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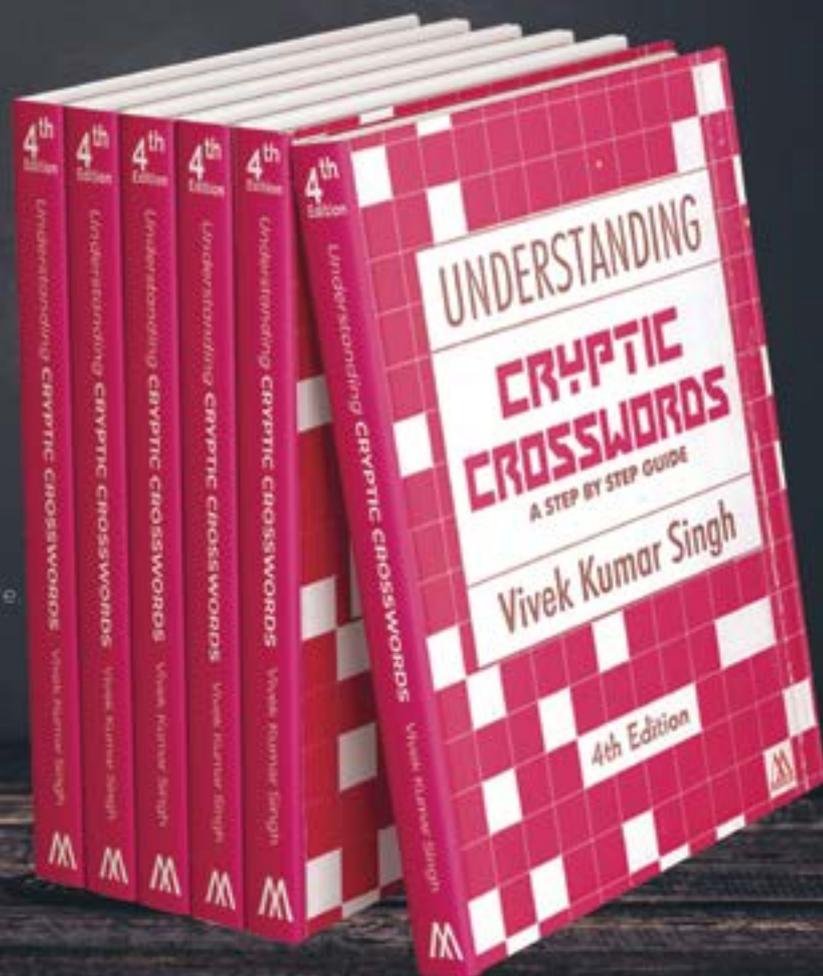
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Introducing the all-new avatar of *Namaste Bharat*

Dear Readers,
At the outset, let's welcome New Year 2022 with new hopes and aspirations. We are indeed grateful to you for your continuous support to *Namaste Bharat*, which has been designed to serve you a veritable feast of in-depth, informative and thought-provoking stories month after month and provide an overarching framework to govern the relationship between India and its diaspora abroad.

We really appreciate your patronage ever since the inception of the magazine, which has now become a resonant voice of millions of Indian immigrants living across the globe. Your keen participation in our endeavour has encouraged us to bring successive improvement in both content and presentation of a wide gamut of issues that strike a chord with the overseas Indians. As a New Year surprise, you are getting this magazine now under a new title *Pravasi Indians*, which has been approved by the Registrar of Newspapers of India (RNI).

In this issue, our Food Columnists Amita Roy and Anand Manikutty choose to delve into the problem of information asymmetry related to Indian culture including cuisine. They rue that more often than not, discussions around India in the Western media tend to be biased.

Continuing with his memoirs of more than 50 years in the United States, Mustafa Ahsan Siddiqui recounts his schooling in Holy Cross High School, River Grove, Illinois. It is an interesting account of the academic and cultural surprises that await an Indian boy in the 1970s America.

In Arts and Culture section, Malvika Kaul interviews Achutan Ramachandran, renowned for drawing myriad facets of Mahatma Gandhi, besides his fondness for depicting the harmony of nature, the lives, rituals and culture of the tribal community, and his belief in the power of art.

Though Covid-19 has had a disastrous impact on the lives in India and abroad, practitioners and organisers of arts kept alive the hopes to overcome pandemic blues through in-person exhibitions, cultural events, and performances during 2021. Our Photo Feature brilliantly depicts such expression of resilience immortalised through various forms of art.

In the current issue's Cover Story, B Shekhar takes stock of the state of Indian economy which is



now on the road to gradual recovery, with core sectors back to their normal growth trajectory. Another interesting story seeks to deal with the intricacies of the surreal world of crypto currencies which have caught the fancy of investors who want to make a quick buck irrespective of legal implications. The Economy section also carries Shashi Kumar Jha's incisive analysis of the spurt in black money and hawala activities despite the implementation of GST and strict monitoring by the government at almost every level.

On a lighter note, Harsha Bhargavi Pandiri writes how saree, the six yards of elegance and sensuality, has changed over centuries with the influence of many cultural traditions making it distinct and diverse.

In the Book Nook column, Dr Sanjeev Chopra reviews Indian Forest Officer Sanjeev Kumar Chadha's 'Jumbos on the Edge: The Future of Elephant Conservation in India' that makes an impassioned plea for saving elephants from extinction.

In the travel section, noted Hindi writer Isht Deo Sankrityaayan recounts his visit to Chittorgarh, an epitome of the chivalry and historical grandeur and opulence of Rajasthan.

In *Namaste Bharat's* new avatar, from February 2022 onward, we are bringing to you a dedicated section on lifestyle including food, fashion, well-being, youth, interiors and travel. It comes close on the heels of Ritu Agarwal, Ex Editor India Today Travel Plus joining us to add to our editorial acumen to articulate various issues close to the heart of several million people of Indian origins living abroad.

We look forward to your support for the exciting new journey that *Namaste Bharat* has embarked upon as *Pravasi Indians!*

Warm regards,

Rashmi

CEO AND PUBLISHER



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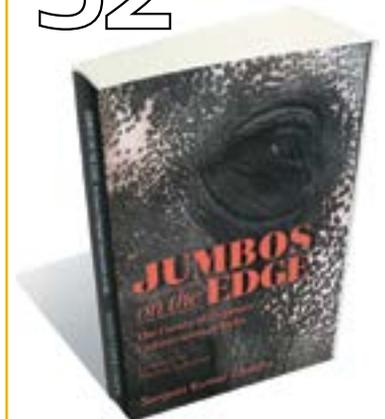
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More often than not, discussions around Indian culture in the Western media tend to be biased

THE PROBLEM OF INFORMATION ASYMMETRY

By **Amita Roy & Anand Manikutty**

In a previous column, we had mentioned “ghee” as an example of a food that entered our diets by a historical accident. Ghee is still extensively used in Indian cooking, but given that we now live in a modern consumer-oriented society, there is no reason why we cannot change this eating pattern, especially with all the new technologies that are now on offer. It is part of the Idea Of America itself to believe that the innovation we work on today will help make a brighter future for us and our children in the future. It is also an idea that animates this column.

We continue to discuss “ghee” in this column, and argue that it is part of a behavioural pattern that we must unlearn. But first, a note about the recipe for the series comes from Awadh or the area around Lucknow in India. It is called Musallam Raan and tastes quite delicious.

Back to discussing ghee. As discussed before, Ghee has historically been considered one of the best cooking fats in Indian cuisines for centuries. The reason for this, as we

said, is historical. There have only been roughly a dozen large mammals that have ever been domesticated. Among the attributes that one looks for in a potentially domesticable species are the following: size, temperament, growth rate and diet. The cow was one of the larger animals that could be domesticated in Eurasia, and indeed is the one animal that meets all four criteria to the greatest extent. It, therefore, acquired a certain status that other animals did not.

This aspect of the nature of the adoption of the cow as a religious icon and the subsequent adoption of milk products has not been sufficiently appreciated within political and learning organisations within India. The advent of globalisation has made collective learning and organisational learning particularly important. As the Indian diaspora spreads across the world, it is important to take into account their cultural backgrounds when developing any learning solutions.

But still, notwithstanding cultural factors, while it



A view of part of the city of Oudh by William Hodges (1744-1797)



Picture of the Durbar of the Badshah of Oudh: three Europeans standing in front of a large crowd of people waiting to greet the king of Oudh.

seems clear why this ancient deference to the cow arose, there is no reason why such deference should be further preserved today in India's special treatment of cattle of the bovine persuasion being allowed to walk around on Indian roads today. It is a sight virtually unique to India, and not something to boast about. And with that out of the way and in keeping with the theme of Awadh or Oudh, here is a picture by the 18th century artist William Hodges of a part of the city of Oudh.

In a paper published in the International Journal of Learning and Change, Prof Manikutty writes: "The steadily increasing degree of globalisation of enterprises implies development of many skills, among which the skills to learn are among the most important. Learning takes place at the individual level, but collective learning and organizational learning are also important. Learning styles of individuals are different and learning styles are affected by the cultural backgrounds of the learners. Organisations need to create conditions for effective learning at the individual, collective and organisational levels." As has been mentioned before, Indian-Americans, Indian-Canadians and other hyphenated Indians have begun to use their cultural background for the purposes of entertainment, and certainly, what level of learning individuals display should be seen as dependent on the organisations from which they acquired their learning. Thus, even if certain members of the Indian diaspora such as Russell Peters and Lilly Singh have odd or confused things to say about Indian culture, it is important that we recognise the various biases with which they enter this discourse.

The fact that a lot of the discussion around Indian culture in the popular media is biased needs little

This aspect of the nature of the adoption of the cow as a religious icon and the subsequent adoption of milk products has not been sufficiently appreciated within India.

introduction. Why does this happen so much? One reason for this is Eurocentrism. Let us look at an example. Why are Lilly Singh and Russell Peters more or less given a free pass if they say something wrong about an aspect of Indian history or culture, but immediately caught out if they say something wrong about European history or culture. (If Peters were to wonder whether Rome was in Italy or France, people would call him "stupid" or "dumb". But he seems to have very little knowledge about the geography of India and that seems to matter very little.) Another reason for this may be the nature of social media. It may even be that Singh and Peters simply choose to essentially engage in a sort of disingenuous way knowing fully well that such an approach is likely to provoke more reactions online and, thereby, make them better known. A third reason may also be the state of schooling in their home countries, viz., the United States and Canada. Indian-Americans often use this as a defense of their own lack of familiarity with Indian and other cultures and that is understandable and forgivable. What is not condonable is to use that as a basis for getting more "Likes" or "Retweets."



Map of Nepal and Awadh/Oudh

The fact that a lot of the discussion around Indian culture in the popular media is biased needs little introduction. Why does this happen so much? One reason for this is Eurocentrism.

Given that the underlying population in question is itself not very knowledgeable, and this would be a global audience of Europeans, North Americans, South Americans, Australians and so forth, the wrong sorts of tweets get retweeted more and the state of disinformation on the Internet only increases. It is this dynamic that certain academics such as Wendy Doniger also seem to exploit. When they say something wrong about India, they simply label it as “provocative thinking”. Well, provocative arguments do have a place in society, but that should be done with the idea that said provocateurs should make themselves available for closer questioning. I

have myself engaged with Prof Doniger and wanted to bring up a step-by-step critique of her book which claimed to undertake doing an all new history of the Hindus as part of *Pravasi Indian’s* Panel Discussion Series. However, Prof Doniger turned down our request citing a reason that we, at Qwykr Technologies, refuse to accept as valid. As a counter response, I have used my good offices as the Editor of Termite magazine to charge a ten thousand fee payable by the University of Chicago or Wendy Doniger personally for responding to any reviews of the articles in our journal critiquing Wendy Doniger’s work.



Indian-Americans, Indian-Canadians and other hyphenated Indians have begun to use their cultural background for the purposes of entertainment.

known as the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, Oudh being the British Era spelling of the Indic word “Awadh”. Okay, so back to our discussion. Here is one more example of Eurocentrism in Social Media. Lilly Singh in one of her videos makes certain comments about “Indian weddings” which includes her attempts at imitating or perhaps slightly mocking a Punjabi accent. It is, of course, odd to hear Lilly Singh characterise “Indian weddings” in this particular way. One does not expect comedians to imitate a German accent and say that this is what one may expect to hear at a “European wedding”. Similarly, one does not expect comedians to imitate an Italian accent while making comments about alcohol served at “European weddings”. Yet a certain amount of essentialisation has occurred in the blogosphere and the Internet about India. This has led not only to such positives as a greater understanding of Indian culture around the world, but also such negatives as certain sorts of stereotyping and negative characterisations and misrepresentations of Indians as “cheap”, “and even “prone to rape”. The problem, from an economist’s point of view, is the problem of Information Asymmetry. With the introduction of that term out of the way, let us segue to take a look at a rendering of the Durbar of the Badshah of Oudh.

Now, that is a scene that as beautiful as any you are likely to see even in “Assassin’s Creed Chronicles: India”, a beautifully recreated depiction of 19th century British India. On that note, we conclude this month’s column. We will come back with the recipe for Awadh in the column for next month and continue the discussion on Information Asymmetry as well. ■

Where does all this leave us? Most likely, it is a combination of both lack of knowledge and disingenuousness that causes much disinformation to spread via Social Media (and the truth is that one cannot hope to combat all of that with one panel discussion, but such panel discussions which employ innovative Artificial Intelligence technology are a start). It is our hope that this column will help reduce the disinformation on the matter of dieting, especially as it applies to health issues such as diabetes and obesity. With that out of the way, let us now view this beautiful map of the Awadh/Lucknow region by Letts, Son and Co. Ltd. who have published many other beautifully rendered maps of areas around the world including cities such as Berlin, Vienna, and Brussels.

As we can see, Awadh is a region in the Northern part of India in what is now Uttar Pradesh. Before independence, it was part of an administrative entity



(Amita is a historian turned startup entrepreneur whose specialisation is on Indian Royal families and their luxury lifestyle. She is also a Research Fellow from Indian Council of Historical Research under Government of India and also an incubatee with IIM - Kashipur.)



(Anand is a strategic management expert, economic historian, poet, Indologist, and a computer scientist. Currently, he is the editor of Termite, the journal of the Epimetheus Society, Top Society and a couple of other High IQ Societies.)

