IIC AUTUMN 2022
Quarterly

IIC Quarterly

AUTUMN 2022

ISSN NO. 0376-9771

COVER ART
SHOBHA GHARE
'Foggy Mountain'
Mixed media on paper, 15 x 13 inches
Courtesy: Gallery Art.Motif, New Delhi

Autumn 2022
Volume 49, Number 2

India International Centre Quarterly is printed and published by Kanwal Wali for India International Centre, 40, Max Mueller Marg, New Delhi 110 003

Price: ₹ 125

Annual Rates
India: ₹ 500; Abroad: $ 45 (by airmail)
INSTITUTIONS
India: ₹ 750; Abroad: $ 55 (by airmail)

BANK CHARGES for Outstation Cheques: ₹ 50 / $ 15

Payments should be made by bank draft or cheque payable to **INDIA INTERNATIONAL CENTRE** at New Delhi

Enquiries may be addressed to Rohit Singh (Tel: 24609330); E-mail: publication.iic@nic.in

Typeset at Glyph Graphics Private Limited, Delhi 110 096
glyphgraphics2013@gmail.com

Printed at Niyogi Offset Private Limited, New Delhi

The India International Centre is a society promoting understanding and amity between the different communities of the world by undertaking or supporting the study of their past and present cultures, by disseminating or exchanging knowledge thereof and by providing such other facilities as would lead to their universal appreciation

CONTENTS

VOLUME 49 AUTUMN 2022 NUMBER 2

ARTICLES

BOOK REVIEWS

EDITORIAL

Oft times the IIC has been defined as a trinity of three core streams: cultural, social and intellectual. When readers open the pages of this issue, it will be at the conclusion of the 2022 *IIC Experience: A Festival of the Arts*, a time when the three streams come together as one. We are certain this most eagerly anticipated annual event has been as enjoyable as always.

As usual, the Autumn issue covers a varied range of subjects. It will appeal especially to those interested in the arts, international relations, governance and education.

Five articles are a canvas of the diversity of what constitutes 'the arts'. Arshiya Sethi asks a question most would not think of: Are the Arts and the Law in a binary relationship? In fact, she says, the two have been intertwined for all the wrong reasons—from the attempt to control devadasis in colonial times to Section 124A of the IPC which has been used extensively against artists, journalists, among others.

Kumud Diwan has provided the uninitiated with a detailed exposition on the evolution of Indian music from the Harrapan civilisation to the present day. She then brings out the connection between sound and yoga, which, too, is integral to Indic tradition. Sunil Sunkara, a professional exponent of Kathak, traces the *bibhatsa rasa* (the odious, ugly sentiment) in the Kathak tradition, which most dancers tend to avoid. He argues for an approach that combines the ugly with the aspects of beauty and entertainment traditionally associated with Kathak.

Moving to the genre of film, Partha Ghosh tells the story of *Taangh* (Longing; Punjabi), a film on the life of Nandy Singh, a world-class hockey player who participated in the famous 1948 London Olympics. But more than Nandy, the film captures the period of Partition; the partition of the country as also the partition of the team.

Meenakshi Jauhari writes about the most influential scholar of modern Urdu *adab*, Rasheed Hasan Khan. A familiar figure at

the 'DSchool' coffee house, resident of Gwyer House, and a great scholar of the 1970s, Khan epitomises a period in the history of the University of Delhi that Shobit Mahajan writes about. Mahajan traces the evolution of the University as it celebrates 100 years. Still a university of some standing, Mahajan does not whitewash the problems that beset this place of learning and expression today and what this means for the future.

Yogendra Narain discusses the many facets of the civil–military relationship in India—from the British Indian Army when the military was used to supress the freedom movement, to Independence when we realised the need to keep the military away from politics to ensure a stable democracy. Unlike India, SinhaRaja Tammita-Delgoda writes, Sri Lanka never had a separate military culture, but the current implosion has changed the role of the military, making it the object of the people's anger and frustration. But Sri Lanka has, throughout its tumultuous history, exhibited an unusual resilience. Life does go on. This is brought out by Radhika Daga's narrative of her walk through the country's rainforest while the city was literally burning.

Two current and ongoing concerns are dealt with by Ajay Dandekar and Rajnish Karki. The former examines the policy compulsions that have driven the Sino–Indian relationship from 1954 to date. Karki makes an interesting point when he describes the government as an 'enormous organisation'. He explores this idea over three phases: pre-Independence or colonial; Independence to the 1980s; and the three decades after to where we are today. Finally, the photo essay, titled 'Baba Saheb: A Philatelic Journey (1966-2022)', and curated by Vikas Kumar. The year 1966 is significant because it took about two decades after Independence for the Posts and Telegraph Department of India to usher a Dalit leader into the philatelic world where till then only upper-caste Hindu men were mostly seen.

We are moving closer to the end of 2022. If I were to think of the most significant development during the year, it would be the election of Ms Droupadi Murmu as President of India, the first tribal woman to be elected to the position; a woman who came up the hard way. This is no mean achievement and we wish her every success.

◆

OMITA GOYAL

ARTS AND THE LAW

The Need for an Urgent and Deep Read

ARSHIYA SETHI

Kri Foundation's efforts in the realms of Arts and the Law were moving slowly via the academic route, up until they were catalysed into pro-activism by the revelation of 19 allegations against the Bhopal-based Dhrupad musicians, the Gundecha brothers (Sethi, 2021). While the matter is in court, the fact that they had been regular resident fellows of Kri Foundation aggravated the situation for the Foundation's members and staff. Personally, it really hit me in the solar plexus as Dhrupad is a musical genre that I am particularly partial to, with the Gundechas being amongst my favourite practitioners of the genre. Thus, when this news broke, I was shocked beyond words. Matters were made more urgent with news of other, similar, allegations being made.

Already the shift to the digital medium had unleashed algorithmic violence in the form of copyright hits. This shift was something that the artists, who after the initial shock of the lockdown that inexplicably and suddenly silenced their artistic voices, were happy to embrace. But the suddenness of shifted terrains resulted in many shortfalls in understanding the medium and its expectations. The enormous consumption, warranted by lockdown and stay-at-home policies, fed by hastily, and often carelessly, created content employed shortcuts and unethical ways. This was perfect fodder for IPR compromises.

Are arts and the law in a binary relationship? Undoubtedly, the arts are hallowed as being otherworldly—certainly directed at a higher pursuit—while law, on the other hand, is more this-worldly, looking at mundane and earthly matters. Perhaps that is why the two have not been in a purposeful and organic conversation that

Autumn 2022, Volume 49, Number 2

could have helped to build a bridge between them. This brings to mind Rudyard Kipling's 'Ballad of the East and West', except that the poem has a more hopeful end.[1] It is with this end in mind that Kri Foundation and its sister organisation Unmute have initiated this conversation.

The template of *rasanishpati*, or the production and savouring of *rasa* (emotion), the goal of *ananda* or the *sab kuchh changa changa* (all is well) approach of the arts, belies the fact that the arts and the law intersect at places too numerous to list. The points of intersection are many: from the legal registration of schools of the arts, to the constitutions of NGOs promoting the arts, to the MOUs and contracts that are employed to raise resources, and the civic and institutional compliances that are mandatory for all arts institutions. The state is required to give specific permissions to hold concerts legally. These permissions come from licenses and permits that are all governed by laws, some of which have been in existence for over a century.

But reading legal subtext in the free spiritedness of arts is hard to imagine. Yet, because the arts often challenge the establishment, the state is frequently compelled to draw restrictive lines by means of the law, and where these are found inadequate, in the form of add-on laws. This legal need to control the arts was particularly common during the colonial period, when colonial masters were paranoid about dominating the land that they were exploiting, the people they were subjugating and the resources they were appropriating. But this trend did not end with Independence—in fact, many colonial laws still prevail.

While the colonial trope testifies to the concept of 'power over' (Follett, 1940), rather than 'power with', it is hardly becoming for a postcolonial, democratic and fundamentally rights-oriented, constitutionally safeguarded country like India to subscribe to this degree of monitoring and proscribing. Yet, laws restricting the arts, artists and artistic expressions have prevailed unchallenged and many legal provisions have only deepened. Listed here are four colonial laws on the arts, their histories and their present-day manifestations.

Chronologically, the earliest laws proscribing the artist are the Cantonment Act (1864) and the Contagious Diseases Act (1868). In 1864, soon after the first War of Independence, as Britain consolidated its power over India, more and more British troops occupied the cantonments. For fear of sexual frustration, same-sex

encounters and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases—then a public health epidemic—the British decided to permit prostitution, but in a controlled manner. This inscribed the imperialistic reading of sexuality within sanitary and public health discourses. The women were subject to frequent, ignominious and rough sexual examination, and if found infected were compelled into the oppressive physicality of lock hospitals. It is noteworthy that sex work was not considered illegal, just that it needed to be controlled. This position—that sex work is not illegal—has been reiterated quite recently in the judgement pronounced by a three-member bench of the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court categorically stated that sex work was a 'profession', and the Court order reinforced that sex workers are 'entitled to dignity and equal protection under law', under Article 21 of the Constitution.[2]

Among the public women that the colonial administration attempted to 'control' as early as the second half of the 19th century were devadasis, many of whom, even if married to the Lord, maintained open liaisons with men of eminence in what was called *chinna veedu* (the small house). Sexual liaisons with well-heeled benefactors were a truism for *tawaifs* and *baijis* as well. They, too, came under the purview of controls that attempted to paint all public women with the same brush, with scant regard for their artistic position and talent.

The negative valence ascribed to these traditional female templars of art reached fruition with the spread of the Anti-Nautch Movement, as a consequence of domestic rejections and foreign evangelism evident in the growth of missionary activity, and missionary-led print culture and capacity. It was accompanied by the rise of such Hindu reform movements as the Punjab Purity Association, among others. Eventually, the Madras Devadasis (Prevention of Dedication) Act was enacted on 9 October 1947 shortly after Independence. The present-day debate on the now-on–now-off legal position of dance bars is a residue of this similar mindset of conflating artistry with sexuality and the need to impose sanctions.

One of the most troublesome words associated with the arts today is sedition—when the state feels threatened and unsafe about its very existence, imagining a threat to public disorder. The idea of sedition is longstanding in colonial jurisprudence, but was not included in the Indian Penal Code (IPC) by Thomas Macaulay when

he drafted it in 1860. Many say that it was an oversight. But, by 1870 it had progressed to a criminal offence and by 1890 sedition was included as an offence under Section 124A IPC through Special Act XVII, with the prescribed punishment being transportation 'beyond the seas for the term of his or her natural life'. This made it a provision frequently used to curb political dissent during the movement for Independence, against such celebrated freedom fighters as Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Annie Besant, Shaukat and Mohammad Ali, Maulana Azad and Mahatma Gandhi.

Although the term sedition did not feature in the Constitution after Independence, it remained a part of the IPC as Section 124A. In modern India it has been used extensively against artists, journalists, comedians, poets and writers. Among recent well-known cases are those of journalist Siddique Kappan, author Arundhati Roy and environmental activist Disha Ravi. Even folk singer S. Sivadas, popularly known as Kovan, was arrested in 2015 and kept incarcerated under this law for two songs that criticised the state government and the then Chief Minister J. Jayalalitha for allegedly profiting from state-run liquor shops, all at the expense of the poor. Cartoonist Aseem Trivedi was arrested in Mumbai, in September 2012, for his cartoons that, according to the complainant, mocked the Constitution and national emblem. The charges were dropped a month later after public protests and furore on social media.

Sometimes it is not necessary to do anything artistic. Being an artist and upholding the dharma of an artist—of showing a mirror to society—is quite enough to evoke sedition charges. This happened in 2019 when 49 eminent artists and intellectuals, including national and Padma awardees, wrote a letter to Prime Minister Modi expressing concern over the growing incidents of mob lynching, and urging him to send out a strong punitive message against perpetrators of those crimes. It resulted in an FIR being filed against them. Eventually, the FIR was revoked, but the question that begs to be asked is why it was filed in the first place, especially since the *Kedar Nath Singh v. the State of Bihar 1962* judgement by the Supreme Court had established that the charge of sedition was constitutionally valid only if the act incited public disorder. Interestingly, in the United Kingdom—the legal system of which gave us our sedition law—this law was recognised as arcane, and abolished in 2009.

The overlay of the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) on the Sedition Act, and the recent changes in UAPA making bail almost impossible, flies in the face of the judgement delivered by Supreme Court Justice V. R. Krishan Iyer in *State of Rajasthan v. Balchand,*[3] which held that bail—not jail—was the norm.

Renowned Telugu poet and author of 15 poetry anthologies Varavara Rao was charged as many as 45 times for his poetry, but released each time.[4] Presently, he is on medical bail from UAPA confinement for delivering a 'seditious' speech at the Bhima Koregaon congregation in 2018. Rao has never hidden his pro-poor stance or his readiness to be a mediator in talks between Naxalites and the government. But this arrest is not for his poetry. Yet, young poets of India issued a statement in support: '…we see the attack on Rao as an attack on all of us, our minds, our pens and our views'.[5]

The Blasphemy Law was inherited from the British colonial government during Punjab's religious uprising and repeal of the Press Act in 1920, when Muslims violently protested against *Rangila Rasool* that spoke in derogatory terms about Prophet Muhammad's personal life. For several years thereafter, discord prevailed in Punjab. The publisher Mahashay Rajpal was charged with Section 153A IPC for hate speech, which promotes enmity between various groups on grounds of religion, race, etc. Eventually, it was realised that a specific law needed to be introduced to prevent hate speech that insults, or attempts to insult, the religion or religious beliefs of any class of citizen with deliberate and malicious intention to outrage their religious feelings. In usually tolerant India, the main purpose of this law was to maintain 'public order in a multireligious and religiously sensitive society'. Its special, and new, section was Article 295A IPC. As this legislation was promulgated in undivided India, both Bangladesh and Pakistan have a similar section. In Pakistan, however, it has been significantly widened to include anti-Ahmadiyya laws.

In 1932, *Angaray*—a collection of nine short stories and a one-act play by a group of writers believed to be the precursors of the Progressive Writers Movement, and among whom was Rashid Jahan, believed to be Ismat Chughtai's literary mentor—was banned because its progressive content rubbed some clerics the wrong way. In 1998, the Marathi play *Mee Nathuram Godse Boltoy* (This is Nathuram Godse Speaking) was banned for disturbing and hurting the emotions of a sect of followers of Mahatma Gandhi.

In the process it erroneously equated the teachings of the Mahatma with religion. In more recent times, Article 295A has been used on Wendy Donniger's *The Hindus: An Alternative History* (2010) and Audrey Trushke's *Aurangzeb: The Man and the Myth*, and responsible for the ban on James Laine's *Shivaji: A Hindu King in Islamic India.*

It was under this law that iconic artist M. F. Husain, against whom a series of FIRs had been filed, was hounded out of India; he died in London as a Qatari citizen. The trouble that was to lead to his eventual exile began in 1996, even though the problematic paintings of the goddesses Durga and Saraswati, depicted in the nude, were painted in the 1970s. 'I drew the Saraswati holding a lotus. She is sitting in water. There is a fish. On one side there is a peacock. This is a symbolic drawing,' is how Husain described his Saraswati (Jain, 1996). In 1996, his work was featured in a Hindi monthly magazine, *Vichar Mimansa* (Discussion of Thoughts), in an article by Om Nagpal titled, 'M. F. Husain: A Painter or Butcher'. It is evident from the violence and vituperation inherent in its very title that it was not mature scholarship of the arts. Nagpal made it plain that it was the painting's nudity that was offensive. Why, he asked provocatively, could Husain not paint his mother and sister in this modern art style? Why did he paint a Hindu goddess in such a disrespectful manner? Why didn't he paint Allah?

Within a few days, citing anti-Hindu sensibilities in Husain's craft, Bajrang Dal activists stormed the famous Herwitz Gallery at the Husain–Doshi Gufa in Ahmedabad, damaging 23 tapestries and 28 paintings of enormous value. Oddly, as many as eight lawsuits were filed against Husain at various courts for promoting enmity between diverse groups by painting Hindu goddesses—Durga and Saraswati—in an uncharitable manner, thus hurting the sentiments of Hindus. Ignored was the fact that the works that stirred controversy were merely sketches and, in the final visualisation, Saraswati was draped. In any case, these were simply outlines, not coloured and shaded figures. They were quintessential 'modernist reinterpretations of mythic and religious interpretations that had made him India's most famous painter' (Grimes, 2011).

All art builds on previously expressed patterns and in Hinduism there is a tradition of depicting goddesses in the nude. Aparna, one of Parvati's names, means one without even a leaf (cover). 'Lajja Gauris' are depicted not just in the nude, but in

birthing postures that reveal genitalia that, however, cannot be deemed erotic sculpture. Although there are echoes of fertility and fecundity, by no stretch of the imagination can these figures be deemed lascivious, prurient, depraved or erotic. 'Nude' goddesses, including Saraswati, can be found in ancient sculptures as well as in the cachet of Halebid and Badami sculptures. Numerous temples in India depict poses of erotica, even in their external friezes.

Colonialism, particularly Victorianism, convinced Indians that nudity and obscenity go together. Proof of this warped notion lies in the Europeanising of Indian art in the colonial period, including the draping of mythical bodies, as can be seen in Ravi Varma's images, including in that of Saraswati. The fissure of colonialism appears to have made us uncomfortable with our heritage. Husain certainly believed that the colonial period deprived us of ideational oxygen and fertiliser (Pal, 1994). In any case, in his thoughts, the nudity of these goddesses was not nakedness, but a reflection of their purity and innocence (Pal, 2017).

Husain's artistic work on these Hindu themes earned him fulsome praise from none other than the Shankaracharya of Puri, who claimed that the former's Hindu Sanskaras were responsible for his painted images that evoked such intense emotions. When Dharamvir Bharati, well-known Hindi writer and editor of *Dharmayug*, saw the 'Ramayan' (1968) and 'Mahabharata' (1971) series painted in the same style, he was emotionally stirred and wrote a moving article in his magazine (ibid.: 222). Later, Husain was to be further embroiled in the Bharat Mata controversy, which has been dealt interjectionally with the Babri Masjid issue, and the anti-Hindu image imposed on all Muslims, a fact cited by many writers, including Ira Pal, Yashodhara Dalmia and this writer.[6]

We may not accept the Shankaracharya's, Bharati's or even Husain's argument in toto, but one must acknowledge the judgement passed by Delhi High Court on 8 May 2008 by Justice Sanjay Kishan Kaul, in the case of *Maqbool Fida Husain v. Raj Kumar Pandey and Others,* which looks at the many dimensions of art and the law. This judgement begins with the words: 'Art is never chaste! It ought to be forbidden to ignorant innocents.' He went on to say,

> The world's greatest paintings, sculptures, songs and dance, India's lustrous heritage, Konark and Khajuraho, lofty epics, luscious

> in patches, may be asphyxiated by law if prudes, prigs and state moralists prescribe paradigms and heterodoxies.

The judgement referenced scenes from *Bandit Queen* and *Schindler's List* to argue that nudity does not always evoke baser instincts and could generate sorrow, sympathy and compassion instead. Justice Kaul recommended the practice of tolerance and not the use of the criminal justice system to criticise discomfort-inducing artistic expression. With these words it appears that the judge was directing our attention to a deeper reading of Husain, humanity and humanism.

If this judgement had been read, and its spirit followed, the Perumal Murugan incident would not have taken place. In 2010, Murugan wrote *Madhorubhagan* (One Part Woman) about the legend of a one-night festival in a Shaivite temple, a festival that was known for its promiscuous possibilities. It was translated by Aniruddhan Vasudevan into English and won the Sahitya Akademi award for translation in 2016. Murugan was hounded for the book's theme with obscenity and blasphemy charges. Eventually, the police played peacemaker and tried to negotiate a compromise. Embittered with these developments, he announced his own death on Facebook as he pledged never to write again. Caste organisations that took him to court had to eventually accept an order in which High Court justices dismissed the case, citing Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution. It was only after this dismissal that he returned to writing.

I would like to end with the Dramatic Performance Act (1876). According to scholar Nandi Bhatia, theatre played an important role in the social changes that came about in colonial India in the second half of the 19th century. Bhatia illustrates the role of theatre in bringing nationalist, anticolonial and gendered struggles into the public sphere (2004). One of the first plays to be staged was Dinbandhu Mitra's *Nil Darpan* (The Indigo Mirror; 1858–1859), just prior to the indigo revolt by 'ryots' protesting against inhuman conditions. It was translated anonymously and published by Reverend James Long, who had been Mitra's teacher. The endeavour resulted in the Reverend being imprisoned on sedition charges.[7] Expectedly, the white man's demonisation triggered a negative impact. In fact, at a performance in Lucknow,

angry British soldiers present in the audience ran onto the stage and a skirmish followed.

It was precisely to control the narrative, and the drama that would ensue if a performance hit the wrong spot, that, under the administration of Viceroy Lord Northbrook, the Dramatic Performance Act (DPA) was passed in 1876. The ordinance empowered the Government of Bengal to prohibit certain dramatic performances which were found to be scandalous, defamatory, seditious, obscene or otherwise prejudicial to public interest. Thus, the script of each play was required to be submitted for permission before its performance. Among the plays banned or not given permission during the colonial period were *Gajananda o Jubraj* (Gajananda and the Crown Prince),[8] *Nil Darpan*, *Bharat Mata*, *Puru-Vikram*, *Bharate Yavan* and *Beer Nari*. It is evident that one of the seminal reasons for the imposition of this Act was to halt the spread of nationalistic ideas and literature.

Although the DPA was reformed and repealed from time to time even after Independence, and in different parts of India, it continues as a residue to this day in the form of the performance license that has to be obtained before each performance, and the police permissions that accompany it. It is noteworthy that this Act has been deemed an obsolete law by the India Code Compilation of Unrepealed Central Acts 1993. The report of the committee to identify central acts, which are not relevant or no longer required in the present socio-economic context, has identified this Act as suitable for repeal. But with the high surveillance trends adopted by the current right-wing Indian government, repeal is unlikely.

What we need to do instead is to encourage the awareness of, and compliance to, rights and responsibility-bestowing acts specific to the arts, such as IPR provisions and protections, and the general laws that make artscapes safer spaces, like the Prevention of Sexual Harassment at the workplace (POSH), and the Protection of Children Acts, including the Prevention of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO). Kri Foundation and Unmute are foregrounding such issues for these contain empowering, enabling, energising and life-affirming provisions, not proscribing and prescribing legal provisions that asphyxiate art, artistry and the artist. While there are no nifty actions one can recommend, or smart instantaneous solutions, this article is intended to serve as a reinforcement of the

manner in which arts and the law repeatedly intersect and have done so for long. I hope the scope of this article will allow us to reflect on prioritising these intersections, and promoting positive and proactive positions.

◆

NOTES

1. 'Ballad of the East and West' (Rudyard Kipling)

   Oh, East is East, and West is West,
   And never the twain shall meet,
   Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great Judgment Seat;
   But there is neither East nor West,
   Border, nor Breed, nor Birth,
   When two strong men stand face to face, though they come from the ends of the earth!

2. While voluntary sex work was not illegal, running a brothel was. Therefore, the court order forbade the police from harassing sex workers while raiding a brothel.

3. https://action4justice.org/resource-bank/state-of-rajasthan-jaipur-v-balchand-india/#:~:text=About%20this%20resource%3A,repeat%20offences%20or%20intimidate%20witnesses.

4. 'Reflection' (Varavara Rao)

   I did not supply the explosives
   Nor ideas for that matter
   It was you who trod with iron heels
   Upon the anthill
   And from the trampled earth
   Sprouted the ideas of vengeance

   It was you who struck the beehive
   With your lathi
   The sound of the scattering bees
   Exploded in your shaken facade
   Blotched red with fear

   When the victory drum started beating
   In the heart of the masses
   You mistook it for a person and trained your guns
   Revolution echoed from all horizons.

   Rao was released on regular bail on 10 August by the Supreme Court.

5. https://mobile.twitter.com/thewire_in/status/1283340646724497409; https://thewire.in/rights/varavara-rao-young-poet-public-statement.

6. Ironically, he seemed to have fallen foul of conservative Muslims too. It must be remembered that in 2004 Husain also came into conflict with a Muslim group led by the Ulema Council, on the issue of a song in his 2004 film, *Meenaxi: A Tale of Three Cities*. The song '*Noor un aala Noor*' (Light of the superior kind, in Arabic),

picturised on Tabu and used to describe her beauty, was objected to by the Council, which claimed that its defining words were a phrase from the Quran in praise of Prophet Muhammad. Husain pulled the film from theatres, rather than delete the song from the film. Such was his sense of creative independence and secular open-mindedness.

7. In the trial, it appears that Reverend Long refused to divulge the name of the translator, but, according to Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, it was Michael Madhusudan Dutt who did the translation.

8. Although banned, it appeared again soon enough under a different name, *Hanuman Charitra*.

REFERENCES

Bhatia, Nandi. 2004. *Acts of Authority/Acts of Resistance: Theatre and Politics in Colonial and Postcolonial India*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Follett, Mary P. 1940. *Dynamic Administration: The Collected Papers of Mary Parker Follett*. Edited by E. M. Fox and L. Urwick. London: Pitman Publishing.

Grimes, William. 2011. 'Maqbool Fida Husain, India's Most Famous Painter Dies at 95', *The New York Times*, 9 June. https://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/10/arts/design/maqbool-fidahusain-indias-most-famous-painter-dies at 95.html?ref=deathsobituaries. Accessed on 1 September 2020.

Jain, Madhu. 1996. 'My Countrymen Don't Understand Their Own Culture: M. F. Husain', *India Today*, 31 October. https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/interview/story/19961031-people-just-like-to-interpret-things-way-they-want-to-mf-husain-833974-1996-10-31. Accessed on 19 August 2020.

Pal, Ila. 2017. *Husain: Portrait of an Artiste*. New Delhi: HarperCollins *Publishers*.

———. 1994. *Beyond the Canvas: An Unfinished Portrait of M. F. Husain*. New Delhi: Indus.

Sethi, Arshiya. 2021. 'Controversies in the Arts: From Minneapolis to Mumbai', in Atasi Nanda Goswami (ed.), *Lives and Learning: Learning to Know at the Time of Pandemic*. Bishnupur: Terracotta.

◆◆

CLASSICAL MUSIC AND THE DIVINE POWER OF YOGA

KUMUD DIWAN

For centuries immemorial, Indic thought has held that *naad brahma* (Indian classical music is called naad brahma, giving it the status of supreme power), is the divine presence, also called *param brahma* (ultimate supreme power). One can attain higher consciousness by its practice and worship. A deep immersion in naad (music and musical sound production) leads to states of harmony and ecstasy unachievable by any other human activity. The exalted bliss of mind and body that one attains by the daily living of naad brings both joy and tranquillity. According to the ancient Indian traditions of yoga, naad yoga (in which music becomes a discipline like the practice of yoga), also called *laya* yoga (classical music is said to have emanated from laya yoga, a branch of yoga), is one of the yoga methods.

Essentially, naad yoga involves the making of one's heart one with the beat or laya (musical beat). The *sadhak* (practitioner) turns inward and away from worldly external influences to seek the words within, as these internal sounds and words are naad.

There are descriptions of many types of *anhat naad* (musical sounds created without striking action and mostly focused within oneself) in *Shiv Samhita*, a Sanskrit text on yoga by an unknown author. The practitioner can hear many types of sounds at the beginning of this naad yoga exercise of looking inwards, ranging from buzzing bees, to tinkling bells and, eventually, even the thundering of skies. The practioner can hear sounds of the *vina* (an Indian string instrument used from Vedic times) and the shehnai, the sound of a gong, and, finally, the thundering of clouds.

The genesis and evolution of Indian music from the time of the Harappan civilisation to today's highly sophisticated form

has been a fascinating subject for research. Vedic recitations (1500 BC–500 BC) saw the evolution of Indian music from simple chants to the melodic system of raag (combination of certain musical notes that together create a melody) development. Our most important sources of information on the development of Indian music, dance and drama over the centuries are Sanskrit texts of yore. The *Upanishads* and *Puraans* have accounts of dance, vocal and instrumental music, and we see that music has been an important part of ancient life as a stand alone concept as well as a part of dance. The *Ramayana* (an ancient text written by Valmiki), written in the times of *jatis* (the preceding form of raag), and the *Mahabharata* (an Indian epic) have been important sources to trace the evolution of Indian music.

Through *sangeet shashtra* (texts) and *lakshan grantha* (texts describing the indicative quality and characteristics), definitions of naad, *sruti*, *swara*, raag, *taal*, *gamaka* and *prabandha* (musical sound, accuracy of fine notes, arrangement of certain musical notes, tempo or beat, decorative pattern of notes and the structure of the composition, respectively) are known to us. Important musical theories such as the time of the raag, the *gun* (good qualities) or *dosh* (limitations) of a singer and a *vaggeyakar* (composer), requirements of a performing stage, etc., have been defined. Much has been lost on account of the negligence in preserving manuscripts and their commentaries, and it is often difficult to find detailed descriptions of the systems of music prevalent in ancient India. A key resource that has inspired later musical texts is Matang Muni's *Brhaddesi*. This, too, is an incomplete text, and many chapters on taal and *vadya* (musical instruments) are missing as only one or two manuscripts were located.

The thrust of Matang Muni's book is on the word desi (common and popular taste) and the concepts of *margi* (structured and codified system of music), *nibandh* (thoughtful writing), and desi. Margi sangeet is said to be classical music, and desi sangeet popular or folk music. *Brhaddesi* refers to prabandha in Indian classical music for the first time, prior to which all music was called *gana* (singing). Thus, the starting points of Indian classical music, as it has evolved since then, are raag and prabandha, which means a set composition.

Music is a type of naad bhasha or language and naad is referred to as the soul of music. *Alankaar* (patterns of musical notes) is central to any creative and artistic genre, and Indian music, like literature,

is replete with it for higher aesthetic appeal. In fact, Bharat Muni's *Natyashashtra* mentions 33 alankaars that are musically useful. Many musical texts have been written over the ages to collate the various sounds and their musical appeal, the objectives of musical sounds, and the enhancement of these sounds to become more endearing and appealing. The oral traditions of musical sounds and notes might have been formalised over time to balance the practical side of Indian music with its conceptual parts. The constant evolution of theory and practice led to Indian music becoming extremely sophisticated and embellished. Gandharva music, which was celestial, became the basis of classical music. Bharat Muni laid down the tenets of this music in six chapters of *Natyashashtra*, based on which the music of today was developed.

Nadikeshwar Karika, *Tumburu Natakam*, *Kohaliyam*, *Dattilam*, etc., are musical texts that have further refined and developed today's classical music. Like *Brhaddesi*, which is believed to date to the 8th or 9th century, the *Sangeet Makarand* by Narad around the same time was an important musical text. It classified raag on the basis of gender (male, female and neuter). Abhinav Gupta's *Abhinav Bharati* was written around the end of the 10th century and became the inspiration for Sarangadeva's *Sangeet Ratnakar*.

The Mughal invasions in the 11th and 12th centuries impacted Indian classical music and two styles of music came into being: Hindustani and Carnatic. Sarangadeva, a great Sanskrit scholar, remarks at the beginning of *Sangeet Ratnakar* that naad is said to be brahma (supreme power and entity) by seekers and worshippers.

The practice of naad leads to naad yoga and yogic discipline. Many types and intensities of sound can be heard and experienced by the naad seeker who trains in discovering internal sounds while obliterating the external sounds of the universe. It is said that perfect practise will lead to the total immersion of the mind in listening to naad and the sounds within, and attaining a *samadhi*-like (the ultimate calm and oneness with the supreme) position or find the highest degree of self-attainment, thus experiencing oneness with the cosmos. The external *dhwani* or sounds start fading and *anahad* (limitless and celestial) sounds filter through the right ear of the practitioner or naad yogi.

Since naad yoga entails disciplined practise through body movements, our limbs and sense organs are all engaged in

discovering the sound within and to block the sounds without. Naad yoga becomes akin to yoga or physical discipline, as mentioned in ancient shastras, including Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* (a compilation of directives on yoga).

Like naad, yoga is an integral part of Indic spiritual tradition. *Yoga Sutras* by Patanjali was compiled over 2,000 years ago. A discipline with the ability to transform both mind and body, yoga is the practice of the physical, mental and spiritual syntheses of energies, leading to harmony and good health in living beings, and creates positive, healthy surroundings as well.

The word yoga is derived from the Sanskrit root *yuj*, which means to bind together. The unification of individual and universal consciousness is the aim of yoga. A practitioner can control their mind and body in a balanced manner. Like naad yoga, yoga is an ancient Indic philosophy and way of life, aiming to balance the mind and body for a more harmonious daily living experience.

The yoga tradition upholds a slightly different view from *mimansa*, s*amkhya* (other traditions of ancient knowledge) and the Grammarians. Yoga had traditionally subscribed to the presence of a Supreme Being, with yogis inspired by and wanting to emulate this being. This supreme being is signified by the syllable 'Om', and is responsive to devotion and bhakti.

The *adi naad,* or original sound, was created by the Big Bang. That original sound, symbolised by Om, is naad brahma. Patanjali describes Om (the sound of enunciation of Om) in *Yoga Sutras* as life force itself.

Om is indestructible—whatever happens, or will happen, everywhere, is Om. The past, the present and the future is Om. In naad yoga and tantric (tantra is a discipline of meditation and worship based on mantra) traditions, the word naad means the reverberating sound, the buzzing nasal sound with which Om fades.

If yogis practise devotion to Ishwara (God), then Ishwara can bring about the experience of samadhi for the practioner. Samadhi is the final emancipation and state of union with the divine. The eight-fold path of yoga (*ashtaang* yoga) believes samadhi to be the final path or goal of yogic practices.

The concept of naad brahma and naad yoga, and that of yoga as a way of life, have been part of Indic traditions for many centuries, and most ancient sages and scholars have studied and

practised these disciplines. There is indeed a profound connection between sound and yoga, and the universes of naad and yoga do converge at the common ground of sound and the attainment of samadhi through practise and meditation. The practice of yoga, as outlined in *Yoga Sutra* and commentaries by Vyasa (*Yoga Bhashya*; AD 600), Vachaspati (*Tattva Vaiṣ̲aradi*; AD 900) and Vijnana Bhikshu (*Yoga Varttika*; AD 1500), all show that the use of the sacred sound and linguistic symbols are aids in meditation. The recitation of 'Om' is a powerful connect between the worlds of naad and yoga. The recitation of the sacred sound and meditation upon it is the Patanjali way of yoga.

Ved Vyasa authored some of the most celebrated Indian texts such as the *Mahabharata*, *Shrimadbhagwat*, 18 *Purans* and 18 *Up-Purans*. He serialised and wrote 18 *Upanishads*, and much more. He was, arguably, the greatest seer and rishi of all time, and a great yogi. Vyasa helps readers understand the complex sutras of Patanjali. It is Vachaspati, however, who is helpful in deciphering Ved Vyasa's cryptic language. Vachaspati, a renowned scholar who lived in the 10th century, wrote commentaries on all six philosophical systems or *darshana* of the Indian shashtras.

Known as *sangeet*, the classical music and dances of India are rooted in the sonic and musical dimensions of *Rig Veda* (*Saam Veda*), *Upanishads* and *Agama* (ancient scriptures), and express a religious character. From time immemorial, sacred verses (mantra, *stotra* and *pad*) have been recited to the accompaniment of musical instruments, and there exists a deep connection between *shabda brahman* (word as divine entity) or naad brahma and musical sound. Ancient musical texts also hold that musical sounds are a manifestation of naad brahma. The word naad brahma appears in yogic and tantric sources, such as Agamic sources, but not in Vedic sources. Thus, there are inherent dangers in ascribing naad brahma to Vedic texts or *Saam Veda*.

It is widely accepted, though, that Indian music emanated from the chanting of *Saam Veda*. Singer–priests, known as *udgaat*, recited verses from *Rig Veda*. North Indian and south Indian music both owe their origins to *Saam Veda*, the musical version of *Rig Veda*, a fact that all musicologists dealing with the history of Indian music have noted.

Instrumental music was a part of Vedic sacrifices and the vina

or lute was the most important instrument at the time. A variety of flutes, drums and cymbals are mentioned in Vedic texts. Numerous rules about instruments were collected and compiled in *Gandharv Veda*, the *Upveda* attached to *Saam Veda*.

