Gandhi @ 150: What do we see today?

A daylong seminar was organised at the National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS) Bengaluru in September to mark the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, revered as the Father of the Nation. The event brought together academics and experts in different fields, from around the country. The presentations and discussions provided some thought-provoking insights on Gandhi’s ideas and their relevance to contemporary society, says Sakuntala Narasimhan who attended the event.

Mahatma Gandhi was not just about non-violence and satyagraha (non-violent resistance). His ideas spanned several other areas of nationhood and citizens’ entitlements. Some of these seem particularly relevant to the developments that we see today, in contemporary India.

The concept of trusteeship, which was the focus of the presentation by Subramaniam Ramadorai, is one such. Gandhi believed that each one of us holds in trust, for the common good, whatever resources we gain access to and use. Appropriation for personal gain is the anti-thesis of such a concept of trusteeship, whether it is the use of natural resources like water and land and forests, or the allocation of priorities in development planning.

But what do we see today? Common land being fenced off and used for the benefit of commercial activities and corporate business. Tribals being ousted from land that they have been living on for generations, to make way for a mega dam (Narmada, for example) or a factory (Singur, Thoothukudi, for manufacture) in the name of ‘development’; river water that people had access to freely, being dammed and diverted for power generation or other commercial enterprise; water being bottled and sold for profit, while millions in poor localities and slums have to hunt for a pot of water for their basic needs.

Farmers are committing suicide after being trapped in the clutches of agri-business tactics that want to promote chemical pesticides for profit generation. The rich and the powerful call the shots for deciding on who

(Continued on page 3)
FROM THE EDITOR

Truth and non-violence – haven’t we failed Gandhi badly?

A hundred and fifty years after his birth and 71 years after his death, Mahatma Gandhi still remains alive in our collective conscience. We received quite a few articles for this issue about him even without asking. Some of the questions we frequently ask or are confronted with are: How relevant is Gandhi today? Does today’s generation get inspired by him and the ideals he stood for? Will Gandhi’s principles and ideals work in today’s world? How would Gandhi have reacted (to a particular situation) were he alive today? How would he have felt about the media’s functioning today, and about the use of social media, too? Answers to these and other such questions are always debatable. Let’s get a flavour from those who have written about him and his relevance in this issue.

Sakuntala Narasimhan says Gandhi believed that each one of us holds in trust, for the common good, whatever resources we gain access to and use. Appropriation for personal gain is the anti-thesis of such a concept of trusteeship, whether it is the use of natural resources like water and land and forests, or the allocation of priorities in development planning, she adds, pointing to how today common land is used for commercial activities and corporate business, how tribal people are being driven from where they have lived for years to make way for a mega projects, how farmers are committing suicide (numbers shock) faced with a host of problems and getting little government support, how the rich and the powerful call the shots and how the poor have no voice in decision-making. Everything that Gandhi wouldn’t have wanted and nothing of what he had preached. Resurrecting his ideas, rather than ritually garlanding his statues on his birthday, Narasimhan feels, would be a meaningful tribute to the Mahatma.

Bharat Dogra mentions how non-violence was a way of life for Gandhi, extending to all forms of life and covering not only action but also one’s innermost thoughts – a tall order for mere mortals to follow, but inspiring nevertheless. We live in a world today (India, that is) where religious and caste differences are highlighted and violence is easily used to show might is right. This was what Gandhi feared and was dead against; he set an example by his own behaviour and practices. In Gandhi Before India, Ramachandra Guha mentions how Gandhi’s vision of an inclusive, tolerant India was being threatened from both ends of the political spectrum.

N.S. Venkataraman is convinced that after celebrating Mahatma Gandhi’s birth anniversary, the world will go back to its normal routine, which means violence, hatred and animosity, all totally contrary to his advocacies and preaching. He points to a list of things that are missing today: honesty and probity in public and private lives, mindsets open to reform, non-violence, adherence to truth, courage of conviction, and simplicity in living and outlook. Venkataraman says corrupt and dishonest people, including politicians, businessmen and bureaucrats, some of who have even been jailed, vying with each other to garland the statue of Mahatma Gandhi during his birth and death anniversary and posing for a picture beside the statue is sheer mockery.

Referring to Gandhi’s thrust on commitment to truth, Narasimhan in another article wonders how the government could have declared Rural India ‘open defecation free’ when we all knew well that it just wasn’t the case. What was the harm in admitting that there were still miles to go before Rural India or the country as such was open defecation free? Also, as we again know, there are toilets that have been built but there is no running water, and there are toilets that aren’t used at all.

Now, what about the media? M.V. Rajeev Gowda says Gandhi strongly believed that journalism should be accessible and empowering, he was an ardent supporter of the regional media and understood that a vital role of the media was to speak truth to power and ensure accountability and transparency. However, today, Gowda says, Gandhi would find a media that had acquiesced and bowed down to the powers that be, a media that was afraid to ask tough questions. Gandhi, he points out, had emphasised that publication of false news was “a crime against humanity” and he would have been shocked by the surge of fake news and doctored videos today.

Sashi Nair
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(Continued from page 1)

gets what, not those on the lower rungs of the economic ladder, who
have no voice in decision-making. They count as vote banks only once
in five years when their ballots are needed by politicians; thereafter
they get nothing. Because they do not count.

This was not what Gandhi preached. He lived frugally, like
any poor citizen, and identified with the poorest of the poor. Resurrect-
ing his ideas, rather than ritually garlanding his statues on his birth-
day, would be a more meaningful tribute to the Mahatma. Following
a market-driven economic policy is a travesty of all that Gandhi held
sacred.

Professor Narendar Pani of NIAS referred to ‘morality’ which has
become another casualty of ‘modern’ policies. The media regularly
report on some scam or the other, corruption is rampant at all lev-
els of administration, and VIP’s indicted on corruption charges are
“leaders” who get elected on the basis of money power, or caste or
other devious means. One third of today’s members of Parliament
have some criminal charge or the other against them. Where is our
national obeisance to Gandhi?

The other concept that came in fort discussion was swaraj (free-
dom). As one paper put it, Gandhi believed that “real swaraj will
come not by the acquisition of power by a few but the acquisi-
tion of power by the majority (the masses) to resist authority when
it (authority) is abused”. Today, anyone questioning or criticising
the policies of those in power, get penalised in ways small and not
so small – ranging from threats and harassment to imprisonment,
whether media persons or individuals activists.

Former ambassador P.A.Nazareth who heads the Sarvodaya Trust,
focused in his presentation on ahimsa and conflict resolution. While we in India seem to have side-
lined the Mahatma’s philosophy based on non-violence, humanitar-
ian service and peace, as “irrelevant to modern times”.

Illustration: Arun Ramkumar
It is interesting to note that a French edition of a book on Gandhi was released recently at the UN library in Geneva. A Romanian edition was likewise launched at the National library of Romania, while Polish and Burmese (Myanmarese) editions were released at Warsaw and Yangon. In the past 25 years, the Sarvodaya Trust (http://sarvodayatrust.org) has gone from strength to strength, with the book in Gandhi’s outstanding leadership going into 12 Indian and 23 foreign languages.

Former US President Obama has commended the publication. World leaders like Martin Luther King Jr of USA and South Africa’s Nelson Mandela were inspired by Gandhian ideas. While in Gandhi’s own native Gujarat, we saw horrendous violence after the Godhra train incident, and Delhi saw similar mob violence in the wake of Indira Gandhi’s death.

Gandhi said, “It’s health that is real wealth, and not pieces of silver or gold.” Seven decades after Independence, we, the world’s largest ‘democracy’, still have millions wallowing below the poverty line, and millions of children suffering from malnutrition. We, the people, need to ponder over this immorality if we mean to honour the Father of the Nation who led us out of colonial rule without using guns and bombs. The audience came out of the seminar deeply conscious of the points that were raised by the participants.

(The writer, based in Bengaluru, is a recipient of the Media Foundation’s Chameli Devi Award for Outstanding Woman Journalist 1983. Her fortnightly columns on gender issues and consumer rights ran in the Deccan Herald for 27 years. She had earlier worked for The Times of India Group in Mumbai.)

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**The Hindu joins BBC, others in fight against fake news, disinformation**

*The Hindu* is partnering with the BBC and other leading global news and technology organisations in a new industry collaboration to tackle disinformation. The collaboration was announced by the BBC and the partners recently. Under the collaboration, news and technology majors will work together to protect their audiences and users from disinformation, particularly around crucial events such as elections.

Earlier this year, the BBC convened a Trusted News Summit, bringing together senior figures from major global technology firms and publishing. It was precipitated by events such as the Indian elections, which highlighted the dangers of disinformation and underlined the importance of working together.

The summit agreed to work collectively on various initiatives, including creating systems where organisations can warn each other quickly when they discover disinformation that threatens human life or disrupts elections. The emphasis of the ‘early warning system’ will be on moving quickly and collectively to undermine disinformation before it can take hold.

The summit also agreed to work towards a joint online media education campaign, and also to co-operate on election-related information such as explaining how and where to vote.

“Disinformation and so-called fake news is a threat to us all. At its worst, it can present a serious threat to democracy and even to people’s lives. This summit has shown a determination to take collective action to fight this problem and we have agreed some crucial steps towards this,” said Tony Hall, director-general of the BBC and president, European Broadcasting Union (EBU).

The BBC’s partners who attended the summit were the EBU, Facebook, Financial Times, First Draft, Google, The Hindu, and the Wall Street Journal. Other partners were AFP, CBC/Radio-Canada, Microsoft, Reuters, the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, and Twitter.

(Courtesy: The Hindu)
Gandhi’s work and writings covered a wide range of topics, but the focus in this article is on his emphasis on non-violence while resolving conflicts or correcting injustice. To him, non-violence was a way of life, encompassing both personal relationships and the quest for national goals. It extended to all forms of life and covered not only action but also one’s innermost thoughts.

Referring to the role of non-violence in his own life, Gandhi wrote “I have been practising with scientific precision non-violence and its possibilities for an unbroken period of over fifty years. I have applied it in every walk of life, domestic, institutional, economic and political. I know of no single case in which it has failed. Where it has seemed sometimes to have failed, I have ascribed it to my imperfections (Harijan).

Gandhi had big hopes of harnessing the tremendous force of non-violence. “...more powerful than all the armaments, non-violence is a unique force that has come into the world”, he wrote in Harijan. Elsewhere, he said: “We are constantly being astonished these days at the amazing discoveries in the field of violence. But I maintain that far more undreamt of and seemingly impossible discoveries will be made in the field of non-violence (Harijan).

The path of non-violence is noble, but it is not easy. As Gandhi says (Harijan): “If the method of violence takes plenty of training, the method of non-violence takes even more training and that training is much more difficult than the training for violence.”

“The very first step in non-violence is that we cultivate in our daily life, as between ourselves, truthfulness, humility, tolerance, loving kindness. Honesty, they say in English, is the best policy. But in terms of non-violence, it is not mere policy. Policies may and do change. Non-violence is an unchangeable creed. It has to be pursued in face of violence raging around you (Harijan).

“Non-violence, to be a potent force, must begin with the mind. (Young India).” A man of action, Gandhi clearly said, “Non-violence cannot be preached. It has to be practiced.”

Gandhiji mobilised hundreds of thousands of people for non-violent struggle for the cause of India’s freedom. At the peak of some of the struggles, he was willing to withdraw the movement when he found that it was not being true to the principles of non-violence. Giving directions for such struggles (Young India) he wrote, “It follows, therefore, that a civil resister, whilst he will strain every nerve to compass the end of the existing rule, will do no intentional injury in thought, word or deed to the person of a single Englishman... A civil resister will not salute the Union Jack, nor will he insult it or officials, English or Indian.”

Gandhi captured the spirit of non-violent struggle in the following words: “I seek entirely to blunt the edge of the tyrant’s sword, not by putting up against it a sharper edged weapon, but by disappointing his expectation that I would be offering physical resistance. The resistance of the soul that I should offer instead would elude him. It would at first dazzle him and at last compel recognition from him, which recognition would not humiliate him but would uplift him.”

For Gandhi, religion was clearly a place for peace and there was absolutely no room in his thinking for religious differences turning violent. He wrote, “I believe in the fundamental truth of all great religions of the world. I believe that they were necessary for the people to whom these religions were revealed. And I believe that they were necessary for the people to whom these religions were necessary. And I believe that, if only we could all of us read the scriptures of different faiths from the standpoint of the followers of those faiths, we should find that they were at bottom all one and were all helpful to one another (Harijan).

Gandhi saw clearly that the aggressiveness of the great powers is rooted in greed. He said world peace “is clearly impossible
without the great powers of the earth renouncing their imperialistic designs. This again seems impossible without these great nations ceasing to believe in soul-destroying competition and to desire to multiply wants and therefore increase their material possessions (Harijan).

The ideal he placed before his own countrymen was: “We will exploit none just as we will allow none to exploit us (Young India). In fact, Gandhi was an internationalist much ahead of his times. He wrote, “The better mind of the world desires today not absolutely independent states warring one against another, but a federation of friendly inter-dependent states (Young India).”

Speaking optimistically of his vision of a future world, he wrote, “The world of tomorrow will be, must be, a society based on non-violence. That is the first law: out of it all other blessings will flow.”

“... An individual can adopt the way of life of the future – the non-violent way – without having to wait for others to do so. And if an individual can do it, cannot whole groups of individuals? Whole nations? Men often hesitate to make a beginning, because they feel that the objective cannot be achieved in its entirety. This attitude of mind is precisely our greatest obstacle to progress – an obstacle that each man, if he only wills it, can clear away.

“...Equal distribution – the second great law of tomorrow’s world as I see it – grows out of non-violence. It implies not that the world’s goods shall be arbitrarily divided up, but that each man shall have the wherewithal to supply his natural needs, no more (The Mind of Mahatma Gandhi).”

Note: Harijan and Young India are journals with which Gandhi was closely associated.

(The writer is a senior freelance journalist and author who has been associated with several social movements and initiatives. He lives in Delhi.)

Mathrubhumi Book of the Year Award instituted

*Mathrubhumi* has enriched Malayalam language and literature since its inception in 1923. For close to a century, *Mathrubhumi* has been a platform for almost all of the leading writers from Kerala and has published some of the best in Indian literature.

The Mathrubhumi International Festival of Letters (www.mbifl.com) is gearing up for its third edition from Jan 30 to Feb 2, 2020. Encouraged by its success and acceptance both by the general public and the literary circles in India and abroad, Mathrubhumi considers it is fitting to institute an annual Mathrubhumi Book of the Year Award, which will carry a cash prize of Rs 5 lakhs and a memento.

“The Mathrubhumi Book of the Year Award is a commitment from Mathrubhumi to honour the best in Indian literature every year. We are inspired to honour and celebrate brilliant works and encourage the publishers to look for the best writing by Indian authors,” says M.V. Shreyams Kumar, joint managing director, Mathrubhumi, and a patron of MBIFIL.

The theme this time is: Shrinking Spaces; Transcending Letters. The award is open to Indian writers who are published in India. Works in regional languages should be translated to English to be eligible for the award.

MBIFL is celebration of Kerala culture, literature and words. It will include conversations and reading sessions, a cartoon/illustration exhibition, story-telling, impromptu performances and an exploration of traditional Malabar cuisine. Each day of the festival will culminate in cultural evenings.

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After celebrating Mahatma Gandhi’s birth anniversary, the world will go back to its normal routine, which means violence, hatred and animosity, all totally contrary to Mahatma Gandhi’s advocacies and preachings.

Mahatma Gandhi called for honesty and probity in the public and private lives of individuals. He believed that without reforming the mindset of individuals, the world cannot become a better and more harmonious place. He called for non-violence, adherence to truth, courage of conviction, simplicity in living and outlook, and set an example by his own behaviour and practices.

Mahatma Gandhi had the courage of conviction to go to England.
to attend the Round Table Conference during India’s freedom struggle, dressed in a simple dhoti as the poor men did in India then. When reporters in England asked him how he could meet the king in such attire, he said, with the contempt for the rich and with a sense of humour, that “king has enough clothes for both of us”. Not many of those who claim that they are followers of Mahatma Gandhi’s teachings follow his simple life style anymore or show solidarity with the deprived people of the world.

India called Gandhiji the ‘Father of the Nation’ and several world leaders saw him as the torchbearer of truth and peace. However, is the world really observing Mahatma Gandhi’s guidance and philosophy? Certainly not.

We often see politicians, businessmen and bureaucrats, who are known to be corrupt and dishonest, some of them facing serious charges of nepotism (even in the judiciary) and have gone to jail for corrupt dealings and misdeeds, vying with each other to garland the statue of Mahatma Gandhi during his birth and death anniversary and posing for a picture beside Gandhiji’s statue. This is mockery. Most of these people do not measure up to the standards set by Mahatma Gandhi.

Today, there are very very few people who live up to such high standards. In any case, they remain unknown and the media hardly talks about them. To live upto the cherished values of Mahatma Gandhi, the essential requirement are adherence to scruples and not having greed for money and power. How many people can be seen with such qualities these days?

Several decades ago, Albert Einstein paid glowing tributes to Mahatma Gandhi and said that future generations would not believe that such a man of great and noble spirit ever existed and walked on the earth. Time has proved that Einstein was indeed right.

Gandhiji’s birth anniversary will be celebrated year after year. Children will read and be told about the Mahatma Gandhi’s life and principles, much like folk stories, much like how incidents in mythology are narrated. There will be more Gandhi forums, and more institutions and roads bearing his name. But his principles of non-violence, probity and truth will be largely forgotten or ignored. The few alive today, who have participated in various struggles launched by Mahatma Gandhi, feel deeply disappointed.

(Reverse, Nandini Voice for the Deprived, Chennai.)

The Hindu’s Coimbatore edition turns 50

The Hindu’s Coimbatore edition has reached a milestone by completing 50 years in journalism. From having its copies air lifted from Chennai to Coimbatore to facsimile printing to its current state-of-the-art printing, the edition ranks No. 1 in the city of Coimbatore.

“For The Hindu, the year 1969, 50 years ago, was a special one. The daily, in its 91st year, was until then printed from its home base in Madras and delivered across the country, transported by road, railway and aircraft (special flights first, then its own planes starting 1963). For the first time, on July 27, 1969, page images were transmitted by means of a facsimile transmission system across some 500 kilometres and printed in Coimbatore to effect early morning deliveries over wide swathes of the States of Madras and Kerala. For a newspaper that had already heralded many a technological advance over the decades, this helped it meet its commitment to fulfil the needs of its growing readership for quicker access to the paper.

“It was for the first time that an Indian newspaper had used such an advanced electronic page transmission process for printing. This also marked an inflection point that saw a significant rise in the circulation and reach of The Hindu. More facsimile editions were launched in subsequent years: 1970 in Bangalore, 1976 in Hyderabad, 1978 in Madurai, and so on. Until the 1990s, when The Hindu switched to digital technology to widen its footprint, the facsimile transmission system remained its mainstay. Today, The Hindu is printed in as many as 21 centres. But Coimbatore remains something special,” says Suresh Nambath, editor, The Hindu.
Stepping out of my gate on the morning of October 2, I put my foot on – you guessed it – a pile of poo. This is an upmarket area, not a slum. Many residents own dogs, some fancy breeds among them (the dogs, I mean) and they are taken out for a stroll early in the mornings. And the animals ease themselves along the pavement, while the owner, holding the leash, looks the other way to pretend he/she has nothing to do with the defecation, before pushing off, dragging the pet along. Every few feet, there is a pile of you-know-what.

As I walk around, I recalled strolling along a street in Paris, and noticing a pet owner scooping up his dog’s poo with a small shovel he carried, and putting it into an envelope, to be disposed off, later, at home.

Turning the corner a little ahead, I walk along the pavement in front of the ISRO headquarters, with an impressive vista of large trees along the wall, and again, at the base of every single tree is a pile of shit, left by pets. Never mind, animals cannot read or know about ODF – but they stink and are nauseating; the residents tell me that though the newly built toilets exist, no one uses them because there is no water connection to keep them clean. They are just a showpiece for the books.

One toilet lacked even a door, so the women asked me, “How do you expect us to use it? It is better to ease oneself in the privacy of the fields.” There is no water connection because no pipes have been laid from the highway three kilometres away.

At one toilet on the outskirts of a metropolis, there was a toilet in a village but it was not usable; the village head said to me that the septic tank had got choked within two months, and there was no way of getting it repaired. There was no money and, in any case, no one with the expertise to undertake the work was available in the vicinity.

This, then, is the reality, not just in villages but also in urban slums – water is always scarce, and having a toilet without water is meaningless. Statistics about ODF do not reveal the true picture.

It is not just ODF that we declare “done”, without checking for veracity. Many of our national achievements are only on paper, while the reality is different. “Untouchability is abolished”, says our Constitution adopted seven decades ago. The reality is that to this day, caste prejudices and shunning of ‘untouchables’ makes news regularly.

Last month, even a politician was barred from entering a village in his constituency in Karnataka because he was from a lower caste. “Abolished”? Hardly. That will happen not through enactments, but through changes in mindsets. Which could take decades.

It was not as if the government was not aware that we are nowhere near declaring the country ODF. But that is how today’s politics works – words and declarations have become substitutes for action on the ground. And we the people, do not bother to challenge this lack of accountability.

We “abolished” the nasty custom of dowry, through the Dowry Prohibition Act of 1961, nearly six decades ago. Grooms’ families around the country merrily continue to demand and extract dowries from the father of the bride (often wiping out his entire life savings).
Which is why we continue to see female foeticide and a skewed sex ratio – daughters are unwelcome because they wipe out the family’s finances at the time of marriage, so they are killed at birth, or even as foetuses (although we also have a law banning sex determination tests on unborn progeny).

Again, not law, but social change is needed to declare our country “dowry free”. Among those indicted on charges of demanding dowries are high-ranking police officials, politicians and industrialists.

Gandhi would have been horrified, not so much by open defecation, but by the government stating that it no longer happens, in both rural and urban places. There was a report in September, of a child being killed for defecating in the open, in Madhya Pradesh. How does one blame the child, when various governments over deacessed have defaulted miserably in providing access to even basic needs to all its citizens?

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**Mathrubhumi reports growth**

According to IRS April to July second quarter report, Mathrubhumi print publication achieved 27000 growth in readership with a total readership of 1.32 crore. Mathrubhumi continues to maintain its 11th position in Total Readership of dailies in India and is amongst the top 10 dailies as per Average Issue Readership (AIR).

(Courtesy: exchange4media.com)
REMEMBERING MAHATMA GANDHI

What would he have said about Indian media today?

As we celebrate Mahatma Gandhi’s 150th birth anniversary, a thought experiment that could yield provocative insights would be to explore what Gandhi would say about different aspects of modern India. Since Gandhi was a journalist before he became a political revolutionary, M. V. Rajeev Gowda conjectures how he would have responded to the state of the Indian media today.

Gandhi started as a journalist with the Vegetarian in England, before launching a weekly newspaper called Indian Opinion in South Africa. When he returned to India, he founded publications like Navajivan, Young India and Harijan that became communication platforms for the Freedom Movement.

Writing about the satyagraha (non-violent resistance) in South Africa, Gandhi highlighted the critical role of the media. He wrote: “I believe that a struggle which chiefly relies upon internal strength can be carried on without a newspaper, but it is also my experience that we could not perhaps have educated the local Indian community, nor kept Indians all over the world in touch with the course of events in South Africa in any other way, with the same ease and success as through Indian Opinion, which therefore was certainly a most useful and potent weapon in our struggle.”

Believing strongly that journalism should be accessible and empowering, Gandhi was an ardent supporter of the regional media. He published Indian Opinion in four languages: English, Gujarati, Hindi, and Tamil. He also inspired other journalists to write in regional languages. On this front, he would have been happy to see that the regional media is flourishing in India today.

