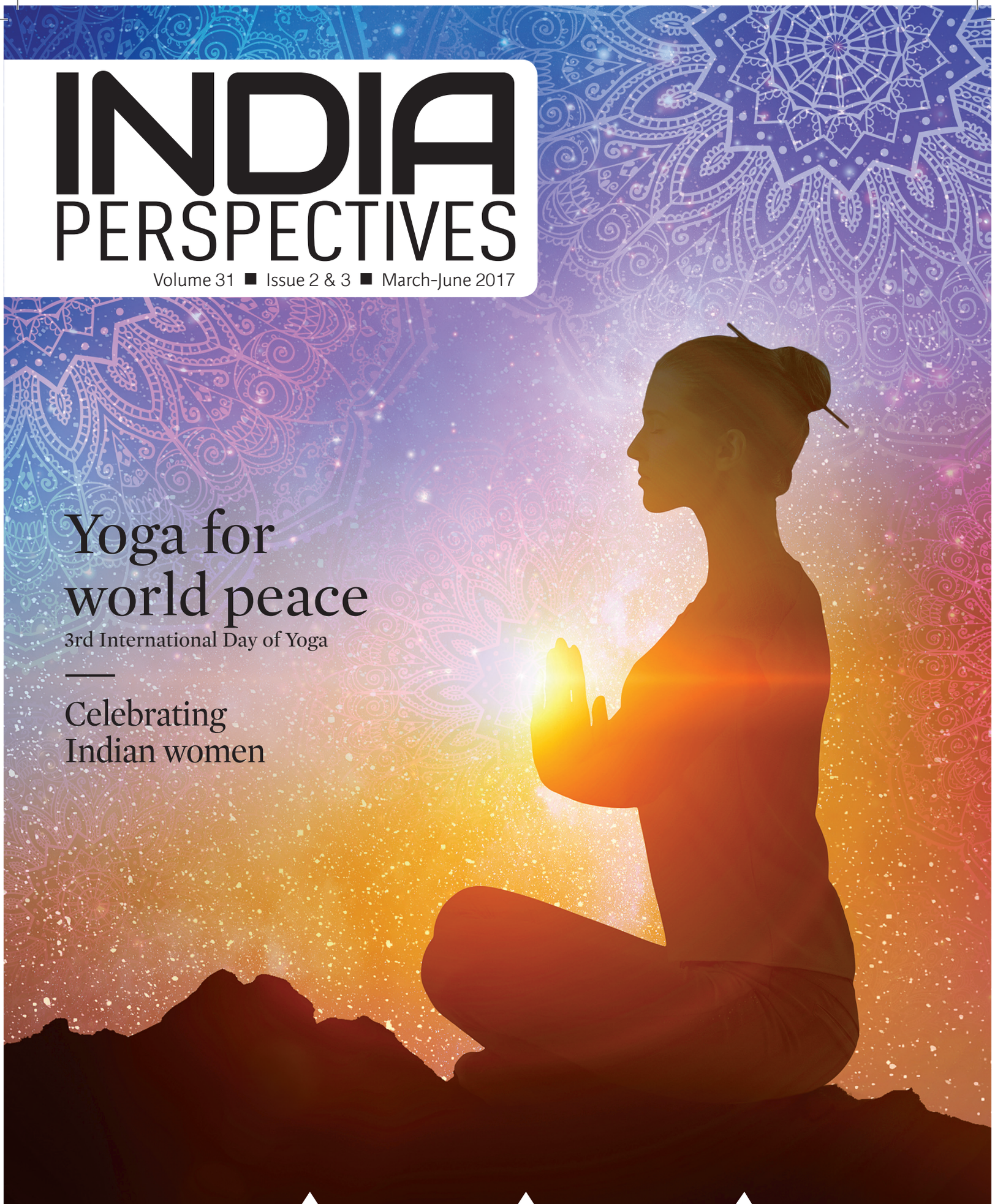
INDIA PERSPECTIVES

Volume 31 ■ Issue 2 & 3 ■ March-June 2017



Yoga for world peace

3rd International Day of Yoga

Celebrating Indian women

PBD 2017: REACHING OUT TO INDIAN DIASPORA

CINEMA
A WORLD OF INDIE FILMS

HERITAGE
INDIA'S MOUNTAIN RAILWAYS

TRIBUTE
VETERAN ACTOR OM PURI

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POTPOURRI

UPCOMING EVENTS ACROSS INDIA

HEMIS FESTIVAL

Hemis Gompa, the largest Buddhist monastery in Ladakh, hosts the Hemis festival for two days every year. The festival is famous for the masked dance called Cham. There is also a bustling fair full of handicrafts and other items that you must explore.

WHEN: July 3-4, 2017
WHERE: Hemis Monastery, Ladakh

DREE FESTIVAL

The fertility festival of Dree is celebrated by the Apatani tribe in Arunachal Pradesh to appease the sun and moon gods. A Dree flag song inaugurates the festival at the Dree altar, with games, sports, song and dance to mark the occasion.

WHEN: July 4-7, 2017
WHERE: Ziro valley, Arunachal Pradesh

CHAMPAKULAM BOAT RACE

The Champakulam Boat Race is celebrated with much fanfare, with a large procession that includes water floats, highly decorated boats and music and dance performances.

WHEN: July 8, 2017
WHERE: Champakulam, Kerala

NEHRU TROPHY SNAKE BOAT RACE

The Nehru Trophy is held in memory of India's late Prime Minister, Jawahar Lal Nehru. The race has been held annually ever since 1952. This year will be the 65th edition of the spectacular race.

WHEN: August 12, 2017
WHERE: Punnamada Lake, Alleppey in Kerala

INDEPENDENCE DAY

India celebrates its independence from British rule on August 15, 1947. Most of the festivities take place around the Red Fort in Delhi with a flag hoisting ceremony and cultural programmes.

WHEN: August 15, 2017
WHERE: Across India but especially in Delhi

ATHACHAMAYAM

The Athachamayam festival marks the beginning of Onam. The celebrations feature a street parade accompanied by decorated elephants and floats, musicians, and various traditional Kerala art forms.

WHEN: August 25, 2017
WHERE: Thripunithura, Kerala

Foreword

From an idea proposed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the 69th session of the UN General Assembly to an international celebration of health and wellness, the International Day of Yoga has only grown in stature over the last three years. We celebrate yoga, an invaluable gift of ancient Indian tradition, in this issue of India Perspectives, exploring how citizens of the world commemorated the third International Day of Yoga and discovered the benefits of yoga for physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well-being as well as for world peace and harmony.

Earlier this year, the world observed International Women's Day, celebrating the importance of women in society and appreciating and respecting their roles in our lives. We feature Indian women achievers from all walks of life who have excelled in their fields in the recent past and made their country proud.

Moving on, we explore the biennial event Pravasi Bharatiya Divas, which provides a platform for the Indian diaspora to connect with the Government of India. Portuguese PM Antonio Costa was the chief guest for this year's event, whose theme was 'Redefining Engagement with the Indian diaspora'. The event was held in Bengaluru and attended by more than 4,000 delegates.

In January this year, ties between India and the UAE also saw a boost with the visit of UAE Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan for our 68th Republic Day. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the UAE Crown Prince committed themselves to the expansion of India's role in the promotion of security in West Asia. We discuss the outcome of the talks held between the two leaders.

Under the sections exploring Indian art, culture and heritage, this issue dwells on ragas as an intrinsic part of Indian classical music, why festival curators are increasingly warming up to India's independent cinema, how bamboo is one of the most versatile materials and mountain railways of India.

The travel section takes you to Lakshadweep Islands, with some of the most beautiful and exotic beaches and islands of India. And the cuisine section features natural-ingredient drinks for improving health organically.

Lastly, we pay tribute to veteran actor Om Puri, who left an indelible mark on cinema in a career spanning over three decades.

Gopal Baglay

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The world embraces yoga for *peace and wellness*

Enthusiasts across the world started their day with yoga on June 21, as they came together to mark the third International Day of Yoga

text | **Tripti Nath**

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The fiery monsoon weather could not stop thousands of yoga enthusiasts from assembling at Ramabai Ambedkar Maidan in Lucknow, the capital of Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state, where Prime Minister Narendra Modi joined them in performing asanas to celebrate the third International Day of Yoga (IDY) on June 21, 2017.

Yoga enthusiasts across all age groups, holding umbrellas and clad in raincoats, arrived as early as five in the morning reaffirming their faith in the time-tested curative power of yoga. Those who had come unprepared ended up using orange-coloured yoga mats to shield themselves from incessant rain as they heard the Prime Minister's speech and watched him perform asanas undeterred by the downpour.

In just three years, IDY celebrations have already been breaking records in terms of participation. The first edition at New Delhi's Rajpath entered the *Guinness Book of World Records* for witnessing the biggest yoga congregation with 35,985 participants from 84 nationalities. The idea of IDY was proposed by the Prime Minister at the 69th session of the UN General Assembly on September 27, 2014. Just four months into office by then, he persuaded the world community to work towards adopting an IDY. "Yoga is an invaluable gift of ancient Indian tradition. It embodies

Indian PM Narendra Modi participating in a yoga demonstration in Lucknow during International Day of Yoga celebrations

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unity of mind and body, thought and action, restraint and fulfilment, harmony between man and nature, and a holistic approach to health and well-being. Yoga is not about exercise but to discover the sense of oneness with ourselves, the world and nature. By changing our lifestyle and consciousness, it can help us deal with climate change," he said.

The message received an overwhelming response – the world embraced this ancient Indian spiritual, mental and physical practice right from the word go. Amazingly, India's resolution was adopted in just 75 days with a record 177 countries co-sponsoring and all 193 member states unanimously supporting the same, declaring June 21 as the IDY. Today, yoga is celebrated across the world on summer solstice, the longest day in the year in many parts of the world.

Yoga enthusiasts reached the venue much before the scheduled time

The year 2017 proved to be yet another record-setting year for the IDY. The tone was set by the Prime Minister in Lucknow, when he emphasised that yoga has the power to provide health assurance to all at zero cost. From Indian space scientists and management gurus in Bengaluru to medicine researchers, all joined the celebrations. Yoga functions were held at the Indira Gandhi International Airport in New Delhi, the Mehsana Sun Temple in Modhera, Gujarat and the Rashtriya Sanskrit

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Facing page: Yoga enthusiasts strike a pose in Belgrade. *Above:* As many as 50 community organisations participated at the Sandy Springs Heritage Park in Atlanta

A BRIEF TIMELINE OF YOGA

As it has evolved and developed through the centuries, yoga has retained the message of peace and equanimity that lay at its core when it first began

2700 BC (PRE-VEDIC ERA)
Historical evidence of the existence of yoga was seen in the pre-Vedic period

500-800 AD (CLASSICAL ERA)
The Classical period is considered as the most fertile and prominent period in the history and development of yoga

800-1700 AD (POST-CLASSICAL ERA)
The teachings of great Acharyatrayas - Adi Shankracharya and Ramanujacharya, were prominent during this period

1700-1900 AD (MODERN PERIOD)
This was the period when Vedanta, bhakti yoga, nathayoga or hatha yoga flourished

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Top: People practising Yoga in Tokyo. *Bottom, clockwise from left:* Water yoga session in Hungary. Yogis in Hungary. Yoga enthusiasts in Sri Lanka

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Above: People having a gala time during the IDY celebrations in Cambodia

Sansthan in Sringeri in Karnataka. Around 100 envoys attended the yoga event - led by Minister of External Affairs Sushma Swaraj - at Pravasi Bhartiya Kendra in New Delhi's diplomatic enclave in Chanakyapuri. She told the diplomats that yoga belongs not merely to India but to the whole world. "Its inclusion as World Intangible Cultural Heritage by UNESCO underlines its global significance, benefits for the entire humanity and growing reach," she said. Swaraj, who has learnt yoga from Baba Ramdev, added that yoga is a science to attain inner peace and an art to attain equanimity. The event concluded with Shanti Prarthanas or prayers for world peace. The Ministry of Defence organised sessions all over India for the Indian Army, the Indian Air Force and the Indian Navy. Indian Navy personnel performed yoga onboard INS Vikramaditya, Shivalik, Kamorta, Jyoti, INS Jalashwa and Kirch in the Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal. Personnel of the Indo Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) performed yoga at an altitude of 19,000 feet in Ladakh and at 11,600 feet on the banks of the Indus River in the region.

The Ministry of AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoepathy) organised a two-day international conference on the theme 'Yoga for Body and Beyond' in New Delhi on June 22 and 23. The increasing popularity of yoga has motivated the Ministry of AYUSH to construct 100 yoga parks across the country.

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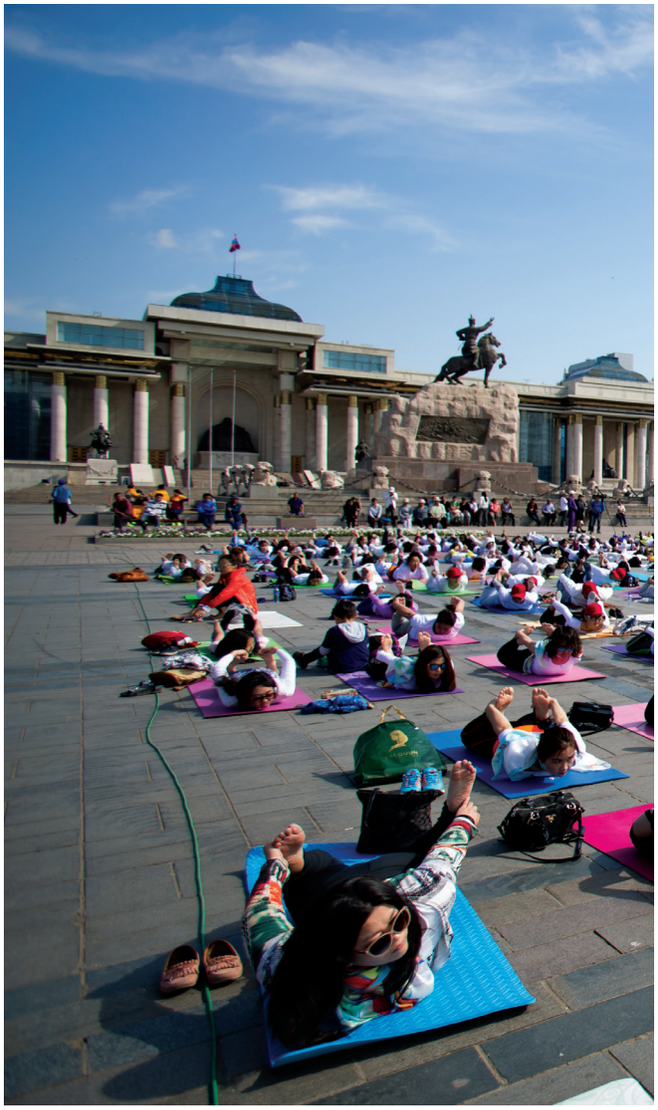

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Clockwise from top: People performing *dhanurasana* in Mongolia. People practising *kapalbhati pranayama* in Lao PDR. IDY celebrations in Saudi Arabia. Meditation session in Mexico. Yoga enthusiasts try their hands at asanas in Melbourne. IDY celebrations in the lap of nature, in Peru. IDY celebrations in Senegal. An IDY event in Nairobi

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Glimpses of IDY celebrations clockwise from above: Paris. Milan. Romania. Turkey. Oman

Sripad Naik, Minister of State for AYUSH (Independent Charge) said this writer that he will put up a proposal to the PM to start a yoga university to be run by the Ministry of AYUSH. "We will also set up a yoga and naturopathy institute in north Goa where we will run one-month and three-month courses for foreigners. Yoga is the soft power of India. I learnt yoga in Goa and have been practising yoga for an hour everyday for the last 30 years," he said. He also added that last year, the PM dedicated the yoga day to diabetes. Likewise, this year, it has been dedicated to cancer. "We want to detect cancer at an early stage so that people can be cured by lifestyle interventions," he explained.

