

INDIA PERSPECTIVES

Volume 34 | Issue 02 | 2020

WOVEN WITH CARE

Rajasthani hand-woven carpets
and modern aesthetics

ANCIENT ENTERTAINMENT

Indigenous games from yesteryears
and a strong comeback

RIDING TO GLORY

Four female motorcyclists on
the IMT Trilateral highway



LEADING BY EXAMPLE

Indian initiatives aimed towards checking the spread of the Novel Coronavirus



7

MAY, 2020

BUDDHA JAYANTI

Also known as Vesak (in South and Southeast Asia), the festival commemorates the birth of Prince Siddhartha Gautama, who went on to become Lord Buddha, the founder of Buddhism. In India, the festival marks the birth, enlightenment and the passing of Lord Buddha. As a part of the festivities, devotees wear white clothing and distribute a dish called Kheer (a sweet milk porridge made with rice) amongst friends and family.

WHERE: East and Northeast India

29

MAY-12 JUNE, 2020



SAGA DAWA FESTIVAL

Saga Dawa, or the fourth month of the Buddhist calendar, is celebrated as one of the most auspicious and spiritual time of the year. It is believed that since Lord Buddha attained enlightenment during this month, every good deed and spiritual act is multiplied manifold during this time. One of the highlights of the celebrations is devotees and followers gathering in the streets, reading from holy scriptures and seeking blessings.

WHERE: Sikkim and NE India

23-24

MAY, 2020

EID-UL-FITR

One of the most important festivals of the Islamic community, Eid-ul-Fitr marks the culmination of the holy month of Ramadan, that involves day-long fasting. The festival begins early with the distribution of an obligatory contribution by every member of the family for the greater good of society. Following the congregational Eid prayers, delicious meals are shared amongst friends and family.

WHERE: Across India





12-14 JUNE, 2020

SINDHU DARSHAN

Celebrated in Shey Manila, eight km from the town of Leh, the Sindhu Darshan Festival is aimed towards celebrating the communal harmony and national integration through the Indus river. The three-day event features music and dance performances by artistes - both local and from across the country - along with prayers offered to the great river.

WHERE: Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh



16 JUNE, 2020

OCHIRA KALI

The Ochira temple, based on the principles of universal consciousness, is renowned for the Ochira Kali festival. The festival's highlight is a mock battle that is re-enacted in a flooded field called *padanilam*. The mock war commemorates the historic battle fought between the erstwhile Kayamkulam and Ambalapuzha kingdoms.

WHERE: Ochira, Kerala



23 JUNE, 2020

RATHA YATRA

A tradition said to be as old as the historic Puri Jagannatha Temple, the Ratha Yatra is the annual procession of the shrine's presiding deity Lord Jagannatha, along with his brother Lord Balabhadra and sister Goddess Subhadra, to the Gundicha Temple (about three km away) for a week-long stay. The towering *rathas* or chariots are decorated with flowers and pulled by thousands of devotees along the *Bara Danda* or grand avenue. The sight of the deities in their chariots is considered a blessing.

WHERE: Puri, Odisha

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FOREWORD

As millions across the world stand affected in one way or another by the spread of the Novel Coronavirus or COVID-19, India too deals with the unprecedented situation that has resulted due to this global pandemic. In these challenging times, the nation stands fully united against a common enemy and presents a strong front, be it in adhering to norms aimed at curbing the spread of the virus or in terms of efforts, ideas and innovations to overcome this challenge.

We bring you detailed reports on how Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi has successfully spearheaded an unprecedented diplomatic outreach to galvanise countries around the world to unite in the face of the pandemic. We also look at how the multi-faceted and dynamic business and innovation ecosystem of the country has come together to find solutions to this crisis.

India is revisiting its rich heritage, traditions and age-old wisdom, as we move towards making our lives wholesome, disciplined and more in sync with nature. From the healing power of Indian spices to the immune-boosting capabilities of yoga, from ancient practices that have guided our lives to traditional games that enhance our grey cells, we are making a shift towards natural remedies and simple habits, all of which is featured in this issue. We look at how basic yoga techniques, that do not require any formal training, can make our lives more fulfilling by boosting our mental, spiritual and physical strength through simple do-it-yourself routines. We then embark on a journey of rediscovering our roots that leads us to the vibrant state of Rajasthan, where the indigenous art of carpet-making has not only made artisans financially self-sufficient but also placed their craft on the global design map.

Home to thousands of species of flora and fauna, India is nothing short of a natural paradise. We take you across the length and breadth of the country as we visit the lesser known national parks and conservation reserves.

In this issue, we also salute Indian women, who create the perfect balance in life – helming traditional roles at home while shattering the proverbial glass ceiling outside. We bring you the adventurous tale of four female motorcyclists, who rode along the newly-laid Trilateral Highway from India through Myanmar to Thailand, conquering hearts across nations. Travel's power to bring disparate people together is brought to fore by author and philanthropist Sudha Murty, who speaks on how Indian culture transcends borders.

With this issue, we introduce a new section to pay tribute to legendary personalities, who have, with their visionary ideas and hard work, made a mark. We start with Mahasweta Devi, a renowned author and social activist from West Bengal, whose efforts to better the lives of tribals across India were duly recognized.

Anurag Srivastava



THE CRUSADE AGAINST Coronavirus

India has been playing an active role in the global fight against COVID-19 and PM Narendra Modi's call to host a video conference meet of SAARC leaders was a significant step in that direction. Under the PM's guidance, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has been taking several steps to make sure we win this fight

BY ANIL WADHWA

In mid-March, when India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi called for a video conference summit of leaders of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) countries to develop a roadmap to fight the challenge of Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic together, he set a new precedence in international diplomacy. The video conference was not only a huge success in the fight against the virus but may also

set the tone for the future of high-level diplomatic interactions.

Prime Minister Modi's initiative asserted India's leadership role in SAARC, once again. This was a pragmatic diplomatic move, given the intermingling of people and cultures across India's borders with Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Maldives, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan. Since then, PM Modi's initiative has galvanised SAARC externally and internally to fight the spread of the virus



Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi (C) attends a video conference of SAARC leaders on combating COVID-19 with External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar in New Delhi

External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar and Barry Faure, Secretary of State of Seychelles, greet each other with folded hands instead of the customary handshake in New Delhi on March 20. The two leaders met to discuss their nations' preparedness to fight COVID-19



and help the infected. It has led to a constant exchange of information and cooperation between health authorities of member nations, and avoidance of unilateral steps to the detriment of other SAARC countries.

COVID-19, which originated from Wuhan, China in November 2019, has spread quickly across the world, and a majority of countries around the globe are now grappling with a growing number of infections, deaths and lock-downs. The World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a pandemic in March, 2020.

QUICK ACTION

Consequently, the Indian government took a number of timely and proactive steps to identify, contain and prevent the spread of COVID-19. Effective March 13, India decided to suspend all visas, barring select categories, till April 15. An advisory was also issued under which no scheduled

international commercial passenger aircraft could take off from any foreign airport for any airport in India, after 0001 hrs GMT of March 22, effectively closing India's borders. This was followed by PM Modi's announcement of a 21-day lockdown, which has since been extended till May 3. This was done to break the chain of transmission of the virus and to "flatten the curve" of infections.

All incoming travellers, including Indian nationals from COVID-19-hit nations after February 15, were quarantined for a minimum of 14 days.

Since PM Modi's first address to the nation on March 19, when he called for a one day "*Janta curfew*", he has constantly sought to involve the people in joint action against the fight to contain the spread of COVID-19.

MULTILATERAL INITIATIVES

PM Modi also contacted King Salman of Saudi Arabia, the current chairman

About COVID-19

- Coronavirus is an RNA virus that has high mutation rates, which can be correlated with enhanced virulence
- For Coronavirus, the transmission range varies from 2.1 to 4.1, almost three times the required number
- No vaccine exists for the disease and the only treatment is symptomatic. The elderly, infirm and the sick are particularly vulnerable. There is, thus, a need to decrease transmission by two-thirds to contain the epidemic.

PARTNERSHIP

The medical team from India at the Indian Embassy in Rome, gearing up for testing Indians for COVID-19



Innovative management

PM Modi proposed setting up a voluntary emergency fund for SAARC members where India initially offered USD 10 million conveying that any SAARC country could use the fund for “immediate actions”.

He also offered rapid response teams of experts and specialists to member states of SAARC. The teams have been sent to Maldives and Kuwait on their request

Integrated Disease Surveillance Portal has been set up to better trace possible virus carriers.

A ten-day capacity building programme on Covid-19 has been broadcast online to SAARC health professionals.

of G20 (a group of 19 countries and the European Union), to organise a virtual conference of member nations on the COVID-19 crisis. The G20, in a virtual meeting at the end of March, agreed to suspend both principal and interest payments for the developing countries through the end of the year. This is expected to free up to USD 20 billion for such countries, an amount they can spend on improving their health systems and fighting the pandemic. The finance, trade, employment, tourism and health ministers of G20 nations have also met subsequently.

India also waived restrictions for export of drugs like Hydroxychloroquine and Paracetamol, which are being used to treat COVID-19 patients, to more than 100 countries. This includes USA, Russia, Spain, the UK, Brazil, Jordan, Egypt, and partner nations of SAARC,

BIMSTEC (The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation), GCC, Latin America and Africa. While the Prime Minister holds discussions with heads of states from across the world every day, there have been several high-level exchanges as well. India and Russia have discussed facilitating the emergent needs of medicines and equipment in both countries as part of their efforts to contain COVID-19. China too has thanked India for its support to fight the virus in China, after India sent about 15 tonnes of medical assistance to the coronavirus-hit Wuhan city. In April, a team of Indian medical experts was sent to Kuwait, following a phone call between PM Narendra Modi and the Prime Minister of the State of Kuwait HH Sheikh Sabah Al-Khaled Al-Hamad Al-Sabah. External Affairs Minister Dr S

Jaishankar and his Kuwaiti counterpart also held a telephone conversation to further strengthen cooperation during these challenging times.

LOOKING FOR A SOLUTION

India has teamed up with a number of countries in the search for a COVID-19 vaccine.

By April 7, PM Modi had completed a round of consultations with all GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) countries, focusing on possible plurilateral cooperation in fighting the pandemic. India has been in regular touch with Germany in order to invigorate the

Alliance for Multilateralism, which was initiated by Germany in 2019 and comprises several dozen countries. On March 21, India also participated in a video conference organised by the US for the senior officials of seven Indo-Pacific countries -- USA, Australia, Japan, South Korea, Vietnam and New Zealand besides India -- in

“TOGETHER, INDIA WILL CERTAINLY OVERCOME THE COVID-19 MENACE. THE MANNER IN WHICH PEOPLE FROM ALL WALKS OF LIFE ARE MAKING THE FIGHT STRONGER IS COMMENDABLE.”

Narendra Modi
Prime Minister of India

Taking charge

- The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has mobilised all resources to address the grave situation that has arisen due to the spread of COVID-19.
- With active support from MEA, in what can be described as one of the biggest evacuation exercises in human history, since mid-March, so far around 50,000 foreigners have been evacuated to their countries
- A fully-functional special cell has been set up in the Ministry of External Affairs in New Delhi to coordinate the response to COVID-19 both internally and externally.
- The External Affairs Minister, Dr S Jaishankar, and the Foreign Secretary of India Harsh Vardhan Shringla are personally monitoring the situation.

Right: The Indian Rapid Response team after its initial interactions in Kuwait towards the joint fight against COVID-19

Bottom: The crew, medical team and support staff of a special flight of the Indian Air Force (IAF) before departure from Air Force Station, Palam, New Delhi to Wuhan, China



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PARTNERSHIP



The Indian flag, covering an area of more than 1,000 m, projected on the Matterhorn Mountain, a Swiss landmark in Zermatt, Switzerland, as a symbol of solidarity and support for Indians

“ WE WERE PREPARED TO BRING BACK NOT ONLY OUR PEOPLE BUT ALSO THOSE FROM ALL OUR NEIGHBOURHOOD WHO WOULD HAVE LIKED TO. THIS WAS AN OFFER WHICH WAS MADE TO ALL OUR NEIGHBOURS. THE GOVERNMENT REMAINS FULLY COMMITTED TOWARDS THE WELFARE OF OUR NATIONALS IN ANY PART OF THE WORLD; THIS HAS BEEN THE HALLMARK OF OUR FOREIGN POLICY.

Dr S Jaishankar
External Affairs Minister
Government of India

order to discuss strategies for fighting the disease and also to agree on joint cooperation, mutual assistance and steps to revive economies. These online meetings are continuing on a periodic basis.

INDIA FOR ITS CITIZENS

The Indian missions, in Iran and Italy, which had become the epicenter of the pandemic early on, have been in regular touch with Indian nationals in the countries and have been constantly advising them on following all health protocols amidst the outbreak. Medical teams were sent to both countries to test Indian nationals for the virus. In Iran, the Indian mission not only evacuated but also helped in establishing a quarantine facility.

External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar had travelled to Srinagar on March 9 and met the families of Indian

Luggage screening being carried out at the Jaisalmer airport in Rajasthan. A quarantine facility in the city is housing Indians evacuated from Coronavirus-hit countries





The 14-member composite medical relief team with members from all corners of India after their arrival in Malé to support and assist the Maldivian health authorities

students in Iran, heard their concerns and briefed them about the efforts being made to ensure their welfare.

There are millions of Indians who are engaged in jobs and businesses across the world. Some of them, in the light of the raging pandemic, would like to return to India. Indian missions and its envoys are, in the interim, regularly in touch with the Indian nationals working or studying in these countries, in order to take care of their difficulties.

PUSHING BACK

The Govt of India has rightly identified that the Coronavirus pandemic can only be handled through a synchronous public-private-people partnership. The government has already identified adequate laboratories in the public and private sector as testing facilities. All efforts are being made to successfully counter the

pandemic following the best medical practices and Standard Operating Procedures developed by the Indian Council of Medical Research which is the nodal agency for fighting the Coronavirus challenge in India. As long as the pandemic lasts, the Indian Ministry of External Affairs will continue to be in touch with its nationals, coordinate further evacuations as needed, and support India's diplomatic efforts in global organisations like SAARC, BIMSTEC and G20 to galvanise a common front to fight this unprecedented menace.



Ambassador Anil Wadhwa has served as Secretary (East) in the Ministry of External Affairs, and as the Indian ambassador to Poland, Oman, Thailand and Italy. He has also been posted to Indian missions in Hong Kong, China and Switzerland and worked for the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) in The Hague.



INDIA Innovates

As the world scrambles to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, Indian scientists and researchers are coming together to offer unique solutions. It is also seeing a rise in private-government partnerships

BY VINAYAK SURYA SWAMI



The Government of India's citizen engagement platform MyGov is suddenly buzzing with action. It is inviting citizens to participate in a challenge to find solutions to stop the spread of the Novel Coronavirus or COVID-19 and aid its treatment. "Participate and win INR 1 lakh" says the banner on the site. This is just one of the many steps the government of India is taking to encourage indigenous scientific solutions to fight the deadly disease.

Given the recent advances towards producing high-quality goods within the country and the widespread success

of the Make in India initiative, the manufacturing sector in the country shows immense potential and promise; be it through the public or private partnerships. India's history is filled with events where the country's diverse mix of entities has come together to present a united front whenever the nation has faced a crisis. It seems another chapter is being written today as we fight the global pandemic.

BEING PREPARED

Several ministries across the government went into action at war footing, to ensure that the country was prepared to tackle a critical situation

Members of *Team Drone Masters* carry their drones after spraying disinfectants in densely populated areas of Ahmedabad, Gujarat

“THE WORK PLACE IS GETTING DIGITAL FIRST. AND, WHY NOT? IT IS TECHNOLOGY THAT DEMOLISHES BUREAUCRATIC HIERARCHIES, ELIMINATES MIDDLEMEN AND ACCELERATES WELFARE MEASURES.

Narendra Modi
Prime Minister of India

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Left to right: Hand sanitiser manufactured by Mahindra & Mahindra; A foodtruck by Mahindra Automotive North America, bringing food to healthcare professionals in Oakland, California; A contact less hand sanitiser dispenser designed by DRDO through a collaboration with a startup called Riot Labs

of such magnitude. The private sector also joined the fight against the rapidly spreading disease with many companies, regardless of their size, voluntarily proposing interventions.

A major step was the identification of areas of concern with regard to the spread of COVID-19. As the world's second-highest populated country, it was also imperative to prepare for a large number of cases which would require specialised equipment for protection and treatment like N95 masks, protective gear and most of all, ventilators.

APPROPRIATE RESPONSE

On March 20, the Department of Science and Technology (DST), had invited India's rapidly evolving industrial and start-up ecosystem for support with regard to developing technologically innovative solutions towards fighting COVID-19. An astounding 300 companies responded favourably to the call with almost 140 formal proposals being submitted to

the TDB (Technology Development Board), a government entity that provides financial support to Indian companies for commercialisation of indigenous technology or adaptation of imported technology.

The initial responses that were received offered an innovative approach towards manufacturing diagnostic kits aimed at minimising the time taken to receive results. Others included proposals for vaccine development, thermal screening equipment, large scale production of PPE (personal protective equipment) as well as innovative solutions using Information Technology for monitoring of essential supplies in quarantine zones etc.

It is important to note that with the diverse entities in India's corporate and business ecosystem, it is necessary that we move towards combating COVID-19 with renewed vigour. "Every step taken in this direction will have a multiplier effect," says Professor Ashutosh Sharma, Secretary, DST.