HOLY CROSS HIGH SCHOOL, RIVER GROVE, ILLINOIS 'DO YOU HAVE A DIME ON YOU?'

The academic and cultural surprises that await an Indian boy in the 1970s America

By **Mustafa Ahsan Siddiqui**

Since my parents were in Saudi Arabia and education in English was not possible, my parents sent me to school in America. I had an uncle in Chicago and that's where I landed in the United States on a cold, snowy night on a Friday in January 1974.

My uncle got me admitted to a private school at one of the suburbs in Chicago. The school was Holy Cross High School in River Grove, Illinois.

Saturday morning my uncle went through the clothes that I got from Saudi Arabia and decided that they were not appropriate for me to use in high school in the US. So, he took me shopping to buy two sets of wool pants, two warm shirts, a winter jacket, gloves, and a cap. The next day, on Sunday, he drove me to show me where my new school was going to be and told me that the next morning I would be on my own. He showed me where the bus stopped and where it took me to school and said this was a piece of cake, no problem, just hop on the bus pay \$0.25 and get off at the third stop. He said the bus would go for 10 blocks West, turn South, go two blocks turn West again and go four blocks and that's where I get off. Simple, right?

Wrong! Ten blocks? What are these blocks? Furthermore, he said to be sure you take the westbound bus. West? Which way is West?

Monday morning, I woke up bright and early, ate breakfast prepared by my aunt, and went out on my adventure. I was lucky I found where he showed me the bus stop was and waited for 15 minutes, but no bus. It was cold outside, snowing and I knew I was going to get late to school. So, I started walking. I remembered watching English movies where they showed that in America in order to get a ride you show your thumb up. So, I started walking backward, still headed towards the way to school. Nobody stopped to give me a ride. I looked up and saw the sun rising and felt confident that I was still going in the right direction, in other words going West. I also realised that after walking for so long the



street would end and I would have to cross the street and keep going again. Aha! So that's what my uncle meant by blocks so I started counting the blocks that I had walked so far. Remembering the Indian map, I remembered Bombay was West, Delhi was north, Hyderabad was South, I started navigating myself based on my uncle's directions and ended up walking all the way to my school. This was a two-mile hike that God only knows how long it took but I finally saw the sign that said Holy Cross High School. I was wet, tired but I got to my destination. I was directed to the principal's office who took me around, showed me the school, took me to the bathroom to get my hair dried and my clothes dried by using the hand dryer that happens to be in just about every bathroom in America.

Thus started my education in America.

My school records from Hyderabad and the correspondent courses that I took in Saudi Arabia were already sent to Holy Cross High School in America. My new school decided that I needed one more year of education at Holy Cross before awarding me my High School Diploma. Since I joined in the middle of their school year (in January), I was admitted into 11th grade with an understanding that I would complete my



education the following January (1974) when my parents were due to join me in America.

In my old school in Hyderabad, I had taken two years of Biology, two years of Chemistry, and two years of Physics. Since my parents were pushing me to be a doctor, I decided to repeat these classes in my American School to make sure I was better prepared for college in America. To my surprise, what I learned in two years in India, was finished in one, four-month, semester at my American school!! The pace of education was mind-boggling but seemed a lot easier because a lot of audio/visual aids were used to drive the point home (slides and video movies).

My schoolmates were almost all whites with a few blacks, and one brown, me! I was their first foreign student! I got a lot of attention!

Since this was a private school, a lot of students were dropped by their parents and some even had their own cars. The school did not have school buses like they do in Public Schools. There was a city (municipal) bus that stopped in the school parking lot after school that I used to take to get back home. One day, one of my schoolmates stopped me and asked, “do you have a dime on you?” I looked all over myself to see if I had something on my clothes, a mark, a bird dropping? When he found me confused, he repeated the question slowly, “do you have a dime on YOU?” I still looked confused, then he said he was short of \$0.10 for a bus ride!! Here, a penny is \$0.01, a nickel is \$0.05, a dime is \$0.10, a quarter is \$0.25.

One day in school a group of students approached me and asked me if I wanted to buy a ticket for High School Prom? I asked them what a “Prom” was. They said it is a big high school party that is usually the highlight of their school year. I asked them how much, and they said \$50. This, to me, was

They wrote down my name then they turned around and asked me who I planned to bring as my date! What? Date? Coming from India, from a very strict Muslim family, bring a girl as a date!

a big amount but they insisted that it would be fun and that I should not miss out. They even took me to our class teacher, and he also reaffirmed that it was a major high school event and that it would be a very memorable experience. After debating a lot, I finally agreed. They wrote down my name then they turned around and asked me who I planned to bring as my date! What? Date? Coming from India, from a very strict Muslim family, bring a girl as a date! I did not know any girl that I dared ask! One of my friends saw the despair in my eyes and came to my rescue. He said that no one has yet asked his sister out for the prom, that he felt bad for his sister, and he even offered to pay for my prom ticket if I asked her out!!

Sorry, I wasn't ready for that! ■



(The author is a real estate investor, technology and banking consultant, who lives in Minneapolis, Minnesota, the USA.)

‘GANDHI WIELDED SO MUCH POWER WITHOUT POSSESSING ANY POWER’

An interview with Achutan Ramachandran on his recent exhibition ‘Gandhi: Loneliness of the Great’, his eternal endeavour to capture the harmony of nature, the lives, rituals and culture of the tribal community, and his belief in the power of art...

By **Malvika Kaul**

Achutan Ramachandran’s art (painting, sculpture, graphics) has for years successfully infused Indian classical imagery with modern ethos. Ramachandran grew up in Kerala amidst Carnatic music, lotus ponds, cashewnut trees and Raja Ravi Verma paintings. His now iconic lotus pond series are a tribute to the mystic beauty of nature, interlaced with parables and messages of a civilisation in crisis. For decades, Ramachandran has drawn inspiration from the simple and nature-loving life of the Bhils of Rajasthan, the pond at Ubeshwar Shiva temple, a constant backdrop of his luminous works. At 87, the activist in him has grown up, more adept at diagnosing the social crisis. The writer talks to the Padma Bhushan awardee on his recent exhibition ‘Gandhi: Loneliness of the Great’, his eternal endeavour to capture the harmony of nature, and his belief in the power of art.

Q. Gandhi appears to be a constant inspiration for you. In 2019, you created an exhibition ‘Mahatma and the Lotus Pond’ which included sketches of Gandhi and the now-famous sculpture of Gandhi depicting his martyrdom. What fascinates you about Gandhi?

A. I was 12 when I was introduced to Gandhi by my favourite teacher in school who was a Gandhian. He talked so passionately in class about Gandhi that I fell in love with him without knowing anything about him. Gandhi’s life appeared like a fairy tale to me. Later when I went to Santiniketan, I learnt to appreciate Gandhi more. Especially his ideas on Indian culture and his vision for independent India. His emphasis on strengthening the village systems, using indigenous materials and supporting the arts and crafts that emerged from villages. My teachers like Nandalal Bose and Ramkinkar Baij were greatly influenced by Gandhi’s thoughts and ideas. At Shantiniketan, they visualised an art movement largely inspired by Gandhi. Gandhi advocated the sustenance of a village structure where potters, weavers and other crafts people thrived. He inspired artists to create art that was attractive to common people and not remote from their lives. Unfortunately, the ruthless emphasis on science and technology, the encouragement to big cities and promotion of information and technology destroyed the cultural ecology of villages. I deeply appreciate Gandhi’s vision for India that was Indian in spirit and outlook. I tried to mould myself as an artist



more inspired by his innate vision and moved away from the modernists.

As a political leader, too, Gandhi is a figure of reverence. There is no leader of his stature in this world. He wielded so much power without possessing any power. He influenced thousands without holding any office of influence. This is an enduring quality. While there may be many leaders like Nelson Mandela who made huge sacrifices, Gandhi's position is unique in human history. He is beyond politics, he touched so many aspects of our lives. His idea of panchayati raj proposed to construct and not dismantle the village ecology. In independent India, village crafts and art traditions have been destroyed.

I am also impressed by Gandhi's appearance and conduct: travelling third class, frugal living, consoling people during riots in Noakhali. His choice of clothing – his audacity to wear a loincloth and shawl on his visit to the Buckingham Palace – illustrate his courage and commitment.

Over the years, several of his photographs are etched in my mind. Some haunt me, like the one taken after his wife Kasturba's death in 1944. He seems to be staring into blankness in that picture. There is so much one gathers from his photographs

Gandhi advocated the sustenance of a village structure where potters, weavers and other crafts people thrived. He inspired artists to create art that was attractive to common people and not remote from their lives.

– his facial expressions, posture, his walk, his hand movement – about the human qualities. For me he stands out as a model.

Q. *How and when did you start working on the Gandhi drawings for this exhibition?*

A. The drawings for this show were created between 2019 and 2020, when I went to Mumbai to stay with a friend. I was there for four months and worked on the drawings. The drawings drew inspiration from memory, history, current situation.

GETTING INTIMATE WITH GANDHI

A Ramachandran was 12 when he first sketched Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. The Mahatma was a fairy tale figure for the young boy but as he grew in knowledge and art, he became more intimate with the revolutionary leader. In 1969, to mark Gandhi's centenary, Ramachandran created sketches for a mural 'Gandhi and the 20th Century Cult of Violence' for Gandhi Darshan in New Delhi. Gandhi stayed as a constant study for the artist. In October 2021, Vadehra Art Gallery showcased 20 ink/pen drawings of the Mahatma. Each one takes the viewer closer to a flesh-and-blood Gandhi, fragile and strong, humble and self absorbed, courageous and giving. Ramachandran's portrait peels Gandhi off his super-hero status. It brings him closer to all of us.

1

Gandhi breaks the British Raj Salt Law in 1930. Ramachandran's Gandhi has fragile frame that rests on firm legs, his arms exude the power of Hercules: Ink and watercolour on paper.



2

Ramachandran's head studies focus on Gandhi's eyes, lips, forehead, jaw, ears – pen and ink strokes combine to create the moments of self-reflection, sorrow, resolve, compassion and loneliness. Multiple lines create an intricate web of faces that portray a gamut of emotions. Gandhi is under the microscope: Ink on paper.



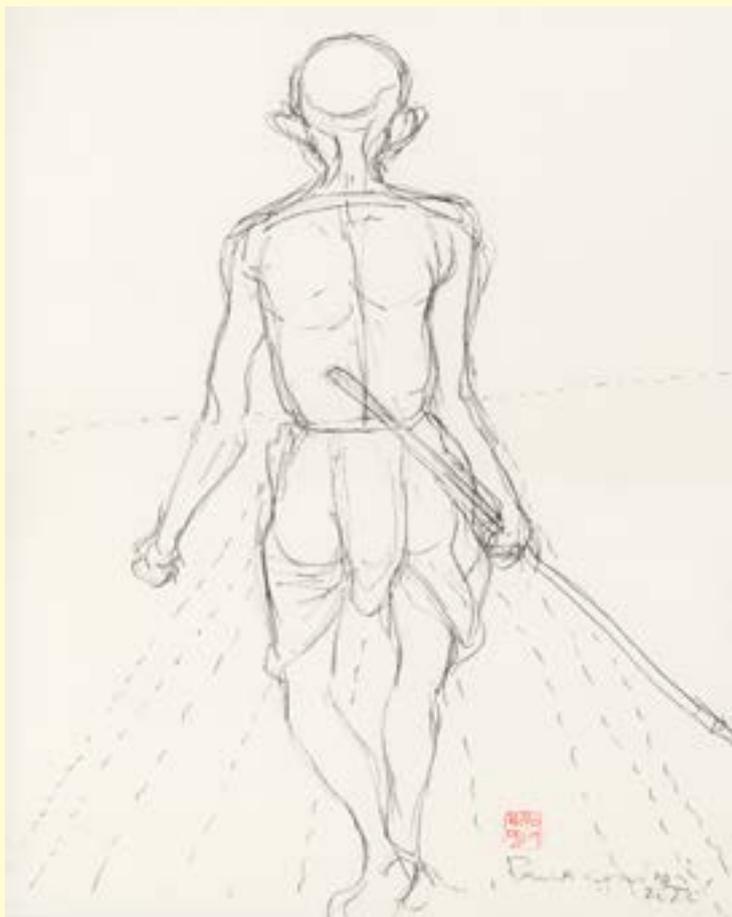
3

In some of the drawings, Ramachandran used a moistbrush to add to the intensity and emotion of the expression. Pale grey daubs give the portraits a depth, at times energising them, at times making them solemn. Gandhi in a meeting, and (bottom) reflective amidst setbacks: Ink and watercolour.

“The image of Gandhi determinedly walking alone through riot-torn Noakhali in 1946 has remained etched in my memory,” says Ramachandran. Often considered by historians as one of the finest moments of his life, Gandhi attempted to douse the fire of hatred as parts of North India were ravaged by communal riots. Ink on paper.

4

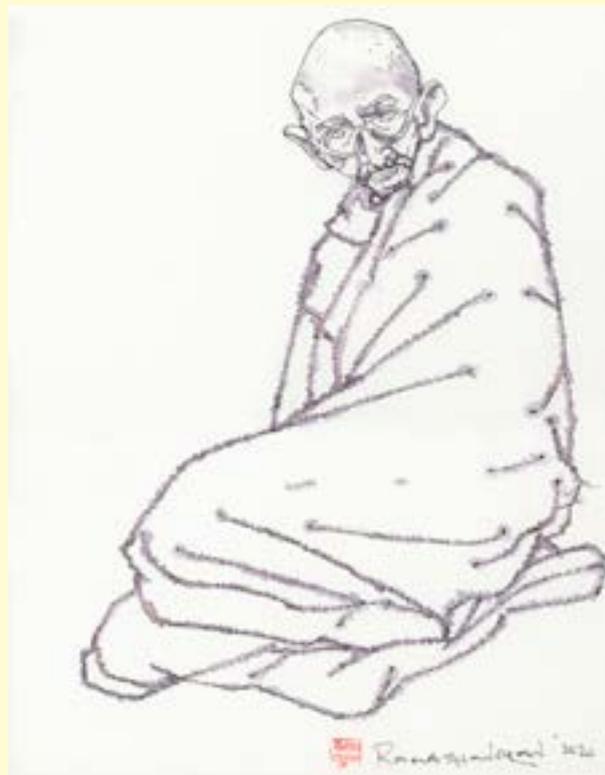




5

Art historian Ella Dutta comments in the Vadehra Art Gallery catalogue, “The image of Gandhi walking away with his back to the viewer remains a tantalizing work. Is Gandhi abandoning us or is he showing us a way forward?” The drawings are open to interpretation. They emote to some and set some thinking about the challenges that assail us today. Ink on paper.

