhima of Koudinyapur and his wife, childless and in forest penance, met Sage Vishwamitra who gave them the *ekashar gajana mantra*, leading to their son Rukmaganda's birth. During a hunting trip, Rukmaganda visited Rishi Vachaknavi's hermitage, where his wife, Mukunda, fell in love with the handsome and virtuous prince who declined her and left. Later, Indra disguised as Rukmaganda fathered Gritsamada with Mukunda.

When Gritsamada learnt the truth of his birth, he cursed Mukunda to become the thorn-bearing Bhor plant and was cursed by her in turn. A celestial voice revealed Gritsamada as Indra's son, leaving them both regretful. While Mukunda transformed, Gritsamada left for Pushpak forest to pray to Lord Ganesh for penance. Ganesh granted Gritsamada a boon that he will bear a son whom only Shiv could defeat. A grateful Gritsamada built a temple for Lord Ganesh, the Varadvinayak, in what is now Bhadraka forest.

The stone idols of Riddhi and Siddhi are also enshrined in the sanctum. The Varadvinayak Temple is a popular pilgrimage site, attracting devotees throughout the year. On festivals like Magha Shukla Chaturthi, which is observed piously in Konkan zone, huge crowds gather at the temple. The Varadvinayak Temple is also known for its architectural beauty, spiritual significance and ancient history.

Another Ashtavinayak temple, built in 1640 AD and renovated in 1760, is the Ballaleshwar Temple in Pali village of Raigad. This temple is unique among the Ashtavinayak temples as it is the only one named after a devotee, Ballal. As per legend, a young devotee of Lord Ganesh named Ballal was tortured by his father for worshipping Ganesh. The lord, pleased by the boy's

Ganapati Temple in Awas

devotion, appeared before him, healed his wounds and granted him a boon that he would be known by his name in this temple. The name Ballaleshwar translates to 'the lord of Ballal'. Here, the idol is uniquely dressed like a Brahmin.

The temple was originally constructed in 1640 AD by Moreshwar Vitthal Sindkar. The original wooden temple was later renovated in 1760 AD, with a new stone structure designed by Shri Fadnis. The temple was carefully positioned, facing east, so that the first rays of the rising sun illuminate the idol of Ganesha. The temple complex features two sanctums - an inner sanctum 15 feet high and an outer sanctum 12 feet high. The outer sanctum contains an idol of a mushak holding a modak, facing the main Ganesha idol which is seated on a stone throne, facing east with its trunk turned left. The murti is adorned with a silver backdrop displaying the Siddhi and Riddhi deities.

The temple features ancient wooden architecture with a shikhara adorned with intricate carvings of peacocks and elephants. It also houses a bell brought back by Peshwa Chimaji Appa following his victories over the Portuguese in Vasai and Sasti. Ballaleshwar Temple is a prominent pilgrimage site, with major festivals celebrated during Bhadrapada and Magha months. The temple complex has eight pillars, one inner sanctum, an outer sanctum, two lakes and accommodations for devotees.

Where Gods reside

One of the most interesting zones in Raigad is Awas, located across the Arabian Sea from Mumbai and accessible through road and water transport. Literally translating to 'abode of all gods' and true to its name, the quaint coastal village of Awas is home to several temples. The most significant being the Shree Nagoba Tirthkshetra or the Nagoba Temple in the heart of the village. The temple is more than 350 years old and is a reminder of the existence of three sages who lived there, healed people, and finally, took a *samadhi* at the same spot. Here, the most important day is the Nag Panchami when devotees from neighbouring villages and towns visit the temple - from dawn till

Entrance to Nagoba Temple of Raigad

midnight - to pray to their Nagoba. The day is observed through a fair or a mela where locals and visitors partake in fun activities, shopping, buying sweets, eating snacks, playing games, etc.

Among the many temples in Awas - the Kalbhaireshwar Temple is located on a small cliff atop a pond surrounded by beautiful trees. The members of the Bhagat community in Awas have been the caretakers of this temple for generations. The Ganesh temple in the village is a colourful structure with multi-hued walls and a sanctum with the idol of Shree Vakratunda Ganesha which is *swayambhu*. Several centuries ago, the villagers found the idol buried in the ground.

Another popular religious and tourist site near Awas is the Kankeshwar Devasthan - an ancient temple situated atop a hill near the village of Mapgoan, approximately 13 km from Alibaug. It is dedicated to Lord Shiva, the principal deity in Hinduism and renowned for its architectural splendour. The temple is accessed via a series of steps which were built by the Diwan of Sardar Raghoji Angre called Govind Rangdas. Inside the temple rests a four-feet long *shivlinga* which is a site in itself, just like the breath-taking forested ambience of the temple.

Built in the Hoysala architectural style, which flourished between the 11th and 14th centuries under the Hoysala Empire, the temple features a *garbhagriha* (sanctum sanctorum), a *sabhamandapa* (assembly hall), and a *pushkarni* (water tank). Here, traditional rituals are predominantly conducted by members of the Gurav family. As per legend, this temple was built by the Pandavas when they were on their exile to seek blessings of Lord Shiva. This is also a *swayambhu* temple.

A hidden gem, the Goteshwar Temple in Dhokawade, around two km from Awas is a sight to behold. This ancient temple, dedicated to Lord Shiva, is not just a place of worship but a destination that offers a serene retreat for tourists seeking a blend of spirituality, history, and natural beauty. The temple's origins are shrouded in local legends and folklore.

Dhokawade`s serene environment enhances the spiritual experience at Goteshwar Mandir

The intricate carvings adorn the temple walls tell stories of mythological events and deities, offering a glimpse into the artistic brilliance. The temple, dedicated to Lord Shiva, is situated at the banks of a lake lines with thick-foliaged trees that offer it a photogenic quality making it the perfect venue for pre-wedding photoshoots.

Goteshwar temple's architecture is a harmonious blend of traditional Indian temple design and unique local influences. The towering shikhara (spire) and the beautifully sculpted pillars are a visual treat for visitors. The sanctum sanctorum, where the idol of Lord Shiva resides, exudes a profound sense of peace and divinity.

Dhokawade's serene environment enhances the spiritual experience at Goteshwar Mandir. Surrounded by lush greenery and picturesque landscapes, the temple offers a perfect escape from the hustle and bustle of city life. The gentle breeze, chirping of birds, and the rustling of leaves create a tranquil atmosphere, making it an ideal spot for meditation and relaxation.

Goteshwar Mandir is not only a spiritual centre but also a hub of cultural activities. Mahashivratri, the grand festival dedicated to Lord Shiva, is celebrated with great fervour and enthusiasm. For tourists, Goteshwar Mandir offers a unique blend of spiritual solace and cultural enrichment. The surrounding zone offers a glimpse into rural Maharashtrian life, with its traditional houses, local markets, and friendly villagers.

Visitors can also explore nearby attractions, such as the pristine beaches of Alibaug, which is just a short drive away. The combination of spiritual and natural attractions makes it a compelling destination for a weekend getaway or a day trip. This serene retreat in the heart of Raigad is symbolic of the timeless charm and spiritual depth of India's cultural heritage.

Restoring history

Located in Raigad's Shrivardhan, the Harihareshwar Temple is one of the holiest sites in Raigad and Maharashtra, steeped in history and spiritual significance. The temple is believed to have been blessed by Lord Shiva, earning it the nickname *Dev ghar.* It is also known as Dakshin Kashi owing to its importance as a pilgrimage centre. Here, Shiv is worshipped as 'Harihareshwar' or 'lord of Hari (Vishnu) and Hara (Shiva)'. It is located at Harihareshwar beach, about 200 km from Mumbai.