Gandhi argued that “one of the objects of a newspaper is... to fearlessly expose popular defects”. Thus, a vital role of the media is to speak truth to power and ensure accountability and transparency. However, today, he would find a media that has mostly acquiesced in a prime minister taking no questions at press conferences and generally eats out of his hand. He would have been appalled, for instance, by how the mainstream media avoided asking hard questions on the economy during the 2019 general election. When the Modi government rejected the Periodic Labour Force Survey that showed record levels of unemployment, it was given a free pass. After the election, when it acknowledged that the data was indeed valid, there was no outrage from the media on such an important issue. So, is the Indian media cowed down by epithets such as ‘presseitute’ and ‘anti-national’? Or is concentrated ownership of Indian media houses by businesses that are afraid of attracting the government’s wrath affecting the editorial line?

The Modi Government is already denying advertisements to some media houses. While Gandhi had no problems with big business (and garnered substantial support from them), he did decry a dependence on advertising. The Press Freedom Index, released by Reporters Without Borders in August 2019, ranked India 140 out of 180 countries. The report highlighted how criminal prosecution, especially sedition, is rampant used to gag journalists. It also noted that “at least six Indian journalists were killed in connection with their work in 2018”. The recent death anniversary of Gauri Lankesh is a chilling reminder of the cost of standing up for truth in India. A strong critic of communal politics, who refused to sell ad space in her newspaper to protect its integrity, and wrote mostly in Kannada, Gauri was a journalist Gandhi would have been proud of.

Gandhi was ready to face sedition charges for his journalism. In 1922, he pleaded guilty in order to expose the undemocratic nature of the sedition law, which he termed a “prince among the political sections... designed to suppress the liberty of the citizen”. He would be astounded to see this British-era law being used against journalists and activists today too.

In the era of fake news
Gandhi emphasised that publication of “false news is a crime against humanity... Young India will be stale when truth becomes stale”. He would have been shocked that doctored videos became the basis for demonising student leaders of Jawaharlal Nehru University. The infamous ‘tukde, tukde gang’ label was propagated by TV anchors, who spun malicious and fictitious tales to whip up public frenzy.

Further, Gandhi would have been disgusted by prime-time TV debates, which are sensationalist, jingoist, partisan, exploitative of viewers, and prone to
warmongering. Given that journalists can choose what information to share and what aspects to emphasise or downplay, they are in a privileged position to influence thinking, behaviour and attitudes.

Gandhi would be saddened by the blatant misuse of this privilege.

One development that would have thrilled Gandhi is the rise of social media platforms. He would see these as empowering technologies that allow citizens to share their ideas and mobilise politically. He would have welcomed how the Internet has allowed independent, non-mainstream journalistic voices to fight on valiantly.

However, the prevalence of fake news on social media would have deeply upset him. Gandhi would find it unbelievable that WhatsApp messages can trigger mobs to lynch people. He would have been relieved that fact-checking sites have emerged to debunk fake news.

Given Gandhi’s foray into Noakhali in 1947, he would have tried his best to communicate with our fellow citizens of Jammu and Kashmir and to lift the lid on what is actually happening there.

Gandhi said, “Freedom of the press is a precious privilege that no country can forgo.” At another time he stated: “It is my certain conviction that no man loses his freedom except through his own weakness.”

One can only hope that the media heeds his words and reclaims the strength and independence befitting the fourth pillar of our democracy.

(Courtesy: The Hindu. The writer is a Congress member of the Rajya Sabha representing Karnataka. Views are personal.)

Samudra Bhattacharya is CEO - Print, HT Media

HT Media has named Samudra Bhattacharya as the chief executive officer for Print. Bhattacharya will report to HT Media MD & CEO Praveen Someshwar.

As the CEO for the print business, Bhattacharya will be responsible for the print business with coordination across all functions in the print business. He will lead transformation across the business and will work on product/geography innovation, while helping building new age capability.

The print marketing team will continue to report to Rajan Bhalla, Group CMO for HT Media, who will have a dotted line reporting relationship with Bhattacharya for all print related activities. Bhalla will continue reporting to Someshwar for marketing initiatives on the rest of the business. The events organization will also continue to report to Bhalla.

HT is creating a business vertical for Mint, which will be headed by Anuradha Sehgal, who will report to Bhattacharya, while also having a dotted line reporting to Bhalla for all marketing initiatives on Mint.

(Courtesy: Exchange4media.com)
Kunwar Prasun was like an earthen lamp which lights the path of others, and this light will continue to illuminate the path of activists long after his death. — Sundarlal Bahuguna

Fearless activist, barefoot journalist, a man of truth

Kunwar Prasun could perhaps be remembered as a leading activist of the Chipko (save the trees) Movement because of his prominent role in it. But he was much more than an environmental activist, he was also a capable writer and journalist, says Bharat Dogra.

If one looks at Kunwar Prasun only as an activist, then it started with participation in an anti-liquor movement when he was still at school. He was inspired by a teacher, Dhum Singh Negi, and he succeeded in driving out a liquor seller from his village. Negi later became his co-activist in Chipko and other movements.

Prasun went on to play a leading role in movements to prevent destructive mining practices and to oppose construction of large dams. Though not a Dalit himself, he contributed richly to Dalit activism. At a very young age he became a strong proponent of ‘equal education for all’ and organised a foot march on this theme. He was a member of the Chatra Yuva Sangharsh Vahini, a student-youth organisation, and became its coordinator for Uttar Pradesh (before Uttarakhand was carved out).

Prasun was also a consistent campaigner against religious divide, communalism and related issues. A champion of national integration, his thinking went beyond this and he was truly a citizen of the world. His last days were devoted to conserving traditional seeds and popularising organic farming. He emerged as a strong advocate of agro-ecology and farming practices which are in harmony with environment protection.

The guiding principles of the three major movements of our time – the quest for peace, justice and environmental protection – were integrated in Prasun’s personality. He was also a very capable writer and journalist. He was one of the best examples of what may be called barefoot journalism. With minimal support of any kind, he travelled to some of the remotest villages and reported from places where perhaps no journalist had gone before. His style may best be described as ‘telling the truth as it is’.

* * * * *

I first met Prasun when, as a freelance journalist, I went to his village to cover the Chipko Movement. I cannot recall even a minor conflict, or the remotest ill feeling for any reason. As his co-writer on many occasions, I worried endlessly about the impact of writing too openly about some sensitive issues (for example, the practice of prostitution in some areas). Prasun never questioned my apprehensions, but continued to write as he had always done.

Unlike many other Gandhian writers, Prasun delighted in taking digs at people he considered guilty of malpractice. Knowing his precarious financial position and the needs of his family, I worried about powerful persons who were at the receiving end of his sharp pen taking legal (or other) action against him. My fears were not unfounded and Prasun got several legal notices. But just as my pleading did not change his writing style, the legal notices did not affect it either.

After Prasun’s untimely death in 2006, when I sat down with my wife, Madhu, to compile a selection of his writings, we were amazed at the depth and diversity of his writings. If these had been in English, they would have surely attracted international attention. Prasun was very involved in whatever he wrote about, and he never tried to hide his likes and dislikes. For some time, he reported for one of the largest Hindi newspapers published from Delhi, but then resigned in order to freelance.

Prasun also wrote in Garhwali and used folk-forms (like Mandaan) brilliantly. His Garhwali talks and stories were broadcast regularly from Najibabad Radio Station. While his reporting and comments on local issues were widely published, I regret deeply that his views on national and international issues, particularly on evolving alternatives to the existing system, did not get adequate attention.
Prasun was a thinker in the Gandhian tradition, deeply committed to peace and non-violence, but he often went beyond what is generally voiced by Gandhiji’s followers, because of his more intense interactions with the society he wanted to change and also because of his pronounced tendency to speak out openly.

Prasun had the courage of his convictions and was never afraid of being alienated. In fact, on quite a few occasions I’ve seen him in a position of ‘Prasun vs all the others’. At a time when it was becoming almost a fashion to negate some basic ideas of Gandhiji, he spread Gandhiji’s ideas with a passion rarely seen among followers now.

* * * * *

Though born into a high-caste farmer family of Tehri Garhwal District (in present day Uttrakhand), he deliberately used a name which did not indicate his caste identity, as this was the practice of some activists who were attracted to the movement led by veteran Gandhian Jayaprabhash Narain. While a college student, Prasun and his classmate were once asked to get a certificate attested by an ‘eminent’ person. Prasun promptly went to a nearby cobbler (a Dalit) and got his signature on the document. When the teacher berated him, Prasun replied calmly that in his opinion the cobbler was an ‘eminent’ person.

While in college, Prasun came under the influence of Garwhal-based Gandhian Sunderlal Bahuguna. It evolved into an association that was almost life-long. Prasun also had a close relationship with Sunderlalji’s wife, Vimla Bahuguna, who became a mother figure for several young activists like him. During the period, he also met Vijay Jardhari, who became a co-activist in several movements.

Those were the days when an intensive anti-alcoholism movement was being carried out. Prasun was an active participant, smashing liquor bottles at one place, confronting a liquor contractor at another.

After graduating, Prasun worked as a school teacher for a short time. He became involved in JP’s campaign for social and political change, and was lucky to escape when the government imposed Emergency and cracked down on the movement.

From 1977 onwards, Prasun was intensely involved in the Chipko Movement in Henvalghati Region of Tehri Garhwal District. He was not just a fearless activist, staying in forests on cold desolate nights to protect trees, he was also determined and persuasive and had great skills in communicating with villagers. When trees were being auctioned by the government, he went to villages to mobilise people against tree-felling.

Such were the skills of the young activist that in a few days Prasun was able to prepare villagers, particularly women, to oppose the felling of trees even though earlier the contractor had used his money and connections with the government to get influential villagers on his side. During a Chipko agitation, he met Ranjana, and later married her. Ranjana’s tremendous support enabled Prasun to contribute to several more movements.

Prasun was involved in the anti-Tehri Dam movement for a while, and was also in the thick of the movements against destructive mining practices in Nahin Kala and Henvalghati. A special skill that fellow activists remember with admiration was his ability to coin very effective slogans. Some of these became world-famous.

In the last phase of his life Prasun was deeply involved in conservation of traditional seeds and in the spread of organic farming practices. Simultaneously, he opposed the so-called ‘green revolution’ farming with its emphasis on chemical fertilisers and pesticides, as well as corporate agriculture. He was firmly opposed to GM crops and patenting of seeds or life-forms. He opposed all efforts to replace traditional cropping patterns and rotations with new commercial crops.

Together with other leading activists like Vijay Jardhari of Beej Bachao Andolan (Save the Seeds Movement), he went (as a part of a band of marches or in smaller groups), to remote villages to gather information about traditional crop varieties and collect seeds. We were able to publish his notes documenting over 328 traditional varieties of paddy grown in Uttrakhand only after his death. In fact, I had initiated this publication effort in the last days of his life, but due to his sudden death, the publication was delayed.

Also, in his twilight years, he and his friends revived the spirit of the Chipko Movement. As trees were felled to make room for high tension wires, they hugged the trees to save them. Finally, a committee of the Supreme Court visited the area and thousands of trees were once again saved.

Prasun’s activism thus continued till his very last days. In fact, his entire life can be seen as a series of sincere and fearless engagements with various social and environmental movements. His integrity and honesty were always total. Despite his tremendous achievements, he was extremely modest. He never yearned for fame. He was content with the most meagre personal possessions.

Occasionally, when handing over payment for an article we had jointly written, I would see his face light up and he would tell me that it would enable him to buy a tin of oil or some other daily necessity for his family on his way back to his village.

In the early hours of July 15 in 2006, Kunwar Prasun passed away at his family home in the village of Rampur (Tehri Garhwal District) in
Uttarakhand. He was only 56. He left behind his wife, his two sons, Anurag and Anupam, and a daughter, Jigyasa.

For me and for many others who were fortunate to know him closely, Prasun will always remain a source of inspiration. Over the 29 years of our association, my family and his had become very close, too. We will always remember Prasunji as a great friend and as a constant source of inspiration.

If his life had to be summed up in a sentence, I would say, he was a man of truth.

Note: Any reader wishing to support the publication of Kunwar Prasun’s writings can contact his family at their village: Ranjana Bhandari, Village and P.O. Jajal, District Tehri Garhwal, Uttarakhand.

Coluthur Gopalan, father of nutrition science in India, is no more

Coluthur Gopalan, widely considered as the father of nutrition research in India, is no more. Gopalan, decorated with top civilian honours and several professional awards, would have turned 101 on November 28 this year. He passed away in Chennai recently.

Gopalan was responsible for initiating nutrition research in independent India, leading to a number of interventions such as the Integrated Child Development Services, midday meal scheme for school children, goitre prevention programme. He was the director of the Hyderabad-based National Institute of Nutrition (NIN) from 1960 to 1974 and director general of the Indian Council of Medical Research from 1974 to 1979. He later founded the National Nutrition Foundation and served as its Chairman till the end.

Starting his professional career in nutrition research at the Nutrition Research Laboratory (NRL) during the British period, Gopalan continued his journey over the next six decades. In the late 1950s, NRL moved to Hyderabad and became NIN, Gopalan took over as director and expanded research to several key areas. Since nutrition is a multi-disciplinary subject, he set up divisions for clinical research, biochemistry, bio-physics, endocrinology, analytical chemistry, food toxicology and the field units.

At NIN, he laid the foundation for research to tackle problems such as protein energy malnutrition, Vitamin A deficiency, Phrynoderma, Lathyris, fluorosis and Pellagra. The National Nutrition Monitoring Bureau (NNMB) was also a result of his labour.

Under his leadership, ICMR expanded research into neglected communicable diseases and modernised the working of the council. Three new institutes – Malaria Research Institute, Vector Control Research Institute and Leprosy Research Institute – were established to develop and implement preventive and management strategies for these diseases.

Dr Gopalan also got NIN to work on Indian foods, resulting in publication called Nutritive Value of Indian Foods, which was based on analyses of over 500 Indian foods. This work was used for calculating dietary in-take of all nutrients. This made India the first developing country to have its own ‘recommended dietary allowances.’

“NIN today bears testimony to his genius as an architect and father of nutrition sciences in India. Research under his leadership formed the basis of major national nutrition programmes initiated in the 1970s - ICDS, Massive Dose Vitamin-A and iron supplementation,” commented R. Hemalatha, director, NIN.

“Dr Gopalan was visionary institution builder. He viewed medical and nutrition science from a holistic perspective and always wanted to address them taking a multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral approach. His contributions to medical science in general and nutrition science in particular are immense. He, in fact, brought nutrition to centre stage and was instrumental in putting it as an important driver in developmental plans and policies of the country,” said Dr Balram Bhargava, director general of ICMR.

Dinesh C Sharma
(Courtesy: India Science Wire)
The kinds of pressures cited above sometimes reflect on news coverage methods and output, raising questions about responsible journalistic practice. The results are telling on news consumption worldwide. For instance, a 2019 Columbia Journalism Review study found that the American public has the least trust in the media among all of Washington’s institutions – even less than the trust placed in the Congress.

India, however, bucks the global trend. According to a 2018 Pew Research Centre study, 80 per cent of Indian respondents said their media houses gave them accurate news. The Pew survey also found that India was the only country among those surveyed where respondents said that it is sometimes “acceptable for a news organisation to favour one political party.”

The Media Conclave on Responsible Journalism, organised by the Department of Journalism, MOP Vaishnav College for Women, Chennai, on September 6 and 7, brought together practitioners, educators and policymakers to deliberate on some tough questions surrounding responsible journalism. The conclave, featured prominent journalists of national repute, as well as policymakers and academicians.

The event was inaugurated by Justice C.K. Prasad, Press Council Chairman. In his address, he made a case for legislating the financial and social security for journalists. Justice Prasad also touched upon the growing peril of fake news. “While the Press Council is a champion of the freedom of expression, the constitutional provision guaranteeing this freedom also mentions reasonable restrictions, he reminded the audience, primarily comprising journalism students. The news media must exercise responsibility in its reporting,” he stressed.

Shekhar Gupta, chairman and editor-in-chief of the digital news platform, The Print, addressing the gathering, said today’s journalists often come under pressure to take sides, not for profit, but for fear of being judged. The job of a journalist is not made easier by the anti-media attitude adopted by several “muscular” world leaders heading polarising governments, he noted. “One thing they all agree on most unanimously and passionately is that free media is a pestilence, and the world’s biggest problem,” Gupta said, citing US President Donald Trump’s criticism of journalists and media houses as an example.

Gupta was critical of the Press Council of India’s support of the government’s restrictions on the press with respect to the recent developments in Kashmir. He concluded his talk by stressing the importance of sticking to facts. “News is not what we want it to be. It is often the opposite, but we can’t change it,” he said.

Sandhya Ravishankar, award-winning investigative journalist and editor, The Lede, underlined the importance of research, a non-partisan approach and the need to protect news sources, in investigative journalism.

A panel discussion on emergency reporting saw D. Krishnan, former photo editor, The Hindu, and faculty, Asian College of Journalism, Chennai; Maya Sharma, executive
A panel discussion on emergency reporting saw (l-r) D. Krishnan, former photo editor, The Hindu, and faculty, Asian College of Journalism, Chennai; R.K. Radhakrishnan, associate editor, Frontline; and C.S. Koteeswaran, assistant editor, Politics, DTNext; and Maya Sharma, executive editor (South), NDTV, Bengaluru exchanging views.

Editor (South), NDTV, Bengaluru; R.K. Radhakrishnan, associate editor, Frontline; and C.S. Koteeswaran, assistant editor, Politics, DTNext, exchanging views. When lives are at stake, editors, news organisations and political affiliations do not matter. One must stay true to facts – was the consensus that emerged.

In a country with neither a regulatory council for the news media, nor a complaints council, self-regulation is often the only regulation, said Sevanti Ninan, media analyst, columnist, and former editor of media watch website, The Hoot, which is now an online archive. Speaking at a session titled ‘Watching the watchdog: Regulatory mechanisms for Indian Journalism’ she summed up the Indian media regulatory scenario as “work in progress”.

The audience was left pondering the question - how can the recently announced foreign direct investment cap of 26 per cent in digital news media be regulated in a sector that is neither a license regime nor a regulatory regime?

Kiron Bansal, associate professor of Journalism at the Indira Gandhi National Open University, discussed the misuse of the term ‘ethics’, which is being increasingly confused with the terms ‘morality’ and even with ‘spirituality’. Ethics should be incorporated more cohesively into the syllabus for journalism students, she felt.

A workshop on combating fake news was led by Akshaya Nath, India Today principal correspondent and Google-certified fact-checker. She reminded participants of the adage ‘With great power comes great responsibility’. “It is every individual’s responsibility to check the authenticity of any information they come across, and as journalists, even more so,” she said. Nath also explained the basic tools that can be used to navigate and verify digital information.

Arun Ram, resident editor of The Times of India, Chennai, used ISRO’s recent, much-reported loss of contact with the Vikram lander to illustrate a point about journalistic responsibility. He recounted how his paper had chosen not to use information it received that the failure was due to a specific technical glitch, because the information could not be verified, in the process passing up on the chance of a scoop.

“Not giving into the temptation to break news in an age where everything is breaking news is something that needs to be ingrained into journalists today. We chose to be more responsible and less exciting,” Ram said. He added good journalists always work with an attitude of “respectful irreverence”, so that they are not afraid to ask questions of anyone.

‘Alternative paths to responsible journalism’ was the topic of a lively panel discussion among Subhashini Dinesh, deputy resident editor, The New Indian Express, Chennai; Padma Priya, editor and co-founder, podcasting platform Suno India, Hyderabad; Meera K., co-founder, Citizen Matters and Co Media Lab, Bengaluru; and Siddharth Prabha, principal correspondent, The Times of India, Chennai.

Other speakers at the conclave included Rangaraj Pandey, popular news broadcaster and founder of the online news channel Chanakyaa, and lawyer Sanjay Pinto.

Prabhu Chawla, editorial director of The New Indian Express Group, delivering the valedictory address, regretted that “the anchors of TV channels have now become opinionated noisemakers, and the front pages of newspapers have become editorials.” “The concept of ‘I am right, everyone else is wrong,’ once unknown in the industry, is all too familiar today,” he said. He wrapped up the two-day conclave with a time-tested bit of advice to upcoming journalists: “Fear none, favour none.”

(The Student Press Team report was edited by Susan Philip.)
The recent order of a Bihar court directing the filing of an FIR against 49 eminent persons who signed an open letter to the prime minister expressing concerns over mob lynching is shocking, disappointing, and completely disregards the true meaning of the law. The FIR was lodged under various sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), including sedition, public nuisance, hurting religious feelings, and insulting with intent to provoke breach of peace. But many would agree that the writers of the letter were doing precisely what every citizen ought to do in a democracy — raise questions, debate, disagree, and challenge the powers that be on issues that face the nation.

It is evident that if you take the letter as a whole, leave alone sedition, no criminal offence is made out. Surely, this court decision warrants an urgent and fresh debate on the need to repeal the sedition law, for it has no place in a vibrant democracy.

**History of the sedition law**

A century ago, debates around sedition were about how the British abused it to convict and sentence freedom fighters. Today, unfortunately, Indians face the same question, except that instead of a foreign government, the country’s own institutions appear to be misusing the law.

This decision strangely coincided with Mahatma Gandhi’s birth anniversary. The soul of Gandhi’s philosophy lay in the right to dissent, which is today being systematically destroyed. Now, anyone, be it university students or civil society activists, who utters even a single critical phrase is instantly targeted, without any introspection on why such criticism was voiced at all.

Sedition laws were enacted in 17th century England, when lawmakers believed that only good opinions of the government should survive, as bad opinions were detrimental to the government and monarchy. This sentiment (and law) was borrowed and inserted into the IPC in 1870.

The law was first used to prosecute Bal Gangadhar Tilak in 1897. That case led to Section 124A of the...
IPC (which deals with sedition) being amended, to add the words ‘hatred’ and ‘contempt’ to ‘disaffection’, which was defined to include disloyalty and feelings of enmity.

In 1908, upon conviction for sedition in another case, and imprisonment, Tilak reportedly said, “The government has converted the entire nation into a prison and we are all prisoners.” Gandhi, too, was later tried for sedition for his articles in Young India, and famously pleaded guilty.

Twice in the Constituent Assembly, some tried to include sedition as a ground for restricting free speech. But this was vehemently (and successfully) opposed for fear that it would be used to crush political dissent.

The Supreme Court highlighted these debates in 1950 in its decisions in Brij Bhushan v the State of Delhi and Romesh Thappar v the State of Madras. These decisions prompted the First Constitution Amendment, where Article 19(2) was rewritten to replace “undermining the security of the State” with “in the interest of public order”. However, in Parliament, Jawaharlal Nehru clarified that the related penal provision of Section 124A was “highly objectionable and obnoxious and […] the sooner we get rid of it the better”.

In 1962, the Supreme Court decided on the constitutionality of Section 124A in Kedar Nath Singh v State of Bihar. It upheld the constitutionality of sedition, but limited its application to “acts involving intention or tendency to create disorder, or disturbance of law and order, or incitement to violence”. It distinguished these from “very strong speech” or the use of “vigorouous words” strongly critical of the government.

In 1995, the Supreme Court, in Balwant Singh v State of Punjab, acquitted persons from charges of sedition for shouting slogans such as ‘Khalistan Zindabaad’ and ‘Raj Karega Khalsa’ outside a cinema after Indira Gandhi’s assassination.

Instead of looking at the ‘tendency’ of the words to cause public disorder, the court held that mere sloganeering which evoked no public response did not amount to sedition, for which a more overt act was required; the accused did not intend to “incite people to create disorder” and no “law and order problem” actually occurred.

This same lens must be used to examine the present letter. The law and its application clearly distinguishes between strong criticism of the government and incitement of violence. Even if the letter is considered hateful, or contemptuous and disdainful of the government, if it did not incite violence, it is not seditious. Unfortunately, Indian courts have, especially recently, repeatedly failed to appreciate this distinction.