Kastur Kapadia was 13 when she married 14-year-old Mohandas. The Mahatma grew into a possessive young husband and continued to be a dominating spouse. Yet their bond of more than 60 years was remarkable. She was his better half – an equal satyagrahi and freedom fighter, a loving mother and grandmother and also one of the rare persons who could give him a fight. She breathed her last in on Gandhi’s lap at the Aga Khan Palace Detention Camp in 1944. The now famous photograph of a very lost Gandhi at her funeral conveys his deep loss he may have felt at her passing. Ramachandran’s Gandhi, wrapped in a shawl staring into blankness completes the portrait of a leader mourning for his partner and the loss of an era. Arun Gandhi, his grandchild, wrote in *Kasturba, A Life*, that as Bapu stood by the burning pyre of Kasturba, he said “The best half of me is dead. What am I going to do now.” Ink and water colour on paper.



6

PHOTO COURTESY: VADEHRA ART GALLERY

Q. You have been engaged with the tribal community (Bhils from villages of Undri, Pai, Ubeshwar, Eklingji and Baneshwar in Udaipur district of Rajasthan) for many years. Your colourful paintings celebrate their rituals and culture. Are the black and white drawings a shift in style?

A. For the last 40 years (except during COVID-19), I have been going to Rajasthan villages and staying with the community. I spend days observing the Bhils, participate in their rituals and customs, attend their all-night concerts. I learnt to train in this way from my teachers in Santiniketan who spent a lot of time with the Santhals in the district. Unlike the European studios, where painters created impressions of the models, at Shantiniketan we were encouraged to go out and observe, make quick sketches and then return and paint according to the inherent attributes of the subject.

I make thousands of sketches before starting to work on something. Then I reconstruct and reinterpret images.

Q. In your experience, does art have capacity to change things? Are your recent works a statement you are attempting as an artist?

A. I don't think art really changes things. If that were so, after Picasso's Guernica, which depicts the horrors of war, there would not have been any war. Art for political purposes is not something I believe in any longer. I changed my mind after witnessing the horror of 1984 riots. I saw a mob brutally murder a man. Before '84, I believed that art can motivate change. Not any longer. For me, Van Gogh's Sunflowers is a far superior painting than Guernica. In terms of craft, aesthetics, colours and light, Sunflowers is outstanding. That's what an artist should strive for – beauty, aesthetics – a superior form. Even if the subject is gruesome, it may not be ugly in visual. Guernica is structurally superior, but Sunflowers demonstrates a certain spiritual quality. Sitting in comfort of our drawing rooms we cannot say this piece of art stopped war or influenced war.

If we want to change society, we have to go out on the streets, carrying placards and shouting slogans. You have to go out and address problems, like Mother Teresa did, Baba Amte did. As an artist, we need to create. At best, art can give momentary nirvana. If you want to change society, throw away your paints!

Q. With the exhibition entitled 'Gandhi: Loneliness of the Great' what message did you attempt to give? What about Gandhi endures with you?



ALL PICS COURTESY: VADEHRA ART GALLERY, NEW DELHI

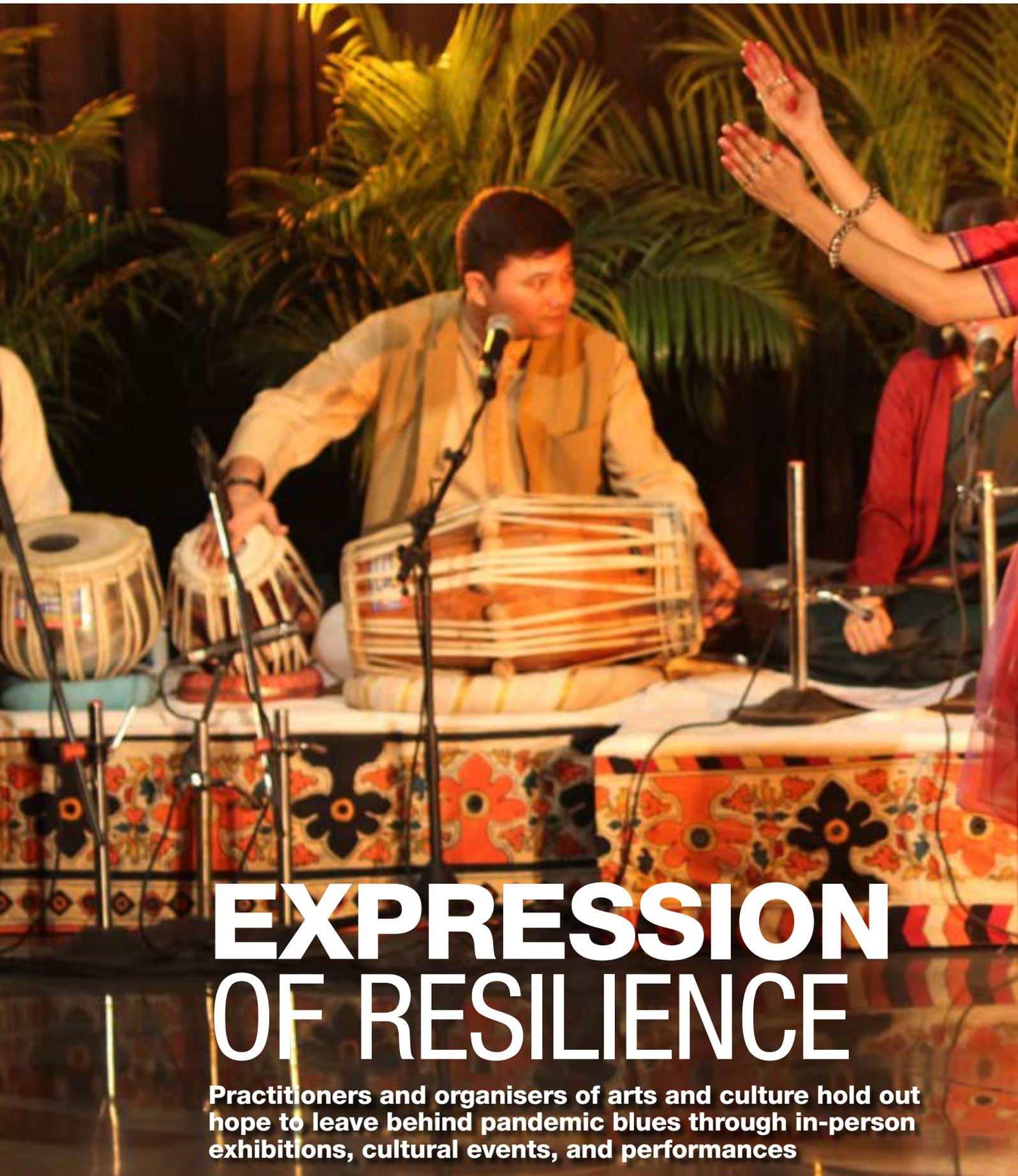
I don't think art really changes things. If that were so, after Picasso's Guernica, which depicts the horrors of war, there would not have been any war. Art for political purposes is not something I believe in any longer

A. I named this series more while recalling the image of Gandhi sitting next to Kasturba's body, staring far away. His sense of loss, emptiness. That photograph haunts me. Gandhi had a vision for India. Sadly, that has been lost. That is disheartening. Besides, whether he was in a crowd, or sitting alone somewhere, he had a unique quality about himself. He was a very rare human being.

A Ramachandran's exhibition 'Mahatma and the Lotus Pond' was on display at the Vadehra Art Gallery, New Delhi, from 1- 10 October 2021. ■



(The author is a senior journalist and writes a blog on art and culture <https://wordpress.com/post/iforart.wordpress.com/657> from which this article has been sourced.)



EXPRESSION OF RESILIENCE

Practitioners and organisers of arts and culture hold out hope to leave behind pandemic blues through in-person exhibitions, cultural events, and performances

Odissi danseuse Arushi
Mudgal performing at
NatyaTaranagini-organised
Parampara 2021 on
November 19, 2021, in
New Delhi



No cultural events could be held through 2020 due to Covid-19, nor during the first nine months of 2021 as the second wave of Covid-19 peaked. But there was hope and relief as more than a 100 crore doses of vaccines were administered by the government at the Centre and in the states. There was a gradual revival of cultural activities as events began to be held physically in New Delhi and other parts of the country in the later part of 2021. Here are glimpses of those events that speak of the undying human spirit to emerge out of the worst calamity...



1

1. Chairman of Indian Council of Cultural Relations Vinay Sahasrabudde lighting the lamp with Raja Reddy, Radha Reddy and Kaushalya Reddy of Natya Tarangini at Parampara 2021 on November 21, 2021 in New Delhi
 2. Odissi danseuse Arushi Mudgal performing at Natya Taranagini-organised Parampara 2021 on November 19, 2021, in New Delhi
 3. Hindustani classical singer Madhup Mudgal of the Gandharva Mahavidyalaya in New Delhi and Sawani Mudgal sing for the Odissi recital of Arushi Mudgal. Arushi and Sawani are the daughters of Madhup Mudgal. The Parampara festival highlighted the generational continuity in the arts.



3



“Without art,
the crudeness
of reality would
make the world
unbearable.”

- George Bernard
Shaw



“Our most valuable and most instructive materials in the history of man are treasured up in India.”

- Mark Twain



5



6



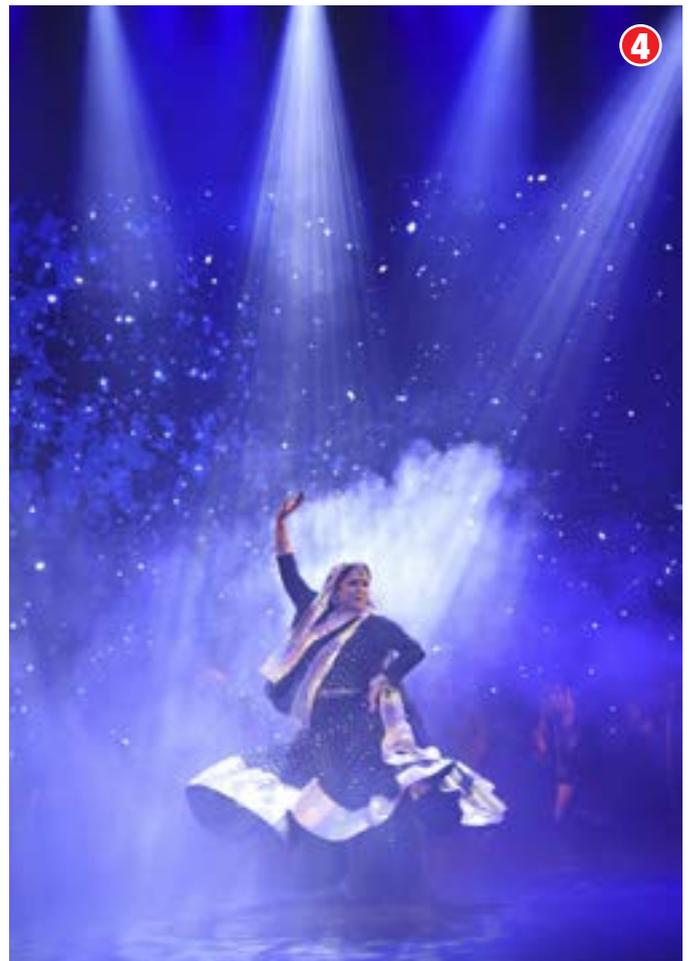
7

1. Hindustani classical singer Sanjeev Abhyankar sings at Parampara 2021 of Natya Tarangini on November 21, 2021, in New Delhi
2. Odissi danseuse Shagun Butani performs at India International Centre Double Bill Recitals on November 25, 2021 in New Delhi
3. Kathak danseuse Manjari Chaturvedi performs at the Qawwali Mehfil accompanied by Qawwali Ustad Ranjhan Ali of Dargah of Hazrat Banney Shah of Amritsar at the India International Centre on November 27, 2021 in New Delhi
4. Tabla maestro Pandit Yogesh Sasmsi plays at the Parampara 2021 of Natya Tarangini on November 21, 2021, in New Delhi.
5. Mridangam maestro Thiruvaarur Bhakthavatsalam plays at Parampara 2021 of Natya Tarangini on November 21, 2021, in New Delhi
- 6-7. Odissi danseuse Shagun Butani performs at India International Centre Double Bill Recitals on November 25, 2021 in New Delhi.

1. Hindustani classical singer Sanjeev Abhyankar and Pt. Vinay Sharma on the Harmonium at Parampara 2021 of Natya Tarangini on November 21, 2021 in New Delhi

2-5. Art is the only balm that can heal this pandemic-ravaged world. O Jugni Punjab Di', a large format musical event was performed at the spectacular socially distanced full Royal Opera House.