Academia, too, has cause to cheer, with yoga institutes across the country reporting

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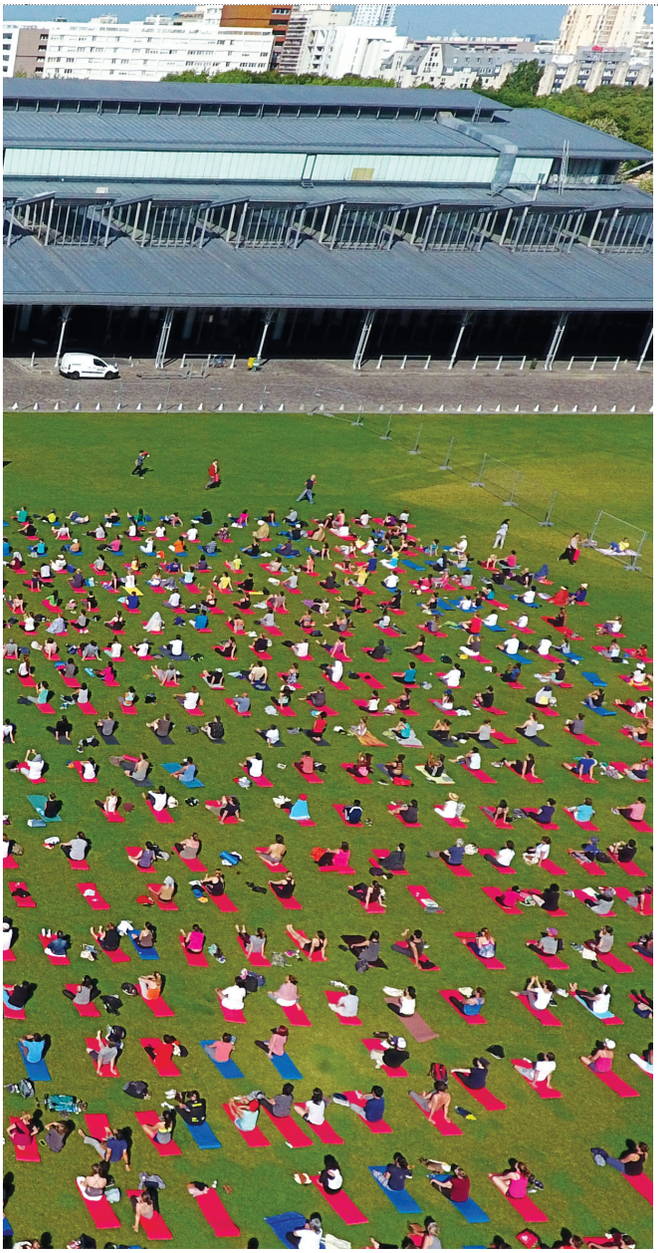

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Clockwise from top: The third International Day of Yoga was celebrated in Bangkok with great enthusiasm. Yoga practitioners warm up in Germany. A girl strikes a yogic pose in Iran. IDY event in the Philippines

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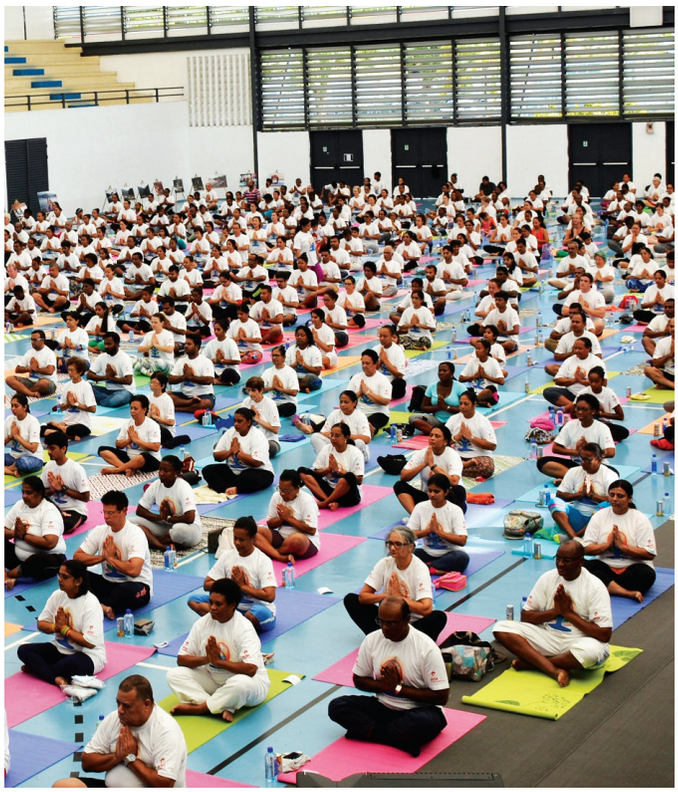

Clockwise from top left: IDY celebrations in Seychelles. IDY celebrations in Fiji. Yoga enthusiasts in Croatia

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IDY CELEBRATIONS ACROSS THE WORLD, 2017

1. Afghanistan
2. Algeria
3. Angola
4. Argentina
5. Australia
6. Austria
7. Azerbaijan
8. Bahrain
9. Bangladesh
10. Belarus
11. Bhutan
12. Bolivia
13. Botswana
14. Brunei Darussalam
15. Cambodia
16. Canada
17. Chile
18. China
19. Colombia
20. Comoros
21. Congo (Democratic Republic)
22. Croatia
23. Cuba
24. Cyprus
25. Czech Republic
26. Denmark
27. Egypt
28. Fiji
29. France
30. Georgia
31. Germany
32. Ghana
33. Greece
34. Guatemala
35. Hungary
36. Indonesia
37. Iran
38. Ireland
39. Israel
40. Italy
41. Jamaica
42. Japan
43. Jordan
44. Kazakhstan
45. Kenya
46. Korea(DPR)
47. Korea (ROK)
48. Kuwait
49. Kyrgyzstan
50. Laos
51. Lebanon
52. Libya
53. Lithuania
54. Madagascar
55. Malawi
56. Malaysia
57. Maldives
58. Mali
59. Malta
60. Mauritius
61. Mexico
62. Mongolia
63. Morocco
64. Mozambique
65. Myanmar
66. Namibia
67. Nepal
68. Netherlands
69. New Zealand
70. Niger
71. Nigeria
72. Norway
73. Oman
74. Pakistan
75. Palestine
76. Panama
77. Papua New Guinea
78. Peru
79. Poland
80. Portugal
81. Qatar
82. Romania
83. Russia
84. Saudi Arabia
85. Senegal
86. Serbia
87. Seychelles
88. Singapore
89. Slovak Republic
90. South Africa
91. South Sudan
92. Spain
93. Sri Lanka
94. Sudan
95. Suriname
96. Sweden
97. Switzerland
98. Syria
99. Tajikistan
100. Tanzania
101. Thailand
102. Trinidad and Tobago
103. Tunisia
104. Turkey
105. Turkmenistan
106. Uganda
107. Ukraine
108. United Arab Emirates
109. United Kingdom
110. United States of America
111. UN-PMI (New York)
112. Uzbekistan
113. Venezuela
114. Vietnam
115. Zambia
116. Zimbabwe

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Note: Above map has been kept just for graphical representation to provide easy user navigation and it's not presenting or associated with any political boundaries of countries.

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a manifold increase in the intake of new yoga students. S-VYAASA (Swami Vivekanand Yoga Anusandhaan), a full fledged yoga university; the Art of Living ashram in Bengaluru; and other yoga institutes have reported increased enrolments. Speaking at the IDY celebrations in Lucknow, the PM said that several new yoga institutes have been set up in the last three years and yoga has created a new job market in the world.

From the UN headquarters in New York lit up with the word "yoga" to several events marked in India, the message of peace and wellness has transcended boundaries, making the IDY a truly global festival within three years of its inception. Celebrations were held at several iconic locations across the world, including the Eiffel Tower in Paris, Machu Picchu in Peru, Trafalgar Square in London and Central Park in New York; countries like Afghanistan, Bhutan, China, Japan and New Zealand also joined in.

The message of peace and wellness has transcended boundaries, making the IDY a truly global festival

In China, a large number of Chinese and Indian enthusiasts assembled at the iconic Great Wall of China to join India's Minister of State for External Affairs, General VK Singh in performing yoga postures at an event described as "a cultural milestone". The event was organised jointly by the Indian Embassy in Beijing, the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC) and Yogi Yoga, a popular yoga school. Twenty young Indian ambassadors from the New Delhi-based Morarji Desai Institute also demonstrated advanced yoga poses. Yoga has generated

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a lot of interest among foreigners and is contributing to foreign tourist arrivals (FTAs) as well. Chandra Kishore Mishra, secretary, Ministry of AYUSH, said that FTAs have been reported more in centres where yoga sessions and naturopathy have been organised. "We are expecting more and more foreign tourists to come to India for yoga," he added.

Convenient visa processes have played their part. The Indian government gives e-Visas in three categories: It permits tourists to attend a short-term yoga programme besides recreation, sightseeing and casual visits to meet friends or relatives. The duration of stay in India under the e-Visa has also been increased from 30 days to 60 days. Michael Dust, 30, an international taxation lawyer from Dusseldorf, Germany, was in India on a scholarship. He joined IDY celebrations at New Delhi's central business district Connaught Place. "Initially, I thought it would be very tough. While working with a law firm in Germany, we had yoga classes every two weeks. I thought my body was very stiff but I could do yoga properly. It was a delightful experience."

Given the immense interest that yoga is generating globally, the Prime Minister has a point when he says that yoga is playing an extremely important role in connecting the world with India.

Facing page: Yoga enthusiasts strike a perfect pose in China. *Above:* IDY celebrations in Tashkent

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India's pride: *our women achievers*

As women are major contributors to Indian society, we showcase personalities from all walks of life who have excelled in their fields while doing their bit for the world over the last decade. By no means is this an exhaustive list, but it shows how much the women of our country are capable of accomplishing with sheer dedication, determination and hard work

text | **Neharika Mathur Sinha**

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History has seen Indian women rising to the occasion whenever the need has arisen – be it the legends Rani Lakshmibai and Razia Sultan who ruled and defended Jhansi state and Delhi Sultanate respectively with courage and pride, or Ahilya Bai Holkar who ruled Indore between 1694 and 1766 with justice and wisdom. There is renowned Vedic philosopher Gargi Vachaknavi; seer and philosopher Maitreyi; India's nightingale Sarojini Naidu; Savitribai Phule who started India's first school for girls; Captain Prem Mathur, the first woman pilot in India; Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, the first woman president of the United Nations General Assembly; Sucheta Kriplani, the first woman chief minister in India; Aruna Asaf Ali, Indian independence activist… the list is long and their achievements stellar enough to have filled up pages of history. With such a rich heritage of women achievers, it is not surprising that the current generation of women in India is carrying on the mantle. We look at Indian women who have challenged their limits and excelled in their fields in the recent past.

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Photo: rajasthantourismbuzz

Chhavi Rajawat

India's youngest *sarpanch* (head of village) Chhavi Rajawat has dedicated her life to the betterment of her ancestral village Soda in Malpura tehsil, Tonk district, Rajasthan. Rainwater harvesting, toilet facilities, solar power utilisation, paved roads and even a bank – this MBA graduate left no stone unturned to ensure Soda flourishes. Leaving behind the corporate city life as an IT professional, she contested elections in March 2010 to earn this honour. An alumnus of prestigious institutes including Mayo College Girls School (Ajmer), Lady Shri Ram College and Balaji Institute of Modern Management, Rajawat today divides her time between Soda and Jaipur, where her parents live.

Incidentally, her grandfather Brig Raghubir Singh had also been *sarpanch* of Soda 20 years before Rajawat's election. She has faced several challenges, including attacks by anti-social elements who did not want her to construct an IT centre on common land. But through it all, Rajawat remains strong and confident in her belief of making changes at the grassroot level to help make India shine.

Tessy Thomas

The first woman engineer to head a missile project in India, Tessy Thomas won the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Award for her outstanding contribution towards making India self-reliant in the field of missile technology. It all began because Thomas grew up next to a rocket launching station in Alappuzha in Kerala. She was fascinated and went on to do engineering from Government Engineering College in Thrissur, followed by an M Tech in guided missiles. The missile woman of India joined the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) in 1988. From being the associate project director of the 3,000 km range Agni-III missile project, Thomas became project director for the Agni-IV missile project. In 2009, she went on to hold the post of Project Director for the 5,000 km-range Agni V missile.

Constant hard work and dedication have helped her make a mark in this male-dominated field. Despite working 16 hours a day and many a time on Sundays, this "*Agniputri*" (one born of fire) has always managed to shine. And this is when she is also a mother. Truly a perfect example for the women of today.

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Photo: facebook/deepa.malik.9022

Deepa Malik

She's the first Indian woman to win a medal at the Paralympic Games in 2016. But Malik's silver honour in the shot put section is not just a recognition of her skill in the sport- it is also testimony to years of hard work and dedication, and her never-say-die attitude. Since 1999, Malik is paraplegic – paralysed below the chest – and has undergone three spinal tumour surgeries in the past 14 years. Because of the surgeries, she had to bear 183 stitches between her shoulder blades. And despite all the tough times, Malik is the first paraplegic Indian woman biker, swimmer and car rallyist. She drove 3,000 km to Leh and back in a hand-controlled car. She was part of the Tour-de-Himalaya Car Rally in 2009.

That's not all! This Army officer's wife wears many more hats. She ran a successful catering and restaurant business (2003-2010), is well-known as a motivational speaker and is now a member of the working group in the formulation of the 12th Five Year Plan (2012-17) on Sports and Physical Education. In 2012, she received the Arjuna Award for her efforts in swimming.

Moumita Dutta

One of Indian Space Research Organisation's leading scientists, Moumita Dutta was a key part of the acclaimed Mars Orbiter Mission (MOM). She and the other team members are credited with having planned and implemented the Mission within a span of just 15 months.

After completing an MTech in Applied Physics from the University of Kolkata, Dutta joined the Space Application Centre, ISRO in 2006 and was Project Manager for payloads for MOM, realising her childhood dream of working at ISRO. Today, she has become accomplished enough to have worked on several prestigious ISRO projects including Oceansat, Resourcesat and HySAT. She is an expert in miniaturisation of gas sensors and has received ISRO's Team of Excellence Award for MOM.

Dutta is interested in literature, creative writing, recitation and music. At present, she is heading a team that is making indigenous progress in optical sciences as part of the Make in India initiative.

Rupa Devi

She is the first woman referee from Tamil Nadu to be selected by the Federation Internationale de Football Association (FIFA). Football had been Devi's childhood passion – as a student of St Joseph's Girl's School in Dindigul, she played at the sub-junior level and in district football tournaments. In university, she played at the national level. However, she was not allowed to play when she started working as a teacher. In 2010-11, life dealt her a raw deal as she lost her parents. And for two years, there were no women tournaments at the national level. But Devi did not give up. She joined a referee development school in 2012, and went on to officiate several international matches. In 2013, the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) chose her as referee for the under-14 football festival in Doha. In 2016, Devi qualified as a referee for FIFA matches.

Photo: www.thenewsminute.com

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Photo: Shikha Bawa Sahu / Flickr

Teejan Bai

She took the traditional performing art form of Pandavani from Chhattisgarh to the world stage. But that's not the only reason Teejan Bai is admired by one and all. Her struggle in the male-dominated sphere of Pandavani where she also faced social ostracism, is commendable.

Teejan Bai is a recipient of the Padma Shri (1998) and the Padma Bhushan (2003), apart from several other awards for beautifully enacting tales from the Indian epic Mahabharata for many years.

Her first performance was at age 13 in Chandrakhuri, near her village Ganiyari. She sang in the Kapalik *shaili* (style) of Pandavani, which was the first time a woman had done so as traditionally, they used to sing in the Vedamati – the sitting style. Since then, she has always stood tall on the stage and sung out tales of valour, love, war and heartbreak in her guttural voice that touches the soul. Married four times, she lives with her fourth husband Tukka Ram, a former harmonium player in her troupe.

Photo: facebook / @IafsFighters

Puja Thakur

She is the first woman to have led the guard of honour for a major visiting dignitary at the Rashtrapati Bhavan. In 2015, when US President Barack Obama was the Chief Guest at India's Republic Day celebrations, Wing Commander Puja Thakur commanded the joint services guard of honour. It was truly a proud moment for every Indian woman.

Thakur has served in the Indian Air Force as an administration officer for over 15 years. This para jumper from Rajasthan wants more women to join the Indian armed forces and realise their potential by becoming capable officers who can successfully serve their country. She was recently posted at DISHA, the publicity cell under the Directorate of Personnel Officers at the Air Force headquarters.

Eli Ahmed

Known as one of the few all-rounders of Assam, Eli Ahmed has been a renowned writer, scriptwriter, director, lyricist, costume designer, actor, social activist and much more! Famous for her boundless energy and enthusiasm, 81-year-old Ahmed has over 1,000 articles, stories, and poems to her credit. Although she was born into an affluent family, times got tough when her parents expired and she along with her brothers had to move to Guwahati.

She is currently working on a collection of short stories in English. Her books *Romanthan* and *Asom Jyoti* have been critically acclaimed. She is the editor and publisher of *Oranil*, the only magazine for women in the Northeast. Ahmed was also the one to establish the first film institute in the Northeast.

Photo: www.northeastnews.in

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Arunima Sinha

She climbed Mount Everest with one prosthetic leg in 2013, gaining the honour of being the first amputee and the first woman amputee to have done so. It took Arunima Sinha 52 days to reach the summit. She credits her determination and strong willpower for the achievement. Her experience has been recorded in her book *Born Again on the Mountain*, released in December 2014, and she was awarded the Padma Shri in 2015.

This national level volleyball player was pushed from a running train by thieves back in 2011. Another train on a parallel track ran over her leg and it had to be amputated from below the knee. Lack of resources at the Bareilly District Hospital, where she was rushed to, led to the amputation being done without anesthesia! But not one to be cowed down by the pain, this gutsy lady started to look at other ways of "doing something" in life. Lying on the hospital bed, she decided to achieve the most difficult task of climbing Mount Everest. She did a basic mountaineering course from the Nehru Institute of Mountaineering, Uttarkashi. Arunima has also scaled Kilimanjaro (Africa), Elbrus (Europe), Kosciuszko in Australia, Aconcagua in Argentina and Carstensz Pyramid in Indonesia.