CHALLENGE ACCEPTED

At its most lethal stages, the Coronavirus is known to impact the lungs drastically reducing pulmonary capabilities, at this stage ventilators are a must if the condition is to be treated. One of the first areas identified for development was the production of ventilators to manage treatment of infected individuals.

Several large-scale organisations across the country have risen to the occasion forming associations that transcend industrial differences. An apt example is of auto industry heavyweight, Maruti-Suzuki India's tie-up with a New Delhi-based ventilator manufacturer, AgVa Healthcare. The joint venture is aimed towards dramatically ramping up the manufacture of the highly specialised machine to 10,000 pieces a month from the existing capacity of 400 units per month. The venture, facilitated by Invest India has been aided by BHEL (Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited) with the supply of electrical components.

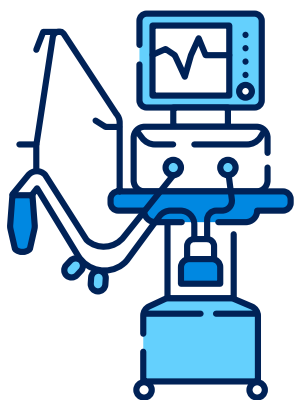
Similarly, another industrial giant, Mahindra & Mahindra, has teamed up with SkanRay (international healthcare technology company), BHEL and Bharat Electronics Ltd (BEL) to manufacture a modified version of the ventilator, which would be best suited for current requirements and would be easy to transport. Infact, Anand Mahindra (Chairman) and Pawan Goenka (MD) of Mahindra & Mahindra, had even tweeted videos of these prototypes mentioning that the aim was to bring down costs to INR 7,500. The company, has also



Many technology start-ups in the field of robotics have also joined the fight by providing innovative solutions to problems revolving around critical healthcare



Top: A motorist rides through an innovative and quick disinfection tunnel as a preventive measure in Chennai, Tamil Nadu; **Bottom:** Medical staff with robot 'Zafi' (C) in Chennai. The interactive robot by Propeller Technologies will be deployed at COVID-19 isolation wards to lower risks of infections to healthcare professionals



What are ventilators?

Ventilators are sophisticated pieces of technology built to closely assist human breathing.

The human lungs, interwoven with blood vessels, tend to get inflamed when a person is battling COVID-19.

A ventilator when used at this stage, helps the person breathe by supplying oxygen to the lungs.

How do they help?

It is important to understand that ventilators are often used as a last resort and do not cure COVID-19, they however, assist patients dealing with respiratory problems resulting from the infection.

A patient has to be monitored 24*7 when on a ventilator and vitals like Oxygen and Carbon Dioxide saturation etc need to be maintained.

Oxygen is then transmitted directly into the lungs at a controlled pressure through a tube.

Ventilation allows the body to function and respond to treatment. Once the patient has recovered, assisted breathing is then removed.

moved to start production of a low-cost indigenously developed sanitisers that would be available for as low as INR 400/litre.

That not all, state-run organisations such as the DRDO (Defence Research and Development Organisation) are also partnering up with local entrepreneurs and small-scale manufacturing units to produce N95 masks on a mass scale. Another venture with BEL, the state-run electronic giant, production of ventilators has also been established. Several prestigious companies like JCB India, Hyundai Motors and Tata Motors are soon expected to join the massive efforts aimed towards tackling the global pandemic.

BREATHING EASY

The current efforts, by government agencies along with the much needed push from the private sector are aimed to boost production of such critical



Right: The innovative and economical, 'toaster-sized' ventilator from AgVa Healthcare

Bottom: Workers of AgVa healthcare make portable ventilators. In a partnership with industrial giant Maruti-Suzuki, AgVa has dramatically ramped up its production for ventilators





Left: As part of the vigil called by Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi, where he urged citizens to light candles, lamps or torches in a show of solidarity, a hotel chain with its lights switched on to form the word 'Hope' in Pune, Maharashtra

Bottom: A drone used by police to monitor activities of people and spread awareness announcements during a government-imposed nationwide lockdown



equipment. For example, companies producing ventilators had a joint capacity of about 5,500 units every month, are poised to increase production to almost 50,000 units each month through partnership ventures. Testing kits and PPE, apart from being imported in large numbers are being produced indigenously as well. Meanwhile, several state-run and private organisations have come forward with donations and contributions to national funds that are fuelling the fight against the spread and treatment of the Coronavirus. The brightest minds from top-educational institutions across India have volunteered to join the race to make critical healthcare widely available at affordable prices. Members of the Indian diaspora across the world have also pitched in with inputs to manage production and solve manufacturing woes for many start-ups that are now preparing to battle one of the largest

challenges the nation has ever faced.

Several committees set up to monitor and combat the spread of COVID-19 under the Disaster Management Act, along with cooperation across the private sector have surely adhered to the words of visionary Sardar Patel “Little pools of water tend to become stagnant and useless, but if they are joined together to form a big lake the atmosphere is cooled and there is universal benefit.”



Vinayak Surya Swami is a Delhi-based journalist. He holds a degree in mechanical engineering and has worked as an apprentice Shipbuilder with the Indian Navy. A part-time writer since his teenage years, he switched to journalism to pursue his prurience for writing and travel.

Immunity

THE NATURAL WAY

In contemporary times, with an increasingly fast-paced lifestyle and a modern approach to healing tactics, we unknowingly keep accumulating micro assaults to our immune system without allowing our body to address them. Here's how the ancient albeit simple practices of yoga can be utilised to boost our immunity, lead a healthier life and so much more

BY DR RAGHAVENDRA RAO



The human body to a great extent is a self-regulating, preserving, repairing and maintaining entity. Nature has designed the human body with an inherent capability to heal and provided the natural laws of healing are allowed to operate, our health is in its entirety, a natural outcome of all the encounters we have in life. This healing capacity that we are endowed with is called vitality or immunity. Our body has a self-reliant system of protecting its tissues against assaults by bacteria, viruses, harmful proteins and oxidative stress through an interplay of nervous, endocrine and immune systems. In today's world these systems are constantly challenged due to our fast paced lifestyle, stress, unhealthy eating habits and exposure to pathogens. Yoga *asanas* and *pranayama* reduce stress and improve the body's immune



response to fight infections and allergies. Yogic practices are well known for improving the immunity.

Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi joins thousands in a mass demonstration of yoga on the International Day of Yoga in Chandigarh on June 21, 2016

YOGA AND IMMUNITY

Yoga can help to modulate this immune response in an appropriate way. Yoga as a mind-body intervention has been used globally to combat these lifestyle related diseases where stress is believed to play a role. Yoga helps calm down

Shatkriyas are yogic cleansing techniques used to clean the internal organs and systems of the body. These kriyas cleanse, activate and revitalise organs and develop deep internal awareness

Nadi Shodhana Pranayama

(Alternate Nostril Breathing):

The main characteristic feature of *Nadi Shodhana Pranayama* is alternate breathing through the left and right nostrils without or with retention of breath (*kumbhaka*).

Sit in a comfortable posture.

Keep the spine and head straight with eyes closed.

Relax the body with a few deep breaths.

Keep the left palm on the left knee in *Jnana mudra* and the right palm should be in *Nasagra mudra*.

Place the ring and small fingers on the left nostril and fold the middle and index finger.

Place the right thumb on the right nostril.

Open the left nostril, breathe in from the left nostril, close the left nostril with the small and ring fingers and release the thumb from the right nostril; exhale through the right nostril.

Next, inhale through the right nostril. At the end of inhalation, close the right nostril, open the left nostril and exhale through it.

This completes one round of the *Nadi Shodhana Pranayama* (Alternate Nostril Breathing).

Repeat for another 4 rounds.

The duration of inhalation and exhalation should be equal for beginners.

Breathing should be slow, steady and controlled. It should not be forced or restricted.

the mind, bring stability and balance the vital energies. Studies have shown yoga to improve immunity in the population during influenza epidemics. Yoga is a system of holistic living, having its roots in Indian traditions and culture. It is a discipline to develop one's inherent power in a balanced manner. Now it is being practiced as a part of healthy lifestyle. Yoga is popular globally because of its spiritual values, therapeutic credentials, its role in the prevention of

diseases, promotion of health and management of lifestyle related disorders. One of the most useful and popular mode of yogic exercises which provides the benefits of *Asanas*, *Pranayama* and *Mudras* altogether is the *Surya Namaskar*. It consists of a series of twelve postures which are performed early in the morning facing the rising Sun. Each step of *Surya Namaskar* is accompanied with regulation of breath. Its regular practice energises all systems of the body and ensures



In the current times, incorporating practices like yoga and meditation in our daily routine can help promote a healthier, holistic and more aware lifestyle

Meditation is an integral part of yogic practices and is beneficial for psychological and spiritual growth



People meditate in the lotus position on a beach during sunset. Meditating after a busy day helps in releasing stress and achieving clarity for the forthcoming day

a perfect harmony between them. It makes the body flexible and improves immunity.

Our body has its own set of immuno-responses, amongst them, inflammation is the most common. A natural counter which is often helpful when it comes to healing injuries and infections, inflammation often becomes chronic under constant psychological and physical stress, thereby weakening our immune system. Most *asanas* involve systematic stretching that alleviates inflammation and increases flexibility. The immunity boosting capabilities of even basic yogic

practices also find mention in a new research published in the *Journal of Behavioural Medicine*.

Today, even Western researchers vouch for yoga's benefits. *The Harvard Medical School Guide to Yoga: 8 Weeks to Strength, Awareness, and Flexibility*, says regular practice of yoga can lead to greater muscle and bone strength, improved sleep, better stress management and resilience, strengthened immune system and enriched brain health.

CLEANSING WITH KRIYAS

Cleansing techniques called *kriyas* also help in removing excess

Benefits of Pranayama

- The main purpose of the *Pranayama* is to purify the principle channels of carrying energy, thus nourishing the whole body.
- Induces tranquillity and helps to improve concentration.
- Increases vitality and lowers the level of stress and anxiety. Alleviates cough disorders.
- It calms the mind, improves focus and concentration and useful in strengthening the immune system.

Understanding immunity

Though exposure to pathogens help build adaptive immunity, surviving such an exposure may sometimes become fatal. Research has shown that there is a heterogeneity in susceptibility to infections during a flu epidemic. Psychologic stress, fitness and physical activity, nutrition, sleep, comorbid conditions and lifestyle play a vital role in shaping this immune response. A growing body of evidence identifies stress as a cofactor in infectious disease susceptibility and outcomes. It has been suggested that the effects of stress on the immune system may mediate the relationship between stress and infectious disease. Stress increases stress hormones that dampen immune response and also reduce the ability of the cells to repair the damage caused due to infections.

mucous and restore mucosal immunity. *Shatkriyas* are yogic cleansing techniques used to purge the internal organs and systems of the body. These are a part of the process of detoxification. These techniques are classified into six divisions as under: *Neti* (nasal washing); *Dhauti* (stomach washing); *Basti* (colon washing); *Kapalbhati* (purificatory yogic breathing); *Nauli* (isolation of abdominal recti-muscles) and *Trataka* (yogic visual gaze). These *kriyas* cleanse, activate and revitalise organs and develop deep internal awareness.

The practice of *Surya Namaskara*, deep breathing exercises, *pranayama*, meditation and deep relaxation is also highly beneficial. *Pranayama* is the fourth constituent of *Ashtanga* yoga, which deals with the regulation of *Prana* and energy, grossly translated as breath. It is a practice which helps to regulate vital energies through the regulation of breathing. The main purpose of *Pranayama* is to gain control over the autonomous nervous system and through it to influence the mental functions. Regular practice



Beginning with standing upright, the postures of the *Surya Namaskar* help in increasing circulation, flexibility and reducing any inflammation throughout the body



Yoga asanas and *pranayama* reduce stress and improve body's immune response to fight infections and allergies

One of the postures of the *Virbhadrāsana* or the Warrior pose. The posture, that can be practiced during any time of the day, promotes lower body strength while relieving stress and calming the mind

of *Pranayama* makes the mind calm and quiet.

MEDITATE ON WELLNESS

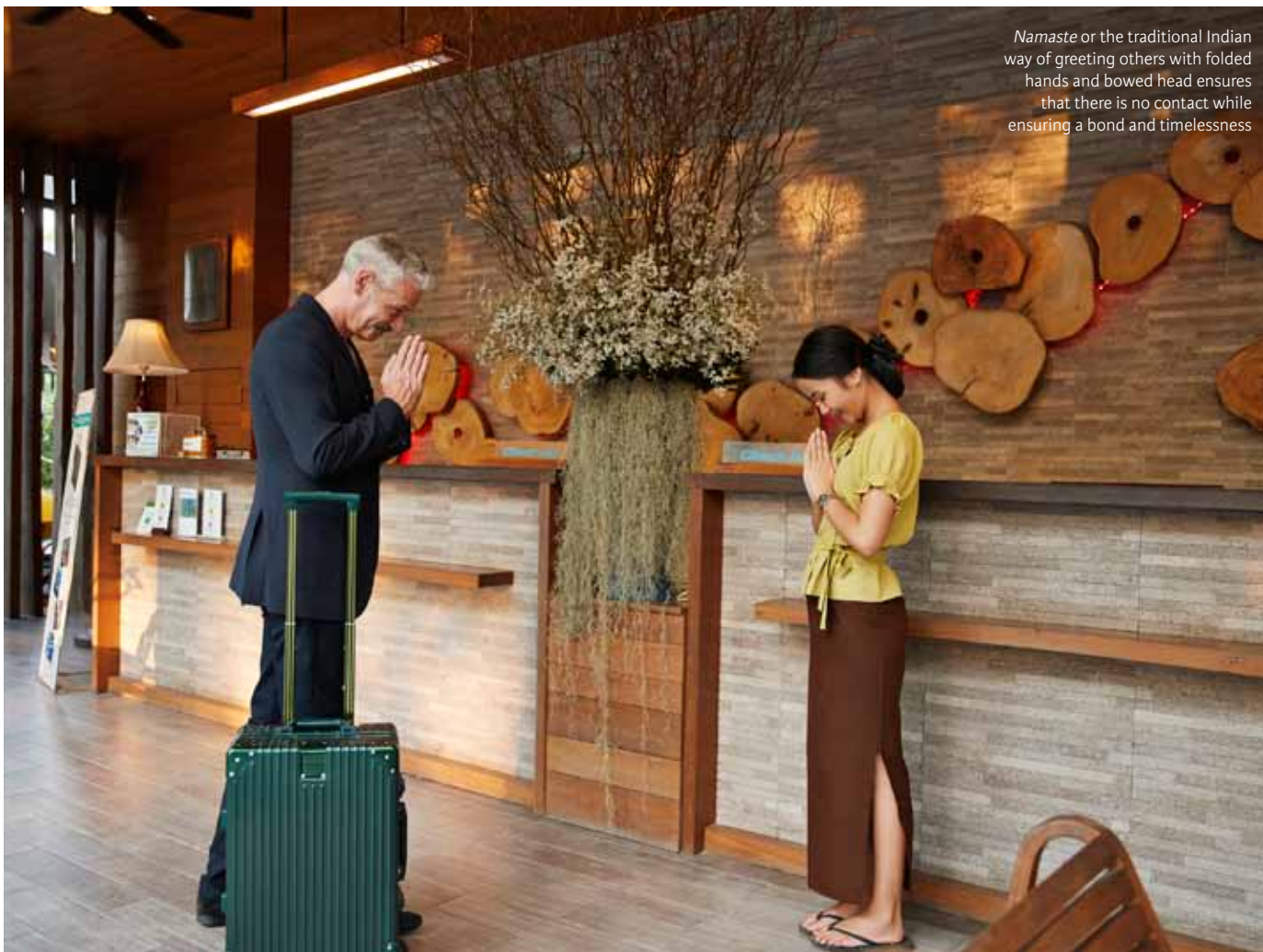
The process of keeping one's attention focussed with sustained concentration on an object is commonly known as meditation. It is an integral part of all yogic practices and is beneficial for psychological and spiritual growth. Over the years, the stress relieving benefits of regular meditation have been known to achieve a sense of calm which has a positive impact on an individual's health and promotes a healthy lifestyle.

It has been known to be beneficial when it comes to overcoming addictions of tranquilizers, reducing hypertension, insomnia, migraines, depression, anxiety, and other psychosomatic illnesses. It stabilises the mind, increases awareness, concentration and will power while simultaneously improving memory and alertness. It is an effective tool for rejuvenation of the mind, body and soul, and even helps in coping with the stressful situations of everyday life.

*With inputs from **Dr Rajeev Rastogi**, Assistant Director, Central Council for Research in Yoga and Naturopathy*



Dr Raghavendra Rao M, BNYS, PhD is the Director, Central Council for Research in Yoga & Naturopathy (CCRYN), under the Ministry of AYUSH, Delhi. He has completed several research projects on the use of both yoga and naturopathy interventions.



Namaste or the traditional Indian way of greeting others with folded hands and bowed head ensures that there is no contact while ensuring a bond and timelessness

ROOTED IN Traditions

From yoga and Ayurveda to *Vastu Shastra* and philosophies of *ahimsa*, knowledge from ancient India has been influencing the modern way of living in India since time immemorial. Here are a few aspects of the past that can be followed today for leading a more balanced, aware and healthier life

BY GITA HARI

Just after US President Donald Trump returned to America after visiting India, he surprised the world by announcing that the Indian way of greeting with folded hands is ideal to maintain social distance and would prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus. The image of President Trump's *namaste* went viral online, and photographs of other world leaders doing the same started making the rounds. In Britain, Prince Charles opted to use the Indian greeting over a handshake and so did French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The word *namaste* (or *namaskar*), is a form of traditional salutation and is mentioned in several ancient Hindu texts, including the *Rig Veda*. The *Vedas* say that "*namaha*" or the act of bowing to god or the creator removes all egos. Experts say that when we fold our hands in a *namaskar*, various pressure points in our palms and fingers, connected to our eyes, ears and brain, are pressed, which help us to remember the person we are meeting for a longer period of time.