Naad brahma is equated with Brahma, Vishnu, Janardan (the Indian trinity), Shakti (Goddess) as well as Shiva. The following shloka says it all: naad is akin to the trinity of the Gods.

> *Naad rupah smrto brahma Naad rupo janardana*
> *Naad rupa para saktir nada rupo maheshvarah*

Sangeet Ratnakar is considered the most important treatise on Indian music and musicology. It contains an entire section on naad brahma and opens thus:

> We worship *Naad-Brahma*, that incomparable bliss which is immanent in all creatures as intelligent and is manifest in the phenomena of this universe. Indeed through the worship of *Naad-Brahman* are worshipped Gods (like) *Brahma*, *Vishnu and Shiva* since they essentially are one with it.

Sangeet Ratnakar acknowledges that all musical sound as well as dance emanates from naad brahma. Naad is the essence of vocal music, and instrumental music is enjoyable as it manifests naad. *Nritt* (dance) follows both (i.e., vocal and instrumental music) and therefore all three depend on naad. The 22 *shrutis* (subtle sounds indicating the swar or tone) of Indian music are paired with 22 *naadis* or subtle arteries in the body perceived in yoga meditation. Naad brahma is believed to be both the external source of musical sound in the cosmos as well as its internal manifestation within the human body, originating in the lower *chakra* (concept of the body comprising of circles) of kundalini yoga (a serpent coil formed at the base of the body), and gradually revealing itself through a kind of 'sympathetic string correspondence' (Beck, 2009: 110).

This establishes a common connection between the worlds of naad and yoga. Just as the yogi meditates on the chakras within the body, the musician uses the 22-shruti structure for voice production with the help of breath. It is said that 'na' of naad represents the vital force and 'da' represents fire.

> The divine sounds of the drums, cymbals, vina and flute which were enumerated in texts such as *Naadbindu Upanishad* and *Hath Yoga-Pradipika*, exhibit marked correspondences with the instruments employed in devotional music. In some styles of standing *kirtan* [genre of devotional singing], for example, there is a strong emphasis on the loud playing of the *mridang* drum and the *kartaal* [instrument played with hands and fingers to keep beat], as if, to reflect externally what the advanced *Yogi* should be perceiving internally (ibid.).

Current musical education in India establishes a connection between naad brahma and naad yoga techniques of breathing and voice production and the performance of Indian classical music, both Hindustani and Carnatic. Most musicians, Hindustani or Carnatic, believe in the sonic dimension of Hindu culture and regard naad brahma as the basis of their music.

In order to understand the deep connection between naad and yoga, the yoga *Upanishad*, which talks about the role of sacred sounds in yoga, needs to be examined. The Gorakhnath tradition of yoga, including *hatha* yoga (a school of yoga), also needs to be taken into consideration. Naad brahma meditation techniques could entail listening to seven notes, ascending and descending, played on the cello, and focus directed to the reverberations perceived in various chakras or centres of the human body as regards the intervals. Similarly, on the recitation of Om, one could be directed to listen to after sounds. Naad yoga meditation techniques were popularised by Shyama Charan Lahiri Mahasaya, the renowned *kriya* yoga master and disciple of legendary yoga master Mahavatar Babaji. Usharbudh Arya, Swami Sivananda, Swami Naad Brahmananda, Bhagwan Rajneesh, Swami Ramdev, among others, have made invaluable contributions to modernising yoga and introducing new techniques. They have popularised yoga in India as well as internationally. Each of them has evolved his own naad yoga techniques where sound plays an important part. The Upanishadic concept of Om and Brahman as *shabda* brahman has been reshaped by yogic and Agamic traditions of naad brahma and kundalini yoga (serpent power). Naad yoga, naad brahma, shabda brahman, types of yoga and their techniques, musical sounds and the evolution of classical Indian music of today from all these, point to the common connection in

the practice of both yoga and music as a way of life by reaching a common goal and end—the highest state of bliss or *parmanand*.

Yoga prescribes an eight-fold path (ashtaang yoga), much discussed by practitioners and researchers of yoga, for achieving this equilibrium. Patanjali describes yoga as 'eight limbs': 'ashta', meaning eight; and 'ang', meaning parts or limbs.

Melodious and appealing to the ear are the two criteria for sound to become naad in the musical sense. Naad bestows joy and is the basis for music. Naad leads to shruti, shruti to swar (musical note), and swar to the genesis of the raga. Naad means unexpressed sound. Naad brahma may be expressed through music.

In *Sangeet Ratnakar*, Sarangadeva declares that naad leads to varna, varna to shabda, shabda to *vakya* (sentence), and vakya defines behaviour in this world—the entire universe is subservient to naad. This naad manifests in the human body as anhat naad and *aahat* (sound created by striking) *naad*.

ANHAT NAAD

Anhat naad is said to be understood by yogis and sadhaks only and is a subject of deep knowledge. It bestows moksha or salvation, not joy. There is no strike required for anhat naad. A yogi can hear this form of naad in samadhi. The physical manifestation of anhat naad becomes aahat naad. The true spirit of naad brahma is anhat naad. Ancient sages believe that anhat naad was born of the *mooladhar* chakra (the imaginary circle of energy at the base of the hip in the human body). Anhat naad can be heard when our ears are closed with our fingers. The siddhi to be done to reach a state of anhat naad is *nadanusandhan* (research on naad). According to Shankaracharya, *Swayambhu Sadashiv* has said that when the mind has to be brought to a state of laya, then nadanusandhan helps. Thus, anhat naad has to be practised and perfected.

AAHAT NAAD

Dhwani, word and sound, is aahat naad, which can be natural or mechanical. This sound is natural in humans, birds and animals, and is mechanically produced in inanimate objects. Natural sound is used in vocal music, and the mechanical in instrumental music. Aahat naad is important to the world of music. This sound is heard through the ear and needs rubbing and striking activities to produce

musical sounds. It is also of two types: pleasing and sweet to the ear, and cacophony. Hindustani music is aahat naad.

Music is a *sadhna* (dedicated practice) much like yoga. Vocal music is perfected and practised through thorough training of *ucchwaas* or breath, and numerous exercises for the vocal chords. Attaining breath control is a yogic process.

The yoga of music entails correct posture whilst seated. The backbone is required to be straight while sitting down to sing to channelise breath all through the body. Yogic *asans* (postures), such as *sukhasan* and *padmasan*, are important for singers and musicians. Just as the chakras and kundalini are energised by yogic exercises, the energy for musical practice and rendition is derived from three places in the human body. The *mandra swar* or the lower octave emanates from the stomach, the middle notes from the lungs, and the top notes of higher octaves from the tongue on top of the neck. The *swarotpadan* (sound production) and *swaroccharan* (enunciation of swaras) take place in this manner. Sounds of Om are often produced for breath control and the control of various voice registers such as low, medium and high. Breathing exercises also aid the mastering of *kaku bhav* (voice projection) in singers.

Swar sadhna (to practise and perfect musical notes) is another way to do pranayama or *vyayam* (physical exercise), which are daily yogic practices. *Ansh kriya* (technique of kriya yog) in a sitting position has fixed directives for correct posture and handling of musical instruments while seated. If a musician is seated with his tanpura in his hand, with the tanpura resting on the floor, it is known as *veerasan mudra*. If the instrument is slanted on the lap while touching the floor, the position is known as *sukhasan*. Sitting in the *vajrasan* pose to sing was common in ancient times. For women, holding the tanpura in one's hand while keeping it slanted was half-sukhasan. All these are postures of sitting and handling musical instruments.

Yoga Vashishth holds that a mind is ready for samadhi when it has been fed on *shravan* (listening), concentrated listening to the teacher (mantra), mind made peaceful by *japa* (meditation of mantra) and hushed into blissful silence by *dhyan* (contemplation).

Lord Shiva is regarded as the ultimate Yogi. Shiva, in dialogue with his wife Parvati, gives a detailed account of yogic exercises and tantra mantra jaap, as mentioned in the *Mahanirwaan Tantra*,

an ancient tantric text translated from the Sanskrit into English by Arthur Avalon:

> O Parvati, the devotee should practise pranayama, reciting while the mula mantra or the pranava. O Parvati, pressing the left nostril with the middle finger and ring finger of the right hand, and reciting while the mula mantra for eight times he should fill up himself with air through his right nostril (44-45). Then pressing his right nostril with the thumb of his right hand he should be suspending respiration, practicing the *Yoga 'Kumbhaka'*, recite the mula Mantra for two and thirty times. He should practice *Puraka* and *kumbhaka* and *rechaka*, pressing the left nostril (2008).

The *saswar* (vocal) recitation of *Saam Veda* has a gravitas of sound that propels one naturally to the listening of the recitation and varying sound waves that emanate from this Vedic recitation. The *udgita* (recitation and singing) tradition was established precisely because of the power of the sound that is produced in the recitation of Vedic *richa* (a two to four line couplet found in Vedic literature), which is also the bedrock for classical music and raag-based gayaki. The adi naad has a dhwani symbolised by Om. Patanjali has called it *tasya vachak pranavah*, meaning Om. All of the universe is immersed in Om.

The genesis of all knowledge being the Vedas, Vedic recitations harnessed, captured and invoked the power of the universe and the heavenly trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh. The worship of the five elements (*panch mahabhoot*) also energised our sages and rishis who invoked the power of the sun.

The *Hiranya garbha* (birthplace or place of origin) shloka, central to cosmic and musical sounds, is often quoted in Vedant and other *darshan granthas* (philosophical texts). Indic thought holds that the universe was created with this primary *shrotra* (a couplet in praise of a divine entity). The supreme God was present even before the universe was created and thus ought to be worshipped. Maintaining the sanctity of the *purush* (male) and *prakriti* (nature symbolising the female) balance in the universe is its crux.

THE SCIENTIFIC ANALYSIS OF VEDIC RECITATION AND HAND GESTURES

Since the Vedas are not only the source of knowledge but also a way of life, Vedic hymns and recitations, viz., the *Rig Veda* richa chanted

by our ancient seers and *Saam* (hymns sung from *Rig Veda*), became precursors of classical music. Naad and swar became a single entity. There is a deep scientific connection between the throw of words and projection of voice while reciting Vedic mantras, and the movements of hands during recitation. The movements of Vedic recitation have been scientifically experimented with since time immemorial in the Vedic laboratory of our sages. The dimensions of *udatt*, *anudatt* and *swarit* (high, low and medium notes) swaras are expressions of naad being rotated in Vedic swaras.

This is the science of the Vedas applied to yoga, to naad, and to the very music. The Vedic *prayogashala* or Vedic laboratory innovated and perfected the best way to reach the supreme deity. It craved blessings and energy from the cosmos, and dhwani and the human voice were powerful tools in this celestial dialogue.

Music is a divine blessing and it is through music that a musician endeavours to offer petals of devotion to the great sources of energy—sun and moon, ether and wind, fire and water. Our naad should cajole and entice Krishna with his magical flute-like renditions to allow us to revel in an eternal Vrindavan of harmonics, as in Mahakavi (poet) Jaidev's *Geeta Govind*. A naad yogi and musician should offer to Lord Shiva, adi Yogi and Nataraj of Mahakavi Kalidas' *Kumar Sambhavam* with his resounding naad from the *damroo* (percussion instrument), the offerings of music and the discipline of Yoga to attain *sat-chit-anand* = *Sacchidanand* (true and eternal bliss and happiness).

◆

REFERENCES

Avalon, Arthur. 2008 [1913]. *Mahanirvana Tantra: Tantra of the Great Liberation*. Kindle Edition.

Beck, Guy L. 2009. *Sonic Theology: Hinduism and Sacred Sound*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press.

◆◆

CREATING 'UGLY' BEAUTY

Tracing and Delineating *Bibhatsa Rasa* in Kathak*

SUNIL SUNKARA

INTRODUCTION

The journey of Kathak dance begins with first imbibing the āngika (movement vocabulary) of the dance into the body or the *sthul sharira* (gross body), which connects with *sagun sākara* (both quality and form). The next step is the transference of the effects of these movements into physiological inner space or *sukshma sharira* (subtle body), which connects with *sagun nirakāra* (with quality, but no form). This then transfers to the *kārana sharira* (causal body), eventually becoming *nirgun nirakāra* (that which has no form or quality). The impressions absorbed in this formless space within us is an intangible imprint (*sanskār*) that can best be described as *bhaav* (Sunkara, 2019a).

Figure 1. Intangible imprint of *Bhaav*

In his book *Ekadash Natyasangraha Aur Prayoktagan*, Puru Dadheech presents a few lines written by Benikruta in *Navarasa Tarang* on the interrelation between *rasa* (universal sentiments experienced by the spectator) and the emotional landscape employed by the artiste—bhaav (1988: 45):

Sthayi Ras Ko Mool Hai, Atal Roop Tehi Jaan
Prati Ras Ik Ik Hota Hai, Kahahi Sukavi Gunavaan
Ya Ras Ko Thayi Ju Hai, Tahi Ras Mein Hota
Achal Sada Vhai Jaat, Ras Thai Bhaav Udot

The sthayibhaav (durable psychological state) is the starting point of the rasa, and it is present in permanence
Each rasa has its own unique sthayibhaav, says the auspicious and learned poet
The sthayibhaav is unique to the rasa, and is its central ingredient
When the sthayibhaav manifests, it transforms into the rasa

The sentiments (rasa) are imbued with a quality of universality (*yortho hridayasanvadi tasya bhavo rasodbhava*) (Ghosh, 2006). Rasa is both the source as well as the outcome of any artistic creation. While understanding the stylisations in various Indian art forms, one must keep in mind that the parameter by which the aspect of realism in an art form is judged is based on the quality of the rasa experience by the spectator. Thus, whether a portrayal is close to life is not decided on the basis of its tangible similarities to reality, but by the ability of that piece of art to invoke sentiment in the observer. This is how a viewer can observe such tangibly different art forms as Kathakali and Kathak, but leave the performance with '*rasa-swada*', or enjoyment of the same rasa (Sunkara, 2019a).

While Bharata describes eight rasas in the Nāṭyaśāstra, Abhinavagupta, in 11 CE, consolidates the addition of the ninth rasa—*shanta* (state of peacefulness or tranquility). Rūpa Gosvāmī further expands these to 12 in his elaboration of bhakti rasa. Many shlokas from the Ramayana transcended from *kathavachaks*[1] (storytellers) into proscenium Kathak through the teachings of the *gharanedaar* (hereditary) Gurus of the Awadh Kathak *parampara* (tradition) (Sunkara, 2019b). A Sanskrit shloka depicting the *navarasas* (nine rasas), as experienced by Lord Ram, was an iconic

piece performed by Pt. Birju Maharaj in solo concerts (Kothari, 1990: 30): *shringāram kshiti nandini virahane* (looking at Sita with love); *viramdhanurbhanjane* (heroic, when breaking the bow to marry Sita); *karunyam balibhojane* (pity and compassion at the burning of Kakasura, the demon who attacked Sita); *hasyam shurpanakhamukhe* (laughter at Shurpanakha's attempt to entice him); *bibhatsamanyamukhe* (disgust at the other woman's approach); *adbhutam sindhaugiristhapane* (wonderment at the monkeys building the bridge on the ocean); *raudram ravanamardane* (furious at killing Ravana); *bhayamaghe* (fear at the approach of sin); and *munijane shantam* (quietude while offering prayer to the sages).

The variegated and multifarious nature of rasa embraces not only that which is apparently beautiful, sweet or attractive, but subsists equally on whatever terrorises, is hideous or ugly and disturbs us, leading to abhorrence and loathing. The masters of rasa theory cite the Mahabharata as an example, as it has an ending completely devoid of rasa (*virasavasana*), leaving the readers in a state of *vimanaskataa* (a mind uprooted from everywhere, dismay). It is a state where we stand in aversion, sickened by our own emotions (Tripathi, 2016). But the ending that is devoid of rasa leads to fountains of real rasa. It leads to the other aspect of rasa discourse, where the concept of ugly, however disturbing and complicated, is taken up for the creation of aesthetic theory. Bharata Muni, therefore, counts the odious and repulsive *bibhatsa* (odious sentiment) as a *moola* (fundamental) rasa (ibid.).

According to the Nāṭyaśāstra, *jugupsa* (disgust) is the sthayibhaav of bibhatsa. The *vibhaav* or determinants of jugupsa are hearing and seeing of unpleasant things. The *anubhaav* or consequents are the contraction of limbs, spitting, vomiting, narrowing of the mouth, heartache, and the like (Ghosh, 2006). For example, a dead rat on the road would be the *alambana* vibhaav or primary determinant of jugupsa. Seeing a crow tear the rat open, spilling its organs on the street, would be the *uddipana* vibhaav or excitant, which would manifest in bodily reactions (Sunkara, 2019a). Bibhatsa is said to be of two kinds: *kshobhaja* (born of anguish) and *udvegi* (generated by uneasiness which could be nauseating or triggering). Kshobhaja is also known as *shuddha* (pure) bibhatsa, while udvegi is known as *ashuddha* (impure) bibhatsa (Purecha, 2016: 355). There are very few such descriptive examples that bring to the fore imageries and delineation of bibhatsa rasa.

In his 2020 lecture series on Kathak Shastra, Dadheech observed that within the Kathak tradition, bibhatsa rasa is least explored. Often, dancers just touch upon the ugly sentiment in passing, not liking to delve into it. The Kathak that is performed today is greatly influenced by the royal darbar where, primarily, *shringaar* (shades of love) was the dominant rasa. The Bhakti movement took this a step further by connecting shringaar to the ultimate emotion of liberation (Sharma, 2015). This made the use of bibhatsa a less-sought, prickly approach mostly relegated to academic discussion or pedantic examination. Therefore, there is a need to trace the use of bibhatsa rasa in Kathak, as well as call attention to an approach that could be used by dancers today while retaining aspects of beauty and entertainment.

TRACING BIBHATSA RASA IN KATHAK

In the evolution of Kathak, a watershed century is marked by the Vishnu Dharmottara Purana where the role of the *kathaka* (the dance/storyteller) has expanded to include aspects of, or enjoyment of, a viewer other than the self or the divine. We see for the first time that the dance of the kathaka starts to take the shape of a profession between 450 and 650 AD (Shah, 1928), and the dance of Bharata's era gives way to newer interpretations. The Nṛttasutram of Vishnu Dharmottara Purāna, chapter 11, shloka 26, describes attributes of bibhatsa (Dadheech, 1990: 93).

> *jugupsayā ca bhavati bībhatsya samudbhāva:*
> *nāsā vikunaṇātasya covda gena tathaiva ca*
>
> *Jugupsa is the source of bibhatsa rasa. Scrunching of the nose is typically an involuntary reaction by the body while a strange, yet exciting agitation grips the mind in both the experience and delineation of this sentiment* (ibid.).

The Nṛttasutram gives narrow scope to this sentiment in comparison to the Nāṭyaśāstra and seems to focus more on outward delineation. Agrawal, et al. (2020: 87), in their Hindi translation of the mid-13th century text Bhāvaprakāśanam, written by Śāradātanaya, clearly highlight the two bifurcations of bibhatsa, as proposed by Bharata. Spontaneous *kshobhajatma* (feeling of kshobhaja) is produced by the

sight and touch of blood, intestines, etc. The sight of worms, vomit, pus, excretions, etc., causes uneasy *udvegatma* (udvegi emotions). Malice, guilt, fear, fascination, anger, stupor, confusion and pity are the transient emotions that arise along with the stable emotion of disgust. Revisiting Bharata's description—*bhibhatsha kshobhaja shuddha udvegi syat tritiyaka, vishtakrumibhirudvegi kshobhajo rudhiradheej*—we see similar descriptions for kshobhajatma and udvegatma. The unique usage of the word shuddha has been elaborated upon by Abhinavagupta who propounded that kshobhajatma, being born of anguish, would lead to disillusionment and, ultimately, to liberation (moksha).

In his discussion on the aesthetic experience according to Abhinavagupta, Raniero Gnoli connects the mental states of permanent nature to consciousness: 'Indeed every creature from its birth possesses these nine forms of consciousness' (2015: 74). Based on the principle that all beings hate to be in contact with pain and are eager to taste pleasure, there is a simultaneous possibility of being overcome by a sense of revulsion directed towards the ugly object (disgust), while being desirous of abandoning certain things to move towards serenity. Through the aesthetics of bibhatsa rasa, the spectator undergoes the experiences of anguish and disgust which will liberate him from the mundane and the earthly (Sunkara, 2019b). Therefore, Abhinavagupta suggests that the experience of bibhatsa rasa would lead to shanta and salvation.

Through the Bhakti movement in India, to which the *raasdhari* (stagings of the Krishna raas-lila) antecedent of today's proscenium Kathak is deeply connected, we arrive at the locus standi of the idea of bhakti as a rasa classified into 12 forms (Sharma, 2015). The five primary bhakti-rasas are shanta-bhakti-rasā, priti-bhakti-rasa, preyān-bhakti-rasa, vatsalya-bhakti-rasa and madhur-bhakti-rasa. The seven secondary bhakti-rasas are hāsya-bhakti-rasa, adbhuta-bhakti-rasa, virā-bhakti-rasa, karuṇā-bhakti-rasa, raudrā-bhakti-rasa, bhayānaka-bhakti-rasa and bibhatsā-bhakti-rasa. There was a transference of this aspect of *mokshatva* (salvation) into the Kathak tradition that came to be known as the idea of *shuddha sattva*. This further consolidated the concept of bibhatsa being presented in Kathak, in tandem with moksha.

In recent times, Dadheech has composed a *kavitt* (poem set to a metrical pattern) based on the various lilas of Krishna,

encompassing narratives where the sthayibhaav of each narrative correspondingly creates the navarasas. The various narratives surrounding Krishna have been artfully interwoven. In his exploits with the beautifully adorned Radha, Krishna himself becomes an adornment of love, creating shringāra (*Radha ju sangh kar vihar sringaar sajayo*). While stealing butter and enjoying the spoils with his friends, he makes them laugh with joy at his butter-smeared face (*makhan mukha laptayo sakha sangh hāsya janaayo*). But, on the other hand, while dancing on the hood of the serpent Kaliya, he is seen as the epitome of bravery and courage (*kaliya phan pe tandav kar ras veer bataayo*) when he rescues the entire village by holding up Govardhan on his little finger through many days of rainfall, an experience of absolute wonder (*Govardhan dharan kar, adbhut ras darshaayo*). Stealing the clothes of *gopis* (milkmaids) bathing in the river, he makes them aware of mortality as well as bibhatsa of the clothes of flesh that mask consciousness (*cheerharan kar gopina ke bibhatsa bataayo*). Killing the fierce demoness Putana while still an infant, he instils fear in the hearts of other demons (*kari Putana vadh, asuran mann bhaya sarsaayo*), while his unbridled, yet just, anger is released on Kans and other wrestlers Chanur-Mushtik (*Chanur-Mushtik Kans marike raudra janaayo*). But having left Vrindavan to go to Mathura, he riddles the hearts of the gopis with sorrow (*aur chado Vrindavan, gopika ke mann karun basaayo*). Immersing oneself in his song the Bhagwat Gita brings peace to the seeker (*gahi Gita ko dhyan, munimann shant samaayo*), and thus, through his various lilas exposes us to every emotion and yet makes us enjoy every sentiment that the dance of life offers (*yuh lila dhar natwar ne, navras kar dikhlaayo*).

Thus, through the focal point of Krishna, each of the rasas could be explored. The episode of the gopi cheerharan metaphorically connects to shedding of the body, a thought echoed in numerous poems of Surdas and Kabir. This is a different shade of bibhatsa where the object is itself not disgusting, but becomes so through context and perception. There is also great scope for new material to be written to further explore this intriguing ugly–peaceful aesthetic.

BIBHATSA RASA IN KATHAK SWA-SAHITYA

Dadheech describes the concept of shuddha sattva, as found in Kathak parampara, through the depiction of *shuddha-bibhatsa*, i.e., that

which leads to the path of liberation. Hence, the *auchitya* of bhava, or propriety in Kathak, is to show the bibhatsa arising out of kshobhaja. The intra-form *parmelu*[2] was first found in *rasadhari* parampara, from which evolved the darbar form of Kathak (Sunkara, 2019a). In the words of Pt. Birju Maharaj, parmelu bols are the ones that connect with spirituality. Thus, it is noteworthy that Dadheech has composed a kavitt, based on bibhatsa rasa, based on the traditional rasadhari parmelu bol, *tat tat ta draga dan dan*. He bases it on the scene of battle between Ram and Ravana in Lanka (Deo, 2010: 143).

Tat Tat Tan Ko Guman, Ta Na Tu Kar Ajaan
Driga Lakh Yeh Rakta Maansa Majja Ki Dheri Hain
Dan Dan Din Ek Eha, Nocha Khaiyhe Cheel Kaaga
Jhijajhijakata Na Jarat Chita, Laage Kachu Deri Hain
Tho Thudanga Simati Ang, Naak Bhoha Ko Chadhaye
Mukh Pheri Kari Hi Ghina, Teri Piya Cheri Hain
Tak Thuna Thun Meri Sun, Toda Sakal Moha Jaal
Raghubar Ko Dharahu Dhyan, Shesh Jagat Bairi Hai

O Ignorant one, your body is nothing but pure ego
Look around you on the battlefield, the piles of blood, fat and bones
The precious body is pecked upon by eagles, vultures and crows
The funeral pyres die out snuffed out by the accumulating bodies
Amongst this she walks, constricting her body, clenching her nostrils
She who was your beloved, now looks upon your corpse with disgust
Break the bonds of this illusion, the tenuous ties of ego
Meditate in your last moments upon Raghuveer Ram, as the rest of the world cannot save that which is precious—your soul.

Wars have been a recurring theme in literature in the depiction of bibhatsa. A traditional *sadra* (vocal genre in Hindustani music) written by Bindadin Maharaj (*shesh phan dagmagyo*) highlights this aspect in the stanza *chalata shara, ladata bhara, katata binu munda bhaye, shrunita sarita* chale (as the war progresses, the battlefield is decorated with severed heads and rivulets of blood stain the sands of Lanka) (Maharaj, 1990: 30). The composition further describes Mandodari, Ravana's wife, observing the battle, which leads her to believe that her side would lose the war (*jeet na sakoge, ram sangh jangjhor*).

While all the eight *sattvikabhaav* (involuntary states)—*stambha* (paralysis), *pralaya* (fainting), *romāñca* (horripilation), *sveda* (sweating), *vaivarṇya* (change of colour), *vepathu* (trembling), *aśru* (weeping), *vaisvarya* (change of voice)—can manifest in the development of bibhatsa, the complimentary psychological states or *vyabhicharis* that are prominent are the epileptic fit (*apasmaara*), delusion or distraction (*moha*), weakness (*glaani*) because of sickness, agitation (*avega*) on hearing bad news, and death (*marana*). A few of these are depicted in the lines that follow, based on the episode of Sanjay's narration of Duryodhana's death on the battlefield. Dhritrashtra is struck by an epileptic fit, while Gandhari overcomes her weakness and rushes to the battlefield.

Sunkar Vachan Sanjay Ka, Andhe Ankho Mein Basa Apasmaar
Kurukshetra Ke Bhoot Pisaacha, Bane Ghrunit Darbaari Aaj.
Pralayavastha Murchit Naresh, Ati-Glaani Pravishya Kuru-Rani Dwaar,
Kaise Tuuta Woh Vajra Shareer, Kya Maran Bana Hain Bhram Aaj?

Listening to the fateful words spoken by Sanjay, blind eyes turned epileptic
The ghosts and demons of Kurukshetra became newfound courtiers
The king fainted as if never to recover, the queen tried to fight debilitating weakness that overcame her
Is it a curse or a delusion that a diamantine body be broken?

...

Avega Ko Rath Banakar, Chali Gandhari Chita-Bhoomi Oor
Rangbhoomi Par Dhoond Rahi, Apne Putro Ke Shavamurthy Har Choor.
Achanak Yeh Ehsaas Hua, Bhutal Nahi, Hai Yah Kankal-Tal?
Khadi Hu Main Aaj Yahan, Apne Putra Ke Kankal Par!

Flying on the wings of agitation, Gandhari travelled towards the battlefield of dead bodies
She searched on that war-stage, the lifeless forms of her children
Suddenly she realised, it is not the ground but a carpet of bones
She stands today on the skeleton of her Son!

...

Ati-Jugupsa Se Ghiri, Koose Apne Andhe Maatritva Ko
Rakt Rupi Ashru Bahe, Vatsalya Dhare Ati-Krodh Ko.
Mata Ke Ashruo Se, Suneel Nabh Par Chaya Andhakaar Yaun

Bibhatsa Roop Dhare Janani, Nahi Rahi Gandhari Woh, Nahi Rahi Gandhari Woh

…

Overcome with self-disgust, she curses her blind motherhood
Blood like tears flow from her eyes, her motherhood devoured by unfiltered anger
The tears that rained from her eyes, turned the bright blue sky pitch black
She becomes an embodiment of disgust, leaving behind her identity as Gandhari…

Another kavitt by Bharatendu has been documented by Pt. Teerathram Azad (2015: 577):

Kahu Sulagata Kou Chita, Kahu Kou Jaati Bujhayee
Ek Lagayi Jaat, Ek Ki Rakh Bahayee.
Vividh Rang Ki Uthati Jwal, Urgandhini Mahakati
Kahu Charabi So Chatachati, Kahu Deha Deha Dahakati
Kahu Shringaal Kou Mrutal Aang Par Ghaat Lagavat
Kahu Kou Shava Par Baithi Giddha Chata Chonch Chalavat

Some burning pyres, some extinguishing
One pyre just being lighted, one turning to ashes
Each fire has a character of its own, a smell of its own
In some places the melting of flesh, in some the burning of bodies
Jackals and hyenas tear at the remains of some bodies
While vultures feast on the remains of others

In this kavitt, designed from the spectator's perspective, the cremation ground is the alambana vibhaav. The burning of bodies, the half-burnt pyres, the smells, the melting fat, the vultures eating the bodies, etc., are the uddipana vibhaavas. The constricting of the nose and weakness in the body are the anubhaava which can be shown through use of vyabhicharis like *vishada* (despair), *trasa* (fright), *moha* (delusion), *chinta* (anxiety), etc.

A recent kavitt [Figure 2], created by Gayatri Bhat (2021), depicts the scene on the battlefield of Kalinga where Ashoka is filled with disgust at his own war-lust, and thirst for power and glory. Against this imagery, the sound of Buddhist monks chanting *Buddham Sharanam Gacchami* creates a paradigm shift within him,

taking him on the path of peace and thus changing the course of history. The lyrics of the kavitt are as follows:

Mahabhayankar Samrangan Ki, Ranabhoomi Ya Nadi Lahu Ki
Bijali Jaise Khadag Chamakte, Lal Lal Ye Boond Tapakte
Deha Kate Hain Chinna Chinna, Nirdayitaka Naag Kabhinna
Maanke Upar Hua Yeh Haavi, Kaam Krodh Rakshas Maayavi
Chakravarti Banane Ki Bhook, Narsanhaar Kare Ye Bhoop
Param Neechata Ka Yeh Krodh Kaaran Bana, Ashok Maurya
Chata Chata Chata Jali Chitaye, Analashikha Bani Hawaein
Dekhkar Yeh Bheeshanta, Hridda Hua Devapriyata
Buddham Sharanam Gacchami, Dhamma Ki Sunkar Vaani
Shastra Chodi Uske Paani, Seh Na Saka Sekado Shaap
Thana Ab Dhounga Paap, Dhamma Ki Diksha Basi Chitta
Parityag Prayashchit, Buddham Sharanam Gacchami
Dhammam Sharanam Gacchami, Sangham Sharanam Gacchami

A terrible cavalry trampling the battlefield, soon converted into a blood-filled swamp
Swords flash like quick lightning, a heavy rain of blood pours on the battlefield
Bodies are hacked to pieces, the serpent of cruelty having reared its hood
Each mind overtaken by the demon of anger and blood-lust
With a thirst to become ruler of the world, he felled every human that came his way
Setting aside all rules of war, Ashok Maurya became a king of atrocity
Dead bodies burned continuously for days, the air filled with toxic gases
Seeing this sight of gory, he stopped for a moment to think
Suddenly a sweet melody wafted through—Buddham Sharanam Gacchami
Weapons dropped from his hands, as the weight of a thousand curses crashed upon him
'I will wash away my sins, I will follow the path of Dhamma', he resolved
Penance and Peace will be the new way, Buddham Sharanam Gacchami
Dhammam Sharanam Gacchami, Sangham Sharanam Gacchami

Similarly, exploring the vast sources of *pauranic* (from the Puranas) and folk narratives brings forth a number of such stories that can be explored through suitable literature for Kathak. There is scope

Figure 2: *Samrat Ashok Kavitt*

too for new works to be created along these lines. An aspect that has not been explored in depth is the use of vyabhichari bhaav within the concept of bibhatsa. Typically, the pieces performed by Kathak dancers for the ugly aesthetic are very short in length, not giving them scope to delve into the elaborate and intricate aspects of bibhatsa. This is another research area that can be explored, both through theory and praxis within the topic of bibhatsa rasa and Kathak.

CONCLUSION

Within the theme of bibhatsa rasa and Kathak, the first objective explored was tracing the evolution of bibhatsa rasa with respect to Kathak. This was studied by taking three main texts from varying time periods, beginning with Bharata's perspective, followed by that of Markandeya in the 6th century AD and Śāradātanaya in

the mid-13th century AD. The influence of the Bhakti movement was significant in developing current philosophy in Kathak with regard to the delineation of this rasa. Within the parameters of rasa discourse, the concept of ugly, however disturbing and complicated, can be used for creating aesthetic theory, especially in tandem with the principles of liberation, thus making it essential for the Kathak community to study these aspects of bibhatsa in greater detail so as to create 'ugly' beauty.

◆

*Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are by Sunil Sunkara.

NOTES

1. *Kathaka* and *kathavachak* are homologues in a sense. During the medieval period, kathavachaks separated into those who only narrate (who today retain the name kathavachak) and those who dance as well as narrate (kathaka). Yet, in a number of texts, one will find these terms used interchangeably.
2. *Parmelu* are metrical rhythmic compositions created by blending echomimetic syllables inspired from sounds in nature: e.g., 'kuku' or the call of the Nightingale; 'jhanak jhanak' or the sound of ankle bells; and echomimetic syllables resonating with sounds emanating from the *pakhawaj* drum (e.g., *tharikita*, *dhumakita*) and *naach ke bol* or syllables of Kathak dance like *ta, thei* and *tat*.

REFERENCES

Agrawal, Madan Mohan, Rasik Vihari Joshi and Ram Suresh Tripathi. 2020. *Bhāvaprakāśanam of* Śāradātanaya. Varanasi: Chaukhamba Surbharati Prakashan.

Azad, Pt. Teerathram. 2015. *Kathak Gyaneshwari*. Delhi: Nateshwar Kala Mandir.

Bhat, Gayatri. 2021 (May). *Kavittmala*. Pune: Archives of Ishawasya Gurukul.

Dadheech, Puru. 1990. *Nṛttasutram*. Indore: Bindu Prakshan.

———. 1988. *Ekadash Natyasangraha aur Prayoktagan*. Bhopal: Madhya Pradesh Hindi Granth Academy.

Deo, Manjiri. 2010. *Kathak Nrityamein Kavitt Chand*. Thane: Shriganesh Nritya Kala Mandir.

Ghosh, Manmohan. 2006. *Natyashastra of Bharatamuni with Text, Commentary of Abhinavabharati by Abhinavaguptacharya and English Translation, vol 1*. Delhi: New Bharatiya Book Corporation, 116–18.

Gnoli, Raniero. 2015. *The Aesthetic Experience According to Abhinavagupta*. Varanasi: Chowkhambha Sanskrit Series.

Kothari, Sunil.1990. *Kathak: A Classical Dance Art*. Pune: Abhinav Publications.

Maharaj, Birju. 1990. *Ras Gunjan*. Delhi: Popular Prakashan.

Purecha, Sandhya. 2016. *Natyashastra*. Mumbai: Maharashtra Rajya Sahitya Ani Sanskruti Mandal.

Shah, Priyabala. 1928. *Shri Vishnudharmottara*. Ahmedabad: The New Order Book Company, 132–34.