Shrivardhan also has a rich history where the first Peshwa, Balaji Vishwanath was born and was the Deshmukh of the town. The temple complex comprises two adjacent shrines: the smaller Kalbhairav Temple and the main Harihareshwar Temple. The former is believed to have been created by Lord Shiva, who blessed Kalbhairav with all mantras while the main temple houses an ancient *shivlinga*, surrounded by deities of Brahma, Vishnu and Parvati.

The Kalbhairav Temple at Shrivardhan

The temple's history is intertwined with the Peshwas, the prime ministers of the Maratha Empire. The Peshwas, including Bajirao Peshwa I, contributed significantly to the temple's construction and renovation as Hari Hareshwar was their family deity. In 1723, Bajirao Peshwa I renovated the temple after it was almost destroyed in a fire, demonstrating the temple's importance to them.

The temple's architecture is unique, with a pradakshina route that circumambulates the temple along the seashore. This route is not advisable during high tide, as it can be hazardous. The temple's serene surroundings, surrounded by hills and the Arabian Sea, add to its spiritual ambiance. Its proximity to the beach makes it a popular tourist destination, offering a blend of spirituality and natural beauty.

Harihareshwar Temple is a significant pilgrimage site, attracting devotees from all over Maharashtra. It is particularly revered during festivals like Mahashivratri, when devotees throng the zone to seek blessings. The town of Harihareshwar is surrounded by Harihareshwar, Harshinachal and Pushpadri hills.

In Diveagar, a village located in Shrivardhan, Raigad lies the Suvarna Ganesh Temple that contains a centuries-old, one kg gold idol of Lord Ganesha that was found buried below a coconut plantation nearby. It is one of the most captivating places of worship in Raigad. The idol was found buried in a copper box along with some ancient ornaments belonging to the deity.

Interestingly, the discovery was made on the auspicious day of Sankashti Chaturthi which is when the discovered idol of gold became an object of religious significance and the primary object of worship. People believe that this gold idol was created to conceal an earlier stone idol of Lord Ganesha, which was already present in the temple. The Suvarna Ganesh Temple is a popular pilgrimage site, attracting devotees from all over Maharashtra, particularly during major festivals such as Ganesh Chaturthi.

It's no secret that Raigad has some of the best forts from the time of the Maratha Empire such as Raigad Fort, Korlai Fort, Kolaba Fort, Kothaligad Fort, Padmadurg Fort, Harishchandragad Fort, etc. Some of these forts have temples that have been integral to local culture and traditions.

Swayambhu Ganapati at Awas

The Jagadishwar Temple, built by Chhatrapati Shivaji, is one such place, situated about 25 km north of Mahad in Raigad Fort. It is believed that Shivaji used to visit this temple everyday. The primary deity of the temple is Lord Jagadishwar and there is a Nandi idol too outside the temple structure.

The Sudhagad Fort situated about ten km from Pali in Raigad also has a religious significance. The temple of Bhoraidevi is situated in this fort that is popular among trekkers and tourists. The fort was earlier called Bhorapgad, named after the patron goddess Bhoraidevi. When it fell to the Marathas in 1657, it was named Sudhagad.

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Our Last Six Issues

July 2024	June 2024	May 2024	April 2024	March 2024	Feburary 2024

"History, that is facts, cannot be rewritten"

Moupia Basu, hailing from Pune, holds a Master's degree in English Literature from Delhi University and boasts an esteemed career as a journalist with several prominent national publications. Married to an army officer, her extensive travels throughout India have cultivated a profound appreciation for its history, cultural diversity, and rich heritage. Her passion for India's narrative is deeply rooted in childhood memories of stories recounting the nation's struggle for independence, shared by her parents. An accomplished author, Moupia Basu has already penned three books, each contributing uniquely to the vast tapestry of Indian literature, with a fourth eagerly anticipated.

In an exclusive dialogue with **A. Radhakrishnan,** she delves into her inspirations, challenges, and the evolving landscape of her literary journey.

Can you briefly tell us about yourself?

I grew up in Delhi where I completed my education. I worked as a journalist with some of the leading publications in the country such as The Times of India, The Economic Times, Business Today and The Indian Express. I also worked with Afaqs!, a leading marketing and advertising portal for a while.

Having married an Indian Army officer, I had the opportunity to travel across India. During these travels, I discovered some wonderful places and was fascinated with the immense physical, political, religious, architectural and cultural diversity of our country.

My interest in history was rekindled and my romance with the past began. And, with that started my writing journey with the objective to bring to the fore our chequered and multi-layered past through the story-telling format.

Moupia Basu

Are you a historian?

No, I'm not. Though I have done my Masters in English Literature, I was always interested in history, especially Indian history.

How many books have you authored? Give gist of each.

My first book is KHOKA, published by The National Book Trust of India, which is a collection of short stories set during India of the 1930s-40s, a time when both the country and the world were grappling with their respective battles for freedom.

Though the book is targeted at young adults, I feel it is relevant to everyone. It is the story of Khoka, a young boy, who having lost his father at the age of three is tossed amongst his relatives, stretching from the plains of Bangladesh to the plateau of erstwhile undivided Bihar.

Khoka's life is a merry-go-round of adventures and there is a constant supply of excitement. It is these incidents which fill up the chapters as stories told by a mother to her son Prahlad, at a different time, in a different place.

My second book is The Queen's Last Salute. It is a historical fiction set in the backdrop of India's first war of Independence in 1857, popularly known as the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857. It is the story of Rani Lakshmibai, the Queen of Jhansi and her close companion and comrade-in-arms Chandraki. It is about a lesser known political and military event that was overshadowed by the larger sequence of events at the time.

It is also a story of female heroism and of those unknown

women freedom fighters who laid down their lives for India's struggle for freedom. It is about the geopolitics of Bundelkhand with Jhansi and its neighbouring kingdom of Orchha being the main players.

My third book is Anarkali and Salim – A retelling of Mughal-e-Azam. It is a fictionalised version of the epic love story of Mughal prince Salim and the courtesan Anarkali with some twists and turns.

Both the 2nd and 3rd books were published by Juggernaut Books.

Are there any more in the pipeline?

Yes, my forthcoming fourth book is about one of the glorious kingdoms of southern India and the controversy surrounding the birth of its capital city. That's all I can mention as of now.

What ethical dilemmas do you face writing about history?

History has been and will always be interpreted in different ways. I won't call it an ethical dilemma, but yes, there is always a POV which can be different from the accepted views. As far as ideology is concerned, I try not to tamper with certain beliefs and convictions and try and present facts as they are, leaving it to my readers to arrive at their respective conclusions. I do not mess with or distort facts.

How have the Marxist ideologues usurped Indian History?

I do not think it has. It may have been in certain areas of history and briefly and those are usually about events that actually happened. Indian history is coming of age and we can see both historians as well as lovers of history present their ideologues. As long as that is allowed, history cannot be usurped by any particular ideologue.

Has it to be rewritten?

History, that is facts, cannot be rewritten. But different interpretations can be offered which is often the case. Vested interests with their own agendas have often distorted history over the ages with the result that histories at different times, under different regimes have been presented differently. But, the facts have to be correct and we cannot wipe off or add events and incidents that align with different ideologies.

Will you venture into any other genre of writing?

Haven't thought about it, but I'm not closed to the idea. But whatever it is, a historical backdrop may be present to a certain extent. I would also love to write a novel set in modern times.

What kind of research do you do before writing a book? How many hours a day do you write?

Oh, there's loads of research and it's not just before but is a continuing process even while I'm writing the book.

Research is at multiple levels –oral history references, cultural representations, books and manuscripts, periodicals, and contemporary sources that include biographies, documented reports of travellers as well as commissioned projects, transcripts of my conversations with intellectuals, scholars, journalists, heritage enthusiasts and old families who reside in that region. I also visit museums and monuments, examine paintings and read poetry.