The broad scope of Section 124A means that the state can use it to chase those who challenge its power, and the mere pressing of sedition charges ends up acting as a deterrent against any voice of dissent or criticism.

Challenging the law
Even the threat of sedition leads to a sort of unauthorised self-censorship.

for it produces a chilling effect on free speech. This misuse must be stopped by removing the power source itself. The law must go, as has happened in the UK already. No government will give up this power easily, and logically, one would turn to the courts for help.

Unfortunately, although I have been part of it, the judiciary seems less and less of a protector of our rights, having let us down on civil liberties often lately. Arguably, it is time for the people, for civil society, to challenge the law directly. There needs to be a concentrated movement from the ground up. What form such a direct challenge should take cannot be said, but we must protect our right to dissent as fiercely as we protect our right to live. If we fail to do so, our existence as a proudly democratic nation is at risk.

(Courtesy: The Hindu. The writer is a former Chief Justice of the Delhi High Court and Chairman of the 20th Law Commission of India.)

Australian newspapers unite against secrecy

Media freedom is under siege: What’s the government hiding? That is the message behind a whole lot of censored front pages that appeared in Australia on a Monday morning as part of a landmark drive to enforce the public’s right to know. In an unprecedented collaborative campaign, Australians woke to find the front pages of newspapers across the country heavily redacted – as a warning of a future where laws continue to erode media freedom so that governments can cover up information from the public. The move aims to push the federal government into lifting its veil of secrecy. It follows more than 60 pieces of legislation introduced during the past two decades which effectively criminalise journalism and penalise whistleblowing, even when they reveal wrongdoing or important information about decisions the government is making.

(Source: WAN-IFRA website/ Author: Cherilien Ireton)

October-December 2019 | VIDURA
Of content and control – where advertising and PR still rule

When the path and the pace of the media in India are by and large set by advertising and market research, which are often controlled by foreign corporates, any debate on the entry of foreign capital into the print media may be irrelevant. This was what N. Bhaskara Rao had said in 2011. His article (reproduced here) was written for the September 1-14 issue of Frontline that year. A lot of what he had written eight years ago holds true even today.

The Indian media scene has gone through a dramatic shift in recent times both in terms of content and control. While media content is more and more market-driven, control has now shifted, although indirectly, to ‘foreign corporates’. And yet our political masters continue to revive irrelevant debates such as the 1955 Cabinet decision against the entry of foreign capital into the Indian print media, when in fact the ‘foreign factor’ is already ‘moderating’ the priorities of most media in the country. The debate on foreign equity is perhaps meant to sideline the core of the issue – the direction of the Indian media.

Today, advertising and market research, in many ways, determine the scope of the media. Both these functions are in the hands of corporates controlled by foreign corporates. Let us examine this phenomenon, which we could either brush aside as a ‘global trend’ or get down to understanding the larger implications. The path and the pace of the media today are set as much by advertising, market research and media planning as much by ownership patterns and journalistic trends. The control of these ‘determining factors’ has, by and large, slipped out of Indian hands with no one making an issue of it.

First, the share of advertising in the total revenue of the media has been on the increase, from a “supplementary” 25 to 30 per cent some decades ago to a ‘supportive’ 45 to 55 per cent today. In fact, in the case of television channels advertising has been a ‘primary source’ (50 to 70 per cent) to sustain themselves and to the extent of ‘determining’ their priorities and preoccupations. Even in the case of some big newspapers, revenue from advertising constitutes 60 per cent of the total revenue.

Today, advertising and market research, on television today is mostly by multinationals and big corporates. In fact, the top 15 advertisers account for three-fourths of the advertising revenue of newspapers and television channels. Except for Dabur, Tata, Bajaj and Videocon, all other top advertisers belong to the multinational category. Top brands that are being advertised in the media belong to these corporates. There has been a wave of foreign brands recently – all giving a big boost to the media as well as consumerism in such a way that as a country we cannot reverse the trend even if we want to.

Third, the advertising agency business in the country has been getting concentrated in fewer and fewer hands over the last few years. The top five advertising agencies, with majority holding abroad, account for well over half the advertising business in the country, and this trend has been on the increase. The entry of foreign advertising agencies has been going on alongside the entry of foreign brands and the increase in the share of foreign corporates in the total advertising in the country. In fact, lifting the limits of foreign capital in the advertising agency business has opened the floodgates.

Now, global conglomerates such as WPP, TWT, O&M, BBDO, DDB-Needham and JWT have gained majority control in Indian advertising and the bulk of the market share too. A little over half of all Indian advertising now is accounted for by agencies based abroad, whose majority control in India is with foreigners. In fact, among the top 20 agencies there may be just two without foreign partnership. Except for these, the others are answerable to either private groups based abroad or dollar-trading stock markets in London or New York.

Fourth, market research is the basis for the proliferation of brands and consumerism, as well as for the preoccupation and priorities of the media, and the very scope and character of advertising. Until a few years ago we had six or seven market research agencies, mostly Indian-owned.

Today, the top seven or eight market research agencies, accounting for more than two-thirds the total number, have either been taken over by a foreign corporate or a foreign corporate has acquired a significant interest in them. In fact, with the recent mergers and acquisitions, a certain monopolistic trend...
is evident in this business, which has an annual turnover of over Rs 350 crore.

More specifically, market research agencies conduct ‘readership’ surveys and determine the ‘rating’ of television viewership, and thereby directly influence advertising agencies as well as the media about their priorities and preoccupations. The point here is that the methodology being followed for readership surveys and TV ratings assessment is not without bias in favour of the sponsors and the subscribers.

As the one who was involved in launching India-specific readership and rating studies 25 years ago, I feel guilty for what is happening today, particularly the way the findings of these surveys are being used both by newspapers and by TV channels. The “TRP trap”, as I call the phenomenon, has larger and long-range implications for India than we seem to realise. The distortions are already evident in our media scene. This dilemma has been causing concern even in the United States at the highest levels of policy-making.

Fifth, with the media becoming complex and also specialised, two ‘new’ mediating functionaries have emerged in the last two years, with serious consequences to the very nature and character of the Fourth Estate. Both these functionaries of media planning and public relations (PR) in a way erode the core prerogatives of the media functionaires and their “editorial control”. And the fact that both these functions have become corporatised, with foreign agencies in control, should cause some concern in the country before it is too late.

These days, media planners are the ones involved in buying space and time wholesale for advertising and selling it on a retail basis on their terms. They are yet to expand nationally. Think of the implications, particularly because some of these corporates are controlled by foreign agencies and they have been in business in a big way trying to determine the terms of advertising in India. In a way, this amounts to undoing what Doordarshan initially did in terms of providing a level playing opportunity to small and regional advertisers, by way of special concern for them so that they could compete with big corporates and in larger markets.

In the case of ‘public relations’, the functioning of these ‘experts’ implies a certain undermining of or interference in the functioning, particularly of reporters and editors. For, the function of PR is to ensure coverage for a particular viewpoint or otherwise. ‘Disinformation’, which is being talked about recently, is a part of this new phenomenon. Today majority control of these PR corporates in India, some six or seven leading ones operating nationally, is with foreign agencies.

In fact, some of these have entered India as a part of one or other advertising agency already having majority foreign equity.

Most of these PR agencies cater to the interests of foreign corporates or their collaborators in India. Many Indian concerns, including some public utilities, now use the services of these PR agencies in order to make their presence felt in the media, as if it is a compulsion.

Giving out the findings of their analysis in this regard, P.N. Vasanti, director of the Centre for Media Studies, New Delhi, said that “communication business has now moved into foreigners’ control and this reflects on the scope of the content of newspapers, even more so in the case of television channels. Even Doordarshan’s programming today is based on the guiding formula and criteria promoted by foreign-dominated agencies having their interest in big corporates”.

Against this background, a debate on the entry of foreign capital into the print media is irrelevant and contradictory in view of what the government has already done by opening the floodgates to the electronic media.

(The writer is chairman of the Centre for Media Studies, New Delhi.)

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**The Hindu adds 5.47 lakh readers**

*The Hindu’s total readership grew by 8.8 percent over Q1 2019, registering the highest growth rate among the top three national English dailies, as per the Indian Readership Survey’s recent report released by Media Research Users Council (MRUC) in the second quarter of 2019. The Hindu added 547000 readers over Q1 to register a total readership of 6773000 in Q2 nationally. Its Average Issue Readership grew by 4.1 per cent over Q1 2019. The Hindu’s all India performance is attributed to its sustained leadership in Tamil Nadu and gains in markets like Bengaluru, rest of Karnataka, Telangana and Hyderabad. It registered the highest Total Readership in South India and continues to be South India’s largest read English daily, while retaining the number one position in Tamil Nadu and Chennai.*
The most defining feature of the 21st Century is the survival crisis our planet is facing. Earlier, this issue was most often discussed in the context of accumulation of nuclear weapons. The high risk is of course still there, and in fact has increased of late. In addition, there is also risk from chemical and biological weapons (despite the ban on them). In the future, we may face danger from robot weapons, AI weapons and autonomous weapons.

However, increasingly, when we speak of survival issues, we mean it in an environmental context. The United Nations Environment Programme issues periodic reports on the state of the world’s environment, recent trends and future prospects. The latest of these – Global Environment Outlook 5 – has presented “undeniable evidence that the world is speeding down an unsustainable path”. It voices a clear warning that urgent changes are needed “to avoid exceeding critical thresholds beyond which abrupt and generally irreversible changes to the life support functions of the planet could occur”.

This critical issue has been taken up by scientists at the Stockholm Resilience Centre (SRC). Johan Rockstrom, director of SRC, says “The human pressure on the Earth System has reached a scale where abrupt global environmental change can no longer be excluded. To continue to live and operate safely, humanity has to stay away from critical ‘hard-wired’ thresholds in the Earth’s environment, and respect the nature of the planet’s climatic, geophysical, atmospheric and ecological processes.”

The SRC scientists first identified the Earth System processes and potential biophysical thresholds. They then proposed the boundaries that should be respected in order to reduce the risk of crossing these thresholds. The nine boundaries identified were: climate change, stratospheric ozone, land use change, freshwater use, biological diversity, ocean acidification, nitrogen and phosphorus inputs to the biosphere and oceans, aerosol loading and chemical pollution.

The study suggests that “three of these boundaries (climate change, biological diversity and nitrogen input to the biosphere) may already have been transgressed”. In addition, it emphasises that “the boundaries are strongly connected — crossing one boundary may seriously threaten the ability to stay within safe levels of the others”.

Clearly, these issues have to become our top priority. Remedial steps should be rooted in justice and equality, so that basic needs of all people can be met while respecting the needs of all other forms of life.

To take just the issue of climate change, while the importance of reducing greenhouse gas emissions adequately and urgently is widely recognised, it has not yet become focal point for mass mobilisation, particularly among weaker sections in most countries. The reason is obvious – people are too involved in their day-to-day problems.

On the other hand, if any world-level planning for reducing GHG emissions is linked to meeting the basic needs of all people, then all weaker sections will have a vital stake in the plan, making mass mobilisation possible. This will also increase the opportunities for justice and peace movements to work closely with environment movements.

It will immediately become obvious that in light of carbon space and other related constraints, there is no place in such a plan for wasteful production and consumption or for weapons. Hence, disarmament and concerns of the peace movement are already inbuilt.

Such a plan can have the following components:

1. There must be a list and quantification of all wasteful forms of consumption, particularly those which involve specially high GHG emissions, and also a schedule to reduce wasteful consumption as much as possible.
2. There must be efforts to stop production of weapons to the extent possible (in addition to the previously acknowledged reasons for disarmament, the need to reduce GHG emissions is a factor).
3. There must be steps to minimise war and civil strife, as, apart from causing enormous distress to people, modern wars and the preparation for such wars involve a lot of GHG emission.
4. There must be efforts to increase the production of food and other goods and services to meet the basic needs of all mankind, using the most environment-friendly and least energy-intensive forms of production.

About our survival crisis and justice-based solutions

Environmental issues jeopardise the very existence of Earth. Bharat Dogra throws some light, with particular reference to climate change and the need to reduce greenhouse gases.
GHG-emitting technologies possible. Such efforts should ensure maximum local self-reliance in meeting basic needs so that unnecessary transportation measures are avoided and local employment is generated.

5. There must be identification and implementation of socio-economic changes that are needed to ensure adequate availability of and access to all goods and services to meet all basic needs.

6. There must be efforts to replace fossil fuels with solar, wind, hydro and other environment-friendly technologies which avoid or minimise GHG emissions.

7. There must be steps to ensure that new technologies for reducing GHG emissions and related objectives are free from patents so that these can be used as widely as needed, while encouraging efforts to promote local solutions for local problems.

8. There must be ways to help and prioritise farming and village-based life and livelihood patterns, with special focus on environment-friendly agricultural methods and compassionate animal husbandry, over big industry and city-based life and livelihood patterns.

9. There must be prioritisation for protecting fresh water sources and conserving water.

10. There must be arrangements to monitor and reduce all hazardous products, technologies, substances and chemicals.

Such a plan should clearly convey the message that if carbon space (keeping emission levels low enough to restrict global warming to a maximum of 1.5°C) and other related constraints are to be respected, then there is no room for wasteful consumption and energy-use, for weapons production, wars, deforestation and exploitation of fossil fuels. Once this message is absorbed, it will be easy to set the discipline of using available resources and carbon space only to meet universal basic needs.
I need one pawua (a quarter of liquor) to go into the manhole and one after cleaning,” the worker made the strange demand to the residents. “Otherwise, it is impossible to get over the obnoxious smell.” What shocked us was that he did not have any safety gear, gas mask or even gloves or any other equipment. He took off his clothes and went into the manhole. Yes, he was lucky to come out alive to our great relief. Not all are.

Every other day, there is a report of death of workers killed while cleaning sewers from one part of India to another. Nearly 1800 workers have lost their lives while cleaning the sewers and entering manholes or cleaning septic tanks. The worst part is that even today most of the workers do not get the mandatory safety gear to clean sewers and have to pay with their life or get infections and suffer from various ailments and injuries.

The rules notified by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment under the Prohibition of Employment as Manual scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act 2013 has specified a number of safety gear equipment mandatory for cleaning sewers and septic tanks. There are number of other provisions for the safety of the workers which remain on paper as reports on the deaths from various parts of the country show. Maximum number of deaths have been reported from Tamil Nadu, the second in the list is Gujarat.

India’s capital Delhi is no exception. Eleven Indians died in September last year while cleaning sewers or septic tanks without adequate safety gear. Five died in a single incident while cleaning a sewage treatment tank.

The Delhi Jal Board guidelines says that in no circumstances should one enter manhole, sewer or sump until all necessary safety precautions have been taken. Safety gear such as gas masks, oxygen breathing apparatus, portable lighting equipment, portable air blowers, safety belts, inhalers, helmets, gloves, head lamps, barrier creams and diver’s suit are mandatory.

The guidelines also say that no one should be working inside the manhole for more than 15 minutes. Is that ever followed?

What is most insensitive is the fact that the workers are sent into sewers knowing fully well the consequence they face. Is there life any less precious than any other common man or those at the helm of affairs? Maximum deaths occur due to asphyxiation that is because of lack of air (oxygen) or preponderance of other gases, even CO₂ (which is not toxic in itself).

The Supreme Court in its judgement in March 2014 in Safai Karamchari Andolan & Others v Union of India has stated that entering sewer lines without safety gear should be made a crime even in an emergency situation.

The National Commission for Safai Karamcharis (NCSK) in reply to queries by the writer said no information is available regarding any convictions, nor does it maintain the record of FIRs relating to deaths lodged. NCSK says that the Rs 10 lakh compensation that is mandated under law in case of manual scavenging-related deaths has been paid only in 375 cases so far.

In addition to the manual cleaning of sewers, more than 50000 persons, mostly women, are involved in the inhuman practice of manual cleaning of human excreta from the dry latrines, exposing themselves to a number of diseases and infection. They are considered social outcasts. According to the Safai Karamchari Andolan, there are 26 lakh individual and community dry latrines. Manual scavenging is not only banned in India but there are laws against employing manual scavengers which attract both imprisonment and fine.

Under provisions of The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and Their Rehabilitation Act, 2013, engagement of a person as manual scavenger is a punishable offence with imprisonment for a term which may extend to one year or with fine which may extend to fifty thousand rupees or both for the first contravention. Any subsequent contravention attracts imprisonment which may extend to two years or fine which may extend to one lakh rupees or both. Every offence under the Act is a cognizable and non-bailable offence.

Has any employer ever been convicted in this regard? In addition to
According to Sulabh International, there are nearly 8000 towns and cities out of which only 732 have sewage treatment plants. In about 500 cities in Class-I, the total sewage capacity is only 32 per cent of the total sewage generation and in Class-II 225 cities, the total sewage capacity is only 8 per cent of the total sewage generation. Even in Delhi, only 69 per cent sewage is treated although 17 STP facilities have been set up.

“To provide sewerage system in just the urban areas of India, something like the total budget of tenth five year plan will be required, an enormous amount that a country like India simply cannot afford, because we also have an enormous rural India to look after,” says Bindeshwar Pathak, founder of Sulabh International that has constructed over 15 lakh household toilets. It has constructed more than 9000 public toilets in urban areas spread across the country.

Countries like Malaysia and Japan have moved from non-mechanical systems to mechanical and automated ones. In most Western countries, machinery is used for cleaning of sewers. Unfortunately, in India there has been no concerted effort to go in for mechanisation. Is it because of the cost of mechanization? Does it supercede the safety and dignity of the workers, most of whom are dailits?

According to Pathak, mechanisation to the extent possible and strict compliance of mandatory safety gear to be used by workers is necessary to prevent deaths. Earlier this year, a fleet of 200 sewer-cleaning machines were flagged off with the aim of eradicating manual scavenging in Delhi. But is that enough to end manual scavenging?

Pathak says that if the two sanitation technologies invented by Sulabh International, one for individual households and the other for public places like housing colonies, high-rise buildings, schools,
colleges, hospitals, are implemented on a large scale, the burden on sewerage system will come down significantly.

The household Sulabh toilet (two-pit pour-flush ecological compost toilet) represents a paradigm shift from centralised treatment of human waste to a decentralised system. The technology is affordable, culturally acceptable, indigenous and environmentally sustainable, Pathak says.

So you have two pits. When the first one becomes full, the other pit is put in use and both are used alternately. After two years or so, the human excreta in the first pit (which is full and not in use) turns into bio-fertilizer that can be used in fields and gardens for enhancing the farm productivity.

In a wide variety of Sulabh toilets, the minimum period of cleaning the pit is two years and the maximum is 40 years. The other technology invented by Sulabh is the biogas generation from public toilet that can be used for lighting lamp, cooking food, warming oneself, etc.

“The effluent water discharged from such biogas plant linked with public toilet is treated extremely well by our dedicated system called SET (Sulabh Effluent Treatment) system, which is able to reduce the biochemical oxygen demand (BOD) to less than 10 mg/l. The Government of India standard is 10 BOD. It has nutritional value as it contains plant nutrients – nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium. So, on the one hand, it can be used as a farm fertilizer, and on the other, if the treated effluent water is discharged into river bodies like Ganga, Yamuna or Kaveri, there will be no pollution in water bodies,” says Pathak.

There has been too much of campaign around safai (cleaning) but not the safai karamchari (the cleaner), whose safety and dignity doesn’t seem to matter to the administration. What is the pointing of enacting laws if the government lacks the political will to implement them? How can any country that dreams of becoming a super power allows manual cleaning of sewers, gutters, septic tanks and dry latrines in this technology driven era?

(The writer is a senior journalist who spends time in Delhi and Shimla.)

**DNA downs shutters, to go digital**

Amidst the liquidity crunch the parent Zee Group faces and staggered closure, its print venture, the Daily News & Analysis (DNA) has said it is stopping its print edition and will go digital, citing changing reader preferences.

The last edition of the 14-year-old morninger, which had already stopped from Delhi and other centres earlier, came out from Mumbai and Ahmedabad, the broadsheet owned by Zee Group’s Subhash Chandra’s Essel Group said. The Chandra family is going through financial difficulties as some its business bets have gone awry and the liquidity crisis made it difficult to refinance debt. They are selling their promoter holding – over 90 per cent of it is pledged – to repay lenders. The group still owes around Rs 7000 crore to lenders after repaying over Rs 6500 crore since March.

DNA began from Mumbai in July 2005, when the rising ad-spends amid a boom in economic growth had led to entry of many new players in the financial capital. The Hindustan Times had launched its city edition the same month, while the market leader The Times of India had introduced a tabloid, the Mumbai Mirror, just a few months before. The HT group also launched a new business daily, The Mint, with multiple editions since 2007.

DNA will continue as a web-portal and it is also planning to soon launch a mobile application which will focus more on delivering video-based original content. Readers having long term subscriptions can get a refund, the note said. There have been many exits from the newsroom in recent past, but there was no word on the staff at the newspaper and how they will be accommodated. DNA is the third paper to be closed in 2019 in India.

(Courtesy: The Tribune)
The term ‘anti-social’ is very often used to label any act which is against society or social norms. Anti-social behaviours are actions that harm or lack consideration for the wellbeing of others. In an Indian context, some antisocial behaviours are actually facilitated by officialdom, while others are practised at the level of the family or individual.

A recent decision of the NCT (Delhi) Government can be considered an illustration of the former category. The government decided to follow the trend set by some other governments and either completely or partially waived the water consumption dues of Delhi households. How does this decision look from the point of view of consumers who had been diligently paying their bills, as against those who had defaulted, running up huge dues, and possibly even earning interest on the money not paid out?

Did the step not convey the message that if you don’t clear your dues, whether consumer bills or bank loans, expecting that one day the amount would be waived, you are smarter than those who dutifully pay up on time? The question then arises, is willfully defaulting an antisocial act?

The ‘anti-social’ tag is not limited to the illiterate or less-informed citizens of India. Even the ‘educated’ and affluent are guilty of such behaviour. Those who own upmarket cars don’t see anything wrong in parking them on the roadside instead of within their own compounds. They encroach on pavement space by setting out decorative plants and so on, forcing pedestrians on to the busy roads. Such anti-social activity adds to their living space, at no extra cost!

Often, in affluent residential areas, rules are bent to carry out construction without requisite approval, cutting off light and air and posing safety risks to nearby buildings. The same principle is seen in commercial spaces and marketplaces, where shopkeepers stake claim to pavements to extend their display space, and pick up fights with those who object. This is often done in collusion with political parties keen to appease their vote bank, and any efforts to rein in such behaviour is promptly met with protests and accusations of ‘grave injustice’.

One of the main criticisms against demonetisation is that it badly affected the informal sector, which provides jobs to 80 per cent of the workforce in India, because employers had to deposit all cash in banks and could not withdraw it to make payments. But wasn’t the underlying reason for not making digital payments the fact that the payments that were due were not in accordance with the wage norms prescribed by the government?

Take GST as another example. Its objective is to get rid of all unofficial businesses and transactions.
Then why opposition to its introduction? The intention, then, is to be antisocial by avoiding tax or paying employees less than the legal wage rates, isn’t it?

It is hard to believe that anyone would have starved to death due to lack of money to purchase food items during the demonetisation period. But assuming this happened, isn’t it a poor reflection on the community itself? Have Indians become so insensitive that they allow people to starve to death because they don’t have ready cash to buy food? What were the many temples, mosques, gurudwaras and churches, which regularly organise feasts on religious occasions, doing at the time?

As a society, we have the habit of throwing down water bottles and snack packets the moment they are empty, wherever we may be at that point in time – it could be a train, a bus, or a road. We do not bother to look for a trash can, we just fling away the sachet or bottle.