Sharma, Krishna. 2015. *Bhakti and the Bhakti Movement: A New Perspective*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 283–89.

Sunkara, Sunil. 2019a. 'Literature as Element of Spiritual Communication in Awadh Kathak Parampara'. March. http://indiafacts.org/literature-and-language-as-the-elements-of-spiritual-communication-in-awadh-kathak-parampara/.

———. 2019b. 'Resonating in Rasa'. August. https://narthaki.com/info/prism/prism7.html.

Tripathi, Radhvallabh. 2016. *Vaada in Theory and Practice*. Shimla and Delhi: Indian Institute of Advanced Study and DK Printworld, 252–53.

◆◆

RASHEED HASAN KHAN

Guardian of Classical Urdu Tradition

MEENAKSHI JAUHARI

December 2022 will mark the 97th birth anniversary of one of the most influential scholars of modern Urdu *adab*—Rasheed Hasan Khan. Literary critic, researcher, philologist and scholar, his rich legacy endures even as stories of him 'offending' contemporaries abound.

Rasheed Hasan Khan's date of birth is not certain. According to educational records, he was born in Shahjahanpur, Uttar Pradesh, in January 1930. In an autobiographical piece written for the 2002 edition of *Bazyaft* (Lahore), however, he gives his birthdate as December 1925.

His father Amir Hasan Khan was conservative in outlook, and Rasheed Khan was given a traditional education in a madrassa, where he learnt Arabic and Farsi. When the Second World War broke out, the ordnance factory in Shahjahanpur began recruitment to increase production for the war. His family's financial condition was precarious, and toward the end of 1939 a young Rasheed Khan took up employment in the factory as an ordinary worker. A few years later, the factory workers' union announced the factory's first hartal. The strike lasted for a full 34 days. Rasheed Khan was then joint secretary of the union. He paid the price when, after the end of the war, he was fired along with other union workers who had struck work.

His tenure at the ordnance factory did not come in the way of his education and passion for reading. It is said that Rasheed Khan would bring volumes of *Tilism-e-hoshruba* with him to the factory, and read during the half-hour break between the night shift, ending at 6 a.m., and the first day shift. This way, he went through the entire volume set of *Tilism-e-hoshruba* twice over.

In 1959, Rasheed Khan joined Delhi University, and later the Urdu department as a researcher. He retired from Delhi University in December 1989. Khan did not have a university degree, per se. Regardless, he was invited to premier Indian universities to deliver lectures and talks, and as an examiner for MA and PhD candidates.

His awe-inspiring output might create the impression that Khan was all work—a serious and perhaps dull person to know. But scholars who have known him disagree. Aslam Parvez asserts that Khan was a 'normal person'. While being 'old-fashioned' in some respects and exercising strict discipline in daily life, he still made time for outings with friends, recreation, and even had a pleasant interest in sports. He frequently went to the Ambedkar and Shivaji stadiums to watch football and hockey matches.

Rasheed Khan spent more than three decades at Delhi University's Gwyer Hall, the oldest men's hostel in the university, and was a common figure at the Delhi School of Economics' coffee house and the Urdu Department.

STANDING FOR FACTS AND THE BARE TRUTH

Aslam Parvez addresses Rasheed Khan as the '*amiin* (custodian) of the Urdu tradition'. And, indeed, today we know Rasheed Hasan Khan as a pre-eminent scholar–editor and researcher who remains the touchstone for Urdu orthography in the subcontinent, and whose depth of critical analysis and understanding are mirrored in the classical texts he restored.

Ather Farouqui elucidates in his Preface to *Rasheed Hasan Khan: ShaKHsiyat aur adabi KHidmaat*:

> His work is proof of two singular aspects of literary research. One, for a successful researcher, it is not enough to have knowledge; one also needs to have the appropriate attitude to perform meaningful research. There are scholars and scholars, but it's not at all necessary that every scholar will have the ability or propensity for research. Rasheed Hasan Khan was a scholar of Urdu, Farsi and Arabic, and at the same time, his deep commitment to research is in plain evidence in his commentaries. Two, the researcher should have the ability to dispassionately examine facts, shake them up to check if they stand up to scrutiny, and then, without any inhibition or hesitation, place his findings in the public domain (2002: 5).

Rasheed Khan did not merely broaden the scope of Urdu literary research to include language and orthography, but his insightful and innovative approach shifted the paradigm of Urdu orthography in subtle but significant ways, helping to bring the language closer to the modern reader. For instance, when, through his work on Urdu orthography, *Urdu Imla,* he discouraged the old practice of joining single- or two-syllable words, Urdu writers began to consistently separate words like '*ke liye*', '*is liye*', '*un ka*', and so on. For compound words, he introduced the convention of writing them separately, whereas earlier there was no convention at all, and so, words were joined together or written separately, in keeping with the writer's preference. Examples include compound words such as '*mai-KHana*', '*dil-kashi*', '*dast-varzi*'. His other works comprise *Classiki adab ki farhang*, *Mustalahat-i-thugii*, *Zabaan aur qavaed*, *Insha-i-Ghalib* and *Imla-i-Ghalib*. His book *Adabi tehqeeq: masaael aur tajziya* is a practical guide for every researcher of Urdu.

Over the years, Khan earned a formidable reputation, and sometimes the displeasure of a section of his peers. In fact, he was feared in academic circles because he was not afraid to speak his mind and did not hesitate to point out flaws and errors in the works of contemporaries, no matter how famous. He paid for his unabashed straightforward manner, but at no point was he willing to compromise on his high standards.

One of Rasheed Khan's greatest assets—especially when seen through the lens of the modern Urdu reader—is his simple and direct style of writing. He employs a vocabulary that the present-day Urdu reader can grasp, and articulates his insights in crisp, precise fashion.

Aslam Parvez states:

> Although literary research has a direct connection with classical literature, it does not mean that the language and expression should be flowery in the same manner as seen in classical works like *Sehr-ul bayan*, *Gulzaar-e-naseem*, *Fasana-e-ajaib* and *Bagh-o-bahar*. The language of literary research should be plain, direct, a simple documentation (ibid.: 37).

This was Rasheed Khan's style exactly.

In a recent development, Khan's voluminous correspondence with renowned Pakistani scholar, Mushfiq Khwaja (1935–2005),

starting from the early 1960s and well into their final years, has been published in a volume titled *Silsila-i-Mukatabat: Rasheed Hasan Khan aur Mushfiq Khwaja ki do tarfa murasalat* (Parekh, 2022).

RASHEED KHAN'S REPRODUCTION OF CLASSICAL TEXTS

When reproducing a classical Urdu text that was written in the 19th or early 20th century, the editor is, in effect, standing in for the absent author. The editor analyses, restores and arranges the text in the most appropriate way, frequently from multiple previous editions. The editor's objective: to bring the work closest to what the author originally intended. Whether emendations in the text and revisions to correct errors that have crept in through repeated reprintings; or ensuring orthographic consistency for the ease of the contemporary reader; or annotating to enlarge upon context, archaic phrases and forms; or simply smoothening subtle aspects of the text that defy elucidation and that still require painstaking attention and an almost-obsessive dedication—the editor does all of this, and more. Therefore, the editor becomes an invaluable medium for the reader, as the latter sets foot in the tilism of a hitherto unseen world.

Rasheed Khan was such an editor—he brought perfection to the art and craft of restoring and reproducing classical Urdu texts. Researching, critically reviewing and validating prior editions and sources, and finally collating the most appropriate text—the entire process was torturous, and often meandered through several years for each text he took in hand.

For a modern translator of Urdu classics, Khan's restored texts are like a lighthouse. Add to it his annotated Preface (*muqaddama*), packed with insights and abundant contextual information, none of which needs to be fact-checked or verified again. It lies in the translator's hands—how to utilise all of the information, and how to present it, so that the story from a different world is consumable by present-day audiences.

In *Dehli ka aaKHri mushaira*, first published as an essay in 1927, Mirza Farhatullah Baig describes a mushaira (2015a). In 1991, Rasheed Khan put together the *aaKHri mushaira* text for the Anjuman Taraqqi Urdu (Hind) (ibid.). In his Preface to this edition, Khan takes the reader behind the scenes, dwelling upon and explicating in simple words Baig's motivation and cues for the cues depiction of a royal mushaira in all its magnificent detail.

Rasheed Khan introduces the multi-faceted Baig as well as his abiding connection with Delhi in the earliest decades of the 20th century. Detailed notes on the internal workings of Baig's mind, the historical facts that Khan validated, and then the creative story layer Baig laid upon these facts—he describes all of this in clean, unvarnished prose.

Rasheed Khan's Preface to another popular text by Baig, *Dr. Nazeer Ahmad ki kahani, kuchh meri kuchh unki zubaani*, is equally educative (2015b). He provides a wide-angled view of a bygone era; thereafter, he dwells on the personality of Deputy Nazeer Ahmad, an intellectual heavyweight, and his highly idiomatic style of writing. He even pokes fun at the quintessential Delhi *maulvi* (learned teacher or doctor of Islamic law) of the time, with his pompous and somewhat puzzling practice of injecting Arabic and Farsi words in everyday speech. Again, for a reader (and translator), Khan's mediation puts the biographical sketch in perspective, thus setting the stage for a truly rewarding read.

If we are to talk of Rasheed Khan's work with classical Urdu texts, it is impossible to exclude his reproduction of, and his muqaddama for, the 19th-century classic, *Fasana-e-ajaib,* by Rajab Ali Beg Suroor (1990). A vastly popular work originating in Lucknow, it has remained in continuous publication during the author's lifetime and even afterwards.

Suroor is widely regarded as an early representative of the 'new Lucknow *adab*'. *Fasana* is in the genre of '*muKHtsar dastaan*' (a short dastaan), and Khan's Preface is a masterclass on how to re-present an Urdu classic to the modern reader. *Fasana* is not just a dastaan or a *qissa*, Rasheed Khan asserts, but the '*nuqta-e-aaghaaz*' or the start of a literary tradition. He expends considerable effort in enlarging the orthography, the importance of proper pronunciation, and the use of symbols and diacriticals for a more precise presentation using detailed annotations or footnotes to guide the reader.

Rasheed Khan explains in his muqaddama to *Fasana-e-ajaib*, '…. Use of certain phrases is completely different now. It is the responsibility of the editor to be so familiar with the period and author, so as to be able to anticipate the problems the reader might face, and provide guidance through his comments and annotations' (Suroor, 1990: 24).

Early on in the Preface, Khan tells the astonished reader that his search for the *Fasana* manuscript, which the author had last revised before his death, lasted between 8 and 10 years. He proceeds to discuss Suroor's varying signatures in all the editions, as well as variations in the very title of the book. He places great emphasis on the sources he has consulted, and that is totally in character. To get to the truth on the basis of facts, to place before the reader that which was in the author's mind—these were always the guiding principles for Rasheed Khan.

His epic achievement remains a detailed glossary of phrases and words that Mirza Ghalib used in his *divan* (collected works of a poet or writer). Covering three volumes, the *Ganjeena-i-ma'ani ka Tilism: Ishariya-i-Divan-i-Ghalib* manuscript remained unpublished for 13 years. Finally, Ather Farouqui took it upon himself to have it published in collaboration with the Ghalib Institute.

Rasheed Hasan Khan died on 26 February 2006 in his hometown of Shahjahanpur. His life's journey was complete, but his legacy endures, and he will always be remembered for his larger-than-life contributions to the world of Urdu.

◆

REFERENCES

Farouqui, Ather (ed.). 2002. *Rasheed Hasan Khan: ShaKHsiyat aur adabi KHidmaat*. New Delhi: Maktaba Jamia.

Baig, Mirza Farhatullah. 2015a. *Dehli ka aaKHri mushaira.* New Delhi: Anjuman Taraqqi Urdu (Hind).

———. 2015b. *Dr. Nazeer Ahmad ki Kahani, kuchh meri aur kuchh unki zubaani.* New Delhi: Anjuman Taraqqi Urdu (Hind).

Suroor, Rajab Ali Beg. 1990. *Fasana-e-ajaib*. New Delhi: Anjuman Taraqqi Urdu (Hind). https://www.rekhta.org/ebooks/detail/fasana-e-ajaib-rajab-ali-beg-suroor-ebooks-1. Accessed on 15 July 2022.

Parekh, Rauf. 2022. 'Letters of Two Great Scholars, Packed with Rare Info', https://www.dawn.com/news/1676262. Accessed on 4 July 2022.

◆◆

TAANGH
Multiple Memories, Multiple Narratives*

PARTHA S. GHOSH

Commenting on documentaries is not my forte. The reason I am attempting it for the first time is because the central theme of Bani Singh's debut documentary *Taangh* (Longing [in Punjabi]) is also one of my research interests, viz., the Partition of India, and its continuing impact on all three subcontinental societies. Although *Taangh*'s multiple sensitivities are rolled into one, its central theme underlines the same without ever saying so explicitly. On the one hand, it is an assortment of little-known human and professional stories associated with India's first hockey gold in the 1948 London Olympics.[1] On the other, it is a daughter's tribute to her father, Grahnandan Singh (Nandy Singh, as he was popularly known), who had played in the right-forward position on that winning Indian team.

But between these two narratives is tucked away yet another, and probably more important, one: the rediscovery of the yearning of millions of Indians and Pakistanis who were torn from their ancestral homes and loved ones by circumstances. They were forced to resettle in new habitats, which, while not altogether alien, were not entirely the same. They had to acquire new nationalities, which were not asked for—rather, were thrust upon them. Bani Singh gives this nostalgia a name: *Taangh*. For whom, and for what, was this longing?

An NID (National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad) graduate, Bani Singh is a Bengaluru-based design professional. Her refugee family—father Nandy Singh, his mother, two sisters and a brother—had migrated from Lahore in undivided Punjab to Simla on the Indian side of Punjab. In Simla, Nandy Singh's elder brother was posted as a junior officer in the government. Subsequently, various job postings

resulted in the family branching out to locations such as Calcutta, Ferozpur, Dharamshala and Bombay. Nandy Singh's family finally settled in Delhi. Family stories of pre-Partition days, as narrated by her father, inspired Bani Singh's documentary project. Her brother, Mano Singh, also a co-listener, actively participated in the project in various ways. These stories are likely to have been supplemented by other family members, relatives and friends.

I met Bani Singh for the first time about three years ago when she was already five years into the making of this documentary. We were introduced by my sociologist friend, Supriya Singh, then a professor at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT), Australia. Supriya Singh was aware of my research interest in Partition and the resultant refugees.[2] She is also Bani Singh's aunt. The fundamental message of human bonding that Bani Singh was trying to communicate through her project was dear to my heart as well as my academic interest (Ghosh, 2016).

I suspect that at the point when Bani Singh and I first met, her knowledge of the history of Partition was rudimentary. Her scholarly knowledge about the phenomenon of inter-state migration on a global scale, both forced and voluntary, was perhaps much less. Yet, the manner of her narration convinced me of the promise of an exploration into oral history on a clean slate, untainted by prior acquaintance with the subject, barring some titbits about her father's friendship with some of his Muslim teammates—physically long lost on account of Partition. As Bani Singh wrote to me later: 'My film is more about the personal story of friendship, and is an attempt to speak of a common past that we have shared. Fortunately, the interviews reveal this past well.'

To my reckoning, the Partition of India was one of the most momentous events in the history of the Indian subcontinent. The only other event that can match it in terms of a long-term impact was the subjugation of the region by British imperialists two hundred years before that. The impact of Partition was not confined merely to those fateful days; it is being felt on a daily basis in the political life of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh even today. Five communities in particular bore the brunt of the tragedy, viz., the Hindus and Sikhs of West Punjab, the Bengali Hindus of East Bengal (lower castes, in particular), the Muslims of Jammu, and, in subsequent years, the so-called 'Bihari Muslims' of East Pakistan/Bangladesh. One may

perhaps add yet another category to the list, i.e., present-day Indian Muslims, psychologically at least, who are being constantly ridiculed for their 'un-Indian-ness' (*Babar ke aulad* [the offspring of Babar]) by a powerful section of pro-Hindutva forces.

Taangh's principal protagonist, Nandy Singh, whose voice is conspicuously missing in the documentary,[3] was a world-class hockey player on the United Punjab team before India was divided. Following Partition, like everything else, this team too was rent asunder with several Muslim players playing for Pakistan, their Sikh and Hindu counterparts playing for India. But notwithstanding their nationalistic zeal whilst on the field, their personal bonds in certain cases survived the tragedy.

This personalised documentary highlights three narratives simultaneously—the story of Indian hockey before and after Partition; the human bonding that cuts across religious and national boundaries; and post-colonial India's nationalistic passion embodied by the defeat of the erstwhile colonial masters by their erstwhile 'native subjects', be it in the game of hockey. In undivided India, the centres of hockey had primarily been Lahore, Lyallpur (from where Nandy Singh hailed), Lucknow, Bhopal, Calcutta, Bombay and Madras, all situated on the railway line.

An interesting highlight of this history was that, contrary to common perceptions, one of the breeding grounds of the game was Calcutta, which one generally associates with football, the Mohun Bagan–East Bengal rivalry being rather legendary. Calcutta in those days prided itself on the best grass grounds for the game. Mohun Bagan's field was considered the best hockey ground in the whole world—its grass was like a carpet. The introduction of AstroTurf in due course completely neutralised this advantage, and this change went in favour of the Europeans in general. The Anglo Indians had contributed significantly to the growth of hockey in India. After Independence, a large section of this community migrated to Australia, as did the Burghers of Sri Lanka who were of mixed Sinhalese/Tamil–Portuguese/Dutch/English descent.

The shooting for the documentary was indeed challenging and one can only imagine the great passion that drove Bani Singh to succeed. To start with, Nandy Singh, who was unable to speak, could not provide the valuable cues required to launch the project. The hostility between India and Pakistan and the region's lamentable

lack of record keeping were further obstacles. The meetings with Nandy Singh's friends, both in India and Pakistan, were therefore vital. Time was of the essence as they were all very old; yet, at the same time, it would have been impossible to reconstruct the narrative firsthand without those interviews. For example, for quite some time, notwithstanding her meticulous efforts, Bani Singh had virtually reconciled to the fact that her most coveted potential interviewee in Pakistan, Shahzada Shahrukh, was no more. Then, by sheer stroke of luck, coupled with her tenacity, she discovered that Shahzada Shahrukh of the United Punjab team, who had played alongside Nandy Singh, was still alive.

On the advice of Lahore-based Salima Hashmi,[4] Bani Singh paid a visit to Lahore with many questions, but with no guarantee as to their answers. Once in Lahore, events started to unfold, but with one major obstacle: the Pakistani visa authorities had not been informed of her intention to film a documentary. Interestingly, all South Asian nations seldom grant visas for any research or documentary making. But once one manages to enter a country under a pretext of any kind, the world is open. Unless of course one is identified as a security hazard, in which case the individual is constantly shadowed by security officials in disguise.

Bani Singh's first port of call was, naturally, the department of sports. But it was soon clear that these efforts would not bear fruit. The hockey office functionaries seemed to have no information about Shahzada Shahrukh. All that appeared to interest them was their own publicity through her anticipated documentary. Before long, however, that moment arrived when Bani Singh was face to face with Shahrukh, a meeting which yielded priceless footage. Of the many interviews she conducted in February 2014, this was perhaps the most memorable because Shahrukh was Nandy Singh's closest friend on the erstwhile United Punjab team. Later, he was on Pakistan's hockey as well as cycling team.

Bani Singh's encounter with Shahrukh at his daughter's house in Lahore was emotion-packed. It underlined pre-Partition inter-communal camaraderie, the warmth of which had not cooled despite Partition and its aftermath. She recollected that her father and Keshav Datt, another team mate who had also played on the winning Indian team, were Shahrukh's dearest friends, and how Shahrukh had once saved Datt's life. In fact, it was on Datt's

recommendation that Bani Singh had gone to Lahore in search of Shahrukh to learn more about their Government College days.

Both Shahrukh, and before that Datt, had mentioned their common friend Ali Iqtidar Dara (subsequently a colonel in the Pakistani army) in different contexts. Shahrukh was convinced that it was Dara's poor leadership that was responsible for Pakistan's loss to England in the 1948 Olympic semifinal. At those Olympics, the United Punjab team mates would have played against one another had Pakistan made it to the final. Shahrukh confessed that his dream was to earn the gold. But he was so demoralised once that chance was lost that he was completely uninterested in watching the final between India and England.

Bani Singh's farewell to Shahrukh was most touching. He kissed Nandy Singh's picture repeatedly, which Bani Singh had gifted him, with tears rolling down his cheeks. He prophesied that Gurnandan (which is how Shahrukh would always remember Nandy Singh) would do the same when Bani Singh described her meeting with Sharukh—and it did happen as predicted.

As Bani Singh's trip to Lahore was inspired by her prior interview with Keshav Datt, the latter's version of contemporary hockey is important. Since the Indians and Pakistanis were placed in two different pools, they had expected to confront each other in the 1948 Olympic final. According to Datt, Pakistan lost to England because the match was played on the unsuitable surface of Wembley Stadium's football field. He recalled that heart-breaking moment of loss for the Pakistani players. Datt was saddened that the fabled artistry of Asian hockey had been reduced to little more than a game of 'rugby' on that surface; it was inconceivable that the organisers could not have known that hockey was played on carpeted grass. Datt emphasised that the Indian players were apprehensive about winning because they knew that the Pakistani team was outstanding.

An aspect that is both human and nationalistic in Datt's testimony is that Nandy Singh, Ali Iqtidar Dara, Shahzada Shahrukh and he had all played together for the United Punjab team which had won the Nationals in 1946. Since it was well known that Datt and Shahrukh were very close, their respective team managers for the 1948 Olympics kept them apart lest it dilute their passion to defeat their opponents. In any case, strong friendships notwithstanding, both teams were keen to meet each other in the

final and defeat the other to lift the gold. Datt believed that knowing both Dara's and Shahrukh's styles of play would allow the Indian team to outmanoeuver the Pakistanis.

The nationalistic element in *Taangh* is reflected in the pride Indians had felt when they lifted the gold by defeating their erstwhile masters, the British. Unfortunately, there is no footage of the event available. Bani Singh's exhaustive search for an archival photograph or film of the victory ceremony in which the Indian Tricolor flew above the Union Jack, and that too on British soil, met with little success. The Indian newspapers of the day too did not carry any photograph of the event on their front pages—the news of this great moment appeared only in their sports sections. Perhaps the preoccupation with the news pertaining to Mahatma Gandhi's assassination trial, post-Partition rehabilitation concerns, and the controversy over the purchase of warships from Britain was responsible for this omission. I offer one more reason: Could it have been that India missed the pleasure of defeating Pakistan very soon after the brutalities of Partition? At any rate, a showdown between India and Pakistan would indeed have been infinitely more exciting.

The event, therefore, went unsung in India, although, according to Nandy Singh's testimony, the Indian hockey team shed tears of joy at the sight of the Indian flag fluttering above the Union Jack, and even more so when the future Queen of England Elizabeth II[5] stood in respect in Wembley Stadium, barely months after Britain's exit from India. Another member of the Indian team, Trilochan Singh, a right-back player who had passed away by the time the documentary was launched, had said in another interview that the 'flag that the British police used to shoot at and we could be arrested for possessing, was fluttering above the Union Jack and Her Majesty stood up for it and saluted it'.

Although Bani Singh's documentary is largely confined to the story of the 1948 hockey gold, she has researched the history of hockey in India on a much larger canvas. From 1924 until 1972, the Indian subcontinent dominated the game and it is for this reason that Britain did not want to face the Indians at the 1948 Olympics. According to Datt, lots were cast in such a way that Britain would not have had to be in the same pool lest it be defeated by India (which, until recently, had belonged to the British Empire). The British considered the slender South Asian body type effeminate and

inferior, but European masculinity was of little use when it came to the art of dribbling.

It is evident from the documentary as well as my subsequent conversations with Bani Singh that ever since the 1924 Olympics, the English team had shied away from directly confronting India in the final. It meant that they would have to play at least one game with India which they were likely to lose—the idea being that as Britain would lose in the pool matches, they would not make it to the semifinal and hence would not have to face India in the final. But their calculation failed at the 1948 Olympics. It was a virtually foregone conclusion that Pakistan would make it to the final, which meant it was going to be an India–Pakistan face-off.

But poetic justice awaited. Pakistan lost, and England was left with no option but to confront India in the final. According to Datt, England had watched the Pakistanis' discomfiture while playing their style of Asian hockey on Wembley's surface with great professional interest. Perhaps England fully expected India's defeat by using the same strategy—why else would the future queen of England have been present for the anticipated victory ceremony? Meanwhile, the Indians were dismayed by the damage wrought by Wembley's pitch to Pakistan's game. However, soon after watching Pakistan's loss, the Indian team was lucky enough to play the second semifinal against Holland, in which it addressed the pitch's disadvantages. India strategised for the final by changing its playing style, taking recourse to scooping together with dribbling, which in any case was its forte. It worked.

The surface at Wembley's football pitch was of a type designed to kill the Asian style of hockey. It was suggestive, too, of the future impact on the game when the International Hockey Federation (IHF) switched from grass to AstroTurf. According to Datt, the European-dominated IHF, of which Britain was also a part, changed the rules to reverse the trend of constantly losing to the subcontinent's teams. More research can be done to see how rule changes favoured speed over skill, which gradually changed the texture of the midfield game. AstroTurf did indeed change the picture completely. Grass hockey, according to Gurbux Singh, a 1964 gold medalist, is as different from AstroTurf hockey as ice hockey is from grass hockey.[6]

In conclusion, some observations: one, the documentary is rather long and would benefit from professional editing. A few

appropriate voiceovers would be helpful for the viewers. Second, now that India–Pakistan relations are in deep freeze ever since India effectively abrogated Article 370 of the Constitution, footage from the documentary towards its end says it all. As Bani Singh mused on the return flight to Delhi: 'Only a fifty-minute flight between Lahore and Delhi, but an immeasurable emotional distance. It felt like I went behind enemy lines but when I found the enemy, he was a friend.'

After watching *Taangh*, I found strong parallels between the fate of the pre-Partition Indian hockey team and the British Indian army. A few days before Partition, Yahya Khan, then a Major in the British Indian army, under training at the Quetta Army Staff College, lamented to his instructor Colonel S. D. Varma at the 'break-up' party: 'Sir, what are we celebrating? This should be a day of mourning. As a united country, we would have been a strong and powerful nation. Now we will be fighting one another' (Nawaz, 2009: 21). Yahya Khan, who later became president of Pakistan and is responsible for the dismemberment of his country in 1971, was remarkably prophetic in 1947. Within two months of his statement, the Indian and Pakistani armies were on the battleground fighting their first war over Kashmir. Foresight is not necessarily normative.

◆

* An abridged version of this article was first published in *Economic and Political Weekly* (Mumbai), 57 (14), 2 April 2022, as 'Taangh—Longing: For Whom and for What?'

NOTES

1. A fictionalised Bollywood film, *Gold*, was made in 2018. Its primary focus, however, was on the role played by the manager of the Indian team, A. C. Chatterjee, essayed by Akshay Kumar. The film was a commercial success.
2. In her own work, Supriya Singh has highlighted one particularly positive aspect of Partition. The economic hardship faced by refugee families had unleashed female energy as never before. To meet the day-to-day challenge of sustaining the family, many refugee women who were otherwise seen as merely homemakers, had to join the workforce to supplement family income. This process contributed to the overall phenomenon of women's liberation which had just started emerging in independent India. See Singh (2013).
3. He had lost his speech two years before filming had started. He is present in the documentary only through his nods confirming a yes or no, or through the expression of his feelings: a smile or tears. As Bani Singh told me later, the

project was primarily intended to lift Nandy Singh's gloom through the recall of his memories. It had worked wonderfully well.

4. A celebrated name in Pakistan's art world, she is the daughter of the legendary Pakistani poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz.
5. Queen Elizabeth ascended the throne on 6 February 1952 at the age of 25 on the death of her father George VI.
6. Based on my conversations with Bani Singh.

REFERENCES

Ghosh, Partha S. 2016. *Migrant, Refugees and the Stateless in South Asia.* New Delhi: Sage.

Nawaz, Shuja. 2009. *Crossed Swords: Pakistan, its Army, and the Wars Within*. Karachi: Oxford Pakistan Paperbacks.

Singh, Supriya. 2013. *The Girls Ate Last*. Singapore: Angsana Publications.

◆◆

ORGANISING THE INDIAN GOVERNMENT

Where We Stand, and Could

RAJNISH KARKI

A recent news item in *The Times of India*—'Uttarakhand: Headmistress Hires Woman to Teach in Her Place for ₹10,000/month, Suspended'[1]—captures in many ways the current state of government organisation. The headmistress' salary is ₹70,000/month, far higher than that paid to school teachers in private schools, and there is a surfeit of such skill holders. Being seven times overpaid does not lead to any superior commitment or performance, individually or at the delivery unit level. Her Chamoli school has merely 12 students spread over five primary classes, as most children attend private schools, forsaking the free education, uniforms and mid-day meals of government schools.

Uttarakhand's case is not the only one. For instance, Nagaland estimated in 2016 that more than half its 22,000 teachers employ proxies by paying them 10–25 per cent of their own salaries. The overstaffing, on an equally astonishing scale of 3–5 times the appropriate teacher–student ratio, stands out as much. Such overstaffed schools and overpaid, poorly supervised teachers set a poor example for young pupils and society at large. The situation can be reckoned to prevail in other states and in healthcare, the police and similar delivery setups of the government.

The Indian government is an enormous organisation employing approximately 225 lakh individuals, with an estimated 35 lakh in the central government, 14 lakh in the armed forces, 15 lakh in public sector units and banks, 30 lakh in autonomous institutions, cooperatives and allied bodies, and 130 lakh in state governments. These salaried, full-time employees hold permanent appointments till retirement and are eligible for pension, medical

and other benefits thereupon. In addition, approximately 150 lakh contractual employees—about two-thirds the number of permanent employees—are engaged on various terms. The sheer numbers are rivalled by the complexity of government organisation, in the vast variety of contexts and stakeholders, and interconnected layers, levels, processes and cultures at play.

An organisation is a living entity. Born or founded, it grows and matures, gains rigidity and flexibility, changes in big or small steps, is prone to inertia, flourishes and strengthens or weakens and declines, could multiply, die or get subsumed into some other. This evolutionary journey is unique to an organisation in its time and space. The 'context' in which it exists and functions, and its 'performance', as gauged by its stakeholders, imprints and defines an organisation's journey. There are great continuities going all the way to its founding, over decades and centuries even, just as the current government organisation owes some of its defining patterns to the Indian Civil Service (ICS) established in 1858.

In order to understand the government organisation, these defining patterns must be identified—in terms of the timing or 'when' a particular pattern emerges and the reasons therein, and 'why' with respect to prevailing social, economic and political contexts and to performance yardsticks of dominant and other stakeholders. And then tracking 'how' a new pattern changes and impinges upon other existing patterns for outlining the evolutionary dynamic of an organisation till the present. This could appear daunting, but organisational constructs generally evolve slowly and in distinctive phases.

These phases in the case of the government are: (i) the pre-Independence or colonial period; (ii) from Independence up to the 1980s; and (iii) the three decades thereafter till the present. The onset of the second phase marked a shift in the political context, while the third phase was characterised by an economic shift and consequent social changes. The stakeholders' side of government has broadly tracked these periods, such as the relative dominance of the ruling disposition vis-à-vis the public at large and their respective expectations. The act of training a long-range telescope on the past, with feet planted firmly in the present, tracking the evolution of the defining patterns in structure, the operating and

performance processes, and cultural attributes, is a fascinating and intense experience. This sets the stage for exploring the government's potential in the decades to come as well as that of the country.

EXOGENEITY, ENTITLEMENT FROM THE COLONIAL PERIOD

India's large, long-standing empires were well organised with a variety of ideas, constructs and procedures for their administration or government. The Mauryas constituted the largest Before Common Era (BCE) empire in the world. Chanakya's *Arthashastra*, which defined and detailed Mauryan administrative mechanisms, remains amongst the most comprehensive treatises on the subject. The Mughals governed an equally large and well-integrated empire for a century and half in the medieval period. Its structuring into *subas* headed by governors, the levels of office bearers and their upgradation and rotation policies, the forums and procedures for tax revenues and the judiciary were well institutionalised.

While some of these administrative mechanisms may have been influential, the antecedents of current government organisation clearly lie in the British period. It was a new and an exogenous construct. Since Indians played virtually no role in its formulation, the organisation was conceived and imposed in its entirety from the outside. The Government of India Act 1858 laid out the contours and procedures of British rule. The government in India was headed by a viceroy and governor general, as representative of the Crown and head of administration, respectively, who reported to the secretary of state, a member of the British cabinet.

At the next organisational level were governors, lieutenant governors and commissioners for directly ruled provinces. The viceroy interfaced directly with the large princely states, and through the Rajputana Agency, for instance, with the smaller ones. The Act would have meant some reallocation of existing British and local employees, but a key change was the introduction of the ICS. This new cadre of personnel, selected through a competitive examination and controlled by the secretary of state, was to man the core and higher echelons of government organisation. Gradually, British administration in India came to be defined by the ICS as the pivot around which almost everything functioned and which embodied encompassing cultural attributes.

Service in Britain's foremost colony attracted the best of Oxbridge graduates, who often sat out a year or two in preparation. They underwent approximately two years of training, organised in and around various London colleges, before taking up their first posting as assistant commissioner in India. A clear-cut chain of command and rigorous reporting linked them through the district commissioner, who supervised all the government activities and establishments in a district, to the commissioner, the governor and his provincial secretariat, and to the viceroy (Dewey, 1993). The ICS was a minuscule cadre of less than 1,000 officers. However, the salary was stupendous, rising from £300 at entry level in 1858 to £6,000 per annum (or £828,720 in present value) for governors, with a pension of £1,000 per annum. It was a thoroughly exogenous or foreign- dominated organisation—in 1917, 8,000 British personnel were paid 4.24 times the 130,000 Indians in government, or 70 times per capita.

Permitted entry into the ICS only from 1878, the proportion of Indians reached 5 per cent by 1905. An examination centre in India was added in 1922, but by that time its culture was well set. The founding motive was to rule a much larger and far-off colony, and to rule strongly, emphasised during training and early years in the districts. The ICS felt themselves entitled to rule, and to the accompanying social and economic privileges. The local populace or colonial natives were taken to be distant, inferior and, at best, in need of help. Accountability and social and emotional alignment were to the foreign and away (Karki, 2019). The splitting of the all-India services and the federal or central services in 1911, and the formation of provincial assemblies in 1937, had a peripheral effect on the domination and influence of ICS culture.

The organisational patterns of exogeneity and entitlement were transmitted throughout the width and depth of Indian governance. The armed forces were organised very similarly, with orientation tending towards the mercenary extreme whether operating in India or overseas, and in the raising, deployment and disbanding of units. The police, the judiciary, forest and all other government departments largely replicated the structure, processes and culture of the ICS, by virtue of serving directly under district, provincial or federal officials from the service. The government organisation remained a colonial construct till Independence.

OVERSTAFFING, DELINQUENCY FROM 1947–1990

These eventful decades saw India defining and establishing itself as a republic and parliamentary democracy. The government assumed overall responsibility as the primary instrument for social and economic development, and for realising the peoples' aspirations. There was a vast increase in the scale and scope of government organisation at the federal level as well as in the provinces or states. The departments for development work were set up at the district and lower levels; central services were expanded and new services created; education, research institutions and public enterprises in steel, power and other sectors were founded; and the armed forces saw rapid additions and modernisation, particularly after the early 1960s.

The ICS was renamed Indian Administrative Service (IAS) just before Independence through an executive order. Thereafter, the IAS and Indian Police Service (IPS) were regularised as all-India services in the Constitution, marking continuity and remaining the 'iron' frame of the government. By manning the bulk of senior positions in government, they were responsible for handling its increasing scale and scope. The only organisational model they knew, and were schooled in, was that of the ICS. It was also highly regarded by leading ministers and became the stated, or unstated, ideal after 1947.

The essence of the model was 'clear but rigid' hierarchical structure, 'rigorous reporting on a few parameters and adherence to laid down procedures', and the ICS being a small organisation administrating a huge territory 'depended on individual integrity, hard work, training and initiative' to suitably handle a range of often unforeseen situations. These were overlaid by exogeneity and entitlement as the defining cultural patterns, which fitted in well with the pre-Independence context and buttressed its efficacy. The expansion and replication of this organisational model was, however, a challenge.