My hours are not fixed. Some days it can be long continuous hours, at other times; days may pass before I write anything. I'm not a very disciplined writer. But mostly, I write spontaneously and do not always decide what to write beforehand.

How long on average does it take you to write a book?

There is no fixed time limit. It can take between six months to years. There are different stages in writing a book. Besides, writing the first draft is always easy but the edits can take a long time. My first book was written over ten years. My second book was written over 7-8 years with huge gaps. The third book took a year etc.

Does writing energise or exhaust you?

It definitely energises me. It is a creative process; so I enjoy every moment of it. The research can be exhausting at times.

What literary pilgrimages have you gone on?

Several. I visited almost all the regions and places that my books covered. Without visiting those places, I can't write honestly. I have to feel the earth under my feet, absorb the sights and sounds and transport myself to a bygone era. Unless I feel for that period or that place I cannot visualise it and identify it.

What is the most unethical practice in the publishing industry?

I will not comment on that.

What is your writing kryptonite?

Lethargy at times. On a couple of rare occasions, I have had a writer's block, which happened in the case of Anarkali and Salim. Since the story was not original, in the sense not mine, it took me time to believe in it and then adapt it or change certain things in the original story. For instance, my Anarkali, unlike what has been portrayed in the film, is a Persian. Also, I get stuck with some piece of information which is not readily available.

How did publishing your first book change your process of writing?

I became more disciplined and careful with my writing. Each book is a different journey.

What was an early experience where you learned that language had power?

I felt nothing so serious. But yes, when I watch or hear of people who have read my book and discuss it, it feels good. I loved writing from childhood and I enjoyed creating stories and characters.

I try to be as responsible a writer as possible. After all, I have to own what I write and there's a sense of responsibility and accountability.

Is writing a kind of spiritual practice?

It depends entirely on the writer him/herself. As for me, I can't define it in any particular way. I know that I enjoy the process of writing.

How do you deal with book reviews, good and bad?

I accept both. If the review is uncomplimentary, I try to improve in those areas. Good reviews always uplift my spirits.

What is the most difficult part of your artistic process?

When I'm expected to take a political stand. It interferes with my creativity and honesty.

How much has your family supported you?

Tremendously

What advice do you have for writers?

Just write what you feel, be honest to yourself.

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

"Only three of every five girls in India make it to the 11th and 12th standards."

Kreeanne Rabadi, Regional Director – CRY (West) highlights the importance and reasons behind **Child Rights and You - CRY's** campaign **'Poori Padhai, Desh Ki Bhalai: Studying for Change'** and why encouraging girls towards higher education should be a priority for each one of us.

Kreeanne Rabadi

Can you share with us what CRY's new campaign 'Poori Padhai, Desh Ki Bhalai' is all about?

The name of the campaign says it all – it is aimed to promote higher secondary education among girls and reduce the number of girl child dropouts in school.

To give you some background, the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act 2009 was brought in to provide universal education for Indian children up to the age of 14 years. The landmark act completed its 15th anniversary this April, and there's no denying the fact that the education scenario in the country has significantly improved over the past one and a half decades.

Nevertheless, there's a lot more that needs to be done. Evidence gathered from the ground suggests that even today many girls lack access to secondary and higher secondary education. To address this issue CRY, along with its many grassroots-level partner NGOs spread across 20 intervention states has launched 'Poori Padhai Desh Ki Bhalai' – a pan-India awareness campaign to raise public awareness and change societal attitudes towards girls' education.

The seven-week-long campaign kickstarted on the 24 June 2024, and aims to engage all its stakeholders to address gender disparities in education. The campaign will come to a close on 15 August 2024 celebrated as the Independence Day of India.

As part of the campaign, CRY and its partner organisations will aim to increase the number of enrolment and retention of girls in primary, upper-primary, secondary and higher secondary education in its operational areas; and will strive to create widespread awareness by engaging with all relevant stakeholders including children and their families, educators, community members, state administrative authorities, students at schools, colleges and universities, media houses, social media influencers, corporates, HNIs, and the people at large.

What do you think is the current situation of access to education in India?

The National Education Policy 2020 has paved the way to extend universal, free, and quality education up to age 18, aligning with the promises of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG Goal-4) for equitable education by 2030. However, as the latest Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE+) 21-22 data reveals, only three of every five girls in India make it to the higher secondary level of education.

A deep dive into the UDISE+ 21-22 datasets reveals that a little less than 60 percent (58.2%) of girls are enrolled in higher secondary education. In other words, only three of every five girls in India make it to the 11th and 12th standards (calculations based on the Gross Enrolment Ratio – GER).

As per calculations based on the Adjusted Net Enrolment Rate (ANER) one of every three girls (35%) of the corresponding age group is out of school at the secondary level, while one of every eight girls (12.25%) of the corresponding age group enrolled in Secondary level drops out and hence does not complete secondary education.

What do you plan to achieve with this campaign?

Ensuring that all girls are enrolled in schools within our intervention areas is just one aspect of it; and the other is to make sure that they stay in school till they complete their school education up to the Higher Secondary standard – that's what this campaign aims at.
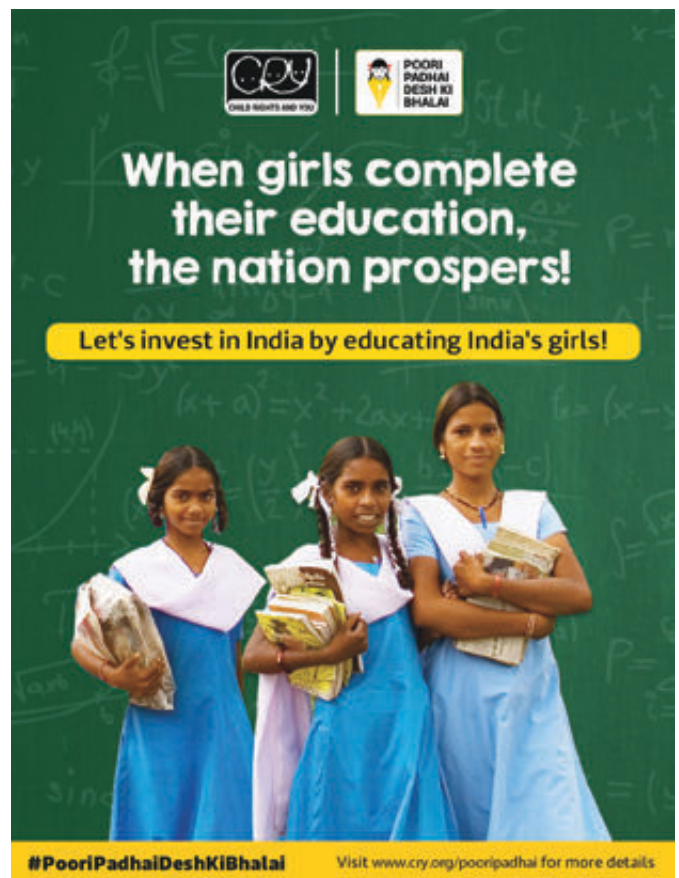
Posters of the Campaign

Evidence suggests that socio-economic challenges, cultural norms, gender discrimination, early marriages, inadequate school facilities, long travel distances and safety concerns on the way to school are some of the major barriers that hinder their educational journey and continue to pose significant stumbling blocks for girls in completing their higher secondary education. This eventually increases school dropouts and makes them more vulnerable to child labour, underage marriage, teenage pregnancy, abuse and exploitation, and even child trafficking.

Can you share some success stories of girls pursuing higher education despite challenges?