Not just the *namaste*, today, several philosophies from the ancient Indian value system, that our elders used to practise and advised us to follow, seem extremely relevant. While yoga has been gaining global popularity in the recent times as a natural booster of health and well-being, currently the focus is also on traditional breathing exercises that are a part of yoga. Medical practitioners often stress on the importance of controlled breathing to keep

Prime Minister of Ireland Leo Varadkar (left) and US President Donald Trump greeting each other with a *Namaste* gesture at the White House in Washington DC during the former's visit to the US (March 12)



The ancient practice of *Vastu Shastra* is a systematic and precise study of directions to generate positive vibes and a sense of well-being around one's surroundings

CULTURE AND LIFESTYLE



Homes across rural areas in India are often constructed using locally sourced materials as the best defence against the elements. Seen here are village homes from Jaisalmer in Rajasthan painted with slaked lime; in Sohra, Meghalaya, made with bamboo, in Munnar, Kerala, made with clay, and in Dalhousie, Himachal Pradesh, using stones and mud

stress at bay and strengthen our immune system.

CLEANLINESS RITUALS

Another example that comes to mind is the common advice to wash hands and feet immediately after entering the house. In some households, shoes would be removed outside the main entrance and hands and feet would be washed there. It is an ancient Indian custom for people returning home from outdoors to wash their hands

and feet before entering the house. In villages, entrance to houses had a small area with a tap or a vessel filled with water where one could clean up. The same practice is followed while entering a place of worship in several religions. The logical purpose behind this is applicable in recent times too – we may have passed by filthy and unhygienic locales, brushed past many strangers and harmful germs may have entered our body through our hands and feet. Taking

a bath and washing our clothes ensure that we are clean and don't let the microbes spread in our surroundings. Also, the traditional practice

The Hindu sage Patanjali believed that getting to grips with *ahimsa* can tame wild animals and even render vicious criminals harmless

The 13-day period of mourning after a funeral ensures protection against any infectious diseases or microbes that were present and as such, have been eliminated

of drying clothes out in the sun is more effective in killing germs than in an electric dryer, a fact supported by modern science as well.

Most evaluations of the incubation period for several bacterial and viral infections range from one to 14 days. The incubation period is actually the time between getting infected and beginning to have indications of the syndrome. Isn't it surprising then that way back our ancestors took precautions for the precise number of days. Among Hindus, a 10-day isolation period used to be strictly observed by the family

of a deceased person. This period was often referred to as the time when a departed soul finally passed over from the realm of the living. From the point-of-view of modern-day medicine, it can be viewed as a protection period for others to check if any infectious diseases or microbes were present and as such, have been eliminated. During this time, family members close to the deceased were kept away from touching or cooking food for others, and on the 13th day they would be allowed to cook and pray for *moksha* of the departed soul. Today, time constraint often forces us to give

Traditional eating habits

- Using fingers establishes a link between the mind and body; it stimulates the sensory organs which hold the consciousness in balance.
- *Sattvik* (pure and natural) diet consists of fresh and seasonal vegetables, fruits, nuts, seeds and milk products. It cleanses our body of toxins. Likewise observing fast regularly cleanses our system.
- The last meal of the day should be had before the sun goes down to prevent indigestion and adverse effects on sleep.
- It is advisable not to drink or have food while standing as it unsettles the equilibrium of fluids in the body.
- Our predecessors cooked in earthen vessels like clay pots which added calcium, iron, and other minerals to food.



Vastu Shastra follows the placements of element to attain natural equilibrium. Traditional houses across South India are centered around open areas containing a body of water

While praying

Camphor used in *aarti* ritual is known to be loaded with healing properties like allaying pain and reducing itching.

It also purifies the air, which has health benefits.



Temple bells are for ringing. The ratio of metal elements in the bells is such that the decibels produced by them generate a harmony in the left and right parts of our brains. The intense and enduring sound helps trigger all the 7 healing *chakras* of our body.

It is advisable to spend some time sitting in the temple premises since the *vastu* of a temple is such that it creates positive energy and a calm state of mind to face the challenges of the day.



The third eye or the vulnerable spot between the eyebrows is the origin of energy by way of electromagnetic waves that explains why heat and headaches are caused by tensions and mental pressures. Sandalwood paste or *chandan tilak* offered at temples (as a sacred mark on the head) cools the forehead and inhibit energy loss.

Holy ash or *bhasma* contains medicinal value. It soaks in the body's surplus moisture and keeps it cold while keeping headaches at an arm's length.



up this practice born from a deep and scientific thought process.

EATING HEALTHY

If vegetarianism is widely prevalent in India, it can be attributed to *ahimsa* or non-violence – the mind-set of not to harm any living being. Hindu sage Patanjali says in his *Yoga Sutras*, compiled in 400 CE, that getting to grips with *ahimsa* can tame wild animals and render vicious criminals harmless. He says it is a benevolent approach towards the much-needed universal compassion.

As youngsters we have been admonished from eating from the same plate, taking a nibble from a friend's lunchbox or a sip from a common glass. This practice of avoiding eating *jootha* (food eaten by one person) can be related to the fact that several diseases get transmitted via spittle.

LIVING PRACTICES

Another ancient philosophy is *Vastu Shastra* – a systematic and



Elders from the Apatani tribe in Arunachal Pradesh have raised bamboo platforms used for washing in the morning and before entering the home



Clockwise from top left: Across India houses traditionally have a tap or a vessel to wash oneself at the entrance before entering; Children washing before entering a mosque during the month of Ramadan in Patiala, Punjab. The purity and sanctity of places of worship is often maintained by requesting devotees to thoroughly wash themselves before entering; Painting on a wall of a temple in Jaipur, Rajasthan, requesting visitors to remove shoes outside the premises

precise study of directions to generate positive vibes and a sense of well-being in one's living area and surroundings. It deals with the concept of balancing the five elements of nature – air, water, fire, earth and space – to bring about equilibrium, for maximum advantage. For instance, the most ideal direction for the cook to face while cooking is supposed to be east to allow the morning sun's UV rays to destroy harmful microorganisms in food. The *tulsi* (holy basil) tree worshipped in every Hindu house, has over the years ensured that every house has access to the leaves of the tree, which have many beneficial properties.

While in today's age we embrace modernity and contemporary values of living, our curiosity has helped us find the intelligent and simple logic behind the many traditional practices that were until recently, thought to be of religious significance only. It is important to remember these traditional habits, to incorporate them in our day-to-day routine as they are rooted in scientific values and logic that promote a healthier, more holistic lifestyle.



Gita Hari curates healthy Sattvik cuisine for premium hotels. Her recipes have been featured in the health columns of leading newspapers. The recipient of Women Achievers' Awards, Hari has conceptualised, scripted and hosted shows on television and the digital platforms as well.



SPICE UP YOUR immunity

Since time immemorial, traditional spices and herbs have played a vital role as immuno-boosters in Indian cuisine. Here's a look at how these ingredients make our everyday food not just tasty, but also wholesome

BY GITA HARI

The addition of the bouquet of spices in traditional Indian meals is what makes them one of the healthiest dietary solutions in the world

According to ancient Indian texts, *aushadham ucchyathe sarvam*, which means food is the absolute cure and healer. Traditionally, in Indian cuisine, vegetables and spices are used in a dish according to their nutritional benefits and their ability to strengthen our immune system, which in turn, can protect us from ailments and infections. A reason why it is advised to include a balanced mix of spices and herbs in our daily meal plan to provide a regular boost to our immune system.

Spices like turmeric, saffron, cloves, cinnamon, carom seeds, ginger and garlic are known to have a plethora of beneficial properties. Herbs like mint, *tulsi* (Holy Basil), and leaves of *neem* and moringa trees are said to have several health benefits. In India, with diverse preparations being made from more or less the same ingredients, spices play a significant role in culinary preparations.

For instance, turmeric - the commonest of all Indian spices - is added in almost all dishes. It not only lends the dish a golden hue but is known for its antiseptic properties and in reducing existing metabolic syndromes. We have often had our mothers urge us to drink warm milk mixed with turmeric to treat dry cough, sore throat and purify the blood of toxins, thereby upping the immunity quotient. Today, this drink



In India there are many examples of beneficial herbs and spices being added to dishes to lend a distinct flavour and also to make them healthier



Top: Jaggery is a staple in traditional Indian kitchens. It is rich in anti-oxidants, aids digestion and is known to cleanse the liver; **Bottom:** A *thepla* (flatbread) made with fenugreek leaves, known to absorb sugar and reduce bad cholesterol

CUISINE



Top: A tea made from fenugreek leaves is known to provide relief from anemia, loss of taste, fever and even dandruff; **Bottom:** A Sattvik meal of cottage cheese fritters deep-fried with a layer of buckwheat flour (*kuttu ka aata*)



Sattvik cuisine

- Depending on its character and effect, food can create a balance or imbalance in one's state of living.
- Sattvik cuisine, in essence, embraces the nutrients that cultivate a positive outlook in a healthy body to enhance spiritual and physical progress.
- It is intrinsically good and in total accord with nature. It comprises of pure foods such as vegetables, grains, fruits and dairy products like milk, curd, white butter and *ghee* (clarified butter).
- This type of cuisine is free from artificial ingredients and desists from spreading disease. It maintains and focuses on stamina, serenity and mental clarity.

is available at many upscale cafes as turmeric latte. Ginger too has similar health benefits.

There are many such examples of beneficial herbs and spices being added to dishes to lend a distinct flavour and also to make them healthier. For example, moringa leaves and fruits (drumsticks) are used in curries across north India to help fight bacterial afflictions. *Neem* too is used in meals and brewed into a thick concoction called *kadha*. A special *neem* leaves chutney is prepared in Maharashtra during the festival of Gudi Padwa. *Neem* has proven remedy to cure loss of appetite, fever and also boost cardiac strength. Curry leaves, the staple garnish in Indian cooking across states, is a popular natural anti-oxidant. "Almost all parts of a *Azadirachta indica* or *neem* tree have beneficial properties – the leaves had raw or cooked, purify blood and aid digestion; the bark extract has been found to cure stomach and intestinal ulcers and *neem* oil reduces skin blemishes. The oil is also a cure to breathing problems," says nutritionist Kavita Devgan.

According to Dr Pooja Thacker, Head of Department Dietetics at Bhatia Hospital, Mumbai, "The clinical trials of *tulsi* on humans have shown it to be a unique combination of anti-viral, anti-microbial, anti-fungal, anti-malarial. It can reduce hypertension, arthritic pain and depression. It acts as anti-epileptic, anti-inflammatory, hepato protective, anti-ulcer, and anti-asthmatic."



Traditional South Indian meals, served on banana leaves are known to be rich in spices that prevent several ailments. Most Indian kitchens apply the concept of minimal wastage along with many eco-friendly practices

Asafoetida relieves bloating, flatulence and irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) while fenugreek is known to control long standing ailments like diabetes. Cumin and bishop's weed, the culinary equivalents of modern indigestion drugs, help digestion and check food-borne disorders. Pepper improves absorption of essential nutrients and promotes gut health. A pepper drink is often the go-to cure in many Indian homes to fight a flu.

Asafoetida, fenugreek, black pepper, coriander and cumin seeds

have anti-inflammatory properties, and are extensively used in Indian cuisine. Quintessential South Indian dishes like *sambhar* (lentil curry with vegetables), *rasam* (a clear sour soup) and even curries are flavoured with these spices. *Bisibele Bhath* of Karnataka is another classic rice and lentil preparation using various spices and nutritious vegetables to avert deficiencies.

If dishes like *pongal* from the South uses crushed pepper and cumin, Gujarat finds its comfort food in *khichdi* – wholesome rice and lentil dish prepared with minimal spices like cumin and ginger. While restoring digestive enzymes, this one-dish meal builds up energy and resistance levels in the body to fight infections.

The habit of eating freshly-cooked meals must be formed to derive more nutrients, energy and to maintain a healthy body

CUISINE

Khichdi is often the remedy to dietary distress and is used to reset the digestive system with its simple albeit healthy ingredients. Various dried and powdered spices and herbs in traditional Marwari preparations from Rajasthan like *ker sangri* and *pitod ka saag* ensure physical strength. These dishes, often heavy in the use of garlic and onion, ensure that the body is prepared against the heat in most parts of the desert state. Maharashtra has its share of wholesome meal in *usal/misal*, consisting of multiple sprouts in a spice-rich gravy that has loads of ginger and garlic and ensures essential nutrients like proteins. The liberal use of lemons and citrus fruits, which do not allow for thick gravy preparation, ensure the adequate dosage of Vitamin C and a strong defense against the hot and humid environs around Maharashtra.

Punjabi cuisine is hugely popular for the intoxicating aromas of spices and herbs used generously in its



recipes. Just as the fragranced waft of garam masala (a rich mix of spices like cardamom, clove, star anise and cinnamon) from North Indian kitchens are simply irresistible they also burst with vigour. Cinnamon and cloves can be counted as immunity-warriors for their anti-fungal and anti-bacterial properties. These dishes often include or end with a generous portion of fennel, ensuring that there is no acidity.

Top: Drumsticks in a bowl of *sambhar* for added health benefits

Bottom: Azadirachta indica or *neem* leaves have unbelievable and numerous health benefits. It can be enjoyed as a juice, a spicy chutney with chillies or as a roughly ground powder



Right: A bowl of *rabri*, a dessert, enjoyed all across the country, is often garnished with stands of saffron.

Bottom: A traditional fish curry in mustard sauce. Mustard seeds are rich in a nutrient called selenium, known for its high anti-inflammatory effects



Plenty of star anise, bay leaves and saffron can be found in the dishes from Kashmir. Dr Thacker throws light on saffron's benefits, "It helps in curbing asthma by reducing inflammation. Tests have proven that having saffron regularly can reduce Immunoglobulin M and Immunoglobulin G, which directly reduce asthma." The star among the

Valley's contribution to India's spice treasure is the Kashmiri red chilli, full of minerals besides black cumin (*shah jeera*), black cardamom and white pepper. The signature lamb dish, *rogan josh* with curd and a variety of spices is a robust low-cholesterol delicacy. Embracing mindfulness while eating and fresh, home-cooked meals can help you kick off stress, discomfort, and depression. Experts say that ingestion of food within four to five hours of cooking is the best.

It's interesting that even today, the ancient concept of a balanced Sattvik meal, cooked fresh with a bouquet of spices, is considered one of the healthiest in the world.



Gita Hari curates healthy Sattvik cuisine for premium hotels. Her recipes have been featured in the health columns of leading newspapers. The recipient of Women Achievers' Awards, Hari has conceptualised, scripted and hosted shows on television and the digital platforms as well.



A palatial room at the *Patwon ki Haveli* heritage building in Jaisalmer, Rajasthan, with a vintage board for the game of *Chausar*

The Game is on

From board games that sharpen the brain's strategic prowess, to those which build memory, Indian traditional games are not just for enjoyment. **Abhishek Dubey** looks at some of these games which are making a comeback in contemporary avatars, captivating the attention of even the modern day gamers

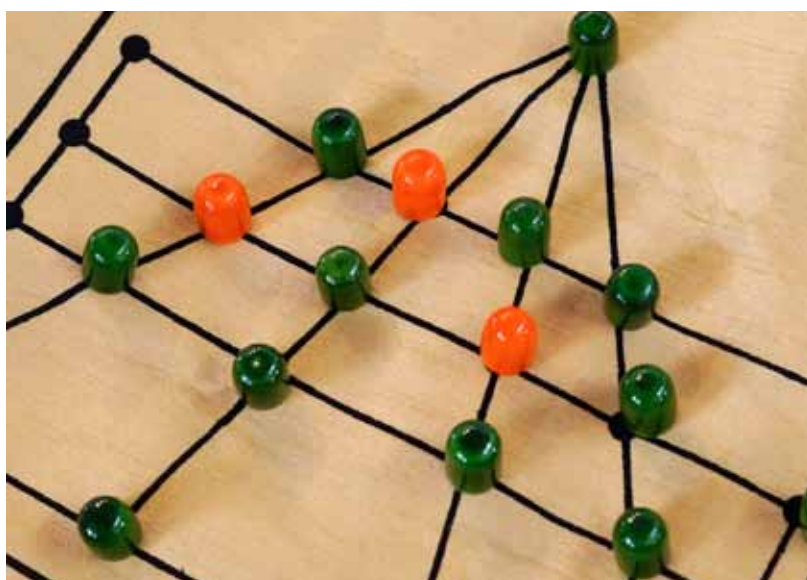
Ancient Indian epics are rife with descriptions of entertaining games that kept people of that time entertained through fictional yet strategic challenges. Be it indoor or outdoor games, there are several examples of hours spent by the elite and the masses alike indulging in sporty challenges. Take for example the game of *chausar*, often called the ancestor of the immensely popular board game we

now call Ludo. Played by four players on a cross-shaped board, the game involves the strategic movement of markers - four of which are allotted to every player. This is the game that finds a mention even in the Indian epic, *Mahabharata*. The modern avatar, Ludo, is now one of the most popularly enjoyed game on online platforms with thousands of games being hosted online. Historians say similar dice games were popular across India during ancient times. Remnants of oblong dices have been excavated at several Harrapan-era sites. The dice is mentioned in the *Rig Veda* and *Atharva Veda* too.