To start with, only a third of ICS officers remained in India. There were major gaps, particularly at senior levels, and it could have taken more than a decade to be at par in accordance with laid-down recruitment, promotion and training procedures. Such measures were difficult to adhere to in post-Independence India and therefore the spurt in requirement led to substantial deviation. For instance, several direct appointments in the foreign service were based on recommendations, bypassing competitive examinations.

This arrangement percolated into other services, the new hydro and other projects being set up in the public sector, and the states. These recruitments often became fair game for elected representatives and officials trying to get their own people employed, particularly at the levels of Groups C and D.

In a decade or so, the drop, and variation, in capability at the time of recruitment, the infirmities in induction training, on-the-job guidance and, thereby, preparedness for promotions, crossed a tipping point towards inefficiency. By the late 1950s, the cases of corruption at higher echelons started coming to light, calling into question integrity at various levels. The ethos of sincere, hard work and of accountability took a beating as well. A bandwagon effect started setting in amongst various departments, aided considerably by the democratic context with a preponderance of influencers. Certainly, 'delinquency'—toward inefficiency and corruption—became a cultural pattern of the government organisation.

'Overstaffing' was another emergent pattern by the late 1960s. Its behavioural consequences—wasting time, lethargy, seeking devious gratification, and the loosening of control and accountability—became apparent in most departments. The staff strength of the central government was estimated at 17.37 lakh[2] in 1957, 29.82 lakh in 1971 and 37.87 lakh in 1984. The corresponding figure is unlikely to have been more than 4 lakh at the time of Independence, rising from the well-documented 1.3 lakh in 1917.

This manifold rise in employee strength in the first decade after 1947 could not have made for orderly expansion. Much of the earlier structures and processes were distorted or considerably weakened. As employee strength more than doubled in the subsequent two decades, delinquency and overstaffing became distinctive patterns of government organisation, superimposed on patterns of exogeneity and entitlement of the colonial period. Employee and organisational orientation continued to be distant, *sahib*, and being privileged and focused on its perquisites, instead of the expected close and direct identification with their compatriots post-Independence, and their needs and aspirations.

OVERPAID, OVER-SECURE FROM 1991 TO THE PRESENT

This period is characterised by dramatic change in the economic context of the government organisation. India, in a shift from its

approach in the decades after Independence, moved to de-control or liberalise its economy in response to market and global forces. The impact was sudden and many dimensional. Notably, the economy was finally propelled into a higher trajectory, sustaining an approximate annual growth rate of 6 per cent. The country was exposed to ideas, products and finance from overseas that set in motion a range of social changes. Expectations started becoming progressively aligned with global levels, and Indian enterprises and technocrats rose across the board to become comparable to, and competitive with, the best in the world.

The 6th Central Pay Commission was convened in October 2006, this time with a wider mandate to rationalise and modernise the government organisation. While the recommended rationalisation, based primarily on non-replacement of retirees, was gradual, the new pay-band system led to an upfront sharp rise in remuneration, particularly for the merged Groups C and D, such as school teachers and drivers, which comprise nearly 90 per cent of employee strength. The government further embellished pay and promotion terms, resulting in a highly 'overpaid' organisation. The 7th Pay Commission, formed in 2014, compounded the problem which finally snowballed into cases such as that of the aforesaid Uttarakhand headmistress.

The panchayati raj system at the village, block or tehsil, and district levels was introduced in 1992. Panchayats have been established across most of India, with largely regular elections and structures, and processes for meetings and documentation. However, they are grossly underperforming in terms of achievements or outcomes and costs or efficiencies, and are plagued by frequent reports of delinquent conduct of elected members and officials, singly or in collusion. The 2nd Administrative Reforms Commission,[3] while emphasising the suitability of panchayats for development programmes, cited the unwillingness of the district administration and the district magistrate in particular to cede power and space, and incessant interference and nit-picking as primary roadblocks.

This is a clear indication of 'over-secure' employees, in addition to that of other patterns in government organisation. It also underscores serious dysfunctionality—the government's district-level employees are thwarting its own programmes, corrective measures from higher official and political levels have not been

implemented for decades, and there is a deep disconnect with the fundamentals of government in a democratic polity. After all, the panchayati raj initiative is all about decentralising power and taking democracy closer to the people, the overall and final stakeholders.

Government employment is assumed to be nothing but permanent in nature. For an overwhelming majority in Group C, and to a degree in B and A, permanent employment in effect means finding entry by whatever means, foraging for extra benefits and incomes soon after, with the salary, work and security for life taken for granted. When supervision is weak and accountability loose, which is generally the case at most levels, a permanent employment-based organisation descends into slothfulness, wasteful inefficiency and, possibly, corruption.

Following the 6th and 7th Pay Commissions, a government job has become the most attractive proposition for youth. This is particularly so in villages and small towns, but now extends to large cities which once looked askance. As the government reaches wide and deep, it is setting a poor example with a perverse work ethic and path to high earnings. It is seriously dis-incentivising and de-motivating employees in the private sector, such as school teachers who work hard and sincerely, and micro and small entrepreneurs who take risks.

A sizeable category of contractual employees has been built in the last two decades. They generally range from 50–75 per cent at lower levels and a large proportion has served over a decade of rolling contracts. A salary jump from three to five times on becoming permanent being irresistible, they are seemingly forever in agitation, affecting work culture further. Their numbers are often so large that political representatives in Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh are taking up their cause. This is likely to cause an explosion in the government's size, in sharp contrast to developments in the design of large turn-of-century organisations. For instance, information technology (IT) has led to optimally decentralised structures and real-time performance management systems. Incidentally, Indian corporations are leading the curve globally in lean manufacturing, frugal and fast innovation, and remote services delivery.

'RESPONSIVE–ROOTED–WORLD-CLASS' ORGANISATION

The six patterns in India's government organisation are salient and hard to deny. They stand out singly, and together make a

compelling case for redesign or reconstruction. They are akin to the critical concerns or areas that need improvement, which, by being unattended are undermining the positive, and those parts and levels that function efficiently. Most of these patterns are cultural, with deep roots and continuity, and are ephemeral enough to escape definition and attention.

Interestingly, exogeneity and entitlement patterns, which go all the way to the founding construct of the 1850s, still hold sway and are definitive attributes of the government. This is not only at the top, but now percolate to the lowest organisational levels and farthest corners of the nation. The forces of isomorphism for continuity and compliance occur as much within the organisation as without, in the context that imposes established behaviour—a new employee is suitably, and irretrievably, schooled within a year.

India, the third-largest economy in purchasing power parity, and soon to be the most populous nation in the world, is regarded as an emerging global power. It will lead the world in areas such as IT, and aspire to be competitive and second to none in most others. Citizens of a democratic polity with access to widespread information cannot but be demanding of their government. A younger demographic in India over the next two decades is unsurprisingly aspirational—and impatient in seeking improvements toward the desired direction and level. Moreover, India is among the handful of civilisational states in the world with distinctive features, memories and an ethos evolved over millennia. It ought to draw on these to find its own bearings, unique strengths and trajectory, not mimic any other nation.

The need for, and the expectation from, the Indian government organisation is to be 'Responsive–Rooted–World-class'. Such an emerging construct is in dramatic contrast to the organisation that has evidently evolved from the six patterns. An entitled, over-secure government cannot be responsive to the people first and foremost, but tends to be self-concerned and exists for itself. A delinquent and overpaid organisation will lack capability by being deviant in orientation and direction, and wasteful of resources. In addition, an exogeneity-based and overstaffed government will continue to perceive itself as inferior to, and a follower of, the West, besides being inefficient and lethargic, instead of demonstrating the confidence to set the global standards that behove a nation the size of India.

The changes in economic, political and social contexts, and in performance expectations, apply pulls and pressures on the government organisation to adapt. These, as discerned from the three phases and especially after 1947, have been incremental and inadequate. Although the reports of the 6th Pay Commission and the two Administrative Reforms Committees attempted to address the problem, the measures taken were not holistic or cogent enough and only those suggestions that were easy and convenient were taken forward. This further propagated convention and the incremental patches that were added complicated the situation even further. It is indeed remarkable that the 1850s construct has survived the political shift of 1947 as well as the social changes and economic shifts of the subsequent seven decades.

The emerging construct needs a quantum shift in India's government organisation. This needs to be meticulously planned and taken up at a carefully chosen point in time, as an uncontrolled push at a vulnerable period—such as in Sri Lanka, in July 2022—could be damaging and counterproductive. The quantum shift, however, can be attempted in parts, starting with the organisational unit that most requires it, eventually extending to other parts and, thereafter, taking all the parts or entire organisation to the next stage or the emerging construct. India's armed forces, which are without doubt the most convention-bound, are currently seeing a quantum shift. They face a global power and have to match it wholly and in specific aspects of armed operations, as the consequences of a breach along some weak link could be disastrous. The urgency of the shift was underscored by the border standoff since the summer of 2020.

The Agniveer initiative is designed to demolish the over-secure pattern for over 95 per cent of combat manpower, overcoming deeply-set conventions within the organisation. This initiative can be extended to the officers, who already have a similar short-service commission format, and thereafter to non-combat, civilian employees. It also corrects to a degree or paves the way to re-align the over-staffing, overpaid and entitlement patterns. The introduction of theatre commands and the drive towards the indigenisation of defence production curbs the exogeneity pattern, which is particularly pronounced in the armed forces.

These measures could mark a quantum shift to the desired construct in this key part of the Indian government organisation,

perhaps initiating a similar shift for the rest. The need for parity of civilians in the armed forces could catalyse a shift for employees of the centre and state governments. An initial short-service engagement, followed by more than one 10–15-year-long appointment, could break the over-secure pattern in the civil services. The Railways, which too is facing urgent challenges, is also seeing some reorganisation in its higher echelons. A de-linking of the development function from the IAS is possibly another such initiative.

◆

NOTES

1. See *The Times of India*. 23 May 2021. https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/dehradun/headmistress-hires-proxy-to-teach-in-uttarakhand/articleshow/91731504.cms.
2. Government of India. November 2015. 'Report of the 7th Central Pay Commission', p. 22. The Commission collated the sanctioned strength of various departments in the central government over the decades and it is the best available proxy for the trend in government employment and serves our purpose.
3. Government of India. May 2005. 'Report of the 2nd Administrative Reforms Commission', pp. 136–91.

REFERENCES

Dewey, Clive. 1993. *Anglo-Indian Attitudes: The Mind of the Indian Civil Service*. London: The Hambledon Press.

Karki, Rajnish. 2019. 'The Need to Re-design IAS'. http://www.karkiassociates.com/research/Article-The-Need-to-Re-Design-IAS.pdf.

◆◆

PHOTO ESSAY
BABA SAHEB
A Philatelic Journey (1966–2022)

VIKAS KUMAR

On 14 April 1966, about two decades after Independence, the Indian Posts and Telegraph Department ushered a Dalit leader into the philatelic world where till then only upper-caste Hindu men were mostly seen.[1] The occasion was the 75th birth anniversary of Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891–1956). The department issued a commemorative postage stamp that carried a portrait image of a solemn, middle-aged, bespectacled Ambedkar in a suit. This image of Ambedkar seems to have circumscribed most of his subsequent philatelic representations on commemorative and definitive stamps and first day covers (FDC) designed in New Delhi.[2] But special covers that are designed and issued locally enrich the philatelic repertoire with novel images.[3]

While most of the philatelic material on Ambedkar issued from New Delhi followed the precedent set by the first stamp, three innovations appear over the years. In 1973, on Ambedkar's 82nd birth anniversary and the 25th year of Independence, the department issued another commemorative stamp on Ambedkar. This propelled him into the league of Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Rabindranath Tagore, Mirza Ghalib, Lal Bahadur Shastri and Subhas Chandra Bose, who had by then featured on two or more commemoratives. The stamp showed Ambedkar in the foreground of Parliament and, in retrospect, marked the beginning of the process through which he eventually emerged in the philatelic space as the foremost icon of India as a constitutional republic. In fact, the 1966 brochure had justified his induction into the philatelic space on account of 'the role he played during India's transition from a colony to a republic'.

In 2000, Ambedkar featured on the cachet of the FDC of one of the finest Indian commemorative stamps called '50 Years of the Republic of India: Mahatma Gandhi Father of the Nation'. The cachet shows a bespectacled Ambedkar in a *bandhgala* in the foreground of the Preamble. The growing association between Ambedkar and the symbols of the republic culminated with the issue of 'Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and Constitution of India' in 2015 that brought together different streams of the philatelic imagination of Ambedkar. This stamp places Parliament below the Preamble to the Constitution, with Ambedkar in the foreground. The cachet of the FDC places Parliament, the Constitution and the Constituent Assembly in Ambedkar's background. The deepening of Ambedkar's association with the Constitution in images was also reflected in the information brochures of commemoratives. According to the 1966 brochure, he played a 'leading part in the framing of the Indian Constitution' as an 'authority on Constitutional Law'. By 1973, he was recognised for his 'very important role in making of the Constitution', as an 'architect'. In 1991, after he was posthumously conferred the Bharat Ratna, he was presented as 'the chief architect of [the] Indian Constitution'. His contribution to the Constitution had become a familiar fact by 2015, and the brochures of some of the stamps related to him issued later dropped the customary references to this aspect of his life.

The second innovation relates to Ambedkar's portrayal as a leader of the masses. The background of the commemorative stamp released in 1991, on the occasion of his birth centenary, carries the sketch of a young, dhoti-clad Ambedkar 'leading the satyagraha for [the] liberation of Chowdar Tank'. Its cachet introduces another novel image from the philatelic perspective: a statue of Ambedkar on a pedestal with the index finger of his right hand pointing toward the sky, and the Constitution in his left hand. We see Ambedkar once more with people in the background of the stamp on R. Srinivasan, a Dalit leader in the erstwhile Madras province, issued in 2000.

A third innovation was introduced when Ambedkar began to be depicted on stamps alongside monuments related to him that symbolise his turn toward Buddhism. In 2013, Ambedkar was shown alongside Chaityabhoomi, where he was cremated. Four years later, in 2017, Ambedkar was shown on a stamp on Deekshabhoomi, where he embraced Buddhism.

It bears note that the 1966 brochure did not even mention Ambedkar's conversion, which was first acknowledged only in passing in the 1973 brochure. The details of his conversion emerge slowly over the next five decades. In the brochure of the stamp on Bhaurao Krishnarao Gaikwad (2002), a founding member of the Republican Party and a Padmashri awardee, we learn about the Dhamma Parishad at Yeola, while the brochure of Rajabhau Khobragade (2009), a close aide of Ambedkar and a deputy chairman of the Rajya Sabha during 1962–1972, adds further details. The brochure of the 2015 stamp on Ambedkar was the first to mention that he had attained 'Mahaparinirvan' on 6 December 1956. Ambedkar's association with Buddhism in the philatelic space matured in the brochure of the stamp on Deekshabhoomi that locates him in the larger Buddhist tradition, stretching back in time to the Mauryan Emperor Ashoka. This brochure notes that Ambedkar 'embraced Buddhism with nearly 4 lakhs of his followers', which is in sharp contrast to the 1973 brochure that had suggested a smaller numerical scope by noting he 'embraced Buddhism followed by hundreds of his followers across the country'.

The gradually shifting portrayal of Ambedkar in the philatelic material issued from New Delhi was overtaken by the grassroots imagination reflected in special covers, picture postcards, booklets and folders issued from various cities across the country. This new phase in Ambedkar's philatelic afterlife began, possibly, with the issue of booklets on Gandhi and four Bharat Ratna awardees, including Ambedkar, by the Lucknow Philatelic Society in 2012.

Special covers fill in gaps in the commemorative series, add fresh images absent from the New Delhi-centric imagination of Ambedkar, and include quotes not featured in the official postal releases. For instance, the Janmabhoomi, the memorial at Ambedkar's birthplace in Mhow, has not yet appeared on a commemorative stamp. However, a special cover released in 2022 features the monument at Mhow.

One of the first noteworthy special covers, though, was released in Vijayawada. It showed Poorna, a tribal girl, and Anand, a Dalit boy, who conquered Mt. Everest on 25 May 2014, and unfurled the Indian flag and a banner with Ambedkar's image at the summit. The next noteworthy issue is a set of nine picture postcards released in Coimbatore in 2017 that capture various aspects of

Ambedkar's life. In 2018, the cachet of a special cover released in Mysuru depicts the inauguration of Ambedkar's statue in white marble, and another cover, issued from Bengaluru, carries an image of Ambedkar with Buddha in the background. More recently, the cachet of a special cover on the 70th anniversary of Constitution Day, issued from Mumbai, shows Ambedkar presenting a copy of the Constitution to Rajendra Prasad with Sardar Patel, Jawaharlal Nehru, C. Rajagopalachari and Maulana Azad as onlookers.

The most outstanding series of special covers on Ambedkar was released in coastal Andhra Pradesh between 2019 and 2021. This series, which includes the first train and bullock cart carried special covers on Ambedkar, commemorates the platinum jubilee of his tour of coastal Andhra Pradesh after he had joined the Viceroy's Executive Council. Each of these covers curates images associated with Ambedkar in local memory. Three covers stand out in this series of 10 special covers. A bullock cart-carried special cover was released in Palakol, where 53-three-year-old Ambedkar was welcomed by a procession of 53 bullock carts. A cover released in Kakinada shows Ambedkar addressing a public gathering. Ambedkar is shown alongside women delegates of the Depressed Classes Women's Conference in July 1942 at Nagpur on the cachet of a cover released in Gudivada. The description at the back notes that Ambedkar had laid the foundation of a girls' boarding home in Gudivada and is accompanied by an image of the plaque outside the boarding home. This cover is among the very few philatelic items that celebrate Ambedkar's contribution to women's empowerment. Also, it is perhaps the only one that shows Ambedkar with women.

This photo essay captures the defining images of the exhibition 'Baba Saheb: An Extraordinary Philatelic Journey (1966–2022)', held at the India International Centre, New Delhi, in June 2022. The exhibition traced the shifting evolution of Ambedkar in official and popular imagination through a rich archive of philatelic material. In the brochure of the first commemorative stamp, he was presented as a leader who 'often appeared' to take 'extreme positions on social and political matters' even though independent India '[made] use of his talents to consolidate the gains of freedom'. The brochure of the second commemorative on Ambedkar described him as 'a highly controversial figure', although it notes that he was a 'fervent nationalist'. These apprehensions disappeared after he

received the Bharat Ratna award, and he was referred to as 'Baba Saheb' in the brochure of the 1991 stamp. In the following decade, quotes by Ambedkar featured on postal stationery, references were made to him in brochures of stamps on institutions and other personalities, and he was incorporated in the definitive series that marked his entry into the Indian postal pantheon.

◆

NOTES

1. Between 1947 and 1965, only seven women—Mirabai, the Rani of Jhansi, Madam Bhikaji Cama, Ramabai Ranade, Annie Besant, Sarojini Naidu and Kasturba Gandhi—and only one Muslim—Mirza Ghalib—featured on commemorative postage stamps. No one from the Sikh community featured on stamps during this period. It is also noteworthy that the first stamp on Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel was issued 15 years after his death in 1965.
2. Commemorative stamps commemorate important events and personalities, but are printed only once in limited quantities. Definitive stamps do not commemorate specific events. These stamps are issued in a large indefinite quantity and continue to be reprinted until a new definitive series is issued. A First Day Cover (FDC) bears a newly released stamp cancelled with a postmark that indicates the date of the official first day of its issue.
3. 'An event which is not nationally important enough to be commemorated by the issue of a commemorative/special stamp, or for which a stamp cannot be accommodated in the annual issue programme, may be commemorated by the issue of special covers cancelled with a special postmark.' Special covers can also be issued at the request of private parties on payment with the sanction of the competent authority in their postal circle. Most recent special covers describe the event on the back along with the price, name of the sponsor, and a serial number assigned by the postal region of the issuing post office. See http://postagestamps.gov.in/SpecialCoversCancellation.aspx.

◆◆

1.
2.

Baba Saheb

A PHILATELIC JOURNEY

VIKAS KUMAR

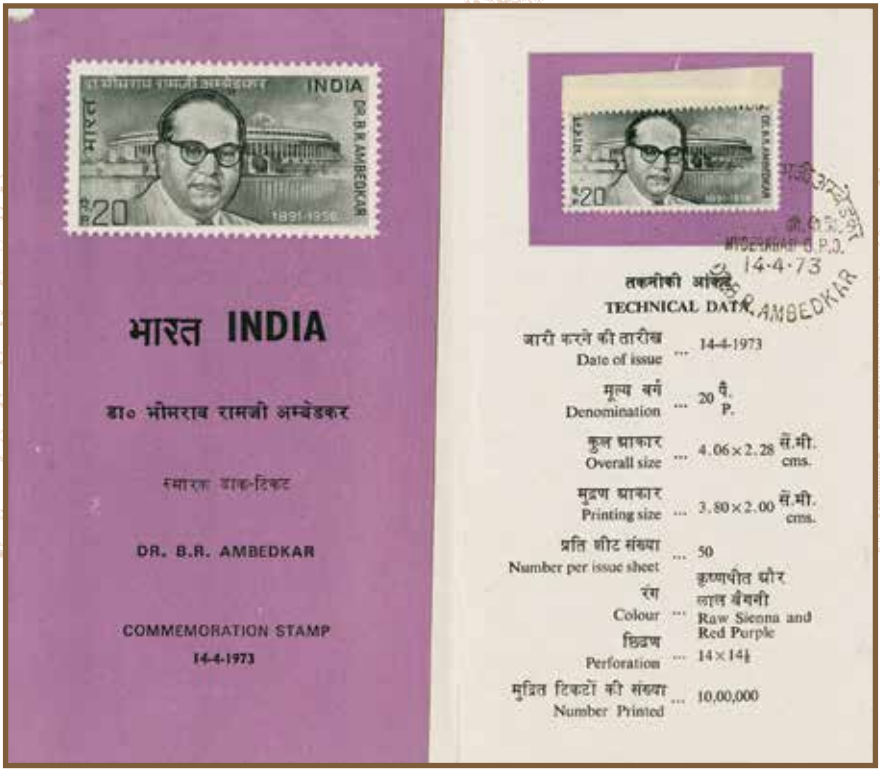
3.


प्रथम दिवस आवरण
FIRST DAY COVER
14-4-1966
B. R. AMBEDKAR
INDIA
E.R.AMBEDKAR
14-4-66
NEW DELHI
बी. आर. अम्बेडकर B. R. AMBEDKAR
भारतीय डाक-तार विभाग INDIAN POSTS & TELEGRAPHS

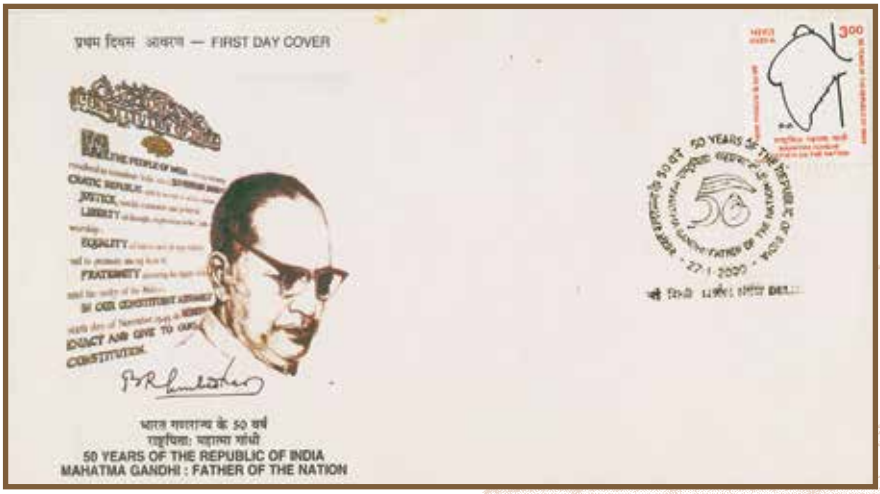
4.


BY AIR MAIL
PAR AVION
INDIA
30
Very Rev.Nobert Georges,O.P.,
General Director
The St.Martin De Porres Guild
160 Fifth Avenue, Room 719
New York 10,N.Y.10010
U. S. America.
INDIA
50
INDIA
5

5.


INDIA
DR.B.R.AMBEDKAR
20
1891-1956
भारत INDIA
डा० भीमराव रामजी अम्बेडकर
स्मारक डाक-टिकट
DR. B.R. AMBEDKAR
COMMEMORATION STAMP
14-4-1973
14·4·73
तकनीकी आंकड़े
TECHNICAL DATA
जारी करने की तारीख Date of issue ... 14-4-1973
मूल्य वर्ग Denomination ... 20 पै. P.
कुल आकार Overall size ... 4.06×2.28 सें.मी. cms.
मुद्रण आकार Printing size ... 3.80×2.00 सें.मी. cms.
प्रति शीट संख्या Number per issue sheet ... 50
रंग Colour ... कृष्णपीत और लाल बैंगनी Raw Sienna and Red Purple
छिद्रण Perforation ... 14×14½
मुद्रित टिकटों की संख्या Number Printed ... 10,00,000

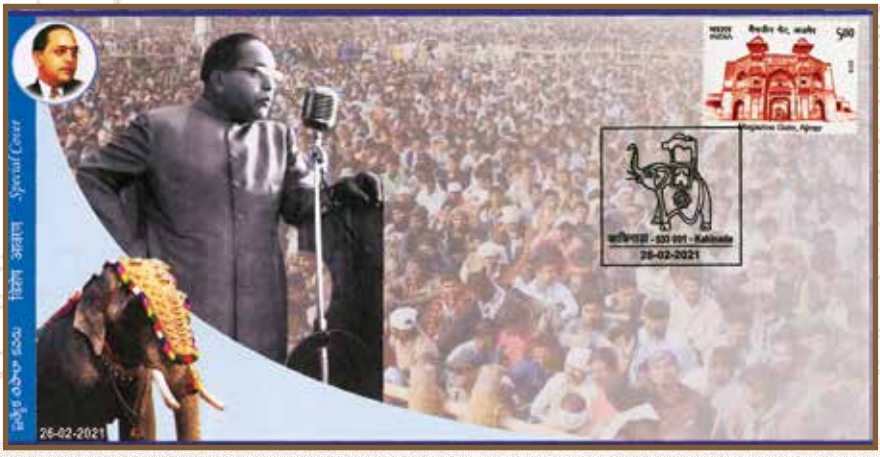
6.


प्रथम दिवस आवरण — FIRST DAY COVER
WE THE PEOPLE OF INDIA
SOCIALIST SECULAR DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC
JUSTICE, LIBERTY
EQUALITY
FRATERNITY
IN OUR CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY
DO HEREBY ADOPT ENACT AND GIVE TO OURSELVES THIS CONSTITUTION.
50 YEARS OF THE REPUBLIC OF INDIA
MAHATMA GANDHI : FATHER OF THE NATION
भारत गणराज्य के 50 वर्ष
राष्ट्रपिता: महात्मा गांधी

7.


29.09.2021
29.09.2021

8.


26-02-2021
26-02-2021

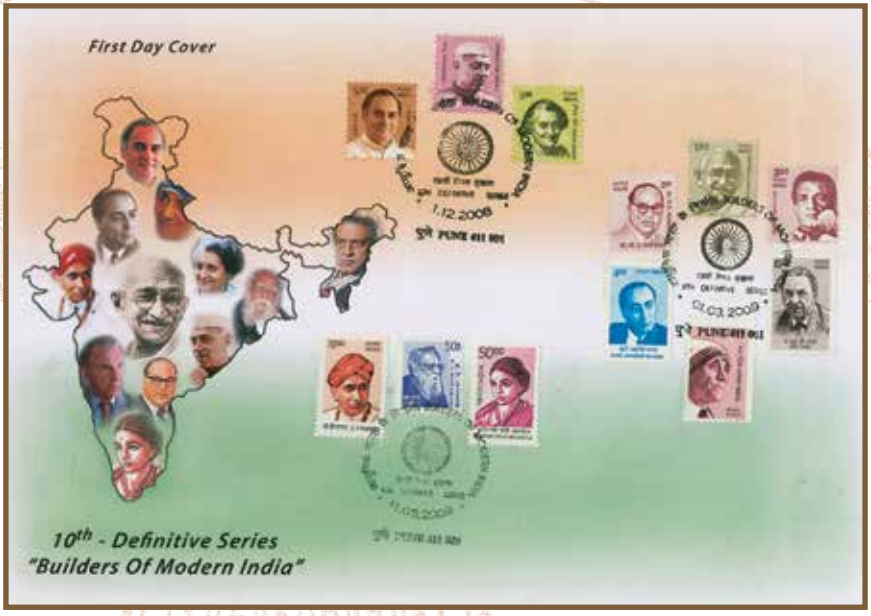
9.

10.


1702-2002 नागपुर त्रिशताब्दी
नागपुर त्रिशताब्दी
1702-2002
300
2002
NAGPUR TERCENTENARY
Nagpur Tercentenary 1702-2002

11.


विशेष आवरण SPECIAL COVER
INDIA
स्वराज्य
23-1-2001
अमृतसर / Amritsar-143001
AMRITSAR 143001
विशेष नियत शृंखला
SPECIAL DEFINITIVE SERIES

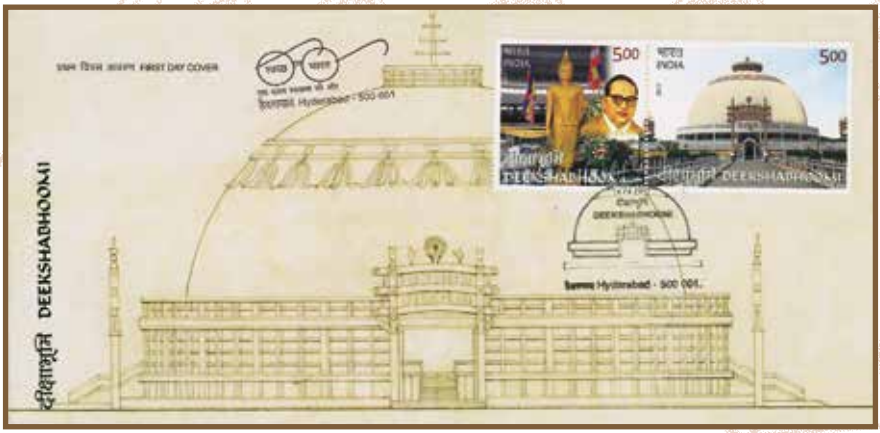

First Day Cover
10th - Definitive Series
"Builders Of Modern India"

12.

13.


SPECIAL COVER / विशेष आवरण
BHIM JANMABHOOMI
भीम जन्मभूमि - डॉ.भीमराव अम्बेडकर स्मारक, कंटोनमेंट बोर्ड, महू
BHIM JANMABHOOMI - DR. BHIMRAO AMBEDKAR MEMORIAL, CANTONMENT BOARD, MHOW

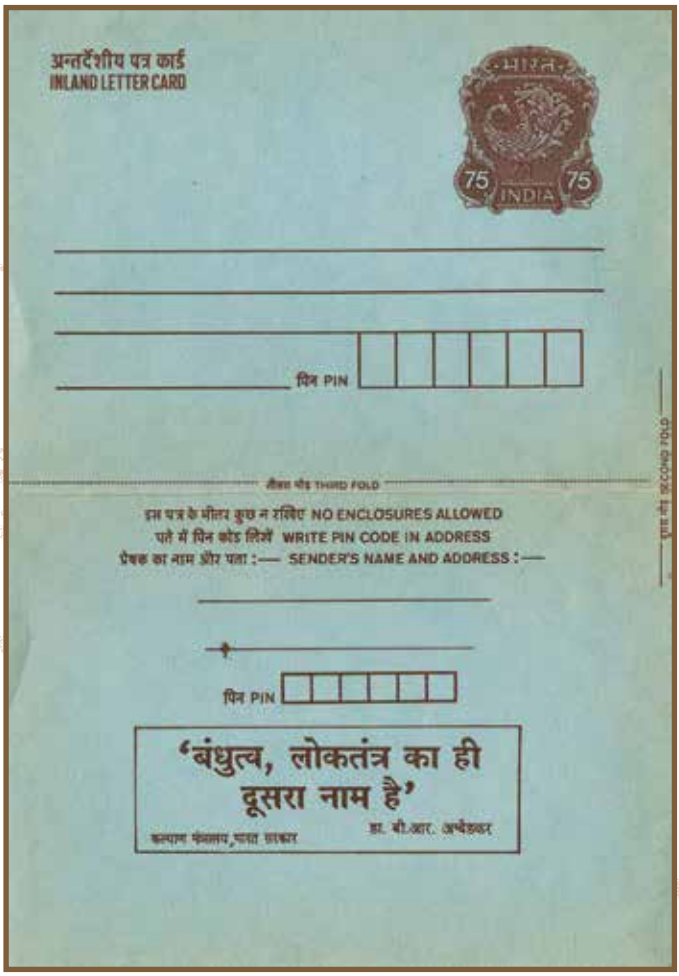
14.


प्रथम दिवस आवरण FIRST DAY COVER
500
INDIA
DEEKSHABHOOMI
दीक्षाभूमि DEEKSHABHOOMI

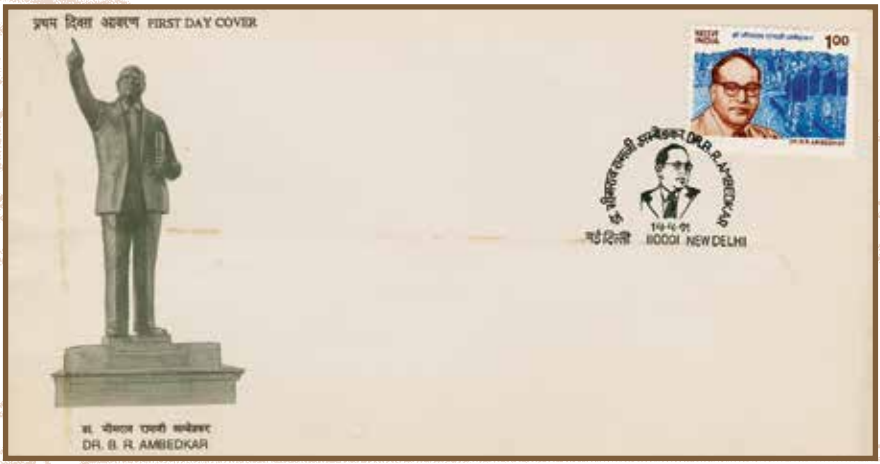
15.


प्रथम दिवस आवरण FIRST DAY COVER
14-04-2013
CHAITYA BHOOMI, MUMBAI
जबलपुर 482001 JABALPUR
चैत्य भूमि, मुम्बई
Chaitya Bhoomi, Mumbai

16.


अन्तर्देशीय पत्र कार्ड
INLAND LETTER CARD
INDIA
75
75
पिन PIN
इस पत्र के भीतर कुछ न रखिए NO ENCLOSURES ALLOWED
पते में पिन कोड लिखें WRITE PIN CODE IN ADDRESS
प्रेषक का नाम और पता :— SENDER'S NAME AND ADDRESS :—
पिन PIN
'बंधुत्व, लोकतंत्र का ही दूसरा नाम है'
डा. बी.आर. अम्बेडकर

17.


प्रथम दिवस आवरण FIRST DAY COVER
100
DR. B. R. AMBEDKAR
110001 NEW DELHI

18.