Indians think nothing of driving on the wrong side of the road and against the legitimate direction of traffic to get out of a traffic jam or simply to reach their destination faster. We regularly jump traffic signals as we want to remain ahead of others. We overtake from the wrong side, unconcerned about the effect this has on fellow drivers. If a minor collision takes place in the thick of traffic, we are willing to drop everything to prove that the other party was at fault.

If these aren’t examples of anti-social behaviour, what is?

Look around. I’m sure you’ll find many more examples of anti-social people carrying on with their patterns of life with no sign of remorse or guilt. After all, we Indians believe in the motto ‘live and let others live’, but with a caveat – in our style!

(The writer is director, CMS Social, Centre for Media Studies, a multi-disciplinary social research and advocacy organization in Delhi.)
How globalisation has affected unorganised women workers

Globalisation has accentuated inequality and poverty and has had a massive influence on poor urban, rural and Dalit/tribal women who are paid, underpaid and unpaid workers. As homemakers, the women have shouldered a disproportionate (triple) burden of the effects of globalisation, due to commercialisation of day-to-day survival needs such as drinking water, and cash controlled privatised education. Expensive transport and dismantling of the public distribution system that provided grains, cooking fuel, textiles, soap, etc have made millions of workers, especially working-class women and their children, poor and malnourished, says Vibhuti Patel and explains how.

Neo-liberal stabilisation policies that drastically reduce state contribution to the social sector and enhances only its regulatory and surveillance role have reduced chances of quality education, nutritious diet and healthy growth of the children of the poor. Laissez-faire in the labour market promoted through new labour codes has wiped out historical gains of the working class in terms of lifespan, collective bargaining power and labour standards and occupational safety.

Macroeconomic stabilisation policies, also known as structural adjustment programmes – devaluation, deregulation and deflation – have accentuated human misery and escalated economic inequalities, making poor women “the last colony”. Mass unemployment, food price volatility due to liberalisation of agriculture, galloping inflation and privatisation of education and healthcare affect the masses, women, children and the elderly the most.

Agrarian distress forced rural men to migrate to urban areas and there is widespread femisation of subsistence agriculture in the Asian countries. The introduction of robots and artificial intelligence has accentuated the process of declining work participation of women in South Asia over last the last years.

The neoliberal logic of free play of market forces has resulted in tremendous human suffering. The nation states need to ensure social security and social protection. Equal access to employment, better provision of childcare services, improved social security measures, workplace safety and re-examination of differential retirement age are the major needs of the working women in all sectors of the Asian economy.

Women farmers’ organisations such as Gabriella (in the Philippines), Asian Peasant Coalition, All Nepalese Peasant Federation and The Mahila Kisan Adhikar Manch (MAKAAM in India) have demanded that irrespective of land rights and whether women are cultivating or working as labourers, they must be recognised as farmers and must be guaranteed wages. They have opposed new labour codes that rob women cultivators and agricultural workers of their entitlement to social protection and social security. Forest dwellers’ agitations focus on opposition to draconian land acquisition laws that criminalise and brutalise them and deny them traditional common property resources.

Women in fisheries are demanding credit facilities, appropriate technical assistance, training and better preservation tools and storage facilities, and improved modes to transport catch. Women workers in tea, coffee and rubber plantations of Nepal, Sri Lanka and India are at the forefront of struggles demanding minimum wages and protesting against the male-dominated trade unions entering into negotiations with estate owners without consulting women workers.

International networks such as Women Working Worldwide, Homenet, Committee of Asian Women, Women in Informal Employment: Globalising and Organising (WIEGO), rural and urban working class women’s united fronts such as Gabriela, Domestic Workers Unions in several Asian countries, women’s cooperatives such as Annapurna Mahila Mandal and women’s trade unions like Self Employed Women’s Association are empowering informal workers and finding collective methods to address livelihood concerns.

Women workers/employees in China are fighting against gender wage gap, limited opportunities in top management and segregation in the type of employment. Women’s rights organisations are also challenging gender boundaries that are constructed in largely male-dominated occupations (namely, women apprentices working as carpenters, iron workers, painters, electricians and plumbers) and are fighting against discrimination, sexual harassment and stressful work environments. Women nurses, midwives, caregivers, teachers and workers in mega development programmes of the
state have periodically raised their voices against contractualisation of employment.

Women’s rights organisations in Asia have highlighted practices that favour the customer without regard to workers’ safety and security. They have studied the skewed gender patterns in employment, especially focusing on women workers in the informal sector, as well as digital automation and its impact on women workers in labour-intensive industries.

They have demanded ‘digital justice’ and compliance of companies with legislation on women workers’ rights, stock-taking of public policies, etc. They are working on new methods of protest such as ‘mass logging out’ to address their grievances.

As much as 49 per cent of all migrants in these countries are women seeking jobs as domestic workers. They work without any social security or protection. In India, Bangladesh and Nepal, these women work for up to 16 hours. If they ask for a hike in wages, false charges are often foisted on them, and some are even put behind bars.

Even if they enter a country legally, it does not ensure freedom from overwork, torture and sexual harassment. Their position is further aggravated by the fact that employers often hold their passports.

Under the sponsorship system in cross-country migration in search of employment, documentation is linked to the employer and this forces them to slog under horrible living conditions for a pittance. Women’s rights groups have demanded that embassies of all Asian countries in the sending and receiving countries should keep one set of identification papers of the migrant workers.

Anti-Slavery and Human Trafficking organisations have been fighting against the belief that “rice should be in the field, fish in the rivers, and daughters in brothels” held by some communities in India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and the Philippines, and condoned by the State.

Sexual harassment at the workplace is the most widespread occupational hazard which women have been fighting individually and collectively in the streets and in courts.

In all Asian countries, there was massive response for the #MeToo Movement as well as the One Billion Rising campaign against violence against women.

The major challenge faced by the various women’s movements, trade unions and human rights movements is to make the nation states accept the ILO’s Workers’ Rights Framework and Decent Work Framework, undertake implementation of gender sensitive policies to address the basic needs of working class households, curtail violence against women in private and public domains and sexual harassment at workplace.

Collective research, action and advocacy from the gender perspective to deconstruct the issue of unpaid work of women is the need of the hour.

(The writer is a professor at the Advanced Centre for Women’s Studies, School of Development Studies, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai.)

Vikatan Group revamps print portfolio

As part of its restructuring exercise, the Vikatan Group has revamped its print portfolio with a sharper focus towards its content reorientation. The print bouquet has been realigned as core magazines and special interest magazines.

The core magazine bouquet consists of the 93-year-old Ananda Vikatan weekly magazine in Tamil, which has a Total Readership (TR) of 33.94 lakh (IRS 2019, Q2); Aval Vikatan, the fortnightly women’s Tamil magazine with TR of 13.26 lakh (IRS 2019, Q2); and Junior Vikatan, the bi-weekly Tamil socio-political magazine.

The special interest magazine bouquet includes Nanayam Vikatan (TR of 3.46 lakh / IRS 2019 Q2), a personal finance and entrepreneurship magazine; Pasumai Vikatan (TR of 8.55 lakh / IRS 2019 Q2), a magazine devoted to organic farming and inclusive farm practices; Motor Vikatan, (TR 3.72 lakh / IRS 2019 Q2), the auto magazine in Tamil; Sakthi Vikatan (TR of 4.88 lakh / IRS 2019, Q2), the spiritual magazine about the religious culture and heritage of India; and Aval Kitchen, the brand extension of Aval Vikatan, focusing on food, recipe and kitchen.

In the process, two of its print titles, Vikatan Thadam and Doctor Vikatan have been shelved from September, while Aval Manamagal, the quarterly bridal magazine has been converted as an advertiser driven publication in the B2B route and Chutti Vikatan, the children’s magazine will take a completely new format to directly engage with schools and children.

(Courtesy: exchange4media.com)
The three-language formula – what do students feel?

Nandini Voice for the Deprived, a Chennai-based not-for-profit organisation, conducted an essay competition for college and school students in Tamil Nadu on the subject of the three-language formula, giving them an opportunity to express their views and suggestions. Is opposition to the three-language formula in Tamil Nadu schools appropriate, was the topic they were asked to write on. N.S. Venkataraman tells us of some interesting views that were thrown up.

Students from several schools and colleges from across Tamil Nadu participated in an essay competition for college and school students on the subject of the three-language formula. Here is a round-up of the students’ views on various aspects of the subject:

The majority – 60 per cent – felt the three-language formula was both appropriate and necessary. Only 25 per cent felt it was unnecessary, while the remaining did not express any categoric views, one way or another. Most students felt that in the formative years, from Standard 3 on, it should not be difficult to learn three languages. Believing that it would be beyond the capacity of the students was to underestimate the abilities of the children, they felt.

With regard to the controversial draft education policy submitted recently by the Kasturirangan Committee, many of those who participated in the competition felt that the committee had not held proper consultations with the student community or educationists in Tamil Nadu.
It was pointed out that when the proposals were met with opposition, the government had maintained that it was only a draft report and not a documentation of decisions, an obvious attempt to buy peace. The general view was that the committee’s report was unwarranted.

Students across the spectrum were of the opinion that making the learning of Hindi mandatory amounted to Hindi imposition, and went against assurances given by earlier governments. However, they also made it clear that there was no blind hatred for Hindi in Tamil Nadu.

Several pointed out that thousands of students in the state voluntarily learned Hindi at centres like the Hindi Prachar Sabha and also choose to study Hindi at CBSC schools and Kendriya Vidyalayas. Their opposition to learning Hindi being made mandatory, they said, was based on the fear that it would replace Tamil in course of time.

Students also pointed out that while Hindi was spoken by more people than any other single Indian language, the number of people speaking Hindi was less than that of the combined total of those speaking other languages. While people in important towns and cities in India other than Tamil Nadu were reasonably familiar with Hindi, in rural areas of many states like West Bengal, Maharashtra, Kerala etc, it was not readily understood. Therefore, propagating Hindi as a link language was unacceptable, they said.

Many students were of the view that there was no need for a link language in India, as there were many deep unifying factors in place already, such as history, traditions and beliefs. It would, of course, be useful to people from one state seeking jobs in others, but its importance should not be exaggerated, they felt.

On the question whether English and Tamil should be made compulsory in the three-language formula, the students were unanimous in their opinion that English should be made compulsory as it was an international language. Many, however, felt that insisting that students from states other than Tamil Nadu to study Tamil would be an imposition, too.

A large number of students voiced their own, and their parents’ concern, about job prospects, and felt that the decision to learn a particular language was not a reflection of one’s love or loyalty to one’s mother tongue. They felt that to know three languages would be an asset and, therefore, the three-language formula was a must.

However, the students felt that, while English should be a compulsory part of the three languages, the choice of the other two should be left to the school, the parents and the children. Schools should be allowed to decide which other languages to offer in their curriculum, based on the interests of the majority of their students, and parents and their children should be free to pick their preferences from these choices. Such a policy would be both fair and democratic, they felt.

Note: According to Nandini Voice for the Deprived, if sent around 300 circulars about the essay competition to schools and colleges across Tamil Nadu, and a press release as well. The Hindu and The Times of India did not publish, but Dinamalar did, in all its editions in Tamil Nadu. This helped carry the message to the students and educational institutions. The response was fairly good, but not from the ‘elite’ schools. Considering the enthusiasm shown by the students and the quality of their observations, the number of prizes was increased to 14, from the five planned earlier.

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**Shailesh Gupta elected INS President**

Shailesh Gupta of Mid-Day has been elected president of the Indian Newspaper Society for 2019-20. The decision was taken at the 80th annual general meeting. Gupta takes over from Jayant Mammen Mathew of Malayala Manorama.

L. Adimoolam, Dinamalar, has been picked as the deputy president; D. D. Purkayastha (Ananda Bazaar Patrika) the vice-president and Naresh Mohan (Sunday Statesman) the honorary treasurer of the Society. Mary Paul has been appointed the Society’s secretary general.

In January 2018, the Indian Newspaper Society had nominated Gupta as a nominee to the board of WAN-IFRA. In 2004-05, Gupta was elected as the youngest member of the managing committee of the Audit Bureau of Circulation. In 2012-13 he was the chairman of the Audit Bureau of Circulation.

(Courtesy: exchange4media.com)
A river flows once again, but when will we realise its worth?

This is the third time that the Luni River is flowing again. Earlier in 2017, heavy rainfall in the Aravalli Region had caused floods in Rajasthan. Thousands of people thronged to get a glimpse of the flowing river which had been dry for years. Dilip Singh Bidawat says the game of destruction in the name of development has rendered the Luni dry for decades. Now, Nature has made the river flow once again.

Rivers Sukri and Bandi overflowed owing to torrential rainfall in Pali District in Rajasthan, which in turn quenched the thirst of the dry Luni River. By seeing the unfathomable water in the river, the people of the desert are not satisfied; those who seek to gain profits from the river's womb are no less happy. The illegal mining mafia still dream of millions of profits because the quantity of gravel is increasing with the rise in the river's flow.

On the banks of the Luni, the manned dyeing-printing factory will also wash some hands in this flowing desert by releasing chemical dyes secretly in the river. It is also a matter of joy for the people living on the shore from the point of origin of the river to the end. The river will be rid of the waste dumped in it in the last two years in some time; it will pour the garbage into the Rann of Kutch as it flows into it.

The game of destruction in the name of development has rendered the Luni, also known as Maruganga of Marwardry, dry for decades. However, nature’s bounty has made the river flow once again. Even though the effect of climate change has led to sporadic rains in the state, for the Luni, it is a positive moment.

The river that has supported life for centuries is being exploited by development workers, businessmen, industrialists, the mining and land mafia, politicians and bureaucrats. Also, thanks to negligence of the public community, the river has been struggling for its very existence. But the Luni has blossomed again because nature is kind.

The news that the Luni River once again has started to flow in the Rann of Kutch, flowing from the land of its origin, the western desert, is indeed a great joy for the people here. Those living along the banks of the river in hundreds of villages come in great numbers to see the sight of the flowing river. Environment lovers are thrilled, so are the farmers who recall the prosperity the river brought at one time.

Starting from the Nag Pahar in Ajmer District, River Luni, which flows 330 km in western Rajasthan, was once a boon for the Thar Desert. From the point of origin, the Luni flowing through Nagaur, Jodhpur, Pali, Barmer, Jalore, and innumerable springs, ravines and half a dozen tributaries in the Rann of Kutch, has also been given many names by the communities.

Known as Lavanwati, Sagarmati, Maruasha, Sakri and Maruganga, it is considered to be the longest river of Marupradesh. The Luni was also called the Half Salty Half Sweet River, because the river flows on the salt rich surface of the Thar. The growing urban population has increased the demand of water for consumption and development. To meet the rising demand of water, dams were built by blocking the river’s womb which led to drying up of the river; the dry river then has been used for dumping waste.

Luni was also called the Chemical River after chemical dyes were released into it from textile dyeing-printing industries and other
industries of Pali, Jodhpur and Balotra. Gravel miners and illegal occupants also scavenge the river day and night. The stink emanating strongly for miles and miles from the textile dyeing factories of Pali and Balotra compels residents nearby to cover their noses with hands.

People living in the villages and towns along the banks of the Luni have had good as well as bitter experiences in their lives. Farming and animal husbandry businesses flourished (the river’s catchment area is 37363 sq km). The ground water of the area was recharged. Wells had water providing people a source of drinking water; there was plenty of water for irrigation as well.

People would grow watermelons after the river dried up. Crops such as maize, millet, wheat, chillies and spices were cultivated. Thousands of wells, stepwells from Jodhpur, Nagaur, Pali, Sirohi, Jalore and Barmer were recharged. People living on the shore said that there was never shortage of drinking water when the river flowed. People could find sweet water by digging a pit four or five feet from the ground.

Drinking water was supplied from Bithuja Village to hundreds of villages in the Balotra Region. In the animal fairs held annually in the villages and towns on the banks of the river, it was evident that there was economic prosperity.

The famous cattle fairs, such as the Mallinath Fair of Tilwara, the Sindhri Fair, attracted people from far and wide. They would come and buy animals and other agricultural products. The traders used to keep their livestock for months due to adequate water supply in the area. The happiness and prosperity of hundreds of villages that used to be associated with Samdari, Parlu, Kanana, Sarana, Bithuja, Balotra, Jasol, Sindhri towns of Barmer, is now merely a history of people’s memories.

But this time, the people are content. The wells that had been dry for the last two decades will be filled again; water level will rise. Even if it is temporary, some of the lost prosperity will be regained. Dams have been built on the Luni to meet the rising demand of water from the urban population, industries, and businesses; untreated sewage is then released from the households, factories into the river again.

Balotra has more than 700 textile dyeing-printing units. There is a daily trade worth Rs 25 crores per day and more than one lakh people are employed in the trade. Not only has the river been polluted due to the release of chemically polluted water from these units into the Luni, but also the groundwater of the area flowing beyond Balotra has also been polluted. Despite the order by the Rajasthan High Court banning discharge of treated and untreated effluents into the river, the exploiters are defying the court’s order on the basis of high influence and immense wealth.

The voice of the regional people who are struggling to defend the river is subdued by various factors such as negligence by corrupt bureaucrats, and unaccountable leaders. The river has always had something to give to the people.

Sadly, the state treasury, commercial establishments and social system have provided nothing but neglect and filth to the Luni. There is still time to transform Luni to its old form. Nature has given the people one last chance. There is no better gift for the coming generation than a clean, flowing Luni.

(Courtesy: Charkha Features)

The Luni River entering Barmer District after many years.
According to the 2018 Composite Water Management Index (CWMI) Report released by Niti Aayog, 21 major cities (Delhi, Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad and others) are careening towards zero groundwater levels – they are expected to touch the nadir by 2020, affecting 100 million people.

Chennai-based Flinto Early Learning Solutions aims to tackle the problem of water scarcity by tapping into the huge potential presented by India’s young population through a novel game that incorporates a 21-day Water Saver Challenge.

The game tells youngsters about myriad methods by which water can be saved as they go about their daily routines, and awards them tokens and stars if they manage to save water. The game also incorporates fun word challenges and puzzles involving water conservation, so that youngsters learn as they play.

Developed as part of the Flinto Change Makers initiative, the Flinto Water Challenge game box contains a water challenge tracker, aqua tokens and ‘daily stars’. Children are required to put up the Water Challenge Tracker on their refrigerators, and track their progress on any six of the water saving activities listed. The activities listed under ‘How to become a water savour’ include:

- Brush your teeth using one mug of water, instead of using running water
- Use a medium-sized bucket of water for bathing (don’t use the shower)
- Shut faucets tightly after use, and check for leaks before going to bed
- When washing hands, turn off the tap while lathering your hands
- Use the same glass or water bottle throughout the day to reduce the number of washes
- Dry and reuse your towel for two or three days to reduce water consumption through daily washes.
- Request parents to only run full loads in the washing machine
- Encourage one friend every day to follow the above activities

For each activity completed successfully in a day, a child gets a star. If a child collects less than six stars in a day, then he or she needs to start the game all over again. If six stars are earned in a day, the child gets an aqua token. These tokens and stars can be stuck on the magnetic water tracker board, and displayed proudly by the child. On completing the chosen challenges for seven days, the child will be awarded an attractive ‘water champ’ badge.

Elaborating on the exercise, FlintoLearning Solutions CEO and co-founder Arunprasad Durairaj explained, “Children are blank
slates. Play is a primary mode of learning for children. Hence, we have been using games to impart important lessons to children, making them socially conscious and creating a cleaner, better world.”

Set up in 2013, Flinto Learning Solutions has been coming up with a new game every two months. The games are especially designed for several age groups. Flinto started its first Early Learning Research & Development Centre in Chennai two years ago, and experts have been working with children to develop new games.

The Flinto Changemakers Initiative is aimed at imparting several important skills sets that will equip children for life, and instil confidence in them to face the wider world. Among these are a gender sensitisation programme, one to instil traffic sense in children, a cleanliness drive and an anti-child abuse initiative. The kits are not just aimed at individual families, but also at schools.

For now, Flinto Learning Solutions is selling its products only through subscription. However, the games will soon be available through retail stores. “We are working on it,” Durairaj says.

(The writer is a senior journalist based in Pune.)

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Request to roll back customs duty on newsprint turned down

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has turned down the request for a rollback on 10 per cent customs duty on newsprint, as per media reports. The minister has said the duty was in place to promote domestic manufacturers. A representation had been made before the minister by the newspaper industry asking for a rollback of the duty that was announced in the Union Budget. The argument made was customs duty would put “pressure on the bottom line”.

The Indian Newspaper Society had appealed to the government last month, saying: “Publishers of newspapers and magazines are already reeling under severe financial pressure due to many factors like lower advertisement revenues, higher costs and digital onslaught from technological giants. Small and medium newspapers will go into deeper losses and many of them will be forced to close down.”

(Courtesy: exchange4media.com)
We can bring it within civilised limits of health and social welfare. Strict implementations of rules relating to loudspeakers during festivals and elections covered by different Acts of the municipal corporations of Indian metros can help minimise community noise.

Too much noise can affect us in many ways, some easily detected, some hidden for years. It can damage the cells of the ear or rupture the eardrum. This could result in – (a) dizziness and disorientation, (b) ringing ears (Tinnitus), (c) insomnia, (d) constriction of blood vessels, (e) high blood pressure, (f) heart disease and (g) psychological disturbances. Despite the dangers, noise pollution does not receive the attention air and water pollution do.

The reason partly is the failure of the traffic police branch of India’s metros to check the rapidly growing traffic population. Though the Central Motor Vehicles Rules of 1989 clearly specify the kind of horn that can be used and make it mandatory for all vehicles to be fitted with silencers, three-wheelers, trucks and motorcycles remain the biggest contributors to traffic noise.

In a paper presented at the Association for Research in Nervous and Mental Diseases, Dr Louis J. West, director, Psychiatry Department of the University of Oklahoma, stated that during the Korean war, air force prisoners who gave false confessions were awakened at regular intervals with noise and were allowed to sleep only in snatches.

According the International Labour Organization, ‘noise’ covers all sounds that can result in hearing impairment or are harmful to health, or are otherwise dangerous. A survey of more than 1000 people in Calcutta in 1998 revealed that about 28 per cent suffered from hypertension and irritability caused by traffic noise.

A survey completed last year jointly by the Bose Institute, University of Kalyani and the West Bengal Pollution Control Board (WBPCB) shows that traffic noise is the biggest peace-buster in Calcutta. Noise levels at major traffic corridors in Delhi often cross the 100-decibel mark and over half the residential areas record noise beyond the acceptable limit of 55 decibels, says the Delhi Pollution Control Committee.

Some years ago, a middle-aged jeweller was held up in his shop in New York in the heart of Times Square and was shot not once or twice, but four times. Not one pedestrian heard a sound. The sound of the shots was drowned by the noise of compressed air hammers and other equipment at construction sites nearby. The two hold-up men escaped. The man died.

A 13-year-old New Jersey girl was found beaten and strangled to death 75 feet away from the backdoor of a neighbour’s home. When questioned by reporters, the
neighbour’s son said, “none of us heard anything, we had the air-conditioning running all night”.

Noted environmentalist Rashmi Mayur recalls a time in the history of China during the 3rd Century BC when noise was used as a method of torture in place of hanging, for dangerous crimes.

The Handbook of Noise Measurement lists 106 words “commonly used to describe sounds of various types”. These range from bang and bark through ping, pop, row to rattle, squark, thud, thump and yap. Continuous exposure to noise causes constriction of blood vessels in human beings which may eventually lead to heart ailments. A higher incidence of arteriosclerosis and coronary heart disease among humans exposed to noise was reported from Yugoslavia and Crete. A comparatively higher incidence of high blood pressure was found among industrial workers in Russia.

Animal experiments with rats exposed to noise have revealed an increase in cholesterol levels and arteriosclerotic changes. Unrestricted use of loudspeakers and burning of high decibel crackers causes the noise levels to go up compared to the normal times and cause the noise pollution during festivals. The imported crackers, especially from China, are found violating the norms of the land.