Photo: facebook / TheArunimaSinha

Photo: indiatoday.in

IAF women fighter pilots – Bhawana Kanth, Avani Chaturvedi, Mohana Singh

These three women made history by becoming the first women combat pilots to be inducted into the Indian Air Force in July 2016.

Bhawana Kanth from Darbhanga in Bihar is a keen sportswoman with interests in badminton, volleyball and adventure sports. But to fly like a bird had been her childhood dream. During her training, she faced several challenging moments, the biggest being her debut solo spin. When her plane was at 20,000 feet, she began doubting her ability to make her aircraft recover. However, she put all her fighter pilot skills to use and managed to successfully complete her spin.

Avani Chaturvedi had been part of her college flying club. Joining the Air Force as a fighter pilot fueled this passion. This girl from Madhya Pradesh loves to play table-tennis and also engages in creative pursuits like playing the violin and painting. Her experience in the IAF is one she cherishes. Not only did she find all the instructors and colleagues supportive during her training, she got the opportunity to fly two different aircraft.

Hailing from Jhunjhunu in Rajasthan, Mohana Singh loves singing, sketching, reading, travelling and cooking. She joined the Air Force to carry on the family legacy of serving the nation. Flying in the night was a memorable experience, for it taught her one important rule of flying – to trust the instruments. Some lighting next to her aircraft temporarily shook her confidence as she was unable to distinguish between the stars and the clusters of light below. Disregarding the visuals, she concentrated on descending to the ground depending only on her instruments, and was able to land safely.

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Photo: facebook / nagpalsmriti

Smriti Nagpal

Growing up with two elder hearing-impaired siblings, Smriti Nagpal always wanted to do something for them. At age 23, she founded and became the CEO of Atulyakala, an NGO that empowers deaf artists through design partnerships and creative collaborations.

Nagpal used to work at the National Association for the Deaf (NAD) at age 16. Soon, while still in school, she became a part of the Hearing Impaired Morning Bulletin for Doordarshan. After her graduation, she came in touch with a senior hearing-impaired artist with a Masters degree in art who was unable to pursue his passion. This led her to start Atulyakala, which sells art by such talented artists. The aim of the NGO is to help the hearing-impaired lead a life of dignity and pride. They are now also working with other hearing-impaired artists and raising awareness about sign language, aiming to benefit the entire hearing-impaired community.

Today, Nagpal has the honour of being one of BBC's "30 under 30" young businesswomen. She calls sign language her mother tongue and is working towards giving more and more opportunities to the hearing-impaired so that they can live at par with everyone else.

Vikeyeno Zao

Vikeyeno Zao holds the honour of being the first filmmaker from Northeast India to showcase her work at the 63rd Cannes Film Festival in 2010. Zao directed *Last of the Tattooed Head Hunters*, a 15-minute film about the head hunting Konyak Nagas, which was globally acclaimed. A mother of two, she spent a gruelling seven years researching for this film – reading books on the subject and also interviewing the tribes across Nagaland, bordering Myanmar and Arunachal Pradesh. Zao has also directed a documentary on man and elephant, *This Land We Called Our Home,* which was screened at the 64th Cannes Film Festival in 2011. Besides this, Zao has also made several documentary films, tele-films and serials on the people of Northeast India as well as its natural beauty and environment. She herself belongs to the Angami tribe and earned her diploma in Direction and Cinematography from Asian Film and Television Institute in Noida. Zao lives with her children and husband Indrajit Narayan Dev who shares her passion for filmmaking.

Photo: facebook / vikeyeno.zao

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Baoa Devi

This artist holds the honour of exhibiting her artwork in several countries across the world. Her Madhubani painting was also gifted by PM Narendra Modi to the Mayor of Hannover, Stefan Schosstok. Among other honours and recognitions, she was awarded the Padma Shri in 2017. Interestingly, it was her mother-in-law Gunja Devi who supported her in pursuing her talent of Madhubani painting, the traditional art form of Bihar. Married at age 12, Baoa Devi was asked by her mother-in-law to paint the bare walls of their mud house in Jitwarpur in Bihar. Today, she has diversified and added her own thoughts to her creations. For instance, after the 9/11 attacks in the US, she painted a snake in the sky looking at the blood and misery in the world.

Photo: www.bhaskar.com

Zeenat Musarrat Jafri

She holds the honour of having set up the first Indian School in Riyadh in 1982 with her husband. She has dedicated a major part of her life to ensuring quality education to the children of Indian expatriates in Saudi Arabia. Jafri, the founding principal of the Indian International Public School in 1982, has been working hard to ensure that standards of education as well as co-curricular activities are maintained. Hailing from Bhopal, Jafri took up this initiative with an aim of community service. In 2017, she was awarded the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman. This was the first time that an Indian woman living in Saudi Arabia was conferred this prestigious award.

Sujata Sahu

She's known as the 'Iron lady of Ladakh' for her tireless efforts to improve the quality of education there with her 17,000 ft Foundation. She has been working on developing activity-based learning, infrastructure and libraries in 981 schools in the area. Sujata Sahu quit as a teacher of information technology at Gurgaon's Shri Ram School and dedicated her life to Ladakh. It takes almost 10 hours of driving followed by two days of walking or a ride on a muleback to reach any of these remote schools that lie at altitudes between 9,000 and 15,000 ft. The walk itself is through steep mountain passes, frozen rivers and sand beds in tough weather. In 2010, Sahu made a solo trip to Ladakh carrying 900 kg of education material on 25 horses. She started the 17,000 ft Foundation in Gurgaon in 2012 with like-minded corporate professionals and trekkers. Her team also carries specially designed furniture and sends long-term volunteers for specific subjects. Sahu received the Nari Shakti Puraskar (2016) for her good work.

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Chitra Ramakrishna

The first woman managing director and chief executive of the National Stock Exchange (NSE), Chitra Ramakrishna has had an illustrious career. Apart from several other senior posts at NSE, she has been a member of the Derivatives Panel of Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), chairperson of Malaviya National Institute of Technology in Jaipur and member of executive committee at National Securities Depository Ltd. In 1985, this chartered accountant joined the project finance division of Industrial Development Bank of India (IDBI). The then Chairman of IDBI, late SS Nadkarni, handpicked Ramakrishna among four others to help set up the NSE from scratch in the early 1990s. A finance whiz who loves Carnatic singing and playing the tanpura, Ramakrishna started internet trading at NSE in 2000. She has also been known for working on new, investor-friendly offerings. Today, Ramakrishna is recognised as an institution builder. She is involved in several bodies including CII's National Council on Financial Sector Development, FICCI's National Executive Committee and Capital Markets Committee. Ramakrishna has won several awards and accolades including woman of the year in the Business Leadership Awards by *Forbes* magazine and ranked 17th in the list of top global women business leaders by *Fortune* magazine.

Photo: Indian Mouth and Foot Painting Artists

Sheela Sharma

Despite having lost both her arms in a train accident, four-year-old Sheela Sharma went on to be a good student. With time, she started managing all her tasks by holding articles with her mouth and feet. Sharma, who hails from Lucknow, was always fond of making sketches of people and sceneries. In fact, during her school days, her friends and teachers asked her to make geometrical diagrams as well as biological drawings of frogs, birds and the like. Their appreciation and encouragement helped her gain confidence and blossom as an artist. But there were many who criticised her style of painting. Nevertheless, Sharma did not give up and went on to do her Bachelors in Arts. Now in her late 40s, Sharma has several solo exhibitions to her credit including one at the prestigious Jehangir Art Gallery in Mumbai. She believes that everything lies in the brain and if that is working fine, no challenge, no disability can stop you from getting what you want to achieve. Today, she does everything herself – from mixing colours to cleaning brushes and moving canvasses. The most admirable thing about her is that in her works, she never dwells on negativity; her works mostly depict women and nature.

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Ira Singhal

This Meerut-born lady showed the world that all it takes is mental strength to make it to the top. She did not let her physical disability bog her down as she pursued her passion to become an IAS officer. The journey of Ira Singhal, the first physically-challenged candidate to top the UPSC examination in the general category, has become an inspiration for millions of physically-challenged people. However, the route was tough. Singhal suffers from scoliosis or curvature of the spine, a disability that doesn't let her twist her arms completely. Singhal was a topper in school. She went on to study computer engineering from Netaji Subhas Institute of Technology (NSIT) and later did her MBA from Delhi University's Faculty of Management Studies (FMS). She appeared for the UPSC exam in 2010 but did not get a posting as authorities cited "inability to push, pull and lift" as a reason. She took her case to the Central Administrative Tribunal and got a ruling in her favour in February 2014. In the meantime, Singhal sat for the test twice to improve her rank, and on her fourth attempt in the year 2015 at age 31, she topped the exam. Ironically, her physical challenges debar her from being eligible to be an IRS officer, clerk or even a sweeper, but the rules do allow her to be an IAS officer. Despite all the challenges in life, Singhal is not a serious person but rather known as a prankster among her friends. Currently an officer trainee in IAS, she loves drama, dancing and travelling.

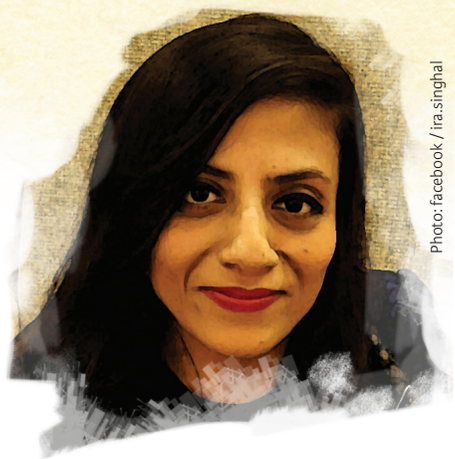

Photo: facebook / ira.singhal

Archana Ramasundaram

This lady has proved her mettle several times over the many decades she has served in the Indian Police Service (IPS). Her list of achievements is impressive. In 1995, Archana Ramasundaram was awarded the Police Medal for Meritorious Services, and in 2005 she got the President's Police Medal for Distinguished Services. In 2014, she became the first woman officer to be made an additional director in the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), and in February 2016, Ramasundaram earned the honour of becoming the Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) Director General – the first woman police officer to lead a central paramilitary force that guards the country's borders with Nepal and Bhutan.

After completing her post graduation in Economics from the University of Rajasthan, she became a lecturer in the same varsity. But later, she went on to train at the National Police Academy in Hyderabad. Ramasundaram was the only woman in the class, but that did not deter her. In 1982, she joined the police service in Tamil Nadu.

Always aiming to excel, Ramasundaram took study leave between 1989 and 1991 to pursue a Master of Science degree in Criminology from the University of Southern California in Los Angeles. There too, she performed well, securing the highest Grade Point Average. She has handled all kinds of assignments with courage and conviction, with an underlying aim to work towards the protection and welfare of women.

Ramasundaram's last post was Director of the National Crime Records Bureau. She lives with her husband, a former senior state IAS officer, and two sons in Tamil Nadu.

Photo: facebook / ipsarchana.ramasundaram

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Growing interaction with *the home country*

Thousands of prominent Indian-origin business leaders, professionals and artists settled in other countries head to India in January to attend the biennial Pravasi Bharatiya Divas, which sees them interacting with their counterparts here

text | NB Rao

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Minister of State for External Affairs, Gen (retd) VK Singh and others watching cultural performances at PBD 2017

The Indian diaspora, which adds up to more than 30 million individuals, lives across the globe and has over the years contributed significantly to the improvement of its adopted countries.

While most members have prospered tremendously in their new homes, many of them also repatriate funds to their relatives and dependents in India. Remittances of funds by Non-Resident Indians (NRIs), Persons of Indian Origin (PIOs) and Overseas Citizens of India (OCIs) added up to nearly $70 billion last year. NRIs alone comprise nearly 18 million Indians living abroad.

The Government of India has been organising the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) every year in January from 2003 onwards. The national capital hosted most of these events: in 2003, 2004, 2007, 2008, 2010, 2011 and 2014. But other cities including Mumbai (2005), Hyderabad (2006), Chennai (2009), Jaipur (2012), Kochi (2013), Gandhinagar (2015) and Bengaluru (2017) also hosted the event.

After the Gandhinagar event in 2015, the government decided to celebrate PBD every other year on January 8 and 9 (the latter date marks the day Mahatma Gandhi returned to India from South Africa in January 1915). January 7 is now being observed as Youth Pravasi Bharatiya Divas, and smaller, outcome-based PBD conferences will be held in New Delhi during alternate years to address issues of concern to the Indian diaspora.

Engaging the overseas Indian community has been a priority for the government

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who addressed the 14th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas in Bengaluru on January 8, pointed out that engagement with the overseas Indian community – which represents the best of Indian culture, ethos and values – has been an area of priority for the government.

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Prime Minister Narendra Modi greeting the Prime Minister of Portugal, Dr Antonio Costa, at the PBD event.
Facing page: Former President Pranab Mukherjee addressing the event

"Indians abroad are valued not just for their strength in numbers," remarked the PM. "They are respected for the contributions they make— to India and to the societies and countries where they live in foreign lands and communities across the globe, irrespective of the path they take, and the goals they pursue."

Overseas Indians include politicians, scientists, doctors, educationists, economists, musicians, philanthropists, journalists, bankers, engineers, lawyers and information technology professionals.

More than 4,000 delegates attended the three-day Bengaluru event, whose theme was 'Redefining Engagement with the Indian Diaspora.' The participants included NRIs from the US, Europe, Africa, Middle East, the Far East and Australia and New Zealand. The largest delegation of overseas Indians — adding up to 140 people —was from Qatar.

More than 4,000 delegates attended the three-day Bengaluru event

The PBD convention also attracted many foreign leaders. Dr Antonio Costa, the Prime Minister of Portugal, was the chief guest. Malaysia's Health Minister S Subramaniam; the government's special envoy on infrastructure, Samy Vellu; and Mauritian Health Minister Prithvi Raj Singh Roopun were also present.

Former President Pranab Mukherjee also gave the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award (PBSA), the highest honour conferred on overseas Indians, to 30 prominent personalities from the US, the UK, the UAE, Australia, Bahrain, Belgium, Brunei, Canada, Djibouti, Fiji, France, Israel, Japan, Libya, Malaysia, Mauritius, Portugal, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Sweden, Thailand and Trinidad & Tobago.

Nisha Desai Biswal, the assistant secretary of state in President Barack Obama's government in the US from 2014 to 2017, and one of the award recipients, delivered the acceptance speech on behalf of all the winners.

The primary objective of hosting the PBD is to enable the Indian diaspora to know about

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the achievements in various sectors in India and brief them on the policies and initiatives of the government.

PBD 2017 also aimed to strengthen the engagement of overseas Indians with their home country and provide them a platform for networking with other NRIs and PIOs.

According to government statistics, several countries are home to more than a million NRIs/PIOs each. The US has about four million Indians — the largest number of migrants from India. Next is the UAE with 3.5 million NRIs. But Indians in the Gulf countries (UAE, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain) are largely temporary residents and most do not get permanent residency or local passports.

Indians also live in large numbers in the UK (1.5 million), East Africa, Australia and New Zealand. And many Indian-origin citizens are living in other countries including South Africa, Singapore, Malaysia and Fiji.

PRAVASI BHARATIYA SAMMAN AWARDEES 2017

Name	Country	Field
Dr Gorur Krishna Harinath	Australia	Community Service
Rajasekharan Pillai Valavoor Kizhakkathil	Bahrain	Business
Antwerp Indian Association	Belgium	Community Service
Nazeer Ahamed Mohamed Zackiriah	Brunei	Community Service
Mukund Bhikhubhai Purohit	Canada	Business
Nalinkumar Sumanlal Kothari	Djibouti	Community Service
Vinod Chandra Patel	Fiji	Social Service
Raghunath Marie Antonin Manet	France	Arts & Culture
Dr Lael Anson E. Best	Israel	Medical Science
Dr Sandip Kumar Tagore	Japan	Arts & Culture
Ariful Islam	Libya	Community Service
Tan Sri Dato Dr Muniandy Thambirajah	Malaysia	Education and Community Service
Pravind Kumar Jugnauth	Mauritius	Public Service
HE Mr Antonio Luis Santos da Costa	Portugal	Public Service
Dr Raghavan Seetharaman	Qatar	Business Management
Zeenat Musarrat Jafri	Saudi Arabia	Education
Singapore Indian Association	Singapore	Community Service
Dr Carani Balaraman Sanjeevi	Sweden	Medicine
Susheel Kumar Saraff	Thailand	Business
Winston Chandarbhan Dookeran	Trinidad & Tobago	Public Service
Vasudev Shamdas Shroff	United Arab Emirates	Community Service
India Social and Cultural Centre, Abu Dhabi	United Arab Emirates	Philanthropy and Community Service
Hon'ble Priti Patel	United Kingdom	Public Service
Neena Gill	United Kingdom	Public Service
Hari Babu Bindal	USA	Environmental Engineering
Dr Bharat Haridas Barai	USA	Community Service
Nisha Desai Biswal	USA	Public Affairs
Dr Mahesh Mehta	USA	Community Service
Ramesh Shah	USA	Community Service
Dr Sampatkumar Shidramapa Shivangi	USA	Community Leadership

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Raising the global *Indian profile*

Overseas Indians are increasingly occupying a prominent place in their adopted nations, getting elected to public offices or heading companies and other organisations

text | **NB Rao**

The Indian diaspora has contributed significantly to the development of its adopted countries, especially in terms of economic growth.