प्रथम दिवस आवरण FIRST DAY COVER
डॉ. बी. आर. अम्बेडकर और भारत का संविधान
Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and Constitution of India
30.09.2015
Chennai-600 002

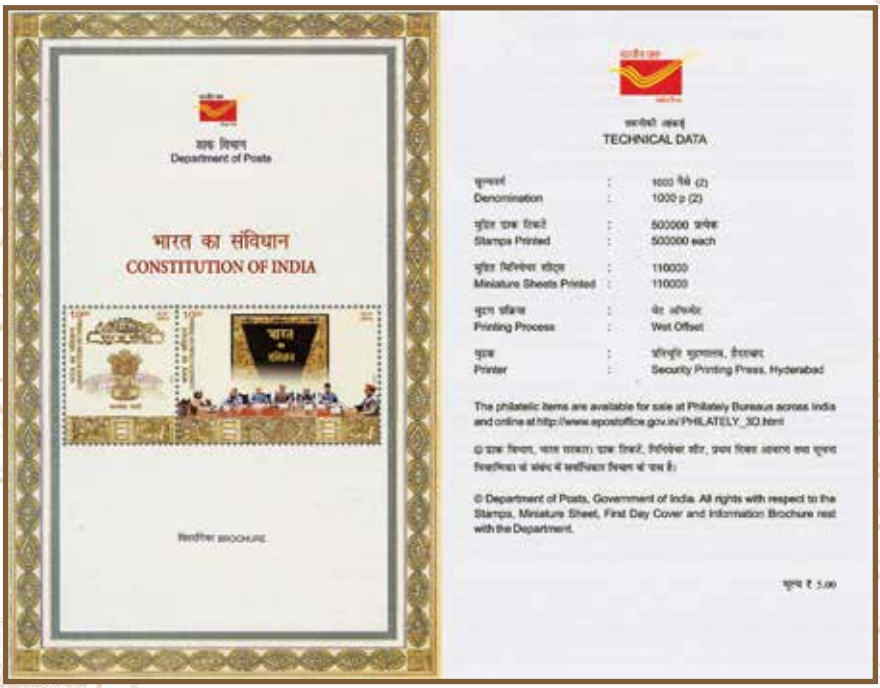
19.


भारतीय डाक विभाग
Department of Posts
India
डॉ. बी. आर. अम्बेडकर और भारत का संविधान
Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and Constitution of India
विवरणिका
BROCHURE

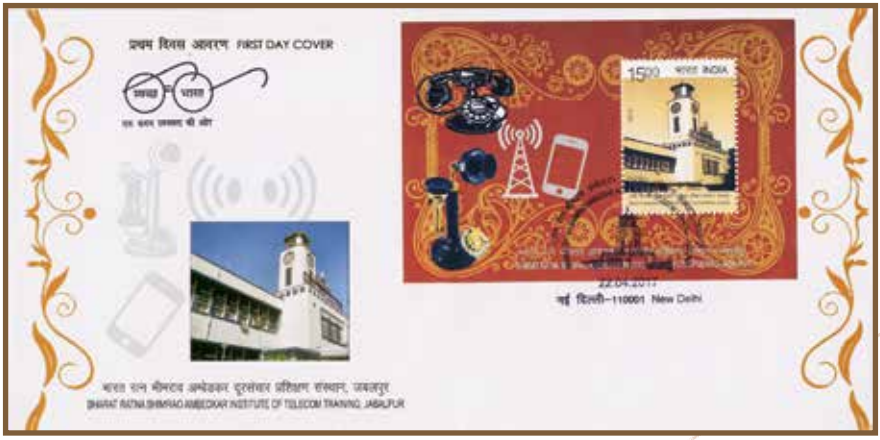
20.


भारत का संविधान
CONSTITUTION OF INDIA
प्रथम दिवस आवरण - FIRST DAY COVER
26-01-2020
CONSTITUTION OF INDIA

21.


डाक विभाग
Department of Posts
भारत का संविधान
CONSTITUTION OF INDIA
सूचनात्मक BROCHURE
TECHNICAL DATA
मूल्यवर्ग : 1000 पैसे (2)
Denomination : 1000 p (2)
मुद्रित डाक टिकटें : 500000 प्रत्येक
Stamps Printed : 500000 each
मुद्रित मिनिएचर शीट्स : 110000
Miniature Sheets Printed : 110000
मुद्रण प्रक्रिया : वेट ऑफसेट
Printing Process : Wet Offset
मुद्रक : प्रतिभूति मुद्रणालय, हैदराबाद
Printer : Security Printing Press, Hyderabad
The philatelic items are available for sale at Philately Bureaus across India and online at http://www.epostoffice.gov.in/PHILATELY_3D.html
© डाक विभाग, भारत सरकार। डाक टिकटें, मिनिएचर शीट, प्रथम दिवस आवरण तथा सूचना पुस्तिका पर कॉपीराइट विभाग के पास है।
© Department of Posts, Government of India. All rights with respect to the Stamps, Miniature Sheet, First Day Cover and Information Brochure rest with the Department.
मूल्य ₹ 5.00

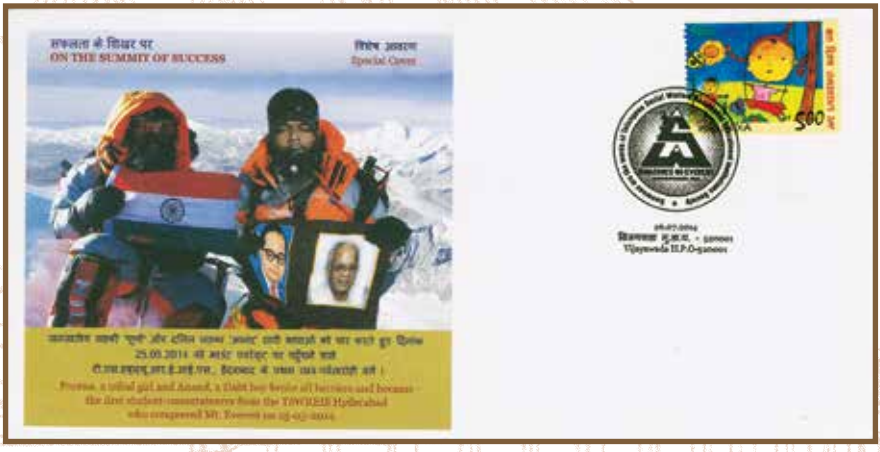
22.


प्रथम दिवस आवरण FIRST DAY COVER
1500 भारत INDIA
22.09.2011
नई दिल्ली–110001 New Delhi
भारत रत्न भीमराव अम्बेडकर दूरसंचार प्रशिक्षण संस्थान, जबलपुर
BHARAT RATNA BHIMRAO AMBEDKAR INSTITUTE OF TELECOM TRAINING, JABALPUR

23.


विशेष आवरण Special Cover
A VISION OF
INDIA
THE COUNTRY
भारत देश की झाँकी
500 भारत INDIA
इनपेक्स / INPEX 2013
21.02.2013
मुंबई MUMBAI 400001
इनपेक्स / INPEX 2013
मुंबई MUMBAI

24.


सफलता के शिखर पर
ON THE SUMMIT OF SUCCESS
विशेष आवरण
Special Cover
500

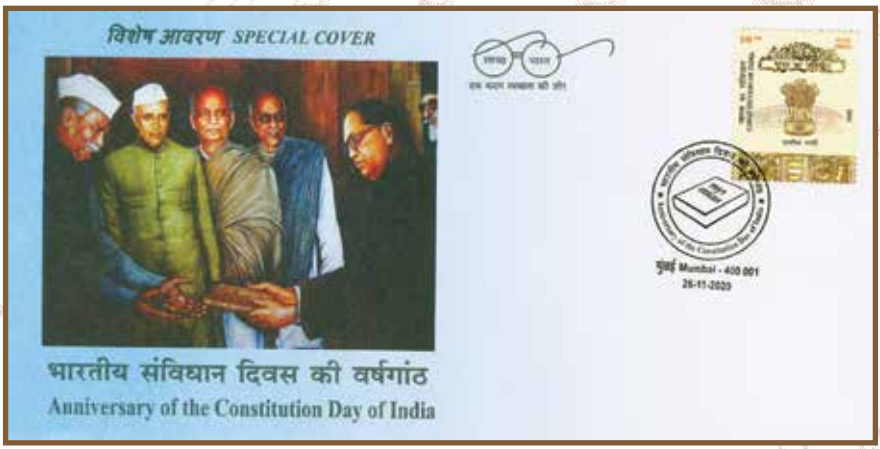
25.


ಕರ್ನಾಟಕ ಸರ್ಕಾರ,
ಸಮಾಜ ಕಲ್ಯಾಣ ಇಲಾಖೆ, ಮೈಸೂರು
भारत
INDIA
500
Head Post Office, Mysuru-570001
25-03-2018
Unveiling Marble statue of Dr. B R Ambedkar

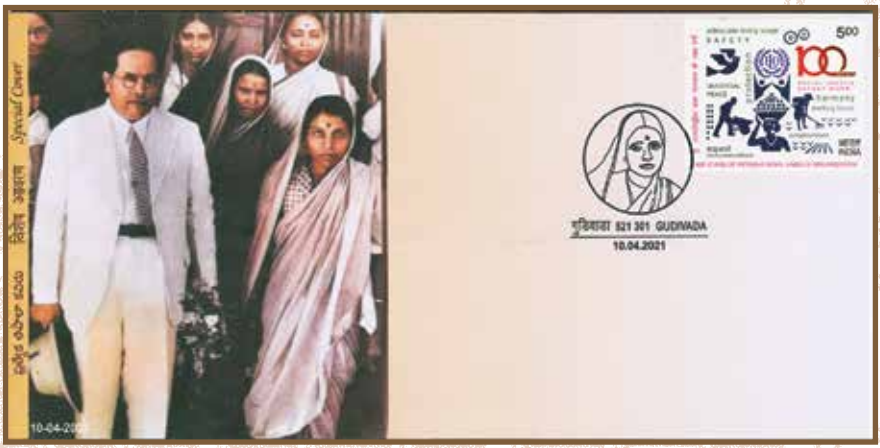
26.


14-04-2018
अम्बेडकर जयंती
Ambedkar Jayanti 2018
भारत रत्न डॉ. बी.आर. अम्बेडकर मेडिकल कालेज, बेंगलूरु
Bharatha Ratna Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Medical College, Bengaluru
2018 AMBEDKAR JAYANTI
भारत INDIA
5.00
ARABIC COLLEGE
14-04-2018

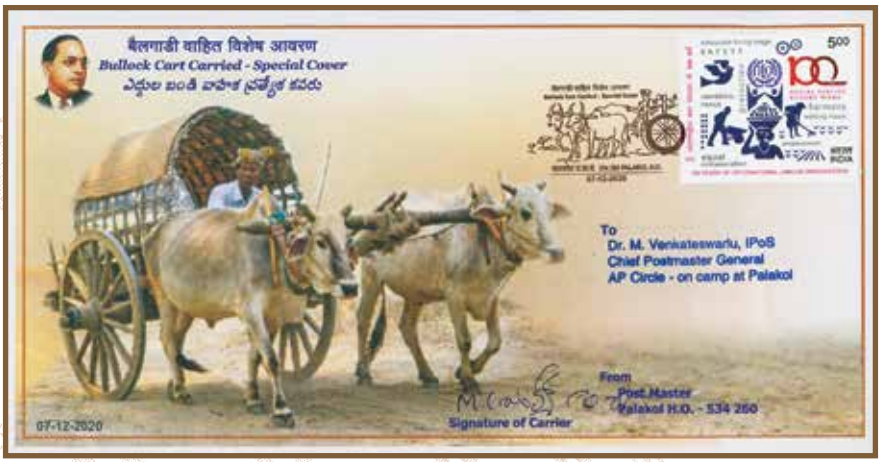
27.


विशेष आवरण SPECIAL COVER
भारतीय संविधान दिवस की वर्षगांठ
Anniversary of the Constitution Day of India
मुंबई Mumbai - 400 001
26-11-2020

28.


विशेष आवरण Special Cover
5.00
गुडिवाडा 521 301 GUDIVADA
10.04.2021

29.


बैलगाडी वाहित विशेष आवरण
Bullock Cart Carried - Special Cover
ఎద్దుల బండి వాహక ప్రత్యేక కవరు
To
Dr. M. Venkateswarlu, IPoS
Chief Postmaster General
AP Circle - on camp at Palakol
From
Post Master
Palakol H.O. - 534 260
Signature of Carrier
07-12-2020

30.


रेलगाडी वाहित विशेष आवरण
Train Carried - Special Cover
To
Dr. M.Venkateswarlu, IPoS
Chief Postmaster General
AP Circle – on camp at TUNI
From
Post Master
Waltair R.S. -530 004
Signature of Carrier
26-11-2020

31.


Special Cover
అనకాపల్లి 531 001 Anakapalle
23-02-2021
23-02-2021

32.


भारत INDIA
2017
रामजस कालेज RAMJAS COLLEGE
मुम्बई विश्वविद्यालय
1857 1957
तमसो मा ज्योतिर्गमय
10 nP INDIA POSTAGE 10 नए पै

33.


5.00

CAPTIONS

1. A mint regular sheet of the first commemorative postage stamp on Ambedkar issued in 1966. The plum-coloured stamp carries a portrait of a solemn, bespectacled, middle-aged Ambedkar in a suit. The sheet comprises 54 stamps.

2. A 1966 commemorative stamp, cancelled in New Delhi on the first day of issue, 14 April 1966.

3. A first day cover (FDC) of the 1966 commemorative stamp, cancelled in New Delhi on 14 April 1966. The cachet of the FDC carries a sketch of Ambedkar.

4. A used example of the 1966 commemorative stamp on an airmail cover, mailed on 28 November 1966 from Kumbakonam (Tamil Nadu) to New York. The stamp on Ambedkar is placed alongside stamps on Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi and Maharaja Ranjit Singh that were released in the same year. The cover also carries three definitive stamps issued as part of the third definitive series.

5. An information brochure of the second commemorative stamp on Ambedkar, cancelled with the relevant stamp at Hyderabad GPO on 14 April 1973. A brochure is an official document released mostly with commemorative stamps that provides information about the subject of the stamp as well as technical and design details.

6. The FDC of the stamp '50 Years of the Republic of India: Mahatma Gandhi: Father of the Nation'. This is the first instance when Ambedkar featured alongside Gandhi in the philatelic space and, also, when he featured on the cachet of the FDC of a stamp not directly related to him.

7. A special cover (AP/39/2021) issued on 29 September 2021 to commemorate the Platinum Jubilee of Ambedkar's visit

in 1944 to Ramachandrapuram (coastal Andhra Pradesh), where he was presented with a sword in a public meeting. The side flap of this cover carries the following quote: 'Cultivation of the mind should be the ultimate aim of the human existence'.

8. A special cover (AP/06/2021) was issued on 26 February 2021 to commemorate the Platinum Jubilee of Ambedkar's visit in 1944 to to Kakinada (coastal Andhra Pradesh), where he was taken to the venue of a public meeting in a procession on a decorated elephant. The side flap of this cover carries the following quote: 'Cultivation of the mind should be the ultimate aim of the human existence.'

9. A mint stamp on R. Srinivasan. This is the only stamp which depicts Ambedkar alongside another well-known figure. The stamp's brochure does not refer to Ambedkar, though.

10. The FDC of the stamp 'Nagpur Tercentenary 1702–2002', cancelled in New Delhi on 11 November 2002. The cachet of the FDC depicts a few iconic images, including Deekshabhoomi, which are identified with Nagpur. This was the first instance when a monument associated with Ambedkar featured on an FDC cachet.

11. A special cover issued by the Department of Posts (DoP) on the occasion of the release of the special definitive stamps on Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and Ambedkar. It carries all three special definitive stamps cancelled in Amritsar on the respective days of release.

12. A private FDC cachet designed by Ankit Agrawal. It carries all the definitive stamps of the 10th series cancelled in Pune on the respective days of release. The cachet shows all 12 personalities within the map of India, with the tricolour in the background.

13. A special cover on 'Bhim Janmabhoomi: Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar Memorial, Cantonment Board, Mhow' (MP/17/2022), issued on the eve of Ambedkar's 131st birth anniversary on 13 April 2022

at the Dr. Ambedkar Memorial, Mhow. Ambedkar was born in Mhow on 14 April 1891.

14. An FDC of the stamp on Deekshabhoomi, cancelled in Hyderabad on 14 April 2017. The stamp shows Ambedkar with a statue of Buddha on his right and Deekshabhoomi, where he embraced Buddhism, on his left. The pictorial cancellation depicts the dome of Deekshabhoomi. This was the first se-tenant stamp on Ambedkar.

15. An FDC of the stamp on Chaityabhoomi, where Ambedkar's last rites were performed, cancelled in Jabalpur on 14 April 2013. This was the first stamp on a monument related to Ambedkar.

16. In the 1990s, Ambedkar began to be quoted on postal stationery. The first inland letter card with an Ambedkar quote was issued on 20 December 1993. It carried the following quote sponsored by the Ministry of Social Welfare: बंधुत्व लोकतंत्र का ही दूसरा नाम है (Fraternity is another name for democracy).

17. An FDC of the third commemorative stamp on Ambedkar, cancelled in New Delhi on 14 April 1991. It carries the first pictorial cancellation of Ambedkar. Released on the occasion of his birth centenary, the stamp shows a bespectacled and middle-aged Ambedkar in a suit. In the background, the stamp carries a sketch of a young, dhoti-clad Ambedkar 'leading the satyagraha for liberation of Chowdar Tank'. The cachet of the FDC shows a statue of Ambedkar standing on a pedestal, with the index finger of his right hand pointing toward the sky, and the Constitution in his left hand.

18. An FDC of the stamp 'Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and Constitution of India', cancelled in Chennai on 30 September 2015. This was the first stamp on Ambedkar that was not released on his birth anniversary.

19. A brochure of the stamp 'Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and Constitution of India', cancelled with the relevant stamp in Chennai on

30 September 2015. It highlights Ambedkar's differences with Nehru over the Hindu Code Bill, which led to his resignation from the cabinet. It also refers to the Poona Pact, 1932, between Ambedkar and Gandhi, which 'carved out a clear and definite position for the downtrodden on the political scene of the country'.

20. An FDC of the se-tenant stamp 'Constitution of India', cancelled with a miniature sheet in New Delhi on 26 January 2020. One part of the se-tenant stamp shows the seven-member drafting committee seated at a table with the Constitution in the backdrop, while the other depicts the national emblem and Parliament. The cachet of the FDC shows the members of the Constituent Assembly and carries their signatures in the backdrop. (A miniature sheet is a smaller sheet released along with a set of commemorative stamps. It includes only one value of each stamp of that set. The entire sheet appears like a large piece of art incorporating the related stamp as part of the design.)

21. A brochure of the stamp 'Constitution of India'.

22. An FDC of 'Bharat Ratna Bhimrao Ambedkar Institute of Telecom Training, Jabalpur', cancelled with a miniature sheet in New Delhi on 22 April 2017. This was the first stamp issued on the anniversary of an institution named after Ambedkar and also the first that was issued in the form of a miniature sheet.

23. A special cover (No. MH/03/2013) released on the occasion of INPEX 2013, a National Philatelic Exhibition organised in Mumbai by the Philatelic Society of India in association with India Post. Its cachet includes Ambedkar in the pantheon of national leaders—alongside Gandhi, Tagore, Nehru, Subhash, Patel and Bhagat Singh—accompanied by the Constitution and national symbols—peacock, lotus and tiger.

24. A pair of special covers was released to commemorate the success of Poorna, a tribal girl, and Anand, a Dalit boy, who conquered Mt. Everest on 25 May 2014. On the cover

(No. AP/06/2014) shown here, Poorna is holding the Indian flag at the summit, while Anand is holding a banner with the images of Ambedkar and IAS officer S. R. Sankaran.

25. A special cover (KTK/18/2018) released on 25 March 2018 on the occasion of the unveiling of a white marble statue of Ambedkar in Mysuru near the Rangacharlu Memorial Town Hall.

26. A special cover (KTK/34/2018) on Bharatha Ratna Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Medical College, Bengaluru, released on 14 April 2018 to commemorate Ambedkar's birth anniversary. The cachet shows Ambedkar's bust under the image of Buddha, with the college in the background.

27. A special cover (MH/18/2020) released on the occasion of the Constitution Day. The cachet shows Ambedkar presenting a copy of the Constitution to Rajendra Prasad with Sardar Patel, Jawaharlal Nehru, C. Rajagopalachari and Maulana Azad as onlookers. The cover was cancelled with one of the Constitution of India (2020) stamps. The cancellation includes the image of the Indian Constitution encircled by the bilingual text 'Anniversary of the Constitution Day of India'.

Ambedkar visited coastal Andhra Pradesh in 1944 after he had joined the Viceroy's Executive Council. To commemorate the platinum jubilee of his visit, 10 special covers were released in nine towns of coastal Andhra Pradesh. The side flap of most of these covers carried the following quote: 'Cultivation of mind should be the ultimate aim of the human existence.' The next four images show special covers released in coastal Andhra Pradesh.

28. A special cover (AP/17/2021), released on 10 April 2021, to commemorate Ambedkar's visit to Gudivada, where he laid the foundation of a girls' boarding home (30 September 1944). The cachet shows Ambedkar alongside women delegates of the Depressed Classes Women's Conference in July 1942 at Nagpur. The back of the cover carries an image of the plaque outside the boarding home. This cover is among the very few philatelic items that celebrate Ambedkar's contribution to

women's empowerment. Also, it is perhaps the only philatelic item that shows Ambedkar with women.

29. A special cover (AP/09/2020), released on 7 December 2020, to commemorate Ambedkar's visit to Palakol, Andhra Pradesh (23 September 1944). Fifty-three-year-old Ambedkar was welcomed by a procession of 53 bullock carts. The cover was carried within Palakol on a bullock cart. This is, possibly, the first bullock cart-carried special cover on Ambedkar.

30. A special cover (AP/06/2020), released on 26 November 2020, to commemorate the platinum jubilee of Ambedkar's rail tour of coastal Andhra Pradesh. The cachet includes the image of a train with the sea in the background and Ambedkar's bust above. An image of Ambedkar attending a meeting at Tuni is reproduced on the back of the cover. This is, possibly, the first train-carried special cover on Ambedkar.

31. A special cover (AP/05/2021), released on 23 February 2021, to commemorate Ambedkar's visit to Anakapalle (27 September 1944). The cachet shows Ambedkar standing with an unidentified person, a car and a building associated with his visit in the background.

32. On Ambedkar's 126th birth anniversary (14 April 2017), the Postmaster General, Western Region, Coimbatore (Tamil Nadu), released a presentation folder containing nine picture postcards pertaining to different aspects of Ambedkar's life. Each postcard was cancelled with definitive stamps on Gandhi (100 paise) and Ambedkar (500 paise), using the Deekshabhoomi postmark. The picture side of this postcard reproduces the stamps on the University of Bombay and Ramjas College (Delhi). The other side notes that Ambedkar studied Economics and Political Science at the University of Bombay and served as the Chairman of the Governing Body of Ramjas College.

33. The Lucknow Philatelic Society and India Post issued 500 sets of three picture postcards, on the anniversary of Mahatma

Gandhi's martyrdom, on 30 January 2016. The picture postcard shown here bears the number 000369. It carries an iconic image of the Second Round Table Conference (RTC), London (1931), which shows Gandhi, Madan Mohan Malviya, Ambedkar, and others. On the writing side, the picture postcard mentions the names of Gandhi and Ambedkar.

◆

DELHI UNIVERSITY @ 100

Institute of Eminence or Crumbling Edifice?

SHOBHIT MAHAJAN

The centenary celebrations of the University of Delhi were inaugurated on 1 May 2022 by the Chancellor of the University, Vice President M. Venkaiah Naidu. On this occasion, a commemorative coin of ₹100 as well as a stamp was released. The year-long celebrations, with many events and programmes, are planned to be held in the University. Completing a century is clearly a landmark event for any institution and must undoubtedly be celebrated.

The University of Delhi, or Delhi University as it is almost universally known, is a relative newcomer as far as universities go. The University of Bologna was founded in 1088 CE, followed by Oxford University in 1096 CE. Even in India, the Universities of Calcutta, Madras and Lahore were established earlier than Delhi University. In the late 19th and early part of the 20th centuries, Delhi was considered a backwater as far as education was concerned. The educational centre for north India was Lahore, with its many fine institutions, including Punjab University.

Prior to the establishment of Delhi University, Delhi's educational landscape was essentially its four colleges: St. Stephen's, established by the Cambridge Mission in 1881; Hindu College, founded as a nationalist reaction in 1889; Ramjas College, set up in 1917; and the oldest, Delhi College, formally established in 1824. Delhi College, now called Zakir Husain Delhi College, had many illustrious scholars like Master Ram Chander and Maulvi Abdul Haq. It played an important role in translating into the vernacular several scientific treatises as well as works of Greek philosophy. These translations played a key role in bringing Western scientific

knowledge to the literate elite at that time. All these colleges were originally affiliated to the University of Calcutta, but later changed their affiliation to Punjab University, Lahore.

At the Delhi Durbar in 1911, King George V announced the shifting of the capital of British India from Calcutta to Delhi. Any capital by rights ought to have a university, and so the University of Delhi was set up in 1922 with two faculties—arts and science. The existing four colleges were affiliated to it over the next few years. In 1933, the Viceroy's residence was shifted to what is now Rashtrapati Bhawan, and the erstwhile Viceregal Lodge Estate near the Ridge became the nucleus of the University campus. The Lodge has been the Vice Chancellor's office ever since, while the other buildings have housed some of the other departments and offices. For instance, the Viceroy's ballroom became what is now the convention hall, and the stables of the Viceroy's establishment became the laboratories of the physics department—or so goes folklore.

The University truly came into its own during the tenure of Sir Maurice Gwyer who served as the Vice Chancellor from 1937 to 1950. New departments were opened while the existing ones, especially in the sciences, were augmented. Laboratories for teaching and research were started, and eminent academicians were hired as faculty. This trend continued even after Gwyer's tenure, and in the 1950s, the university could boast of some of the finest minds in Indian academia. These included D. S. Kothari (physics), T. R. Seshadri (chemistry), V. K. R. V. Rao (economics), P. Maheshwari (Botany) and many others who were not just eminent academicians, but, more important, institution builders. Right from acquiring funding, to hiring the finest teachers, to building infrastructure, these stalwarts laid the foundations of the University as we know it now.

It was during the 1960s and early 1970s that undergraduate teaching, which had hitherto been split between the colleges and University departments, became the exclusive preserve of the colleges, while the departments now focused on postgraduate teaching and research. This led to the expansion of the departments in terms of the number of students as well as research scholars.

Unlike the colleges in other parts of the country, colleges in the University are constituent colleges and are not affiliated, and hence have always formed an integral part of the University.

Some of these colleges rank among the finest places to get a well-rounded undergraduate education. They have groomed a whole generation of students by exposing them not just to academics, but to sport and other extra-curricular activities as well.

Some of the teachers in these colleges were legendary and acquired cult status in their respective fields. They were not just brilliant academics who could have easily got an academic position at any institution, but also exceptional teachers who inspired their students. Their contribution, in terms of the normative norms of academics, viz., cutting-edge research and publications in journals, might not have been exceptional, but was more than made up for by their teaching and role in shaping young minds.

The departments also prospered because of excellent faculty members. The reputation of the departments attracted bright young faculty who then went on to contribute to improving the stature of the parent institution. This virtuous circle meant that the University was considered among the best institutions in the country for both teaching and research. Both national and international recognition came easily. Thus, when the University Grants Commission (UGC) started its Centre for Advanced Study to promote high-quality research, as many as three departments from the University were the first to be selected.

Delhi University's reputation as a premier centre for learning kept growing during the 1960s and 1970s, and it soon became the institution of choice for the best students. It also helped that the University was one of the few in the country where teaching went on smoothly even at tumultuous times during which teaching was disrupted at many other institutions. Bright students, who ordinarily would have gone to Calcutta or Allahabad University, came to Delhi.

The list of alumni from Delhi University reads like a virtual Who's Who—from politics to cinema, from law to bureaucracy, academics and sport, its alumni have gone on to distinguish themselves in many areas. Personalities such as Arun Jaitley, Amitabh Bachchan, Shah Rukh Khan, Justice D. Y. Chandrachud, Sanjay Kishan Kaul, Kaushik Basu, Ramachandra Guha, Mohinder Amarnath, among many others, have been students. There is hardly a field of human endeavour in which Delhi University's alumni have not shone.

Over time, as was expected, Delhi University expanded its footprint from one campus, a handful of colleges and departments to its present form with two campuses, 16 faculties, 86 departments and over 90 constituent colleges. Enrollment went up and it now has more than 5 lakh students on its rolls. A majority are in the School of Open Learning, and the rest in the various colleges and departments of the University. It continues to be counted among the best public universities, as evidenced by its selection some years ago as an Institute of Eminence. It also has a reasonable ranking in global university ranking tables.

Despite the mushrooming of private universities, Delhi University still remains the first choice for a majority of students from across India. It has a truly national character with representation from every corner of the country. The number of students seeking admission is several times more than the number of seats available. Not only is it popular nationally, but also attracts students from across the world, especially the Middle East, because of its high academic standards and affordability.

A cursory look at the state of Delhi University would seem to indicate that it is in rude health and will scale new heights in the future. However, any prognosis for the future must examine the institution's present state in greater detail and consider any possible trajectories it might take. Therefore, it is important to be cognisant of the role of a public university in any society and, in particular, in a country such as ours.

◆◆◆

Modern universities trace their origin to the founding of Bologna University. Earlier, learning was mostly restricted to monasteries and institutions run by the Church. It is important to note that the first universities were essentially guilds of students and masters organised for the purposes of specialised learning of such subjects as law, theology and medicine.

Although founded in the late Middle Ages, the evolution of universities as institutions of learning accelerated during the Renaissance (with the Reformation as well as Guttenberg's invention of movable type), and especially during the Enlightenment and thereafter. In their present form, universities are the locations of

teaching, training and research in modern societies. Knowledge is created and distributed, and future knowledge workers are trained there. Universities are also meant to be arenas of free-ranging thought, creativity and debate which, among other things, lead to new ideas. At least for a century, these characteristics of universities have been almost universally accepted.

Moreover, public universities have another important role to play. Funded by the state, they are expected to be free from the pressures of private capital and can use this freedom to explore disciplines and areas of their choice. However, even in an ideal scenario, a public university is obligated to contribute to society in terms of generation of new ideas and technologies, as well as nurturing critical thinking in its citizens. It also has an obligation to further whatever goals society has set for itself, goals which might go beyond the narrow confines of disciplines and subjects. Universal access is one such goal—the obvious implication being non-discrimination in everything, except academic matters. In addition, at various junctures, societies might decide to compensate for historical injustices by agreeing to a set of affirmative action programmes. Access, thus, remains a crucial defining characteristic of a public university—access here as defined in its broadest sense to mean real, as opposed to *pro forma*, opportunities for everyone to high quality and meaningful education.

Thus, to see where Delhi University is at present, and is likely to be in the future, it would be productive to try and assess its performance in the areas of creation and distribution of knowledge. Further, since universities are sites where free thought and expression is encouraged, we would need to examine how Delhi University fares on account of encouraging free speech and promoting debate. And since it is a public university, we ought to be aware too of its efforts to provide meaningful, affordable high-quality education to all sections of society.

Teaching and training form an essential part of any higher educational institution. In Delhi University, teaching is divided between colleges for undergraduates and university departments for postgraduates. The departments also train students for research by running PhD programmes.

Quantitatively speaking, Delhi University, like all public education institutions, has done remarkably well. India's Gross

Enrollment Ratio (GER) for higher education, defined as the percentage of youth between the ages of 18 and 23 enrolled in tertiary education, has seen a steady rise from 11 per cent in 2006, to 23 per cent in 2014, to 27 per cent in 2021. If we use the international definition, then India's GER is more than 31 per cent. Thus, about one in three adults in this age group is enrolled in an institution.

Much of this increase is on account of the proliferation of educational institutions. From about 750 universities and 37,000 colleges in 2014, there are now approximately 1,050 universities and more than 42,000 colleges. For Delhi University, this increase in enrollment has come about primarily because of two sets of legislations. The first, in 2007, with what is called Other Backward Castes (OBC) expansion when the total number of seats was increased by over 50 per cent; and the second in 2019, with the Economically Weaker Section reservation, when there was a further 25 per cent increase.

These enabling legislations have not just increased the student population, but have also made a great difference to its composition. The number of students from previously under-represented or unrepresented groups has increased dramatically. These include not just students from poor households and backward castes, but also first-generation learners as well as students from rural backgrounds, including women.

Thus, it would seem that Delhi University has fared well on the score of providing access. However, increased enrollment does not necessarily translate into meaningful access. Students from these backgrounds are usually not as well equipped as their contemporaries from more advantageous backgrounds. These disadvantages range from language issues (a large number of them come from Hindi-medium backgrounds, and have trouble with textbooks and lectures), to a below-average academic preparation because of poor quality of schooling. Consequently, they are not entering a level playing field and many of them have trouble coping. They are, however, extremely motivated and ambitious.

Given the numbers, the scale of the problem is immense. Nevertheless, there are certain steps which could be taken to assist those who are motivated. Thus, the University could, for instance, offer remedial classes to make up for the lack of academic preparation. The linguistic issue is a much larger one, for which the government

would need to promote either the production of high-quality material in the vernacular or translate good text books (as was envisaged by the Knowledge Commission's National Translation Mission). In the interim, English speaking and reading classes could be organised to bridge the gap.

◆◆◆

Teaching at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels is also beset with its own share of problems. These range from the lack of infrastructure because of financial constraints, a dearth of teachers, and a curriculum structure which seems to frequently morph from one acronym to another while being academically bewildering.

Almost every single college and department faces an enormous deficit in basic infrastructure, or what would be considered the bare minimum required for an academic institution. The list is long: inadequate classrooms, a clean and healthy environment for students and staff, a dearth of laboratory equipment, and much more. For instance, enrollment at the physics department, the largest in the University, increased by almost 100 per cent because of legislation. And, yet, there has been no increase in the number of classrooms since the 1970s.

There are now approximately 800 postgraduate students and more than 250 PhD scholars in the physics department. Classrooms are overcrowded and badly ventilated, a critical disadvantage in these days of physical distancing. There are few washrooms, especially for women, and barely any functional drinking water facilities. The budget for new equipment for teaching is ₹15 lakh a year, a figure which has not increased in more than two decades—and this, for the University's largest and oldest department! Conditions in most colleges are equally bad. For instance, in a premier college of the University, the annual budget for the physics lab is a paltry ₹25,000. This, when an oscilloscope of decent quality costs upwards of ₹40,000.

The situation with regard to human resources is even more critical. There are more than 6,000 vacancies for teachers in the University and its colleges which have not been filled. This is more than half the total sanctioned strength. For instance, the physics department has a sanctioned strength of more than 85 teachers,

but has only 39 on its rolls currently. Most colleges are making do with contractual appointments, oddly called ad-hoc teachers. And some of them have been teaching in this capacity for over a decade, their contracts renewed every year. It seems hard to imagine how a teacher, who is not even sure if she will have a job after a year, is going to be motivated. Administrative stasis, combined with ever-changing regulations, has led to this huge backlog which has impacted teaching in a very serious way.

Then, there is the issue of the curriculum itself. Over the last decade or so, there have been so many changes in its structure that it is sometimes hard to determine which particular one is being followed. These range from FYUP (Four Year Undergraduate Programme), to CBCS (Choice Based Credit System), to New Education Policy (NEP), and back to FYUP! These changes in the structure would still be desirable if they were academically sound and in tune with realities on the ground. However, that is not the case.

The new and improved system, which is going to be in force from the coming academic session, for instance, significantly waters down the curriculum for the core subject in an undergraduate degree. Instead of a thorough grounding in the core subject—a strength of past Honours courses at Delhi University—it offers Skill Enhancement Courses and General Electives. These choices might sound perfect since, after all, there could be little objection to a well-rounded education. Except that, as usual, policy makers are clueless about ground realities. Most colleges have neither the teachers nor the classrooms to offer more than a couple of these courses, and even these with the greatest difficulty. Even in the physics department of the University, the so-called general electives, which are meant for students of other departments as well, are taken only by physics students simply because it is impossible to adjust timings to suit the timetables of other departments, given the shortage of classrooms.

The new system also offers an option of dropping out after one or two or three years, instead of finishing the four-year programme. This option is as meaningless as some of the skill enhancement courses on offer: What kind of job would a student with a 1-year certificate or a 2-year diploma get when thousands of engineering graduates are forced to accept low-paying call centre jobs for lack

of opportunities? Once again, the mandarins framing policy seem to be supremely unaware of reality.