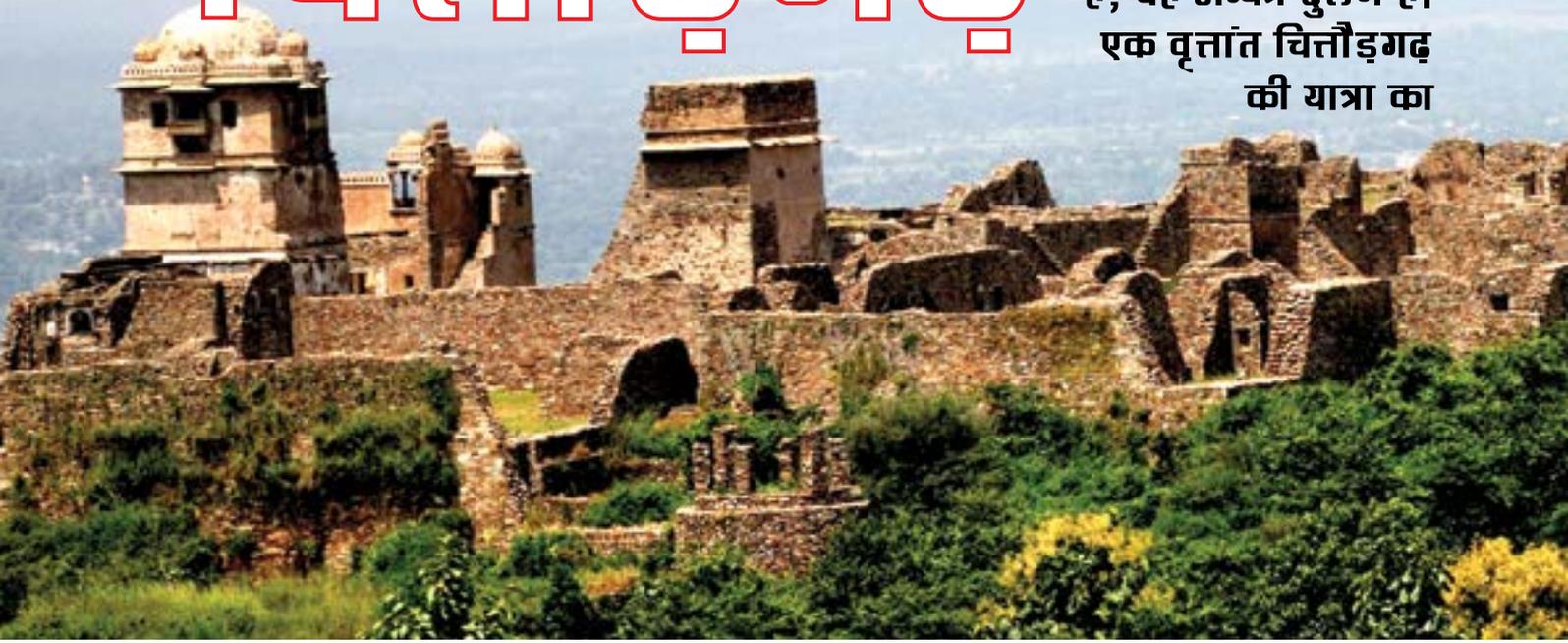




अप्रतिम शौर्य का साक्षी

चित्तौड़गढ़

इतिहासप्रेमी पर्यटकों के लिए घुमक्कड़ी का जो आनंद राजस्थान में है, वह अन्यत्र दुर्लभ है। एक वृत्तांत चित्तौड़गढ़ की यात्रा का



इष्ट देव सांकृत्यायन

कि

ले-महल और रेगिस्तान में रेत के ढूँहे यानी सैंड ड्यूंस... दूर-दूर तक यही राजस्थान की पहचान है। लेकिन इस पहचान के इतर इसकी एक और पहचान शौर्य, बलिदान और तप की भी है। गढ़ों यानी किलों का सरताज कहा जाने वाला चित्तौड़गढ़ राजस्थान की इन तीनों विशिष्टताओं का जीवंत साक्षी है। यही तो वह प्राचीर है जिसकी दीवारों में लगी एक-एक चट्टान अपने भीतर महाराणा सांगा और महाराणा प्रताप के शौर्य की गाथा समेटे हुई है। धूल की एक-एक कण से जो फूट-फूटकर स्वयमेव सुनाई देता है वह पन्ना धाय का बलिदान है। अपने अतुल्य सौंदर्य के लिए कई गाथाओं-महाकाव्यों में वर्णित महारानी पद्मिनी के बुद्धिचातुर्य और उनके साथ-साथ जौहर करने वाली सैकड़ों क्षत्राणियों का तप इस पूरे क्षेत्र की हवाओं में अपने-आप ही मुखरित होता है। और हाँ, सत्तालोलुप बनवीर की गद्दारी भी यहीं रह-रह कर टीसती रहती है।

गढ़ तो चित्तौड़गढ़, बाकी सब गढ़ैया... यह कहावत और इसके साथ-साथ मेवाड़ के महाराणाओं की शौर्यगाथाएँ बचपन से सुनता आया था। इसलिए चित्तौड़ का गढ़ यानी किला देखने की इच्छा कब से मन में पलती आ रही थी, कह नहीं सकता। कार्यक्रम सुनिश्चित होने के बाद हम लोग दिल्ली से रात में देहरादून एक्सप्रेस से चले और चित्तौड़गढ़ पहुँचे तो दिन के साढ़े 11 बज रहे थे। रेलवे स्टेशन के पास ही जैन धर्मशाला में एक अच्छा कमरा मिल गया। फ्रेश होने

और नाश्ता आदि करने के बाद करीब एक बजे हम लोग निकल पड़े किले की ओर।

दूरी कुछ खास नहीं है, लेकिन ऑटो वाले ने अपने वादे के विपरीत बस स्टैंड से थोड़ा आगे ले जाकर छोड़ दिया। वहाँ से हमें दूसरा ऑटो पकड़ना पड़ा, जो हमें चित्तौड़गढ़ किले की ओर ले चला। थोड़ी दूर आगे चलते ही किला शुरू हो गया। पहले पाडल पोल, फिर हनुमान पोल, इसके बाद जोरला और अंत में राम पोल। इससे थोड़ा और आगे ले जाकर उसने हमें छोड़ दिया। थोड़ी दूर पैदल चलने के बाद सामने फतेह प्रकाश महल था। बड़े से क्षेत्र में फैला कभी महल रहा यह भवन अब राजकीय संग्रहालय बन चुका है। इसके परिसर में बड़ी संख्या में ऊँट और घोड़े लिए लोग खड़े थे। साथ में पारंपरिक वस्त्रों की कई दुकानें भी थीं। पहले तो हमें लगा कि ये भी घोड़े और ऊँट से दूर कराने वाले हैं और कपड़े भी शायद बिकने के लिए हों, पर बाद में गौर करने पर मालूम हुआ कि ये फोटो खिंचाने के शौकीन लोगों के लिए हैं। घोड़े और पारंपरिक वस्त्राभूषणों से लेकर बंदूकें तक यहाँ थोड़ी देर के लिए किराए पर उपलब्ध हैं। बहुत लोग यहाँ महाराणा प्रताप से लेकर सुलताना डाकू तक बनने का अपना शौक पूरा कर रहे थे। आसपास का जायजा लेने हम लोग महल के पिछवाड़े चले गए। पीछे दूर-दूर तक फैला मैदान और खंडहर ही दिख रहे थे।

इतनी बार बसे-उजड़े

किले जैसा वहाँ कुछ दिख ही नहीं रहा था। थोड़े दिनों पहले मैंने किले की जर्जर हालत उसके संरक्षण के लिए केंद्रीय खनन एवं ईंधन अनुसंधान संस्थान तथा केंद्रीय भवन अनुसंधान संस्थान के वैज्ञानिकों



धूल की एक-एक कण से जो फूट-फूटकर स्वयमेव सुनाई देता है वह पन्ना धाय का बलिदान है। अपने अतुल्य सौंदर्य के लिए कई गाथाओं-महाकाव्यों में वर्णित महारानी पद्मिनी के बुद्धिचातुर्य और उनके साथ-साथ जौहर करने वाली सैकड़ों क्षत्राणियों का तप इस पूरे क्षेत्र की हवाओं में अपने-आप ही मुखरित होता है।

के प्रयासों की खबर भी पढ़ी थी। जिसमें कहा गया था कि अलाउद्दीन खिलजी के हमले से क्षतिग्रस्त हुआ यह दुर्ग अब प्रदूषण के आक्रमण से त्रस्त है। हमें लगा, कहीं उत्खनन से उपजा प्रदूषण 7वीं शताब्दी की इस अंतरराष्ट्रीय धरोहर को पूरी तरह खा ही तो नहीं गया। हमारा इरादा सबसे पहले विजय स्तंभ और फिर पद्मिनी महल देखने का था, जिसका कोई रास्ता पता नहीं चल रहा था। रास्ता पूछने पर मालूम हुआ कि सामने बाईं तरफ जा रही सड़क से सीधे चले जाएँ। इसी पर आपको सारी धरोहरें दिख जाएंगी। यह मालूम हो जाने के बाद हमने तय किया कि अब पहले संग्रहालय ही देख लेते हैं। संग्रहालय में प्रवेश के टिकट लिए गए और हम अंदर।

इस दोमंजिले महल का निर्माण उदयपुर के महाराणा फतह सिंह ने 20वीं शताब्दी के शुरुआती दौर में करवाया गया। बाद में 1968 में इसी भवन में राज्य सरकार द्वारा संग्रहालय स्थापित किया गया। इस संग्रहालय में मध्यकाल में राजाओं द्वारा इस्तेमाल की गई विभिन्न वस्तुओं से लेकर पाषाणकाल तक की कई कलाकृतियाँ मौजूद हैं।

इसके संग्रह में शामिल सिक्के, कलाकृतियाँ, मूर्तियाँ, अस्त्र-शस्त्र और लकड़ी की बनी कई चीजें न केवल दुर्ग और मेवाड़ के प्राचीन वैभव, बल्कि इसके संघर्ष का भी साक्षात्कार कराती हैं। चित्तौड़ की नियति बहुत कुछ दिल्ली जैसी रही है, बार-बार बसने, बसकर उजड़ने और फिर बसने की। शौर्य, षड्यंत्रों, युद्ध, नीति-अनीति, सत्ता संघर्ष, राजनीति-कूटनीति और पारिवारिक विखंडन के साथ-साथ युद्धों और जौहर में जाने कितने प्राणों की आहुतियों के जितने दौर इस किले ने देखे हैं, उन्हें देख और महसूस कर तो खुद काल का मन भी टूट कर रह जाए। गहलोट वंश के राजाओं द्वारा स्थापित इस किले पर पहले सिसौदिया राजाओं का कब्जा हुआ। सिसौदिया लोगों की अलाउद्दीन से लंबी लड़ाई चली और आखिरकार वह हार गया। फिर अकबर से लंबी लड़ाई चली, जो छल-बल का प्रयोग कर अंततः जीत गया। संग्रहालय में मौजूद वस्तुओं का बारीकी से निरीक्षण करें तो इतिहास को यहाँ आप जीवंत होते महसूस कर सकते हैं।

फतह प्रकाश महल के बीच में एक बड़ा सा आँगन है, जहाँ कई

पर्यटक बैठे आराम करते मिले। इस आँगन में दो पेड़ भी लगे हैं और बीचोबीच एक छतरी भी है। यहाँ से बाहर निकल कर हम बाईं तरफ की सड़क पर सीधे चल पड़े। बमुश्किल एक किलोमीटर आगे चलकर सड़क के बाएँ हाथ सतबीस देवरी है। वस्तुतः यह एक भव्य जैन मंदिर है। इसमें एक मुख्य मंदिर भगवान श्री महावीर जी का है, इसके अलावा तीन मंडपों में विभक्त इस मंदिर में कुल 27 मंदिर हैं। एक परकोटे के अंदर ऊंची जगती पर स्थापित इस मंदिर का निर्माण विक्रम संवत् 1505 (सन् 1448 ई.) में हुआ था। इस मंदिर में एक कल्पवृक्ष भी है।

शौर्य का प्रतीक

यहाँ से लगभग दो किलोमीटर आगे चलने पर सड़क से दाएँ हाथ विजय स्तंभ है। बहुत बड़े परिसर में मौजूद इस स्तंभ का निर्माण

थोड़ी दूर पैदल चलने के बाद सामने फतेह प्रकाश महल था। बड़े से क्षेत्र में फैला कभी महल रहा यह भवन अब राजकीय संग्रहालय बन चुका है। इसके परिसर में बड़ी संख्या में ऊँट और घोड़े लिए लोग खड़े थे।

1448 ई. में ही कराया गया था। मालवा के सुल्तान पर विजय की स्मृति में निर्मित इस स्तंभ को महाराणा कुंभा ने भगवान विष्णु को समर्पित किया था। इस बड़े परिसर के ही एक हिस्से को जौहर स्थल के रूप में चिह्नित किया गया है। इसके पीछे कुछ छोटे-छोटे मंदिरों के अवशेष हैं और एक मंदिर भी है। अंदर पहुँच कर मालूम हुआ कि लोग ऊपरी तल तक जा भी सकते हैं, लेकिन इसके लिए टिकट लेना होगा। मुश्किल यह थी कि टिकट यहाँ नहीं, प्रवेश द्वार पर मिलता है। पदिमनी महल में प्रवेश के लिए भी वही से टिकट मिलता है, अन्यथा उसे भी बाहर से ही देखकर लौटना पड़ेगा। मजबूरन फिर से वापस लौटना था। मैं तो उसी परिसर में ठहरकर वहाँ उपलब्ध पुरातत्व संपदा देखने लगा, लेकिन मेरे दो साथी श्री हरिशंकर राढ़ी और श्री बट्टी प्रसाद यादव वहाँ से टिकटघर के लिए लौट गए। करीब तीन किलोमीटर से कुछ अधिक ही दूर तक आने-जाने में समय तो लगना ही था, लिहाजा आसपास मौजूद अन्य जगहों का भी जायजा मैंने ले लिया। दूसरी दर्शनीय जगहों पर जाने के रास्ते और नियम-कानून भी पता कर लिए। खीज भी आई। इतना गैर प्रोफेशनल अप्रोच सिर्फ भारत के ही पर्यटन विभागों का हो सकता है। इसके लिए टिकट किले के प्रवेश द्वार के पास मिलता है, लेकिन वहाँ ऐसा कोई साइनबोर्ड तक नहीं दिखा जिससे यह जाना जा सके। बेहतर होता कि प्रवेशद्वार के पास सामने ही साइनबोर्ड लगा दिए जाते और पूरे किले में कहीं भी घूमने के लिए सभी टिकट इकट्ठे वही दे दिए जाते। इससे पर्यटन विभाग की भी बचत होती और पर्यटक को भी बार-बार टिकट लेने-देने के झंझट से फुर्सत मिल जाती।