Increasingly, NRIs, PIOs and OCIs are also getting into the political scenario in their countries. Last November, for instance, Indian-Americans made their mark in US politics, with four seats in the House of Representatives, and one being elected to the Senate.

Kamala Harris, a two-term attorney-general from California, became the first Indian to win a US Senate seat from California. Pramila Jayapal became the first Indian-American to be elected to the House of Representatives from Washington state. Others who were elected to the House of Representatives included Raja Krishnamoorthi from Illinois and Ro Khanna from California. Ami Bera was re-elected from California — he is the longest-serving Indian-American Congressman. Tulsi Gabbard, a

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Hindu but not of Indian descent, was re-elected to the House from Hawaii.

But Indian innovators, contributors and information technology and medical professionals have contributed far more to America in recent years. Prominent Indian business names in the US include Satya Nadella, CEO, Microsoft; Sundar Pichai, CEO, Google; Shantanu Narayen, CEO, Adobe Systems; Indra Nooyi, chairman and CEO, PepsiCo; Lakshmi Pratury, CEO, INK; and Pranav Mistry, head, Think Tank Team and director of research, Samsung Research America.

Of course, America also has hundreds of other prominent Indian-origin people including scientists and Nobel Prize recipients (Venkatraman Ramakrishnan and Amartya Sen); deans and presidents of universities (Rakesh Khurana, professor at Harvard; Vijay Kumar, professor at University of Pennsylvania); mathematicians, economists, actors, filmmakers (Mira Nair), fashion designers, media personnel, musicians and writers (Anita Desai at MIT).

The UK too has a long list of prominent Indians, led by industrialist Lakshmi Mittal, the Hinduja brothers and Karan Billimoria. It is also home to renowned writers like Salman Rushdie and scores of prominent personalities in the arts, dramatics and film sectors.

Prominent overseas Indians try to influence policies by advising leaders in their adopted lands and in India

Prominent overseas Indians in politics, arts, literature, business and other sectors have a significant influence on happenings both in their adopted nations and in India. Increasingly, many of them visit India frequently and interact with top political, business and art and culture leaders.

They try to influence policies by advising leaders — in their adopted lands and in India — and their views are taken seriously by political and business leaders.

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Transforming India-UAE ties *set for 'take-off'*

The visit of the Crown Prince of the United Arab Emirates gave a boost to the cordial and stable relationship shared by India and the UAE

text | **Manish Chand**

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Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest building, glowed in the colours of the Indian flag on India's 68th Republic Day, captivating the region with the unfolding story of the burgeoning friendship between India and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Back in India, a 179-strong contingent of the UAE's armed forces led the resplendent Republic Day parade at Rajpath with Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan and Prime Minister Narendra Modi looking on. The leaders of the world's largest democracy and the

Left: Crown prince of Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, inspecting the Guard of Honour at the Rashtrapati Bhavan. *Above*: Burj Khalifa lit in the Indian tricolour to mark the Indian Republic Day

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India's Republic Day chief guest, UAE Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, along with PM Modi, the then Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar, former President Pranab Mukherjee and former Vice-President Hamid Ansari watching the parade

Gulf's economic powerhouse had plenty to celebrate as their talks the previous day had laid out an ambitious and multi-faceted template for upscaling their strategic partnership to new heights.

Optics and substance

This was the first time an Arab contingent had participated in the Republic Day parade — but the visit of Sheikh Nahyan to India as the chief guest at the country's Republic Day transcended imagery and symbolism, bringing this mutually empowering partnership to a "major take-off" point, in the Prime Minister's evocative words.

Indeed, the relations between India and the UAE, home to 2.6 million Indians who remit home around $2.6 billion annually, are poised for an all-round upgrade and transformation with the two countries signing a comprehensive strategic partnership and an array of pacts straddling diverse areas, ranging from defence, maritime transport and energy to trade, logistics and cyber security. Sheikh Al Nahyan was the third leader from the energy-rich Arab region India has hosted for the Republic Day, underlining the strategic intent by New Delhi to shape a greater West Asia policy.

For the first time an Arab contingent participated in the Republic Day parade

Bolstering strategic partnership

The showpiece outcome was the elevation of India-UAE ties to the level of Comprehensive

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Strategic Partnership (CSP), which firmly positions the Gulf's second largest economy as India's preeminent partner in the region in both strategic and economic arenas. "We have been successful in creating new synergies in our ties. The agreement that was exchanged just now has institutionalised this understanding," said PM Modi at a joint media interaction with his guest from the UAE.

On the strategic side, the agreement on defence industry cooperation envisages joint manufacturing of high-end weapons systems and transfer of technology that will aid the Make-in-India mission of modernising the country's emerging military-industrial complex. The pact on joint technology development and cooperation in cyberspace to set up joint R&D Centres of Excellence, and another MoU on preventing and combating of human trafficking signed during the visit shows that the two sides are looking to push the envelope.

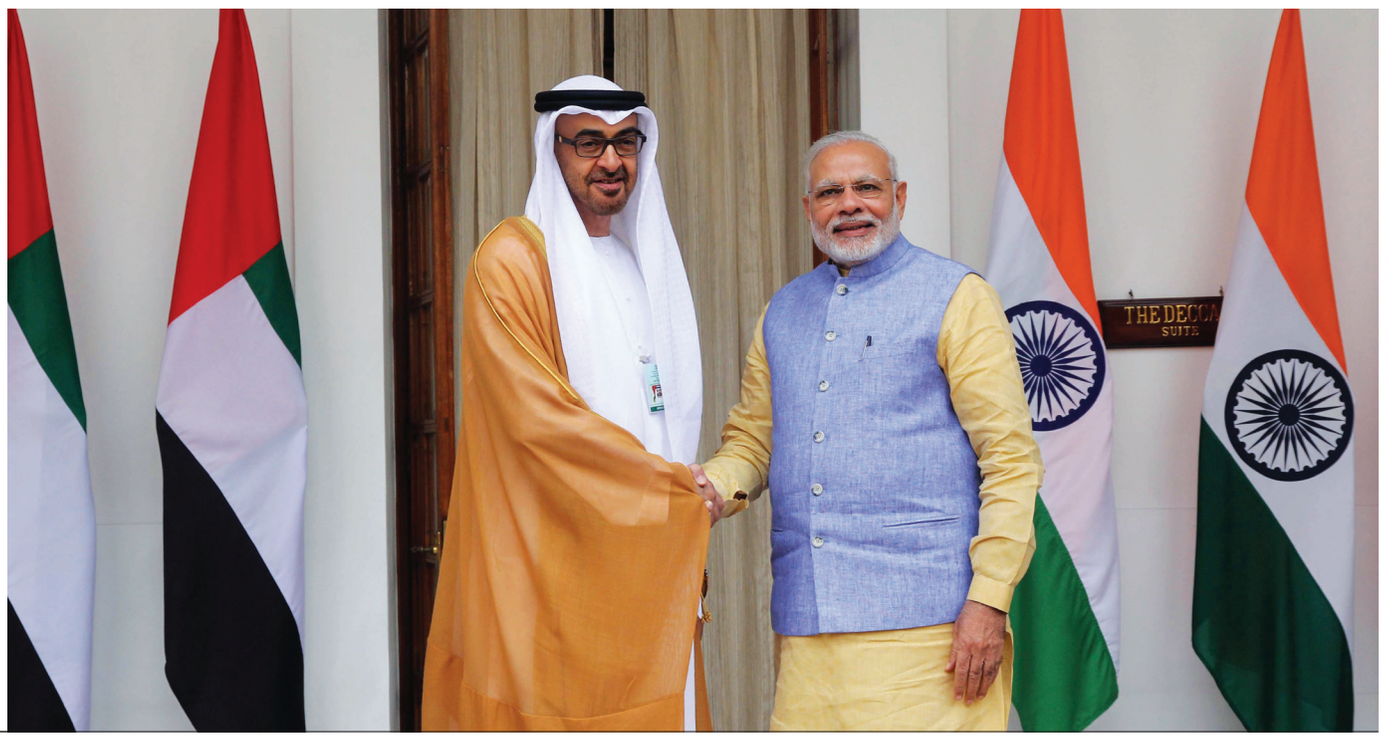
The $75 billion infrastructure Investment Fund was fleshed out during the Crown Prince's visit

Win-win: Partnering India's growth story

The thrust will be on operationalising the $75 billion Infrastructure Investment Fund, which was unveiled during PM Modi's visit to the UAE in August 2015, but was fleshed out during the Crown Prince's visit. Outlining India's expectations from the UAE in the economic arena, PM Modi said: "The UAE can benefit by linking with our growth in manufacturing and services. We are also encouraging and facilitating business and industry of both countries to increase the quality and quantum of bilateral trade."

Half a dozen economic pacts were signed during the Crown Prince's visit, which could

The Prime Minister of India with the UAE Crown Prince



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UAE Crown Prince and PM Modi witnessing the exchange of agreements between the two countries

have a force-multiplier effect. These included maritime transport, mutual recognition of certificates of competency of marine officers, establishing cooperation in highways and road transport, and cooperation in MSMEs.

Upgrading energy partnership

Energy partnership also got a new impetus and strategic character. The agreement on oil storage and management between India's Strategic Petroleum Reserves Limited and Abu Dhabi National Oil Company to establish a strategic crude oil storage in the southern Indian city of Mangaluru signalled a long-range view of advancing energy partnership. The MoU between National Productivity Council and Al Etihad Energy Services Co is expected to enhance cooperation in energy efficiency services.

The UAE supported New Delhi's bid for a permanent seat in the UN Security Council

United against terror

India and the UAE renewed their strategic resolve to intensify their cooperation in counter-terrorism and de-radicalisation. Significantly, the volatile situation in Afghanistan in which five UAE diplomats were killed recently, allegedly by operatives of the Taliban and the Haqqani network, also figured in

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discussions, and provided an added urgency to deepening counter-terror cooperation.

Rallying to India's side against cross-border attacks, the UAE joined India in condemning "efforts, including by States, to use religion to justify, sustain and sponsor terrorism against other countries." The UAE leadership's signature initiatives like setting up the Ministry of Happiness, Tolerance, and the Future to strengthen moderate Islam opens new windows of cooperation to promote "a culture of inclusiveness, openness and tolerance within and among societies to confront the global ills of extremism, terrorism and religious intolerance."

The road ahead

In a boost for India's global aspirations, the UAE reiterated support for New Delhi's bid for a permanent seat in the UN Security Council. "Our convergence can help stabilise the region. And, our economic partnership can be a source of regional and global prosperity," said PM Modi.

(Manish Chand is founder and editor-in-chief of India Writes Network, www.indiawrites.org, an e-magazine and journal focused on international relations and the India story)

KEY NOTES

Joint statement: Elevating India-UAE ties to Comprehensive Strategic Partnership
The framework agreement on CSP enunciates core areas of expanded cooperation in areas such as defence and security, and builds on the templates outlined in joint statements in August 2015 during the visit of PM Modi to the UAE and the Crown Prince's earlier visit to India in February 2016.

Agreement on defence industry cooperation
Other than joint manufacturing of high-end weapons systems and transfer of technology, the defence pact includes studies, R&D, innovation and cooperation between public and private sector institutions of the two countries. Maritime security is also set to emerge as a focus areas of cooperation in the Gulf and Indian Ocean regions with joint anti-piracy training and exercises.

Operationalising the Infrastructure Investment Fund
Outlining India's expectations from the UAE in the economic arena, PM Modi said: "I particularly welcome UAE's interest in investing in India's infrastructure sector. We are working to connect the institutional investors in UAE with our National Investment and Infrastructure Fund," he said.

Economic pacts
The inter-governmental pact on institutional cooperation on maritime transport has the potential to upscale bilateral maritime trade ties through facilitating maritime transport, free transfer of monies between contracting parties and reciprocal recognition of ships' documents. Another pact establishing a framework for mutual recognition of certificates of competency of marine officers, engineers and crews will further enhance maritime trade between the two countries. The pact on establishing cooperation in highways and road transport sectors through sharing of technologies, systems and best practices in freight logistics, warehousing and value added services could be a big win-win for India. There was also a pact on promoting cooperation in MSMEs sectors, including in joint projects, R&D and related activities.

Agreement on oil storage and management
The agreement on oil storage and management between India's Strategic Petroleum Reserves Limited and Abu Dhabi National Oil Company envisages storage of 5.86 million barrels of ADNOC crude oil in underground facilities for emergency situations.

Counter-terrorism and de-radicalisation
India and the UAE renewed their strategic resolve to intensify their cooperation in counter-terrorism and de-radicalisation. "We also feel that our growing engagement in countering violence and extremism is necessary for securing our societies," said PM Modi.

India's global aspirations
The UAE reiterated support for New Delhi's bid for a permanent seat in the UN Security Council and backed its intent to play "an increasingly important role in regional and global affairs." Placing the relationship in the larger canvas, PM Modi underscored that closer India-UAE ties are of "importance, not just to both our countries," but "they are also of significance to the entire neighbourhood."

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Engaging in dialogue for *a multipolar world*

Raisina Dialogue, India's flagship conference on geo-politics and geo-economics, focussed on strategic issues like new challenges and cybersecurity

text | **Anahita Mathai**

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The second edition of the Raisina Dialogue, India's flagship foreign policy conference hosted by the Ministry of External Affairs and the Observer Research Foundation (ORF), was held from January 17-19. The theme of this year's conference was "The New Normal: Multipolarity with Multilateralism", highlighting the transformational geopolitical changes worldwide and consequential changes, and India's role in the emerging world order. Speakers from 37 countries debated policy questions in sessions that covered a wide range of themes, from nuclear politics to sustainable development, cybersecurity, counterterrorism among others. Over the course of three days, the conference was attended by over 1,200 people from 61 countries.

The three-day conference was attended by over 1,200 people from 61 countries

Delivering the inaugural address at the conference, Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke about India's transformations in a time of global innovation, technological growth and greater connectivity, while acknowledging economic volatility and increasingly protectionist attitudes in major economies as challenges. Crucially, he welcomed the "multipolarity of the world, and an increasingly multipolar Asia", signalling an evolution from the global institutional architecture that dominated the previous century.

Re-energising new roles for existing institutions is part of the balancing of multilateralism and multipolarity. Antonio Guterres, the Secretary General of the United Nations (UN), addressing the conference via a video message called for a "surge in diplomacy for peace". He reiterated the importance of the UN as a multilateral organisation, noting that its role was not limited to reacting during times of conflict.

The interactions at the Raisina Dialogue made it clear that institutions were not the only things changing — the ideas underpinning those

Facing page: The Prime Minister and the Minister of State for External Affairs, MJ Akbar, at the opening session of the Raisina Dialogue. Left: Former President of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai, addressing at the Second Raisina Dialogue

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Boris Johnson, MP, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs of the United Kingdom and PM Modi speaking at the Raisina Dialogue

institutions were also shifting monumentally. Chief among these is the idea of globalisation, which is taking on new and varied meanings as countries navigate their domestic politics and external relations. India's Foreign Secretary, Suhrahmanyam Jaishankar, said India was well-placed to approach the "recalculation and recalibration" of the global order. He spoke of the need to increase the country's capabilities as well as its influence to contribute to "global development, progress and security".

One of the recent fundamental changes affecting geopolitics was the exit of Britain from the European Union. Speaking about 'Brexit' and the reasons behind it, British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson said trading systems should be strengthened for the mutual benefit of those participating in them. He highlighted avenues of Indo-British cooperation, in trade, medical research, infrastructure development and more.

The conference provided an opportunity for many to discuss possible changes in US policy

The timing of the conference, just before the inauguration of US President Donald Trump, provided an opportunity for many to discuss possible changes in US policy and how they would impact different regions of the globe. The former Prime Minister of Canada, Stephen Harper, suggested that though Trump's election had caused uncertainty around the world, US foreign policy could become "potentially much more predictable" under its new leader, and that many new opportunities for India could arise as a result. That possibility was also mentioned by two military leaders from the US. The Commander of the US Pacific Command, Admiral Harry Harris, stated that India and the US should "be ambitious together", and Admiral Michelle Howard, Commander of the US Naval Forces in Europe and Africa said "building partnerships should form the new normal".

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A high-level inaugural panel on "Big Power Politics and New Challenges" featured India's Minister of State for External Affairs, MJ Akbar, with Nepal's Foreign Minister, Prakash Sharan Mahat in addition to former President of Afghanistan Hamid Karzai and former Prime Minister of Australia Kevin Rudd. The speakers touched upon the idea of 'big power rivalries', drawing comparisons to the Cold War. Nepal's Foreign Minister called for greater global unity, building on successes like the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Paris Agreement. Separate panels built on those themes, with discussions including universal health coverage, women's leadership, energy and climate, and financial infrastructure.

With digital connectivity a major talking point, several panels at the Dialogue addressed digital issues, including cybersecurity, digital payments and countering violent extremism. Radicalism was also a key talking point in panels on changes in Europe, combating terrorism, the situation in West Asia and the potential for a new Cold War.