Possibly the most harmful policy concerns online credits. Currently, a student can get up to 40 per cent of the credits required for a degree through online courses run by accredited institutions. Despite the widely reported devastation inflicted on learning by online teaching, forced upon the nation because of the pandemic, it is unbelievable that policy makers still seem to regard it as a sound academic decision. The strong connections within the government built by the EdTech lobby might well be a coincidence, but EdTech companies are certainly salivating at the prospective returns from selling enabling technologies because of this decision. Or, perhaps it is a happy coincidence of interests of these companies with that of the state which seems to be wanting to wash its hands of publicly funded higher education for the masses. The slow but steady encouragement of online education will automatically translate into less funding for teachers, labs, libraries, and much more. What it will do to future generations does not seem to bother our policy makers.

As for research, the manner in which the system has been set up makes it almost exclusively the preserve of university departments. Apart from teaching postgraduates, faculty members in a department also take on students for a PhD. Here, too, it is evident that the lack of infrastructure and funding, byzantine regulations as well as bizarre policies have made it hard to carry out high-quality research.

Researchers are required to get projects from various funding agencies to fund their research. This is clearly a healthy practice and is followed globally. Funding agencies, after a rigorous peer review process, grant funds for equipment, personnel, among others. The University is expected to provide such basic infrastructure as space, power, and much more, for which it gets 15–20 per cent of the project funding as overheads. It is in the provision of these basic facilities that Delhi University falters. For instance, years ago, the physics department acquired a generator set to meet the needs of its teaching and research laboratories. It functioned for a couple of years, but has since become a white elephant. The reason—no funds for maintenance and, more pertinently, no provision in the budget for fuel to run the generator!

The purchase of equipment from project funding is a process so onerous that the bureaucratic hoops, which sustained research

in the University demands, are not for the faint hearted. Paperwork has to be followed up at all stages: from approvals, to ordering the equipment, and finally ensuring payments to suppliers. This takes time and energy which could be much more productively spent on research.

However, potentially, the most devastating factor for the research environment, not just in Delhi University but in all universities, is a UGC-mandated regulation. This regulation decrees that everything in one's academic career—from a PhD degree, to jobs, to promotions and increments—will depend on the number of research papers published. The motivation for this seems to be the near talismanic obsession that our politicians and mandarins have for various world university rankings.

That the very world university ranking system is flawed and can be gamed easily has been established conclusively. For instance, in an interesting expose, noted Pakistani public intellectual Pervez Hoodbhoy has shown how institutions in Pakistan have ranked high in subjects which do not even exist in those institutions. Since an important part of the evaluation criteria is research publications by faculty, our administrators seem to think that the only thing which matters in research is quantity, not quality. Deeming the number of research publications the only benchmark of one's capability has had a regressive side effect: the mushrooming of a number of predatory journals (those which take money to publish one's work), as has been pointed out by the UGC Chairman M. Jagadesh Kumar, himself. Even worse is the growth of PhD shops which routinely advertise PhD degrees, complete with the requisite number of published papers as well as typed and bound theses—all this can be acquired from the comfort of one's home and for a modest sum of a few lakhs.

Promotions for teachers are also linked to their research output. This loads the dice against them, including those in colleges who have no access to facilities for research. But human ingenuity knows no bounds; recently, at a promotion interview, a teacher who had not been active in research, or published for decades, was able to present the required number of research publications, all published in one year. He was of course duly promoted since he had fulfilled the mandated criterion of eight research publications in the previous 10 years. If our educational planners believe this to be the path to becoming a knowledge superpower, then one can only be amused.

Universities are not only meant for formal instruction and research; they are also sites to debate new ideas and to foster free thinking among young minds whose ideas may not always be in sync with what is acceptable to the state. But that is exactly how new modes of thinking take root and flower. Delhi University, until a few years ago, could pride itself on always encouraging debate and the expression of a variety of opinions. Not so long ago, one would, for instance, find a celebrated Marxist activist giving a talk in one of the rooms of the arts faculty while, outside, the student-wing of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was holding a demonstration. Protests regarding various local, national and international issues were common, with public figures addressing the protestors. And then, there were the coffee houses with their low, graffiti-covered sunmica tables, where the whole universe of ideas and ideologies was discussed for hours over cups of inexpensive coffee.

All those things are now in the past. To reserve a room in any campus building for a meeting, various forms giving all the details are to be submitted, and a fairly high sum of money paid, which makes it unaffordable for most small groups. And if this is not discouraging enough, permissions are routinely refused. Curiously, permissions are frequently refused for events with speakers who might hold opinions divergent from the 'official' narrative, while speakers affiliated to various organisations responsive to the current dispensation never seem to have that problem. Protests are banned on campus, with the result that students are forced to dissent in the small space outside the gate. It is a strange sight to see a handful of students, holding a peaceful protest with placards and banners, watched over by a huge contingent of police in riot gear and anti-riot vehicles. Anyone not familiar with the situation could easily be forgiven for mistaking those poor protesting students on the list of most-wanted terrorists.

Two of the three coffee houses on campus are now a distant memory; a third one at the Delhi School of Economics somehow has managed to survive. The main coffee house is now an administrative office, because a past Vice Chancellor had decided that coffee houses were places where students wasted time. The other coffee house was first replaced by a private outlet, but is now a canteen. While a canteen can efficiently exercise its core function of serving economical food to a high turnover of customers, it can never replicate the leisurely, slow-paced environment of a coffee house.

May 2022 has been the hottest month in Delhi in living memory. It was 41 degrees Celsius in the afternoon and I had just come from teaching a class in a room without electricity, packed with students. As I walked back to my room, I met a colleague who seemed extremely upset. Apparently, one of his experiments, which had been going on for 72 hours and was nearing completion, would have to be repeated because of the power failure that had caused his equipment to shut down. And this on the day after the inauguration ceremony, where speakers had held forth on how Delhi University would soon be joining the ranks of leading global academic institutions.

◆

THE CIVIL–MILITARY RELATIONSHIP

YOGENDRA NARAIN

The civil–military relationship in India has been the subject of intensive analysis and discussion in the country, especially after Independence. Usually, it is taken to mean the interaction between the civilian bureaucracy in the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and the military establishment. But in its broader sense it also includes the civilian ministers/state ministers heading the MoD. With the creation of a separate Department of Military Affairs (DMA) under the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), the interaction between the military and civil bureaucracy in the defence ministry has substantially reduced. However, why does this acrimony between the two verticals still remain? To understand this, we need to go back a bit in history.

The British Indian army grew out of the East India Company's involvement in the disputes between Indian states in the 18th century. There were three separate armies in the Presidencies of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras. However, by the Regulating Act of 1774, these three separate armies were brought under the control of the Council of the Governor General. The concept of civilian control over the military was an established principle in Britain and this was extended to India. The Presidency Councils in turn exercised control over the local military commanders in their jurisdictions.

After 1857, the Crown took complete control of the East India Company's possessions, and the three Presidency armies were gradually amalgamated into one under a Commander-in-Chief (C-in-C) in 1895. In 1905, the civil–military relationship led to discord between the then C-in-C Lord Kitchener and Viceroy Lord Curzon. The viceroy wanted the defence department to be headed by a civilian who would vet independently the proposals received

from the C-in-C. Kitchener, however, disagreed, and wanted to head the military department of the government. The British government supported Kitchener, and consequently Curzon resigned. Kitchener was now not only the commander of all military forces in India, but also the military member of the Viceroy's Council—a post that was hitherto kept separate. This gave the military an outsized position within the government.

The Indian political leaders were quick to grasp these issues. In the Budget of 1903, Gopal Krishna Gokhale argued that 'Indian finance is virtually at the mercy of military considerations' as the latter was being given excessive weightage in the government's consideration of the matter. In 1907, Gokhale argued against privileging the narrow standpoint of the soldier. The newly constituted Legislative Assembly, while discussing the recommendations of the Lord Esher Committee, tabled 15 resolutions as recommendations to the viceroy, which covered the central 'structural problem of civil military relations'. They argued for the establishment of similar civil–military relations, as in Britain. To realise the 'principle of ultimate supremacy of the civil power', they also demanded that the C-in-C cease to be a member of the Executive Council. This was not agreed to, and it was argued that the ultimate control of the defence administration nonetheless continued to vest in the Secretary of State in India, who was subject to parliamentary control. Thus, civilian control continued. The army department was put under the control of the C-in-C, but the department was headed by a secretary who was a military officer of the rank of major general. He could not independently examine the proposals received from the army headquarters, but had to issue orders under the aegis of the Government of India for the same.

It was in 1921 that a civilian was once more appointed as secretary, and in 1936 the department was renamed Department of Defence (DoD). In addition, the Department of Military Finance (DMF) was also created, which scrutinised all proposals with a financial bearing. Budget preparation, the overview of expenditure and other aspects of financial control were vested in that department.

In September 1946, when the Interim Government was formed, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru ensured that the C-in-C no longer had a seat at the political decision making table, as had been the case by combining the roles of the Defence Member and

C-in-C in the Viceroy's Council. In the new structure, the C-in-C was no longer part of the cabinet, and all important communications and decisions were now routed through civilian officials and the member heading the DoD. Sardar Baldev Singh, a civilian, was appointed Military Member of the Executive Council.

INDEPENDENCE AND AFTER

Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of independent India, realised the importance of keeping the military subordinate to civilian political authority. Symbolically, shortly after Independence, Nehru moved into Flagstaff House, the C-in-C's mansion, to use as his own official residence.

Nehru then adopted a policy of separating the unified armed forces structure, in which the army and the C-in-C dominated—a potential threat to civil power—into one in which the army, navy and air force each had their own command structure and were headed by separate Cs-in-C. In Parliament, the prime minister emphasised that 'civil authority is and must remain supreme'. In 1955, the government further downgraded the position of Cs-in-C to that of Chief of Staff (CoS), and all the positions were made coequal.

The study team on defence matters, set up by the first Administrative Reforms Commission of 1966, noted that there was some misapprehension that civilian control amounted to 'civil service control'. As early as 1951, H. M. Patel, the first defence secretary of independent India, observed that the military leadership deeply disliked the role of civilian bureaucrats in policy and administrative matters alike.

A three-tiered structure from the colonial period continued to be used in higher defence policy making. The Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs (CCPA) was the foremost national security authority. The CCPA comprised all the senior ministers of the prime minister's cabinet and was responsible for policy making on a variety of subjects, including foreign affairs and defence. The tier below the CCPA, the Defence Planning Committee (DPC)—previously the Defence Minister's Committee—consisted of the cabinet secretary; the prime minister's special secretary; secretaries of finance, external affairs, planning, defence, defence production, defence research and development; and the three service chiefs. The CoS committee was the military component of the third tier. The other half was

the MoD's Defence Coordination and Implementation Committee (DCIC), chaired by the defence secretary. The DCIC coordinated defence production, defence research and development, finances, and requirements of the services.

The defence ministry under H. M. Patel also changed the Warrant of Precedence, so that at public meetings and state occasions, the top generals were clearly below senior civil servants and elected representatives of the people. Today, while the three chiefs are higher in precedence than the secretaries, they are below the cabinet secretary. Similarly, today, while the vice chiefs are of the same rank as the defence secretary, the latter chairs their meetings. Further, according to the note attached to the warrant of precedence, all secretaries have higher precedence than vice chiefs/equivalents in all public and official functions in New Delhi.

In his seminal work on civil–military relations, the late Samuel Huntington differentiated between subjective civilian control over the military and objective control. Objective control accepted that there is an inviolable military sphere of action which should not be intruded upon. Subjective control, by contrast, operated on an ideological affinity between military and political leaders.

Clearly, civil–military relations do not exist in a vacuum—they respond to the times. There is always bound to be some friction between senior elected officials, who are in control of the instruments of national power for some limited period, and senior officials of the military with long years of experience managing one of those instruments. This happened in India when Krishna Menon was defence minister, and General Thimmaya the army chief. When friction between the two reached a flashpoint, Thimmaya resigned. Nehru persuaded him to withdraw his resignation, but Thimmaya was clearly disillusioned when Nehru did not live up to the assurances given by him.

The 1962 war with China was a disaster for India. It exposed the unnecessary interference by civilian–political leadership in military matters. The order given by Nehru to set up forward posts without the requisite backing force was clearly given without consultation with the armed forces. The appointment of General B. M. Kaul as army chief at that critical point showed the lack of foresight on the part of the civilian government, and primarily by its then Defence Minister Krishna Menon. The government at that

time refused to heed the advice of the previous army chief to prepare and arm Indian troops for the likely attack by China. They firmly believed that China would never attack India.

Again, in 1971, when Prime Minister Indira Gandhi planned to send Indian troops to aid the freedom movement in Bangladesh, the then Chief of Army Staff General Sam Manekshaw advised against it, suggesting that nine months be dedicated to adequate preparations. The prime minister agreed, which is why the Indian armed forces could defeat the Pakistani army in Bangladesh in a very short period. Prior to that, Prime Minister Gandhi had also signed the treaty with Russia to ensure Russian aid if any other country tried to intervene (read China and the United States). Civilian diplomacy was as important as the actual battles between Indian and Pakistani armed forces.

In the 1999 Kargil war, there were two interventions by the civilian government. First, the Indian armed forces were directed not to cross the international border. The air force had to use precision bombing to destroy the bunkers set up by Pakistani forces on the Indian side. They were clearly told not to cross the border. The intervention by the air force was approved by the Cabinet Committee on Security on 25 May 1999. The second intervention was again on the diplomatic front. Every day, Indian diplomats had briefed the US government on the actual field situation. As a result, when Pakistan Premier Nawaz Sharif went to the United States for help, he was rebuffed and advised to immediately withdraw Pakistani forces from the Indian side.

KARGIL REVIEW COMMITTEE REFORMS

After the Kargil war, and after the receipt of the Kargil Review Committee Report (authored by K. Subrahmanyam), the Government of India set up a committee under the then Home Minister L. K. Advani to review the entire course of events leading to the Kargil conflict and recommend reforms necessary in the fields of intelligence, internal security, border management and higher defence management (1999). The implementation of these recommendations led to closer civil–military functioning at various levels. A Defence Procurement Board was set up under the chairmanship of the defence secretary and included the three vice chiefs of the army, navy and air force, as well as secretary defence finance, secretary defence

production, and secretary defence research. They were to decide jointly on defence items to be procured. Another Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) was set up under the defence minister to finalise the defence equipment and platforms required, as well as whether they ought to be made in India or bought outright from manufacturers. Similar councils were created for the departments of Defence Production and Defence Research. Thus, through all these bodies the armed forces were empowered to give their advice directly to the defence minister and voice their concerns on issues that came up before these councils.

The reforms also established a secretariat for the proposed CDS and till that post was created, it functioned under the CoS committee. The Chief of Integrated Defence Staff (CIDS), who heads the Secretariat, is charged with the examination of budget proposals received from the army, navy and air force headquarters and, with the approval of the CDS, recommend budgetary allocations to the MoD. Although these recommendations are scrutinised by the Department of Defence Finance as before, it is the CIDS to whom these queries are now directed, not the defence secretary/joint secretary concerned. Thus, a large part of civilian functions in this area now rests with the military.

It is commonly acknowledged that two long-standing demands of the armed forces have been to man posts in the MoD and be posted as staff officers to the defence minister, to which the government did not concede. But to ensure that the government benefitted from direct military advice, it was decided to create the post of CDS in the MoD, to be manned by a military officer.

CHIEF OF DEFENCE STAFF (CDS)

On 31 December 2021, a day before his retirement, Indian Army Chief General Bipin Rawat was elevated to the post of CDS. He served as India's first CDS until his tragic demise in a helicopter crash on 8 December 2021.

While the defence secretary continues to be Chief Defence Advisor (CDA) to the government, the CDS is Chief Military Advisor (CMA) to the government, thus making a distinction between their functions.

The functions and duties of the Chief of Defence Staff are as follows:

(i) To head the DMA in the MoD and function as its secretary;
(ii) permanent chairman of the CoS Committee;
(iii) CMA to the minister of defence on all tri-service matters;
(iv) to administer tri-service organisations/agencies/commands;
(v) to be a member of the DAC, chaired by the minister of defence;
(vi) to function as military advisor to the nuclear command authority;
(vii) to bring about jointness in operations, logistics, transport, training, support services, communications, repairs and maintenance, etc., of the three services;
(viii) to ensure the optimal utilisation of infrastructure and rationalise it through jointness among the services;
(ix) to implement the five-year defence capital acquisition plan and two-year roll on annual acquisition plans, as a follow-up to the integrated capability development plan;
(x) to assign inter-service prioritisation to capital acquisition proposals, based on the anticipated budget; and
(xi) to bring about reforms in the functioning of the three services, with the aim to augment combat capabilities of the armed forces by reducing wasteful expenditure.

OTHER ISSUES IN THE CIVIL–MILITARY RELATIONSHIP

The MoD does not work in isolation. It has to interact with various other (civilian) ministries: (i) Ministry of Finance, for budgeting; (ii) Ministry of External Affairs, which decides on foreign policy and strategy; (iii) Ministry of Shipping/Ports, for the use of ports, and building of ships and submarines; (iv) Ministry of Railways, for the movement of troops; (v) Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, which supplies fuel for vehicles and the air force; (vi) Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), under which function the Intelligence Bureau and the paramilitary forces; (vii) Cabinet Secretariat, under which the external intelligence agency, Research and Analysis Wing, functions; (viii) National Security Advisor, and the National Security Council, which advises the government on overall security matters; and (ix) Department of Space, which helps in the installation

of communications and other special purpose satellites that help the military.

In short, when we talk of the civil–military relationship we think only of the civil bureaucracy in the MoD and the headquarters of the army, air force and the navy. But this is not so. This relationship and the various issues facing the military have a much wider range. It includes the interaction with civilian authorities in the field not only during riots, but also when troop movements are taking place. When land is required for stationing troops, both in forward as well as inland areas, it is the civil authority which legally acquires land for the armed forces or removes encroachments on military land.

Too much of our time is taken up in finalising equivalence levels between civilians and officers of the armed forces, both in the field as well as at the armed forces headquarters. The issue of who will salute whom becomes more important than all other matters. Today, there are more than 4 lakh civilians working in the military.

As an old Bible saying goes, give unto Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God. Therefore, in operational matters, the military should be given complete autonomy and there should be no interference from the civilian side once the objective is laid down by the political masters. However, once the objective is achieved, it is for the political masters to decide when and how to end it.

Even today, when the three chiefs meet to discuss operational strategy with the prime minister and the defence minister in the war room of the MoD, the defence secretary and other secretaries are kept out of the discussions.

PAY COMMISSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS PERTAINING TO CIVIL AND MILITARY OFFICERS

Another contentious issue bedevilling the civil–military relationship is the lack of parity in the pay and allowances of civilian officers/employees with their military counterparts. This issue is raised after every Pay Commission (PC) report. The military establishment's demand for a representative in the PC is usually rejected by the government on the ground that if the military were given representation, other services would also demand the same. This would defeat the concept of an independent PC for all the officers/employees of the central government.

The issue of One Rank, One Pension became a burning subject in 2015–2016. Orders in this regard were issued on 7 November 2015. The military raised 38 anomalies in the recommendations of the 7th PC, while pointing out that earlier anomalies were yet to be satisfactorily resolved. Civil bureaucrats were blamed for this delay and procrastination.

POST-RETIREMENT ABSORPTION OF ARMED FORCES PERSONNEL

The transfer and absorption of armed forces personnel on the conclusion of their military service into government organisations, including the police and other departments where their unique skills, training, discipline and strengths can be optimally used, has not been implemented despite the recommendations of Parliament and the PC. Indian Police Service (IPS) officers heading paramilitary organisations under the MHA have consistently opposed the induction of jawans retiring from the army, in their forces. The army jawan usually retires around the age of 35, and is still youthful and energetic. He then has no option but to return to his village and live on his pension.

Every district of India has a Soldiers Board to look after the welfare of ex-servicemen as well as to resolve issues pertaining to land disputes and criminal intimidation of families of still-serving soldiers. Commanding officers refer such cases to the concerned District Magistrate. However, it takes years to resolve these disputes and the military is very critical of the civilian administration in this regard. Unfortunately, empathy for the soldier is missing.

CONCLUSION

There are various facets of the civil–military relationship in India, all of which need to be analysed to ensure harmonious functioning between the two. Servicemen in India are deeply respected by ordinary citizens. Their acts of valour have become part of folklore and now find mention in textbooks as well.

In British times, the military was located in cantonments, away from cities, as the British believed that the army ought to be protected from the virus of national freedom. This was the beginning of the civil–military divide. The army was used to suppress the freedom movement in various parts of the country, which is why in the early years after Independence the Congress leadership took steps to keep the military firmly under civil control.

In the first decade after Independence, there were fears of military coups. Consequently, the civilian government decided to extend army recruitment to all parts of the country, rather than areas known to be populated by martial races as was the prior practice. They also took steps to diffuse leadership in regiments with mixed-class officers.

The military in India has eschewed politics, and that is why we have a more stable democracy, unlike some countries in our neighbourhood. It is hoped that this environment will be maintained.

◆

THE CHINESE PUZZLE AND THE INDIAN POLICY STANCE

Some Considerations

AJAY VISHWAS DANDEKAR

The savage beauty that is the cold desert of Ladakh, with monasteries on its heights and the mighty Indus River flowing through its lands, is the most unlikely of places to become the eye of the fireball, as it were. But the eye it has become, ever since the conflict in 1962 with a blatantly belligerent China, and with clashes in the strategically located Galwan Valley in recent times. This paper will attempt to analyse the policy compulsions that have driven the Sino–Indian relationship, to argue that the basic tenets of our policy stance towards China have not changed all that dramatically. In that context, it looks at the original offer by the Chinese on border negotiations in 1960, and its rejection by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, at the operating principle of 'forward policy', and the crux of the matter—the Chinese stance on Tibet. Then, as now, it is contended that Tibet remains the key issue. Expansionist Chinese imperial dreams of supremacy of being the Middle Kingdom, and the Communist Party of China as the rightful inheritor of the Imperial Vision of China, have driven China's policy framework ever since the Communist takeover of mainland China in 1949 (Saran, 2022: 173).

◆◆◆

Did Prime Minister Nehru misread China in the decade of the 1950s? As early as 1950, Nehru, speaking in Parliament, had stated that ever since the Chinese revolution India had had to consider this major fact and what this new China was likely to be (Subrahmanyam, 1976). Going further ahead, in 1952, the then Ambassador to China N. Raghavan was instructed in no uncertain terms:

> Our attitude to the Chinese Government should always be a combination of friendliness and firmness. If we show weakness, advantage will be taken of this immediately. This applies to any development that might take place or in reference to our frontier problems between Tibet and Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim, Ladakh and rest of India. In regard to this entire frontier we have to maintain an attitude of firmness. Indeed, there is nothing to discuss here and we have made that previously clear to the Chinese Government.[1]

Indeed, this resolve was soon evident post the Panchsheel Agreement (1954) when, in an internal note, a position was decisively taken on the issue of Indian borders vis a vis China.[2] The relevant paras 7 to 10 unequivocally stated that

> All our old maps dealing with this frontier should be carefully examined and, where necessary, withdrawn. New maps should be printed showing our Northern and North Eastern frontier without any reference to any 'line'. These new maps should also not state there is any undemarcated territory. The new maps should be sent to our Embassies abroad and should be introduced to the public generally and be used in our schools, colleges, etc.
>
> Both as flowing from our policy and as consequence of our Agreement with China, this frontier should be considered a firm and definite one which is not open to discussion with anybody. There may be very minor points of discussion. Even these should not be raised by us. It is necessary that the system of check-posts should be spread along this entire frontier. More especially, we should have check-posts in such places as might be considered disputed areas.
>
> Our frontier has been finalised not only by implication in this Agreement but the specific passes mentioned are direct recognitions of our frontier there. Check-posts are necessary not only to control traffic, prevent unauthorised infiltration but as symbols of India's frontier. As Demchok is considered by the Chinese as a disputed territory, we should locate a check-post there. So also at Tsang Chokla.
>
> In particular, we should have proper check-posts along the U. P.-Tibet border and on the passes, etc., leading to Joshi Math, Badrinath, etc.

Interestingly, this note emerged immediately after the Panchsheel Agreement was signed. India was taking cognisance of the fact that Chinese expansionist policies had already violated the understanding on Tibet. China had reneged on an explicit assurance to respect the internal autonomy of Tibet by moving in the army. It was one major reason why India was now clearly indicating her stance publicly. It is also noteworthy that India took four years to duly acknowledge the fact on ground in Tibet. Nehru's acceptance of this reality came only when he realised that no help was forthcoming from the West (the United Kingdom and the United States), and with the USSR firmly behind Beijing he had no option but to close the issue. It is also significant that India accorded political asylum to the Dalai Lama in 1959, thus keeping the issue of Tibetan autonomy alive in international forums.

There are two other points to consider: What was the final Chinese offer in 1960? And what caused the conflict in 1962? There is enough documentation now available to pass judgement on both. The final Chinese offer on border negotiations was made by Premier Zhou Enlai to the Government of India as a package deal. The offer was for India to make concessions in the western sector and for the Chinese to reciprocate the same in the eastern sector, with some adjustments in the central sector. In effect, what the Chinese were asking of India was to concede almost all of Aksai Chin in the western sector; they were willing to accept the McMahon Line, thus accepting Arunachal Pradesh (earlier North East Frontier Agency [NEFA]) as Indian territory. Zhou Enlai, in a press briefing before exiting India, stated as much: 'The dispute regarding the Eastern sector has become a smaller one.' He also hoped that the 'Indian Government will take an attitude similar to that which the Chinese Government has taken in the Eastern sector, that is to say, we believe settlement of the question can be reached' (Rao, 2021: 368). This offer must have been read along with what had happened in Tibet, thus questioning its very credibility. Even in earlier dialogues between the two prime ministers, China was willing to accept the McMahon Line, but Aksai Chin did not become an issue until India discovered that China had constructed a road in a covert manner, linking Aksai Chin to Tibet. It is therefore not surprising that, starting with Nehru, every Indian prime minister has rejected the 'package deal', even though today there is a seeming strategic asymmetry between India and China.

In this context, we ought to consider the so-called 'forward policy' that has led to provocation and war, as suggested by Maxwell, among others. As Subrahmanyam has demonstrated so clearly, Maxwell wrote with a strong bias against India (1970). Forward policy was nothing but an attempt to establish patrols and check the Chinese on the Indian side of the perceived border in Ladakh and in the NEFA sector. This became important as China then (and even now) continued to advance its claim line between 1959 and 1961, and thus it was imperative that such salami slicing be contested.

The operating part of the forward policy needs to be quoted here to clear some misconceptions about it being adventurous and ill-thought-out. All that this policy was attempting to do was to safeguard Indian interests in Ladakh as well as in the NEFA sector, and the operative directive was that

> In view of the numerous operational and administrative difficulties, efforts should be made to position major concentration of forces along our borders in places conveniently situated behind the forward posts from where they could be maintained logistically and from where they can restore a border situation at short notice (ibid.).

It would be interesting to find out—if and when the archives on this subject open—whether this operating part of the directive to army headquarters was indeed conveyed to eastern and western army commanders in NEFA and Ladakh, and whether the two army commanders were at all aware. Forward posts were not to be thrown up blindly, but created with sufficient back up to quickly restore any situation on the border at short notice. The directive envisaged a careful build-up of forces and logistics, contrary to what is normally conveyed, and it is a moot point whether this was followed or not.

Thus, Nehru did perhaps read the strategic situation clearly, albeit constrained by India's strategic disadvantage because of reluctance on the part of the USSR and the West to take some position vis à vis China, and China's adoption of the now very well-known stance of 'aggressive deterrence' to assert its expansionist intent and practice of salami slicing. The critical elements of Nehru's policy were: to assert the Indian position on the issue of borders; to reject the package deal offered by the Chinese premier and thus maintain claim on Aksai Chin; to keep the issue of Tibet's autonomy

alive; and to retain the Indian right to further rightful claim about her borders, whenever the situation so resolved in the future.

The strategic logic of such a position has been clear ever since 1959. The imperative of Tibet is certainly important for any resolution of this issue, along with the post-1962 war development of Pakistan's handover of the Saksham Valley to China. The Chinese do not have any locus standi, which includes Aksai Chin, either in the Kashmir Valley or in the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir—that much is certainly clear. The Chinese intrusion in Doklam Plateau that threatens Chicken's Neck as well as the entire Ladakh sector—from Depsang Plains to Pangong Tso Lake and Chushul, with Galwan and Hot Springs in-between—is an initiation of qualitatively another phase altogether in the Sino–Indian relationship. It is also clear from the extensive mobilisation across the Line of Actual Control (LAC) that the original Chinese offer is now most certainly off the table, and that the Chinese leadership will push for a dominating role for itself in Ladakh and in Arunachal Pradesh. Their problem of course is that India is bound not to repeat tactical errors on ground and is much better prepared to hold the line not only in the Himalaya, but also on high seas, hurting China's maritime interests in a decisive manner.

◆◆◆

So, then, why the aggressive posturing by China? If it is read together with the Chinese tango with Russia over Ukraine, and its overtly assertive posture in the Indian Ocean and South China Sea, then it should be concluded that the Chinese nation state, tired of playing second fiddle, is shedding its inhibitions in global affairs and is disinclined to tolerate any more questioning of its supposedly pre-eminent position in Asia and the Indo–Pacific and, possibly, the world. Given the context of the times we find ourselves in today, what, then, are the policy options on the table that were not available to Nehru in the 1950s and 1960s?

Unlike in the 1950s, the United States is today perhaps more amenable to understanding India's strategic stance and is likely to be more responsive. The recent US position is indicative of such a situation, with one important caveat. The United States cannot be a fair-weather friend to India as there are hurdles in that relationship.

These hurdles stem from the complicated past the United States shares with South Asia where, traditionally, Pakistan has been the US frontline state in either fighting a war in Afghanistan or using the former's good offices to achieve a breakthrough in the US relationship with China during the Nixon years. Pakistan would always be more than willing to play the role of a frontline state for the United States as well as nurture its 'special relationship' with China. Lastly, the United States is capable of striking a deal with China on trade once it demonstrates its supremacy to the latter and is, thus, capable of turning a Nelson's eye to issues critical to India. India has traditionally refused to be a frontline state of the United States and has pursued an independent foreign policy, with non-alignment as a creative strategy earlier. India is now trying to carve out a soft power space for herself in global affairs. Our diversity, democracy and very large domestic market, along with a younger population, are the strengths that we must nurture and preserve to counterpoise China. However, the shift in Russia's position, where a no-limits friendship with China is fast becoming a cornerstone of Russian stance, will have a decisive impact globally. The compact between Russia and China is, in some sense, comparable to the Germany–USSR alliance of 1939 that led to the conflagration in Europe, and now in Ukraine. Have they given each other carte blanche—to China in South Asia, South East Asia and Africa, in exchange for a quid pro quo in Central Asia and Eastern Europe to Russia? Is another power bloc emerging with a decisive Asian slant? Here, the criticality of the roles of countries such as Japan becomes important.

Indian policy options at their basic levels, however, remain the same, with the new Russian tilt toward China to be factored in, a tilt that was also visible in the 1950s. Therefore, our policy prescription would suggest that we ought to hold on to the principles of border settlement adhered to since 1959, goad the West into a more proactive stance as a short-term measure, and convey to the Chinese that borders cannot be altered by force and, to that extent, bring China back to the negotiating table on the principle of equal and mutual respect. The Chinese economy—dependent on the ability and intent of the West to purchase from China, and China's ability to keep its domestic population under control—should already be in stress. In such a scenario, Xi Jinping's answer is very unlike that of some of the others who have preceded him. Xi would want greater

control of the Party over the country, and absolute control over the Party for himself—shades of the 'Great Helmsman?' The dictatorial control of the Party over the country and a centralised economy, with the Chinese version of extreme nationalism, may, in the long run, prove counterproductive to China's emergence as a supreme global power. The seeds of China's decline are embedded in the manner of her rise and growth as a polity and as an economy.

In that context, the path for India would be, and has been thus far, to pursue the basic policy tenet as practised by her prime ministers, starting with Nehru through Indira Gandhi to Narendra Modi: to strengthen ourselves; to not negotiate with the Chinese from a position of weakness; and to preserve, protect and nurture democratic governance internally, which gives us the strength to cast our soft power ambitions deep and wide. The Asian century—if indeed the 21st century is one—deserves to be led by democratic forces, not dictatorships.

◆

NOTES

1. Foreign Secretary and Secretary General, 1 July 1954, as quoted in Raghavan (2006).
2. This note was written for internal purposes by Prime Minister Nehru.

REFERENCES

Subrahmanyam, K. 1976. 'Nehru and the India China Conflict of 1962', in B. R. Nanda (ed.), *Indian Foreign Policy: The Nehru Years*. Delhi: Vikas Publications.

———. 1970. 'Neville Maxwell's War', *Hindustan Times*. 18 and 25 October. https://www.idsa.in/system/files/K.Subrahmayam%27sBook%20Review.pdf.

Raghavan, Srinath. 2006. 'Sino-Indian Boundary Dispute 1948–1960', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 41: 36.

Rao, Nirupama. 2021. *The Fractured Himalaya: India, Tibet, China: 1949–1962*. Delhi: Penguin.

Saran, Shyam. 2022. *How China Sees India and the World*. Delhi: Juggernaut Books.

◆◆

THE LAST EXPEDITION

Sri Lanka in a Shambles*

RADHIKA DAGA

> When I travel to a place, when I look at the geography and speak to the people, I find that there is a constant recurrence of history. In many places, a few centuries ago is like yesterday. Reading literature can be the best preparation for a discussion of a county's budget deficit. Every place and every conversation is embedded in the centuries and the rivers and mountains that shaped the people who shape the centuries.
>
> –George Friedman (2010)

Dark clouds of despair had started gathering upon the entire island in the Indian Ocean. Sri Lanka, once likened to a pearl in the ocean, was now running out of fuel, cooking gas, food supplies and, furthermore, the currency to purchase these essentials for survival. Thriving and smiling, the people were ready to fight a battle against those accountable for the sorry state of their beloved country. 'This is not going to be an easy journey,' warned fellow Sri Lankan adventurers, as we stood at the entrance to Lion's Kingdom, now called Sinharaja Rainforest. One of the few remaining rainforests in the world, it divulges the story of the people, their evolution and survival.

For centuries, pilgrims of all faiths have walked through this dense mesh of trees and wilderness to offer reverence at the holy mountain of Sri Pada (also called Adam's Peak). Sri Pada is a Sanskrit word, which quite literally translates as 'the sacred foot'. It refers to a footprint-shaped mark atop the 7,360-ft. mountain, which is believed to be either Buddha's or Adam's or Lord Shiva's, according to the religion in question. The Sinharaja is Sri Lanka's virgin rainforest

and is listed by UNESCO as a Biosphere Reserve and World Heritage Site. The forest is home to 830 endemic species, including a number of threatened, endangered and rare species,[1] making it a treasure trove for ecologists.

The word Sinharaja means lion (sinha) king (raja), and popular belief suggests that the Sinhala people in Sri Lanka originated as descendants of the union between the lion king, who once lived in the forest, and a princess. The forest is a living repository of Ceylonese[2] folklore, while its natural splendour has long made it a poet's favourite muse and a writer's inspiration. Forest literature, based on the Sinharaja forest, has been produced in several languages. As for adventurers, the forest offers an exciting hike with surprises, sometimes seemingly formidable. These were the commonly perceived impressions and experiences shared by visitors to this unassuming lushness. But I decided to follow in pursuit of the unknown, for the unknown carries limitless possibilities. I embarked on a virtually undefined ancient trail which goes up to the sacred mountain; this was my attempt to relive a lesser-known journey today.

The forest, as it is, is an embodiment of the wisdom of nature which has been bestowed upon the ancestors of this land. Collective tribal wisdom and botanical skills are visibly manifested throughout this stretch of land, surrounding villages, and much farther. As soon as we departed from the registration office, our local friend filled us with *pour quoi* stories which came alive on this unhurried journey. Sagara lives in the nearby village and has become an expert guide with 11 years of experience with groups of travellers from across the world.

The forest offers a wide range of species, but to set the stage for this show, the lights will soon be cut off, informs Sagara. He starts to introduce us to his friends from the jungle. We are welcomed by green hump-nosed lizards and the endemic junglefowl, which is also Sri Lanka's national bird. A surprise awaited us on a short detour from our path—a family of the rarest purple-faced langurs lying on the branches of a tree on the cliff.