Another popular game, chess, is believed to have been invented in India. Experts say it was originally known as *ashtapada* (64 squares) and the game used to be played with

a dice on a checkered board, but without black and white squares. Some say *chaturanga* (quadripartite) was the original chess game. In Sanskrit, *chatur* means four and *anga* means limbs, that were symbolic of the four branches of an army. Just like an army from the ancient times, the game used pieces shaped like elephants, chariots, horses and soldiers, and was mostly played to sharpen war strategies. The game spread to the Persian kingdom in the 600 CE as *Shatranj*. Another similar game was *chauka bara*, which was played with cowries shells and coins to strategise for wars and also to help children learn counting of

Not all indigenous games are designed to just entertain. A few local games are in fact, aimed towards sharpening memory and observation skills



Left to right: The ancient strategy game of aadu *puli attam*, with markers representing lions and lambs; Young boys enjoying the traditional game of Gilli-danda in Turtuk village, Nubra Valley, Ladakh

Traditional games still enjoyed across India

TRADITIONAL GAMES OF NORTH INDIA

Punjabi Kabaddi (Punjab)

Chaturanga (Uttar Pradesh) – a form of chess

Lagori (Punjab) – also called seven stones, it involved placing seven stones on top of each other in decreasing size

Gatka (Punjab) – a form of martial arts

Camel race (Rajasthan)

TRADITIONAL GAMES OF EASTERN INDIA

Tenga ball (Assam) – a game played with a pomelo, a fruit locally called *robaabtenga*

Along-dolong (Assam) – the local version of London bridge

Luka-suri (Assam) – hide and seek

Mukna (Manipur) – folk wrestling

Thang-ta (Manipur) – folk martial art form

Yubi lakpi (Manipur) – a game similar to rugby but played with an oiled coconut

Cheibi (Manipur) – an ancient form of fencing

Naga Wrestling (Nagaland)

Achugwi Phan Sohlaimgung (Tripura) – wrestling

Dwkhwi Sotonmung (Tripura) – tug of war



TRADITIONAL GAMES OF WESTERN INDIA

Slingshot (Maharashtra) – the classic slingshot or *gulel*

Kho kho (Maharashtra) – a traditional game of tag

Pagathiya (Gujarat) – the classic game of hopscotch

TRADITIONAL GAMES OF SOUTH INDIA

Mallakhamba (Tamil Nadu) – it is a combination of gymnastics and yoga, where a participant displays acrobatic skills on a long pole (*mallakhamba*)

Sathurangam (Tamil Nadu) – chess

Chinni Dandu (Karnataka) – or *gilli danda*, it involves hitting a small stick with a larger one

Buguri (Karnataka) – the classic game of top

Vallamkali/ Snake Boat (Kerala)



numbers. While it was originally played on squares stitched on silk fabric, a simpler version of the game is played in Southern India with chalk lines drawn on the floor. A similar traditional board game that is played even today is *kattam vilayattu*. A variation of tic-tac-toe, the game used to be played with shells, coins or even stones!

Card games too were popular in India during the medieval era. An example is *ganjifa*, which was immensely popular in Mughal courts. Mentioned in historical records beginning around 1300 AD, these hand-painted cards are precursors to today's

playing cards. The circular or square *ganjifa* cards, intricately painted in vibrant colours and motifs inspired by nature, mythology or life, were played in groups. While the game may have been lost to time, the art of *ganjifa* making is still alive in pockets of the country. These games were mostly developed to sharpen the brain or skills. A few local games of Tamil Nadu are, in fact, aimed towards strengthening memory and observation skills

A large scale board used by Indian royals to play the game of *Chausar*. *Chausar*, a strategic board game is closely related to the ancient games of *chaupar*, *pachisi* and Ludo

Indian epics are rife with descriptions of entertaining games that kept our mythical heroes entertained through strategic challenges

Many of the traditional Indian games have even evolved in from and rules to sustain the vagaries of time and entertain the contemporary gamer

- *pallankulli attam* and *aadu puli attam* (also known as *huli gatta* in Karnataka and *puli joodam* in Andhra Pradesh) being two of them. The first, which requires two columns of boards with seven shallow cups and objects to resemble coins (pebbles, seeds or shells), is played by two or four players, while the second, boasts a rather interesting set of rules involving coins representing goats and tigers!

Interestingly, many of these ancient indoor games are being reborn on online gaming platforms.

LOCAL FLAVOUR

India is also the birthplace of several outdoor games, that are known across the world by different names. What the rest of the world calls catch-and-throw,

the residents of Assam's Karbi Anglong district call *dhup-khel*. But the key element that sets the two apart is the object being thrown and caught – a fabric ball. It is one of the more popular games among local women. Lore says originally, women used to wrap cloth around a vegetable and use it as a ball! It has often been seen that traditional games used ingredients found locally.

An apt example is the game of *gilli-danda*, which is popular across rural India even today. Played with two pieces of sticks and a stone

A set of painted ivory or *ganjifa* playing cards from the Deccan region (left) and from Rajasthan (right) from the 18th-19th century



Top: A referee initiating a game of *insuknawr* in Mizoram. The game is related to modern day tug of war and involves one team pushing the other out of bounds with a bamboo stick;
Bottom: The board for the Tamil game of *pallankulli attam* with seven different cups and can be played with pebbles for markers



Image: eastmojo.com



or a rounded object, it can be played between two or more players. History says this game was popular in the region around 2000 years ago.

The beauty of these sports is that, while such modern games as football and boxing exist, traditional ones are still intrinsic to everyday life across the country. Take for example Mizoram's *insuknawr*, a sport where participants try to push each other out by holding a bamboo or a wooden staff. Such is the importance of this indigenous game that its representation can be found on the emblem of the state sports council. In Northern India we see such traditional games as *kushti* (*pehelwani* or wrestling), which is also popularly and extensively practised in South India as *gushti*; *surr* (an outdoor game of tag played in the areas

around Ayodhya in northern India) and *sqay* (a form of martial art originating in Kashmir). There are examples of such traditional games from every region of the country. Today, as we look to the past to find solutions for our present, these traditional games and their relevance become very important. Government and private organisations are taking steps to preserve these games. While board games are being reborn in digital formats, schools have been asked to train children in ancient outdoor games like *silambam*, *mallakhamb*, and *gatka*.



Abhishek Dubey is India's foremost sports journalist, who has covered international sports for over 15 years now. He plunged headlong into sports journalism, at a very young age and ended up leading cross functional teams. He is the author of three critically acclaimed books and is currently, National Advisor, at Prasar Bharati Sports, India's state broadcaster.

TRADITIONS FOR today



Revival of a craft heritage is not just about practising an old artform. It's about making it relevant in contemporary times with absolute creative freedom and keeping the process sustainable. That's what some brands are offering to artisans from rural Rajasthan

BY VINAYAK SURYA SWAMI

A rug from Matteo Cibic's *Jaipur Wunderkammer* collection. A traditional *Rajasthani* face from a miniature painting with the colour scheme as a celebration of the quintessential heritage, beauty and culture

Last year, a colourful rug called *Sawan ka Lehariya* shot to fame after it won the prestigious European Product Design award 2019 for Artisan Original Design. The award, which recognises unique design experiments from across the world, was won by Parvati and Bhagchand from Kekri village near Jaipur. Members of the traditional hand-knotted carpet weaving community of the state, the two created the vibrant carpet inspired by nature around their desert home. The couple say that this was the first time they were given absolute creative freedom and having received so much adulation for a design that they created has given them courage.

However, Parvati and Bhagchand are not alone. They are members of the weaving community supported by Jaipur Rugs India (JRI), a four-decade-old brand that is synonymous with the preservation of the age-old textile traditions of India. There are several more like JRI, that are supporting rural artisans to practice their heirloom crafts and thrive.

Another group working towards keeping alive Rajasthan's vivid artistic traditions and the practising families is Nila House. "Every traditional craft community has a sense of pride and belief in their way of life and if we use these values for any form of intervention, they are more accommodating and accepting of

“THESE CENTRES (OF EXCELLENCE) WILL GIVE A BOOST TO THOSE ASSOCIATED WITH THE TEXTILES AND HANDICRAFTS SECTOR AND CONTRIBUTE TO INDIA'S PROSPERITY.

Narendra Modi
Prime Minister of India

“CREATIVITY IS OUR SOUL, OUR MOTIVE HAS NEVER BEEN TO CREATE THE MAXIMUM NUMBER OF RUGS, IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN TO CREATE SOMETHING WHICH CANNOT BE RECREATED. THIS IS MY DESIGN, IT IS MY CREATIVITY, A POWERLOOM CAN NEVER RECREATE THIS.

Bhagchand
Rug weaver from Rajasthan



The *Sawan Ka Lehariya* with its designers Bhagchand and Parvati. The rug won Bronze at the European Product Design awards that recognises the efforts of talented product designers who improve daily lives with practical, well-thought-out creations

“THE SAME DESIGNS, COLOURS AND DIMENSIONS WOULD RESULT IN TWO VERY DIFFERENT PRODUCTS AS THEY ARE CRAFTED BY HAND. THE WEAVER’S OWN THOUGHTS AND UNDERSTANDING IS THEN CRAFTED WITHIN THE RUG. THAT IS SOMETHING I REALLY WISH TO TAKE BACK.

Matteo Cibic
Italian designer

Left to Right: A showcase of traditionally dyed home furnishings with contemporary designs from Nila House; A rug taking its inspiration from the topography of the city of Jaipur with contemporary design sensibilities

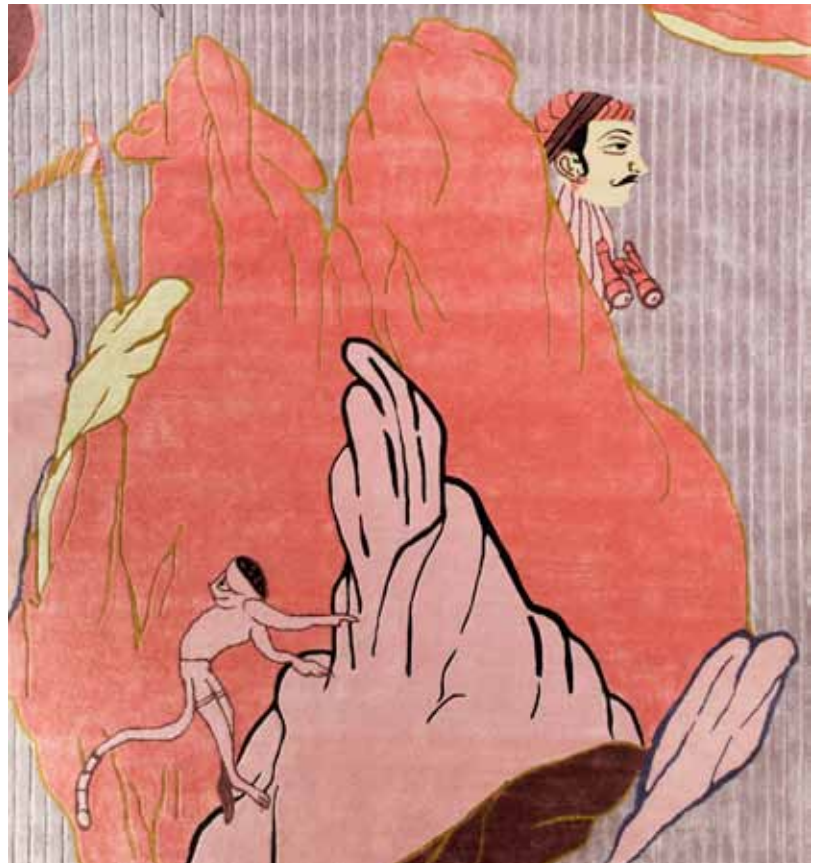
change,” says Juhi Pandey, the head for artisan development at Nila house.

MAKING IT EASIER

Organisations today have accepted that allowing creative freedom to artisans allows for unique results. Take for example the work done by the Doorstep Entrepreneurship programme by JRI that delivers not just raw materials, but necessary equipment like looms, yarn etc along with quality vocational training for women in a

weaving household, to the artisan’s doorstep. The finished rugs are picked up and exported worldwide and the benefits are transferred directly to the weavers, weeding out middle men.

“Direct procurement also helps us offer design inputs from across the world to the artisans,” adds Pandey. Nila House follows a two-pronged approach. One function is to work on direct design development and production, generating business for the artisans. The second, is the exhibition





Rural communities need a voice that understands them for the external world and organisations today are becoming facilitators in this process

space at the Nila House centre in Jaipur, for artisans to showcase, promote, publicise and exhibit their works.

THE NEXT STEP

Some believe that revival as a process is aimed towards simply bringing to life an art, or a craft that was practised decades ago. However, others say it is important to alter the craft for it to thrive in contemporary times. “The key to preservation and sustainability is the translation of these crafts for today’s world. This requires patience, understanding, commitment and the passion for both the traditional form as well as what we can achieve from it today,” says Anuradha Singh, who heads Nila House. Adaptation also includes global exposure. In this regard,

organisations are collaborating with artists from around the world for a creative exchange that provides local communities a wider stage for their crafts and also helps them understand design sensibilities which otherwise would never have made their way to the remote corners of India where they reside. Matteo Cibic, a well-known Italian designer, collaborated with JRI on a design experiment to create a collection of avant-garde handmade carpets according to European design sensibilities. Named *Jaipur Wunderkammer*, the rugs woven in traditional *Rajasthani* style depicted the state’s architecture and traditions. “These rugs are works of art. I want people who look at them and use them, to understand the sensibilities of a

Left to Right: The various stages of production for a traditionally hand-tufted rug

Designing a rug is carried out through a delicate and painstaking process at the village homes of women from artistic communities

The JRI foundation has worked to provide livelihoods to women across remote villages in Rajasthan. This has made their household more secure and financially independent

“ I LOVE THE IMPERFECTIONS AND TIMELESSNESS OF SOMETHING HANDMADE. FOR EXAMPLE, NOTHING FEELS BETTER AGAINST THE SKIN THAN HAND WOVEN FABRICS FROM INDIA THAT FEEL BETTER AND BETTER WITH AGE.

Anna Valentine
British Designer

land that is so rich. I want people to appreciate the hard work that has made each one of these perfect,” Cibic says.

Interestingly, what also mattered to Cibic was the community development outcome of his work. “I like to work with people who believe in sustainability; both socially and ecologically. My focus has been on giving a new look to Indian crafts.”

British luxury wear designer Anna Valentine, who works extensively with textile artisans in Rajasthan, too vouches for sustainability. “As we

become more aware of our environment it makes us more conscious not only of what we buy and where it is made but also how many times a piece of textile will be used,” says Valentine, who has worked with Indian artisans for almost 30 years, and recently collaborated with Nila House on a collection aimed to showcase traditional techniques of handweaving and natural indigo dyes. “The diversity and quality of the artisan’s work is both inspiring and exquisite. When Lady Bamford told me about a Centre for excellence in Jaipur to promote the crafts of India, I thought it would be a wonderful opportunity to support Indian artisans and also learn and exchange ideas,” explains the designer, who was introduced to Rajasthan’s crafts by Lady Bamford, who heads the *Lady Bamford Foundation*. The foundation works with communities around Jaipur and Udaipur



A craftsman uses a traditional handloom to produce rugs in Rajasthan. These handicrafts are often associated with the rich heritage and vibrant culture of the state

Indian organisations today, are collaborating with artists from around the world for a creative exchange that provides local communities a wider stage for their crafts



Left to Right: *The Nila x Anna Valentine collection on display. The collection only used local fabrics along with natural Indigo dyes*
Cotton threads and equipment used to bring creative designs to life on handwoven carpets

to enhance sustainable production and business efficiency in 100 artisan units across five districts of the state.

TAKING SHAPE

Today, in rural pockets of Rajasthan, artisans are encouraging their children to study and practise their craft. “I interact with international designers. I create unique fabrics and my children are studying. Today, it is a matter of pride to be associated with crafts, not like the early days when we used to prefer working as labourers,” says Asha, a rug-designer from Itawa, Rajasthan.

Motivated artisans, sustained livelihoods and an innovative support

system backed by the government is ensuring these crafts are propagated and preserved. Corporate initiatives towards being more socially responsible have now diversified, they are concerned about building rural economies. Rural communities need a voice that understands them for the external world and organisations today are becoming facilitators in this process of connecting our country internally and externally.