Our success stories are many; but I would like to share that of Pratibha Mahilange a mother of two graceful daughters Geetika and Monika who resides in Chuchuhiyapara Ward No. 46 in Bilaspur, Chhattisgarh.

At wee hours every day, almost before the dawn breaks, Pratibha gets ready for her work. Before going to work, she completes her household chores, prepares breakfast and puts that into daughters' lunchboxes mixing with love and concern. Pratibha's husband Girish was a driver who dreamt of providing the best of education to the girls. Pratibha recalls how he worked long hours for extra money to buy books and crayons for them. Despite such shoestring income, she claims they were happy with their dreams.

Unfortunately, that story was not as nice as used to be. Girish met with a tragic train accident and that took his life and also took away the happiness from the family. Since he was the only earning member, the family landed into an existential crisis to feed three mouths.

To put an end to this torment Pratibha shouldered the responsibility. With no prior experience and since she had studied only till 10th standard, it was extremely challenging for her to find a job. And finally, she did secure a job as a cleaning and hygiene staff at Tifra Municipal Corporation. She started with just ₹ 700 a month (even less than $9). Pratibha confesses that she often wished she had completed her Bachelors so that she could have earned well and supported her family better than now.

Pratibha's hard work paid off and seems to bear the fruit of hope. Her younger daughter Monika is currently studying in 9th standard in Government Higher Secondary School, Shankar Nagar, Bilaspur while the elder one Geetika is a second year BSc student in Government Bilaspur Girls College.

During this struggle Pratibha didn't find herself a lone warrior, CRY came forward to support her and stood by her side. Through our local partner, we are currently supporting Geetika to complete her studies, and also spreading the story of the Partibha's fighting spirit among hundreds like Pratibha, Geetika and Monika, so they could complete their education and aspire to have a better future for themselves and for their beloved ones.

Mamta Chitnis Sen is an artist and writer who documents social crises through the arts. She also handles Media Relations for CRY - West.

Policy impact

These statistics, according to the government, demonstrate the positive impact of its policies on employment, painting a more optimistic picture of the Indian job market compared to Citigroup's dire assessment. Furthermore, the government highlighted growth in formal sector employment, with over 62 million net new subscribers joining the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) in the last 6.5 years. Additionally, there was a 30 per cent increase in new subscribers to the National Pension System (NPS) in 2023-24 compared to the previous year, indicating growing formal employment and social security coverage.

The government also pointed to the projected expansion of the gig economy and Global Capability Centers as indicators of India's robust employment prospects. The gig economy, with its flexible work opportunities, and the rise of Global Capability Centers, which serve as critical operational hubs for multinational companies, are expected to further bolster job creation in India.

Emphasising the credibility and comprehensiveness of official data sources, the government cautioned against the selective use of private data, such as Citigroup's report, which can lead to misleading conclusions about India's employment scenario. It reiterated its commitment to creating a robust and inclusive job market, ensuring that economic growth translates into tangible employment opportunities for its citizens.

Workforce and external shocks

The latest Annual Survey of Unincorporated Enterprises (ASUSE) for 2021-22 and 2022-23, published by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), Government of India, reveals a decrease in the number of workers employed in the informal sector. The workforce in this sector fell by 16.45 lakh, or roughly 1.5 per cent, to 10.96 crore in 2022-23 from 11.13 crore in 2015-16.

This data, available for the first time since 2015-16, offers insights into the impacts of significant external shocks such as demonetisation in November 2016, the implementation of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) in July 2017, and the Covid-19 pandemic starting in March 2020 on the growth of unincorporated enterprises and their employment levels.

The number of unincorporated enterprises increased by 16.56 lakh, rising to 6.50 crore in 2022-23 from 6.33 crore in 2015-16, as per the data generated by the ASUSE for 2021-22 and 2022-23. The informal sector bore much of the burden from the sudden withdrawal of cash during demonetisation, the regulatory compliances and tax net inclusion due to GST, and the national lockdown imposed in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The informal sector

Among the top ten states that account for nearly three-quarters of India's informal sector workers, five states—Maharashtra, Bihar, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, and Odisha—saw an increase in informal employment between 2015-16 and 2022-23. Conversely, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Andhra Pradesh experienced a decline in the number of informal sector workers during the same period, with these five states accounting for 42 per cent of all informal workers.

The survey showed that 16 states and union territories (out of 34, excluding Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh due to lack of comparable data) recorded a decline in informal sector workers in 2022-23 compared to the 2015-16 data from the National Sample Survey's 73rd round on Unincorporated Enterprises. However, the share of informal sector workers increased in most states immediately after the pandemic, indicating economic distress and a potential shift from the formal to the informal sector.

Uttar Pradesh saw a decrease in informal sector workers to 1.57 crore in 2022-23 from 1.65 crore in 2015-16, though there was an increase from 1.30 crore in 2021-22. West Bengal experienced a decline to 1.05 crore in 2022-23 from 1.35 crore in 2015-16, with a slight rise from 1.02 crore in 2021-22.

Maharashtra, on the other hand, saw a consistent increase in informal sector workers over the seven-year period, reaching 1.15 crore in 2022-23 from 91.23 lakh in 2015-16 and 98.81 lakh in 2021-22. Other states such as Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, and Odisha also recorded an increase in workers in 2022-23 compared to 2015-16.

Bihar, a major source of migrant workers, stood out by initially recording a decline in informal sector workers from 53.07 lakh in 2015-16 to 43.22 lakh in 2021-22, only to reverse the trend with a sharp increase to 58.95 lakh in 2022-23, surpassing pre-pandemic levels.

In terms of informal sector output in value-added terms of Gross Value Added (GVA), India Ratings noted that the real GVA of unincorporated sector enterprises (USE) grew by 6.9 per cent in 2022-23, which was still below pre-pandemic levels. The real GVA of USE in 2022-23 was 1.6 per cent lower than in 2015-16. While the real GVA of USE grew at a compounded annual growth rate (CAGR) of 7.4 per cent between 2010-11 and 2015-16, it contracted by 0.2 per cent between 2015-16 and 2022-23, highlighting the long-term negative impact of the shocks on the sector.

Smaller enterprises

Regarding the number of unincorporated enterprises, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, and Maharashtra accounted for the highest share in both rural and urban areas in 2022-23. The State Bank of India, in its research report, noted that the employment numbers from the Reserve Bank of India's KLEMS data and the ASUSE broadly match, showing around 8.9 crore employment in industry and services over the nine-year period from FY14 to FY23.

The unorganised sector, which contributes over 44 per cent to the country's GVA and employs nearly 75 per cent of the workforce in non-agricultural enterprises, is a crucial jobs indicator. The Ministry's release of this data after a long gap provides essential insights into the employment generation capacity of the informal sector, especially during formal sector slowdowns.

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

Cracking the weather code

Decoding weather forecasting is not as easy as reading the daily prediction. The meteorologist is forever faced with the dilemma of balancing precision and probability in predictions. **Raju Korti** *lists the challenges of accurate weather forecasting and says in India, these present a complex algorithm of many parameters.*

Cars floating, roads waterlogged as heavy rainfall lashes Mumbai city

Mark Twain is reputed to have said that climate is what we expect and weather is what we get. How many times has it happened that heavy rains were predicted and not even a drop fell? Or for that matter, a dry day was predicted but it poured cats and dogs enough to bring life to a standstill? While this happens almost every year, the weatherman always corners attention in terms of public ridicule and yet, is always taken in all earnestness.