The walk, a fascinating journey through the pages of a jungle chronicle, took a turn as we entered deep jungle. As promised, the path now grew dark and misty, a dense canopy of trees had enveloped us, and melodious frog cacophony reverberated

incessantly in our ears. An alternative reality begins to weigh in on you and all points of identification start to wither away. There is a game of hide and seek with the deadly tarantulas housed inside tree trunks. Although the tarantulas are a deadly species, they are not as frightening, particularly after you have embraced the *Ahaetulla*. According to legend, the gorgeous *Ahaetulla* or green vine snake attacks the eyes of those who approach it. However, my meeting with this *Ahaetulla* left me shedding my own urbanised skin, layer by layer.

For a keen observer, the rhythm of life becomes strikingly apparent further into the woods. Every encounter speaks of this rhythm. The trees are living, water is flowing, animals are moving and insects are humming. Simultaneously, the smell of decaying trees covered in verdant moss is overwhelming, wild mushrooms are growing on the dead branches of trees, exoskeletons of different species are found everywhere on the path, and leeches are bloodthirsty. Birth is intermingling with mortality like comedy with tragedy. The wondrous architecture of the forest is a gentle reminder of the saga of survival narrated by, and preserved in, nature.

This saga is steeped in deep sensitivity, imagination and power. It is based on old and time-tested arrangements. There are trees like the *ginihota*—gini in the local language means fire, and hota, bark. The bark of this tree is still used by villagers to light fires. Several medicinal herbs used by trusted Ayurvedic practitioners in the country are found in this area. One of them, *badura*, is a pitcher plant, containing a liquid with certain useful digestive enzymes. The plant has wondrously devised its own way of shielding this liquid from insects. I removed the lid and got my enzyme dose directly from nature. Additionally, a well-laid out and detailed matrix of 32 water streams along this long, and at times, physically challenging, hike ensured hydration. These discoveries inspire an awareness and oneness with the multitude of elements that have come together to form this existence. Breathless and rainsoaked, I am hypnotised by a jungle symphony and happily walking this invisible path to (self) discovery. When I look around, the entire forest is moving in harmony with me. My mind recounts words by Charles Darwin: 'All living beings share the same ancestors. We are part of the same genealogy of the one great family to which we all belong' (Rovelli, 2020, p. 305).

The two-day hike was over, but I had still not left the rainforest. About 150 km from the actual rainforest, I found a recurrence of the same jungle symphony in the capital city of Colombo and its suburbs. The people and their houses reflect an atavistic identity, which is untouched by ravages of time and space. Since the flashy supermarts had run out of stocks, survival was once more dependent on the old and uniquely organic way of life, embedded in the island's culture. Vegetables and fruits were freshly plucked from the garden, food was cooked on traditional firewood stoves, and dessert—toddy from the *kitul* tree—was sumptuous. Although this kind of simplicity is part of indigenous culture, the present crisis has re-sensitised people to the greatness of nature. Nature came to their rescue for all kinds of resources—from coconut husks used for cooking, to a fresh glass of *beli* fruit juice to keep cool in this tense situation. Possibilities, akin to the rainforest, were endless, and embraced in this quest for survival. Or, perhaps, for Sri Lankans—who always greet you with a smile and treat you to their delicacies—abundance is a state of mind, a likely outcome of their direct relationship with nature.

The Sri Lanka outside the rainforest is modern, yet classical. What stands out is the continual effort by Sri Lankan society to remain anchored in social structures of the past and realise the primacy of values over development. In the dry zone of the island, especially in the two main ancient urban centres of Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa, old systems of irrigation, which were the pride of traditional Sinhalese kingdoms and civilisation, are brought back to life by the local administration. These systems were long-neglected at the time of colonisation and thereafter. Today, these reservoirs and embankments, which are commonly called 'tanks', have been revived, and still hold great relevance for paddy cultivation and the livelihood of a greater part of the population. The preservation of these tanks, and the biodiversity that it nurtures, is considered sacred and indispensable for the progress of the nation. The marshy lands abutting water tanks offer the privilege of bird watching, sometimes right in the middle of the city.

In present-day metropolises, the traditional style of architecture, which focuses on ways of living with the vagaries of tropical weather, is in vogue after the revival of the original Sri Lankan style by leading architects of the country like Minnette de Silva and Geoffrey Bawa,

among others. In its contemporary phase, these designs mainly try not to control climate artificially or follow global trends. I acknowledged the contours of structures inspired by the past: a verandah in front called *ālinda*, where a good deal of daily life is spent; and balconies called *tala,* where mornings start. Self-contained and separate roof pavilions are integral to the house. Previously called *mandap*, the buildings, consisting of pillars and balustrades, allow ventilation from all sides. With the worst power cuts in Sri Lankan history, the existing dwellings and structures, based on the pragmatic foundations of the past, made life bearable. I remember the days with great fondness, for this was the kind of space that allowed you to breathe, even when times prevented it.

The country is also home to many sacred Buddhist relics that mark the enduring influence of religious values and beliefs in society. The people and their life philosophy are deeply rooted in Buddhism, which, in all its historical and cultural manifestations, encourages greater identification with the natural world. The very life of Buddha is the biggest inspiration for ecological and altruistic living. Religious texts and art are replete with such expressions which evoke a sense of joy and harmony between mankind and the elements. Artists have used fresco paintings and murals, and sculptors have used their imagination to describe the path of enlightenment taken by Buddha. On this path, Buddha is accompanied by lions, bulls, elephants, serpents, among other life forms. Co-existence alone is the symbol of strength and prosperity for Sri Lanka and its people.

In the most discernible ways, Sri Lankan society is a confluence of the East and the West, of both within and without, and of discovery and influence. And like everything else, there are layers of diversity within its people. However, this very diversity brings harmony, which is in fact consolidated by a pre-natural sensitivity common to all groups. The current crisis has revealed a sense of solidarity in thoughts and actions which is conveyed by a sturdy opposition to common suffering. Ever since the outbreak of protests, people have sprung into action—people from all ethnicities, religions, castes and classes. There is no attempt at unbecoming, and yet the responsibility towards their country is shared by all. They share the land and even Gods.

At the start of my journey to the Sinharaja Rainforest, one of my fellow adventurers Dimantha called this his last expedition.

Like many others, he was deeply concerned and disheartened by the dire situation in his country. The last expedition, so to speak, was my first encounter with the soul of this land—the land which is fertile and inspires growth in all respects. The cities and villages are forever blooming with a sense of contentment and gratitude. And the people are happy and kind. By the end of our hike, Dimantha was convinced of his own strength and his people's ability to reinvent themselves in difficult times, as proven in the past.

◆

* This article is inspired by the author's visit to Sri Lanka in April 2022.

NOTES

1. Sinharaja Forest Reserve: World Heritage Convention, UNESCO.
2. Ceylon was Sri Lanka's former name.

REFERENCES

Friedman, George. 2010. 'Geopolitical Journey, Part 1: The Traveler'. https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/geopolitical-journey-part-1-traveler. Accessed on 20 February 2022.

Rovelli, C. 2020. *There Are Places in the World Where Rules Are Less Important Than Kindness: And Other Thoughts on Physics, Philosophy and the World.* Penguin.

◆◆

SRI LANKA
A Bloodless Revolution?*

SINHARAJA TAMMITA-DELGODA

It was only ten o'clock at night. In an affluent residential suburb of Colombo, a car reversed slowly off the main road. Although it was still early, the road was empty, deserted and dark. The car backed steadily into a side lane. Close by was an abandoned restaurant. Inside were men singing and swaying to the tune of their own music.

A drunken man weaved slowly to and fro behind the vehicle. The driver got out and told the drunk to move. He was wearing a uniform. The drunk rushed towards him. 'Who are you to tell me what do?' He put his hands on the vehicle.

'Take your hands off, don't touch the car.'

At the sound of rising voices, several men came running towards the vehicle. Within minutes, they had surrounded the driver. There were five or six of them. On the other side of the car, another man got out and stood by the door. He, too, was wearing a uniform. The crowd surged around them. 'What did you say,' they demanded angrily.

The two men in uniform stood their ground. 'He asked him to move,' one said. 'We told him not to touch the car.'

The crowd began to swell. People started shouting. 'Who are you to tell us what to do? Touch the car. We will do anything we like.' They brushed up against the driver, jostling him; one or two even touched his uniform. Putting their hands on the car, they peered inside the half-open windows. The two soldiers stiffened and held their ground. They did not react.

A big-built man appeared from within the crowd. His face too was flushed. 'What are you all doing here? Who do you think you are?' Hands on hips, he stood right in front of the car. The soldier on

the other side spoke directly to him. 'Look, we are just trying to do our job. The vehicle is our responsibility.' The man leaned in. 'Who is in the car?'

'Our officer is in the back.' The man peered inside. We remained silent. The officer did not move. The seconds of silence calmed the air.

The man peered into the car. 'Sorry, sir, we don't want trouble. I was in the forces too.' He nodded to the other men. They stepped back. Slowly, the soldiers got back into the car and we drove away.

It had been a moment waiting to happen. A deliberate attempt to provoke.

The officer explained. 'We are now targets. We have been warned to take care when we use our vehicles. We have been told not to react.'

He thought for a few moments. 'What are we to do? Which officer is going to give the order to shoot on our own people? If we do so, how will we go back to our homes and villages?'[1]

Unlike India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, Sri Lanka has never had a separate military culture. There are no cantonments across the country. The military does not live in separate residential areas and their children do not go to special schools. The vast majority of Sri Lanka's servicemen live cheek by jowl with their neighbours. They see themselves not as a privileged élite, but as government servants required to carry out orders. Like other civil servants across Sri Lanka, their futures are determined by the politicians. Unlike other government servants, they are bound by strict discipline and called to implement tasks which civilians cannot, and will not, do. Yet, for all their training, they too are products of their environment, deeply affected by what is happening around them.

The end of the 30-year conflict with the Tamil Tigers transformed the position of the military within Sri Lankan society. They were acclaimed as 'Ranaviru' or 'Golden Heroes', and accorded tremendous respect and status. Senior officers were given key civilian and diplomatic positions, and some became national figures. Even the average soldier found that he had a place and a voice within his community.

At the height of the pandemic (2019–2021), the forces had accumulated further public trust and respect as the most effective arm of government. Erecting hospitals and quarantine centres at

great speed, they revolutionised the chaotic vaccination process. By the end of 2021, nearly two-thirds of the population had been immunised. In the aftermath of the April bombings of 2019, the armed forces had been the ultimate guarantor of law and order. Swiftly and effectively, they reassured the public and ensured there was no widespread retaliation against Sri Lanka's Muslim community.

In recent months, the implosion of Sri Lanka's economy has completely transformed the position of the armed forces. Called on to police public unrest, they have found themselves pitted against their own people, the targets of anger, frustration and despair. Like their neighbours, their families have no petrol and no diesel, no gas to cook, no electricity for hours, and their children are not going to school. Like the rest of society, they are angry, resentful and deeply worried about the future.

A RELUCTANCE TO ACT

In April and May 2022, public discontent, which had been simmering for several months, finally erupted. On 1 April, protestors attempted to storm President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's home. On 9 May, supporters of Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa emerged from the premier's residence and attacked anti-government demonstrators. This set off an outpouring of rage across the country. There was rioting on the streets, vehicles were set alight, and the homes of members of the ruling party were burned to the ground. Finally, on 12 May, after two days of mayhem, the army was brought in. President Gotabaya Rajapaksa held on and a few days later Ranil Wickremasinghe, former five-time prime minister and leader of the United National Party (UNP), was appointed prime minister for the sixth time. It was hoped that this would shift blame and appease the people.

Cowed, discredited, and often powerless, the police proved incapable of controlling the mounting anger. Cameras show policemen standing by helplessly while the houses that they had been assigned to protect were reduced to ashes. In the days that followed the rioting, a senior policeman, Deputy Inspector General of Police (DIG) Deshabandu Tennekoon, was assaulted and chased down a road in front of the cameras.

Several months of bearing the brunt of public outrage has completely undermined the effectiveness of Sri Lanka's police force. In the last few months, the level of crime has escalated steeply.

Theft and robbery are now commonplace. What has become equally commonplace is that the police are reluctant to act.

Uppermost in their minds was the fear of repercussions. A DIG in charge of a province summed up the situation.

> We are mocked. We are scolded in filth. But we are still told to do this and that. The moment we take action, everyone starts attacking us. Foreign ambassadors get involved. When there is a riot the lawyers say that we are assaulting the people who are suffering. We are accused of violating human rights and our careers are at risk. I have 2,000 men in my command. I am responsible for them and their families. My first priority is my officers and their families.[2]

The reluctance to act would prove decisive in the days to come.

THE COLLAPSE OF GOVERNMENT

On 9 July 2022, the world watched in fascination as Sri Lanka's government collapsed. Despite the lack of fuel, more than 100,000 protesters descended on the capital Colombo, demanding President Rajapaksa's resignation.

Two and a half years previously, in November 2019, Gotabaya Rajapaksa had been given a mandate by the majority community. For the first time in Sri Lanka's political history, the majority Sinhalese community had united across barriers of party, class, religion and caste to give him 52.25 per cent of the vote. As Rajapaksa acknowledged: 'The main message of the election is that it was the Sinhala majority vote that allowed me to win the presidency.' More than a year later, the Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP), the party of the president and his brother, Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa, secured a landslide victory in the general election of August 2020, winning 145 of 225 seats.

Amongst Gotabaya Rajapaksa's most ardent supporters were the Sinhalese middle and professional classes, youth and expatriates. Gotabaya Rajapaksa had been expected to restore national pride, set the country to rights and make it safe. People of all ages and classes wanted a strong man, who would lead them in to a new golden age without fear or favour. Instead, they found a muddled and incompetent regime, led by a man who could not control his family and his politicians. Preethi de Silva, a hotel owner in Anuradhapura,

had been one of those who had once rallied around him. 'He stood before the Ruwan Velisaya, the greatest dagaba in the land and swore to serve the country. He promised that he would rule like a king. Instead he ruled like a Rajapaksa.'

Sri Lanka's economic crisis had been many years and many governments in the making. However, the Rajapaksa government ignored the writing on the wall. For the best part of a year, experts, intellectuals, business groups, and even the media, had warned of impending doom, pleading with the government to approach the International Monetary Fund (IMF) before it was too late. Instead of heeding these warnings, Rajapaksa, his family and their handpicked advisors led the country into the greatest economic crisis ever seen.

Gotabaya Rajapaksa's subsequent refusal to take the blame and resign enraged an already desperate country. Had he resigned earlier, it would have taken the heat out of the demonstrations. Instead, Rajapaksa stayed and watched as public anger hardened into rage—and rage grew into revolution. The same people who had rallied to him in droves turned against him. Unable to travel even short distances, unable to pay for food and medicine, their livelihoods in ruins, they had only one option left—protest. Determined to make a change, hundreds and thousands descended on Colombo. They came from all across the country, anyway they could—in cars, buses, coaches, trucks, lorries, trains and trailers. Those who could not find transport came on foot. Young, professional and highly educated, Shalini, an official at a Western embassy, had literally lived in a queue for two days, waiting for fuel. 'There was no point in keeping quiet anymore. I had no way to go, but I had felt I had to do something. So we jumped on the back of a truck which was going that way, when that stopped we walked and then we got into another lorry.'

In a massive failure of intelligence, the authorities underestimated the size of the crowds. The demonstrators were obstructed by barricades, confronted with water cannon and sprayed with tear gas. However, orders had been given forbidding the use of lethal force. The protestors also knew that the military would not open fire.

Faced with a lack of real resistance, massive human waves forced their way past the barricades. Once the barricades had been overrun, the army and police stood by and watched. As the day

wore on, thousands of people occupied the President's house, the Presidential Secretariat, and Temple Trees, the official residence of the Prime Minister.

It had been a bloodless revolution. In 100 days of protest, the Aragalaya ('Peoples Struggle') had unseated the President and the Prime Minister. Not a single person had been killed in gunfire. Fewer people had died than in a single day of gun violence in the United States.

A SOCIETY ON THE EDGE

As the President and his wife fled, Ranil Wickremasinghe took over the reins of government as Acting President. Later that night his home was torched and burned, while people watched and cheered. When a fire engine arrived, the mob threatened the firemen, stopping them from putting out the fire. One of them even took control of the wheel.

In a special televised statement, Wickremasinghe addressed the nation.

> Here or abroad, I have only one house. My greatest treasure was my library. I had 2,500 books. Paintings more than 200 years old. Today I have only one left….I had 15–20 images of the Buddha. There is one left. Everything has been destroyed.[3]

On 13 July, crowds gathered again to storm the Prime Minister's office. Once again, the security forces refused to act, stepping away after a few rounds of tear gas. Large numbers of people also surrounded Parliament where the MPs were due to meet. On 20 July, within the heavily guarded parliamentary complex, Sri Lanka's legislators elected a new President. Encouraged by the ruling SLPP and in fear for their lives, their property and their future, 134 MPs cast their vote for Ranil Wickremasinghe.

Wickremasinghe had presided over the previous 'Yahapalanaya' or 'Good Governance' administration. His regime's incompetence and corruption was so glaring that it had enabled the Rajapaksas to sweep back into power. At the last election, Wickremasinghe had lost his own parliamentary seat, and his political party was decimated. Widely ridiculed and hugely unpopular, in the eyes of Sri Lanka's masses he personifies the alienation and arrogance of the colonial élite who have dominated Sri Lankan politics since independence.

Nandana Sitinamaluwe

Nandana Sitinamaluwe

Nandana Sitinamaluwe

Nandana Sitinamaluwe

Nandana Sitinamaluwe

Indika Handuwala

Indika Handuwala

Indika Handuwala

Indika Handuwala

As the editor of a national paper put it: 'Wickremasinghe is typical of this class. They are deeply colonised and have no feel for the country. They look down on their own people and bow down before foreigners.'[4]

Although it was the product of the constitutional process, Wickremasinghe's appointment was greeted with howls of anger across the country. The protestors of the Aragalaya questioned his legitimacy and suitability to represent the people of Sri Lanka. Like the Rajapaksas, he embodied the failed and corrupted system which had brought the country to its knees. It was a far cry from the systemic change which they had campaigned for. Wickramasinghe, in turn, termed the protestors 'fascists'. The new government called on the military to maintain law and order and protect the Constitution.

'If you try to topple the government, occupy the President's office and the Prime Minister's office, that is not democracy; it is against the law. We will deal with them firmly according to the law' (Wickremasinghe, 2022).

In the days that followed, the new administration re-established itself. Forcibly dispersing protestors, the regime took back President's House, the Presidential Secretariat and Temple Trees. Those who had been involved in looting and violence were also tracked and rounded up. The protestors, in turn, vowed to continue their struggle.

Sri Lanka has entered a vicious cycle. Authority and law cannot be enforced without stability. Stability, in turn, cannot exist without legitimacy. At the root of the problem is the chaos and upheaval caused by the economic crisis. The country is in desperate need of debt restructuring, loans, financial credibility and international backing. However, without stability none of this can take place. Shortly before Wickremesinghe's appointment, Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva told the Nikkei that the IMF would work with any administration 'as long as the next leader enjoys support and has the longevity to lead the country'.[5]

Although it commands a majority in Parliament, Wickremesinghe's government can guarantee neither longevity nor popular support.

A simmering cauldron, seething with violence, tension and discontent, Sri Lanka remains a society on the edge. The next general

election is not due until September 2024. Whether the country can wait till then has yet to be seen. The greatest sources of tension have revolved around fueling stations as thousands wait for days for petrol and diesel which does not come. The last few months have seen incidents of violence all around the country. Thousands of people have been waiting for days on end, many of them living in their cars. Several have died waiting. Clashes have broken out between police, the army and those waiting in the queues. Fights have also broken out amongst customers, some of whom have been killed. Isuru, the owner of a private petrol station explained his plight.

> The chairman calls. He says there are so many vehicles coming. Doctors, Police, Government Officials and Essential Services. I have to make special arrangements. They all have to fill up and go. We are restricting the fuel we are giving out to the public to a few litres at a time. Its not enough to run for two or three days. Every time we break the lines and allow people to fill up, the crowd goes wild. The police are frightened. The army will not come. I have had to get thugs in to control the situation. Sooner or later there is going to be another riot and my shed will be burnt down.

Sri Lanka has reached a stage where the armed forces have become the only guarantor of law and order, life and private property. A military is defined by its power to enforce. In this atmosphere, the military cannot enforce for fear of reaction and repercussion. There is also the issue of political backing and trust. Senior military officers knew they could rely on Gotabaya Rajapaksa. However, they do not have the same confidence in Wickremasinghe. During the closing stages of the Eelam War, Wickremesinghe had openly disparaged and mocked the armed forces while they were in the field. Now he is dependent on them for his survival.

Immediately after his election as President, Wickremasinghe walked through the troops who had been deployed to protect Parliament. Moving through the ranks, he expressed his gratitude, thanking them for protecting the democracy of the country. It was something he would never have done before.

A man without a future, a mandate and a party, deeply unpopular across the country, alienated from both society and electorate, deeply distrusted by the armed forces and supported

by a party whose members are in fear, Ranil Wickremesinghe might just be the right man for the job. Once they realise what is at stake, the Western powers, the UN and the other international bodies will allow Wickremesinghe the leeway and the space he requires. This will give him the freedom to take drastic action. It is about much more than his political survival—his life may depend on it.

Sri Lanka's implosion has also changed the geopolitics of the region. At the end of the Eelam War, India watched as its support for the Tamil cause had allowed China to establish itself at the heart of the island's polity. Now China has no option but to follow India's example and support Sri Lanka to the end. To do otherwise would be to cede the space it has spent more than a decade building up. For Sri Lanka, too, the game has changed. What has changed is that she no longer has the power to say no.

Revolutions by nature are violent and bloody. Sri Lanka's bloodless revolution may not subside until blood is spilled. There is yet another question which remains unanswered. It can only be answered by Sri Lanka's armed forces.

◆

* Although every attempt has been made to attribute sources, in the case of quotations from serving officials in the security forces, names have been withheld. In certain private communications, personal details have also been withheld on request.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The photographs that accompany this article are courtesy Nandana Sitinamaluwe and Indika Handuwala.

NANDANA SITINAMALUWE is an independent filmmaker and photographer based in Colombo. In 2019, he produced the award-winning documentary, *In Search of Malwathu Oya*. He is the director of the documentary, *The Living Treasure of Memory* (2021), the story of the art of writing in Sri Lanka.

INDIKA HANDUWALA is an award-winning photojournalist with over 12 years of experience. He is currently the photography desk editor at *The Sunday Times*.

NOTES

1. Colonel, Sri Lanka Army, April 2022, name withheld.
2. Deputy Inspector General (DIG), Sri Lanka Police, July 2022, name withheld.

3. See *Newsfirst*, 11 July 2022. https://www.newsfirst.lk/2022/07/11/video-library-of-2500-books-paintings-destroyed-ranils-special-statement-on-9th-july-events/.
4. Comments by senior journalist and editor, 2020, name withheld.
5. Kentaro Iwamoto, 'Sri Lanka Crisis IMF hopes to complete Sri Lanka aid talks as quickly as possible,' *Nikkei Asia*, 20 July 2022.

REFERENCE

Wickremasinghe, Ranil. 2022. 'New President Warns of Legal Action on Protesters', *Colombo Gazette*, 20 July.

◆◆

BOOK REVIEW

JOGINDER PAUL
The Writerly Writer

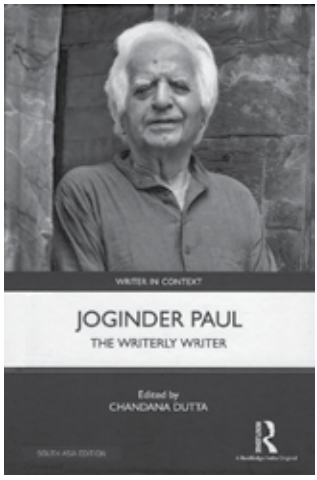
KRISHNA SOBTI
A Counter Archive

MALASHRI LAL

The word 'series' is often visualised as neat leather-bound volumes in an ornamental box, sitting atop a teakwood library shelf. However, Routledge's offering of the 'Writer in Context' series is far more dynamic and user-friendly than the visualised assumption. Meticulously planned by the series editors Sukrita Paul Kumar and Chandana Dutta, 'the volumes as a whole offer a vision of the strands and divergence as well as confluence in Indian literature' (Preface: xvi). Noting the magnificent range of 'modern' writing in the regional languages of the country, and recognising that a map of interlinkages through translations and resource materials would enrich systematic study of trends and comparisons, the editors have commissioned volumes on individual authors, keeping a firm eye on the socio-cultural ethos of their creations. Highly innovative, purposeful and comprehensive, the first two books in the series reviewed here clearly demonstrate the arrival of mature scholarship aimed at benefitting South Asian studies globally. The books are attractive for the common

JOGINDER PAUL: THE WRITERLY WRITER

Series: Writer in Context
Editor: Chandana Dutta
Publisher: Routledge, 2022
Details: pp. 288; Price: ₹ 1495.00



reader as well because curiosity about a favourite regional writer is graciously satisfied.

◆◆◆

'I don't know whether it was fiction on which man first built his faith, or faith on which his fiction,' says the Urdu writer Joginder Paul, integrating the multiple levels at which his narratives operate (p. 69). Aptly titled *Joginder Paul: The Writerly Writer*, Chandana Dutta has compiled an extraordinary range of information that delves into a master-craftsman's forge of the imagination and finely examines each tool along with samples of Paul's aesthetic articulation. In the eight sections that unfold the intricacies of Paul's writing, Dutta holds on to the clear objective of showcasing 'how Paul strove consistently to effect a change in how fiction should be perceived, particularly by his readers who he considered the most important ally-participant in his effort to create stories' (p. 1). Systematically organised and impeccably comprehensive, the book is a first presentation in English of Paul's rich oeuvre in the context that shaped him and his writing.

Understandably, the opening section comprises translations of a few short stories—powerful, robust, incisive. Take, for example, 'Parayi', translated by Keerti Ramachandra, about a young woman's spirited questioning of her 'clod of earth' violent, impotent husband and her abusive in-laws, as to 'where is my house?' For not producing a male heir, or any child, she is being thrown out, but is it her 'fault'? 'Can saffron sprout on trampled earth?' she asks. Ramachandra's exquisite translation of the woman's angst, her earthy colloquialisms, her raw anger show the barren wife's plight and social ostracism. The title 'Parayi' has been wisely left in the original as there is no English equivalent to this vernacular concept for a woman's 'otherness'. Paul, in this story and others, has a keen eye for the marginalised, the dispossessed, whether it be the coloured people in Nairobi, the disabled person, the so-called lunatic—all of whom function outside the normative.

We are witness to Paul's consistent and fascinating explorations into the art of fiction. Through several sections of the book, Paul speaks directly about his life experience of many transitions—Africa, England, Pakistan, India—a writer's

portmanteau of memories and social comment. While dwelling amongst imagined people in a creative space, a writer may be acutely lonely or 'suffering', he says in an essay in 'The Cartography of Creativity'—'The misery of man is attributable to the state of loneliness to which he feels tempted for what he fashionably regards as his right to privacy,' says Paul with irony (p. 67). At the same time, he is a sensitive public figure, a critic of other writers, carrying opinions on the evolution of Urdu and Hindi literatures. From one master to another, Paul's essay on Premchand is a classic which focuses on the influence of the *dastan* in shaping structure and language.

An indigenous form of short-short story called *afsanche* in Urdu was pioneered by Paul many decades before flash fiction became fashionable in English. In a mere 500 words, a vignette sparks into life, such as in the unfinished tale of a hero and heroine who escape the author's pen, walk out of his doleful pages, and decide to joyfully embrace marriage ('The Settled People'). Christopher Merrill places such aphoristic writing within a tradition of 'wisdom literature' (p. 156). Paul, however, invents his own evocative term: *kahanipan*/storyness—'the spontaneous flow in the experience of the story' (p. 61)—and gives full acknowledgment to the intended play between the writer and his characters, his readers and critics.

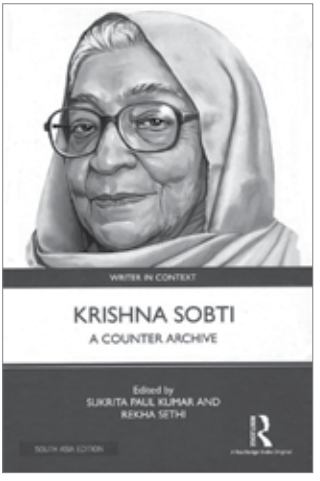
In the sections that are critical commentaries on Paul's writing, I was delighted to find several references to *Nadeed* (Blind), my favourite text for comprehending Paul. Set in a residency for blind people, the metaphor of sight and sightlessness critiques the idea of normalcy. Sukrita Paul Kumar writes, 'At one level the novel engages with the spiritual malaise or problems related to the Indian situation, but on another level, it seems to be the story of our times anywhere in the world' (p. 233). In conjunction with Wazir Agha's essay on *Nadeed* and Hina Nandrajog's recall of co-translating the text with Kumar, the endorsement of Paul's complex, authentic and philosophical portrayal of reality through surreal landscapes holds steady. *Khwabrau* (Sleepwalkers), another novel cast in liminal space, encourages speculations about its metaphors for Partition and the larger sector of human choice. The segment on 'Conversations and Dialogues' opens up the writer's creative process to frank scrutiny. Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, famous for his own work, reads Paul

against the background of the Progressive Movement, catching the moments of assent and dissent. From such literary history to personalised essays by Paul's wife Krishna, niece Usha Nagpal and close friends such as Zahir Anwar, affection and admiration for a remarkable intellectual flow through the pages.

The theory and practice of literary translation stands illustrated brilliantly in the collection. Vibha Chauhan, Meenakshi Bharat, Sunil Trivedi, among others, speak about the challenges of intra-lingual transfers and discuss the affinity of language to a cultural matrix. The fraught issues of retaining original words, creating glossaries, adopting differential tones in conversations and such other topics surface and are explored with examples of their own practice in rendering Joginder Paul into English. In one of his musings, the great writer had composed a 'Self Obituary': 'The fact is that I have no idea as to when I had died, for I am breathing in spite of it' (p. 111). Joginder Paul is indeed a living presence through this wonderful book, its gifted translators, and the academic services of Sukrita Paul Kumar and Chandana Dutta.

◆◆◆

KRISHNA SOBTI: A COUNTER ARCHIVE
Series: Writer in Context
Editors: Sukrita Paul Kumar and Rekha Sethi
Publisher: Routledge, 2022
Details: pp. 286; Price: ₹ 1495.00



Transiting to the second book in the series, *Krishna Sobti: A Counter Archive,* edited by Sukrita Paul Kumar and Rekha Sethi, one notices the shift to the outer world of politics, gender violence, sociological imperatives, and so on. As the editors emphasise, 'Counter archives are disruptive of conventional narratives, and while they tend to engage with the past and historicise differently, there is also a futuristic intent built into them' (p. 1). A rich oeuvre of material unfolds, whether autobiographical or located in historical events such as Partition. Sobti, when I met her at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, came through as a mercurial personage. When I showed interest in her links with Rajasthan, my home state, she

reminisced in a fragmented way about her time as a governess to the young prince of Sirohi. Much later, this shaped into the maverick novel *A Gujarat Here, A Gujarat There,* in which Daisy Rockwell, the translator, deciphers multiple schisms surfacing immediately after Partition.

The schisms of gender identity, linguistic fluidity and locational disruption show up in much of Sobti's work, of which this book offers plentiful examples. Part 1 with a focus on the writer's 'many Hindi(s)' starts with *Sikka Badal Gaya* presenting the admixture of Punjabi words with Hindi (to which Agyeya, as editor, showed no objection) and moves through citations from several works. My favourite is *Ai Ladki* (Hey Girl), in Shivanath's translation. Based on a fictionalised conversation between an elderly, sick woman (Ammu) and her daughter (Ladki), the language is remarkably supple in unravelling the mind of a woman afflicted with thoughts of death, yet fighting to taste the joys of life. She is feisty and unconventional; the daughter is a quiet, unvoiced character, dutifully attending to the ailing woman. In translation, the vivacity and pungency is not lost: 'Ladki, this is not maya or an illusion. No, no, life and living are not imagined. It is the leaving of it that is. Is there anyone of flesh and blood who can savour juicy mangoes, ripened on the tree, after death? *Nahin ri*' (p. 37). In 'Literary Reception', a later section of the volume, critics Savita Singh and Florence Pasche Guignard present their views on intergenerational struggle, and debates around sexuality and motherhood. Superbly done, Sobti's leadership in casting the parameters of an Indian feminism in Hindi literature is substantiated by Singh (p. 147), even as Guignard explores the story through the lens of 'maternal theory' (p. 162). Opposed as Sobti was to stereotypes of a dependent female, she was nevertheless empathetic towards the social realism of family structures in north India where her novels are situated. It is noted in the Introduction that Krishna Sobti never wished to be slotted as a 'woman writer', but always said she was proud to be a woman (p. 11). I may add that such a conundrum is not particular to Sobti and is equally observed in writers as different as Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande.

A substantial section on *Zindaginama* is justified by the sheer volume and significance of Sobti's epic text (pp. 83–112). Nirmala Jain's astute essay describes the novel's unique positionality thus:

'It gives a panoramic view of a common culture, a long-standing tradition; it is steeped in the fragrance of the soil of Punjab and the folktales that arise out of it, whose one end touches the pristine Puranic lore and the other the rural life before Partition' (p. 93). Counted amongst the significant '*anchalik*' (regional) novels, *Zindaginama* inscribes an arch of discovery greater than several others in bridging over dialects and voices, prose and poetry, mainstream as well as marginal languages. To Sobti, what she called the '*zinda rukh*' (a massive living tree) was to be kept alive (p. 7). Hence, translating such a cultural narrative with linguistic differentials poses a particular challenge, as many translators have attested. Neer Kanwal Mani wishes to retain *Sphota* (burst of sound) (p. 88), Jain wonders about authentication of cultural roots, and Sobti herself, penning notes on *Zindaginama*, recognises her 'wrangle between words' (p. 98). A taste of the translation in Rajul Bhargava's rendering from the novel:

> Who will know
> Who will understand
> The pain of leaving one's motherland
> Of turning one's face away from it?
> The anguish (p. 91)!

I return to the high accomplishment of this volume on Krishna Sobti where the challenges of multiple regional languages, cross translation and re-translation have been faced head-on. It therefore becomes a source book for not just entering into the intricacies of Sobti's themes, intellect and languages, but a research guide on the manner and method of approaching such authors and texts.

The enquiry would be incomplete unless I were to speak about the personalised conversations and reminiscences that comprise later sections of the book. Meenakshi Faith Paul presents a dialogue between Krishna Baldev Vaid and Krishna Sobti who were friends and contemporaries, but held vastly different views on how gender is presented. In her poetic chat with Anamika, Sobti reveals the struggle within a writer saying, 'The relationship between the writer and her work is as fiercely bitter as those of rivals' (p. 198), elaborating on the variety of styles in her creativity as expressed in *Zindaginama, Mitro Marjani, Surajmukhi Andhre ke, Dil o Danish* and

Samay Sargam (p. 200). Further, there are vivid recollections by luminaries such as Ashok Vajpeyi, who writes of Sobti's hallmark of 'Resistance', and publisher Ashok Maheshwari who recalls her anxiety over each novel as it progressed towards print. The unfortunate law suit between Krishna Sobti and Amrita Pritam finds mention in muted tones in some of the personalised essays, but is best ascribed to Sobti's principled stand on what she considered 'right'. That she was deeply engaged in every word written by, or about, her is evident in many tales of delayed publication of her works, some of her earliest ventures being the last to see print, such as *Channa* and *Gujarat*. But that's how Krishna Sobti lived—with a fullness of flavour to the last sip.

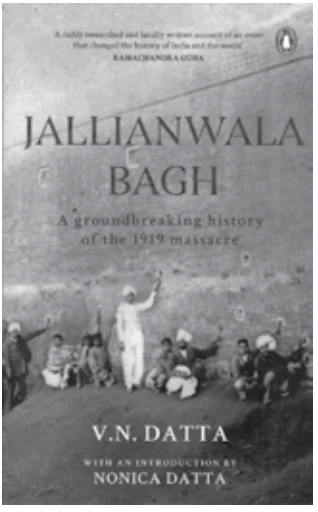
This panoramic view of two books merely whets the appetite for more and the upcoming volumes are happily anticipated. A fortunate development in the study of Indian literature, such material lends texture as well as density to understanding figurations in modern writing across languages. These books are rooted in India's cultural ecology and function as seedbeds for a new efflorescence.