मित्रों के टिकट लेकर आने पर इस स्तंभ के अंदर गए। इसमें





जान कर चलें

कैसे पहुंचें

निकटतम हवाई अड्डा उदयपुर है, जो यहाँ से 70 किलोमीटर दूर है। कई शहरों से प्रीमियर बस सेवाएं भी यहाँ के लिए चलती हैं। रेल की बात करें तो दिल्ली, मुंबई, अहमदाबाद, अजमेर, उदयपुर, जयपुर और कोटा से यहाँ के लिए सीधी ट्रेनें हैं।

स्थानीय घुमकड़ी के लिए अहटो बहुतायत में उपलब्ध हैं। उनसे मोलभाव के लिए तैयार रहें।

कब जाएँ

आम तौर पर तापमान यहाँ 24 से 35 डिग्री सेल्सियस के बीच होता है। मुफ़ीद समय सितंबर से मार्च के बीच होता है। अप्रैल से जून तक यहाँ तेज़ गर्मी होती है और जुलाई-अगस्त बारिश। इस मौसम में जाएँ तो थोड़ा एहतियात बरतें।

कहाँ ठहरें

ठहरने के लिए यहाँ सभी तरह के होटलों और गेस्ट हाउस के अलावा सुविधाजनक धर्मशालाएँ भी हैं।



भीतर जाने की अनुमति तो है, पर बेहद संकरी और अंधेरी गलीनुमा सीढ़ियों वाले इस रास्ते में प्रकाश की कोई व्यवस्था नहीं है। इससे ऊपर जाना काफी मुश्किल काम है। अगर इसके भीतर प्रकाश की व्यवस्था की जा सके तो इसकी भव्यता भी बढ़ जाएगी और पर्यटकों के लिए सुविधा भी। साथ ही अंदर जाने में जोखिम भी कम हो जाएगी। 37 मीटर से अधिक ऊँचाई वाले स्तंभ में कुल नौ मंजिलें हैं। बाहर से तो यह शानदार है ही, भीतर भी जगह-जगह खूबसूरत नक्काशी है। सबसे ऊपरी मंजिल से चित्तौड़गढ़ किले के भीतर मौजूद कई दर्शनीय जगहें साफ दिखाई देती हैं। हमने वहीं से कुछ तसवीरें भी खींचीं। नीचे उतरने पर मालूम हुआ कि इस परिसर में ही मौजूद मंदिर के पीछे ही गोमुख कुंड है, जो बाहर से देखने पर किले का ही एक हिस्सा लगता है।

वह सौंदर्य अनूठा

इसके बाद हम रानी पद्मिनी महल की ओर बढ़े। यह महल एक ताल के भीतर बना है। झील से पहले एक परिसर बना है, जिसे रानी पद्मिनी उद्यान कहा जाता है। हमें उम्मीद थी कि टिकट लेकर महल को अंदर जाकर देखा जा सकता है, लेकिन वास्तव में ऐसा कुछ है नहीं। यह टिकट इसी उद्यान परिसर के लिए होता है, जिसके अंतिम छोर से पानी के बीच बने महल को ठीक से देखा जा सकता है। महल चूँकि एक तालाब के भीतर बना है और सड़क या उद्यान से महल के बीच कोई पुल भी नहीं है, इसलिए अंदर जाकर महल देखना संभव नहीं है। चित्तौड़गढ़ के इतिहास में इस महल का विशेष महत्व है। तीन मंजिलों वाले इस जलमहल का निर्माण कब हुआ, इस बारे में कोई जानकारी उपलब्ध नहीं है। केवल यह पता चला कि सन् 1881 में राणा सज्जन सिंह ने इसकी दीवारों पर प्लास्टर कराया और कुछ नए निर्माण भी कराए थे।

बताया जाता है कि महल के भीतर एक कमरे में आदमकद शीशे लगे हैं। इन्हीं शीशों के जरिये राजा रतन सिंह ने बहुत आग्रह पर दिल्ली के सुलतान अलाउद्दीन खिलजी को तालाब के जल में रानी

पद्मिनी का प्रतिबिंब दिखाया था, जिसके बाद वह रानी पद्मिनी को पाने के लिए बेचैन हो उठा और फिर मेवाड़ के राणा व खिलजी के बीच कई युद्ध हुए। लोगों का मानना है कि इस महल का उपयोग रानी पद्मिनी केवल गरमी के दिनों में किया करती थीं। शेष समय वह राणा कुंभा महल में ही रहती थीं। तालाब के दूसरे छोर पर कुछ खंडहर दिखाई देते हैं। बताया जाता है कि ये खातण रानी के महल के खंडहर हैं। यहाँ से कुछ और आगे चलकर भाकसी है। जनश्रुतियों के अनुसार महाराणा कुंभा ने मालवा के सुलतान महमूद शाह को पकड़ कर यहीं पाँच महीने तक कैद रखा था। इसके आगे मृगवन शुरु हो जाता है।

यह सब देखने में शाम के चार बज गए थे। अब वापस लौटना था और अभी कई चीजें देखनी भी थीं। लौटते हुए हमने सबसे पहले इसी सड़क पर मौजूद कालिका माता मंदिर के दर्शन किए। चित्तौड़गढ़ क्षेत्र का यह सबसे पुराना मंदिर है। इसका निर्माण मेवाड़ के गुहिलवंशी राजाओं ने आठवीं शताब्दी में करवाया था। शुरुआत में यह सूर्य मंदिर था, पर बाद में आक्रांताओं द्वारा सूर्य प्रतिमा खंडित कर दिए जाने के कारण सज्जन सिंह ने इसका जीर्णोद्धार करवाया और यहाँ कालिका माता की प्रतिमा स्थापित करवाई। इसकी दीवारों पर अभी भी सूर्य प्रतिमाएँ उकेरी हुई हैं। थोड़ा और आगे चलकर मीरा मंदिर है। यह भी एक बड़े परिसर में मौजूद है। हालाँकि अब इसे आम तौर पर मीरा मंदिर के नाम से जाना जाता है, लेकिन मीरा मंदिर यहाँ मुख्य मंदिर के पार्श्व भाग में एक छोटा सा मंदिर है। इसका मूल नाम कुंभास्वामिन मंदिर है और अब यहाँ गर्भगृह में श्यामसुंदर की प्रतिमा स्थापित है। मूल रूप से यह भगवान वराह का मंदिर रहा है। इसका निर्माण महाराणा कुंभा ने 1449 ई. में करवाया था। ऊँचे शिखर, विशाल कलात्मक मंडप एवं प्रदक्षिणा वाला यह मंदिर इंडो-आर्यन स्थापत्य कला का सुंदर नमूना है।

अहिंसा का कीर्ति स्तंभ

अब यहाँ से हमें कीर्ति स्तंभ की ओर निकलना था। इसके लिए हमें करीब तीन किलोमीटर पैदल सुनसान रास्ते पर चलना था। हम चल



पड़े। यह पूरा रास्ता पठार की चट्टानों और सड़क के दोनों तरफ शरीफे के बागान से भरा पड़ा है। यह फल लगने का समय नहीं था, वरना शायद कुछ लिए भी होते। रास्ते की सारी थकान दूर कर देने के लिए यह जीवंत दृश्य ही काफी था। बीच-बीच में कई जगह चट्टानों से अपने-आप बन पड़ी आकृतियाँ ऐसा आभास दे रही थीं मानो उन्हें सायास किसी सधे कलाकार ने बनाया हो। किले के दूसरे आकर्षणों की तरह वहाँ भी कई और पर्यटक पहले से मौजूद थे। 12वीं शताब्दी में बनवाया गया यह स्तंभ 22 मीटर ऊँचा है। राणा रावल कुमार सिंह के शासनकाल में इसे जैन व्यापारी जीजा भगरवाल ने बनवाया था। यह जैन धर्म के प्रथम तीर्थंकर ऋषभ देव जी को समर्पित है। इसके निकट ही एक जैन मंदिर भी है। कीर्ति स्तंभ और मंदिर की बाहरी दीवारों पर भी बहुत सुंदर प्रतिमाएँ उत्कीर्ण हैं। इसके पीछे नदी और सामने घाटीनुमा मैदान है।

यह जगह इतनी शांत और सुंदर है कि अगर समय होता तो शायद हम यहाँ घंटों बैठना पसंद करते। वहाँ से वापस लौटते समय रास्ते में भगवान शिव का एक मंदिर था, जहाँ कोई यज्ञ चल रहा था और उसी समय प्रसाद वितरण हो रहा था। हमने सोचा क्यों न पुण्यलाभ उठाया जाए और प्रसाद ले लिया। इसके बाद दर्शन भी कर लिया। यह भी कोई प्राचीन मंदिर ही था, लेकिन कोई ऐसा अभिलेख यहाँ उपलब्ध नहीं था, जिससे ठीक-ठीक जानकारी मिल सके। चलते-चलते करीब साढ़े सात बजे हम राणा कुंभा महल पहुँच गए थे। महल तो क्या, अब केवल खंडहर बचे हैं और ये खंडहर ही चित्तौड़ के ऐतिहासिक गौरव के वास्तविक स्मृतिशेष हैं।

महल के अंदर जाने के लिए मुख्य दरवाजा छोटा सा है। लगभग पांच फुट ऊँचा। वहाँ तक पहुँचने के लिए स्लोप जैसा बना हुआ है। भीतर जाने पर पहले एक कमरा है, फिर गलियारानुमा निर्माण और अब बिना छत के हो गए कई कमरों के खंडहर। इस महल के पीछे एक और खंडहर है। यह खंडहर भी एक ऐसे प्राचीन भवन का है, जो न केवल मेवाड़, बल्कि मनुष्यता के इतिहास में एक निर्णायक मोड़ का साक्षी रहा है। बताया जाता है कि यही वह जगह है जहाँ

महाराणा उदय सिंह का जन्म हुआ था। उस समय मेवाड़ का राजकाज संभाल रहा बनवीर राणा विक्रमादित्य की हत्या पहले ही कर चुका था। आगे वह अपना मार्ग निष्कंटक करने के लिए उदय सिंह की ही हत्या करने वाला था। इसकी भनक पन्ना धाय को लग गई और उन्होंने उदय सिंह की जगह स्वयं अपने पुत्र चंदन की बलि दे दी। यह अलग बात है कि आज पन्ना धाय की चर्चा लोगों की जुबानों और कुछ किताबों के सीमित पन्नों तक ही सीमित है, बाकी चित्तौड़ में उनके नाम का कोई स्मारक नहीं दिखा।

इस महल का निर्माण वास्तव में राणा हमीर ने करवाया था, लेकिन बाद में 15वीं सदी में राणा कुंभा ने इसमें कई परिवर्तन-परिवर्धन करवाए और इसीलिए इसे कुंभा महल कहा जाने लगा। इसके सामने ही बनवीर की दीवार और बड़ी पोल भी है। यहीं से एक रास्ता चित्तौड़ के महाराणा की कुलदेवी तुलजा भवानी के मंदिर की ओर भी जाता है।

अगले दिन साँवलिया जी

यह सब देखते हुए रात 9 बजे हम वापस अपने कमरे में थे। थोड़ी देर शहर में घूमने भी निकले और खा-पीकर लौट आए। अगले दिन सुबह ही साँवलिया जी मंदिर निकले। यह चित्तौड़गढ़ से 40 किलोमीटर दूर उदयपुर वाले हाड़वे पर स्थित है। उदयपुर हाड़वे पर बागुंड-भादसोड़ा चौराया से बाईं तरफ एक रास्ता निकलता है। इसी रास्ते पर 6 किलोमीटर आगे जाकर भदसोड़ा गांव में है यह मंदिर। इसी मंदिर के कारण अब यह गांव धीरे-धीरे एक छोटे कसबे का रूप ले चुका है। ■



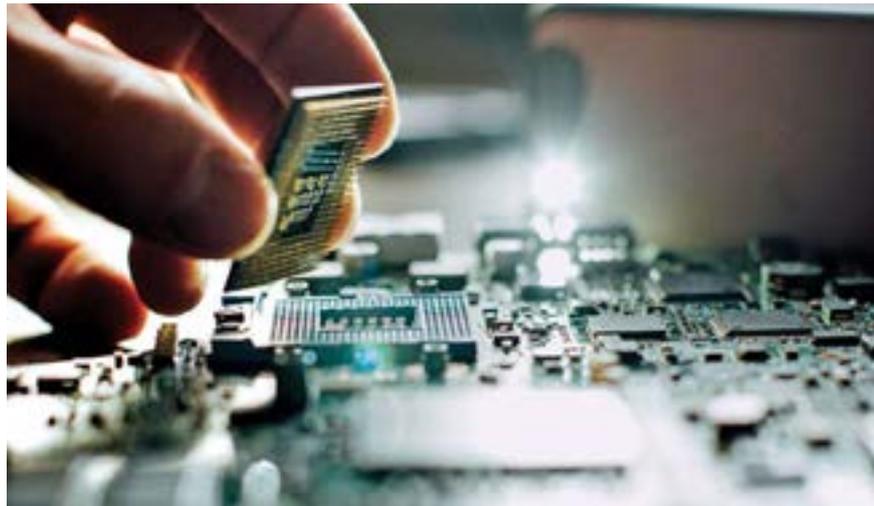
(लेखक वरिष्ठ पत्रकार एवं साहित्यकार हैं।)



GATHERING STEAM

Leaving behind the Covid-19 nightmare, Indian economy is on the road to robust recovery with all core sectors back to their normal growth trajectory

By **B Shekhar/Bangalore**



break-neck speed, many crossing the proverbial double-digit mark.

What Global Consulting Firms predict

Let's decipher the recent studies and surveys conducted by global consulting firms to substantiate the claim made by a section of the economists on Indian economy.

No less an organisation like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) which has a proven history of always downgrading India's business potential and manufacturing capabilities, has forecast a massive 9.5 percent growth in the Indian economy against the projected global growth rate of 6 percent in 2021.

Luis Breuer, IMF's senior resident representative to India, admitted in a recent IMF podcast, "What happens in India has a big impact, both in the region and in the world." IMF further states in its latest annual review that India's broad range of fiscal, monetary and health

A section of the economists, both India and foreign, may not really toe the line that Indian economy is back up and running at a speed which hitherto may not have been achieved without Covid-19 pandemic hitting the very bottom of the economy.