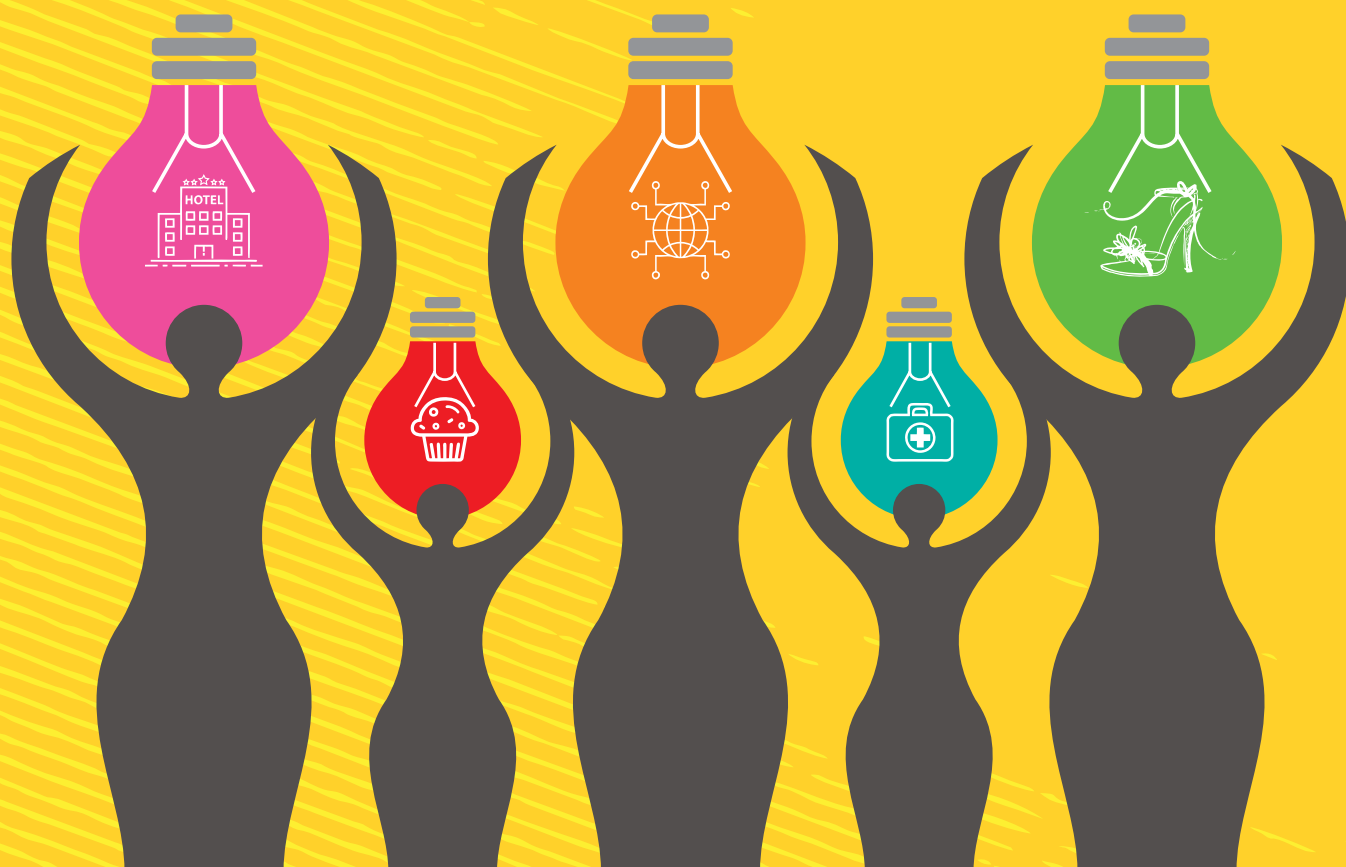


Vinayak Surya Swami is a Delhi-based journalist. He holds a degree in mechanical engineering and has worked as an apprentice Shipbuilder with the Indian Navy. A part-time writer since his teenage years, he switched to journalism to pursue his prurience for writing and travel.

LEADING BY example

There's nothing more a woman needs than her own conviction and resolve to shatter the glass ceiling. From venturing into a business traditionally thought to be a man's domain and turning a colonial heritage to a sustainable venture to changing the way we look at medical education in India, women have broken stereotypes and changed the game for the better. Here are five such women entrepreneurs

BY SHRABASTI MALLIK



There is no doubt the contemporary Indian woman has undergone a metamorphosis to carve for herself an image, an image that society now sees as a role model. The Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, is also a firm believer of this notion, probably why he entrusted the control of his social media accounts

on Women's Day (March 8, 2020), with millions of followers to seven inspirational women, so that they may inspire the country with their journeys of becoming change-makers. Here are five Indian women entrepreneurs who have not just disrupted existing business models but have also addressed several issues pertinent to our environment, society and way of life.

“INDIA HAS OUTSTANDING WOMEN ACHIEVERS IN ALL PARTS OF THE NATION. THESE WOMEN HAVE DONE GREAT WORK IN A WIDE RANGE OF SECTORS. THEIR STRUGGLES AND ASPIRATIONS MOTIVATE MILLIONS. LET US KEEP CELEBRATING THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF SUCH WOMEN AND LEARNING FROM THEM.

Narendra Modi
Prime Minister of India



Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi and Union Minister for Women & Child Development and Textiles Smriti Irani with the recipients of the Nari Shakti Award 2020 on March 8

Overcoming cultural obstacles and redefining the parameters of doing business, female entrepreneurs are positively impacting communities and bringing about socioeconomic upliftment in India

THE CRAFT OF REVIVAL



Some designs from the latest collection of *juttis* from Needledust

In the age of textile revivalists, Shirin Mann chose to focus on *juttis* (a flat-soled traditional footwear). She founded Needledust in May 2014 with the aim to revive and reintroduce quality *juttis* as a fashion statement for the modern woman.

Mann braved through naysayers and notions that she would find no takers as no one wears *juttis* anymore. She set out finding artisans. “*Jutti*-making is a highly skilled craft that is passed down

through generations. Many traditional artisans had taken up daily wage jobs as the craft was declining” she points out.

She not only found artisans but utilised their skills and amalgamated the finesse of old royal patterns with innovative design sensibilities and embroidery patterns. “Our design theory is to do the unimaginable on shoes,” she adds. Today, her success is reflected in her list of clients that boasts several Bollywood celebrities. She is

“

THE DICTUM OF WOMEN HOLDING UP HALF THE SKY, IF ANYTHING, UNDERESTIMATES THEIR SOCIAL CENTRALITY. AND THIS REALISATION HAS DRIVEN OUR ENDEAVOURS TOWARDS GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT.

Dr S Jaishankar
External Affairs minister



Shirin Mann
Founder, Needledust

Achievement: Revived a dying traditional craft

proud that she could revive a dying art and provide livelihood to artisans. “The way we could bring confidence to the artisans was to give them job security. So we house the *jutti* makers as well as their families and also sponsor education for their children. I have always felt that a craft as beautiful as this should bring pride in its artisans and I believe we have been able to do that.”

Clockwise from top: New and colourful design sensibilities being added to traditional juttis; Shirin Mann Sangha, Founder of the Needledust brand; The colourful additions that provide traditional juttis a neo-cotemporary look

THE PAN-INDIA SUCCESS STORY



What started in October 2004 with four small tables in Cursow Baug in Mumbai, with decadent blessings from the Messman family, is today one of the leading patisseries in the country. But Kainaz Messman Harchandrai, the face of the Theobroma Patisserie, humbly refuses to take the entire credit. “The credit must go to my parents who started and grew our brand to what it is today. I just took the idea forward,” she says.

Baking ran in the family. Kainaz’s mother operated a small home-based business, baking cakes and brownies and making desserts. The idea of an outlet was first brought up when Harchandrai was recovering from an injury. “We initiated a discussion about starting a full-time business. We agreed to serve the foods we loved ourselves were soon thinking of little else,” she adds.

Today, Theobroma boasts multiple outlets across the country. But, this was only achieved by meeting challenges head-on. “When we started, we did not even know if we would recover the costs of initiation. The idea behind it all was to make small indulgences a way of life,” she explains.

Top: (L-R) Theobroma’s classic Orange juice cake and the delicious chocolate truffle balls

Bottom: Sisters Kainaz (left) and Tina Messman, founders of Theobroma and authors of the book *Baking a Dream: The Theobroma Story*



Kainaz Messman-Harchandrai
Founder, Theobroma Patisserie

Achievement: Turned a small family-based business into one of the most renowned Indian patisserie brands



The modern Indian woman – aware, educated and empowered, has successfully redefined her roles and responsibilities, be it major positions in the defence forces or contributions to the country's GDP

RECONNECTING WITH ROOTS

All it took for Deeksha Agarwal to carve a niche for herself in the Indian tourism industry was a 19th century colonial bungalow named Cloud End in Mussoorie and faith in her dreams. Run-down and dilapidated when she first saw it, Agarwal transformed the bungalow to the Cloud End Forest Resort and made it one of the most sought-after boutique accommodations in the region. The resort is surrounded by a 2,000-acre forest of oak and deodar that is home to almost 40 species of flora and 103 species of fauna!

“It is not just a resort. It connected me to nature and taught me to appreciate the environment,” she smiles. The remote location of the property led to maintenance challenges, but Agarwal solved water-shortages through rainwater harvesting while solar powered panels took care of energy woes. The local shepherd community provided natural pruning and manuring of the forest through the winter months and her efforts to build a motorable road allowed the people to prosper and grow with the business.



The Cloud End Forest Resort amongst the oak forests of Mussoorie

Deeksha Agarwal
Manager, Cloud End Forest Resort

Achievement: Single-handedly restored a heritage building and preserved its natural surroundings



Sisters Deeksha and Divisha Agarwal, the head of operations at Cloud End Resort

SUCCESS

NO CHALLENGE TOO BIG

Today, everything that we do or use is in some way or the other influenced or powered digitally. Taking cue, Savitha Kuttan, a healthcare consultant with experience of working in the US and Europe, set up Omnicuris, a one-of-a-kind Continuous Medical Education Platform (CME) developed to cater to the country's medical fraternity, in 2016.

Omnicuris attempts to evolve healthcare in India by providing medical practitioners with free video-based content. To implement this initiative, the platform has partnered up with eight state governments and 35 reputed medical associations and institutes. "I noticed a gap in Indian



Savitha Kuttan and Priyank Jain, the cofounders of Omnicuris

India is recognised for having the highest percentage of female pilots and also now for enabling women to hold top roles in the army. The country is moving in the right direction

medical care. Our doctors often have little time or resources to attend medical conferences and seminars. The platform brings together medical experts and specialists from across the country to create a knowledge pool and bring in uniformity" she adds.

Today, Omnicuris' course materials are vetted by leading experts of the institutes it is associated with. "Also, with the help of local governments we can successfully disburse our content to practitioners in almost 10 states, including their remotest areas.



Savitha Kuttan
Founder, Omnicuris

Achievement:
Founded an application to help doctors enhance their knowledge digitally

THE NEED OF THE HOUR



Clockwise from left: A Musical performance at Y3K: Planet Lost and Found event organised by Dysco in February 2020; A panel discussion at one of Dysco's networking event; Khrisha Shah, the co-founder of Dysco



Khrisha Shah
CEO and Co-Founder, Dysco

Achievement: Created an inclusive professional networking platform

At a consulting job in London, Khrisha Shah found herself somewhat with a dearth of interesting professional connections and no-way of forming them. “Every network lacked the core idea of people being like-minded,” Shah recalls. She explained this gaping hole in networking to her brother and Dysco’s co-founder, Mishal. The two immediately put their efforts into creating a social network where people, brands and businesses can discover, work and collaborate with each other.

“The first challenge was to find the right people who understood that we were not trying to build a job portal but an amalgamated platform to serve all needs of someone seeking and offering work. Gradually we were able to formulate, design and create a community that drew its strength from successful networking. We can now host our entire community online as well as offline and soon will be able to

advertise and collaborate opportunities directly to our members.”

Dysco lets its members showcase their work, decide whether they want to be employed or work as a freelancer, avail offline consultation sessions to overcome work challenges and also attend curated events. “India is poised for an overhaul of the way we work and network. We need more inclusive and diverse hiring practices; more transparency, collaborative management styles and to broaden the spectrum of careers . Networking is no longer about wearing suits and handing out business cards.” Shah sums up.



A graduate of the Indian Institute of Mass Communication, she has worked with MYCityLinks, a Bhubaneswar-based tabloid and The Pioneer newspaper. She enjoys music, is a bibliophile and loves to write about her travels, on music and any subject that intrigues her.

A TALE ON two wheels

It has long been maintained that in the details of our vast country lie its true vibrant colours. **Piya Bahadur** charts her journey from being in a sedentary job to an adventurous trailblazer and how motorcycling can be the best way for an in-depth exploration of any country and yourself



Over the last few years, biking trips across India have become fairly common – be it the mountainous roads of Himachal Pradesh or the winding roads amidst the western ghats near Goa



Decision that we make today is based on a general agreement that we think we will get from the world for it. Seldom do we remember to take into account our own consciousness and the effect of our decisions on it. I have understood, especially after travelling solo across some of most scenic destinations in Asia, that the satisfaction of my own self will always make me feel better about my decision and in turn, myself.

Thus, when the opportunity to be part of a four-woman motorcycle expedition from Hyderabad to

Vietnam (and back) came by, it seemed almost unreal. Visiting our neighbours by landing at an airport and taking a guided tour was doubtlessly interesting but driving through the cities and the rural countryside sounded so much more challenging. Riding 400 cc motorcycles tearing up the road under you, through six countries, covering around 17,000 km on the, newly laid India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway seemed like an adventure of a lifetime.

THE FIRST STEP

Until then, a few days' worth of riding

The author (far right) with her fellow riders Jai Bharathi, Shilpa Balakrishnan and ASD Shanthi (L-R) upon their arrival at the Indian embassy in Hanoi, the Vietnamese capital city

“WE ARE DEVELOPING INDIA’S NORTHEAST AS A GATEWAY TO SOUTHEAST ASIA. AN INITIATIVE AIMED TOWARDS REALISING INDIA’S ACT EAST POLICY. THE INDIA-MYANMAR-THAILAND HIGHWAY I.E. TRILATERAL HIGHWAY WILL ENSURE SEAMLESS CONNECTIVITY. WITH THE HIGHWAY’S COMPLETION, TRADE, TOURISM WILL FLOURISH AND TRADITIONS WILL BE STRENGTHENED AS WELL.

Narendra Modi
Prime Minister of India

THE IMT (INDIA-MYANMAR-THAILAND) TRILATERAL HIGHWAY



The author's journey from Hyderabad in India to Vietnam via Myanmar, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia

The 1,360-km-long India-Myanmar-Thailand (IMT) Trilateral Highway is an initiative pertaining to India, Myanmar and Thailand. It traverses from Moreh in Manipur to Mae Sot in Thailand through Myanmar. The Trilateral Highway has boosted trade and commerce in the ASEAN-India Free Trade Area. It has also emerged as one of the most challenging road trips in the region. A complete circuit, along with the IMT highway goes on till Vietnam through Laos and Cambodia.

THE TRILATERAL ROUTE :

MOREH (INDIA) → TAMU (MYANMAR) → KALEMYO → NAYPITAW → YANGON (MYANMAR) → MAE SOT (THAILAND) (APPROX 1,360 KM)

Map not to scale



In Southeast Asia, I couldn't help but be overwhelmed by the bravery of our ancestors and be reminded of a proud lineage of intrepid adventurers

Bottom left: A group of young Buddhist monks cycling away in Northern Laos. Sights like these are quite frequent across the country as you ride through the lush green landscapes

on open highways was as far as I had allowed myself to try. Long years of being a mother, an employee, and a wife had muffled my risk-taking soul. “Don’t rock the boat” had become the credo I lived by. I went home that evening in two minds: one willing me to turn myself loose, the other frowning at my frivolity.

My reservations and inhibitions lingered on till unexpectedly, Aditi, my elder daughter asked why I wasn’t packing for the trip. “Go big or go home” her gaze seemed to say, as she playfully waggled her eyebrows at me. I knew, at that very moment, that my first step was

going to be the hardest, it simply had to be the proverbial leap.

The full import of my daughter’s words came back to me a few weeks later, when well into the ride, we stopped under a tree one evening in a pristine, dark forest nestled in the Arakan range in western Myanmar. This time, at home, I would have been getting dinner ready on the table. But, here, in this beautiful country, I thought about the day I decided to be a part of this expedition. When I decided to no longer be limited by anything — be it societal norms, imagined duties and responsibilities, handicaps of

On the road in India

The best roadtrips from across the country

THE HIMALAYAN SOJOURN

Often the most difficult of journeys are the most rewarding – like this adrenaline fueled ride across the trans-Himalayan region and into the very heart of the Himalayas. Passing through not less than 5 different valleys and numerous mountain passes, biking across some of the toughest roads in India is a challenge that is not for the faint hearted. The perfect time to attempt the trip is through the months of July–October to avoid risking road closures due to snow.



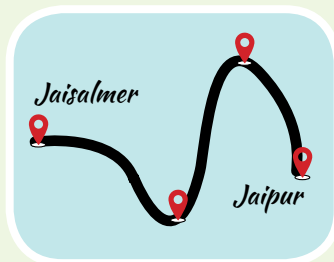
The route: Shimla-Spiti-Manali-Leh-Srinagar (Approx 1522 km)

NORTHEASTERN DELIGHTS

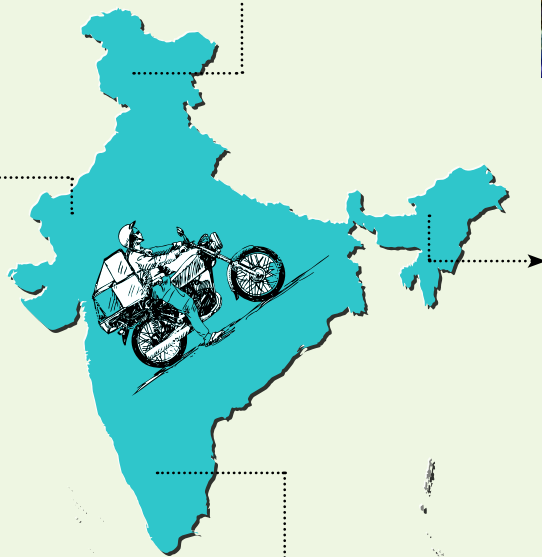
If you plan this trip right, you can cover almost all of the beautiful vistas that the region has to offer. From the forested plains of Assam to the root bridges of Meghalaya and finally the high mountain passes of Arunachal Pradesh, this trip promises it all. Due to heavy snowfall, is the upper reaches of Arunachal Pradesh, the trip is best planned during the months of July–October.