Several panels addressed digital issues, including cybersecurity, and countering violent extremism

The Raisina Dialogue brought world leaders and global thinkers together at an India-led, India-based platform. The Dialogue has emerged as a platform that allows India to convey to the world its foreign policy priorities while offering multiple avenues for innovative collaborations and partnerships with like-minded countries in the region and beyond. As India's global engagement becomes more dynamic and robust, its course through the globalised world will be influenced by a variety of relevant stakeholders. Going forward, the Raisina Dialogue hopes to establish and expand the space for these actors to come together in designing India's trajectory as a world leader.

Indian Foreign Secretary Dr Subrahmanyam Jaishankar at the Dialogue

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Budget - an instrument of change *and development*

The Government of India decided to allocate more funds for rural areas, infrastructure and poverty alleviation and yet maintain the best standards of fiscal prudence in its Union Budget

text | NB Rao

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The Annual Financial statement of the Union Budget presented by Finance Minister Arun Jaitley in the Lok Sabha, the lower house of the Indian Parliament, on February 1 was unique in many ways. This was for the first time that the government changed the more than century-old colonial era tradition of presenting the budget on the last working day of February.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi decided to advance budget presentation by a month to ensure that parliamentary approval for spending plans and tax proposals would be completed before the start of the new financial year, April 1, thus avoiding the procedure involving passing of 'vote on account', providing for expenditure till the budget is passed which used to be almost one and a half months into the new financial year.

Way back in 2001, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government under the Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee had advanced the presentation of the budget in the Lok Sabha to 11 am from 5 pm, which was again the tradition in both British India as well as independent India.

The focus of the budget was on the farming sector, rural areas, healthcare for the poor

Another major change was initiated when the government decided to discontinue with a nearly century-old practice of having a separate railway budget.

The government also did away with the distinction between planned and non-planned expenditure from this year's budget;

Finance minister Arun Jaitley departing from North Block for Rashtrapati Bhawan and Parliament House, along with other ministers and senior officials to present the Union Budget

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expenditure will now be classified under revenue and capital heads.

The focus of this year's budget was on the farming sector, rural areas, healthcare for the poor, infrastructure, public services, and strengthening the financial institutions.

The government raised the coverage of the *Fasal Bima Yojana* — to secure farmers against natural calamities —from 30 per cent of cropped area in 2016-17 to 40 per cent in 2017-18 and 50 per cent in 2018-19.

The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), which had set up a long-term irrigation fund, would see the total corpus raised to ₹40,000 crore. NABARD will also set up a micro irrigation fund to achieve the goal of 'per drop more crop.' The fund will have an initial corpus of ₹5,000 crore.

The government aims to bring about a crore of households in rural areas out of poverty by 2019.

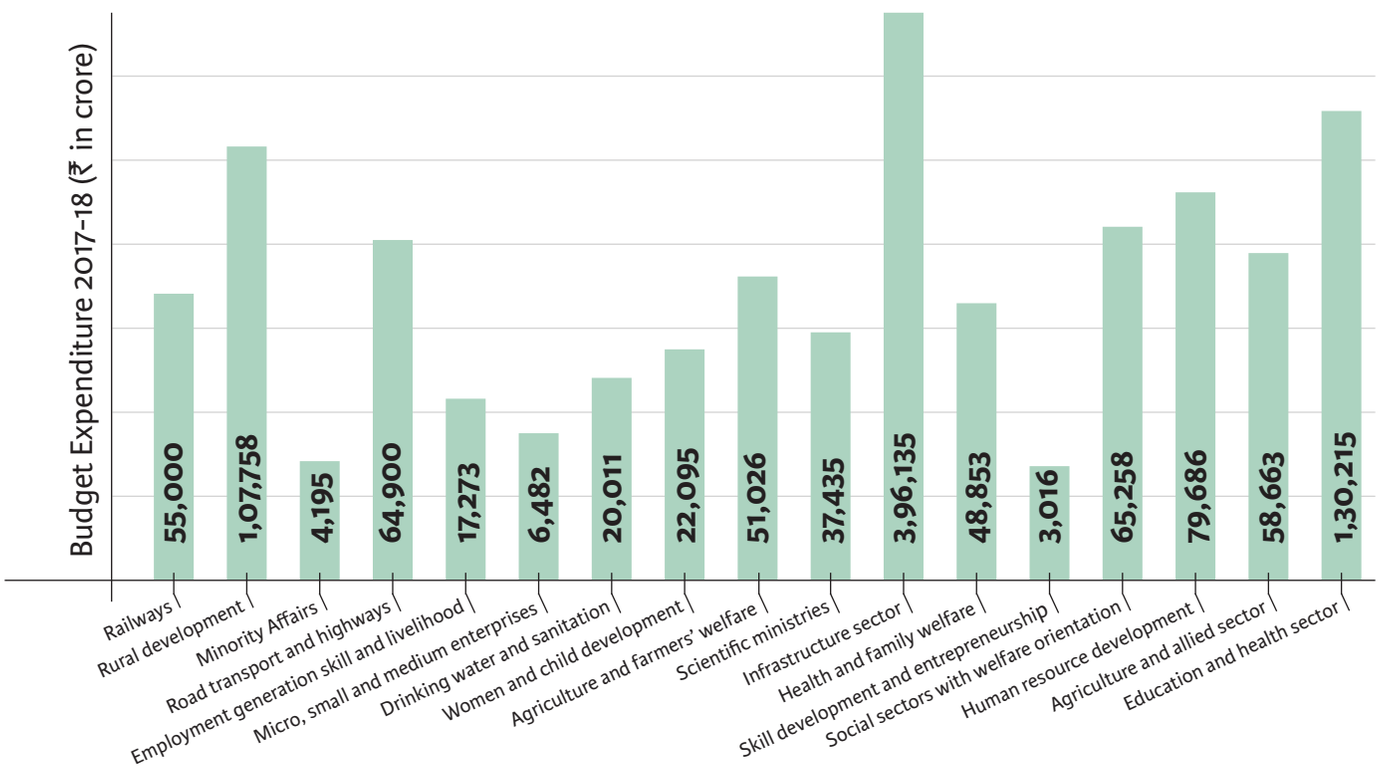
Nabard will also set up a micro irrigation fund to achieve the goal of 'per drop more crop'

In 2017-18, five lakh farm ponds will be taken up under the MGNREGA. The government also aims to spend over ₹3 lakh crore on rural India and the MGNREGA aims to double farmers' income.

In the area of healthcare for the poor and the underprivileged, the government has allocated ₹500 core for *Mahila Shakti Kendras*. It also decided to transfer ₹6,000 to every pregnant woman under a nationwide scheme. It has also allocated ₹1.85 lakh crore for women and children.

The government has allocated ₹39.61 lakh crore for infrastructure and ₹1.31 lakh crore for railways in the budget. The budget has allocated ₹64,000 crore for highways, while high-speed internet will be provided to 1.5 lakh gram panchayats. The government will soon be announcing a new metro rail policy with new modes of financing.

Major changes were also initiated in the financial sector by the government in its



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Union Minister for Finance and Corporate Affairs, Arun Jaitley, addressing a post-Budget press conference

budget. It decided to abolish the Foreign Investment Promotion Board. It will also come out with a revised mechanism to ensure time-bound listing of central public sector enterprises (PSE).

Shares of IRCTC, a railway PSE, will be listed on stock exchanges. The government also fixed the *Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana* at ₹2.44 lakh crore in 2017-18. The *Yojana* was set up to develop the micro enterprise sector by extending financial support to achieve the goal of "funding the unfunded."

The budget also believes that the BHIM app will unleash a mobile phone revolution in India.

The government extended concessions to ordinary tax-payers. Individuals with income between ₹2.5 lakh and ₹5 lakh have been extended an income tax rate cut of five per cent.

Those with an annual income of ₹5 lakh other than business income will have a simple one-page return and those filing returns for the first time will not come under government scrutiny. But those with individual income between ₹50 lakh and ₹1 crore will have to pay a 10 per cent surcharge to make up for the ₹15,000 crore loss due to cut in personal tax rates.

The government also initiated changes in the political funding. The maximum amount of cash donation for political parties has been kept at ₹2,000 from any single source. Parties can, however, receive donations by cheque or through digital mode. The government will also enable registered parties to issue bonds to donors making payments through cheques or digital transactions.

The dramatic changes proposed by the government in this year's budget will have a tremendous impact on the economy. As Jaitley said at the start of his presentation: "My overall approach while preparing this budget has been to spend more in rural areas, infrastructure and poverty alleviation and yet maintain the best standards of fiscal prudence. I have also kept in mind the need to continue with economic reforms, promote higher investments and accelerate growth."

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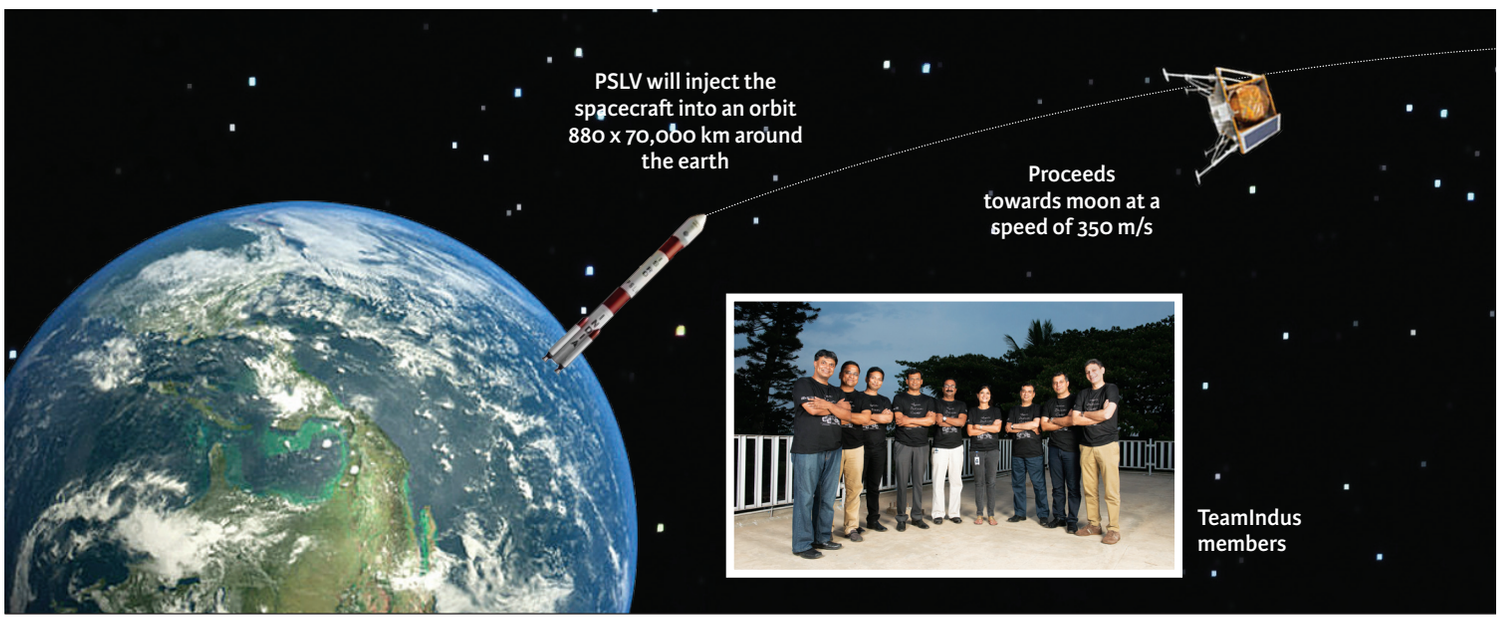
Lunar voyage

With the ISRO-TeamIndus association, India may soon be scaling new heights aiming for the moon — quite literally

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) underlined its dexterity in space missions most recently by the launch of 104 nano satellites via its proven Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV)-C37 platform. But there is more in store for India's premier space research agency, with its association with TeamIndus, India's sole entry to Google Lunar XPRIZE (GLXP). India may soon be scaling new heights aiming for the moon — quite literally.

Seven years after a team of enthusiastic entrepreneurs came together with a vision to make an impossible dream come true, TeamIndus is all set to launch a spacecraft onboard ISRO's time-tested PSLV platform in late 2017. If successful, the company may become the first private entity to soft-land on the lunar surface, a feat achieved earlier by USSR, USA and China. In the $30 million competition, Axiom Research Lab, known as TeamIndus is required to land its spacecraft on the Moon,

INDIAN LUNAR MISSION AT A GLANCE



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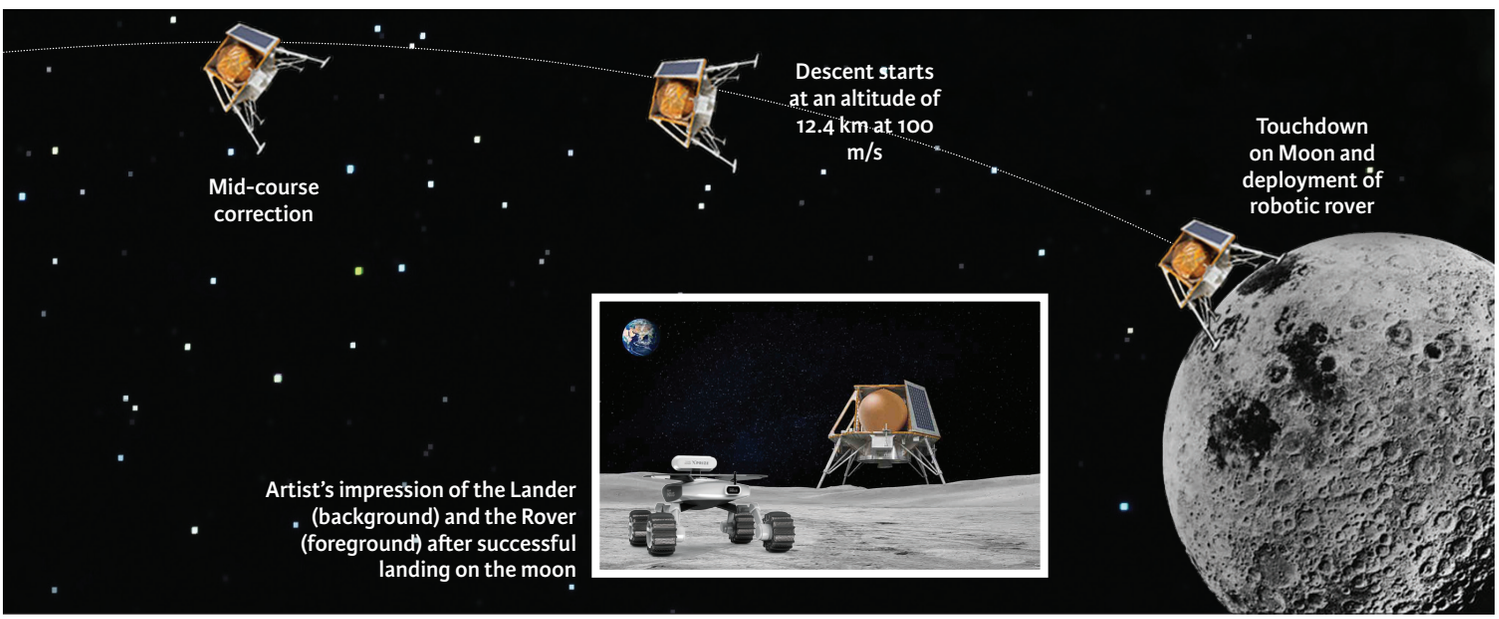
travel 500 metres on the rough and unexplored lunar surface and broadcast data, images and high definition videos to earth.

"Unlike most other teams in GLXP, TeamIndus was started by ordinary folks with neither any aerospace experience nor deep pockets, both of which are prerequisites when it comes to space. One of the foundational principles of TeamIndus is to make space more accessible to everyone. Thus the TeamIndus Mission was designed to be the most open and accessible space mission ever. That is the reason why the central thought guiding the Mission is to be *#HarIndiankaMoonshot*," Rahul Narayan, TeamIndus' fleet commander had recently said.

The TeamIndus spacecraft has been designed and developed in Bengaluru by a 100-person engineering team including 20 retired ISRO scientists. In a launch window starting on December 28, 2017, the PSLV will inject the spacecraft into an orbit 880 X 70,000 km around the earth. The spacecraft will then undertake a 21-day journey to soft-land in Mare Imbrium, a region in the North-Western hemisphere of the Moon. After landing in Mare Imbrium, the spacecraft will deploy all its payload including the TeamIndus rover that will traverse 500 metres on the Moon's surface in order to accomplish its Google Lunar XPRIZE objectives.

The mission — the team claims — is driven by its inclusive nature, providing opportunities for students to conduct flying experiments to the moon, develop mechanisms for supporters to get a ringside view of the engineering as well as for brands to enable and partner this historic journey. Earlier, Narayan had cited that the mission will help India join an exclusive club of nations with proven technology to soft-land on the Moon, thereby opening newer avenues of space exploration. "Programmes like these are a testimony to the Indian government's Make in India initiative," he had said.