What is rarely understood is weatherman has a tricky job to do. After all, it is only a "reasonable prediction" that is sometimes billed as "imperfect science." Weather prediction in India presents a unique set of challenges due to its geographical diversity, climatic variability, and the influence of multiple weather systems. Predicting weather accurately in such a context requires sophisticated technology, continuous monitoring, and skilled interpretation of data. To arrive at an exact inference based on so many parameters is anything but easy. More so given the fact that these parameters can vary locally. So, let's give the weatherman the benefit of doubt and know what makes it tricky for him.

India's vast geographical expanse encompasses a wide range of topographies, including mountains, plains, plateaus, and coastal regions. Each of these areas interacts differently with weather systems, leading to varied micro-climates and localized weather patterns. For instance, the Western Ghats influence the southwest monsoon, leading to heavy rainfall on the windward side and rain shadow regions on the leeward side.

The Indian monsoon, a lifeline for agriculture and water resources, is notoriously difficult to predict accurately. Factors such as El Niño and La Niña oscillations, the Indian Ocean Dipole, and other global climate patterns influence its strength and distribution. A slight deviation in any of these factors can lead to significant changes in rainfall patterns across the country.

Extreme weather events

India experiences a wide range of extreme weather events, from cyclones in the Bay of Bengal and Arabian Sea to heatwaves, cold waves, and intense rainfall events. Predicting the intensity, track, and timing of these events is crucial for disaster preparedness and mitigation efforts.While India has made significant strides in meteorological technology, including

Doppler radars, satellite imaging, and supercomputing facilities, gaps in infrastructure and data collection still exist, particularly in remote and rural areas. This can affect the accuracy of weather forecasts, especially for localised events.

Accurate weather forecasting relies heavily on real-time data collection and analysis. Issues such as gaps in data coverage, inconsistent data quality, and delays in data transmission can hinder the forecasting process. Improving data infrastructure and quality assurance measures is crucial for enhancing prediction accuracy.

India experiences rapid transitions between seasons, such as the onset and withdrawal of monsoons, which can be challenging to predict accurately. These transitions are influenced by complex interactions between oceanic and atmospheric factors, making precise forecasting a daunting task. Weather variability directly impacts India's agricultural sector, which employs a significant portion of the population. Unpredictable weather patterns can lead to crop failures, affecting food security and the national economy. Accurate weather forecasts are essential for farmers to make informed decisions regarding planting, irrigation, and harvesting.

Need for accuracy

Timely and accurate weather forecasts are critical for public safety, particularly in densely populated urban areas prone to flooding, landslides, and other weather-related hazards. Effective communication of weather risks and early warning systems can mitigate the impact of these events.

Weather prediction in India is a complex and challenging task due to its diverse geography, monsoonal variability, extreme weather events, technological constraints, and the critical socio-economic implications of accurate forecasting. Continued advancements in meteorological science, coupled with improvements in data collection and infrastructure, are essential to enhance the reliability and timeliness of weather forecasts, thereby mitigating risks and supporting sustainable development efforts across the country. While perfect accuracy is challenging due to the complexity of the atmosphere, meteorologists employ several key approaches to make predictions as reliable as possible:

Observations: Weather predictions start with gathering current data from various sources such as satellites, radar, weather stations, and weather balloons. These observations provide information on temperature, humidity, wind speed and direction, air pressure, and more.

Computer Models: Meteorologists use numerical weather prediction models, which are complex computer simulations of the atmosphere.

Data Assimilation: This process involves integrating real-time observational data into the numerical models to create the initial conditions for the forecasts. Data assimilation helps improve the accuracy of predictions by reducing errors in the starting state of the atmosphere.

Ensemble Forecasting: Instead of relying on a single model run, meteorologists often use ensemble forecasting, which involves running the same model with slightly different initial conditions or model configurations. This approach helps to account for uncertainties in the initial data and model physics, providing a range of possible outcomes (probability forecasts).

Satellite Imagery: Satellites provide continuous images of clouds, storms, and other weather patterns from space. This data is crucial for tracking weather systems, especially over oceans and remote regions.

Climate Trends and Patterns: Understanding long-term climate trends and recurring weather patterns (such as El Niño/La Niña) can also inform short-term weather predictions. These patterns influence the likelihood of certain weather events occurring.

Expertise and Experience: Meteorologists combine their scientific knowledge with experience and intuition to interpret model outputs and make informed judgments about the weather. This human input is crucial for refining forecasts, especially in complex or rapidly changing weather situations.

Verification and Improvement: Forecast accuracy is continually evaluated against actual weather conditions to identify areas for improvement. Advances in technology, better understanding of atmospheric processes, and feedback from forecast performance contribute to ongoing improvements in prediction accuracy.

Ocean Buoys: Floating devices anchored in oceans and lakes equipped with sensors to measure water temperature, wave height, and currents. Oceanic conditions influence weather patterns, and buoys provide valuable data for forecasting marine weather.

Aircraft-based Instruments: Commercial and research aircraft equipped with instruments that measure atmospheric conditions during flights. This data supplements ground-based and satellite observations, particularly in remote or inaccessible regions.

Ground-based Sensors: Various specialised sensors and instruments deployed on the ground or on structures like bridges or towers to monitor micro-climates, urban heat islands, and other localised weather phenomena.

These devices and technologies work together to provide meteorologists with a comprehensive understanding of current weather conditions and enable more accurate predictions of future weather patterns and events. While no forecast can perfectly predict the weather days or weeks in advance due to the chaotic nature of the atmosphere, modern weather forecasting techniques have significantly improved our ability to anticipate and prepare for weather events, thereby saving lives and minimizing economic impacts. It is worth mentioning here that a team from IIT Bombay has developed a hyperlocal weather forecasting system for Mumbai, offering precise predictions for specific neighbourhoods, streets, and areas across the city. The project, a collaboration with the MCGM Centre for Municipal Capacity Building and Research (MCMCR), is now available to the public via the Mumbai Flood App on Android devices.

Comparisons are always made about the accuracy of prediction in India as against those elsewhere in the world. While specific comparisons between India and other countries would require detailed analysis and specific data, developed countries generally tend to have more accurate weather predictions due to their advanced technological infrastructure, extensive data availability, and sophisticated modeling capabilities. However, advancements in meteorology and improvements in forecasting accuracy are ongoing globally, benefiting countries at various stages of development. Until then, let's make peace with the fact that the weatherman is always right. It's just the weather that's wrong.

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

Ordeal of migrant women kiln workers

'Meelon Dur', an evocative documentary by Megha Acharya, unfolds a threatening tale of unorganised labour and economic debts in a rapidly urbanising India. Three migrant female labourers from Bundelkhand working in a brick kiln, form the film's template. **Shoma A. Chatterji** *explains what drove Acharya to portray the story on celluloid screen.*

Megha Acharya, Director, Meelon Dur One

Meelon Dur – the documentary film poster

Meelon Dur is a 50-minute documentary film directed by Megha Acharya which explores the rare situation of women brick kiln workers who are forced to migrate from their native homes to Bundelkhand. The film is focused mainly on three such women. They are Ramsakhi, Keshkhali and Gaura.

With 50 to 70 percent of households which experience annual migration, Bundelkhand, a parched region in Central India comprises the highest rates of migration in the country. Many families from this area migrate to work in brick kilns used for building and construction purposes across India. During the eight-month migration cycle, from November to June, the kiln workers who live in extreme financial pressure, take loans from the kiln owners through contractors and this loan is deducted from their wages. The labourers, both men and women, are paid their salaries measured in terms of the number of bricks they have made at the end of their eight-month contracts before they travel back to their original homes.

Meelon Dur was seen by this writer courtesy a screener sent by Kriti Film Club that screens and shares documentary films on development, environment, and socially relevant issues, in an effort to positively influence mindsets and behaviour towards creating an equal, just, and peaceful world.