The route: Cherapunji-Guwahati-Tezpur-Tawang (Approx: 660km)

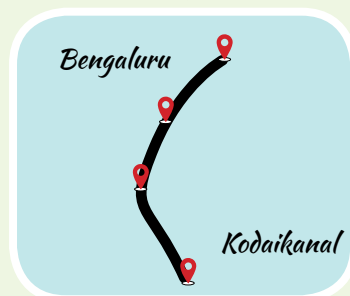


The Route: Jaipur-Bikaner-Jodhpur-Jaisalmer (Approx 870 km)



TANTALISING THAR

There is no better way than to explore the majestic land of Rajasthan than with the constant thumping of a motorcycle. The rustic charm of the state, with its numerous palaces, many forts and friendly people are something that you are bound to miss if you do not traverse the state at ease. This ride begins from the capital city of Jaipur and heads on to the Jaisalmer, the state's golden city. Due to the extreme summer heat, this trip best planned along the winter months of November–February.



The route: Bengaluru-Mysuru-Ooty-Kodaikanal (Approx 518kms)



SOUTHERN SOLITUDE

One of the most popular weekend trips in southern India, the ride from Bengaluru to Mysuru, can be extended to rope in Ooty and Kodaikanal. This trip will take you through quaint villages that hold within themselves, the very essence of rural South India.



The author and her fellow riders at the India-Myanmar border with Burmese officials, before crossing into Myanmar

age and fitness, circumstances of exam timings or, most insidiously, the fear of appearing to be selfish.

A JOURNEY BEGINS

Our journey was in itself an experience – for the first time in life I had no worries about my destination, I was absorbing as much as I could with each passing kilometre and rejoicing that there were almost 17,000 km in total that I had to cover. Wrestling with a 400-cc motorcycle mired in the slush focuses your attention like nothing else. It was an amazing journey, through the massive network of national highways, through the diversity along the iconic highway *dhabas* and sharing gossip with the locals and truckers. We soaked in India's beauty along rivers and on misty roads. Of course, in an eight-week journey I had expected some days to not go well, but what I had not factored in

was that these bad days were what would actually build my resolve. One aspect which remained constant was that we were met with curiosity and hospitality almost everywhere we went, always feeling welcome, never unsafe.

When we were about 2,800 km from Hyderabad, where our journey had begun, and 300 km from the small outpost on the Indian border,



The Khardung La pass in Ladakh is a part of the highest motorable road in the world and an iconic point on a road trip in the region

More from India



THE HIMALAYAN SOJOURN

- The changing landscapes- From the lush valleys of Chamba and Kinnaur, you head to the stark cold deserts of Spiti, Lahual and onward to Leh
- Monasteries - Buddhist monasteries of Dhankar, Tabo (Spiti), Spituk and Sankar (Leh) are some of the oldest in India
- National Parks - High altitude national parks like Pin Valley, Hemis and Kishtawar known for a wide variety of flora and fauna



NORTHEASTERN DELIGHTS

- From steep high-altitude climbs that take you to Tawang to the slick, rain-swept roads around Cherapunji, this trip has something for all riders
- Don't miss the iconic river crossing at Tezpur in Assam over the massive Brahmaputra river
- Must-see are some of the most densely forested protected areas like the Cherrapunji-Mawsynram reserve forest, Nameri National Park and Pakke Tiger Reserve

Highlights



SOUTHERN SOLITUDE

- With winding roads that climb amongst the lush green landscapes of Ooty and the scenic waterfalls of Kodaikanal in Tamil Nadu, this southern sojourn is perfect for weekend getaways and a break from the monotony of your daily routine.
- Ooty (short for Udhagamandalam) is a resort town in the Western Ghats mountains and was originally founded as a British resort town
- Age old monuments like the Mysore Palace and the The St. Philomena's Church



TANTALISING THAR

- The delectable cuisine of Rajasthan is one of the most famous around the country. Be sure to try a bite!
- Desert safaris in Jaisalmer that have you camping under the stars and amongst the massive dunes of the Thar desert.
- The numerous forts and palaces in and around Jaipur, Bikaner, Jodhpur and Jaisalmer

Moreh – the gateway into Myanmar, we heard voices screaming “Indoh! India!” We were in the midst of planning how to cover another 14,200 km, more than half of it in the Southeast Asian peninsula, through the Mekong basin, when this recognition of our nationality greeted us. A group of boys and girls were waving at us and cheering us. We waved back. Since then, we heard the phrase exclaimed several times as we crossed into Myanmar and rode into Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. The cheers were always accompanied by a smile, a thumbs-up sign and much pointing to the tricolour pinned on our riding jackets.

We saw the unmistakable traces of our shared heritage as we crossed the Irrawaddy and the Mekong rivers. We felt it at the My Son monuments of the Champa dynasty, deep in Vietnam. We saw it in the



Top: Piya Bahadur, with her daughter Aditi. Being part of the journey across SE Asia has made Bahadur a more confident, understanding and empowered mother with her daughters now seeing her as their role model

Bottom: A dugout canoe on the Irrawaddy River in Myanmar. An unforgettable sight for the author on her trip



Right: Locals in Rajasthan, dressed in vibrant dresses and turbans are very friendly and often join in for short ride along with motorcyclists

Below: The lush green forests of Kodaikanal in Tamil Nadu are part of one of the most beautiful and lesser-known roadtrip trails in India



ancient Buddhist sites of Bagan. At the ancient Hindu temples in the heart of Southeast Asia, so far away from home, I couldn't help but be overwhelmed by the bravery of our ancestors and be reminded yet again that we indeed come from a proud lineage of intrepid adventurers.

A BETTER TOMORROW

After a Vietnamese newspaper published an article about our journey, a local bike club came to

meet us on the outskirts and escort us into Ho Chi Minh city – we didn't speak a word of each other's language, but the camaraderie was unmistakable. I felt a deep confidence, riding as friends through familiar yet foreign lands.

It is always great to hear and read about multilateral initiatives aimed to bridge gaps and shorten distances across people and traditions. But, as I navigated these paths, my eyes scanning the horizon ahead, the wet road under my wheel, I realised that it was such journeys where you battle the elements, meet new people and exchange stories, that bring cultures together for a better tomorrow; filled with mutual understanding and compassion.

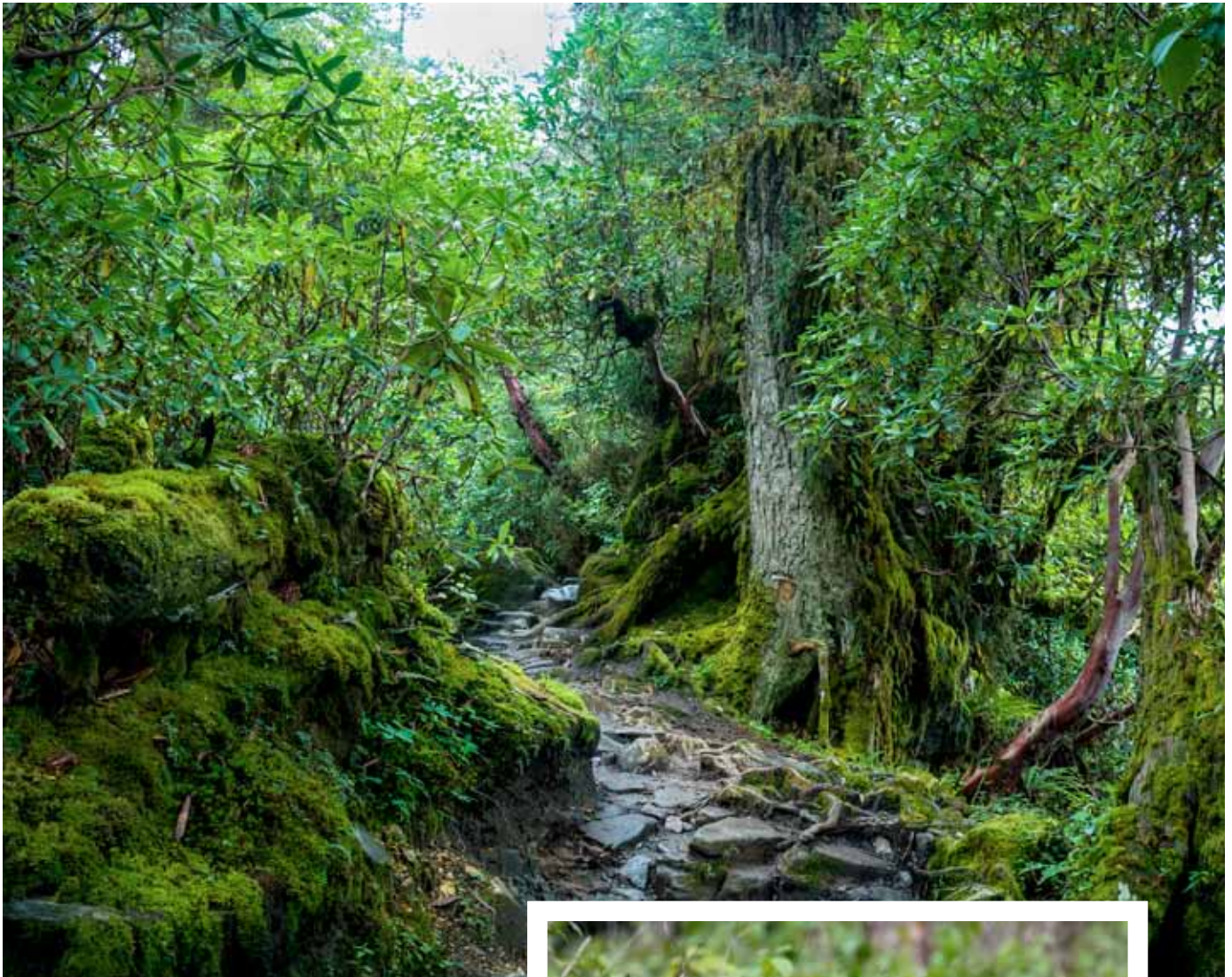


Piya Bahadur is the author of Road to Mekong, based on her motorcycle trip from Hyderabad, through the east Indian coast and the northeast of India, weaving through Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam and her journey from being a working mother constrained by her own inhibitions to a confident traveller.

Call of the wild

There are about 400 species of mammals, 1,250 species of birds, 460 species of reptiles, 240 species of amphibians and 2,550 species of fish in India. We bring to you some of the lesser-known conservation areas across the country which are known not just for the wildlife they protect, but, also for the bewildering mix of habitats they present

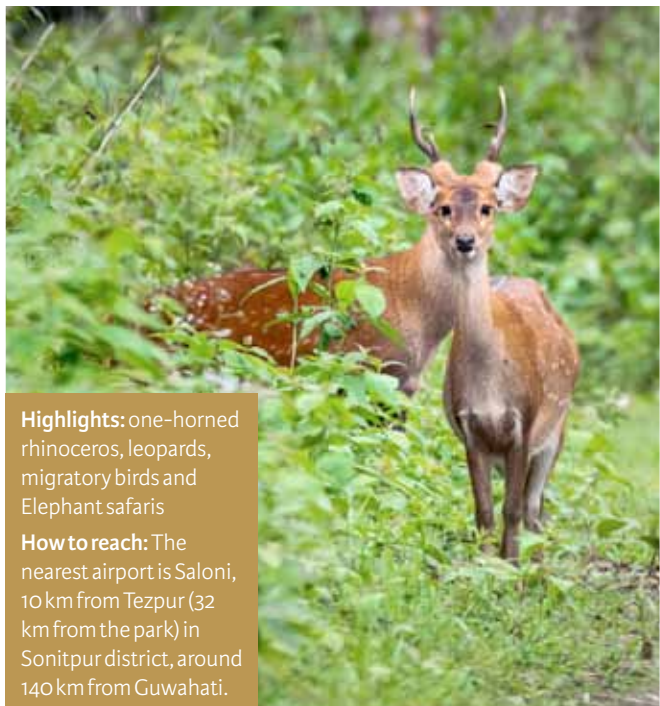




ORANG NATIONAL PARK, ASSAM

The Orang (Rajiv Gandhi) National Park (ONP) is situated on the northern bank of the Brahmaputra river in the Udalguri district of Assam. Constituted as a National Park in 1999, the ONP is often called Mini Kaziranga owing to the population of the great Indian one-horned rhinoceros that call the area its home.

Spread across an area of 78.8 sq km, the park attracts tourists for its captivating natural beauty and numerous migratory birds that travel here from as far as America (milky-white pelicans).



Highlights: one-horned rhinoceros, leopards, migratory birds and Elephant safaris

How to reach: The nearest airport is Saloni, 10 km from Tezpur (32 km from the park) in Sonitpur district, around 140 km from Guwahati.

SNAPSHOTS



Highlights: Snow leopards, Asiatic ibex and great Tibetan sheep. The Hemis Tsechu festival.

How to reach: The easiest way is by air as the Leh Airport is a mere 5 km from the park.

HEMIS NATIONAL PARK, JAMMU & KASHMIR

Founded in 1981, and after two subsequent expansions in 1988 and 1990, Hemis National Park, with a total area of almost 4,400 sq km is the largest of its kind in South Asia. Situated across the Union Territories of J&K and Ladakh, the park boasts almost 200 snow leopards, the apex predator of the Central Asian highlands.

The park is also home to a population of 1600 locals and the 400-year-old Hemis Monastery. An interesting feature of the national park is that it lies in a rain-shadow area which results in high-altitude arid fauna like dry forests of juniper, populus and birch that are both rare and a delight for nature enthusiasts.

KEIBUL LAMJAO NATIONAL PARK, MANIPUR

Manipur is a delight when it comes to the flora and fauna around the region. It is also home to the world's only floating national park! Situated on the iconic Loktak Lake, the Keibul Lamjao National Park (KLNLP), spread over an area of 40 sq km, consists of large floating masses of soil that are filled with diverse, beautiful and unique wildlife.

The national park is home to the rare and endangered Manipur brow-antlered deer, popularly known as the state's dancing deer, the Sangai. The lake has been shortlisted as a tentative addition to UNESCO's list of world heritage centres.



Home to many large and small charismatic species, India's biodiversity is amongst the richest in the world

Highlights: Floating land meadows called *phumdis*, Sangai deer and the Loktak Lake

How to reach: The KLNLP is located 54 km by road from the state capital, Imphal.

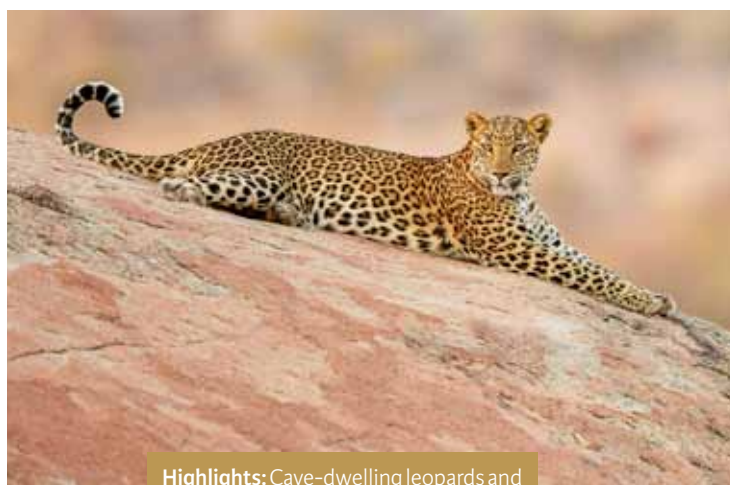




JAWAI LEOPARD RESERVE, RAJASTHAN

Nestled between the tourist hotspots of Udaipur and Jodhpur lies the not-so-well-known Jawai Dam, close to the village of Bera and the site for the Jawai or Bera Leopard Conservation Reserve. With its arid surroundings, a large reservoir and cave-filled hillocks, the area is home to the iconic cave-dwelling leopards. An interesting aspect of this conservation area is that the local population has adapted to the wildlife and have petitioned the government for a 'community status' for the area, meaning that the protection of wildlife would jointly be the responsibility of the local community along with the Forest deptt.

It is believed that the chances of spotting a leopard are as great as 90 percent on every visit!



Highlights: Cave-dwelling leopards and an experience of Rajasthan's rural life.

How to reach: Jawai Dam is located just over two hours from the Jodhpur Airport (148 km) and three hours from the Udaipur Airport (170 km).

KEOLADEO GHANA NATIONAL PARK, RAJASTHAN

Formerly known as the Bharatpur Bird Sanctuary, the Keoladeo Ghana National Park is situated in the Bharatpur district on the state's eastern periphery. Constituted in 1982, the park was added to list of UNESCO's World Heritage Sites in 1985 owing to the 370 species of birds and animals that the reserve protects. Originally established as a game reserve for maharajas in the 1850s, the park is now a breeding ground for the rare and elusive Siberian crane and is considered to be one of the most important feeding and breeding grounds for avian species in the world.

Due to its largely harmless wildlife population, there are numerous self-guided and demarcated trails that can be easily traversed.



Highlights: Rare bird sightings and safaris on foot, bicycle or rickshaws around the park

How to reach: The nearest airport is Agra (56 km away). The park is just three hours from Jaipur (182 km away) by road.