Artist's impression of the Lander (background) and the Rover (foreground) after successful landing on the moon

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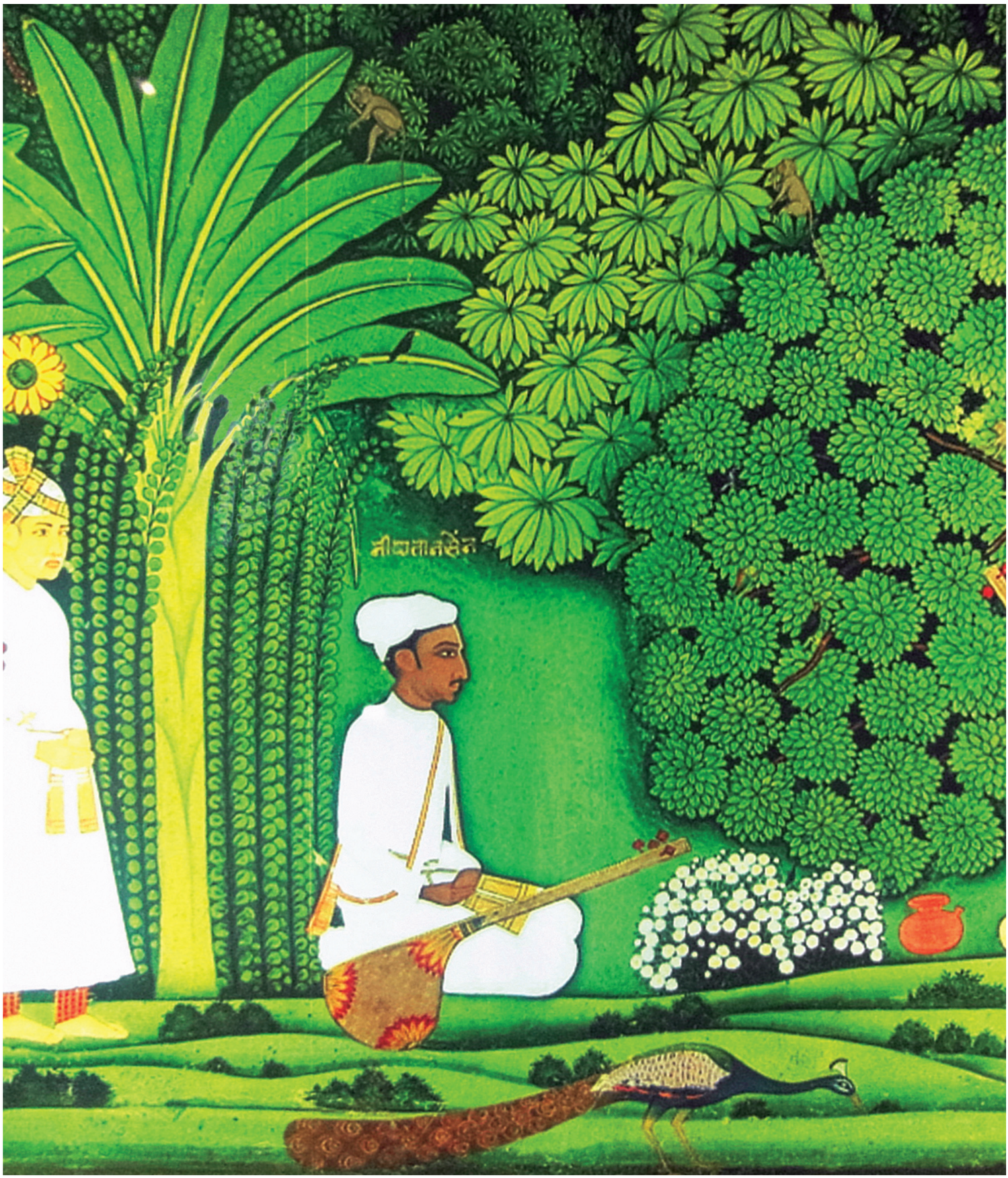

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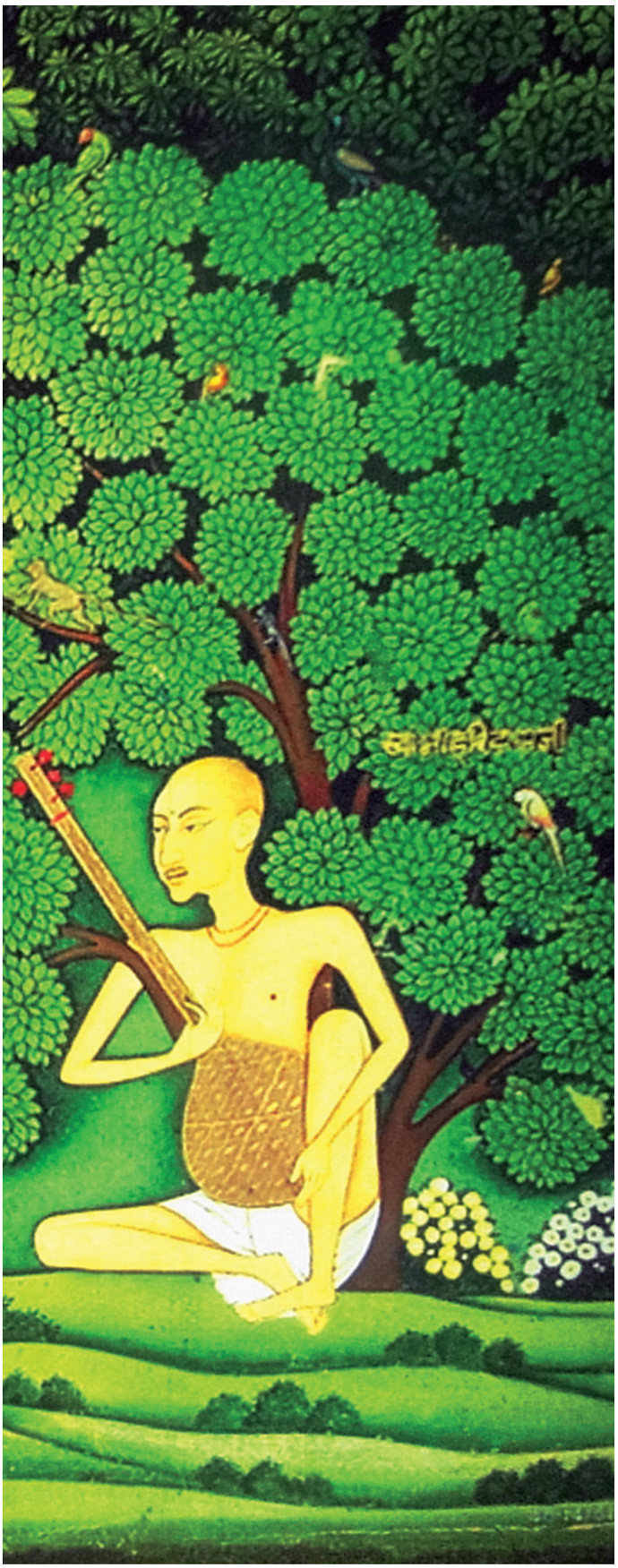

Moods of the *ragas*

Intrinsic to the musical heritage of India, ragas possess not just auditory beauty but also visual and cultural richness

text | **Shailaja Khanna**

Ragas are an integral part of Indian classical music, and are indeed a purely Indian concept seeming to have esoteric origins as their rendering is linked with so many other ideas of mood *(rasa)*, colour, seasons and time — concepts that don't have anything to do with notes. The Sanskrit word 'raga', in fact, translates into emotion and colour.

Each raga is a melodic idea that uses at least five notes of the octave, and two ragas may have exactly the same set of notes like *Darbari* and *Jaunpuri* but their sound and the mood they create are completely different, since they use the same notes differently. *Rasa* or emotion is associated with a raga — a raga like *Puriya* is meditative, while the same set of notes with different emphasis in Raga Marwa create a restless energy. Raga *Sohini*, also with similar notes, is effervescent and is associated with the season of spring. The examples are too many to enumerate!

An imaginary depiction of Mughal emperor Akbar watching Tansen receive a lesson from Swami Harida (Mughal miniature painting). Miniature paintings in India often depicted ragas in human form or associated with gods

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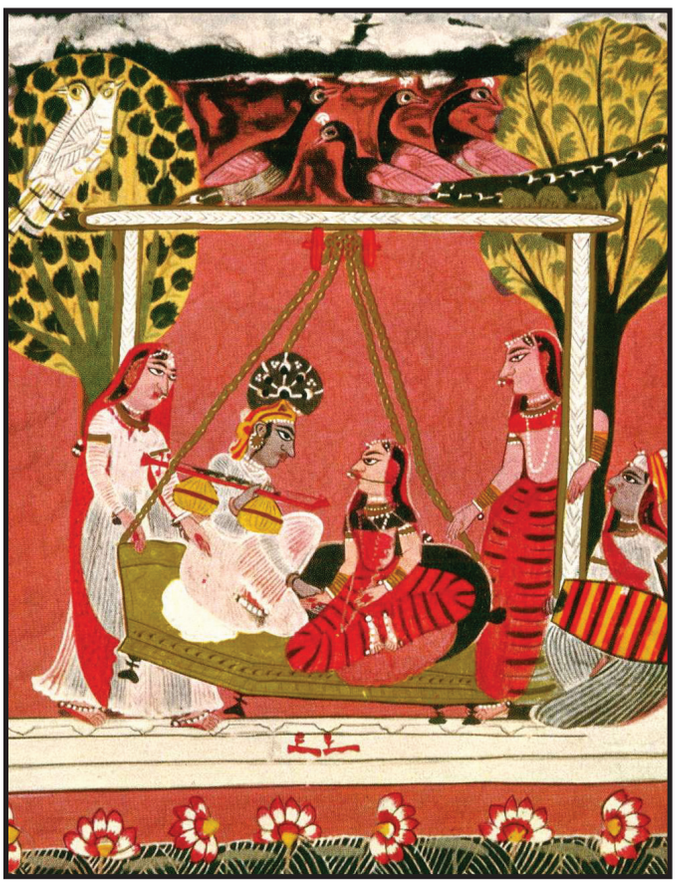
Ragas can evoke the nine rasas or emotions—the predominant ones being love *(shringara)*, peace (shanti), detachment and melancholic solitude *(vairagya)*. Ragas like *Des* and *Pilu* are considered romantic, *Bhupali* brings peace and *Shri* is a raga of *vairagya*. There are anecdotes associated with many of the ragas too, delineating their cultural significance. According to one anecdote, Raga *Tilak Kamod*, a lyrical, light raga was being played on the sitar and a spider on the wall nearby slowly started inching towards the music. The moment the notes of the sombre and melancholic Raga *Malkaus* began to play, however, the spider ran back up the wall! This experiment was repeated two or three times, with exactly the same result!

There are also specific ragas meant to be performed during two of the six main seasons—spring and monsoon. Raga *Basant* and *Bahar* are specifically sung in spring, in the day or at night. The lyrics are also to do with blooming flowers and verdant forests. A famous composition in Basant talks of the dairy maids going to pluck the profusion of flowers in the forests of Vrindavan. Raga *Megh* and various forms of *Malhar* are performed in the monsoon and are associated with the rains — visually shown as dark blue or grey, with pouring rain or dark overhanging clouds. The lyrics, too, talk about clouds, rain and thunder. There are many tales of *Malhar* concerts bringing on rains, even in modern times.

Apart from representing different moods, ragas are also linked to the theory of time. There are specific times of day at which specific ragas are to be performed. This concept is still adhered to in the north Indian classical tradition. There are pre-dawn ragas *(Lalit, Ramkali)*, ragas to be sung at dawn *(Bhairav)*, in the morning *(Todi)*, pre-noon *(Bilawal)*, noon (*Sarang*) afternoon *(Bhimpalasi, Patdeep)*, dusk *(Marwa, Aiman)*, evening *(Bihag, Des)* and finally,



Photos: Shailaja Khanna

Left: Raga Basant, 18th century, Bundi, from a collection of HK Swali; *(right)* a 17th century Marwar painting depicting Raga Hindol

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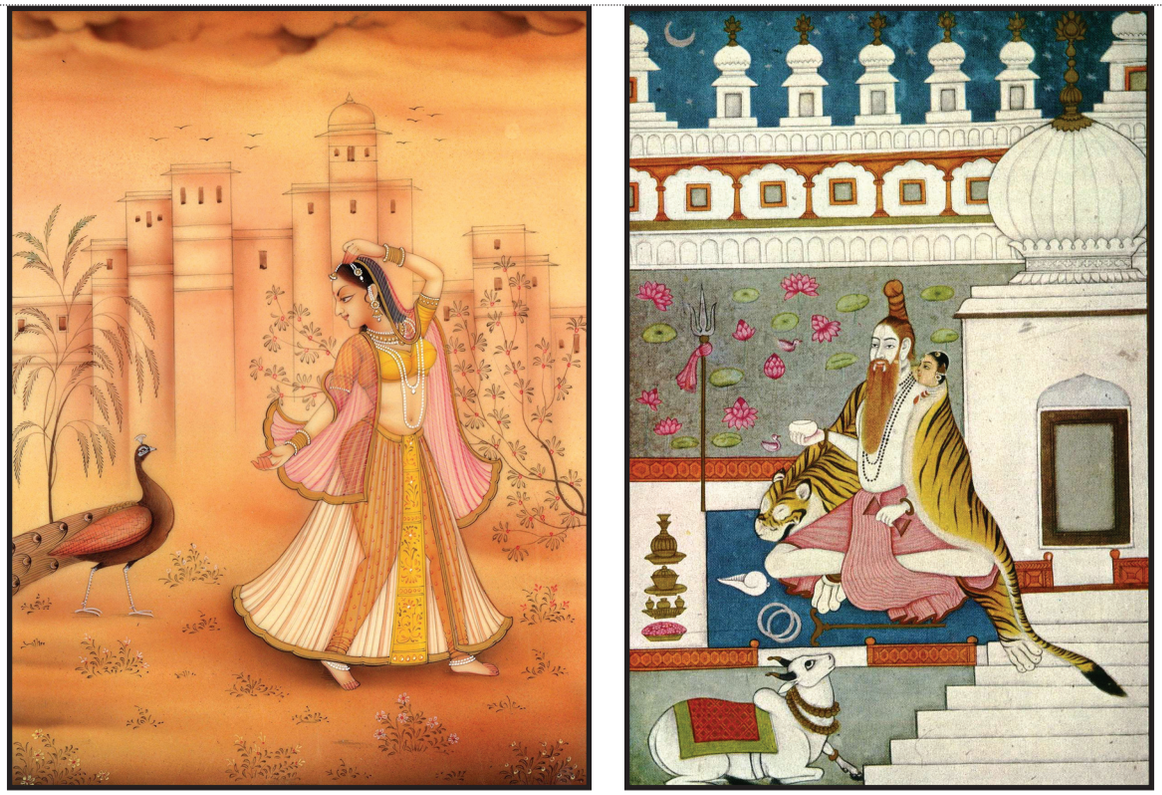

Photo: Shailaja Khanna

Left: Kakubha ragini, Rajasthani miniature painting; *(right)* Raga Bhairav, 18th century, Deccan

late at night *(Malkaus, Kanhara)*. Ustad Rashid Khan, a leading singer today, does not like to even do *riyaaz* (practice) of a morning raga in the evening!

Not only the mood and time of a raga, but the visual depiction of ragas is enlightening too. There are six main ragas, pictorially always depicted as males. Each of these has eight female consorts and eight sons, or *ragaputras*. The familial links are made due to the notes of the ragas that link them. The visual depiction of ragas in the series of *Ragamala* paintings was started around the 15th century in various courts — Mughal, Deccan, Pahari, Rajasthani and Central Indian. The earliest known *Ragamala* paintings date back to 1475 and were found in Gujarat.

There are specific times of the day when specific ragas are performed - a concept followed in the north Indian classical tradition

The seven notes — *sa re ga ma pa dha ni* — were also symbolised by the cry of an animal as well as its representing deity and a colour, to aid the process of visual representation. Thus, according to one manuscript, sa was taken to be the cry of the peacock and its presiding deity is the Fire God Agni, with the colour being the white of a lotus; re was said to be the cry of the hawk, the deity represented is Brahma and the colour is red; ga is the sound of a goat, the deity is Goddess Saraswati and the colour is green; ma is the call of the deer and is represented by Lord Shiva, whose colour is blue; pa is the call of the cuckoo bird, Lord Vishnu is the deity, the colour is black; *dha* is the neighing horse, represented by Lord Ganesha and the colour is yellow; *ni* is the elephant's trumpet, symbolised by the Sun God and the colour is a combination of all the other six colours. The late Ustad Vilayat Khan, sitar wizard, too, associated ragas with colours as well as images. These inescapable connections between sound and visual, mood and time, prevailing since the last 500 years or so, are indeed a marvel. How a *sur* (note), sung at the appropriate time, can create a strong emotion or indeed a physical phenomenon like rainfall is truly miraculous!