In other words, Covid-19 to some extent, has been a boon in the making for several core sectors which have suddenly realised their potential to be self-innovating rather than relying on imports, awakened to the gravity of undermining their very own potential for so long. Emerging statistics clearly indicate several core sectors such as automobile, agriculture, commodities, and services are growing at a



responses to the crisis supported its recovery and, along with economic reforms, these measures are helping the country to mitigate a longer-lasting adverse impact of the crisis.

Analysts at Morgan Stanley expect India's economy to witness a strong recovery, as pickup in investment along with underlying structural reforms is likely to lead to a virtuous cycle of "high productive growth". It further states: "We maintain a constructive view on India's economy – we expect GDP growth to gather steam with all components contributing positively: We expect consumption, which so far has been lagging, to pick up in a broad-based manner from Q1 FY22 as vaccination rates cover the entire eligible population. Improving end demand (consumption and exports) pushes capacity utilization rates higher, alongside a conducive policy environment which should push up private capex from H2 FY22."

Morgan Stanley projects India's GDP growth at 7.8 per cent in 2022-23 (Apr-Mar) and 7.2 per



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growth in production of natural gas, steel, cement, fertilisers, coal, refinery products and electricity.

In addition, the digital industry, ecommerce, aviation, agri and food technology, healthcare, education, financial services, infrastructure and many of the other key sectors are seeing double digit growth now. Some like Indian healthcare sector even witnessing 16 percent compound annual growth rate (CAGR) for the last three years.

The Aviation and Hospitality (including Tourism) sector, which had nose-dived, is now hitting the cliff with almost 15 percent CARG. People have begun to travel and vacationing is the buzzword now. This has pushed these two core sectors back into focus with surge in employment opportunities. The demand for specialised

personnel has pushed salaries to the higher side in these two segments, similar to the health, education, electric mobility, renewable energy, telecom, infrastructure, banking, finance, service, insurance and digital sectors.

With good monsoon across the country, agriculture output has seen record growth this year. The farming community has begun to splurge the surplus income. This has directly increased rural consumption level which had almost dried up two years ago, thereby, making industries work overtime to bridge the demand-supply gap without jacking the price margins up.

The real estate segment which had fallen flat is now soaring into the skies. Apart from residential real estate, the office space is once again seeing a surge with Work From Home



China's position as a go-to manufacturing location has weakened, and producers are looking to diversify. India has emerged as an alternative, and this will boost the government's vision of boosting domestic production.

concept slowly easing out. Now at least 60 percent of the workforce are back to working in their offices.

India playing a major role in the shifting of geopolitical world order

One of the key ramifications of the global pandemic has been the shift in global supply chains. China's position as a go-to manufacturing location has weakened, and producers are looking to diversify. India has emerged as an alternative, and this will boost the government's vision of boosting domestic production.

Structural reforms are a priority for the government as evident in reforms such as disinvestment and the establishment of a bad bank (a financial institution that segregates or removes the bad assets (NPAs, or non-performing assets) from parent banks' balance sheets, thus allowing

the latter to resume normal financial functions. Mining reforms were also cleared, and they will augment mining production and curtail imports. The government is also working on a national logistics policy that will slash logistics costs.

Spurring economic growth

The Government is constantly announcing structural reforms suiting the specific industry requirement. Some of the key industries that have received specific policy boost include eCommerce and EdTech. eCommerce growth will soon spill over into the B2B space. Furthermore, the cold-chain industry stands to benefit from India's eGroceries boom.

The road ahead

Investors should now look out for more government incentives to spur manufacturing. The forthcoming Union Budget 2022-23 may announce radical and neo-policies which are in tune with the requirement of global economy. That will drive economic recovery much faster. Opportunities for privatisation will open up as the government has indicated a long-term vision of industry-wide privatisation, barring a few strategic sectors.

At the macro-economic level, as China's position as a "go-to manufacturing location" has weakened substantially, India has now suddenly become an attractive hub for foreign investments in the manufacturing space. Several mobile phone,



luxury and automobile brands, among others, have already moved bases out of China to set up or are looking to establish their manufacturing bases in the India.

However, this churning in the international order had begun much before the pandemic actually struck. There was already an indisputable trend towards a multipolar world and the power centre of the global economy began to shift to Asia. India was one of the prominent business players to attract investments from global partners as de-risking business from China was in place for several nations already.

The current world order has been substantially altered and this is bound to give rise to a new post-COVID dispensation. In this state of flux, space has been created for aspiring and emerging powers to take centre stage and help shape a new world with a better future for all. India is just now capitalising on this new-found opportunity.

Many studies have pin-pointed that the manufacturing sector of India has the potential to reach US\$ 1 trillion by 2025. The Indian Cellular and Electronics Association (ICEA) predicts that India has the potential to scale up its cumulative laptop and tablet manufacturing capacity to US\$ 100 billion by 2025 through policy interventions.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been saying at many forums that impetus will be given to developing new industrial corridors. Also there are plans afoot to bring more II and III-Tier cities under the Smart Cities ambit. The corridors would only further assist in integrating,

The Indian Cellular and Electronics Association (ICEA) predicts that India has the potential to scale up its cumulative laptop and tablet manufacturing capacity to US\$ 100 billion by 2025 through policy interventions.



monitoring and developing a conducive business environment for the industrial development and will promote adoption of advanced technologies in the manufacturing sector.

In conclusion, if 2020 was the year of collapse for India, especially the MSME sector, 2022 is the year of robust revival and recovery leaving behind Covid-19 nightmares. Almost all core sectors are back to its normal growth trajectory.

What is desperately needed and being openly advocated by industry captains to further propel the economic growth to the next level is that both Union and the State Governments should work in tandem and announce the right kind of policy, administrative and procedural reforms which are in tune with the industry requirement. In a short span of time, India will occupy the position of the “go-to manufacturing hub” of the world. ■



(The author is a Bengaluru-based business journalist associated with IMS Foundation.)

THE SURREAL WORLD OF CRYPTO

Government finds itself on the horns of a dilemma on crypto currency front

By **Kumud Das**

The government finds itself in a catch-22 situation over the influx of crypto currencies. Neither can it legally allow the digital gold to be used for transactions in the country, nor can it put a blanket ban on the virtual currency.

In fact, it was for the second time that the government could not table the Bill on crypto currency regulation on the floor of Parliament during the Winter session though it was scheduled on the Parliament's agenda. The Bill had been deferred during the Budget session of Parliament on February 01, 2021 too. The reason is clear.

The government is not yet clear in its mind on how to regulate the virtual currency. But, at the same time, it is unable to regulate the influx of investments into the 'digital gold' as Indians within the country and even Indian diaspora living abroad have taken a fancy for the virtual currency. Huge investments have been made by them into the currency, though it is yet to become a legal tender in the country.

As per an estimate, there are nearly 20 million crypto investors, but there is no clarity on the size of the Indian crypto market. Thus, a blanket ban is set to shake up the entire crypto ecosystem and affect millions who have put in their hard-earned money into various crypto trading exchanges.

The third and the foremost reason being the non-fungible tokens (NFTs) which have become a craze investment for the celebrities. These NFTs are mostly traded in crypto currencies.

Commenting on it, former Finance Secretary Subhash Chandra Garg, who had headed the inter-ministerial committee (IMC) that drafted the crypto currency bill titled as 'Banning of Cryptocurrency and Regulation of Official Digital

Currency Bill, 2019', has said that the government has been buffeted by two forces in this matter. First, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has been constantly pressuring the government to ban crypto-currencies and statutorily empower RBI to issue digital bank-notes.

The crypto-currency exchanges, applying the force from the other side, want the government to treat crypto-currencies as assets and



statutorily create a regulatory mechanism for the same, he added.

According to Garg, “Whether misused for hawala and money laundering, investments worth billions of dollars escaping abroad and capital gains tax being avoided by the trade exchanges as well as investors continue to be deeper challenges before the government before it gives a go ahead for the same.”

Keeping this in view, the experts believe that time is ripe for the government and the RBI as well to expedite the process of introducing central bank digital currency (CBDC) to curb the massive use of virtual currencies whose circulation,

though illegal, has gone through the roof now. This step will go a long way in stalemating the cash in circulation (CIC) too, which has surged to a record Rs 29.4 lakh crore as on October 29. As a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP), it rose to a record 14.5 per cent for the fiscal 2020-21. The surge comes despite increased penetration of digital payments. It goes against the basic premises on which demonetisation was imposed five years ago.

For starters, the demonetisation was imposed five years ago to kill two birds with one arrow. First, it was aimed at inculcating a habit among the common man to prefer digital currency to cash. Secondly, it was a kind of crusade against the hoarding of black money.

Yes, transparency as an outcome of demonetisation in use of currency did check black money to a certain extent. But, when it comes to use of CIC vs. digital payments, it continues to be a debate if we really achieved our goal.

While almost 100 per cent of cash came back to the system post-demonetisation, CIC has seen a surge since then. This despite the fact that digital payments have also touched a historic height.

As a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP), CIC rose to a record 14.5 per cent for the fiscal 2020-21. The surge comes despite increased penetration of digital payments.

However, an internal report by Ecowrap says that latest currency in circulation has remained constant over the previous year even as record purchases happened during Diwali at Rs 1.25 lakh crores. This happened for the first time since 2014.

Rather, it expresses satisfaction over the fact that Indian consumers have now migrated big time to better technology platform like UPI, which has jumped 70 times in last 4 years, that does not require the intervention of a POS machine and factor authentications.

Secondly, the government is currently busy in

As per an estimate, there are nearly 20 million crypto investors, but there is no clarity on the size of the Indian crypto market.





framing the necessary guidelines for the proposed rolling out of central bank digital currency (CBDC) in its bid to wage war against the virtual currency, which is being operated from foreign soil at the moment. Virtual currencies are like the cat out of the bag as the RBI doesn't have any direct control over these virtual currencies and hence it has been raising its concern over such currencies from time to time. Former RBI deputy governor, NS Vishwanathan has raised a voice of concern against these currencies of late.

High volatility of crypto currency is just another challenge the law of the land is currently struggling with. A high-priced crypto, Ethereum, fluctuated between Rs 30,000 and Rs 3.69 lakh during the year preceding November 5, 2021. Today, Ethereum, bought at its lowest price of the year, fetches 90 per cent return. In comparison to Bitcoin and Ethereum, Polygon Matic is selling (November 5) at a very low price of around Rs 155. However, its price fluctuation (between 91 paise and Rs 215) over the past one year is very high – around 200 per cent.



The one cent-priced Squid skyrocketed and then tanked, but the story of another low-priced crypto, Shiba Inu, is different. Though selling at even less than a paise – 0.0039 paise to be precise, Shiba is going strong. During the last week, Shiba's price doubled and its market value soared to more than \$51 billion last week, putting it among the top 10 crypto currencies.

Crypto market is quite small as compared to the market of traditional currencies. It is easy for



speculators to trigger price volatility in certain cryptos. Let us have a look at some of the causes of price volatility in crypto currencies worldwide.

Whales are the small groups of people holding large amounts of cryptos. They can influence the crypto trade. They may crash the price of a certain crypto by suddenly selling it in large numbers. The price crash, if it happens to be in a strong crypto like Bitcoin, may have a ripple crash effect for the entire market.

Some crypto promoters also destroy a part of their coin supply, using the burning mechanism. This creates scarcity of the coin and thus raising its demand and value.

Surprisingly, all crypto currencies have a finite supply. Their supply speed is uncertain and not controllable by anyone. In the case of Bitcoins, only 11 million coins can be mined. So, with the expansion of the crypto market, if the Bitcoin demand rises, then the coin price is bound to skyrocket. The crypto market attracts a large number of part-timers who want to make quick money. Since all part-timers are not able to make money, the market sees frequent entry and exit of part-timers, leading to price volatility.

Fiat money or fiat currency represents legal-tender paper money or coins, which are issued and backed by a government. However, crypto currencies are pure digital assets, with no government backing or backing of a commodity such as gold. Devoid of any stabilising government or commodity control, the price of crypto currency is determined entirely by the laws of supply-demand. Any factor affecting their supply-demand may lead to a wide fluctuation in their price.

Some crypto promoters also destroy a part of their coin supply, using the burning mechanism. This creates scarcity of the coin and thus raising its demand and value.

The high price volatility has already been a concern regarding the unregulated crypto currency market. And, now the Squid scam would give a new momentum to the demand for crypto market regulation. In the absence of regulations, listing new cryptos on decentralised exchanges is quite easy. If the cryptos being listed are created by promoters with malicious intent, then their prices are artificially inflated by the pump and dump practice to lure gullible investors who want to make a fast buck. Experts emphasise market regulation to save naïve investors from losing their small savings by falling prey to wildly inflated valuations of coins like Squid. ■



(The author is a senior journalist.)



नकल में ढील!