Laxmi Rao, a young researcher from Nagpur, tested 900 school children and 30 teachers. The aim was to study the effects of prolonged and intense noise pollution around 181 schools in Nagpur city. The study established that students studying in high noise areas are educationally and emotionally maladjusted. They displayed a marked lower ability to concentrate.

The teachers showed signs of irritability, high blood pressure, ulcers, mental stress, migraine symptoms and a high degree of anxiety. Their teaching performance, too, left room for improvement. A consulting ENT surgeon said that the students would go completely deaf (hearing) within the next five or six years if not immediately treated. Rao based her research on the decibel level of familiar sounds.

The audible human heartbeat is about 10 decibels. Low conversation records 30 decibels. An average busy office records 50 decibels. Annoyingly loud and strident speech or music could rise up to 70 decibels. A diesel train has a noise level of 80 decibels. The sound of a gunshot or of a jetliner taking off is close to 100 decibels. Beyond this, all sounds are painful.

Ear-damage is caused at 85 decibels. Rao’s findings are substantiated by the fact that the chosen school is located on the busiest national highway near the airport, with a mainline railway track on the other side. Thus, within the span of a single day, the sound of a fleet of speeding trucks, a rushing train and an airplane landing or taking off happen several times simultaneously.

Article 25 of the Constitution of India provides for freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess, practice and propagate religion by all the citizens of the country. But it should also be noted that the article also provides for reasonable restrictions; practice of religion should be subject to public order, morality and health.

The constitutional provision seeks to strike a balance between the fundamental right to freedom of religion of citizens and the need to secure public order and health by the state. The authorities must come up with proactive measures to curb pollution during festivals by considering Article 25 in letter and spirit.

“Noise is an international phenomenon,” said late environmentalist Mayur. “It is a slow agent of death. Most people adapt to it by accepting the damages to health silently, unconsciously and imperceptibly, as if it is an inevitable and essential part of modern living. All forms of sounds and melodies of Nature – rumbling leaves, singing birds, gurgling brooks – known to man for centuries, seem to have been wiped out by the ugly shrieking noises reigning in the environment.”

(The writer is a senior journalist and film historian based in Kolkata. She was presented the South Asia Laadli Media and Advertising Award for Gender Sensitivity 2017. This is an abstract of a presentation she made at a seminar on political narratives in Indian cinema held in January at the Indian Institute of Mass Communication, Dhenkanal, Odisha.)
A newspaper that set a benchmark in Odia journalism

What Malayala Manorama and Mathrubhumi are to a Malayali and Anandabazar Patrika to a Bengali, The Samaja is to an Odia: not just a newspaper, but a part of one’s linguistic and cultural identity. Like the other two newspapers, Samaja too started with a nationalistic and altruistic mission and with time has grown into an institution. Mrinal Chatterjee traces the history of the newspaper that turned 100 on 4th October this year.

The Samaja was first published on October 4, 1919 (it was Vijayadashami, dusserah, a day marking the win of good over evil) from Sakhigopal, about 25 kms from Puri. A four-page tabloid size paper, it was priced at 2 paise per copy and the annual subscription was Rs 1.50.

Pandit Gopabandhu Das, one of the greatest social thinkers and freedom fighters of Odisha founded The Samaja as a weekly in 1919 with two objectives: to highlight the plight of the people of Odisha and to bring it to the notice of the administrators and to support the cause of the freedom struggle of India. Eventually, the newspaper also contributed to the development of the Odia language and the amalgamation of Odia-speaking areas into a separate Odisha State.

The newspaper was shifted to Puri on January 3, 1925. Two years later, on July 28, 1927, it was shifted to Cuttack. Pandit Gopabandhu Das continued his relentless struggle against the British rulers through the columns of the paper. He continued to edit the paper until 1928. The Samaja was handed over to Servants of the People Society (Lok Sevak Mandal) on June 1928. On April 6, 1930, it was made a daily. Pandit Gopabandhu was not there to see the eventful beginning of the new life of The Samaja.

After Gopabandhu, Pandit Nilakantha Das and Pandit Godavarish Mishra became the editors. Pandit Lingaraj Mishra became the editor in 1930 and continued until 1957. Acharya Harihar Das, Radhanath Rath, Udaynath Sarangi and Ramchandra Dash became the editors temporarily. During 1946-1952, Lingaraj Mishra worked as the education minister of Odisha. So RadhanathRath became the editor.

Sriharsha Mishra became the editor in 1957 and continued until 1961 while Radhanath Rath became the editor in 1961 and continued until 1998. After him, his daughter, Manorama Mohapatra, became the executive editor. And after her, Sarat Mishra became the editor.

Sarat Mishra relinquished editorship of The Samaja in early 2010 and Chandrabhanu Pattnaik became the editor for some months. Then, Pramod Kumar Mahapatra and after him, Satya Ray, took over the editorial responsibilities as managing editors for some months. On May 12, 2011, Gopal Krushna Mahapatra became the editor and after him Susanta Mohanty. Bamapada Tripathy is the editor of the venerable paper now.

The Samaja could engage the attention of both the discerning and common people from the very beginning. With time, it evolved and developed. It became synonymous with the national movement and was used as a mouthpiece of the Indian National Congress to rouse the latent patriotism of the Odias. It carried the intended message to every nook and corner of the state.

The success of The Samaja fired the imagination of those who realised the potential of the new medium to shape public opinion. With this, journalism as a profession assumed an aura of social respectability. Journalists were regarded as public-spirited persons with intellectual acumen. It was The Samaja which set a bench mark in journalism in Odisha both as a mission and as a profession.

The Samaja has had the good fortune of having great editors from its beginning. However, it was Radhanath Rath who gave the paper its distinct identity and status as a public-spirited, people-focused non-nonsense newspaper. It was he who
converted *The Samaja* from a weekly to a daily in 1930, on the day of Dandi March. After an earlier stint, Rath became the editor in 1961, a responsibility that he shouldered till his death. At his death, on 11 Feb 1998, he was the longest serving editor of India.

Though *The Samaja* is considered a conservative paper by many media pundits, it has evolved with time and kept pace with technology. It is one of first Odia newspapers to have an e-paper version. Presently, it is published from ten places, including Kolkata and Visakhapatnam.

A century old, *Samaja* has not only retained its position as one of the top three largest circulated Odia newspapers, but has also held to its legacy of social service. What other newspapers are doing now under the CSR (corporate social responsibility) banner, *The Samaja* used to do all that and more when CSR was not even heard of. From providing relief during natural disasters like flood and cyclone to offering scholarships to the needy and meritorious students, *The Samaja* has always been at the forefront of social altruistic activities.

(The author presently heads the Eastern India campus of the Indian Institute of Mass Communication in Dhenkanal, Odisha.)

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**Deccan Herald gets a makeover, content is revamped**

*Deccan Herald* has come out with a new masthead in aqua blue, a colour whose richness it hopes will convey the depth that the daily strives for in journalism, and whose attractiveness will appeal to younger readers who need coaxing to pick up a newspaper.

The new layout has been designed by Edinburgh-based Palmer Watson Words and Pictures design agency. Along with the appearance, *Deccan Herald* is launching a new business section on Mondays that brings business to everyone, and a new Sunday opinion page, christened The Prism for its ability to break down the surrounding white noise into its comprehensible parts.

On the supplement front, it is launching Showtime, a new entertainment offering on Saturdays that captures all the action from showbiz and streaming platforms. Travel and Living sections will be merged into a new supplement – Travel & Living — on Tuesdays that will present the best of both.

“It’s an exciting time at DH. We may be giving a bright new face to our newspaper and introducing new elements, but we are conscious of the legacy of seven decades of solid and well-respected journalism upon which we build. And we believe, more than ever, that good journalism is journalism for good; we are keen to bring about positive change in the lives of those around us, and to spark new ideas for a better tomorrow,” said Sitaraman Shankar, editor, Deccan Herald.

The paper has asked readers to expect closer linkages between the physical product and its fast-growing digital cousins. It also has a formal tagline: The Power of Good.

“This ‘refresh’ reflects our intent to continually enhance the value we offer our readers. We are confident that the clean, crisp design and revamped content (which includes a new supplement and several hard-hitting features) will offer readers a more immersive and satisfying reading experience,” says Karthik Balakrishnan, CEO, The Printers Mysore.

(Courtesy: exchange4media.com)
How Hicky’s romance with publishing came to a sad end

James Augustus Hicky’s *Bengal Gazette*, the first newspaper in Asia, made an appearance in January, 1780. Hickey, aware of the dangers of printing a newspaper, had resolved to avoid party politics and scandal that spelt doom for many journalists then. However, as his and the paper’s influence grew, he became political and started an anti-tyranny, anti-corruption campaign. He soon made enemies, was arrested, taken to court and convicted. *Bengal Gazette* had to be shut down and Hicky eventually faded into obscurity. Here, we continue with R.V. Rajan’s fascinating story.

James Augustus Hicky soon discovered that he had influence. Based on his articles, actions were taken by authorities. Slowly, he began to change. He became more political as he saw the power his newspaper wielded. He changed his masthead to proclaim that his newspaper was ‘Open to all parties, but influenced by none,’ indicating that he would be accepting more controversial topics.

The first of these topics was War. He used his newspaper to criticise the Army’s promotion system. Poor subalterns learned with dismay that the system was corrupted by connections and money. Hicky covered not just European soldiers but also Indian sepoys (soldiers) who fought at the bottom of the Company’s ranks. With ever increasing scepticism, he used his paper to report on the war’s humanitarian tragedy.

Hicky’s war coverage gained him an international audience. Many British newspapers reprinted his news, often verbatim. As the only newspaper in Asia, his gazette became an important source of information. But his success meant that others saw a good opportunity, resulting in competition from people who had the right connections.

Bernard Messink and Peter Reed were the two gentlemen who posed the first major challenge to Hicky. Messink came to printing from thea-tre. He was close to most well-to-do and powerful people in Calcutta. Reed came from Bengal’s salt trade and was equally well-connected. Besides, Reed saw the newspaper as a profitable business venture and his experience taught him how to avoid the pitfalls of others. He knew that the best way to succeed in business was to avoid politics, or better yet, support those in power.

With patronage secured, Messink and Reed launched their newspaper titled *India Gazette* on November 18, 1780. Where Hicky covered the poor, they covered the rich. Where Hicky was lewd, they were dull and dry. Where Hicky emphasised independence, they made no secret of the fact that they had Hastings’s support. Thanks to their closeness to the power centre, they were granted free postage of their paper which gave them an advantage over Hicky who had to pay for it.

Hicky was more than upset when he learnt that Messink and Reed had been given free postage. He saw injustice and began plotting revenge. He began exposing corrupt officers in the Company and the government. His first target was Simeon Droz, the chief of the Board of Trade who was close to Marian Hastings. Droz had tried to lure Hicky to get into a deal with her involving a bribe to protect his paper, which Hicky had refused to pay.

Hicky was certain that it was Droz who had pushed Messink and Reed into starting a newspaper. He exposed Droz as a man who pretended to be good in public but in private was a self-serving character assassin. The city saw Droz’s name dragged through the mud.

Warren Hastings, who was determined to do something to contain Hickey, saw to it that he was banned from mailing the newspapers through the post office. Hicky had to resort to direct distribution of the newspaper using *hicarralis* (couriers). But despite the crackdown, his paper remained as popular as ever. His ability to carry public opinion was his biggest strength. But it was also his most dangerous weakness.

With the help of anonymous correspondents, Hicky started an anti-tyranny, anti-corruption campaign through his newspaper. He decided to drag those in power to public justice. His correspondents focused on three main means of corruption: contracts, nepotism and taxation without representation.

They first attacked Hastings’s many ‘no-bid’ contracts. This was followed by an attack on E. Impey, chief justice of the Supreme Court, for approving a Bye-Law which the correspondents were convinced was a massive fraud to enrich the judges and their acolytes. It was not long before Hicky began to publish articles that more than warned of revolution – they called for it.

In the context of a peace treaty that Hastings signed with Berar, he attacked Hastings personally, calling him an ‘all despotic’ and Great Mogul. While his personal attacks may have only been insolent, his willingness to let his newspaper be the voice of
aggrieved subalterns resulted in his being perceived as a real threat to authority and discipline.

The pressure on Hastings to shut down Hicky was mounting. In the meanwhile, Hicky launched a scathing attack on Kiernander, the first missionary sent by the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge. By now Hicky had made so many enemies that there was an assassination attempt on him on the night of 5th April, 1781. He was not intimidated. He saw himself as the scourge of tyrants, the defender of free speech and the protector of the people. He had changed his role from being an advocate to a provocateur. In article after article, Hicky’s contributors took on tones reminiscent of revolution.

It was no longer about revolt against oppression in some distant place; it was about revolt against Hastings, here and now. Hastings decided to act. Hicky was arrested from his home on 12th June, 1781 and charged with libel.

The next morning, he was dragged into the court and brought before the judges and a grand jury of 23 men. The court read the charges against him – five counts of libel, three from Hastings and two from Kiernander. The grand jury agreed that criminal charges should be brought on all five counts.

A sum of Rs 40000 was set as the bail amount, an astronomical sum in those days, which Hicky was in no position to pay. Unable to post bail, Hicky prepared for his trial as best as he could from his jail cell. He still printed his newspaper, even though he was in jail.

Libel in the 18th Century was defined as any printed matter whose content could breach the peace, and a printer could be sued for libel on almost anything. Furthermore, printers were responsible for their writers’ articles even if they had never seen the content.

Not happy with his lawyer Anthony Fay’s handling of the issue, Hicky decided to defend himself. He claimed he was the victim of tyranny and despotism and no man, or no Company, could take away his right to print. In spite of his forceful arguments, Impey, the chief justice of the Supreme Court, guided the jury to find Hicky guilty. However, the next day, the jury returned to declare Hicky ‘not guilty’. Though Hicky was lucky with the first trial, in all the subsequent three trials dealing with the other libel counts, he was found guilty.

On 29th October, 1781, Judges Chambers and Hyde sentenced Hicky to serve 12 months in jail, pay Rs 25000 in fines – not to mention an unnamed sum in court fees – and be imprisoned until the fines were paid.

Imprisonment did not stop Hicky and he somehow managed to continue printing his newspaper from jail. He continued to defend the freedom of the press, but his tone turned darker, his writings increasingly bitter and his mood more melancholy.

Hastings realised that the only way to prevent Hicky from printing such libellous material would be to shut down his press entirely. In early 1782, Hastings brought four more legal actions against Hicky. Still in jail, in debt, unable to bear the costs of his trials, Hicky swallowed his pride and filed as a pauper.

British Law allowed paupers to keep the implements of their profession because they were seen as the only way the poor could pay back their fines. When the judges permitted his plea, it was a joyous moment for Hicky. However, the next week, with no explanation, the judges reversed their decision to protect his types.

Impey ordered the sheriff to seize his printing press and types and everything including his furniture, dining ware, clothes and even family letters. Two weeks later, all his belongings went up for auction. The Company’s printer bought everything Hicky owned for one sixteenth its value.

Hicky’s Bengal Gazette was no more. Hicky had been silenced within two years of his starting his newspaper. Yet, his case and his complaints would reach the throne of Great Britain. Warren Hastings was recalled two years later to England where he was impeached for all his wrongdoings in India. After a trial lasting eight years, he was acquitted on all charges.

Before Hastings left Calcutta, one of the last acts he had performed was to order the Supreme Court to forgive the rest of Hicky’s fines and let Hicky go free. Ten months after he was released from jail, Hicky tried to restart his newspaper. But he was a broken man and his newspaper appeared to have failed within months. Hicky faded into obscurity until his death in 1802 aboard the ship, Ajax.

(The writer, former chairman, Anugrah Madison Advertising, has authored a few books post-retirement. This is the second and concluding part of a two-part series. The article had earlier appeared in Madras Musings.)
A pioneer of free speech, he was all for press freedom

James Augustus Hickey had to pay a price for the paper that he called Bengal Gazette. Published from Calcutta in 1780, this is recorded as the first ever English newspaper in the country. It took swipes at the East India Company and the shenanigans of the rulers, who initially came to trade. He was even jailed for his efforts in what was then known as the Harinbari Lane Jail, near Lalbazaar.

Sir Charles, known as Baron Metcalfe and Lord Metcalfe as well, on the other hand, came at a time when the foreign rulers had consolidated their rule and had trained their guns towards creating a fair and equitable society.

Many names are today consigned to the dusty pages of history books but they live on in stately imperial buildings. The impressive Metcalfe Hall in Dalhousie on the banks of River Hooghly in Kolkata is one such. It is here that the first Imperial Library was housed and, today, a museum curated within its imposing precincts, pays a tribute to the city through old pictures, posters and artefacts to map the social and cultural changes. Unfortunately, apart from the plaque bearing his name, not much is exhibited on Metcalfe.

The impressive building named after Sir Charles Theophilus Metcalfe (born in Calcutta on January 30, 1785 died in UK on September 5, 1846) has a very interesting history.

The year was 1836 when the city’s first Public Library opened on Esplanade Row after eminent citizens met at Town Hall (another impressive building) the year before, and mooted the setting up of a public library to house rare books and other reference materials for citizens to use. Four years later, the Imperial Library was founded at what later came to be known as Metcalfe Hall, named after Sir Charles in 1845 for his contribution to the liberation of the press in Bengal.

The library moved back and forth, and once even shifted to Fort William, and then back at Metcalfe Hall, wherein Lore Bethune became its curator. Finally, the Imperial Library, today known as the National Library, was inaugurated at Belvedere House, in Alipore, once the residence of Warren Hastings on February 1, 1953.

An administrator of British India between 1822 and 1845, Sir Charles was also the acting governor-general of India for a year, 1835 to 1836. He, however, came to be known as someone who advocated the liberty of the press. Instrumental in passing the Freedom of Press Act in 1835 itself, he had indicated that as a sovereign he would ensure free speech. And he did.
According to The Charter of 1833, chapter 32, which singles out the result of the liberty of Press Act in 1835, “The Act was received with feelings of enthusiasm by the European community in India, and the principal inhabitants of Calcutta, including the native gentry most eminent in rank and accomplishments, met and voted an address of thanks to Sir Charles Metcalfe for the boon he had conferred on the country, and raised subscriptions to commemorate it by the erection of a noble hall, which bears his name.”

In his reply to the address Sir Charles said that “the Act evinced to the world that the government of the Company desired no concealment, that it was happy to have the most minute particulars of its Indian administration scrutinized, and displayed to the gaze of the universe, that it sought information and instruction wherever they could be found, and did not wish to rule India as a conquered, ignorant, and enslaved, but as a cherished, enlightened, and free country.”

Now looking back it would be worthwhile to examine how much of the freedom covered the native press which, as we know, became more and more vociferous as the Freedom Movement gained momentum. In fact, the Press Act was withdrawn in the year of the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857.

But, by then, Sir Charles, later sent as governor to Jamaica and governor-general of the province of Canada, had passed away. Today, the imposing Corinthian columns of Metcalfe Hall resembling columns of Greek temples in Athens, is in various stage of restoration by ASI. The permanent exhibition titled Ami Kolkata has been put together by Kritika Mahotra, a young city-based designer and her team.

As visitors’ footsteps reverberate through the open wide spaces with grand windows, it is time to recall that our colonial history has proved that any subjugation ultimately leads to breaking free. Freedom of speech today is perhaps, more relevant than ever.

(The writer is a lecturer in print journalism and lives in Kolkata.)

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Madhukar Kamath elected ABC Chairman

Madhukar Kamath, chairman emeritus, DDB Mudra Group, was unanimously elected chairman of the Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC) for 2019-2020 at the 71st annual general meeting of the body. Devendra V. Darda, representing Lokmat Media, was elected deputy chairman.

Kamath has more than four decades of experience in advertising and marketing services and has spent over 25 years in erstwhile Mudra, now the DDB Mudra Group. He has also been the president of the Advertising Agencies Association of India, chairman of the Advertising Standards Council of India, chairman of Mudra Foundation and chairperson of the governing council of MICA.

Publishers representatives on the ABC Council for 2019-20 are: Devendra V. Darda, Lokmat Media; Hormuji N. Cama, The Bombay Samachar; Shailesh Gupta, Jagran Prakashan; Chandan Majumdar, ABP; Raj Kumar Jain, Bennett, Coleman & Co; Pratap G. Pawar, Sakal Papers; Riyad Mathew, Malayala Manorama; and Praveen Someshwar, HT Media.
Ramanuja or Ramanujacharya was born in 1017 in Sriperumbudur, near present-day Chennai. To commemorate his life, a major exponent of the tradition of Vaishnavism, a 216-ft statue is coming up near Hyderabad. Named the Statue of Equality, it is scheduled to be unveiled by India’s Prime Minister Narendra Modi this year.

The statue was designed and planned by Chinna Jeeyar Swami, an ascetic and follower of the Vishishtadvaita Philosophy propounded by Saint Bhagavad Ramanuja. Vishishtadvaita can be seen as a response to a perceived need to reform Hinduism in the 11th Century, in light of the influence of Buddhism.

It was while travelling through the Chola territory in South India to worship at the sacred shrines there, that the seeds of the philosophy were sown in Ramanuja’s mind. He was confronted by a girl from the untouchable community coming towards him, and shouted out to her, “Hey! Stop! Do not come near –stand aloof.”

“Oh revered Sir,” said the girl, “which path shall I take? Wherever I turn, I see the Lord’s abode; He is omnipresent and omnipotent.”

Ramanuja was taken aback. When he realized the folly of being arrogant because of his caste, he felt ashamed of himself. Seeing how Ramanuja attained self-realisation, the girl was moved and became an ardent disciple of his.

This was a turning point in Ramanuja’s life. He was also influenced by the Bhakti Movement of Medieval India, which believed the only way to reach God for a devotee, irrespective of caste or creed, to love Him with perfect devotion.

Scholars consider Ramanuja’s Vishishtadvaita philosophy a step forward from Aadi Sankara’s Advaita philosophy. Yadava Prakasa, a great votary of the doctrine of Advaita, was Ramanuja’s first guru at Kanchipuram. The doctrines were neither appealing nor convincing to Ramanuja. His probing questions angered the guru so much that he even tried to kill Ramanuja while on a pilgrimage to Banaras.

Ramanuja’s philosophy rests on three fundamental ideas. The first affirms tattva or the nature of reality; the second declares the hita sadhan or the means; the third states the purusharth or the ideal of humanity.

Ramanuja went to see Thirukotiyur Nambi, a distinguished and pious scholar in Srirangam. Nambi gave him the all-powerful mahamantra, Om Namo Narayana, with two conditions: if the mantra was chanted by him, he would go to heaven; if it was divulged to others, he would go to hell. Instead of keeping the mantra a secret, Ramanuja climbed to the top of the Vishnu temple at Srirangam, and, when a huge crowd of common people gathered, he initiated them into the reciting of the mantra, gladdening the hearts of the people.

This method of educating people became popular as Ramanuja Darshan Communication and it marked the end of the practice of keeping religious mantras a closely guarded secret, known only to a select few.

Guru Nambi took Ramanuja to task for breach of promise, but Ramanuja was unrepentant. He said, in all humility, “As I have helped many people to go to heaven, I do not care if I myself go to hell.” Nambi was touched by the response, and blessed Ramanuja.

Ramanuja subsequently made Srirangam his headquarters, and carried on his mission for about 60 years. As part of the mission, Ramanuja visited various temples in Srinagar, Badrinath, Mathura, Brindavan and Banaras in the North Mysore, Sringeri, Rameswaram and Thiruvananthapuram in the south; Dwarka in the West; and Puri in the East. He attracted hundreds of disciples and spread the philosophy of Visishtadvaita. He made 74 of the disciples simhasana sadipatis or holders of high responsibility at the places where they lived.