The documentary has been produced by *Khabar Lahariya,* a feminist media network, along with two professors Paula Chakravarty, and Michelle Buckley from NYU and the University of Toronto respectively. Both the professors had reached out to *Khabar Lahariya* for doing field research for them on research they were working on.

Gaura, Keshkali and Ramsakhi's families migrate to a brick kiln in UP. When the film opens in November 2021, they are already under debts of ₹ 30,000, ₹ 40,000 and ₹ 60,000 respectively. "Every year, we decide not to come back here," says Gaura. "But after going back home, we find no work at all and are forced to get back again for the next season."

The film depicts visually and very realistically, the vicious circle within which these women work -- loans – migration – work in brick kilns – loans – work in brick kilns – returning home with a burden of loans – coming back again in the next season. The film focusses mainly on the large number of women who work in these brick kilns collecting the wet mud, shaping them into rectangular cubes, pouring them into moulds and putting them out to dry.

Sheelu, a brick kiln contractor and worker states that Covid 19 struck a severe blow to the production of bricks which came down to 50,000 bricks specially as work had to stop due to the sudden and heavy monsoons and the normal average of 100,000 bricks during the season could not be reached. The film covers the time span beginning from November 2021 and closes in August 2022 when the last migrant family is packing to go back home.

Acharya explains that she named the film Meelon Dur because of the speed of tempo journeys that labourers make to far off places for work. Inter-state migration, intra state migration of labourers spell out the spirit of the film. There are bhojpuri songs that talk about migration to far off places in order to fill the stomach.

It is interesting to see the workers preparing for elections during voting time if there are elections held during the season. But as the workers live in terribly precarious conditions where they do not get water even to take their daily bath and cooking becomes a precarious scarcity because the price of cooking oil at around ₹170 per liter is beyond their means. But at the same time, the film shows how the women workers celebrate Holi in March alongwith their children who live without schooling as their mothers are busy working in the kilns and there are no primary schools in the area.

Director Acharya says, "My favourite moment was when Laxmi, a character in the film says that they love spending Holi in the kilns as they are independent and free here. This was in sharp contrast with the situation in their parents' or in-laws' homes where they would remain within the confines of the concrete. It says so much about the complexities in their life. They experience freedom in a space that has otherwise the tendency of being so exploitative. Also – the entire crew loved Holi! We played and danced with them too."

The camera catches the women making sweets for Holi and celebrating the festival of colours with lots of song and dance which shows that despite the precarious condition of their lives, they know how to extract some moments of happiness. "The emotions stuffed inside me do not die but I cannot take serious decisions because we live on a day-to-day basis and life does not offer us any choice," says one of them.

The film shows how production had to stop completely when monsoons lashed the areas and the workers had to sit it out. We are also informed that at least ten dead bodies of workers are cremated everyday during the brick-making season. During the making of the film heavy monsoons went on for 45 days and production dwindled from 1,70,000 per annum to 100,000 per annum that year. During this off-season from work, the camera focusses on some of the women making samosas on their ovens for sale and comment on how the price of wheat has gone up.

The camera very skillfully captures the stages of brick making, the chimneys where the bricks are baked, emitting smoke in the skies in the distance, the women cooking in their shanties barely covering the ceilings they seek shelter in and even the agent is discovered to be a financially deprived person. The rains lashing against everything around, with the kiln workers trying to shield themselves, visually spell out the tragic story of their lives.

By May 2022, the camera shows how Ramsakhi and Keshkali's families finally leave the brick kiln site ten days after the day when they were scheduled to leave. While Ramsakhi's family received its remuneration at the kiln site while leaving, Keshkali's family got their dues a month after they had departed. By the time they left, Ramsakhi's family had saved up to ₹60,000, Keshkali's family had saved up ₹40,000 while Gaura's family had saved a meager ₹5000. The film ended when Gaura and her family were preparing to leave four months later in September 2022, but the film does not explain why they were leaving so late to get back to their original homes.

"We formed a genuine friendship with the three women in the first couple of schedules. Gaura, one of the women was slightly closer to our age. So, she and I just talked a lot about everything under the sun – from parents to relationships to clothes, food, everything! Geeta's (my friend, scriptwriter and team member) presence in me becoming friends with the three women was also crucial as she knows Bundeli. Their comfort with us allowed us to film them as they went about with their everyday life," Acharya sums up.

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.

When the whole world seems empty

We all know that Death is an inevitable part of life. But when a loved one goes away, dealing with the grief and the questions that arise is something we are hardly ever prepared for. **Lina Mathias** *deliberates on what is believed as the "grief cycle" that occurs in five stages.*

Recently, an elderly neighbour of mine who had become a dear friend, passed away in her sleep. This fiesty and young-at-heart woman was a cancer survivor and someone I admired a lot. When she died, I was away from the city and had not met her for a few months. I had been looking forward with all my heart to returning and resuming our tea-and-long-conversation sessions. Despite being in her late 70s she was deeply interested in the news and people and received many visits from her former students who loved her.

I was devastated by her death and even though I flew into Mumbai especially for her funeral I simply could not accept that she was no more. I even found myself mentally remonstrating with her, "How could you go away like this?" And surprising even for me, even after four months, I am still grieving for her. Or perhaps, I am grieving for myself, missing her lively company and her friendship that brought me so much comfort and cheer.

This threw up several questions in my mind. How long should "normal grieving" continue? What could I do to come to terms with her absence? Why was I so deeply affected by her death; did this indicate something about myself?

Many psychologists and doctors treating terminally ill patients have deliberated over the subjects of dying, death, grief and bereavement. They have written articles and books and several have put forth theories about these processes that are so much a part of of life. Death has been the subject of intense scrutiny for humankind, philosophers and others, since centuries. But here I am dealing only with bereavement and mourning for the death of a loved one.

A person is not dead till as long as he/she is remebered, says an African proverb. To keep our loved ones who have passed away, alive in our memories is considered praiseworthy. But the refusal to accept that the loved one has passed away, to feel anger for a long time not just against fate but even the loved one for "abandoning" one and going away, is a very different aspect.

Among the psychologists whose works and theories are well known are a few names that I will mention here. Foremost is Elisabeth Kübler-Ross who wrote about the five common stages of grief. They include:

- Denial
- Anger
- Bargaining
- Depression
- Acceptance

This grief cycle or model was acclaimed and later even criticised. Kubler-Ross had to clarify that she did not mean that every mourner goes through these stages in exactly the order she has put down. There are many variations. Then there is the grief theory of Erich Lindemann who said that "grief work" spans different time periods for different people. However, the same three tasks come into play: i) emancipation from bondage to the deceased ii) readjustment to a new environment in which the deceased is missing and iii) the formation of new relationships. John Bowlby (1907-1990) was a British psychologist who with his colleague Colin Murray Parkes, worked out four stages of grief. These were: i) shock and numbness ii) yearning and searching iii) despair and disorganisation and iv) recovery and reorganisation.

These are only a few well-known theories; there are many more that are a part of the grief and bereavement works and research. Traditionally, most bereavement counselors advocate that the troubled mourner should find meaning in the cultural rituals that follow death and that these have been honed down the decades to help say a proper goodbye to the loved one who is gone. They also advocate doing something to keep alive the memory of the deceased especially something that the person was passionate about or cared for. This could be planting saplings, initiating scholarships or annual community action programmes.

However, some psychologists favour the concept of "adjusting and redefining" a new relationship with the person who has died in order to come to terms with the loss. The idea is not either to attempt to forget or box the memory of the loved one in a separate frame in your life but to "continue the bond" with the person.