जीएसटी के अमल में आने और सरकार द्वारा लगभग हर स्तर पर कड़ी निगरानी किए जाने के बावजूद पिछले कुछ समय से कालाधन व हवाला गतिविधियां में तेजी देखी जा रही है

शशि कुमार झा

क

नौज का इत्र और कंपाउंड व्यापारी पीयूष जैन इन दिनों सुर्खियों में हैं। कानपुर और कन्नौज स्थित उसके घरों की दीवारों और तहखानों से निकलने वाले नोटों और सोने चांदी से भरे बक्सों का तांता लगा हुआ है। उनकी गिनती खत्म होने का नाम ही नहीं ले रही। कानपुर और कन्नौज स्थित उसके घरों से 300 करोड़ रुपये से भी अधिक की नकदी और सैकड़ों किलो सोना चांदी (बिस्किट और छड़े), 600 किलो चंदन का तेल अभी तक बरामद हो चुका है। पीयूष के कन्नौज स्थित घर से 64 किलो के जो सोने के बिस्किट मिले हैं, उन पर विदेशी मार्क हैं। उनके कंपाउंड के व्यापार लगभग 50 देशों में फैले हुए हैं। अंततः पीयूष को 14 दिनों की न्यायिक हिरासत में भेज दिया गया और आगे की कानूनी कार्रवाई जारी है।

पीयूष जैन के घर से कैश या सोने चांदी की इतनी बड़ी बरामदगी कोई अकेली घटना नहीं है। अगर पिछले कुछ समय से ही देखें तो आयकर विभाग, प्रवर्तन निदेशालय (ईडी) जैसी सरकारी

एजेंसियों ने दर्जनों ऐसी बरामदगी की है। 40 से अधिक बक्सों में कैश निकला है जबकि नोटबंदी और जीएसटी के बाद काला धन की समाप्ति का ऐलान कर दिया गया था। क्या किसी के पास इसका कोई उत्तर है कि अभी भी इतनी बड़ी मात्रा में किस प्रकार काला धन पैदा हो रहा है। यह धन कहां कहां जाता है और इसका बचा हुआ हिस्सा कहाँ-कहाँ बंटता है। क्या केंद्र सरकार यह बताने की जवाबदेही से इंकार कर सकती है कि जीएसटी के बावजूद इतना अधिक कैश पैदा कैसे हो रहा है। यह बेहद ताज्जुब की बात है कि नोटबंदी के बाद भी और खासकर जीएसटी के अमल के आने के बावजूद किस प्रकार कालाबाजारी और कालाधन रखने वाले इतनी बड़ी मात्रा में ऐसा कर ले रहे हैं।

इतनी बड़ी मात्रा में काला धन का निकलना और तमाम बंदिशों और निगरानियों के बावजूद समानांतर अर्थव्यवस्था का कायम रहना देश और वित्तीय व्यवस्था के लिए बेहद नुकसानदायक है। क्या ऐसा इसलिए है कि व्यवसायों और कारोबार की निगरानी में अभी भी ढेर सारी खामियां हैं जिनका फायदा ये भ्रष्ट कारोबार उठा रहे हैं और कोढ़ में खाज की तरह भ्रष्ट राजनेताओं और पार्टियों का इन्हें शह प्राप्त हो रहा है। उत्तर प्रदेश में जल्द ही होने वाले विधान सभा चुनावों से भी इनका संबंध हो सकता है, इस आशंका को भी दरकिनार नहीं किया जा सकता।

सबसे चिंताजनक पहलू यह है कि वस्तु एवं सेवा कर (जीएसटी) के अमल में आने और सरकार द्वारा लगभग हर स्तर पर कड़ी निगरानी किए जाने के बावजूद पिछले कुछ समय से ऐसी घटनाओं में तेजी ही देखी जा रही है। नकली कंपनियों, फर्जी चालान और धोखेधड़ी से भरे इनपुट टैक्स क्रेडिट जीएसटी के अधिकारियों के लिए बड़े



प्रयासों के बावजूद क्या सीबीआईसी अधिकारियों या केंद्रीय एजेन्सियों की तरफ से निगरानी में अभी भी खामियां हैं या जीएसटी लगाये जाने से कोई फर्क नहीं नहीं पड़ा है? इसके अतिरिक्त, यह कहना भी गलत नहीं होगा कि हमारी सिस्टम में ही लंबे समय से गलत करने के बावजूद नौकरशाहों तथा राजनेताओं की सांठगांठ से बच निकलने की मनोवृत्ति व्याप्त रही है जो सरकार के लाख प्रयासों के बावजूद पूरी तरह खत्म नहीं हुई है।

पर धीरे धीरे ही सही, ऐसे धोखाधड़ी के मामलों में निश्चित रूप से कमी आ रही है। इतनी बड़ी संख्या में छापे पड़ना और दोषी व्यक्तियों, कंपनियों का पकड़ा जाना इसी बात के साक्ष्य हैं। सरकार की तरफ से टोस संकेत और हरी झंडी मिलने के बाद सभी संबंधित अधिकारी पूरे जोर शोर से ऐसे अवांछित तत्वों को पकड़ने और उनके खिलाफ कड़ी कार्रवाई करने में जुट गए हैं। संबंधित अधिकारी नवीनतम टूल्स, डिजिटल साक्ष्यों का उपयोग कर रहे हैं तथा घपलेबाजों को पकड़ने के लिए सरकार के अन्य विभागों से भी तालमेल कर जरूरी सूचना प्राप्त कर रहे हैं। इन कार्रवाइयों को कानून में सांविधिक तथा प्रक्रियागत बदलाव का भी लाभ प्राप्त हो रहा है। कानूनों के बेहतर अनुपालन तथा शानदार जीएसटी कर संग्रह से भी राष्ट्रव्यापी अभियान को मदद मिली है। नकली आईटीसी से लाभ प्राप्त करने के मामलों में कई विख्यात कंपनियों के खिलाफ भी कार्रवाई की गई है। वर्ष 2020-21 में, नकली इनपुट टैक्स क्रेडिट (आईटीसी) से संबंधित 8000 से भी अधिक मामलों का खुलासा हुआ जिसमें 426 लोगों की गिरफ्तारी हुई। कोविड-19 की दूसरी लहर के कारण नकली चालानों (इनवायर्स) की अंकुश लगाने में सुस्ती आई थी, लेकिन उसके बाद सरकारी एजेन्सियां एक बार फिर से सक्रिय हो गईं। नकली आईटीसी से संबंधित जिन 8000 से भी अधिक मामलों का खुलासा हुआ था, वे 35,000 करोड़ से भी अधिक के थे और जिन 426 लोगों की गिरफ्तारी हुई थी, उनमें चार्टर्ड अकाउंटेंट तथा वकील जैसे 14 प्रोफेशनल भी शामिल थे। आईटीसी के प्रावधानों का दुरुपयोग जीएसटी व्यवस्था के तहत कर चोरी का सबसे सामान्य तरीका है लेकिन इसके अतिरिक्त गलत वर्गीकरण, कम मूल्यांकन और वस्तुओं तथा सेवाओं की अवैध आपूर्ति से संबंधित कर चोरी का भी जीएसटी खुफिया महानिदेशालय (डीजीजीआई) और केंद्रीय जीएसटी (सीजीएसटी) ने पता लगाया। दरअसल नवंबर, 2020 से नकली जीएसटी चालान के खिलाफ चलाये जा रहे विशेष राष्ट्रव्यापी अभियान के तहत कई लाभार्थियों और निदेशकों को भी गिरफ्तार किया जा चुका है। वित्त वर्ष 2021-22 में अभी तक सीबीआईसी के तहत डीजीजीआई तथा सीजीएसटी ने 1200 कंपनियों से संबंधित 500 से अधिक मामलों का पता लगाया जा चुका है। ■



जीएसटी खुफिया महानिदेशालय (डीजीजीआई) द्वारा कन्नौज स्थित मेसर्स ओडोकैम इंडस्ट्री पर डाले गए छापों के संदर्भ में स्पष्ट किया जाता है कि श्री पीयूष जैन के आवासीय तथा फ़ैक्टरी परिसरों से बरामद नकदी और आभूषण भारतीय स्टेट बैंक के सुरक्षित कस्टडी में रख दिया गया है और आगे की जांच प्रगति पर है।

-वित्त मंत्रालय द्वारा 27 दिसंबर, 2021 को दिया गया वक्तव्य



सरदर्द बन चुके हैं। कर चोरी से बचने के लिए एक निर्बाधित श्रृंखला के जरिये सभी ट्रांजेक्शन के लिए इलेक्ट्रॉनिक पद्धति बनाने की कवायद अर्थात जीएसटी व्यवस्था बहुत हद तक विफल होती प्रतीत हो रही है जिसके लिए कर चोरी रोकने में टेक्नोलॉजी की नाकामी, निगरानी में चूक आदि कई कारण जिम्मेदार हैं। पीयूष जैन ने कबूल किया कि जो नकदी उसके परिसरों से बरामद हुई है, वह बिना करों के भुगतान के वस्तुओं की बिक्री से ही संबंधित है।

सीजीएसटी अधिनियम की धारा 67 के तहत गिरफ्तार पीयूष जैन का मामला निस्संदेह एक बड़ा मामला है लेकिन चिंता की बात यह है कि देश में पान मसाला व्यापारी सहित इस प्रकार के दर्जनों ऐसे मामले आते जा रहे हैं और सरकार तथा केंद्रीय एजेन्सियां इनकी रोकथाम करने में नाकाम रह जाती हैं। सवाल उठता है आखिर इतने



(लेखक आर्थिक विषयों के एक जाने माने विशेषज्ञ एवं स्वतंत्र पत्रकार हैं। पूर्व में वे दैनिक हिंदुस्तान इत्यादि राष्ट्रीय समाचार पत्रों से जुड़े रहे हैं।)

REPOSITORY OF HISTORY AND HERITAGE

The six yards of elegance and sensuality has changed over centuries with the influence of many cultures and traditions making it distinct and diverse

By **Harsha Bhargavi Pandiri**

Recently, a restaurant was shut down for not allowing a woman clothed in a saree. It was pathetic that saree has not been included in the list of appropriate dresses in the hospitality world.

There is a long history of elegance and pride behind the six yards draped by the woman. Saree has always been indispensable and integral to Indian culture. It has been a source of inspiration and appreciation for costume lovers across the world. Saree is the only costume in the world which can be worn on all occasions.

Every woman and man has an emotional bonding with a saree. It is the only costume that is preserved for generations and passed on. The almirah of a house has at least one saree in memory of someone special. A beautiful saree contains memories that women wear, it symbolises art, history and our culture. It is not only a piece of cloth but also is a repository of family history. It has an emotional connectivity and bond for every woman.

There is evidence of the saree from the Indus Valley Civilisation which is seen in a statue depicting a female priest wearing a long piece of cloth like a



The early statues show that the saree was draped in a sensual manner, which was tied at the waist, covered up the legs and came in front of the legs like a decorative drape.

saree. The word 'saree' is believed to be derived from a Sanskrit word meaning "strip of cloth" and, also, found in Buddhist literature as 'sattika', and later evolved as sati. With the passage of time, it has become known as saree. It was first mentioned in Rig Veda, the oldest surviving literature of the world, written around 1500 BC. It is evident that contemporary indigenous clothes derive from a high and hoary tradition.

The early statues show that the saree was draped in a sensual manner, which was tied at the waist,



covered up the legs and came in front of the legs like a decorative drape. There was also mention of saree in Indian epics like the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. From the Indus Valley Civilisation to the establishment of empires like the Mauryas, the Guptas, and later to the consolidation of the Mughal Empire, every major dynasty in India contributed to the evolution of the Indian saree. Till the 14th century, the dhoti was worn by both men and women

The social change has had an impact on the woven cloth, colours and designs. The indigenous people have developed a talent for popular art and a profound sense of beauty in designing the costume over time. With the evolving lifestyle and comfort, the costumes were redesigned but the six yards saree remained the same.

In ancient times, law regulated the use of certain types of clothes. The length of the garment was related to a person's social status. Some of these customs persist even today in the use of ceremonial costumes on special occasions. The use of rich fabrics, embellishments and beautiful motifs were combined by the master weavers to make saree an ethnic garment.

Over time, a number of fabulous varieties were developed to enhance the traditional, cultural and aesthetic value of sarees. The Greeks have introduced

the art of stitching in India where every region has evolved its own peculiar style. Later, various methods have been developed for weaving, dyeing, and printing of the fabric which have combined with the highly developed artistic finesse of the saree. The country has the grace to accept the best from the foreign influences and incorporating it into its already rich cultural heritage. This aspect of Indian cultural set-up can be perceived in the growth of the 'saree'.

The saree has earned fame worldwide. In India, sarees are loved by the young as well as old women. Different regions of the country have different sarees such as Bandhni (Rajasthan, Gujarat), Chikan (Lucknow), Kota Doria (Rajasthan), Banarasi (Benaras), Taant (Bengal), Baluchari, Kantha (West Bengal), Kanchipuram, Madisar (Tamil Nadu), Patola (Gujarat), and Chanderi (Madhya Pradesh).

The popularity of saree in India can be gauged from the fact that it is worn on almost all occasions, be it a wedding, a party or day-to-day work. It has become the most popular outfit, which is dynamic, depending on the occasion. During important ceremonies such as a wedding, religious ceremonies



and bridal wear, the saree is the incontestable outfit. India being a country of great cultural diversity, many of the Indian Christian brides started to prefer wearing white saree with a white blouse instead of their traditional Western wedding gown. Each region has specific patterns and designs on the saree.

The patterns on the saree have symbolic significance. Paisley (ornamental design using boteh or buta, a tear-drop shape with a curved upper end) and fish represent fertility, and abundance of food and children. These patterns were mostly imprinted on the sarees worn by people living in the coastal regions. Designs in the form of an elephant symbolise water, fertility, wealth, and good luck. It also exemplifies Lord Ganesha who is the remover of obstacles. The peacock depicted on the fabric represented the physical and emotional power of a person. The conch was also a symbol of the gods and represented the bugle used in war.

Similarly, the use of colours in the sarees also means a lot. In Indian mythology, the goddess is symbolised in a particular colour of saree like Saraswati in a white saree representing peace, Durga in red saree representing power. Different colours of

sarees symbolise different virtues, qualities, and themes. Usually, a saree is chosen according to the colour suitable for the day. For example, on Tuesday people love to wear red-coloured sarees, green for Wednesday, yellow for Thursday, black for Saturday. Indians attach a lot of importance to numerology and astrology. Based on the astrological calculations, women choose the colour of the saree. And every occasion has a colour. Red-coloured sarees are draped on special occasions such as weddings, parties and other special moments. As red symbolises dominance and passion, women prefer to wear them on various occasions.

A saree gives a lady an attractive, beautiful, and fashionable appearance. It's a versatile ensemble that can be worn on nearly every occasion. The ancient wear not only preserves the culture of India, it also expresses Indian pride. ■



(The author is Assistant Director, Telangana Bhavan, New Delhi.)



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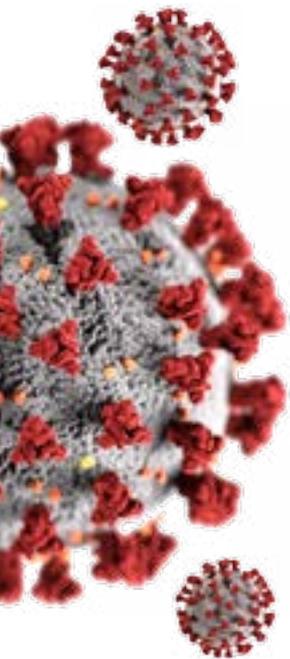
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“SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE-BASED STEPS NEEDED TO PREVENT THE SPREAD OF COVID-19”



Amid rising concerns of fast-spreading Omicron variant together with the already prevailing pandemic scenario, **Sujeet Kumar Jha** spoke to well-known Child Specialist **Dr H P Singh** on the need to expand the coverage and opening up of the vaccination for children even below the age of 15 years. Excerpts from the interview:

Q. How effective do you find the new measures announced by the government to tackle the resurgence of Covid-19?

A. All these are scientific study-based measures, hence quite effective. Whenever any vaccine comes, it is required to be studied and tested first before getting administered to kids.