Ramanuja’s belief that all are equal before God, and his emphasis on kainkarya or service to God and man made him popular among the common people. In keeping with his philosophy, Ramanuja allowed the poor, depressed people, including the untouchables, to enter the temple at Srirangam, and gave them the sacred ashtakshari mantra. He also threw open the doors of the temple of Cheluva Narayan Swami
to all sections of society, something unheard of in those days.

Ramanuja’s philosophy even attracted devotees from other religions. One of the sultans (kings) of Delhi had taken away an idol from the Yadavagiri temple to Delhi, and Ramanuja went there to recover the idol. However, Bibi Nachiar, the daughter of the Muslim ruler, had begun worshipping the idol. She and her bodyguards met Ramanuja and expressed agony over the fact that he was taking away the idol. Subsequently, they joined Ramanuja, Bibi Nachiar becoming one of his disciples.

The statue in Hyderabad, being put up at a cost of Rs 1000 crore, funded entirely by donations, is made of 1140 tonnes of panchloha – a combination of five metals. When complete, it will be the largest ‘seated’ statue in the world.

(The writer is former director, State Information and Public Relations Department, Andhra Pradesh, and editor of Public Relations Voice.)

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**The Wedding Trunk launched**

Wedding company Weddingz.in has unveiled *The Wedding Trunk*, a 150-page, bi-annual magazine, designed to provide readers with the latest trends and updates in the wedding industry.

“The magazine is a go-to guide for anyone planning a wedding, it offers a mix of nuances that can help orchestrate a wedding within a specific budget in a smooth, seamless way,” the company said in a statement.

The premiere edition of *The Wedding Trunk* (September 2019 – February 2020) features diverse content, including dreamy intricacies of a big fat Indian wedding. It will feature insights from industry experts such as Ojas Rajani, Papa Don’t Preach by Shubika, Kalki Fashions, Amrapali Jewels, Azva, Jhoomer Jewels, Floral Art By Srishti, Atisuto Events, The Photo Diary By Monisha and Knots By AMP, amongst others.

The first edition of the magazine will be available across 30+ cities with a circulation of 25,000+ print copies. Priced at Rs 300, the magazine will be available on Amazon & Flipkart and will be distributed for free across all 750 Weddingz.in venues in India. A digital version (e-magazine) will also be available on Magzter and Weddingz.in website & app.

(Courtesy: exchange4media.com)
How Hindi films have been inspired by Hollywood thrillers

Have Western films and filmmakers influenced Hindi horror and detective films? Shoma A. Chatterji, focussing on the thriller film as a genre, looks at how Hindi films, popularly known as Bollywood, have crafted stories that bear nothing but a passing resemblance to their original inspirations.

The word thriller is derived from the word thrill which has a Middle English root meaning ‘to pierce’. The association is with the aggressive, sadomasochistic nature of the thriller as a genre, and also its visceral, sensational side. There is an intriguing similarity between the words thrill and thrall (slave, captive). These meanings come together in the word enthral which has connotations of enslaved / captured and thrilled / spellbound.

Charles Derry in Thriller (1988) focusses entirely on the suspense thriller as a genre, which, according to him, comprises crime films that lack a central, detective figure and features a protagonist who is either an innocent victim or a non-professional criminal.

Has Bollywood cinema been influenced by Hollywood thrillers?

To an extent, yes, because it is dotted with thrillers, some original, others adapted, either from Hollywood hits or from South Korean films. But the changes made to the Hollywood films are so much that it is quite tough to identify the original inspiration.

What does ‘Bollywoodisation’ mean? Roughly speaking, it means the interweaving into the script and the audio-visual narrative, elements of a typical Bollywood film such as the song-dance routine, action scenes, melodrama often extended to family melodrama, generous elements of coincidence and so on. These elements dilute the experience of thrills in cinema as we know it from Hollywood films.

The femme fatale or vamp is an import from the late 19th and 20th Century opera. This stock character first appeared in the film Body Heat (1981), which is said to have inspired the Bollywood hit Jism, which type-cast Bipasha Basu as a horror-thriller-suspense film actor later on.

Kamal Amrohi’s Mahal (1949) produced by Bombay Talkies reflects the influence of German Expressionism, especially The Cabinet of Dr Caligari. The story itself is not an adaptation from any Hollywood or European film but it was the technique and methodology that were inspired by the West. The stunning play of darkness and light, flickering shadows in stairwells, is suggestive of the link between the real and the surreal world, of troubled relationships hinging on obsession and suicide. It was shot by German cinematographer Josef Wirsching.

In Mahal, Hari Shankar (Ashok Kumar) comes to live in an old mansion and is surprised to

Left to right: Posters of Bees Saal Baad, Hound Of The Baskervilles, and Jism.
discover that he resembles the late previous owner of the house. The former owner and his lover Kamini had died tragically, with the owner promising her he would be reborn and reunite with her someday.

Hari falls in love with a beautiful woman (Madhubala), seemingly a ghost, and some melodramatic twists later, it appears that he is the promised reincarnation. Madhubala is gorgeous in the film, and her song “Aayega aayega aayega... aayega aanewala” (the one who is to return, will return) remains popular even today. A box-office hit, Mahal inspired several ghost /reincarnation love stories, including Madhumati, Karz and Om Shanti Om.

The Cabinet of Dr Caligari (Das Cabinet des Dr Caligari), Robert Wiene, Germany, (1919) is widely considered the first true horror film. Emerging from the devastations of World War I, the film recounts the story of a crazy fairground performer, Dr Caligari, and a sleepwalker, Cesare, who he is suspected of hypnotizing and directing to commit murders.

The film marked a turning point in the history of world cinema by using extraordinarily inventive stylized sets and visual distortions. The landscape is all crooked — tilting walls and diagonal staircases — and so are the characters: rather than capture reality, it conjured up a psychological landscape of horror. In his book, From Caligari to Hitler, Siegfried Kracauer suggests that Caligari was Hitler and the German people were sleepwalkers under his spell.

But sometimes, there are gross misrepresentations about the films that spawned Hindi versions. For example, the thumping box office hit Bees Saal Baad (1962) was touted in the media as a Hindi version of the film, Hound of the Baskervilles. It was not.

Tanuja Chandra’s Sangharsh is said to have been inspired by Silence of the Lambs, but it is so distanced from the Hollywood film that it is nearly impossible to make any comparisons between them. Silence of the Lambs is an extremely sophisticated, cold and calculated psychological thriller while Sangharsh is loud, crude and has an almost absurd romantic subplot that ruins the film.

Deewangee (2002) is a psychological thriller directed by Anees Bazmee and produced by Nitin Manmohan. The film is based on the 1996 Richard Gere movie Primal Fear, which tells the story of a Chicago defense attorney who believes that his altar boy client is not guilty of murdering an influential Catholic Archbishop.

However, in the Hindi version, the apparent naivete of the character was to a large extent removed and he was turned into an older person, so as to make it a suitable role for Ajay Devgn, who won a number of awards for Best Villain and Best Actor in a Negative Role for his performance in the film. The older character in the Hindi film is much less convincing than the younger one, played by Edward Norton, in Primal Fear.

There is a mixing of genres of the horror film, the ghost film and the murder mystery in both Bollywood and Hollywood cinema. The recent Ittefaq is a police thriller that stems from a gruesome murder.

There is no ghost at all, so one might call it a murder mystery.

Note: This is an extract from a longer paper presented at Jadavpur University’s School of American Studies held in August this year, at a conference titled, Re-Mediating Hollywood/ American Cinema.
Indian cricket all set to scale new heights

Indian cricket is in the midst of a phenomenally successful phase, says Partab Ramchand. He is convinced that it is headed for another glorious era under Virat Kohli.

Indian cricket is in the midst of a new and even more phenomenally successful era under Virat Kohli. Ever since the start of the New Millennium first under Sourav Ganguly and then under M.S. Dhoni, Indian cricket has climbed to unprecedented heights. The really memorable achievements have included winning the inaugural World T-20 tournament in 2007, winning the 2011 Fifty50 World Cup four years later, emerging victorious in the Champions Trophy in 2013 and rising to the No. 1 ranking in Tests.

Other notable achievements have been winning away Tests on a more regular basis, winning Test series in England, West Indies (more than once), New Zealand and Pakistan and sharing rubbers in South Africa and Australia. Besides, the country produced some of the world’s outstanding players who were rated very high, if not at the pedestal in the ICC rankings.

Over the past two decades then Indian cricket has enjoyed phenomenal success and now as we are about to enter the third decade of the 21st Century, it seems ready to make another leap and achieve further laurels. The Indian team is ranked No. 1 in Tests and No. 2 in ODIs. They again have some of the world’s finest players and the results have been sensational, the high point being the maiden series triumph in Australia in 2018-19, a feat that was achieved after 71 years.

India have won two successive contests in Sri Lanka in 2015 and 2017 after failing to win a series in the island nation for 22 years. True, they have yet to win a series in South Africa but somehow one feels that this is round the corner. At home, of course, India is the master of all they survey having lost only one Test series in the last 15 years and recently setting up a world record of eleven successive home series victories with the win over South Africa.

It is never easy to maintain a successful run for very long. The greats retire, their replacements are not good enough and the side goes through a rough phase.

In January 1984, Greg Chappell, Dennis Lillee and Rod Marsh retired simultaneously and Australia suffered a slump. It was never going to be easy to cover up for the exits of such all-time greats and the Aussies took a long time to recoup, in the meantime suffering one defeat after another.

It has been the same with the West Indies. Once the formidable teams under Clive Lloyd and Vivian Richards broke up following the retirements of the greats, the West Indies, despite the brave efforts of Brian Lara and Shivnarine Chanderpaul, Curtley Ambrose and Courtney Walsh, struggled. And since these players called it a day, the slide has been even more pronounced and the West Indies are languishing near the bottom of the table in the ICC Test and ODI rankings.

Indian cricket has been more fortunate in that even after the legends...
have retired, it has been able to maintain their supremacy thanks to the replacements being as good. The Indian team performed admirably in the first decade of the New Millennium thanks to the presence of the most lustrous batting line-up in the contemporary game – The Fab Four consisting of Sachin Tendulkar, Rahul Dravid, Sourav Ganguly and V.V.S. Laxman, which became the Fab Five with Virender Sehwag joining in.

Spin twins Anil Kumble and Harbhajan Singh gloriously maintained the Indian spin bowling tradition while there was enough strength in the pace bowling spearheaded by the likes of Javagal Srinath, Zaheer Khan and Irfan Pathan. In their own different ways, Ganguly and Dhoni proved to be outstanding captains while presiding over Indian cricket’s most glorious era.

There was a sense of trepidation when one by one Ganguly, Kumble, Dravid, Laxman, Tendulkar and Sehwag retired. But with more than adequate replacements around, the Indian team has remained very strong. The middle-order batting in particular has been outstanding with Kohli being the fulcrum and Cheteswar Pujara and Ajinkya Rahane not being far behind. Now, following the arrival of Hanuma Vihari and Mayank Agarwal, and the resurrection of Rohit Sharma at the top of the order, the batting has a really formidable look.

And, for once, the bowling is perhaps even stronger making sure that the Indian juggernaut just keeps on rolling. The spin bowling tradition has passed on from Kumble and Harbhajan to Ravi Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja with Kuleep Yadav and Yuzvendra Chahal doing a splendid job in the ODIs. But it is the pace bowling that is perhaps the main reason why Indian cricket is enjoying a golden run. Gathering in strength over the years it is now at its peak.

Indeed it is an embarrassment of riches to have a quintet of world class fast bowlers in Ishant Sharma, Mohammed Shami, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Jasprit Bumrah and Umesh Yadav around.

The bench strength too is very encouraging with a number of talented youngsters waiting in the wings. And in this healthy scenario, Kohli, like his two predecessors before him, is all poised to take Indian cricket to new heights.

(The writer is a veteran sports writer who spent his career working for The Indian Express and The Telegraph and Sportsworld.)

Study highlights need to avoid landscape changes near forest areas

A new study by CSIR’s Hyderabad-based Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB) has emphasised the need to avoid changes in land use patterns near forest areas to prevent transmission of parasites and infections between human settlements and wildlife.

Manmade landscape changes such as land use change and fragmentation of habitat are known to alter the diversity of wildlife. These changes are also likely to change the diversity of parasites in the wildlife with implication for their health, since host and parasite diversity are strongly connected. However, research on the subject is limited. The effects of land use change and habitat fragmentation often co-occur but may affect the parasite diversity substantially differently.

In the new study, the researchers assessed how land use changes such as plantation, livestock foraging and human settlement and habitat fragmentation could impact the diversity of gastro-intestinal parasites in wild mammalian host species in Annamalai Hills in the Western Ghats.

The researchers extracted and analysed parasite eggs from about 4000 faecal specimens of 23 wildlife species in 19 forest fragments of the Western Ghats over two years. It was found that the presence of plantations and potentially livestock significantly increased parasite diversity in the wildlife. However, the effect of habitat fragmentation was not significant.

“We found many parasites of cattle and human origin. The presence of plantations and potentially livestock significantly increased the parasite diversity due to possible spillover. We found more parasite species in wildlife nearer human settlement. Disturbed forest had more parasites than the non-disturbed ones,” explained Govindhaswamy Umapathy, who led the study, while speaking to India Science Wire.

The study, Umapathy said, shows that cattle and domestic animals should be periodically de-wormed and completely restricted from roaming and interacting in wildlife habitat.

Umashankar Mishra
(Courtesy: India Science Wire)
Neville Cardus hailed him as “Australia in excelsis”. He was “a young eagle among crows and daws”, wrote the peerless cricket writer. Not surprisingly, he was referring to Keith Ross Miller, the most colourful cricketer of the immediate post-World War II generation, hitting sixes with gay abandon, bowling furiously fast and pulling off magnificent catches.

A great crowd-puller, Miller was the entertainer par excellence always in the game. Moreover, he was Hollywood handsome, tall and broad-shouldered with dark, brown hair. As Wisden noted in its tribute when Miller passed away in 2004. “Little wonder women wanted to be with him and men wanted to be him!”

Before Garfield Sobers took over the title in the 1960s, it was Miller who was acknowledged to be the greatest all-rounder of all time. With an enviable record of 2958 runs with seven centuries at an average of 36.97 and 170 wickets at 22.97 apiece with seven five-wicket hauls and one ten-wicket haul in 55 Tests, the sobriquet certainly fitted the Australian.

The finest series of his Test career which stretched from 1946 to 1956 was the one in the West Indies in 1955 when he got three hundreds in the five Tests besides picking up 20 wickets. Only Sobers has notched up a similar feat. As Richie Benaud said in his tribute when Miller passed away: “Miller was a one-off cricketer. They don’t come like him anymore.” When it came to changing the course of a match in about half an hour by scoring a breezy 50 or taking three quick wickets – the hallmark of the dynamic all-rounder – Miller had few peers.

Miller was an engaging, gregarious personality who loved the good things of life. Off the field, his zest for life and natural charm attracted friendship from every quarter. He was a charismatic personality who had a way with the spectators. Indian opening batsman Syed Mushtaq Ali, himself a handsome personality with a swashbuckling game to match and with an imitable hold over the crowds, wrote highly of Miller’s multi-faceted personality in his autobiography, *Cricket Delightful*.

The two played against each other during the visit of the Australian Services team to India in 1945 and Mushtaq notes: “The match was memorable for me since I first met Keith Miller and took a fancy for him immediately. His cricket, his personality, his gait, his stance, his run-up, his throw and release of the ball and his beaming face all had tremendous appeal. Later, we became good friends and he remains one of my favourite cricketers.” Miller, in fact, wrote the foreword to the book that was released in 1967.

Miller was a star member of Don Bradman’s Invincibles, which demolished England in 1948. Being an independent personality, he had differences with Bradman and he also had a few brushes with those in authority. But no one could question his dynamism or value to the side as the all-rounder supreme. The number of times he came to Australia’s rescue either with bat or ball are too numerous to recall.

Mention, however, must be made of his only ten-wicket haul in Tests which was against England at Lord’s in 1956. It was regarded
As among the finest fast medium bowling performances seen in England and shaped a famous victory. The ultimate showman, Miller, acknowledged the ovation by picking the umpire’s pocket and tossing the balls into the crowd. With Ray Lindwall, Miller formed one of the legendary fast bowling pairs in cricket history. Miller kept in touch with the game after retirement as a journalist writing for several newspapers and making regular visits to England for the purpose. His reports were typically hard-hitting and breezy. He maintained his friendships and his fascination for classical music, being a great fan of Beethoven. During World War II, when he was a fighter pilot during one of his missions, he reputedly diverted over Bonn to see Beethoven’s birthplace. Miller wrote several books, with his autobiography *Cricket Crossfire* being well received for his honest comments about issues and personalities. But the enduring image of Miller was always be one as Australia’s finest ever all-rounder, flamboyant, insouciant, hugely gifted and a dashing personality on and off the field.

A year on, still no justice for Jamal Khashoggi

More than a year after the murder of Jamal Khashoggi, there is no sign of justice while the perpetrators of the crime remain unidentified and the masterminds behind his killing are still at large. To end this injustice, the World Association of News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) supports global calls for an independent criminal investigation led by the United Nations to be backed up by meaningful, decisive actions from states with the capacity to hold Saudi Arabia to account.

“Mr Khashoggi’s murder cannot go unanswered and there can be no return to ‘business as usual’ with a regime that has ridden roughshod over international law, human rights and the profession of journalism,” says WAN-IFRA CEO Vincent Peyrègne.

“We call for justice for Jamal Khashoggi and an end to this charade of innocence, deflection and diversion which does nothing but perpetuate a level of impunity that chills the entire profession of journalism,” says WAN-IFRA President Fernando de Yarza Lopez-Madrazo. Mr Khashoggi’s death and the circumstances surrounding it remain a stain on our collective conscience and are an insult to the laws and protections that are supposed to govern the international system. Saudi Arabia must be held accountable, and those responsible must face justice.”

On 2nd October 2018, Khashoggi entered the Saudi Arabian consulate in Istanbul, Turkey to collect documents related to his upcoming marriage to his Turkish fiancée, Hatice Cengiz. But he never came out. For the next two weeks, the Saudi Government denied any knowledge about Khashoggi’s whereabouts, claiming that he had left the consulate after an hour. Then, on 20th October, state television reported that he had in fact been murdered in an operation ordered by a Saudi intelligence officer.

However, conflicting information about his disappearance continued to surface, with differing reports on how Khashoggi had died. More than a month later, Saudi Arabia’s attorney general admitted that he had been given a lethal injection inside the consulate and that his death had been premeditated.

Since Khashoggi’s murder, 11 people have been charged over the journalist’s death, with five facing the death penalty. However, a high level of impunity surrounds the case in which none of those charged have been identified, despite intelligence reports from multiple global sources - including the CIA - supporting the theory of official Saudi involvement.

In a damning report released in June this year, the UN special rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, Agnes Callamard, concluded there was credible evidence of individual liability amongst high-level Saudi officials, including Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman. The UN report stated that Khashoggi’s killing violated six international laws “and was the result of elaborate planning involving extensive coordination and significant human and financial resources.”

At a ceremony on 1 June, Jamal Khashoggi was posthumously awarded the Golden Pen of Freedom, WAN-IFRA’s annual award recognising individuals or organisations that have made an outstanding contribution to the defence and promotion of press freedom.

While the crimes against Khashoggi go unanswered, the climate for media freedom in Saudi Arabia remains in severe decline. Reports indicate at least 16 journalists are known to be behind bars, although the actual figure could be far higher. Critical independent coverage of religion, foreign policy, the military and the Kingdom’s ruling family continues to be stifled via tight controls over content and the threat of severe punishment for dissent.
Ancient literary works give fascinating glimpses into the customs and rituals of everyday life followed in olden days. Some of these rituals were designed to ensure health, beauty and youthfulness.

In the famous Tamil epic of the Sangam era, *Silappathikaram*, Madhavi, one of the main characters, is portrayed in a situation where she aims to win the heart of Kovalan, another pivotal character. Relying on her looks to attract Kovalan, Madhavi first has a relaxing bath, and then decks herself in fine clothes and jewellery. Her toilette is described in elaborate detail.

The water prepared for Madhavi’s bath was no ordinary one, the author of *Silappathikaram* tells us. It was infused with ten kinds of *thuvar*, five types of *virai* and 32 *omaligai*.

*Thuvar* are basically herbs and plants such as jamun plum, galnut, gooseberry, *thaandrikai* (*Belleric myrobalan*), banyan, peepal, fig, white fig and tender mango leaves. *Virai* are aromats. Costus root, wild turmeric, sickle senna, agarwood and sandalwood were the five *virai* which Madhavi used in her bath water. *Omaligai* are special items used to enhance the bathing experience.

Clove, basil, aromatic ginger, cardamom, *jamalgota* seeds, *kottam*, *naagam*, *mata* rice, star anise, nanniari root, crepe ginger, wild turmeric, ilamichai,*kandasurukkarai*, galnut, gooseberry, tropical almond, milk, *shenbugam* flower, wild pepper, maanjii, *vetiver*, *punugu*, minerals from punnai, *pulinagakondral* flower, Indian *jalab* flower, *thamalam*, betel leaf, *magizham*flower, lotus, nunelam (a special kind of cardamom) and *koduveri* are the items listed as *Omaligai*. These items would have been placed in a large bathing tub, to allow their fragrance and other benefits to soak into the water.

Madhavi is described as applying pleasant-smelling ghee to her hair, and then washing it off with the specially prepared water, leaving it soft and silky. After completing her bath, her hair was dried over the fragrant smoke probably emitted by burning specific resins and gums. Continuing the ritual, five partitions are made in her hair, and *maanmathacheru* – a paste made of the extracts of wild turmeric and *javadhu* – is applied on the partings.

Such an extensive list of herbs and aromats used in the ritual bath will surely put modern-day spas to shame. Probably, these spas could take a leaf or two out of the ancient literary texts, so to speak.

Madhavi’s beauty regimen didn’t end there. She applied red cotton extract to her delicate feet and then put on *kaadazhi*, *peeli* and...
Magaravaaimothiram. Kaalazhi is similar to the toe ring known as metti, which is popular even now. Peeli is worn on the toe next to the big toe, and were of two types – adukku peeli and vengaya peeli.

The kaalazhi and peeli seem to have acquired a sacredness in course of time, being associated with the sacred mangalsutra or thali, the symbol of marriage. Sayings like ‘Thalikku peelithunai’ (the Peeli accompanies the mangalsutra) and Peeli, kaalazhiillama kalyanama? (how can a marriage happen without the peeli and kaalazhi?) became popular.

Magaravaaimothiram was a ring worn on the big toe. Toe rings were not the only items of jewellery which adorned Madhavi’s feet. She also wore pariyyagan, noopuram, padagam, sathangai and ariyagam, according to the epic. The first referred to a set of chains running from the ring on the big toe to the noopuram, also known as the silambu. The padagam was worn above the silambu, while the sathangai was similar to the modern kolusu or anklet. Ariyagam was another antique ornament for the foot.

On her thighs, Madhavi wore the kurnucheri, an ancient ornament made in the shape of an elephant tusk or fish.

The author of Silappathikaram describes Madhavi as dressing in floral patterned blue silk, and wearing a virisigai over it, the virisigai being a hip chain comprising a string of 32 large pearls.

Madhavi also wore muthuvailai, made of pearls, and kandigai, yet another ancient ornament, on her shoulders. Her hands were adorned with various types of ornaments such as the soodagam, made of diamonds and pearls, and bangles made of coral, conch shell and gold. On her slender fingers, she wore different types of rings, like the mudakkumothiram, shaped like the opened mouth of a sword fish, the nellivumothiram, the ruby-studded kilarmanimothiram and the thaalseri, which flashed light in all directions.