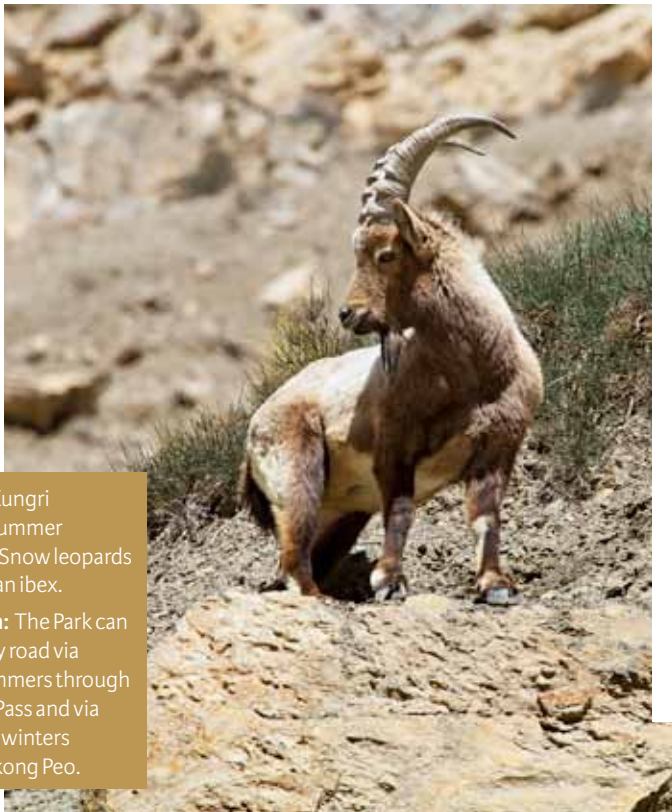
SNAPSHOTS



PIN VALLEY NATIONAL PARK, HIMACHAL PRADESH

The only high-altitude, cold-desert national park in the mountainous state of Himachal Pradesh, the Pin Valley National Park is located in the Spiti subdistrict of Lahaul and Spiti. The park was first started in 1980s and now covers a total area of 675 sq km as the core zone and 1,150 km as a buffer zone. With its headquarters in the nearby village of Kaza, the park is home to as many as 1,600 people during the summers in the 17 villages called *dogharies* (summer settlements).

The park is home to snow leopards and several other endangered species, including ibex, bharal, bearded vultures etc. An interesting feature is the approximately 400 species of flora with high medicinal properties which grow in the region despite the harsh climatic conditions.



Highlights: Kungri Monastery, summer settlements, Snow leopards and Himalayan ibex.

How to reach: The Park can be reached by road via Manali in summers through the Kunzum Pass and via Shimla in the winters through Reckong Peo.

Famed for its crystal-clear waters, deep-sea corals and kaleidoscopic marine life, the opportunities for sea-diving around the Andaman Islands are world class



Highlights: Rare marine ecosystems, snorkelling and boating

How to reach: The park is accessible by road from Port Blair, capital of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

MAHATMA GANDHI MARINE NATIONAL PARK, ANDAMAN AND NICOBAR ISLANDS

One of the few marine conservation reserves in the country, the Mahatma Gandhi Marine National Park (MGMNP) was established in 1983 in order to protect the rare ecosystem of coral reefs, mangroves and vegetated islands. The reserve covers an area of 281.5 sq km, of which almost 220.5 sq km, is the protected area over territorial waters around Wandor, 29 km west of Port Blair.

The park is home to over 300 species of marine fauna and dolphins, turtles, sharks are regular visitors along with the critically-endangered dugong (sea cow). The MGMNP encompasses a total of 15 islands that are surrounded by fringing coral reefs with almost 120 different species of corals recorded so far.

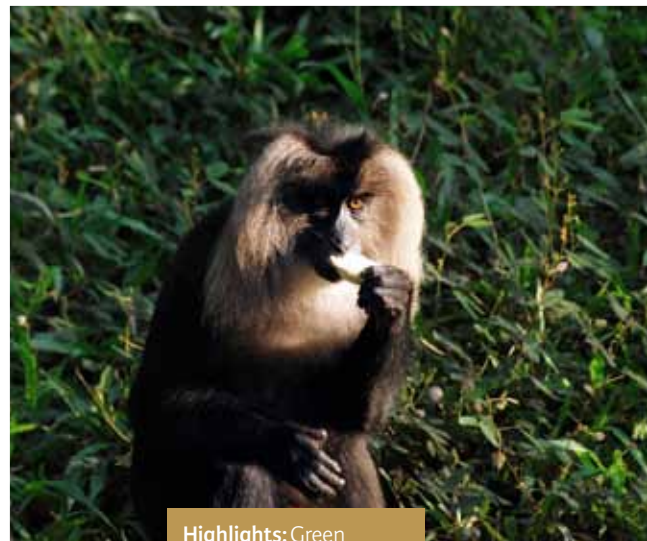


SILENT VALLEY NATIONAL PARK, KERALA

Conserving one of the last remaining rain forest of Kerala, the Silent Valley National Park was formally inaugurated in 1985. The forests of the Silent Valley National Park harbour some of the most pristine, unique and highly-productive ecosystems in the world.

The area is also home to the critically-endangered lion tailed macaques, which also is the flagship species of the park.

The administration is actively involved in promoting eco-tourism through sustainable resorts and river huts along with guided camping activities around the area.



Highlights: Green tourism, lion tailed macaques and almost 164 species of butterflies.

How to reach: The park is accessible through road via Kochi (5hr, 200 km) or Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu (2hr, 65 km).



TADOBA-ANDHARI TIGER RESERVE, MAHARASHTRA

The Tadoba National Park and the Andhari Wildlife Sanctuary together form the Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR) covering an area of 625.40 sq km. Named after the local deity *Taru* and the Andhari river that flows through the reserve, the TATR, officially amalgamated in 1995, is home to a sizeable population of tigers, which are a major tourist attraction. The reserve also protects large herds of chital, the stately sambar, the elusive barking deer and herds of wild boars. The area is surrounded by forests of teak and several species of trees indigenous to the region including ain, shisham etc.

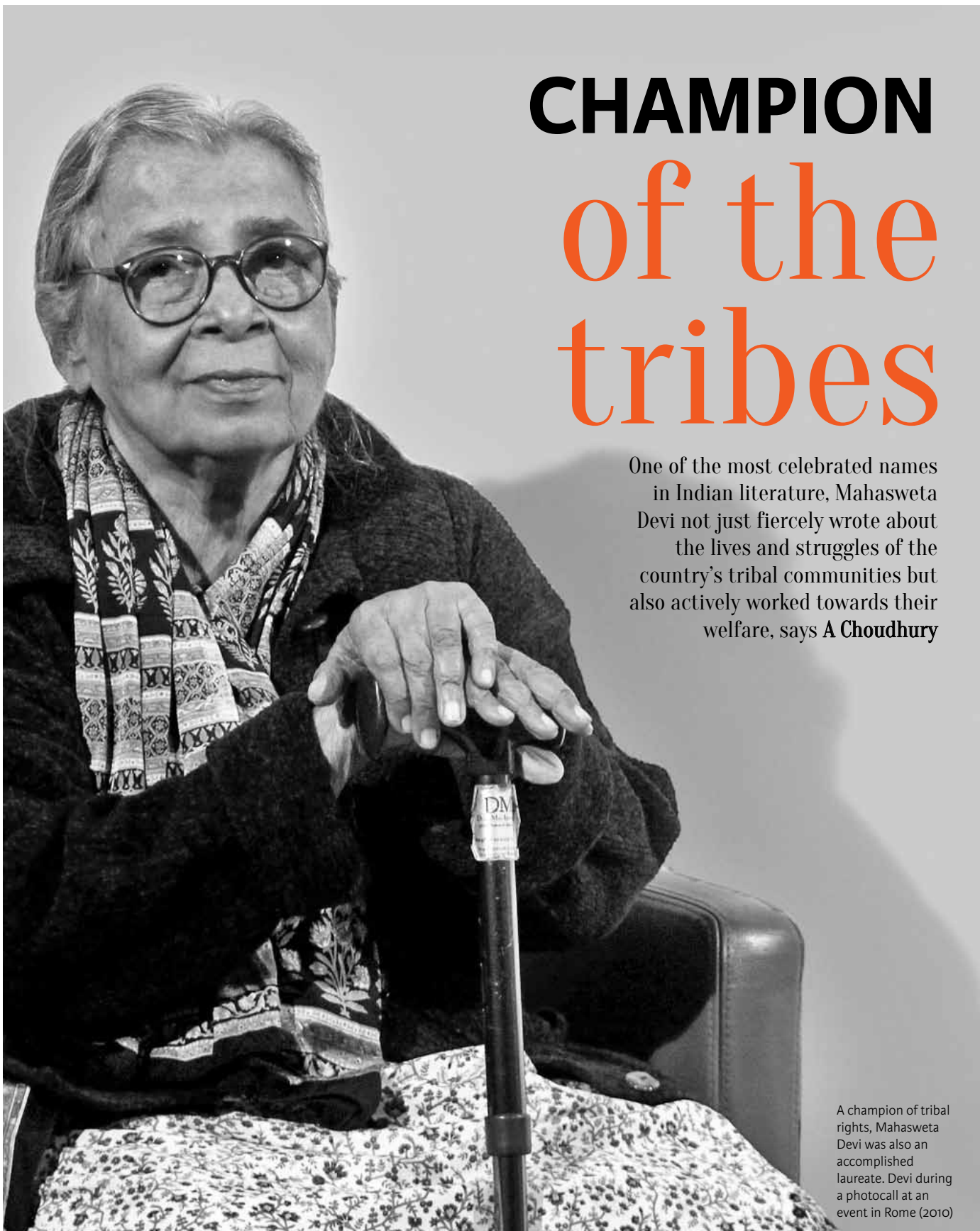


Highlights: TATR is one of 50 tiger reserves in India. Sloth bears and eco-friendly accommodation.

How to reach: The reserve is situated just three hours from Nagpur (145 km) by road.

CHAMPION of the tribes

One of the most celebrated names in Indian literature, Mahasweta Devi not just fiercely wrote about the lives and struggles of the country's tribal communities but also actively worked towards their welfare, says **A Choudhury**



A champion of tribal rights, Mahasweta Devi was also an accomplished laureate. Devi during a photocall at an event in Rome (2010)

“**T**his is truly the age where the *joota* [shoe] is *Japani* [Japanese], *patloon* [pants] is *Englishtani* [British] and the *topi* [hat] is *Roosi* [Russian]. But the *dil* [heart] is always *Hindustani* (Indian). My country – proud, beautiful, hot, humid, cold sandy – is shining India. My country.” This impassioned speech by Indian literary icon Mahasweta Devi, with lines taken from a popular Hindi song ‘*Mera joota hai Japani*’, moved the audience to tears at the Frankfurt Book Fair in 2006.

Clad in a humble cotton saree, with a pair of round framed spectacles and greying hair - Devi was a figure and a force to reckon with in Indian literature, specially in her mother tongue Bengali. Her sharp observation and clear narration of the lives of people, particularly of the country’s indigenous tribal communities, in the last few decades of the 20th century,

were hailed remarkable. Born on January 14, 1926, in Dhaka (now in Bangladesh), she was a champion for the rights and causes, and a voice for these communities. What made her works strike a cord with readers (which they still do) was the use of tribal dialects that she picked up when she spent time with them during her research. A Padma Shri awardee, she toured extensively and lived with tribal communities in villages of West Bengal, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh for several years, and embodied their struggles and sacrifices.

Two of her most unforgettable elaborate Bengali fiction in the genre are *Aranyer Adhikar* (The Right of the Forest or The Occupation of the Forest) and *Hajar Chaurasir Maa* (Mother of 1084). The latter is a poignant tale of a grieving mother’s discovery of how and why her son, who is identified as corpse number 1084, lay dead in a police mortuary. The narrative was set

Mahasweta Devi, writer, novelist, former lecturer in English literature, Jnanpith and Magsaysay awards winner, at her residence in Kolkata, West Bengal



“**MAHASHWETA DEVI WONDERFULLY ILLUSTRATED THE MIGHT OF THE PEN. A VOICE OF COMPASSION, EQUALITY AND JUSTICE, SHE LEAVES US DEEPLY SADDENED.**

Narendra Modi
Prime Minister of India
(On Devi’s demise, July 28, 2016)

“**I THINK A CREATIVE WRITER SHOULD HAVE A SOCIAL CONSCIENCE. I HAVE A DUTY TOWARDS SOCIETY. THIS SENSE OF DUTY IS AN OBSESSION AND I MUST REMAIN ACCOUNTABLE TO MYSELF. I ASK MYSELF THIS QUESTION A THOUSAND TIMES: HAVE I DONE WHAT I COULD HAVE DONE?**

Mahasweta Devi
Author and activist



Literary introductions

She wrote her first novel, *Jhansir Rani* (The Queen of Jhansi) in 1956, when she was 30 years old. A well-researched fictional account of the life of warrior-queen Lakshmbai – Devi travelled across north India and listened to stories about the queen that were passed down through generations.

Her first collection of short stories *Ki Basante Ki Sarate* (Of Spring and Autumn) was published in 1958. She wrote nearly 100 novels and over 20 collections of short stories.

Devi's work has been translated into several Indian regional and international languages, including English, Italian and French.

against the backdrop of West Bengal during the Naxalite uprising of the 1970s that also stirred the tribal belts in parts of central and eastern India. Published in 1977, *Aranyer Adhikar* tells the story of the life of Birsa Munda, a freedom fighter and folk hero who, at the turn of the 20th century, stood up against the British for possession of forest land.

Devi felt that “a creative writer should have a social conscience... A duty towards society”. Following her own dictum, the identification with the community had not remained confined to her writings alone; she had rendered active support to the cause of tribal communities. Till her death in 2016 at the age of 90, she kept working for the people of

Purulia (West Bengal), where she ran a welfare centre.

The writer's tryst with tribal issues began when she travelled through Palamau district in Bihar and came face-to-face with the profundities of tribal life. Realising how they had been denied the benefits of development, Devi's mission had been to see that tribal citizens get social justice.

Not just tribal welfare, the litterateur also wrote courageously about women – one of the most celebrated being *Rudali* (a short fiction portraying the life and struggles of Sanichari, who becomes a *rudali*, women who are hired to cry during the death of someone from a wealthy family).



Right: Mahasweta Devi receiving the coveted Jnanpith Award from Nelson Mandela in 1997

Top: The Google doodle in honour of Mahasweta Devi on the occasion of her 92nd birth anniversary on July 14, 2018



Top: (L-R) Actors Adil Hussain, Seema Rahmani, Dibang, director Italo Spinelli, actors Tillotama Shome, Samrat Chakrabarti and Priyanka Bose with Mahasweta Devi at the 5th International Rome Film Festival (2010). The movie *Gangaur*, based on the celebrated writer's tale of a young tribal woman, was the only Indian entry in the competition

Above: Devi receiving the Ramon Magsaysay Award. The award is internationally recognised as the Nobel Prize counterpart of Asia

A remarkable feature of her writing was that despite the strong undercurrent of political scenario of that time, her works neither had been didactic nor did they suffer from prevalent ideologies and motifs which characterised literary writings of her time. Weaving history, myth and current political realities, she brought to light icons of modern India through the narratives of the tribals.

For her outstanding contribution

to the enrichment of Indian literature she was bestowed with the Bharatiya Jnanpith in 1996. The following year she was awarded the Ramon Magsaysay that is touted as the 'Asian Nobel Prize' for her compassionate crusade through art and activism to fight for the rights of the tribal people. Also recognised with the Padma Vibhushan, Devi's works are honest documents of the times she lived in, centered around the tribal communities.

It is by this virtue, coupled with the author's keen yet blunt opinions weaved in with an almost innocent realism that her works continue to find readers even today.



Mr A Choudhury is an Electrical engineer and has worked as Rapporteur General of a UNESCO workshop in 1988. Over the years he developed an aptitude for biographical sketches through his work. Currently, he is working as a School Principal in Gaya, Bihar.

AMBASSADORS OF Culture and Arts

India's culture is one of the most recognisable characteristics for travellers across the world. Author and philanthropist **Sudha Murty** shares her views on the county's many distinguishable attributes that make it easier to form bonds that transcend borders



International dancers perform *Bhangra* (a folk dance from the state of Punjab) at the Walk for Reconciliation in Vancouver, Canada



Commuters pass a giant representation of a Bollywood film poster through a wall-painting as part of an Indian Festival at Trafalgar Square, London

It's common for tourists to research about the destination to be visited before arriving. Not only does this help a traveller to plan a trip better but to also make the experience of going around and discovering new places more immersive. Before travelling, I too do my diligence to understand the destination and its facets. It's always a delight to know why a certain tradition is being followed for centuries. What also intrigues me is the cultural and historical connect between the place I am visiting and India. And with our vast repertoire of heritage, it's not so tough to find a link. For me, the historical significance of a place often guides my decision to travel

there. For example, a hobby I took up a few years ago, to learn Kannada as it was originally spoken in the eighth and ninth century made me travel through the southern parts of India extensively. Similarly, whenever I get a chance to travel overseas, I make it a point to understand and research about why it is popular. Following this regimen, I have managed to travel to some destinations that are not-so-known amongst Indians. The research that I do, the interactions that I enjoy and the information that I manage to exchange, are, when you

A simple attire of a saree or a *khadi* kurta can immediately put someone at ease and speak volumes about humility and our culture

TRADITION



An audience of over 2,000 moviegoers enjoy the premiere of a film starring Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan in the splendid open-air setting of Somerset House in London

think of it, the very framework of people-to-people relationships that eventually bring nations closer.

Take for example a recent trip that I made to Israel following the footsteps of Jesus Christ. My aim was to not just explore the country's natural beauty but also to be educated and informed about the events that transpired when Christ himself travelled these lands. I enrolled in a three-month long Bible study so that I could at least recognise the history and the culture of the destination.