◆

REVIEW ARTICLE
JALLIANWALA BAGH
A Ground-breaking History of the 1919 Massacre

RANI DHAVAN SHANKARDASS

JALLIANWALA BAGH: A GROUNDBREAKING HISTORY OF THE 1919 MASSACRE
Author: V. N. Datta
Introduction: Nonica Datta
Publisher: Penguin, 2021
Details: pp. 256; Price: ₹ 399.00



In taking the reader through lanes and alleyways of Amritsar, V. N. Datta provides authenticity to his claim that the story of Jallianwala is essentially about the people of Amritsar and Punjab, and not part of 'nationalist hagiography', even if the event did change the subsequent trajectory of Indian nationalism (Datta, 2021: 151). As he reveals in the profile of the innocuous crowd that was fired upon, and narrates events that preceded the day of the firing, Dutta is reluctant to refer to Jallianwala Bagh as a martyr's memorial: people did not go there for *shahadat* (martyrdom) on that festive Baisakhi day.

Datta 'crafts' what he calls 'the history of this tangled happening' in detail, and adds a new feature to our understanding: perceptions of persons involved in, and with, events, Datta argues, 'are to be regarded as a dimension of the events themselves' (Datta and Settiar, 2000). The biographical chapter on Dyer is a case in point.[1]

Acknowledging the incident as a 'consequence of a clash between British policy and Indian opinion', Datta moves his lens away from the Bagh to a wider

canvas—Amritsar and Punjab (Datta, 2021: Preface). Growing up in Amritsar's social milieu, his paternal home in Katra Sher Singh being but '10 minutes away' from the Bagh, he had often heard his sisters speak of their parents' reactions to the horrors of that day. Datta was familiar with the *katras*, *mohallas*, *galis* and *nukkads* (market places, neighbourhoods, lanes and street corners) of Amritsar, and identifies the areas of 'topographical interest' that connect the story of 10 April to that of the 13th. As the Introduction suggests, for him '10 April is a significant date for an alternative understanding of 13 April' (Datta, 2021: xiii).

This alternative understanding, according to Nonica Datta's Introduction, 'challenges the nationalist frame'. While this is true of the incident, and Datta does 'train a magnifying lens on the terrible events in the city' (ibid.: xii), he uses a wider lens to reveal features of post-war Punjab that affected its people variously:

- End-of-war disillusionment in Punjab
- Emergence of Gandhi
- Britain's post-war apprehensions and the (all-India) Rowlatt Act (21 March 1919)
- Hartals of 6 April and specific events of 10 April

Punjab surpassed other Provinces in its contribution to Britain's war effort. Soldiers returning to their villages were greatly affected by the general post-war disillusionment in Punjab. The Punjabi soldiers' reputation of courage and loyalty was remembered since the days of the Mutiny. In the vigorous recruitment campaign by Punjab's civil administration, from 1,00,000 men of all ranks at the start of the war, Punjab had provided almost half a million 'under the colours' by the end: 'With less than one-thirteenth of the population of India, Punjab had furnished about 60 per cent of the troops recruited.'[2]

The Hunter Committee did not believe that harsh recruitment measures contributed to unrest; but the war did bring socio-economic reverses in Punjab's cities and villages that added to the disenchantment of returning soldiers. A village recruit, the soldier was now part of a bigger world of 'special political, social and economic conditions', 'acute shortages and soaring prices', and various 'post-war irritants' affecting Punjab. People felt they had gained less and lost more by cooperating in the war effort (ibid.: 18); and Congress saw it

as an appropriate time to hold its 1919 session in Amritsar.

The Rowlatt Act did serve as a catalyst for agitations throughout the country, but responses to the 'Black Act' varied. Of total hartals in India in the first week of April, a third occurred in Punjab even while satyagraha was being carried out against the Act in other Provinces:

> In Bihar, Orissa, Madras, the Central Provinces and Burma there were no riots. Calcutta was almost quiet. In Delhi and Ahmedabad, violent outbreaks did take place, but in comparison with those in the Punjab they were trivial (ibid.: 16).

Datta's focus on Punjab and Amritsar is warranted; so is Nonica Datta's point that Amritsar's profile, rather than the nationalist argument, is central in understanding what happened on that fateful Baisakhi.

Despite obvious odious features, the Act still needed interpreting for less-educated Punjabis for them to realise its damaging effects. Saifuddin Kitchlew and Satyapal undertook to do just that to raise the political consciousness of less-informed people of Amritsar. Discussions about Gandhi's ideas of satyagraha and the damaging intent of the Act at well-attended meetings were often provocative enough for the government to take stern measures under its 'legitimate' Defence of India Act. At a meeting at Jallianwala Bagh on 30 March, about 30,000 people listened as Kitchlew and others urged people to disobey orders that went against their conscience and against the commandments of God.

Datta profiles individuals who played positive and negative roles to highlight the 'perceptions' he deems 'as important as the incidents themselves' (Datta and Settiar, 2000). While Kitchlew and Satyapal are perceived as positive influences, the negativity around Punjab's Lieutenant Governor Michael O'Dwyer is demonstrated through his 'rule with an iron hand' inspired by a Persian couplet that is believed to have guided his perception:

> *A stream can be stopped at its source by a twig;*
> *Let it flow, and it will drown even an elephant* (Datta, 2021: 21).

A hartal on 6 April was like a red rag to O'Dwyer for whom Kitchlew and Satyapal were 'those scoundrels' that had 'to be dealt with first'

before they incited 'a revolution' (ibid.: 37). Despite large crowds, no untoward incident took place that day, but Kitchlew's and Satyapal's influence was enough for Deputy Commissioner Miles Irving to ask Commissioner Theodore Kitchin for more military forces and effective ammunition.

Equally, the crowds that poured in from nearby villages on Ram Navmi on 9 April made officials anxious. Through his familiarity with the layout of a typical colonial city or town, Datta maps the vulnerable spots where unsavoury incidents were likely. Charming European Civil Lines and cantonments, out of bounds for 'natives' where Britons 'enjoyed a separate social existence', and well-guarded commercial areas, were the places where a breach of the (unwritten) rules of encroachment would be firmly dealt with (ibid.: 38).

Alongside the ploy to get Kitchlew and Satyapal to the deputy commissioner's bungalow on 10 April, and then arrest them, there were adequate military preparations to meet any contingency that could occur en route to Irving's bungalow. As the two 'miscreants' were bundled off to Dharamsala, news of their 'deportation' spread like wildfire. Shops and businesses were closed as enraged crowds gathered in the streets with the aim of crossing the 'iron railway carriage bridge', past pickets and barricades, towards Civil Lines.

Datta gives unbiased accounts of an aggressive but unarmed crowd pushing picket lines, and of shots fired on them when they ignored warnings. Once there were casualties there was mayhem. Uncontrollable crowds broke into the National Bank of India near the Kotwali, and the Alliance Bank, and set them on fire after plundering them. Their (British) managers were beaten to death, and furniture heaped on the bodies that were then set on fire. The mob pushed forward, damaging telegraph and telephone lines and attacking Europeans as they passed.

The most outrageous attack was on Marcella Sherwood as she cycled to the City Missionary School. She was thrown off her bicycle, beaten with fists and shoes, and as she staggered to get up, 'Sunder Singh struck her on the head with a lathi' and left her for dead (ibid.: 48). Of all the acts of brutality this alone elicited enough outrage to shake the British government to the core. European women and children were immediately taken by the army to Gobindgarh Fort for safety. The Gurkha regiment guarded the

Fort road till reinforcements arrived from other parts of Punjab for military protection.

It was to this unruly scene that Brigadier General Reginald Edward Harry Dyer arrived in Amritsar from Jullundur on the night of 11 April. He was briefed in a railway carriage at the station and within hours escorted by 150 British soldiers, toured deserted streets around the Kotwali where 'buildings were still smouldering'. The next day, one of relative calm, plans were made to meet every possible contingency.

Dyer issued a proclamation on 12 April to be publicised throughout the city: 'All meetings and gatherings are hereby prohibited and will be dispersed at once under military law.' On the morning of the 13th another proclamation imposed a curfew: 'Any person found in the streets after 8 p.m. will be shot' (ibid.: 62). Some leaders were going to hold a meeting at Jallianwala Bagh at 4.30 p.m. Was it defiance? Not really. The meeting had been planned the previous day.

It wears a misleading ornate look now, so it is not easy to visualise the Bagh of 1919: a stark, uneven, oblong-shaped 12 bighas (6.5 acres) of unkempt land, large enough for thousands to gather, more like a fairground than a *bagh* (garden), its narrow main entrance would become the high point of the 13 April episode. On that fateful day, thousands were gathered for *different* businesses: some played cards; some listened to speakers talking about Kitchlew and Satyapal; some just loitered amidst the crowd, while others snoozed on the Baisakhi holiday. Shops and businesses were closed, and people attending a large cattle mela nearby also meandered towards Jallianwala Bagh.

Brigadier General Dyer and Major Briggs proceeded towards the Bagh with 'a striking force of ninety men' (all Indian) and two armoured cars with machine guns (ibid.: 64). Dyer came armed, also with strong views ('perceptions') about the mayhem of 10 April. The narrow entrance prevented armoured cars from entering, but 90 men (Gurkhas and Baluchis) marched inside and within a few seconds of taking positions at two ends of a raised mound from which Dyer gave orders, the soldiers were ordered to fire at the crowd. Each soldier loaded and fired continuously and indiscriminately for 10 minutes as the hapless crowd ran helter-skelter. After 10 minutes, '... the Bagh looked like a battlefield. Corpses lay everywhere in great

heaps and the wounded in their hundreds were crying out for water' (ibid.: 68).

To this day, no firm figure has been provided either of those assembled, or of the dead and wounded at Jallianwala Bagh. Estimates of the assembly vary from 15,000 to 30,000. For those killed there is Dyer's figure of 'between 200 and 300', the official figure of 379, and Madan Mohan Malaviya's estimate of 1,000 (ibid.: 71). After perusing municipal and police records, Datta concludes that about 700 died that day and that there were no women in the crowd.

The seven-member Hunter Committee, investigating disturbances in Bombay, Delhi and Punjab, spent 29 of 46 days taking evidence for Punjab in Lahore. Dyer showed no remorse during interrogation. He said he was performing his duty as a *British* soldier engaged in a military operation. He had to restore order and security, and save 'European women and children' and 'the law-abiding Indian community' from violence. If the occasion arose again he would do the same thing.

While Datta does not deal with Dyer's merciless wrath over the audacity of 'natives' assaulting Europeans, and especially Miss Sherwood, a Briton, Nonica Datta addresses this lacuna: 'Dyer's rage did not end on 13 April.' He inflicted 'vengeful punishment' on Indians by ordering that all those who passed the street where Miss Sherwood was assaulted were to be lashed and made to crawl through the street. Dyer's 'crawling order' is etched as vividly in the minds of the people of Khoo Koriyan as the massacre at Jallianwala.[3]

Introducing this new edition, Nonica Datta reminds us that it was Professor Datta's main concern that Amritsar's *human* tragedy that defined the event ought not get lost amidst any political nationalist emphasis. This makes the question of rendering of apologies between governments somewhat superfluous. The story is about the people of Amritsar, not political leaders or governments.

◆

NOTES

1. See Datta (2021: Chapter 3, 'The Massacre').
2. After returning from South Africa, Gandhi gave support to the Empire at the outbreak of the War, including attending the Recruitment Conference at the viceroy's request. See Datta (2021: xlii).

3. Jeevan Lata, resident of Khoo Korian, in conversation with Nonica Dutta in the 'Introduction'.

REFERENCE

Datta, V. N. 2000. 'Perception of the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre', in V. N. Datta and S. Settiar (eds.), *Jallianwala Bagh Massacre*. Delhi: Indian Council of Historical Research Monograph, Series 4.

◆◆

BOOK REVIEW
BAZM-I AAKHIR
The Last Gathering: A Vivid Portrait of Life in the Red Fort

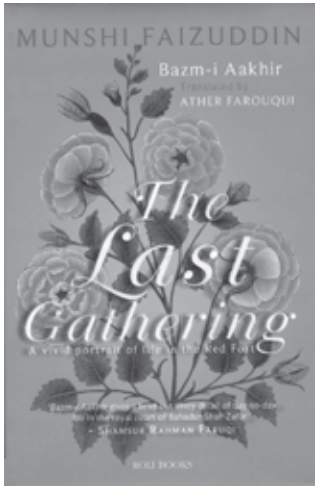
SALMAN KHURSHID

Thin in size but sumptuous in content, Munshi Faizuddin's *Bazm-i Aakhir: The Last Gathering* presents a picture of Delhi from a historian's eye and an insider's memory. It is also a handbook for the common reader interested in the life of the last two Mughal kings and life inside the Red Fort. It offers ideas of syncretism, empires and their impact, and evokes a cultural life in bloom through pre-eminent and contemporary personages such as Amir Khusrau and Ghalib.

In 2012, when Ather Farouqui took over the reins of the oldest and most respected Urdu organisation, the Anjuman Taraqqi Urdu, Hind, established in 1882 to douse the fire of Urdu–Hindi controversy, he utilised his knowledge of Urdu and his translation skills to ensure Urdu was featured on the global stage again without diluting its authenticity. Anjuman is the organisation which is responsible for the canon formation in Urdu, much like the Academie Francaise in French. In 2017, Farooqui's first English translation of Bahadur Shah Zafar as *The Life & Poetry of Bahadur Shah Zafar* was published, which saved the original book in

BAZM-I AAKHIR: THE LAST GATHERING: A VIVID PORTRAIT OF LIFE IN THE RED FORT

Author: Munshi Faizuddin
Translator: Ather Farouqui
Publisher: Roli Books, 2021
Details: pp. 128; Price: ₹ 395.00



Urdu by Aslam Parvez from further plagiarism by the English elite and historians who had had a field day using the text of the book ruthlessly without any acknowledgement since 1986.

As Farouqui puts it in the Translator's Note of *Bazm-i Aakhir*, 'I do not aspire to the identity of a translator, knowing my limitations. These tasks for me are not just translations, but a serious effort at putting the historical record straight' (p. xiv). And more importantly, when he succinctly says, 'In new India, where the names of places are fast changing, nobody knows the future identity of these locations with their centuries-old names. Their topography has already changed completely' (p. xvii).

However, my take is that it is imperative to translate essential texts, especially the text of history from Urdu into English and, subsequently, other languages, from informed and authentic positions. With the fast-diminishing knowledge of Urdu, not only among the common masses but also among historians specialising in medieval Indian history, which is deplorable, these texts will be destroyed in transition by clumsy translations. Interestingly, Farouqui's focus area is Delhi, and his translations open up the casement from which to view this ancient city through a modern lens. I have found the translation at hand especially to be a faithful testament to this.

Bazm-i Aakhir: The Last Gathering is almost impossible to translate in the manner Farouqui has, exploring every shade of every word for which he has consulted practically every old and new dictionary in Urdu. This is evident not only from the text but also from the footnotes, which provide remarkable insights, and an extensive list of the dictionaries and glossaries consulted. An arduous task, to say the least—one of the dictionaries has 22 volumes! The original text comprises merely 66 printed pages in Urdu and 88 pages in English translation. Still, the scholarly Translator's Note of 18 pages is remarkable, and the translated text with 133 notes is spread across 10 pages. This work is thus not just that of a translator but also a lexicographer.

There are several instances where Farouqui has gone beyond mere dictionary definitions of terms. Like a fly on the walls of living rooms of Urdu-speaking families, he has sought out words in currency in lived private spaces that one cannot find in dictionaries, and to which historians working on Delhi are certainly not privy.

One such example is *mirdhe* (p. 87, fn. 3): '…a small section of Muslims comprising people who originally belonged to various castes, and had married outside their respective castes', a meaning prevalent only in the small towns of western Uttar Pradesh, the Urdu heartland. Similarly, his meanderings in the narrow streets of Old Delhi gave him access to the word *tabreed*, used in the local context: a drink used to counter the effects of a hangover (p. 88, fn. 6). This is in addition to the more prevalent meaning of the word, for which he has added four lines of verse, or *qat'a*, of Ghalib. He has recorded minor differences between the many dishes of Dilli with even the slightest variation in name. There is undoubtedly room to publish a separate coffee-table book on the culinary treasure trove from the reign of the last Mughal in the Red Fort featured in *Bazm-i Aakhir*. These dishes are fast disappearing from the Indian *dastarkha'n*.

There are many more instances of rigorous research undertaken during the translation of this text. I have two suggestions, however. The 20-page scholarly Introduction and the Translator's Note appear separately, which makes little sense, and ought to be merged into one. As endnotes tend to interrupt the flow of reading this richly layered text, notes as footnotes on the relevant pages are preferable. I suggest ironing out these details in future reprints.

Ninety per cent of the material referring to the later Mughals, specifically the last Mughal emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar, is in Urdu. As a result, only those with a good command of the language will be able to understand this reference material. The main text makes for easy reading and is lucid and succinct.

Ironically, the decline of the Mughal empire was also the time when Urdu language and literature flourished, with spectacular contributions by great poets like Mir and Ghalib. Ghalib is undoubtedly the most fascinating figure of 19th-century Delhi. To use syncretic material from this period that is devoid of religious bigotry requires the translator to be familiar with the nuances and cadences of the Urdu language, as the untrained eye can easily be swayed into misrepresentation. This Farouqui has done with aplomb.

At this point, I must devote a little time to acquaint readers with the original book's author. Munshi Faizuddin was a courtier working with one of Bahadur Shah Zafar's sons; therefore, his Urdu,

though not accomplished, had the flavour of not only that period but also of the Qila-i Mubarak or Qila-i Mualla (Red Fort). In service since the days of Akbar Shah II, he had witnessed life in the Red Fort during the reign of the last two Mughal emperors. Faizuddin served as the servant of Prince Mirza Mohammad Hidayat Afza alias Mirza Ilahi Bakhsh (1809–1878). Ironically, Prince Mirza was a member of William Hodson's spy network and was instrumental in the arrest of Bahadur Shah Zafar by the British. He was conferred the title of Shehzada and that of Chief Representative and Head of the Royal House of Timur for his services. He received an annual pension of ₹22,830 from the British government and lived in the Rang Mahal of the old city's Suiwalan locality.

The book was published in 1885 after the impact of 1857 had subsided. Faizuddin presents a lively account of day-to-day life in the Fort and its significant social events and celebrations. All festivals, especially Diwali and Holi, were celebrated with gusto. One gets a detailed picture of the royal trips to the *jharna* (waterfall), the frantic melancholia of Muharram, or when the Fort was abuzz with *Sair-i Gulfaroshan* (*Phoolwalon ki Sair*: an annual several-day fair of flower-sellers held in Mehrauli during the rainy season). As this was the 18th century, the nobility took great interest in *mehfils* (musical gatherings) and dance. *Marsiyakhans* (professional reciters of elegies) were in great demand during Moharram. *Shatranj* (chess) and *chaupar* (a board game played with dice) were popular pastimes, while wrestling, kabaddi and swimming were equally loved. Food was also central to the life of the nobility: being an accomplished gourmand came second to being a music aficionado and poetry lover. The code of conducting oneself while dining, speaking and presenting oneself to senior nobility was clear. These mores were clearly understood and expected. The original Urdu work presents essential information that is not available even in well-researched books by renowned scholars. Its translator, Farouqui, has done yeoman's service by bringing these lesser-known facts to a larger readership by successfully representing 19th-century ethos through his translation.

Delhi has always been the focal point for historians working on medieval India. Currently, Farouqui is translating the massive three-volume tome about Delhi called *Waqia't-i Dar ul-hukumat Delhi,* an uphill task close to impossible, and because of this, in a

way, concluding work on Delhi has remained untranslated. If the achievement of *The Last Gathering* is any indication, historians interested in Dilli are in for a treat. We eagerly look forward to more hitherto unknown facets of Delhi that the translation of *Waqia't-i Dar ul-hukumat Delhi* will undoubtedly unearth.

◆

BOOK REVIEW

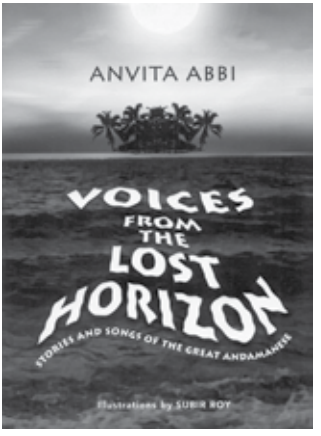
VOICES FROM THE LOST HORIZON

Stories and Songs of the Great Andamanese

AJAY SAINI

VOICES FROM THE LOST HORIZON: STORIES AND SONGS OF THE GREAT ANDAMANESE

Author: Anvita Abbi
Illustrator: Subir Roy
Publisher: Niyogi Books Pvt. Ltd., 2021
Details: pp. 176; Price: ₹ 995.00 (Hardback)



On 26 January 2010, when India was celebrating its 61st Republic Day with pomp and show, an octogenarian—Boa Sr.—silently passed away in the remote Andaman Islands. She was the last of the Bo indigenous peoples. With her demise, yet another Great Andamanese tribe and one of the world's oldest languages were also wiped out. Anvita Abbi, a distinguished researcher on minority languages, and her team of linguists were the first to report the news, whereas the Islands' administration failed to even issue a note to announce Boa Sr.'s death. Barely a year earlier, a quinquagenarian Great Andamanese—Nao Jr.—whom Abbi calls 'a symbol of a priceless Indian heritage' had also succumbed to an illness (p. 16). In death, she laments, the last Jeru-speaker 'carried away with him the knowledge and memories of an entire race' (pp. 16–17).

Voices from the Lost Horizon: Stories and Songs of the Great Andamanese is a quintessential collection of 10 folktales and 46 songs of the Great Andamanese. It is an outcome of Abbi's years-long painstaking research and close association with the last

custodians of the Great Andamanese languages, traditional knowledge and oral histories—Boa Sr. and Nao Jr.—who are also the invisible co-authors of this fascinating work. Besides captivating illustrations by Subir Roy, the book contains nine rare audio-visual recordings of Boa Sr. that readers can access through interactive QR codes.

Abbi's is not merely a collection of tales and songs of a dying tongue that were readily available to the linguist. Besides the apathy and hostility of the local administration, Abbi faced and overcame numerous unique challenges vividly narrated in this book, making it an insightful read, especially for young researchers interested in the study of indigenous communities inhabiting remote geographies. An important, one of a kind scholarly work, the book offers an emic perspective of the Great Andamanese worldview facing extinction. With the death of the tribe's last speakers, their ancient languages, unique worldviews, folktales and songs would also have died had Abbi not documented them.

Until the mid-19th century in the Andamans, a remote archipelago in the eastern Indian Ocean, 10 distinct sub-tribes of the Great Andamanese (estimated at 3,500 to 5,000) lived isolated along with the Jangil (extinct by the 1920s), the Onge, the Jarawa and the Sentinelese communities. According to population geneticists, they are descended from the people who migrated out of Africa around 70,000 years ago and populated South Asia, Southeast Asia, New Guinea and Australia. The 10 Great Andamanese tribes spoke 10 distinct languages, which were 'mutually intelligible like a link in a chain… two ends of the chain were distant from each other, but the links in between were close to each other in a mutual intelligibility scale', proffers Abbi (p. 21).

In 1789, the East India Company attempted to colonise the Andamans with a settlement, which was closed in 1796 on account of an inimical climate and high mortality rate. The British returned to the Islands in 1858 and set up a penal colony which the islanders fiercely resisted. A year later, Great Andamanese warriors valiantly faced the militarily superior colonists in a quixotic 'Battle of Aberdeen' and incurred heavy casualties. In the ensuing years and decades, outbreaks of deadly and alien epidemics—pneumonia, syphilis, ophthalmia, measles, mumps, Russian influenza, and gonorrhoea—wiped out most of the tribes, drastically reducing their population to 90 by 1931. After Independence, the Great Andamanese

were relocated to Bluff Island, and their traditional habitats were appropriated for the resettlement of Bengali Hindu refugees. In 1961, the tribe's population reached its lowest number—19. Eight years later, the tribespeople were once more uprooted and shifted to Strait Island, where they continue to survive on government dole.

In 2005, when Abbi reached the Andamans to document the moribund languages of the Great Andamanese (total population: 53 then, around 59 now), she learnt that there were eight or nine surviving speakers. But none of them were proficient enough to tell a story either in their language or in Andamanese Hindi. The tribespeople had not heard any folktales in the last four to five decades, making the elicitation of stories practically impossible. But Abbi's perseverance and friendly demeanour won her the tribes' trust. She helped the Great Andamanese recollect and share the memories hidden in the cavernous depths of their subconscious minds. It is surprising and gratifying to learn how Nao Jr., who could not initially recollect even a single tale, eventually narrated nine. He could have contributed more but for his untimely death. This is what makes Abbi's work invaluable: the linguist did not merely document and preserve one of the world's oldest languages, but also helped its speakers in countering cultural amnesia by giving them numerous cathartic experiences that significantly revived their language and collective memories.

History reveals that the 'civilised' world has been highly prejudiced against hunter–gatherers. Hobbes calls their life 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short'. Marco Polo, in *The Travels of Marco Polo* (circa 1300), caricatures the indigenes of the Andamans thus:

> [these] people are without a king and are idolaters and no better than wild beasts... all the men of this island … have heads like dogs, and teeth and eyes likewise; in fact, in the face they are all just like big mastif dogs! ...they are a (*sic*) most cruel generation, and eat everybody that they can catch, if not of their own race (Yule and Cordier, 1993: 309).

Similarly, colonial texts are also suffused with unfounded beliefs and prejudices against the Great Andamanese, people who have carried the burden of the colonial gaze. The tribespeople continue to face discrimination and their philosophy of life is looked down upon. Abbi's book opens a window on the inner world of the Great Andamanese, as portrayed by the last survivors. In their folktales,

the islanders generously share food and resources, build strong community ties, pursue collective interest over self-interest, exhibit bravery, cherish true love, consider birds their ancestors, and love humans, animals and nature alike. Far removed from the Hobbesian dystopia of 'war of all against all', the Great Andamanese constitute an 'original affluent society'.

The book offers an eclectic collection of songs. Typically gravitating towards themes such as dance, love, hard work, hunting, local flora and fauna, nature, among others, these songs convey their simple joys, fears, aspirations and everyday realities. However, some seem to convey Boa Sr.'s anguish and grief over the loss of peace, love and ancestral lands: for instance, '*a ḍure kaiyo laṛuka…*' (this place is not good for living); '*no ṭhong icheshe mena…*' (a song based on Boa Sr.'s husband's incarceration by the British for brewing liquor); and '*a lao lao nata thi thyo khulo…*' (strangers of distant land come, and remain here).

For millenia, the Great Andamanese had lived in isolation and thrived in the Andamans. But in less than two centuries of their contact with the 'civilised' world, they were robbed of their lands and languages, and put on the road to extinction. The demise of the last speakers of languages continues to leave the world culturally poorer. But linguaphiles like Abbi offer hope. The 'civilised' world, deeply scarred by greed and war, can learn much from the Great Andamanese, whose languages, says G. N. Devy, have 'the memories of the entire human story of evolution from the time humans became Homo sapiens and became mobile'.[1] A song from Boa Sr.'s oeuvre seems to envision a new world thus: '*ercho taatung tatung, taatung tatung, ercho taatung tatung*' (Let us go to a cleaner place where we can dance and dance and dance).

◆

NOTES

1. Devy made this remark during an online book discussion session organised by the IIC on 23 August 2021. https://youtu.be/YG3nuh3KWyc

REFERENCES

Yule, Sir Henry and Henri Cordier. 1993. *The Travels of Marco Polo*: *The Complete Yule–Cordier Edition*. New York: Dover Publications.

◆◆

CONTRIBUTORS

RADHIKA DAGA is an independent thinker and scholar on International Relations and Strategic Affairs. She has previously worked with leading think tanks based in India and Myanmar, including the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, Delhi; Vivekananda International Foundation, Delhi; and Myanmar Institute for Peace and Security.

AJAY VISHWAS DANDEKAR teaches History in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at Shiv Nadar University. His areas of interest include Pastoral Nomadism, Agrarian Crisis, Tribal Studies and Strategic Studies. Dandekar has published a few writings in these areas of interest over a period of time.

SINHARAJA TAMMITA-DELGODA—historian, art historian, academic, writer, award-winning film-maker—is an authority on the art, history and culture of Sri Lanka. He has lectured in the United States, United Kingdom, India and Sri Lanka, and taught the first-ever course on the Art and Architecture of Sri Lanka at the University of Michigan, Anne Arbor. In 2019, Tammita-Delgoda directed his first film, *In Search of the Malwatu Oya*, an exploration of Sri Lanka's most historic river.

KUMUD DIWAN is a renowned exponent of Banaras Thumri. A disciple of Padma Vibhushan Pt. Channulal Mishra of Banaras, she is an A-grade artist of AIR, an 'outstanding category' artist with the Ministry of Culture, and is also an 'established category' artist with the ICCR. She is the author of *The Legendary Vaggeyakars of Hindustani Classical Music in Main Khayal Gharanas* and *Classical Music: The Divine Power of Yoga*. A recipient of several prestigious awards and accolades, Diwan holds a PhD in Business Studies.

SHOBHA GHARE was born in Madhya Pradesh in 1951. She studied Fine Arts and Applied Graphics at Sir J. J. School of Art, Mumbai, where she received a gold medal in 1971. A recipient of the Amrita Shergil Fellowship for creative work in art, a fellowship from the Government of India, and a National Award in 2001, she has held exhibitions of her work in India and the United States. Ghare's work is represented in several public and private collections.

PARTHA S. GHOSH is currently an Honorary Senior Fellow at the Institute of Social Sciences, New Delhi. Earlier, he was Professor at SIS (JNU), Senior Fellow at Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Visiting Professor at Heidelberg University, among others. Ghosh's recent publications include *India–South Asia Interface* (Manohar, 2022), *The Politics of Personal Law in South Asia* (Routledge, 2018), *BJP and the Evolution of Hindu Nationalism* (Manohar, 2017), and *Migrants, Refugees and the Stateless in South Asia* (Sage, 2016).

MEENAKSHI JAUHARI has been writing poetry and short fiction for more than three decades. Her poetry anthology, *The Fish Who Flew*, was published in 2019 by Writers Workshop, Kolkata, and her work has featured in literary journals such as *Indian Literature*, *The Little Magazine*, *Out of Print*, *The Poetry Society (India) Journal*, among others. She has translated the Hindi–Urdu poetry of Amrita Pritam. Jauhari is presently working on the translation of an early 20th-century Urdu work into English.

RAJNISH KARKI specialises in strategy and organisation design. He has advised business groups, multinational corporations, professional firms and institutions, government and allied entities at the centre and in Uttarakhand. His research contributions include the '3-phase' model of strategy formation, typology of viable strategic configurations, and the 'transformation and momentum' model of organisation change. The author of *Competing with the Best: Strategic Management of Indian Companies in a Globalising Arena* (Penguin: India-2008, Global-2009), Karki has held faculty appointments at IIM, Ahmedabad; IIT, Bombay; and LBSNAA, Mussoorie.

SALMAN KHURSHID read for his BCL at St. Edmund College, Oxford, and taught Law and Jurisprudence at Trinity College, Oxford.

Apart from positions such as Law Minister and Minister of External Affairs of India, his varied interests range from the legal philosopher Ronald Dworkin to the Delhi of Bahadur Shah Zafar. His play, *Sons of Babur*, has been performed worldwide. He has also contributed a chapter to *Delhi: Red Fort to Raisina* (2011). Khurshid is a Senior Advocate at the Supreme Court of India.

VIKAS KUMAR teaches Economics at Azim Premji University. He is the author of *Numbers as Political Allies: The Census in Jammu and Kashmir* (Cambridge University Press, forthcoming) and *Waiting for a Christmas Gift and Other Essays* (Heritage Publishers, forthcoming) and co-author of *Numbers in India's Periphery: The Political Economy of Government Statistics* (Cambridge University Press, 2020). Kumar has curated the exhibition 'Baba Saheb: An Extraordinary Philatelic Journey' at the India International Centre, New Delhi (June 2022).

MALASHRI LAL, an academic, editor and writer with 16 books to her credit retired as Professor, Department of English, University of Delhi. Specialising in Literature and Gender Studies, Lal is currently Member, English Advisory Board, Sahitya Akademi, and serves on the advisory committee of three international journals.

SHOBHIT MAHAJAN teaches at the Department of Physics and Astrophysics, University of Delhi. He has previously taught at St. Stephen's College. The author of several books on science and technology, and a regular contributor to newspapers and magazines, Mahajan has also contributed pieces to the *Routledge Handbook of Education in India*, *The University Unthought: Notes for a Future* and *The Idea of a University*.

YOGENDRA NARAIN belongs to the 1965 batch of the Indian Administrative Service (UP cadre) and retired as Chief Secretary, UP. He has also served as Defence Secretary, Government of India. After retirement, he was appointed Secretary General of the Rajya Sabha for five years. The author of several articles and books on governance and public administration, he is the recipient of the Paul Appleby Award for outstanding contribution to public administration. Narain has published poetry to wide acclaim.

AJAY SAINI is an Assistant Professor at the Centre for Rural Development and Technology, IIT, Delhi. Formerly an Assistant Professor at TISS, Mumbai, his research interests gravitate towards Michel Foucault, governmentality studies, indigenous communities, Northeast India, and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Saini has contributed to *Scientific American, The Guardian, American Journal of Human Biology, Economic and Political Weekly, The Hindu, The Indian Express, Seminar, Scroll.in, Al Jazeera, The Indian Journal of Social Work, Social Change, TEDx,* among others.

ARSHIYA SETHI established Kri Foundation (2003), braiding Arts, Activism and Knowledge. Formerly dance critic at *The Times of India*, she was advisor to Doordarshan Bharati. As creative-head, IHC, she created intangible cultural properties like City Arts Festivals. Twice a Fulbright Fellow, she has co-authored *Non-Gharanedaar: Pt. Mohanrao Kallianpurkar: The Paviour of Kathak* (2022); co-edited and contributed to *Dance Under the Shadow of the Nation* (2019); and edits the forthcoming journal, *South Asian Dance Intersections*. Sethi's new work is on Arts and the Law.

RANI DHAVAN SHANKARDASS is a historian and penal reformer whose books on India's freedom movement and transfer of power include *Vallabhbhai Patel: Power and Organisation in Indian Politics* (1988), and *Vallabhbhai Patel: The Limitations of Anti-colonial Nationalism and Electoral Politics* (forthcoming). As Director of PRAJA (Penal Reform and Justice Association), she has worked extensively on penal reform in India and abroad. Shankardass' publications include *Women in Custody: Therapeutic Counselling for Women* (2012) and *Of Women Inside: Prison Voices from India* (2012).

SUNIL SUNKARA is a Kathak artist, curator, educator and scholar. Having completed Nritya Nipun in Kathak under Vidushi Renu Sharma at Pt. Birju Maharaj's Kalashram, he also holds a Masters in Kathak from Kavikulaguru Kalidas Sanskrit University, Maharashtra, and a Diploma in Natyashastra under Puru Dadheech from Bharata College of Fine Arts and Culture, Mumbai. Sunkara is currently Dance Academic Head at the World Forum for Art and Culture under the aegis of spiritual guru Sri Sri Ravishankar.

◆

SALMAN KHURSHID
AJAY SAINI
ARSHIYA SETHI
KUMUD DIWAN
MEENAKSHI JAUHARI
AJAY VISHWAS DANDEKAR
MALASHRI LAL
PARTHA S. GHOSH
RADHIKA DAGA
RAJNISH KARKI
RANI DHAVAN SHANKARDASS
SUNIL SUNKARA
SHOBHA GHARE
SHOBHIT MAHAJAN
SINHARAJA TAMMITA-DELGODA
YOGENDRA NARAIN
VIKAS KUMAR

CONTRIBUTORS

IIC AUTUMN 2022
Quarterly

INDIA INTERNATIONAL CENTRE IIC

REGISTERED WITH THE REGISTRAR OF NEWSPAPERS OF INDIA UNDER R N 26757/74