Her neck was covered with chains and necklaces of various patterns – the delicate strings of the veerachangili, the saradu, the savadi, the sarappali and the muthuaram made of pearls. These chains were fastened with a hook, from which a string of beautiful pearls swung down her back.

The lobes of her well-shaped ears glistened with the kuthumabi, studded with the special chandirabaani diamond and the Indira neelam. The thoyyagam, which is now known as the netichutti, gleamed on her forehead, while valambursangu and the pullagam adorned her hair.

Most of us today have never even heard of many of the herbs mentioned in this portion of the epic, and, with today’s sky-rocketing gold prices, wearing the amount of jewellery described is inconceivable.

I love Tamil Sangam literature not only for its literary merits but also for the insights it gives us into a bygone era, when read through a different lens. The detailed description of Madhavi’s toilette gives an idea of the abundance of water and the biological wealth of the ancient Chola port city of Kaveri Poompatatinam and its surrounding areas.

A study of the book from this angle will perhaps instil in us a desire to know more about the health and beauty benefits of the plants which once were freely available in the region, and encourage us to find ways to propagate our biological wealth.

(The writer, a software engineer, is interested in history and Tamil culture and has researched on Tamil Sangam Literature, Chennai history and temples. She runs a YouTube channel in her name, focused on Tamil Literature.)
The group consisting of 23 members left by an Indigo flight on the morning of 10th October, which took us to Amritsar via Mumbai. As it was already 1.30 pm by the time we reached our destination, the group decided to have a go at the sumptuous lunch provided by the Hotel Park Inn at Radisson. After a quick check-in and a brief rest, we were off on our visits.

The first halt was at the 16th Century Durgiana Temple dedicated to Goddess Durga. The temple is modelled on the Golden Temple with its main shrine rising from the midst of a tank, its central dome covered with gold and the rest of the structure wrapped in marble. It is also called Silver Temple for its carved silver doors.

Surprisingly, most of the outlets in the area were serving lassi but not tea until an enterprising owner of a small restaurant decided to oblige us. While we were busy gorging on hot gulab jamun and samosa, we could see the owner getting fresh packets of milk and making special tea for us. Once the women in our group returned after window-shopping, we decided to visit the Golden Temple. What an experience it was!

The entire surroundings of the Sri Harmandir Sahib, better known as the Golden Temple, have been cleared of encroachments. Curbs have been imposed on the movement of any kind of vehicles in the cordoned-off area. In the evening, all landmarks both outside and inside the temple premises are well lit. As you enter the temple after getting your bare feet cleansed by a continuously flowing water strategically positioned at the entrance, you get the feeling that you are entering a devulogam or dream world. Wearing a scarf on the head, available for sale outside and free inside the temple, is a must for every devotee entering the temple complex.

On the advice of our guide Simran, a portly Punjabi woman speaking in typical Punjabi English, we decided on darshan of the Granth Sahib the same evening. Hundreds of pilgrims standing in front of the sanctum sanctorum waiting for darshan entered in batches, making the movement smooth and hassle-free.

Once inside, we saw the Granth Sahib placed in the centre with groups of priests singing the traditional hymns in unison. You could hear many pilgrims chanting ‘Waheguru (Wondrous destroyer of darkness)’ as they were circumambulating the holy place.

After darshan and a 45-minute tour of facilities on the first and second floor of the main temple, the group decided to savour the dinner at the Guru-ka-langar located at the south east corner of the gurudwara.
complex. An estimated 75000 pilgrims come to eat here every day. Considered one of the biggest community kitchens in the world it serves meals round the clock all through the year, justifying the popular Sikh saying that no one in Amritsar ever goes to bed hungry.

Here, pilgrims from every religion, caste and social status are treated equally. You could have a CEO or a labourer sitting next to you. The dinner consisting of hot rotis, a subji (curry), dhal and rice payasam was wholesome and tasty. Except that some senior citizens like me found it difficult to get up after sitting cross-legged to eat the meal.

The second day, the group first visited Jallianwala Bagh, a walled garden, which is a major landmark in the history of India’s struggle for freedom. The Martyr’s Memorial built in the shape of an eternal flame has become an important pilgrim site at Amritsar. A section of the wall with bullet marks is preserved along with the Memorial Well into which many people jumped and finally drowned. Unfortunately, this portion was cordoned off as renovation work was going on.

The next attraction was the Partition Museum, said to be the world’s first museum of its kind, and is based on the 1947 Partition of India. It tells us the stories of millions of people affected during Partition through oral histories, personal artefacts, letters, photographs, and original documents. The museum is housed in the Town Hall building, a short walk away from the Golden Temple at the beginning of the Heritage Street.

Bang opposite is the Brothers Dhaba where we went for lunch. The dhaba (roadside restaurant) serves Amritsari asli (original) Punjabi khana (food). Everyone in the group could be seen gorging on the varieties of dishes followed by a glass of lassi. One of the foodies in the group described it as the most divine drink on the planet.

Our group then undertook the 45-minute bus ride to Attari at the Wagah Border. Watching the pomp and pageantry of the Beating the Retreat ceremony and the change of guard was an interesting experience. This half hour pageantry is preceded by a 90-minute interactive patriotic fiesta. It is a huge attraction for visitors, especially the younger generation who join in the patriotic song-dance routine with gusto. Some in our group, however, felt that the exercise was all hype with little substance.

The next morning, we left for Chandigarh, a four-and-half-hour journey by bus. At the best-planned city in India, we checked into Hotel Mount View – a five-star hotel run by the government with spacious rooms but backed by mediocre maintenance. The afternoon saw the group visiting the world-famous Neck Chand Rock Garden which exhibits rocks of all sizes and colours besides dolls, figurines, statuettes housed in caves, artificial hills and amphitheatres.

The following morning, the last day of our trip, while I left Chandigarh by train for Delhi to meet old friends, the rest of the group left for the airport to catch the flight to Chennai. I arrived in Chennai the next day with a Delhi Belly. All the rich asli Punjabi khana of Amritsar and Chandigarh had had its effect on my tender digestive system and triggered several trips to rest rooms.

ABP makes top-level changes to editorial team

ABP News is undertaking major resource restructuring in its editorial department. ABP News is implementing the step to better utilise its talent, empower their editorial to drive more accountability, and to ensure greater clarity in roles. The existing hierarchy within the newsroom is undergoing a makeover. This move will ensure the channel is more audience-centric and responsive towards its consumers.

The roles in the organisation will be more defined wherein Rajnish Ahuja will be the senior VP, News and Programming; Sanjay Bragta the VP, News Gathering; Arun Nautiyal the VP, News Production; Sumit Awasthi the VP, Planning and Special Coverage; Vibha Kaul Bhatt the associate VP, Programme Production; and Anju Juneja the associate VP, Special Projects.

A new role of associate VP, Production and Operations, will be introduced to work in partnership with newsroom and technology teams. Nitin Sukhija will be heading the same.

(Courtesy: Exchange4media.com)
When I was 12, my father threw me into the metaphorical sea of the works of P.G. Wodehouse, leaving after giving me the elaborate instructions, “Read!” While I initially paddled about awkwardly through chapters, hanging onto my dictionary like a float, I slowly befriended these strange waters. It was only a matter of time before I became extremely attached to his writing style, and proclaimed this my favourite water body, an opinion that has not wavered despite years of reading other authors. Here, I shall try to explain my admiration for this writer.

Wodehouse was a 20th Century British writer, who, as he mentions in some prologue, started writing at the age of five. Wodehouse was no activist. He wrote not about wars and prevalent social evils (even though his era was that of the World Wars), but more about silly, droll lives of British aristocrats. His works were predominantly humorous, and his language and vocabulary were stunning.

Wodehouse was, I believe, a pioneer in humorous writing. Wodehouse had an incredible way of stringing and placing sentences together, which is what won him his audience. I enjoy how Wodehouse employed very subtle humour, seldom using innuendos or puns. His humour arose from his descriptions and dialogues, and the clever juxtaposition of words and images, which have never failed to make me giggle with glee.

For example, to imply that a gentleman was standing very quietly, he described his comportment as “a perfect impersonation of someone who wasn’t there”. Or to say that he came out of the room very fast, “He went in and came out so quickly that he nearly met himself going out.” (Very Good, Jeeves)

Reading Wodehouse is a great way to work on your vocabulary, grammar and sentence structure. Each time I read a book of his, I learn some half a dozen phrases, many referring to English culture, and easily 20 to 30 new words, some including imbroglio, escutcheon, nolle prosequi, preux chevalier, and gruntled (“if not actually disgruntled, he was far from being gruntled,” Code of The Woosters).

Also, the variety in the kind of sentences he used, and the way he changed his jargon and style of speech according to the character,
is mind-blowing. In fact, I can guarantee that a new reader’s substantial improvement from reading just one of his books, will outdo that of an equal amount of time on any English textbook.

Wodehouse created an incredibly simple world where an Earl’s greatest problem in life could be that his pet pig is not fat enough for a fattest-pig contest. With an assortment of aunts, uncles, cousins, dukes, impersonations of these people, policemen, policemen’s helmets, and unimaginable criss-crosses of lovers, Wodehouse sets the stage for extremely intricate, complex and hilarious plots, as seen in some of my favourites, Full Moon, Piccadilly Jim and Uncle Freddie in Springtime. And, using the magical swish of turning a page, we read time and again of how he eliminates every single problem with a single blow, so that it’s win-win for everyone.

I would love to live in that world. I would, rather than worry about the various problems of life, deal with much sillier and happier problems. In Piccadilly Jim, he even features this Jim, who, due to a complicated series of circumstances, has to impersonate himself!

In a world currently diseased with a billion problems, are we not, to quote Stephen Fry, “in need of this remarkable healing spirit, this balm for hurt minds?” Undeniably so, I say. And if we cannot ourselves live in that Utopian world, we can very well experience it by burying our noses in his works, and living it vicariously through his splendid characters.

On the whole, I find huddling up with a Wodehouse to be one of the ultimate mood-lighteners. I strongly advise anyone with even a fleeting desire to be happy to pick up any one of his books; they will not be disappointed.

To put it simply, there are two types of people in the world: those who like Wodehouse and those who have not read his works, and I can say this with unflinching confidence. After all, he was regarded by some as merely the greatest writer of his time and, by others, the one true master of the English Language.

(The writer is a student of Sishya & Vidya Mandir School in Chennai.)

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**Climate vulnerability map of India coming soon**

Rising sea levels, increasing number of extreme weather events, urban floods, changing temperature and rainfall patterns – such impacts of climate change are being felt in many parts of the country and not just coastal areas or hilly regions. For preparing communities and people to meet the challenge arising out of such changes, information specific to a state or even district is needed because such impacts of climate change are not uniform.

In order to meet this need, a pan India climate vulnerability assessment map is being developed. The map is being developed under a joint project of the Department of Science and Technology (DST) and Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).

“Such climate vulnerability atlas has already been developed for 12 states in the Indian Himalayan Region, using a common framework. Now this methodology will be extended to non-Himalayan states so that we can have a national level climate vulnerability profile for India. The atlas is expected to be ready by the middle of 2020,” announced Akhilesh Gupta, head of the climate change programme at DST while speaking at a national media consultation on climate change here. Gupta said using a common methodology for assessing vulnerability was critical for comparison and for planning adaptation strategies. It also helps in identifying what makes a state or district vulnerable to climate change.

The vulnerability map for hilly states, released in March this year, showed that while all the Himalayan states are vulnerable, Assam and Mizoram are the most vulnerable among them. The map for the Himalayan Region, developed in consultation with states, has details up to the district level. The national map will also do the same, as vulnerability within a state may differ from one region or district to another. A common set of indicators will be used vulnerability profile and ranking of 650 districts all over the country.

Gupta said the climate change research programme of DST was being implemented as part of the National Mission for Sustaining the Himalayan Ecosystem and National Mission on Strategic Knowledge for Climate Change. Among the priority areas identified for research are glaciology, climate modeling, urban climate, extreme events and Himalayan ecosystem studies. In all, climate change cells have been in 25 states in the country and centres of excellence are also being established in states for capacity building.

*Dinesh C Sharma*  
(Courtesy: India Science Wire)
Durga Puja seems incomplete without books and reading

It is rare indeed to find books being displayed and sold at religious festivals anywhere across the world. But West Bengal in general and Kolkata in particular are different, says Shoma A. Chatterji. During Puja every year, you will find bookstalls put up in all big pandals and some small ones too, she says, adding that the love of reading, despite Internet and digital devices, is omnipresent here.

People buy books even when they are attending Durga Puja, decked in all their finery, and this extends to the celebration of the festival beyond Bengal, too. In big pujas in Mumbai and Delhi, you would come across at least one big book stall standing in one corner of the pandal.

Most of the stalls you see at the pujas in Bengal are funded, owned and managed by leading political parties, with a special place claimed by Marxist parties. Reports state that this year, the stalls selling Marxist literature hit a new high by making a total sale of Rs 2 crore, spread over the five days of the festival. Over 1000 stalls were set up by various Left parties.

The publishing arm of the party, National Book Agency (NBA), received an overwhelming response for former Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee’s recent book on China, Swarger Niche Mahabishrinkhala (Chaos Under Paradise), which sold the most. Two editions of the book were completely sold out during the pujas.

Interestingly, Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee is a prominent Bengali playwright and is also said to be an expert on world cinema. He has written several books and plays, and before he entered active politics, he was an active litterateur. CPI (M) also had within its fold, Bratya Basu, an eminent playwright, theatre director and actor who is now with the TMC.

Party workers manning the stalls were happy they did not face problems either from members of the TMC or from other political parties. The Marxist books focused on the party’s functioning, its history, problems and agendas, as well as fiction and non-fiction – on Marxism, its philosophy, theory and so on.

There were ideological books to classics, books for children, and science and technology that drew crowds. Also, books on climate change, traditional philosophy by eminent philosopher Deibiprasad Chattopadhyya, on Bhagat Singh, and the translation of communist leader E.M.S. Namboodiripad’s book on Adi Sankaracharya. Add to this, select works of Russian authors Gorky, Tolstoy and Turgenev.

CPI (M)’s Ballygunge Area Committee happens to be one of the main organisers of the oldest progressive literature stalls in Park Circus, Kolkata, which started in 1952. One of the key organisers there said that, this year, an added agenda was to spread the message of communal harmony and amity and counter propaganda against any religion- or language-based identity violence in the state.

Reportedly, a total of 10000 book stalls had been put up this year across Kolkata, the suburbs and other parts of the state. The TMC stalls were dominated by books authored by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee who has authored more than 40 books and won awards for some of them, too. BJP stalls had books on Narendra Modi and Shyamaprasad Mookerji, while the Congress had books on Gandhian philosophy and Nehru.

The annual covers of Ananda Bazar Patrika and Desh.
Three of the oldest book stalls in Park Street, Park Circus and Jadavpur are always the key attractions and this year was no exception. Said journalist Aniruddha Chakraborty who also manages the progressive literature stalls, “The entire idea of putting up these literature stalls was conceived by communist doyen Kakababu or Muzaffar Ahmed,” adding, “this year, even Leftist activists belonging to terror-stricken Goghat, Khanakul, Purshura, Arambag, Naranghat of Hooghly district had set up Marxist literature stalls”.

Durga Puja is preceded by the release of special puja numbers by newspaper publications in the state. These are known as sharodiya sankhya or annual issue, and contain novels by noted authors, essays of all kinds, a lot of poetry, stories on cinema, theatre, art, interviews, republication of archival letters written by great men and women and so on. The cover page of each of these annuals – more than a hundred of them at the latest count – illustrate the Goddess Mother in various forms and is one of the great attractions.

I recall one memorable cover. It was a year of severe draught. The goddess, wearing a red-bordered sari quite loose, no jewellery or head gear, was standing in the middle of a vast field filled covered by grains withering away. Each cover narrates a story and while a few explain the cover inside, most of them do not and you are left to draw your own conclusions.
On November 9 this year, Amitabh Bachchan completed 50 years as an actor. What can one say about an actor who has performed every imaginable role, from a 13-year-old person genetically born with progeria in Paa or a ghost in two films, an alcoholic-turned-Alzheimer’s patient in Black, a theatre personality who has lost his sheen and is easily conned into doing a stunt scene by a director that paralyses him for life in The Last Lear?

This does not, however, mean that all his films have been masterpieces or that he has performed brilliantly in all of them. But his durability in a fickle film industry and with a more fickle Indian audience is historic and without parallel. In an industry where heroes today find themselves lucky if they can survive well for a decade or more, he is celebrating fifty long years, albeit with a rather sad break of five years somewhere in between.

Amitabh Bachchan with his image of the convoluted, intense, silent and seething anti-hero changed the image of the hero in Hindi mainstream cinema. Interestingly, three top heroes stepped away from accepting the role Bacchan played in blockbuster Zanjeer – Dharmendra, Dev Anand and Raaj Kumar, each citing different reasons. It was Pran who suggested Bachchan and asked Prakash Mehra (the director) to watch Bombay to Goa.

And that was how Amitabh Bachchan arrived. Zanjeer changed the face of the mainstream cop. For the first time, the angry young man in police uniform strode across the screen, holding the audience in thrall with his unsmiling visage, clenched teeth and eager-to-hit fists. His anger arose from a lonely, orphaned childhood thrust on him by the villain who killed his parents as he, a little boy, watched from a hide-out. His methods were unorthodox, both when placed within the police force, as well as against the backdrop of the Hindi cinema’s policeman stereotype.

In his avenging-hero, angry-young-man phase, Amitabh Bachchan evolved into a human personification of violence with common characteristics: he generally came of common working stock; was not highly educated; if he had good filial roots, he alienated himself from them, at least physically, if not emotionally; he was essentially a loner and thrived on his loneliness; thus, it hardly occurred to him to question the use of violent means for a violent end, often, his own.

The hero’s wife or girlfriend occupied marginal space in his life, unless she was of higher stock such as in Muqaddar Ka Sikandar. His violence was magnified, his aggression justified, the blood he drew splattered all around, spanned the scene and the frame and slowly but, surely, the audience watched – mesmerised, accepting his violence as the only form of retributive justice he had recourse to.

The there was another side. When he got back to the industry after a five-year break, Bachchan was besieged with roles. He did...
them all – Major Saab, Lal Badhsah, Chhote Miya Bade Miya, and Suryavanshi. All of them, except for Chhote Miya Bade Miya, flopped miserably at the box office. Suryavanshi did not manage even an initial draw, according to trade papers, what with just four people found warming the seats of an empty theatre in Mumbai.

This was what the superstar had to go through – the one man who had held the pillar of commercial Hindi cinema on his strong shoulders for two long decades, the one man who financiers, distributors and exhibitors could back their money on. But it was no ‘ending’ as such.

Bachchan switched over to senior character roles and, like he did as hero, redefined the ‘character’ role in Hindi cinema. Thanks to the brilliant comeback of a mellowed and bearded Bachchan, the term ‘character actor’ found a new definition. The dividing lines among the hero, the villain and the character actor became a thing of the past. The earlier lover-boy hero seemed to have made a silent exit.

And what a second innings! Again hits, one after the other – a committed bodyguard-to-avenging angel in Ek Ajnabee; the patient father trying to seek legal redress for his son’s murder in Mahesh Manjrekar’s Viruddh; the loving father who is shocked at his sons’ attitude and then turns his back on him forever in Baghbaan; in Paheli, simply a metaphor, a belief, a concept or an illusion, one who could be the Almighty himself; and the quiet don who rules the underworld with an iron hand but has a philanthropic bent of mind in Sarkar. The, of course, films like Kabhie Alvida Na Kehna and Black (where he gives one of the most power-packed performances of his career as a teacher first and Alzheimer’s patient later).

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**New insight on deaths due to malnutrition in infants in India, cause for some cheer**

In a finding that could have an impact on the strategies for dealing with malnutrition in children, a new study has found that the number of infants dying due to malnutrition after six months of age is only around 1.2% in India, much lower than global estimates of the World Health Organization.

The study, conducted in 120 geographical clusters in rural Jharkhand and Odisha, followed up children diagnosed with moderate and severe categories of malnutrition from the age of six months and until they were 18 months old. The results revealed a very low rate of death, 1.1% and 1.2% for children with moderate and severe malnutrition respectively as against WHO estimates of 10%–20%.

Pointing out that case fatality rates below six per cent have been recorded in three other Indian studies also, the researchers noted that the study added to the growing evidence that although acute malnutrition among children aged over six months was high in India, it was not accompanied by as high a case fatality rate as estimated by WHO.

The researchers said the discrepancy between WHO estimate and the Indian data could be largely because of the fact that WHO estimate was based on a study conducted 15 years ago among African children. Also, it had mostly covered hospitalized infants who were more likely to have other medical complications as well, thus increasing the chances of death. Further, they pointed out that the infection rates in Africa are higher than in India.

Indian infants have a small amount of fat hidden in their bodies that may give a survival advantage by acting as a form of energy reserve available to maintain body temperature and brain development when they are nutritionally deprived. The new study also considered only infants above six months of age, unlike the WHO study that considered newborns also, they added.

Commenting on the findings, Dr. Arun Gupta (Breastfeeding Promotion Network of India) said: “given that the risk of mortality is lower than expected among children older than six months, outpatient treatment for severe malnourished children over six months may be too late to avert a substantial number of deaths from under-nutrition in Indian children. Rather, the study further strengthens the case for prioritizing prevention through known health, nutrition and multisectoral interventions in the first 1000 days of life.”

The study results have been published in journal PLOS. It was done jointly by researchers from the University College London, Public Health Foundation of India and Jharkhand-based Ekjut.

*Monika Kundu Srivastava*  
(Courtesy: India Science Wire)
REMEMBERING OM PRAKASH

A versatile performer with a style of his own

For sheer versatility he has few equals in Hindi film history. As a comedian he was second to none. As a character actor he was par excellence. Indeed, he could tackle any role with ease so much so that seasoned directors had him playing the central character in several movies even with big stars around. Comedian and a character actor par excellence Om Prakash's birth centenary was on December 19. Partab Ramchand pays a tribute

Om Prakash was in a league of his own. His compatriots were two of the biggest names among Hindi film comedians – Johnny Walker and Mehmood – but he held his own thanks to his unmatched facial expressions, the impeccable timing of his comedy routines and inimitable dialogue delivery.

And as a character actor, he was a match for the best of his era changing his dialogue delivery and expressions aptly. Few could be better than him in emotional scenes when he could drive even the most unfeeling moviegoer to tears. One marvelled as to how an actor known for his comical skills could transform himself so expertly in melodramatic situations.

Take, for example, Om Prakash role as Joseph in Hariyali aur Rasta (1962). It is essentially a comic role but thanks to his weakness for liquor he becomes corrupt and is in a way responsible for his beloved wife’s death. The manner in which he breaks down sobbing by her body is a performance that tugs at one’s heart. Similarly in Zanjeer (1973) he breaks down at his son’s grave while relating to Amitabh Bachchan about how he had died because of illicit liquor which is why he becomes an informant to Bachchan who plays a police officer about the nefarious activities of the villains.

Dus Lakh (1966) is another film in which he has a major role of a simpleton suddenly become rich and consequently falling easy prey to the shenanigans of Pran and Manorama. Despite the presence of these two, as well as Helen and the romantic lead pair of Sanjay Khan and Babita, it is Om Prakash’s masterly performance that lives in memory.

Hrishikesh Mukherjee was another film maker who realised what a powerful actor Om Prakash was. In quick succession, he had him playing the central role in Budha Mil Gaya (1971) and Chupke Chupke (1975). The latter film had Dharmendra, Amitabh Bachchan, Sharmila Tagore, Jaya Bhaduri, Asrani and David but it was again Om Prakash who stole the show as the family patriarch who is irritated by Dharmendra speaking in shudh (pure) Hindustani. Another role in which he excelled was as the amiable drunk Anglo Indian patriarch in Julie (1975).