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A world of *opportunities*

With festival curators increasingly warming up to India's independent cinema, films from the globe's most prolific film-producing country seem ready to travel in bigger numbers than ever before

text | **Saibal Chatterjee**

Imphal-based filmmaker Haobam Paban Kumar, 40, is one of the rising stars of India's independent cinema. But chances are that the average moviegoer in this part of the world has neither seen his work nor heard enough about him for him to become a household name. International film festival programmers, on the other hand, simply cannot have enough of Kumar's fiction feature debut film, *Loktak Lairembee* (*Lady of the Lake*).

A product of the Satyajit Ray Film & Television Institute (SRFTI), Kolkata, Kumar belongs to Manipur. Exposed to the depth and range of world cinema, however, he was bitten by the filmmaking bug. In a style that blends striking restraint with piercing insight, Kumar uses the medium to highlight the complexity of life and society in his native Manipur, a part of India that is rarely seen on the big screen.

After winning a slew of national and international accolades through the years,

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A still from the film *Loktak Lairembee*

the filmmaker made his narrative feature debut last year with the critically acclaimed *Loktak Lairembee*, which trains the spotlight on an endangered fishing community. The film had its world premiere at the 21st Busan International Film Festival last September, won the Golden Gateway Award at the 18th Jio MAMI Mumbai Film Festival in October and in February 2017, was unveiled at the 67th Berlin Film Festival, becoming the first Manipuri entry to make it to the official selection of a major European festival since Aribam Syam Sharma's *Ishanou* was screened in the Un Certain Regard section of the Cannes Film Festival in 1991.

"Berlinale," says Kumar, "was the festival that I was particularly keen to be part of. I am hoping *Loktak Lairembee* will now travel further from here and that I will get somebody good to come on board to represent the film internationally," he says.

The filmmaker is one of several Indian filmmakers who are currently making

"I am drawn to contemporary issues. Manipur is a difficult place with a complicated social landscape in which ethnic tensions are rife. It has 29 different tribes."

Haobam Paban Kumar

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a mark on the world stage. At Berlinale itself, India was also represented by Amit V Masurkar's political black comedy, *Newton* and Ashish Avikunthak's experimental Bengali-language *Aapothkalin Trikalika* (*The Kali of Emergency*). Also in the festival was the short film *Aaba*, made by Mumbai-based Amar Kaushik.

At the 2017 edition of the International Film Festival of Rotterdam (IFFR), Sanal Kumar Sasidharan's Malayalam film *Sexy Durga* bagged the event's flagship Hivos Tiver Award, the first Indian film ever to do so. The festival jury lauded the film "for its daring and resourceful approach in creating a mood of constant tension, providing an insight into multi-layered power dynamics of gender, class and authority."

In its Berlin premiere, *Newton*, featuring Rajkummar Rao in the lead role of a government clerk sent to man a polling station in a forest area in Chhattisgarh, garnered praise from its first audience. Describing it as "engaging viewing", the *Screen Daily* said: "Its laughs, tension and the interplay between the two that give *Newton* its momentum." The review added: "The mostly successful handling of its topical premise — not only focusing on difficulties in the world's biggest democracy, but conjuring broader international parallels at a time when the validity of election processes is being called into doubt — is just one of the reasons Masurkar's follow up to 2014 comedy *Sulemani Keeda* deserves to travel on the festival circuit."

> ***"Laughs, tension and the interplay between the two give Newton its momentum," reviewed Screen Daily***

Stills from the film (left) *Aaba* and (right) *Newton*

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MOVIE REVIEW

Nilotpal Majumdar, former dean of Satyajit Ray Film and Television Institute on *Loktak Lairembee*, "Selection of a film from Manipur for the world premiere will not only get the attention of the international audience but will also showcase the rich culture of the region."

Bollywood actor Rajkummar Rao on *Newton*, "India is the biggest democracy in the world, and I am sure people are always curious to know how it functions. In that way, Newton is a very Indian film. When I read the script of the film and when I saw some real people acting in it, it took me back to the days of the golden age of Indian cinema."

Ashish Avikunthak on *Aapothkalin Trikalika*, "My films have a direct relationship to what I am, albeit with some dilution as it's a representation after all."

Aaba producer Guneet Monga posted on Facebook, "Congratulations Amar Kaushik on winning the Special Prize for the Best Short Film for *'Aaba'* in the Generation section at Berlin International Film Festival."

Coming in the wake of titles such as Ashim Ahluwalia's *Miss Lovely*, Amit Kumar's *Monsoon Shootout*, Gurvinder Singh's *Chauthi Koot* and Neeraj Ghaywan's *Masaan*, all of which have played as part of the official selection in recent editions of the Cannes Film Festival, the works of a new breed of rookie Indian filmmakers looking to carve individual niches for themselves are increasingly finding takers among festival curators. Among them are the likes of Raam Reddy (whose debut *Thithi* bagged two Golden Leopards in the Locarno Film Festival, 2015) and Aditya Vikram Sengupta (who won the Best Debut Director prize at Venice Days, 2014 with *Labour of Love*).

A new breed of Indian rookie filmmakers is looking to carve a niche for themselves

Experimental filmmaker Ashish Avikunthak's *Aapothkalin Trikalika* is the first-ever feature-length film from India to be selected for Berlin's Forum Expanded since the segment was launched in 2006. An associate professor at the Harrington School of Communication and Media of the University of Rhode Island (URI), he is known for films underlined by rigorous experiments with form and content. *Aapothkalin Trikalika* is his fifth feature-length cinematic essay.

In an interview posted on the URI website, Avikunthak says of the film: "[It] is a profound political and religious commentary on the state of perpetual and perennial emergencies we live in. It is not a report; but a philosophical comment of the world we live and inhabit."

Mumbai-based filmmaker Amar

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A still from the film *Aapothkalin Trikalika (The Kali of Emergency)*

Kaushik had India's only title competing for an award at Berlinale 2017. His short film, *Aaba* (*Grandfather*), set in Ziro, Arunachal Pradesh, is about an orphan Apatani girl who learns that her grandfather is dying. The old man goes about preparing his own grave, filling it with all the things that he loves. The film, which features non-actors including village elder Dani Randa and his real-life granddaughter Sunku, takes storytelling back to its most pared-down form.

Adding to the Indian buzz is London-based Gurinder Chadha's *Viceroy's House*, which marks Bollywood actress Huma Qureshi's maiden foray into international cinema. The film also features Om Puri in his last role in a British film and is a historical drama set in the final months of the British Raj in India.

There are several other promising independent Indian films in the works. Anup Singh is ready with *The Song of Scorpions*, starring Irrfan Khan and French-Iranian actress Golshifteh Farahani.

Ashim Ahluwalia is making *Daddy*, a biopic of Mumbai gangster Arun Gawli, while cinematographer Shanker Raman's directorial debut *Gurgaon*, a dystopian view of the fast-expanding millennium city on the edge of Delhi, is ready to do the festival rounds. Aditya Vikram Sengupta, too, is set to hit the road with the unconventional *Jonaki* (*Firefly*), the tale of a comatose old woman.

A world of opportunities awaits India's resurgent independent cinema.

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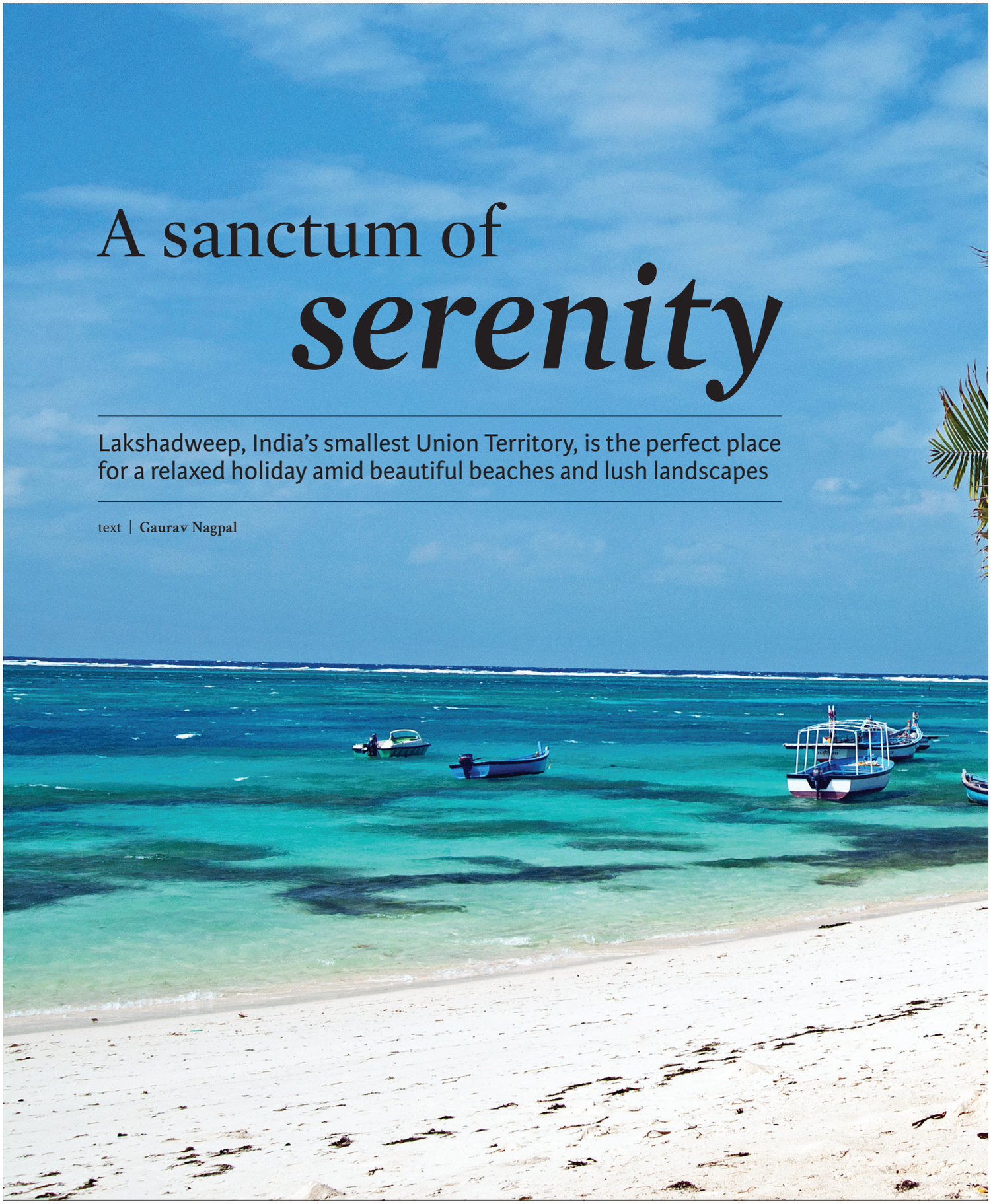

A sanctum of *serenity*

Lakshadweep, India's smallest Union Territory, is the perfect place for a relaxed holiday amid beautiful beaches and lush landscapes

text | **Gaurav Nagpal**

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The Bangaram Island, which lies like an exotic teardrop in the stunningly coloured sea around the Lakshadweep islands

The group comprises 36 members, but is named after a hundred-thousand! Lakshadweep, a paradise in the Arabian Sea, is a group of 36 beautiful islands; yet, its name means "a hundred thousand islands" in Malayalam and Sanskrit. What you get here is stunning natural beauty, pristine sandy beaches, and diverse flora and fauna. And, the mystical Lakshadweep islands are perfect if you are not looking for a typical rushed and "busy" holiday, and instead prefer to enjoy a more laid-back, relaxed experience.

By air or by sea, if you are to reach Lakshadweep, you must pass through Kochi

The facts

Lakshadweep is the tiniest Union Territory of India and the only coral chain of the country! The area was formally designated a Union Territory in 1956 and the name Lakshadweep was given in 1973. Thirty-six islands, 12 atolls, three reefs and five submerged banks make up this archipelago, occupying a total land mass of 32 sqkm and enclosing 4,200 sqkm of lagoons. Though only 10 of the islands are inhabited — Agatti, Amini, Andrott, Bitra, Chetlat, Kadmat, Kalpeni, Kavaratti, Kiltan and Minicoy - you cannot just waltz in when you wish. The islands are a restricted area, and an official permit from the administration is needed to visit them.

History

The history of Lakshadweep is somewhat unclear. Legend has it that the first settlement here was in the period of Cheraman Perumal, the last king of Kerala. He is believed to have slipped out from Cranganore (present-day Kodungallor), and one of the search boats looking for him was caught in a fierce storm, with the crew stranded on the island now known as Bangaram, from where they then moved to Agatti, and further, discovering more islands along the way.

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The theories about the coral atoll formations are equally inconclusive. The most prominent, though, and also the most accepted is the one propounded by Charles Darwin in 1842. He suggested that a volcanic formation forms the base of the islands below the reef, and it was over this base that corals settled and built fringing reefs, which, in turn, transformed to barrier reefs and finally to atolls because of the geological submergence of the base.

When do we go there?

Lakshadweep is characterised by a tropical climate, with summer temperatures ranging between 22-33°C, while in winter the range is 20-32°C. Mid-October to mid-May is perfect — weather is pleasant, and you will not be running helter-skelter away from a deluge from the skies unless you enjoy rains. Conversely, mid-May to September is not a good time, as this is when the rains come calling. Round the year, you will find places to stay at as no resort closes down because of the weather; however, getting there by ship might be tough during the monsoon period.

How do we get there?

Kochi (erstwhile Cochin) is the gateway to Lakshadweep. Be it ships or flights, you must set off from — or pass through —Kochi, if you are to get to Lakshadweep. A short flight of under two hours gets you to the island paradise; if boats catch your fancy, you need to spend 14-18 hours, depending on the island you choose to land on. You can pick from among a variety of passenger ships with different classes of accommodation, a la the railways – AC first/second/seating, with medical and doctor facilities available on board some of the ships.

For travel during the monsoons, remember that certain islands are connected by flights or

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A small boat sailing the sparkling blue waters of Lakshadweep

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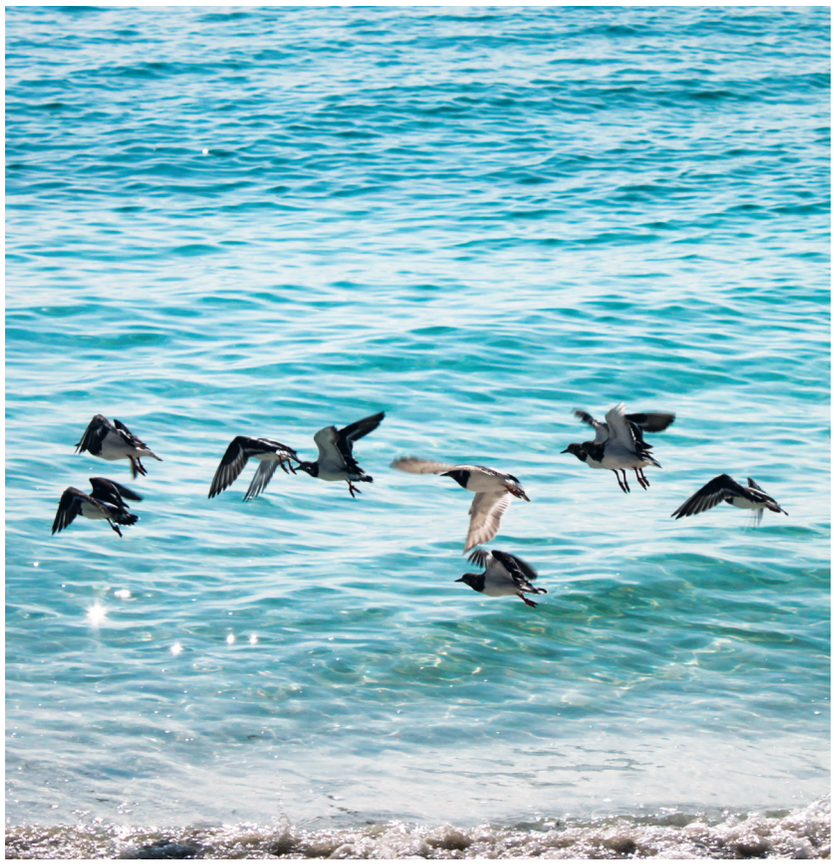
Things to note

- If you require any particular medicines, carry your own supply, as only common medicines are available on the islands.
- Do not pick up corals as souvenirs – this is a punishable offence.
- Consumption of alcohol is prohibited across Lakshadweep, except on Bangaram island.
- Carrying or consuming narcotics is a punishable offence, as is nude swimming and sunbathing.
- Do not venture outside the premises of your island lagoon without permission of the authorities or without a proper escort – it might be risky.
- Do not pluck tender coconuts off the trees – the trees are privately owned and unauthorised plucking is considered a theft.



helicopters and are thus reachable even during the monsoons, while others remain out of reach; do look into this when making your travel plans.

What do we do there?

The islands offer a plethora of water sports — take your pick from scuba diving, windsurfing, snorkelling, kayaking, canoeing, water skiing, sport fishing and yachting. Don't miss the night voyage into the sea, as well as rides on glass-bottomed boats. You could also just go around the islands to catch the sights— lighthouses, marine life exhibits, and local industries. Popular folk art forms include Kolkali and Parichakali, along with Oppana, seen at marriages and involving a song sung by a lead singer and followed by a group of women.