While Indian mythology, religious thoughts and philosophies find a resonance internationally, what pleasantly surprises me is the popularity of contemporary Indian culture in the world, even in the remotest parts, and across every

age group. A school of classical Indian music and dance in Europe; a gym-full of Americans exercising to the beats of *bhangra* in New York; yoga being practised from Tokyo to Toronto; Indian restaurants in London and the global reach of Hindi films! Everywhere I have travelled, my country's heritage and my Indianness have been my cultural passport!

The response of local people to my Indian roots has only made me a better human. When you see the beautiful and ancient mosques of Iran or the exquisite temples of Hindu deities in Cambodia, you realise they are in no way inferior – Infact they may even be better than the ones back home. But, this revelation does not make you feel inferior, it only opens your eyes to different possibilities.

Bollywood actor Salman Khan unveils his waxwork figure at Madame Tussauds in London. Bollywood actors have long been promoters of India's cultural and artistic heritage across the world

A simple attire of a saree or a *khadi* kurta can immediately put someone you are meeting for the first time at ease and can speak volumes about humility. In this regard, Bollywood has played a major part in spreading our delightful cultural nuances to the farthest corners of the globe. I remember during my journey through Iran, I had approached a shopkeeper for some fresh *naan* (a thick, fluffy flatbread resembling a pita/pancake). When the shopowner handed me my order, he looked at my saree and said, "Amitabh Bachchan?" When my response didn't showcase his enthusiasm, he continued, "Salman Khan? Shah Rukh Khan?". After hearing the names of the famous Hindi movie actors, I realised what he was trying to say. "Yes, I am from the same country as them," I replied. He smiled and said, "No money". Even when I insisted, he refused. In broken English, he explained, "India. Bollywood. Very nice. Good dance. Good dress. Good music. Iranian like!" I couldn't help but smile.



Bollywood has graduated from being a part of the movie industry to becoming a vital partner when it comes to business generation

TRADITION



Top: Vibrant colours and iconic decorations adorn the facade of an Indian apparel store in London

Bottom: Author Sudha Murty. Her books, inspired from her travels around the world, often depict instant friendships and cultural connections formed through a common love for Indian movies, music and dance

A Spanish fellow traveller added, “I too love Hindi films. They have increased the popularity of Spain and have also increased tourist footfall to the country. The song “*Senorita*” from the movie *Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara*, which was shot in Spain has made our country a household name in India. The movie also brought the traditional Tomatina festival into the limelight!”

My travels also took me to Bukhara, a city in Uzbekistan. As I went for an evening stroll, the faint tunes of a familiar Bollywood song had me following it. Within minutes, I found myself outside a restaurant by a lake — Lyabi House. “I am from India and this song is from my country,” I said to the artist the moment he stopped singing. “*Hindustan?*” he asked. I nodded. “*Namaste!*” he greeted me with a grin and nodded his head vigorously, as if to acknowledge this new-found link between us. I revelled in the little nostalgia for my homeland, while for the singer, it was his first brush with a person from a land about which he sings songs! It wasn’t about a big achievement such as a space mission or a sports victory, but more



Restaurants serving Indian cuisine have been very popular across the world and are often based on the theme of Hindi movies



Former US First Lady Michelle Obama joins students for a session of Indian dance in the State Dining Room of the White House on November 5, 2015

about the exhilaration that comes with running into common people rejoicing in an experience from India in a remote corner of the world. I was proud that I belonged to a special country.

In England also, I have often seen the overwhelming influence of Bollywood: from Bollywood-themed restaurants that are quite popular among Britishers to Hindi movie songs being played in public.

But then, Bollywood, can be considered as India's most popular cultural ambassador. There is a statue of late Yash Chopra, a renowned Indian filmmaker, in Interlaken, Switzerland, and a poster of actors Shah Rukh Khan and Kajol at the entrance of Mount Titlis, a mountain

of the Uri Alps. These memorabilia are not just examples of popular cinema, but rather, the popularity of an entire culture – the idea behind India's movies, the stories from the country and everyday tales of its people.

While traces of Indian culture can be found across the world, I believe that every time we travel, we too become an ambassador of India, spreading its traditions, its philosophies and its soul.



Sudha Murthy is an Indian social worker and bestselling author. The Padma Shri awardee is known for her philanthropic work through the Infosys Foundation.

She is also a member of the public health care initiatives of the Gates Foundation.



WOMEN IN Charge

Ever since Hindi films began to find acceptance among the masses, the films have continued to pose an incisive critical commentary on the performance of femininity and gender roles. The general outlook is finally changing, becoming more understanding and accepting of female characters in unconventional roles, says **Aarti Kapur Singh**



Some of the most iconic women centric movies in Bollywood: (Top): *Manikarnika* (2019), *Neerja* (2016), *Mardaani* (2014), *The Bandit Queen* (1994), *Kahani* (2012); (Bottom) *Lipstick under my Burkha* (2016), *Lajja* (2001) and TV series *Four More Shots Please!* (2019)

A movie that highlights how women in Indian villages are treated when they demand hygienic sanitation facilities.

Another that addresses the stigma around the menstrual cycle. One, which depicts the battle of a girl who falls victim to an acid attack. A film in which the female protagonist questions her husband's abusive acts. These are a few examples of how India's largest movie industry Bollywood is responding to issues regarding women's rights. While, many of them are helmed by women protagonists, several feature men in leading roles. *PadMan* (2018), for example, a movie that was steered by one of the most successful actors from the industry, Akshay Kumar, narrates the story of a man focused on improving women's menstrual hygiene. Filmmaker R Balki, who directed *PadMan*, said in an interview "Gone are the days when there were just two kind of female characters in Bollywood movies – the weak and compassionate ones, and those who went around brandishing guns."

Actor Shabana Azmi, who has straddled the realms of both parallel



and mainstream cinema, sees a distinct difference in how women's issues were portrayed earlier and now. She says: "There was a pandering to prevalent sensibilities earlier, but then women were cast in the traditional stereotypical mode of the forgiving wife, the sacrificing mother, the understanding sister, etc. I am proud to have been a part of *Arth*, where the complexity of what it is to be a woman was explored. But by and large, these outings were few and far in between. And look how it is all changing to being more than just a flash in the pan phenomenon."

Bollywood actress Deepika Padukone plays the role of Malti, an acid attack survivor in *Chapaak* (2020). The emotionally-charged movie is based on the real-life story of Laxmi Agarwal.

Indian cinema caters to masses, and the way society has seen change in the way it treats women's issues, is reflected in our movies as well

The stereotypical portrayal of women, which ruled Indian films till a very recent time, has been witnessing a paradigm shift

THE TIMES ARE CHANGING

From the black and white films to colour movies, Indian cinema has evolved in a big way and so has the portrayal of women and their issues. Indian cinema caters to masses and the way society has seen an altered viewpoint of a woman's life and her challenges, cinema too reflects the same. Audiences today not only walk up to a multiplex with popcorn and cola in a tow, but they review the movie intensely. Therefore, the rules of entertainment are altering rapidly and filmmakers are tweaking their scripts.

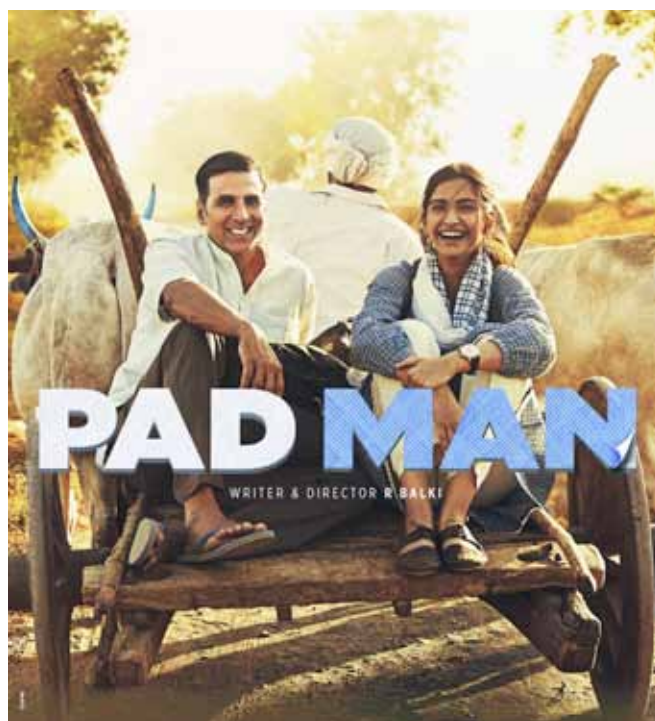
Bottom (left to right):

Indian actresses Supriya Pathak and Shabana Azmi on the set of La Nuit Bengali (The Bengali Night)(1988). Both women have been pioneers when it comes to adapting to unconventional storylines on the silver screen; Movies like Pad Man are bringing important issues like provisions of inexpensive sanitary pads for rural women, to the forefront and creating awareness amongst the general public

Film scholar and author Shoma Chatterji says, "Women in Hindi cinema have been decorative objects with rarely any sense of agency being imparted to them. Each phase of Hindi

cinema had its own representation of women, but they were confined largely to the traditional, patriarchal frame-work of the Indian society. The ordinary woman has hardly been visible in Hindi cinema."

Today, women's roles in Indian cinema have transformed in several ways. Feminism seems to have mobilised the media for women's struggle, as well as subjecting them to a process of interrogation. Since the past years, women's roles in commercial Hindi films have changed and many blockbuster films have included women in significant roles.





(L-R) Actors Rasika Dugal, Nawazuddin Siddiqui and director Nandita Das present her movie, *Manto* (based on the life and times of writer Saadat Hasan Manto) at the 70th Cannes Film Festival. Das has carved herself a niche when it comes to women behind the camera by successfully directing unconventional movies like *Firaaq* (2008) and *Aks* (2001)

But the important question is what these roles mean.

KEEPING IT REAL

“Earlier, Hindi films subjected women to a representation that was submissive to traditional values and men who controlled them. This is evident in the characterisation - the various archetypes of women, being daughter, wife, daughter-in-law, mother, vamp, courtesan and widow - were two dimensional, had no substance and existed in relation to the men in the film. However, now, increasingly, more and more women are real - from within us. These are the strong women who live life on their own terms and those characters are increasingly becoming important,”

asserts actor Vidya Balan, who has been a part of several women-centric movies.

There have been movies which have sent as India’s official entries to global events like the Academy Awards also known as the Oscars. For instance, *Bandit Queen* (1994), a biographical drama based on the life of Phoolan Devi, was India’s official entry in 1994, preceded by *Rudaali* (1993), the story of a woman who is abandoned by her mother shortly after her father’s death.

The strong women portrayed in Bollywood are the types of women who exist in the world - they are not flat as portrayed in the earlier films. The characters have become more real. Filmmaker Sanjay

The new kind of cinema being produced in Bollywood is creating a female identity, which is not restricted and is almost a momentum

“FILMS NEED TO BE RESPONSIVE TOWARDS THE CONTEXT IN WHICH THEY LOCATE WOMEN CHARACTERS. WOMEN CHARACTERS NEED TO HAVE AGENCY AND MEANS TO TAKE APART THE EXISTING POWER FORMATIONS.

Kangana Ranaut
Actor

“THE CHALLENGE FOR THE FILMMAKER WILL BE TO PORTRAY THE WOMAN CHARACTERS WITH AN INDIVIDUAL IDENTITY STILL MAINTAINING CULTURAL VALUES BUT STAYING AWAY FROM PRACTICES THAT ARE REGRESSIVE. THE FILMMAKER’S DECISIONS CAN SHAPE THE PERCEPTIONS OF A SOCIETY THAT HE/SHE WANTS TO PORTRAY.

Deepika Padukone
Actor

“I AM ONLY HOPING FOR A DAY WHEN I DON’T HAVE TO DELVE INTO HISTORY FOR THESE STRONG CHARACTERS. I WANT TO SEE THEM WITH ME, IN FRONT OF ME!

Sanjay Leela Bhansali
Filmmaker



Left: A still from the movie *Tumhari Sulu* (2017), starring Vidya Balan as a loving homemaker for whom things start to change when she accidentally lands a job as a radio jockey and her show becomes an instant hit.

Right: Kangana Ranaut's movie *Queen* (2013) was based on the travels of an independent Indian woman and turned out to be a huge success at the Box office

Succeeding unconventionally

Movies with women-centric storylines that were a success on the celluloid

Ishqjya (2010)

A story of how a smart woman manipulates two thugs

The Dirty Picture (2011)

A biographical drama inspired by the life of Silk Smitha

Kahaani (2012)

The story of a pregnant woman, in search for her missing husband

Queen (2014)

The journey of an Indian girl who rediscovers herself travelling solo

Dum Laga Ke Haisha (2015)

The love story of a school dropout and an educated but overweight girl

Parched (2016)

A tale of four women from Gujarat and their struggles with individual demons.

Leela Bhansali says, “In a country like India, where fates of movies are decided every Thursday or Friday, it isn’t possible to make sweeping generalised statements claiming that the portrayal of women in Bollywood has progressed or regressed. As a director, strong women have attracted me. I cannot resist their demand for a centre-stage. Hence movies like *Padmaavat* and a character like *Mastani*.”

The last few years have seen female characters come into their own in several films - *Queen*, *The Dirty Picture*, *Kahaani*, *Tumhari Sulu*, and many others. “In fact this change that has now become so discernible has been brewing

gradually. Films, like *Lajja*, *Astitva*, *Laxmi*, *Mardani* etc. women are visualised as central characters of films and they are visualised as integral part of socio-economic-political reality,” says Balan.

In the ‘80s and ‘90s and even in early-2000, women-centric movies continued to be made but follow a rather erratic graph. “The new tilt to project how women are represented in my view is at an embryonic phase of change. In the coming years, the percentage of women-led narratives is bound to increase keeping in tune with the rapid surfacing of women in socio political milieu post economic liberalisation and their presence as leaders, activists,



Left to right: Shabana Azmi, an actress who has been known to redefine the parameters of conventional cinema with her adaptations of difficult roles that highlight the struggles of everyday women; Actress Tabu, who has played unconventional roles that portray women faced with difficult scenarios throughout her career in movies like *Maachis* (1996), *Adhadhun* (2018) and *The Namesake* (2006); Bollywood actress Deepika Padukone on her way to the Time 100 Gala. Padukone has featured in enigmatic, empowering and women centric roles in movies spanning various genres, from history, drama to real-life, like *Ramleela* (2013), *Padmavat* (2018), *Chapaak* (2020).

workers and professionals - even as women directors!" says actor Deepika Padukone, whose recent venture *Chhapak* portrayed the struggle of a real-life acid attack victim.

FUTURE PROJECTION

But there is always scope for betterment. According to actor Kangana Ranaut, "Indian popular cinema likes to keep commercial risks to the minimum. And adopting a formulaic approach is the best way to do that. These formulae or 'tropes' include family dramas, song and dance, love stories, happy endings and larger-than-life melodrama and so on. A handful of directors are trying to introduce contemporary themes, everyday characters and real social soul into cinema. A lot of work still remains to be done in balancing out

the mis-representation of women's issues and women in our films. "

What is promising is that audiences are increasingly receptive to unconventional storylines. They appreciate the struggle of real women, who face ordinary challenges yet come out with extraordinary results. As society evolves and truly accepts gender-equality, Hindi movies too are moving ahead -- setting a precedent, providing inspiration and becoming empowered role models that echo with the audience.



Aarti is an independent writer with close to two decades' experience in various media. After securing a doctorate in film studies, she is now indulging in her passion to discover the world. She writes on food, luxury, films, travel, wellness and celebrities.

INDIAN IMPRESSIONS

Know India a little more with these interesting facts



Left to right: Maari at the Silent Valley National Park; Dimbeshwar Das during a patrol at Kaziranga NP

WARRIORS OF NATURE

- Maari, a 48-year-old conservationist from the state of Kerala, is lovingly addressed as the “Keeper of Silent Valley”. Working at the Silent Valley National Park in Palakkad, Maari has lived in the forests for more than 30 years and has made it his life’s mission to protect the region’s incredible flora and fauna. He has been bestowed with Kerala Chief Minister’s Forest Medal this year.
- Dimbeshwar Das, a 54-year-old forest guard, has devoted 33 years of his life to protect the rhinos of the Kaziranga National Park, Assam. Das says he never wants to retire. He was recently given the Earth Hero Award by the Royal Bank of Scotland.
- The longest running national highway in India, NH44, is now equipped with nine ‘animal underpasses’ as part of measures to mitigate infrastructure’s impact on wildlife. The highway runs through the Kanha-Pench wildlife reserve in Madhya Pradesh.



RESILIENT AND GENEROUS

She is 95 years old but that hasn’t stopped Mizoram’s Pi Nghakliani from donating her monthly pension to the state’s Chief Minister Relief Fund to support the battle against the Novel Coronavirus. But she hasn’t stopped at that. The generous soul is also stitching fabric masks at home, which are being distributed among nurses and doctors in her area.

SCULPTING SUSTAINABLY

History is filled with skilful artists creating detailed statues, but, did you know of a sculpture garden created entirely of recycled material? An idea started in his spare time by Nek Chand, a modest road inspector, the rock garden in Chandigarh now has thousands of sculptures, an open air exhibition hall, theatre trove and a miniature maze, all made out of discarded materials like wires, broken foundry and ceramic. The entire park is modelled after an imaginary kingdom replete with dancers, musicians, warriors and even astronauts!





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