Working through our grief and bereavement is also a very individual experience notwithstanding however well researched the above-mentioned theories and processes are. How the mourner can come to terms with her/his grief also depends on the relationship of the one who is gone with the mourner left behind. The death of a child, a young person, death through accidents, due to violent crimes—all generate a different psychological, social and physical impact. But perhaps Shakespeare had it largely right when he said: "Give sorrow words; the grief that does not speak knits up the o-er wrought heart and bids it break."

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

A treasured bond with an Octogenarian

In 2015, a simple email introduction blossomed into a profound friendship with Madhav uncle, an Army Ordnance Corps officer and a guiding light. His unwavering support, heartfelt feedback, and kindness transformed him from an admired elder into a cherished friend. **Rashmi Oberoi** *reflects on his passing and the memories of his wisdom and affection.*

Rashmi Oberoi (left) with Vani

Our friendship began in the autumn of 2015. It all started with wonderful people sharing my published articles. Madhav uncle shared his appreciation for my work and we were introduced via email. My aunts and uncles have been my greatest cheerleaders, sharing my work with numerous accolades (well-deserved or not depends on the thought process of the reader at large).

Madhav uncle, in his early 80's then, became my friend more than an uncle. He would respond to every email of mine and give a detailed feedback to all my published pieces. He was also my protector against brickbats and trolls.

Over the course of time, our emails were long and lengthy discussing our families/life/incidents/ideas at large. There was also the Sunday morning calls he made to check on me. He also called me 'Rash' as all my close friends do.

It is imperative I mention now that Madhav uncle, from the 1st course JSW, No 7 Division, "C" Squadron served as an upright Army Ordnance Corps officer till his retirement. The army component of 1st JSW course joined IMA Dehradun in January 1951.

This course has the distinction of producing three Chiefs of the tri-services among other great honors and achievements. Of course, uncle was already in touch with my father Lt. Gen Vijay Oberoi (a legend himself) and they corresponded over emails often.

When my collection of short stories with 'Slices of life' was published in 2019, he wrote me the most beautiful review: "Rash Dear, you know what strikes me most and have liked too about you (also from your writings) – it's your absolute frank, forthright and an uninhibited expression of your experiences even from your personal life and beliefs without fear or fervor and not caring about what people might think. I applaud you for being a woman of substance – right thoughts and beliefs."

This humble uncle of mine was kind and straightforward at all times. Even though he came from a family of repute, he had no airs and was a gentleman who believed in simplicity.

I had the pleasure of getting to know most of his family albeit long-distance. We always spoke of meeting up in the near future whenever the right time would present itself.

I finally made it to Secunderabad in March this year… Alas, it was too late. Uncle passed away on the 31 January 2024, a few months after turning into a nonagenarian. I did go to the house and pay my condolences to Vani, his daughter who is now my dear friend. I posed next to uncle's picture – he must have looked down at us girls in delight.

His voice keeps ringing in my ears: "Rash, you are so dear to me and even though we have never met, you have become my family. But I know I'll die before meeting you…" That ache will never leave me… I regret not making it in time to see him.

Au Revoir Brig VHM Prasad… My Uncle Madhav… Thank you for your love and affection and those beautiful emails that I will always treasure and keep re-reading… A constant source of joy and encouragement for me.

Rashmi Oberoi, an army officer`s daughter and army wife is passionate about writing and has authored two story books for children – My Friends At Sonnenshine and Cherie:The Cocker Spaniel. Her third and latest book – "Blues, Hues & All Things Wonderful" has short anecdotes. She continues to write articles and middles regularly.

HAVALDAR BHANUBHAKTA GURUNG, VC (1921-2008)

Much decorated hero of Gurkha regiment

Bhanubhakta Gurung was born in September 1921 at Phalpa, in western Nepal, and joined the 2nd Gurkhas in 1940. He saw service in the First Chindit operation in 1943 which destroyed Japanese assets in Myanmar. As Rifleman, Gurung and his Battalion had advanced to Central Myanmar. The road ahead was dominated by a hill feature known as 'Point 582'.

The 2nd Gurkhas 'A' Company, were in position at Point 582. That night the Japanese attacked, killing half the Gurkhas on it; leaving the remainder completely out of ammunition. The following day 'B' Company of 2nd Gurkhas, where Rifleman Bhanubhakta was serving, was ordered to retake the position 'regardless of cost'.

On 5th March, 1945, 'B' Company attacked the Japanese on Point 582. On approaching the objective one of the sections was forced to ground by very heavy Light Machine Gun fire, grenade and mortar fire. Due to the severity of this fire, the company was unable to move in any direction. While pinned, the section came under accurate fire from a sniper a tree some 75 yards to the South.

The sniper was inflicting casualties on the Gurkhas. Rifleman Gurung, was unable to fire at the sniper from a lying position, so he stood up fully exposed to the heavy fire and calmly killed the enemy sniper with his rifle. This saved his comrades from further casualties. The soldiers then advanced again, but when within 20 yards of the objective was again attacked by very heavy fire.

Without waiting for any orders, Bhanubhakta dashed forward alone and attacked the first enemy fox-hole. Throwing two grenades, he killed the two occupants and without any hesitation rushed on to the next enemy fox-hole and killed the Japanese in it with his bayonet. Two further enemy fox-holes were still firing at the Gurkhas. Again Bhanubhakta dashed forward alone and cleared these with bayonet and grenade. During his single-handed attacks on these four enemy fox-holes, Bhanubhakta was subjected to almost continuous and point-blank Light Machine Gun (LMG) fire from a bunker on the North tip of the objective.

Realising that the LMG would hold up not only his own company which was now behind him, but also another platoon which was advancing from the West, for the fifth time, Bhanubhakta went forward alone in the face of heavy enemy fire to knock out this position. He doubled forward and leapt on to the roof of the bunker. He had no hand grenades left, so he flung two No. 77 smoke grenades into the bunker slit.

Two Japanese rushed out of the bunker partially blinded by the smoke. Bhanubhakta promptly killed them both with his Khukri (Nepali knife). A lone Japanese inside the bunker was still firing the LMG and holding up the advance of the company. He crawled inside the bunker, due to lack of space could not use his gun or Khukri and killed this Japanese with a rock, capturing the gun. Most of the objective had now been cleared by the men behind. The Japanese were collecting for a counter-attack beneath the North end of the objective.

Bhanubhakta ordered the nearest Bren gunner and two riflemen to take up positions in the captured bunker. The enemy counter-attack followed soon after, but under his command the small party inside the bunker repelled it with heavy loss to the Japanese.

He was awarded the Victoria Cross for his unflinching courage. He was also awarded the Star of Nepal, 3rd Class Gurung retired in 1946 with the rank of Honorary Havaldar. His Victoria Cross is displayed at The Gurkha Museum at Winchester, Hampshire, UK. The Gurkha Training block in Infantry Training Centre Catterick, UK is named after him. Bhanubhakta passed away on 1 March 2008. He is survived by his three sons all of whom joined the Gurkha Regiment.

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

SUBHASH DANDEKAR (1938-2024)

Architect of Camlin's legacy

"My best learning from life is that it is necessary to acquire new knowledge/technique and skill every day from formal and informal sources available to you and should never be content with what you have achieved and aspire to the greater height in your life".

Subhash Dandekar was the creative mind behind the iconic stationery company Camlin, who introduced colour to the Indian masses.

Showing off expensive compass boxes with buttons or a steel geometry box complete with sketch pens and math boxes, was one of the treasures of childhood during the 1980s and 1990s. Many people have pleasant recollections of Camlin for their time in school. It makes one wonder how many lives Subhash Dandekar touched.

Subhash got an inheritance as well as a business. In 1931, D.P. and G.P. Dandekar, brothers, established the business as Dandekar & Co., beginning with Horse Brand tablets and powders for ink. They soon started manufacturing Camel stamp ink for fountain pens. In 1946, the business received recognition as a private enterprise.