Q. What is the booster dose all about?

A. It should be termed as a precaution dose. It is the third dose. In our country, a large number of people have been administered COVISHIELD, which is a vector-based vaccine. Scientific fraternity is of the view that after a vector vaccine dose, booster dose of any protein

We need to place more emphasis on individual and family protection. Only that community can be considered safe in which the individuals protect themselves and their families.



sub-unit-based vaccine will work. The government has approved recombinant nano-particle protein-based vaccine by Novavax company.

Q. How safe are the people who have been vaccinated with two doses against the threat of Omicron?

A. Whether any person has been infected with

Omicron or any other variant, it can be known only after genome sequencing. Now, the government sends all the samples for genome sequencing tests. How many old and Omicron strains are there can be known after the meta-analysis in the coming days. Statistical values analysis of those people who have got infected by Omicron despite being vaccinated earlier—will reveal this. However, we can say that this strain is a bit less serious. But we need to follow all the corona safety protocols including vaccination.

Q. There are people in the country who have not got even the first dose, and the below 15 population has not been vaccinated. What more needs to be done to safeguard our population?

A. We need to place more emphasis on individual and family protection. Only that community can be considered safe in which the individuals protect themselves and their families. On a larger scale, it will prove to be successful on district and then state levels. In short, I would say it is imperative to safeguard ourselves at the individual level. Any mission, whether big or small, becomes successful only with the right kind of knowledge, attitude and practice.

We don't have any dearth of knowledge now vis-a-vis this infection as we are already looking at it for the last two years. But some people are deliberately indulging in risky behaviour. Because of their wrong attitude, the entire society comes under threat and gets affected.

Q. Why haven't we been able to develop any medicine to prevent Covid infection?

A. It's not that there isn't any medicine. For example, anti-viral drug Molnupiravir has been developed and it's working on some people. In terms of the medicines and vaccines development, we have already achieved a considerable feat. However, due to lack of sufficient study, it will take some more time to develop a sure shot cure of this infection. We all must understand that an epidemic of such a large magnitude occurs only once in a century and all the concerned authorities are continuously engaged in finding out the remedy of it.

Q. What more is required to prevent Covid and its effects on the people in such a scenario?

A. While Covid appropriate behaviour is the biggest known remedy currently, a balanced approach allowing socio-economic activities is also required urgently. We will have to live life

Soon, we will be able to include all the age groups in the vaccination drive. The idea has been to vaccinate the vulnerable age group first.

very carefully for some more time to adjust ourselves in the new normal.

Q. How do you find night curfew applied in some states to prevent the spread of the virus?

A. Night curfew is not at all based on any scientific findings, moreover, the movement of people is already reduced in night; so, it's not at all advisable. Night curfew is being looked at by the World Health Organization (WHO) to know whether it has any scientific base or not. It's not an evidence-based programme, but only an administrative step. We haven't got any evidence in terms of the growing number of Corona cases getting reduced due to the night curfew. Ours is a highly populous country and we need such measures that help us in segregating people at all locations where they usually gather, like the marketplaces and other such places.

Q. What is your view of the recent measures taken by the government in the fight against Covid-19?

A. The government is well-prepared to tackle with the corona resurgence. Medically, the conclusion will depend on the further studies of the evidence and findings. Various vaccines, including nasal vaccines, are also in the pipeline. Steps are being taken with utmost precaution and we will surely make considerable progress in defeating this virus.

Q. What more is required? Isn't it necessary to vaccinate the entire population irrespective of their age?

A. Efforts are underway and very soon we will be able to include all the age groups in the vaccination drive. The idea has been to vaccinate the vulnerable age group first. Now we have been able to develop new vaccines as well to vaccinate all. ■



(The interviewer is a senior journalist, formerly associated with Realty Plus magazine.)

A MAN'S ADMIRING VIEW OF WOMEN ACHIEVERS

The author chooses his subjects well and reveals a lot about the human being behind her stupendous achievements

By **Parsa Venkateshwar Rao Jr**

This is a book of profiles of nine women achievers from a bewilderingly wide range of fields, from a film actress (Rituparna Sengupta), rights activist (Aruna Roy), karate champion (Sandhya Shetty), racing driver (Bani Yadav), wildlife biologist (Latika Nath), interior designer (Payal Kapoor), dancer (Mallika Sarabhai), mountaineer (Premlata Agrawal) to beauty and wellness expert (Blossom Kochhar). Author Swarnendu Biswas is a journalist, and in this book, he combines the diligence of a journalist of not leaving out the details of the person's life and personality. But what makes this book disarming is his unabashed admiration for the women he writes about, the admiration of a man for women achievers. Feminist ideologues might accuse him of the much-maligned male gaze, but Biswas wears his heart on his sleeves. That is why, these profiles are more than mere journalistic pieces. The fact that the women in this book have given him time and spoken about their public and personal life is a clear vote of confidence for the man who wrote about them. There is quite a bit of sentimentality and mushiness in the writing but that shows the author is willing to show his vulnerability. It is easier to write a clinically, objective piece.

For example, he writes in his introduction to Payal Kapoor, the reputed interior designer: "Amidst the sea of crowd was a thin fair girl with large black eyes with a sea of dreams swimming through them." Then he writes at the beginning of his interview with her: "Payal Kapoor laughed indulgently at the mushy

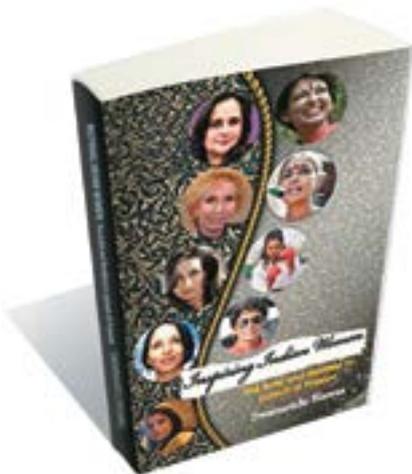
introduction given about her by my mediocre writing as we sipped cold coffee in her well decorated study. I do not know whether she liked it or not, but I decided to keep it nevertheless." Of course, this would not have passed muster in any of the Indian newsrooms because of the strange officious attitude adopted by many of the editors. But it is this candour, which could make the reader wince, that makes the book valuable. Here is an honest account of a genuine encounter between the writer and his subject, one of the true joys of journalism.

At other times, he adopts the plain journalistic style which says it all. He writes: "A person who does not know her would be amazed to know that this simple, down-to-earth housewife became the oldest woman in India to scale Mt. Everest, the tallest peak of the world. Yes, Premlata Agrawal did achieve the coveted distinction in 2011, at the young age of 48."

Biswas chooses his subjects well and reveals a lot about the human being behind the stupendous achievements. It is this factor that makes the book a valuable read. There is need for more books like these about more of our achievers. It is a good thing that a man has written about these women achievers, and he does not fight shy of hiding a man's admiration for these women. ■



(The reviewer is a senior journalist and political commentator.)



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PROTECTING THE JUMBOS

The book makes an impassioned plea for saving elephants that have been part of India's historical memory from the days of the Harappans, with enormous cultural value

By **Dr Sanjeev Chopra**

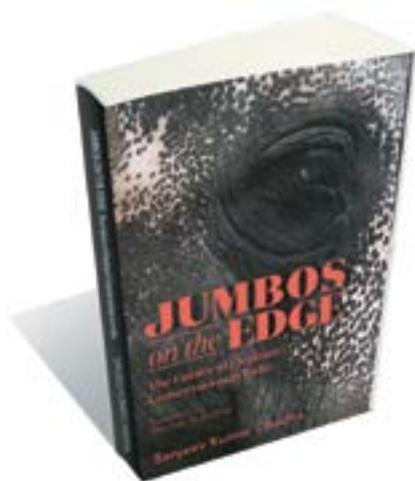
India is a country where most auspicious occasions are marked by an invocation to Lord Ganesha, and kings were called Gajapatis! It is therefore ironic that Indian Forest Officer Sanjeev Kumar Chadha's 'Jumbos on the Edge: The Future of Elephant Conservation in India' serves a reminder that we must act with alacrity to ensure that jumbos are not edged out forever. As Raman Sukumar puts it so succinctly in the Foreword: 'whether in its role as an ecosystem engineer par excellence or as a much-loved deity in the form of Ganesha, the elephants' biological and cultural legacy is unparalleled'. But the future is on a slippery slope.

We learn from this book that elephants had been domesticated and used in times of peace and war in the Harrapan civilisation. In fact, the author avers that the taming of elephants precedes the Harappans. The *Arthashastra* also gives instructions for the care of elephants as well as their classification, training, diet, healthcare, and deployment in battle. Eight kinds of Gaja Vanas (elephant forests) are described in the *Arthashastra*, which shows that the state was certainly keen to keep an eye on the jumbos! We are also aware that in the hey days of the Kalinga empire, there were close to 99,000 elephants in the Imperial army. Most significantly, the only time Yudhishtar did

not speak the 'whole truth' was with reference to the elephant that was also named Ashwatthama!

However, today the twenty-seven elephant reserves in the country hold less than thirty thousand elephants, and another three thousand are domesticated. The four distinct elephant groups in the wild are spread over four geographies – the Northern population of ~1600, NE population of ~9,200, Eastern population of ~2600 and the Southern population of ~12,800, besides forty feral elephants in the Andaman and Nicobar islands. In fact, even today the talk of elephant conservation is a sub text of the inevitable elephant human conflict as the elephant territory shrinks, and they are forced to forage for their food in settlements along the forest.

The strength of the book lies in the fact that Chadha is not just stating the problem, which is what most commentators do after a cursory perusal of Google and Wikipedia. What he has done is to take us on a journey of 'Project Elephant' launched in 1992 by the Government of India to address the issue holistically. The idea was to protect the elephants, their habitat, their corridors besides looking at the issue of man-elephant conflict and the welfare of domesticated elephants. States were offered financial and technical assistance to create the twenty-seven elephant reserves, of which nine are interstate. This



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involved notifying nearly 70,000 square kilometres of forest reserve and the development of a five-pronged strategy. This included planned management of the extant habitat for viable wild populations, measures for mitigation of man-elephant conflict, including support for change of cropping patterns, livelihood opportunities for human beings in elephant habitats, measures to protect elephants from poachers and other unnatural causes, research, awareness, and sensitisation to elephant mores in the development paradigm, and last but not the least, eco-development and veterinary care.

To my mind, the fifth chapter is the 'core' of the book in which the conflict mitigation strategies are discussed. Chadha says that the formulation of a mitigation strategy for a linear project (roads, railways, transmission lines and canals) must entail prevention of adverse impacts to the extent possible with design changes, reduction of adverse impacts, restoration of damage caused to the ecosystem and adequate compensation. The focus should not only

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be on mitigation at and around the project site but impacts on the wider landscape should be addressed with emphasis on maintaining corridor connectivity *'Designing linear infrastructure must incorporate experiences across different habitats around the world. A regulatory regime is a must to alter human behaviour in and around the protected areas in the form of speed restrictions, road closures, restrictions on parking and feeding of wild animals.'*

The case study on the Rajaji-Corbett elephant range identified the Haridwar-Rishikesh -Dehradun highway and railway line, Chilla Power canal, eastern Ganga canal and the Kotdwar-



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Lansdowne-Pauri Road as the main impediments faced by the elephants in this range. He suggests elevated highways, overpasses, eco-friendly bridges on canals and water tanks, besides ensuring that power lines do not sag. There is a case study on the Dedicated Freight corridor and the Gautam Buddha Wildlife sanctuary. Chadha argues that with proper planning and foresight, adequate measures can be put in place to prevent the elephant-human conflict. What matters most is 'sensitivity' on the part of all stakeholders – for the decisions taken today have a long-term, and irreversible impact on the eco system.

Before closing it is important to understand some of the key constitutional amendments which have a bearing on wildlife conservation. These include Articles 48-A and 51-A. It is true that the (original) Constitution of India had no direct provision for environmental protection. Global consciousness regarding the protection of environment in the seventies, especially the Stockholm Conference and increasing awareness of the environmental crisis prompted the government to introduce direct provisions for protection of environment. Article 48-A was added to the Directive Principles of State Policy, which inter alia read: 'the State shall endeavour to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard

the forests and wildlife of the country.' In addition to this, Article 51A made protection of environment a Fundamental Duty of every citizen. 'It shall be the duty of every citizen of India to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers and wildlife and to have compassion for living creatures.' Thus, protection and improvement of natural environment is the duty of the State (Article 48-A) and every citizen (Article 51- A (g)).

While these two legislations had a positive impact, Chadha also draws our attention to the conflict scenario arising out of the Forest Rights Act 2006, which was passed by the Parliament to address the historical injustice done to people living in and around forests whose rights were taken away by the colonial state while declaring the forest as reserved. However, these notifications did not recognise the traditional rights of people living in and around the forests. The process of identifying such people, and verifying their claims was done at the level of the Gram Sabha, subdivision and district through committees constituted as per the provisions of the Act. Over forty lakh individual claims were received, of which nearly half have been settled and forty-one lakh acres of forest land have been distributed. However, the balance claims are contested, and this is a major source of conflict between the Forest administration and claimants, many of whom are backed by interested NGOs. Chadha points an accusatory finger at the arbitrary extension of the cut-off date from October 25, 1980, to December 13, 2005, as the main reason for this conflict.

In fine, this is an excellent read for all those interested in knowing why jumbos are on the edge, and how we must pool in our resources to ensure that they are back in the centre of an ecosystem which belongs to them! ■



(The author is a historian, public policy analyst, and Festival Director at the Valley of Words, Dehradun. Until recently, he was the Director of the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration, Mussoorie.)



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