Actually, Om Prakash gave memorable performances in several films. He was so versatile that he played an assortment of characters with absolute ease. His performance at Girdharilal in Gopi is another of his stellar roles and many analysts believed that he overshadowed the one and only Dilip Kumar.

That was Om Prakash for you, for he was not overawed by the big names who appeared alongside him. In spite of the presence of powerful star personas like Dilip Kumar, Raj Kapoor, Dev Anand and Ashok Kumar, he carved out a niche for himself. After all, he had developed a style of his own, a style that made him a household name in movies for over 40 years.

Photo: Internet

The redoubtable Om Prakash.
Om Prakash appeared in over 300 films, such was his demand. Indeed, some of the best film makers in Bollywood were competing for his presence in their films for they had roles which they knew only he could pull off effortlessly. He didn’t even need a big role to make an impact. How can one forget the suffering old man who is treated shabbily by his son in law Mannmohan in Purab aur Pachim (1970)? It is little more than a cameo but what life Om Prakash puts into it!

With all his expertise in character roles laced with emotion, Om Prakash’s lasting image will be one of the best comedians in Hindi film history. His mannerisms, his stock dialogue (hum bhi ajeeb hain, meaning I’m also so strange, with a bemused look at the camera) and his strong screen presence made him a natural funny man.

Who can forget the amiable Daddu (Amitabh Bachchan’s grandfather) in Namak Halal (1982)? One can really go on and on while talking or writing about this unforgettable actor who also doubled up as a producer of a few films like Gateway of India, Sanjog and Jahan Ara. His career lasted a full 50 years (1944 to 1994). He passed away following a heart attack in Bombay in 1998.

REMEMBERING NAUSHAD
An exceptional Hindi music composer of timeless tunes

On the occasion of his birth centenary on December 25, Partab Ramchand pays tribute to Sangeet Samrat Naushad whose soulful melodies from numerous movies composed several years ago continue to regale old-timers as well as a new generation of film music fans even today.

In the early and mid-1960s, like any teenager, I loved listening to Hindi film music on the radio. Shankar and Jaikishen were my favourite but I had high regard for the music of Naushad, Madan Mohan, S.D. Burman, Salil Chowdhary and Roshan.

Then in 1967, I saw Mehboob Khan’s Andaz during one of the Sunday morning shows (a regular feature then when old movies would be shown) at a theatre in Madras and was absolutely overcome by the melody of Naushad’s music for the film. I had heard two or three songs from the classic, incidentally the only film starring Raj Kapoor and Dilip Kumar, on the radio but it was only when I saw the film that I heard all the songs.

For days thereafter I kept humming the tunes from Andaz particularly Tu kahe kgar, Hum aaj kahi dil kho baite, Jhoom jhoom ke nacho aaj, Koi mere dil me and Toote na dil. I soon became a big Naushad fan.

Shankar and Jaikishen were, however, still at the top of my favourites list but not for long. A few months later, I saw Baiju Bawra again at a morning show at a theatre in Madras and overnight Naushad replaced S-J in my book and that is where he has stayed till today. I wondered how someone could compose the kind of classical music that Naushad composed for Baiju Bawra.

A lovely picture of the one and only Naushad.
I could not get the songs out of my mind and day or night I could only keep singing O duniya ke rakhwale, Man tadpat hari darshan ko, Mohe bhool gaye sawariya, Bachpan ki mohabat ko and Tu Ganga ki mauj main Jamuna ka dhara.

My next step was to check on Naushad’s career and the films that he composed music for and that meant going back to the early 1940s for that’s when he started out for what proved to be a long and illustrious career. The 1950-60s are regarded as the golden age of Hindi film music and Naushad was in the forefront of this glorious era, producing song after song that has stood the test of time.

Over the years, I have seen many of the old films embellished with music by Naushad. Some other movies I have not been able to get hold of but I have heard the music on audio or seen the scenes on video and they continue to overwhelm me for their pleasant rhythm, judicious use of the various ragas and impeccable direction of a large orchestra.

Naushad came from an orthodox family who were opposed against him taking up film music as a career. His father in fact had given him an ultimatum to shed his interest in music if he wanted to stay at home. The Lucknow-based Naushad ran away to Bombay in 1937 to try his luck as a musician.

Naushad started his career in 1940 with Prem Nagar but it was Rattan (1944) which saw him become a household name. Filmgoers all over India were humming and singing the numbers from Rattan. It is said that he had to keep from his family members the fact that he had composed music for the hit film. When Naushad got married, the band was playing tunes from Rattan, so popular were the songs.

For the next quarter of a century, Naushad composed music for numerous movies and most of them were big hits because of the songs. He had as many as 26 silver jubilee hits, eight golden jubilee hits and four diamond jubilee successes. His outstanding films are too many but mention must be made of Anmol Ghadi, Shahjehan, Dard, Anokhi Ada, Mela, Andaz, Dillagi, Dulari, Dastan, Deedar, Baiju Bawra, Aan, Amar, Shabab, Uran Khatola, Mother India, Sohni Mahiwal, Kohinoor, Mughal-e-Azam, Gunga Jumna, Mere Mehboob and Leader.

The songs from these films continue to be everyone’s favourite and the ultimate tribute to Naushad is that the new generation of music lovers also hums his melodies. Lata Mangeshkar, Mohammed Rafi and Mukesh sang some of the best songs in their career under his baton and Naushad struck up a particularly special rapport with lyricist Shakeel Badayuni.

However, sometime during the mid-1960s, Naushad suddenly seemed to have lost the melodious touch. Even as the country gyrated to the breezy tracks of R.D. Burman, Naushad came up with some mediocre stuff – by his standards – in films like Dil Diya Dard Liya, Ram aur Shyam, Aadmi, Saaz aur Awaz, Palki and Sungursh. Accepting the fact that he had to shift gears to keep up to the changing times, Naushad came up with some lilting tunes in Saathi at the end of the decade without actually compromising on his melodious approach.

Through the 1970s and 80s, Naushad continued to compose music for several films but hardly any of the songs touched a chord with movie goers. Their tastes had changed and Naushad’s music was ignored. Film offers cooled off but he continued to work even during the 1990s, composing music for the Shah Rukh starrer, Guddu, in 1995. His last completed film was Taj Mahal: an eternal love story in 2005 but by this time Naushad was in failing health and he passed away the following year.

It is a pity that Naushad’s career petered out towards the end, but the memories he has left us with, his soulful tunes composed during the golden age of Bollywood film music, will be with us forever and continue to regale fans of a new generation. He was the recipient of several awards during his career but the ones he treasured most were the Dadasaheb Phalke Award in 1981 and the Padma Bhushan in 1992.

(The writer has more than a passing interest in English and Hindi films and music.)
TRIBUTE TO J. OM PRAKASH (1926-2019)

A successful filmmaker whose empathy for women showed

It is indeed sad that some significant stories of eminent people remain unknown till that person has passed on. Producer-director J. Om Prakash, who died in Mumbai at the age of 93, is a classic example. Shoma A. Chatterji on the man who lived through the age of technical and social evolution of Hindi cinema and contributed to the change in his own way as producer and director.

Most tributes mentioned him as “Hrithik Roshan’s grandfather and former filmmaker”, which is a pity, as he was a man who personified the ‘rags-to-riches’ story much beyond its clichéd meaning. He lived through the age of technical and social evolution of Hindi cinema and contributed to the change in his own way as producer and director.

J. Om Prakash was born in Sialkot in pre-Independent Punjab in 1926 and his father was a model school teacher who instilled in him an enthusiasm to learn, telling him again and again that learning never stops, because knowledge is an ocean and, never mind, how many drops you imbibe from this ocean, they still remain drops.

Om Prakash graciously exited from public life when he stopped making films as age took over. Instead, he enjoyed the fame, success and affluence his son-in-law Rakesh Roshan achieved, followed by the larger-than-life incredible success of his grandson Hrithik Roshan who, as a sign of affection, gifted him a car.

Om Prakash rose from being a mere clerk in a film distribution office to the position of manager in the same office. Qateel Shifai and Faiz Ahmed Faiz were his friends. They probably inspired in him the love for poetry and music. Reportedly, he could play the harmonium very well. His ear for music and lyrics influenced his directorial work. He was also known to give suggestions on music and lyrics to young music directors.

After Partition, Om Prakash moved to Bombay where he lived in a slum in Chinchpokli and tried to spend his nights sleeping in local trains. His earlier job in Silakot, which had given him accounting skills, helped him to finally land a job as an accountant with director Mohan Segal who married Om Prakash’s wife’s sister. This happened when Mohan Segal was directing New Delhi. In Chinchpokli, he met and befriended actor Rajendra Kumar, who was also struggling to survive.

Then, as if by magic, Om Prakash got an offer from a financier to produce a film and this led to his only black-and-white film, Aas Ka Panchi, which had Rajendra Kumar and Vyjayantimala in the cast and music scored by Shankar-Jaikishen and Hasrat Jaipuri, with Shailendra as lyricist. Rajendra Kumar was a big name by then and Mohan Kumar signed on Om Prakash as his directorial assistant.
Perhaps for the first time, modern Hindi cinema was dealing with the theme of a pathologically suspicious husband who ruins his own life because he unwarrantedly suspects his wife of adultery. Not many films till then had portrayed a married woman not only leaving her husband but marrying again, so this was a bold step.

Om Prakash’s directorial break came with the film Aap Ki Kasam in 1973, inspired from a Malayalam movie, the review of which he had chanced upon in a Bombay weekly. The film starred Rajesh Khanna, Mumtaz, Sanjeev Kumar, Rehman, Asrani and A. K. Hangal. The music was by R.D. Burman, who received a Filmfare nomination for it. The film was declared a superhit at the box office, and received critical acclaim too.

Om Prakash not only produced the film but set up his own production banner, Filmyug, meaning ‘the age of cinema’. His track record of 20 films may sound rather modest by contemporary Bollywood standards but the films were successful both commercially and critically. He had a tendency to give his films names beginning with the letter A because he felt it was lucky for him, though he did deviate from this trend a couple of times.

Aakraman, Aashiq Hoon Baharon Ka, Aakhir Kyon (1985), Apnapan (1977), Aasha (1980), Apna Bana Lo (1982) and Admi Khilona Hai (1993) are some of his other films. With Aakhir Kyon, he boosted the mainstream career of Smita Patil. Most of his films, on rewind, show his empathy for women though he is never loud about it but presents it through beautiful songs and good characterisation.

During his peak phase as producer and director, Om Prakash introduced three more directors – Raghunath Jhalani (who assisted Bimal Roy) in Aaye Din Bahaar Ke, Mukul Dutt in Aan Milo Sajna, and writer Sachin Bhaumick as a director in Raja Rani. Filmyug was the first production house to introduce five new directors, including Om Prakash himself.

Om Prakash’s crowning glory was perhaps the Lifetime Achievement Award he received from the Asian Guild of London in 2004 when three generations were bestowed awards on the same platform the same evening. Rakesh Roshan won the Best Director Award and Hrithik Roshan bagged the Best Actor Award for the film Koi Mil Gaya.

TRIBUTE TO VIDYA SINHA (1947-2019)

The Rajnigandha actress, our favourite girl-next-door

We can never ever forget Vidya Sinha who made a mark with films like Chhoti Si Baat and Rajnigandha. She established a screen image very different from her more glamorous and starry peers. Shoma A. Chatterji pays a handsome tribute to an actress who was loved by all who watched her on screen, who passed away of a severe lung infection in a Mumbai hospital on August 15 this year.

Those who have been fortunate enough to have watched Basu Chatterjee’s Rajnigandha will never forget its independent-minded, charming leading lady doing her doctoral research. The role was played by Vidya Sinha, a married young actress who had made her film debut in 1973 in a film called Raja Kaka that vanished without trace.

Rajnigandha is a milestone in the history of Hindi cinema because it kicked off the trend of ‘middle-of-the-road’ cinema of which Hrishikesh Mukherjee was also a practitioner. But there was a difference between Mukherjee and Chatterjee, in the sense that Basu Chatterjee went one step ahead of his predecessor. The film had no big stars and was made on a shoestring budget based on a Hindi story called Yeh Sach Hai penned by noted Hindi litterateur Manu Bhandari. It was a woman-dominated film without sex or graphic romance.

Rajnigandha beautifully showcased a simple, honest, triangular love story among three characters who are ordinary city-bred Indians and simple in taste and attire. Chatterjee introduced the audience to two theatre stalwarts, Amol Palekar and Dinesh Thakur, and presented Vidya Sinha with a distinct, sari-wearing image. The film had a magical musical score and lovely songs composed by none other than Salil Choudhury himself.

Few are aware that at the age of 17, Vidya Sinha won a beauty contest and was crowned Miss Bombay. She made her screen debut with Raja Kaka (1974), paired with Kiran Kumar, but the film flopped and no one noticed her till Rajnigandha.
made its remarkable appearance on the Hindi screen.

Sinha was famous for her ‘middle-class, sari-wearing, flowers-in-her-hair image’ on screen and, perhaps, this was what made her refuse the role later played by Zeenat Aman in Satyam Shivam Sundaram (1978) because she said she would be very uncomfortable in exposing her body in any way.

Sinha was one of the most media-shy actresses we have seen and kept her private life absolutely private. Gossip magazines found no juice in her personal life. She was married when she stepped into films and since the couple did not have children, they adopted a daughter who grew up with them.

Sinha did not carry any starry airs but one can recall the few interviews she had given only when the demands came at the time of her film’s release. She acted in only 30 feature films in her rather brief career, but also acted opposite actors like Uttam Kumar and Sanjeev Kumar, among others.

Sinha’s notable films are B.R. Chopra’s Karm (1977), with Rajesh Khanna and Shabana Azmi; Chhoti Si Baat with Amol Palekar which also featured Ashok Kumar; Mukti with Sanjeev Kumar; and Inkaar with Vinod Khanna. Among her other well-known films were Kitaab, directed by Gulzar, with Uttam Kumar playing her husband in which she plays a very ambitious wife; and Pati Patni Aur Woh, a super hit.

She stopped acting in films after she played a negative role in Raj Sippy’s Josh, and in Rajendra Kumar’s Love Story in which she played the repressed wife of Danny Denzongpa and Kumar Gaurav’s mother. This was in 1981. Thirty years later, in 2011, she appeared out of the blue to act in the Salman Khan-starrer, Bodyguard.

Sinha also had a fairly productive innings on television. Hers was a familiar face on the small screen –Bahu Rani, Hum Do Hain Naa, Bhabhi, Kavyanjali, Haar Jeet, Qubool Hai, Ishq Ka Rang Safed, Chandra Nandini, Itti Si Khushi and Kulfi Kumar Baajewala. She was shooting for the last mentioned serial till she was hospitalised. When her first husband died after a long sickness, Sinha married an Indian settled in Australia, but the marriage wasn’t successful. Sinha filed a case against her husband on charges of domestic violence and after a long court battle, she managed to free herself from the relationship. She then stayed single till her death.

*Simple and beautiful—Vidya Sinha played memorable roles in some of the hit films of the 1970s.*

**Thanthi, Manorama, Vijay Karnataka, Eenadu lead in South**

Among the Top 10 Dailies in India, Daily Thanthi bagged the fourth spot. The daily reported 24054000 as compared to 24916000 in IRS Q1 2019, there by adding 8.62 lakh readers. It is the only regional language among the Top 10 dailies to have registered growth in AIR.

Malayala Manorama took the 7th spot among the Top 10 dailies in India and first among the Malayalam dailies. The daily reported 18091000 TR in Q2 as compared to 17480000 TR in IRS Q1, adding 6.1 lakh readers.

Among Kannada dailies, Vijay Karnataka bagged the first spot. It reported 8081000 TR as compared to 7860000 TR in IRS Q1 this year, thereby adding 2.3 lakh readers. Among Telugu dailies, Eenadu took the first spot. Sakshi bagged the second spot among Telugu regional newspapers.

South publications also bagged spots among the Top 20 magazines in the country. Vanitha, fortnightly magazine from Malayala Manorama Group, clinched the fourth spot. Ananda Vikatan, Mathrubhumi Thozhilvartha, Mathrubhumi Arogya Masika and Balarama are the others.

*(Courtesy: exchange4media.com)*
**Other News**

**Broadcaster P. V. Krishnamoorthy is no more**

Well-known broadcaster P. V. Krishnamoorthy, a resident of R. A. Puram, passed away on October 16. He was 98 years old. PVK, as friends and Doordarshan colleagues called him, was seen as a titan of India’s Doordarshan network. He rose from the ranks of a programme executive to become DD’s first director-general (1976). While at DD’s various offices in the country, he not only launched some well-remembered programmes for TV but was also responsible for giving a break to artistes who went on to be top rankers later.

In key positions when Doordarshan was growing, Krishnamoorthy was also witness to some landmark developments in India. During his time at DD, Indira Gandhi assigned him the task of setting up SITE – Satellite Instructional TV Experiment – which would beam educational programmes to India’s outback regions. He worked tirelessly to get SITE going and it is still regarded as a great TV initiative.

Born in Yangon, Myanmar, on 1 April 1921, Krishnamoorthy graduated in English Literature there. He had to flee Rangoon, at the height of the World War II. As a World War II refugee from the Southeast Asian country, he joined External Services Division, All India Radio (AIR), as news reader/announcer in 1944. He went on to become station director of AIR in Chennai and Kolkata and of the Doordarshan Kendra in New Delhi and Mumbai.

Krishnamoorthy travelled across the country setting up new DD stations, equipping them and arranging for training for staff. It was at the Cuttack AIR office that Krishnamoorthy chanced on the talent of a man who became India’s famed flutist and gave him studio assignments – Hariprasad Chaurasia.

After retirement, Krishnamoorthy was a UNICEF consultant for some years. He led a quiet life in his RA Puram apartment, but for those who dropped in to visit him, he was still the bubbling raconteur and witty conversationalist, at ease with seniors as well as youths. He is survived by two sons including P.K. Balachandran, a Colombo-based journalist.

Krishnamoorthy was the first broadcaster to receive the Media Ratna award of the Indian Broadcasters Forum in 2011.

*(Courtesy: Mylapore Times/ The Hindu)*

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**Gautam Adhikari dies**

Gautam Adhikari, former executive editor of TOI and founding editor of DNA, has passed away. He was diagnosed with cancer of liver and pancreas.

Adhikari had served the World Bank in Washington DC as a senior consultant. He was Dean of Times School of Journalism and a senior fellow at the Center for American Progress in Washington, DC. Adhikary authored several books, including *The Intolerant Indian: Why We Must Rediscover A Liberal Space* and *Rolling Stones: Selected Writings*.

*(Courtesy: Exchange4media.com)*

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**Pioneer Arunachal journalist passes away**

The first journalist of Arunachal, Taro Chatung, breathed his last recently at the Tomo Riba Institute of Health & Medical Sciences in Naharlagun. He had been diagnosed with cancer. Chatung was 56 and is survived by his wife, three sons, and a daughter.

Chatung began his journalism and filmmaking career after leaving his state civil service job in 1988. He was known for his straight questions on Doordarshan’s News & Views programme.

Chatung was a founding member of the Arunachal Press Club and the Arunachal Pradesh Union of Working Journalists. He served as the president of both the union and the club for a very long time.

A simple human being, yet with a daring personality, Chatung never hesitated to ask questions, no matter who stood on the other end, and always made them feel comfortable, no matter how tough those questions were.

Called the pioneer of electronic media in Arunachal Pradesh, Chatung did his certificate course in journalism from the Delhi Institute of Journalism. He was the first accredited electronic media person from the state and was awarded by the state government in 2003 and 2005 for his outstanding contribution to journalism.

*(Courtesy: The Arunachal Times/ Eastmojo)*
Winners of PII-ICRC Awards announced

Winners of the 13th edition of the PII-ICRC Annual Awards for Best Article and Best Photograph on a humanitarian subject, jointly organised by the Press Institute of India (PII) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) New Delhi Regional Delegation, were announced on September 27 evening at the India International Centre in New Delhi. The theme of the annual awards this year was ‘Impact of Climate Change on Humanitarian Issues’.

Urvashi Sarkar, an independent journalist, won the first prize in the Best Article category for her piece, ‘Our houses are vanishing. Nobody cares’, which appeared on the PARI (People’s Archive of Rural India) website. The story tracks climate-related displacement and looks at the migration of people between Sagar and Ghoramara Islands in West Bengal and the vanishing of islands, homes and livelihoods.

Disha Shetty, independent journalist, writing for IndiaSpend, bagged the second prize for her article, ‘Bengali-speaking students in Kannada-medium Bengaluru school reveal journey of climate change refugees from disappearing islands’. It was the third article in a series on how climate change is disrupting people’s lives and how people are adapting.

The third prize-winner in the same category, Anup Sharma, an independent journalist based in Guwahati, was awarded for his article, ‘Living like Nomads’ in The Pioneer – a story that looked at how climate change-induced erosion affected peoples’ livelihood and highlighted a tale of livelihood crisis and migration.

In the Best Photograph category, the first prize was shared by G. Sivaprasad, news photographer, The Mathrubhumi, for his picture, ‘Close to the heart’, and Rijo Joseph, chief photographer, Malayala Manorama, for his picture, ‘Running for life’. The two winning entries show a man running on the Cheruthoni Bridge holding a child close to his chest, at the time of the devastating Kerala floods of August 2018. A few metres from the Cheruthoni dam, the bridge was swept under water minutes after they crossed over.

The second prize was won by Rinku Raj, senior photographer, Malayala Manorama, for his photo, ‘Rough sea, tough life’. The picture shows the desperation on the face of a sick woman in a coastal area in Thiruvanthapuram, Kerala, who has lost her house to massive waves invading the shore.

The third prize went to Bibin Xavier, photojournalist, Deepika Daily, for his picture, ‘It was life’. The picture shows a person from the Fire and Rescue Services with a child who was trapped in soil following a landslide in Idukki District – the child died before reaching the hospital.

Special awards were presented in the Best Article category to Jency Samuel, independent journalist from Chennai for her article, ‘Unpredictable seas push fishers away from home’, and to Nikhil Ghanekar, independent journalist
based in Delhi, for his piece, ‘When the hills go thirsty’. In the Best Photograph category Prashant K., senior photographer, Lokmat, Pune, won the special mention for his picture, ‘Mining the aquifer’.

The first, second and third place winners received Rs 100,000, Rs 70,000 and Rs 40,000, respectively. Special awardees received Rs 20,000 each.

Speaking on the occasion, chief guest, Ramon Magsaysay Award winner Sonam Wangchuk, founder, Himalayan Institute of Alternatives Ladakh, and co-founder SECMOL, said: “We hear about wars among countries, but the impact of the war on nature is much worse. Today, a lot more people are dying in calamities that occur due to the changing environment.” He added, “Some of the solutions, including the ice stupa, are small efforts that are helping us survive. These can work for a few more years but the real solutions lie in the big cities.” Quoting Mahatma Gandhi, he said: “live simply so that others may simply live”.

Underscoring the humanitarian consequences of climate change, Yves Heller, deputy head of the ICRC Regional Delegation said, “Climate Change worsens vulnerabilities, poverty and inequalities, especially in situations of armed conflict, where countries, communities and populations are the least able to protect themselves and adapt to an ever-changing environment.”

Sashi Nair, director-editor, Press Institute of India, Chennai, stressed the need for editors and journalists to play a catalyst’s role in highlighting issues on a regular basis, and get action taken on avoiding a climate emergency and securing a safe future for the generations to come.

This year saw many interesting entries from national and regional publications covering the wide-ranging impact of environmental degradation and destruction of ecosystems.

A discussion on the ‘Impact of climate change on humanitarian issues’ preceded the award ceremony. The panel comprised jury members Dinesh C. Sharma, managing editor, India Science Wire, and senior journalists Rina Mukherji and Sarita Brara.

The awards, instituted by the PII and the ICRC, are designed to promote and recognise the outstanding work of journalists in the field of humanitarian reporting.
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