After pursuing undergraduate degree in chemistry from Mumbai University, Subhash joined Camlin in 1958 as a technical director. He later enrolled for his post graduate studies in colour chemistry at Glasgow, UK. Following his father's retirement in 1960, he took over and opened up new opportunities for the business. He led the development of the company's offerings beyond stationery goods by introducing premium painting supplies, office supplies, professional artist tools and educational supplies like math instruments, pencils, erasers, markers and inks.

The company, renamed Camlin Ltd., in 1988 solidified its position as the market leader in stationery. In 1998, it changed its status to a public limited company. His dedication to innovation and excellence established benchmarks in the sector. He encouraged entrepreneurship, innovation, transformed the Indian stationery market, and advanced industrial growth. Subhash consistently highlighted the significance of upholding product excellence.

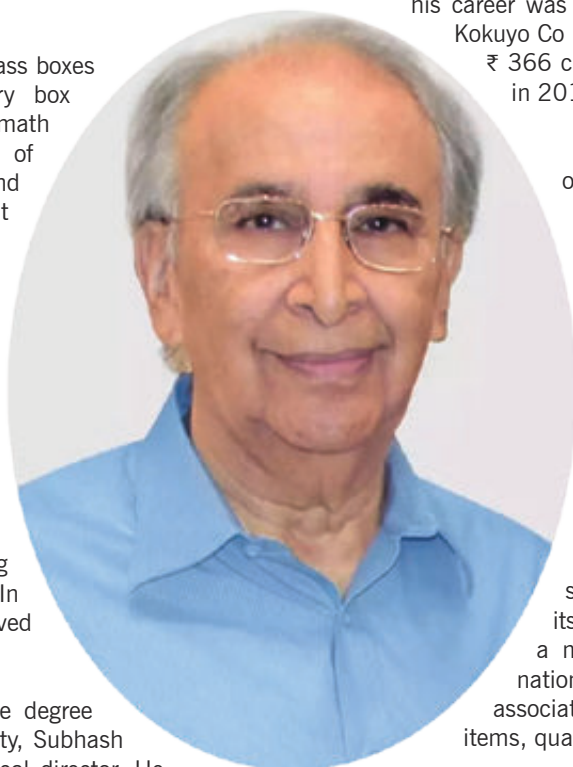Numerous job opportunities were also made possible by his vision and dedication, favourably affecting countless families. In addition to his business skills, he ensured that labour was treated with dignity and corporate procedures met ethics.

Until May 2002, he served as Camlin's Executive Chairman. During that time, he expanded the company's market and demonstrated a thorough grasp of customer needs. A pivotal decision that influenced the later stages of his career was his managing the sale of Camlin to Kokuyo Co Ltd, the Japanese stationery giant for ₹ 366 crores, for a 50.74% share in Camlin in 2011.

This move created fresh opportunities for the brand's development and global reach. It made it possible for Kokuyo items to be sold in India, and Camlin began to spread abroad. With over 2,000 products that meet a variety of customer needs, Camlin's position as a top stationery brand in India was cemented. He continued as Kokuyo Camlin's Chairman Emeritus.

Even with its aspirations to become a global brand, Camlin was still a household name in India, and its distinctive yellow geometry box was a mainstay in classrooms all over the nation. Camlin gained a solid reputation, associated with high-quality educational items, quality, dependability and creativity.

During his tenure (1990 to 1992) as President, Maharashtra Chamber of Commerce and Industries, he contributed to the growth of Maharashtra's industrial sector. He successfully headed the Chamber during the time when India transitioned to an open economy and worked to prepare traders and business owners throughout the State for the upcoming challenges.He was honoured with multiple awards, including the Game Changers of Maharashtra award and the Lifetime Achievement Award. Subhash Dandekar, was 86 when he died in Mumbai in July. He is survived by a son and a daughter. His impact on education and creativity will always be acknowledged.

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

VIDHUSHI MALINI RAJURKAR (1941-2023)

A rock solid pillar of Gwalior Gharana

"You cannot simply become a good singer by copying your guru. You need to make additions to what you are learning" -- *Vidhushi Malini Rajurkar*

Vidhushi Malini Rajurkar was a classical singer belonging to the Gwalior Gharana, believed to be among the oldest schools of Hindustani classical music.

Born in Ajmer, Rajasthan, where she spent her formative years, after graduating in mathematics, she taught it for three years at the same Savitri Girl's High School & College. It didn't seem to be going in tune with the promise Malini showed as a talented vocalist, encouraged by her avid music-loving parents and her reputation in schooldays.

A three-year scholarship in the arts helped her finish her Sangeet Nipun from the Ajmer Music College. She also became a scholar under the Rajasthan Sangeet Natak Akademi. That led Malini to learn under Vasantrao Rajurkar, her to-be future husband who had served as the Principal of Government Music College at Ramkote, and his even more illustrious uncle Govindrao Rajurkar, a noted disciple of Rajabhaiyya Poonchwale of Gwalior. Her father wanted her to focus on taking care of the family after her marriage. Her in-laws, however, insisted she accord priority to music. She found a perfect husband in Vasantrao, who went on to become her life-long guru. The couple migrated to Hyderabad.

Malini performed in major music festivals in India for nearly fifty years, including Gunidas Sammelan (Mumbai), Tansen Samaroh (Gwalior), Sawai Gandharva Bhimsen Festival (Pune), Shriram Shankar Lal Festival (Delhi) and at Surel Sabha concerts. She began giving performances since 1964 and toured the US, UK, Canada and the Middle East, apart from the domestic festivals.

A regular at Akashwani and Doordarshan, she won several awards, including the Sangeet Natak Akademi (2001). Malini the thinking musician, epitomised simplicity and depth and was noted for her command over her khayal renditions and tappa, tarana, thumri and bandish genres. Her tappa renditions rolled out exhilarating vocal patterns that reinforced her excellent sense of geometry which can be attributed to her exposure to mathematics. But Malini was majorly an exponent of the expansive khayal system, built on imagination.

She overcame the rigidities of the Gwalior gharana and successfully evolved her own style, firmly rooted in parampara (tradition). She asserted her pride in an art form that defied the kind of simplifications that it is often subjected to in a lot of articles and books. Her explorations of ragas Yaman, Bhimpalasi, Sohoni, Marwa, Hameer, Parmeshwari, Kirwani, Bilaskhani Todi, Salagvarali and Shankara, were well received. Malini was also into devotional songs, folk music, light music and played the harmonium well too.

Malini forged a special connection with the Pune audience at the annual Sawai Gandharva festival for nearly five decades. She held them spellbound by her renditions of Marathi Natya Sangeet, pandu-nrupati janak jaya, naravar krishnasamaan, ya bhavanatil geet purane. Aficionados of Hindustani music hailed Malini's felicity with fast phrases and her rendition of Bilaskhani Todi and Raga Kedar.

Malini was never superfluous on stage, and her deep, meditative singing, described her gayaki and her demeanour. She was humble and down-to-earth. She was a very loving person, straight forward, honest and generous vocalist. Tai, as she was called always treated accompanying artistes as her equals. Interestingly, Malini seldom gave music classes in the strict sense of the word, though she helped guide. She had stopped giving interviews as she thought it was an unnecessary distraction. In her last few years, she had deliberately moved away from the performing circle. But despite health issues, her music was fresh as always! Malini died in Hyderabad aged 82 of age-related ailments. She had even willed her body to the Osmania Medical College. She left behind two daughters and one granddaughter.

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

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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?

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Sadanand A. Shetty, Founder Editor
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