Minicoy island, dubbed 'Women's Island' (due to the dominating position occupied by women in local society) offers a rich tradition of performing arts — watch, in particular, lava dance, among the most attractive of local dances and performed on festive occasions.

Certain islands are not reachable during the monsoons; remember this when making plans

Kadmat island offers a full-fledged water sports institute and a dive school. You can enjoy the experience of dive package tours on this island; also, this is one of the three islands — along with Bangaram and Agatti — that foreign tourists are permitted to visit.

What is noteworthy across all islands is the focus on preserving the delicate ecology of Lakshadweep. Care has been taken to ensure no activity could possibly damage the coral or other parts of the island, which is why only non-intrusive water sports are allowed.

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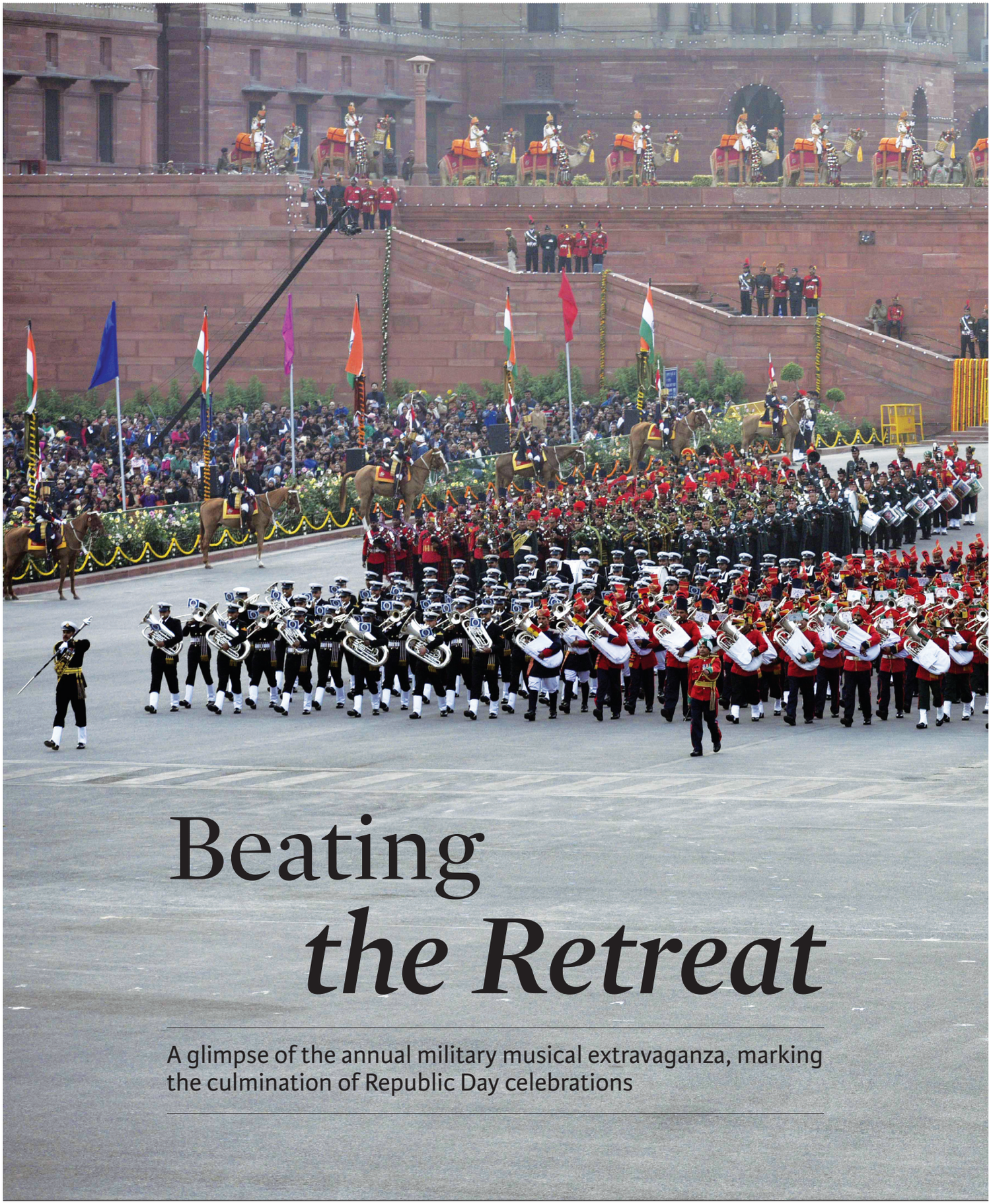

Beating *the Retreat*

A glimpse of the annual military musical extravaganza, marking the culmination of Republic Day celebrations

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It is colourful, musical, and a grand affair. The 'Beating the Retreat' ceremony is based on a centuries-old military tradition, according to which soldiers called a close to the war at sunset. It is held every year on January 29, three days after India celebrates its Republic Day. The ceremony has, in recent years, evolved into a much-awaited event with the foot-tapping music of the bands from the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, the State Police and Central Armed Police Forces enthralling the audience. It is a wonderful sight to watch military bands perform in front of the illuminated Raisina Hills, New Delhi. A look at this year's ceremony...

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The then President Pranab Mukherjee chose to arrive at the venue in a ceremonial buggy – an open gold-plated carriage. The Beating the Retreat dates back to the time when the troops ceased fighting, sheathed their arms and withdrew from the battlefield and returned to the camps at sunset at the sounding of the Retreat.

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This year, 16 military bands, 16 pipe and drum bands from Regimental Centres and Battalions participated in the ceremony. One band each of the Indian Navy and Indian Air Force was also part of the event.

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The performances by bands and musicians thrilled the audience with patriotic fervour. While the tunes were a mix of Indian and Western compositions, the dominance of the *desi* tunes added a special flavour to the ceremony.

Soldiers marching during the Beating the Retreat ceremony. Beating the Retreat is an event of national pride, and creates nostalgia for the times gone by.

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Journey through *the hills*

If you like to enjoy views of India from the heavenly heights, undertake the mountain railway journeys that take you through the most attractive routes while you breathe in the cool mountain air

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The spectacular hill railways of India established an effective rail link across the mountainous and enchantingly beautiful terrains of the country. Built during the British colonial rule as a result of their interest in establishing control over the mountain ranges of India, they are still well-maintained and operated by Indian Railways, and serve as an innovative mode of transportation for people to enjoy the beautiful heights. These rail routes connect popular hill resorts with the foothills, making their way through rugged and scenic views and providing an adventurous ride. As a trip to the hills is a real treat, we take you to five amazing mountain railway routes to enjoy.

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Darjeeling Himalayan Railway

Best time to visit – October to March

The Darjeeling Himalayan Railway (DHR) in West Bengal is synonymous with nostalgia. The toy train journey on the two-feet narrow gauge railway that runs through New Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling has always enticed travel enthusiasts to the scenic beauty of Darjeeling. The slow, serpentine journey extends over 78 km with varying degrees of elevation as the train makes its journey from New Jalpaiguri (374 ft above MSL) to Darjeeling (7,218 ft above MSL), crossing more than 13 stations.

The DHR was built between 1879 and 1881 by the British and is still considered an exemplary form of mountain railway, which combined the innovative idea of engineering and indigenous knowledge of the geography of the mountainous terrain. In 1999, due to its outstanding universal value, authenticity and excellent management, it was declared as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO.

While you travel by the DHR, there is a dramatic change of the landscape gradient as it reaches the Sukna station. As the train begins its slow climb upwards, it reveals the resplendent beauty of the Queen of Hills ensconced by the Himalayas and tea plantations. Tindharia is the first major stop to watch out for, with its impressive antique locomotive shed where the engine is changed for the train to continue its journey towards Darjeeling. Kurseong is another stop to watch out for as the train makes its way through the crowded bazaar and gives a glimpse of the town. But it is the Ghum station, the highest railway station in India, which inadvertently steals the show with its impressive museum on the first floor of the station building. When the train finally pulls into the Darjeeling Bazaar, the slow journey upwards reminds one that it is necessary to take things slow and occasionally stop to smell the flowers.

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Nilgiri Mountain Railway

Best time to visit – March to June

Similar to the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway, the Nilgiri Mountain Railway (NMR) was built by the British in 1908. Initially operated by the Madras Railway (now under the jurisdiction of newly formed Salem Division), the 3 ft 3 3⁄8 inch of metre gauge runs from Mettupalayam to Ooty. Due to the steep, tricky terrain of the Nilgiri Hills, the railway faced a real challenge during the construction of the tracks. Hence, to cope with the steep terrain, it implemented the Alternate Biting System where the engine, when ascending, is placed at the back to push the train from behind and on the return journey downhill, the engine is placed at the front to avoid collisions or derailments. This is why the NMR is still considered as an engineering marvel. It was recognised as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in July 2005.

The train covers a distance of 46 km in a span of five hours and crosses the stations of Kallar, Coonoor, Wellington, Aravankadu, Ketti, Lovedale and Ooty (Udhagamandalam). From Mettupalayam to Kallar, one is treated to the endless views of rice fields that stretch up to seven km. Soon it is followed by 21 km of steep rocky terrain and then it enters Coonoor, the little hill station known for its tea plantations. From Coonoor the uphill journey continues to Fern Hill at a height of 2,218m, the highest point on the railroad. Shortly before Ooty, the line dips downhill. Photography enthusiasts are in for a treat especially by the viaduct, which lies in between Kallar and Adderley.

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Kalka–Shimla Railway

Best time to visit – March to June

The toy train ride at the break of dawn from the quaint station of Kalka to Shimla is what dreams are made of. As the train moves uphill through tunnels and chugs over bridges, amid lofty pines and deodars, the natural beauty leaves you mesmerised. The rail route connects the people from the plains to Shimla, the summer capital of British India. Inaugurated in 1903 by British Viceroy Lord Curzon, the train passes through 103 tunnels, 969 bridges, and 919 curves, halting at popular stations such as Barog and Solan. In fact, the Kalka-Shimla route — proposed in 1891— was modelled on the narrow gauge rail route in Darjeeling. It was declared a heritage railway by the Himachal Pradesh government in 2007, and in 2008 it became a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Matheran Hill Railway

Best time to visit – March to June

A two-feet narrow gauge heritage railway in Maharashtra, Matheran Hill Railway covers a distance of 21 km from the forest territory of Neral to Matheran in the Western Ghats. Built by Abdul Hussein Adamjee Peerbhoy, financed by his father Sir Adamjee Peerbhoy, and supervised by consulting engineer Everard Calthrop of Barsi Light Railway between 1901 and 1907, this project cost ₹16 lakh. Matheran, which means 'forest on top', is an eco-sensitive region and travellers visiting there can soak in the enamouring views of nature. The toy train journey takes around 281 thriller zigzag turns from Neral to Matheran hill top.

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Kangra Valley Railway

Best time to visit – September to June

The little-known Kangra Valley Railway in the state of Himachal Pradesh is another engineering feat that meanders through a maze of hills and valleys. Planned in May 1926 and commissioned in 1929, the Kangra Valley Railway in the sub-Himalayan region starts from Pathankot in Punjab and ends at Jogindernagar in Himachal Pradesh. The railway line passing through 993 bridges and two tunnels covers a distance of 164 km in nine hours and 20 minutes.

The beautiful sights begin after the train crosses Nurpur with hillocks on both sides and the Dhauladhar range gaining prominence. Later, the landscape changes as the train passes through the Daulatpur tunnel and past the ruins of the old Kangra fort, providing glorious views of history, art and culture. As the train chugs further, the passengers soak in the fresh air of countryside and get a glimpse of white peaks. Next, as the train enters the Palampur region, the pine scent fills the air and the tea gardens on both sides provide a refreshing view. However, the train moves at a snail's pace as it reaches its highest point, Ahju station, at a height of 1,290 m.

The picturesque hilly town of Kangra, at an elevation of 733 m, is surrounded by the sublime Dhauladhar range. The town is situated at the confluence of River Bener and River Majhi, and Beas is an important river in the region.

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Bamboo narratives

From handicrafts and construction to medicinal healing, bamboo is one of the most versatile materials to be found in India, and has a flourishing home in the Northeast

text | **Mohona Banerjee**

In 2004, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, then Prime Minister of India, took an initiative to further the cause of bamboo in the country at the seventh World Bamboo Congress in New Delhi. Envisioning the humble bamboo as a medium of change, the wise man's timber was introduced to a revolution that changed lives.

Bamboo is naturally woven into the everyday lives of inhabitants of Northeast India. Indeed, bamboo plays a pivotal role in the cultural, social and economic traditions of the region. However, with improved communication, higher awareness and the aid of the government, bamboo has over the years evolved into an industry which has transformed the socio-economic milieu of the Northeast India.

The National Mission on Bamboo Application discovered through a survey

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that bamboo makes up approximately 12.8 per cent of India's forest cover and two-thirds of the growing stock is situated in the Northeast. Given the considerable growth of bamboo in this region, traditional bamboo mats, bamboo floor boards, headgear, baskets, fish traps and other items have found a new lease of life after the government recognised the potential of bamboo and introduced it to the global market.

The rich sylvan resources of the North-east, especially in the forests of the Mizo hills, Mikir, Nowgong and Lakhimpur districts, have resulted in varied species of bamboo like *Dalu banh* (dinochloa gracilis) and *Muli banh* (dendrocalamus strictus) that are found in the regions of Kulsi and Karimganj respectively. *Muli banh*, due to

Above: Green soup with bamboo shoots; *Right:* Oriental straw hats

Water tap with pipe cover made of bamboo

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CHARACTERISTICS OF BAMBOO

- It helps prevent soil erosion due to its widespread root system and large canopy.
- It sustains riverbanks and serves as a good windbreak.
- It helps decrease water pollution as it devours high amounts of nitrogen
- It absorbs carbon dioxide and generates 35 per cent more oxygen than an equivalent stand of trees
- Bamboo can grow in arid regions where other crops fail due to droughts

USES OF BAMBOO

- Furniture and construction
- Beer, wine and medicine
- Boards or lamination
- Durable utensils and musical instruments
- Handicrafts, rugs, toys and accessories
- Making charcoal

its solid culm or stem, is used for construction purposes especially to make house frames, fences and scaffolding while *Dalu banh*, due to its softness, is ideal for making mats and crafts and also forms an integral part of northeastern cuisine. Bamboo is not limited only to construction and agrarian purposes, however. A young bamboo stem can also be used to cure various ailments including the early stages of diabetes, chicken pox and chronic pain.

Interestingly, Assam is one of the states in India that has a large amount of resources for the bamboo industry to flourish, almost at par with countries like Canada, Norway and Finland. Around 50 species of bamboo grow in Assam alone, with a large chunk of them being processed for handicrafts such as *chalanis* (sieves) that are loosely woven with fine bamboo slips in a criss-cross pattern and are used for sieving rice or tea leaves. As fish dominates Assamese cuisine, fine fishing traps like *Jakai*, *Khalai* or *Chepa* are made with fine bamboo strips and used to catch fish in shallow water. Bamboo is also used to make '*Jhapi*', the traditional Assamese headgear with immense historical value.

Assam is one of the states to have a large amount of resources for the bamboo industry

Tripura is another state that is considered the 'home' of bamboo. Tripura witnesses flourishing bamboo growth all over its landscape. The bamboo forests in the state cover approximately 2,739 sq km. The main difference between the two sister states is the importance of bamboo in their socio-economic makeup. As per government data, an estimated 2.76 lakh families in Tripura are engaged in bamboo-related vocations. Setting aside the artistic aspirations attached to bamboo art, modern bamboo tiles, furrowed sheets, ply boards and bamboo furniture have found commercial and ecological success

A traditional bamboo fish trap

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Mizo tribe performing traditional Bamboo dance – the Cheraw – at Chapchar Kut festival in Mizoram

as bamboo makes for a cheaper and better alternative to timber. *Barak*, *Bari* and *Kali* are some of the bamboo varieties found in Tripura with Bari and Barak being the ones predominantly cultivated.

Given the commercial success of bamboo in Tripura, the state government had launched the Tripura Bamboo Mission (TBM) in the year 2007 to further the development of the bamboo sector. With the help of the TBM, the turnover of the sector in the state saw an increase from ₹ 27.9 crore in 2006-2007 to ₹115.56 crore in 2012-2013. The massive boost to the economy with the help of bamboo has culminated in the construction of a bamboo park on the outskirts of Agartala, the capital city of Tripura.

People in the Northeast have learnt to fashion bamboo into musical instruments

Given the versatility of bamboo, people in the North-east have learnt to fashion it into musical instruments and use it to perform their traditional dance! In Nagaland, people use the thin variety of bamboo to make mouth organs, flutes and cup violins – instruments that are popularly used by the Aos of Nagaland. Also, the Cheraw dance performed in Mizoram, involving two crossed pairs of bamboo staves and four people, is one of the most famous dances in the Northeast and a popular attraction during festive occasions.

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Break with *convention*

Beyond its presence in *3 Idiots*, the SECMOL institution holds aloft the beacon of practical education to build a sustainable future for its students

photos | **Lobzang Dadul/ SECMOL**

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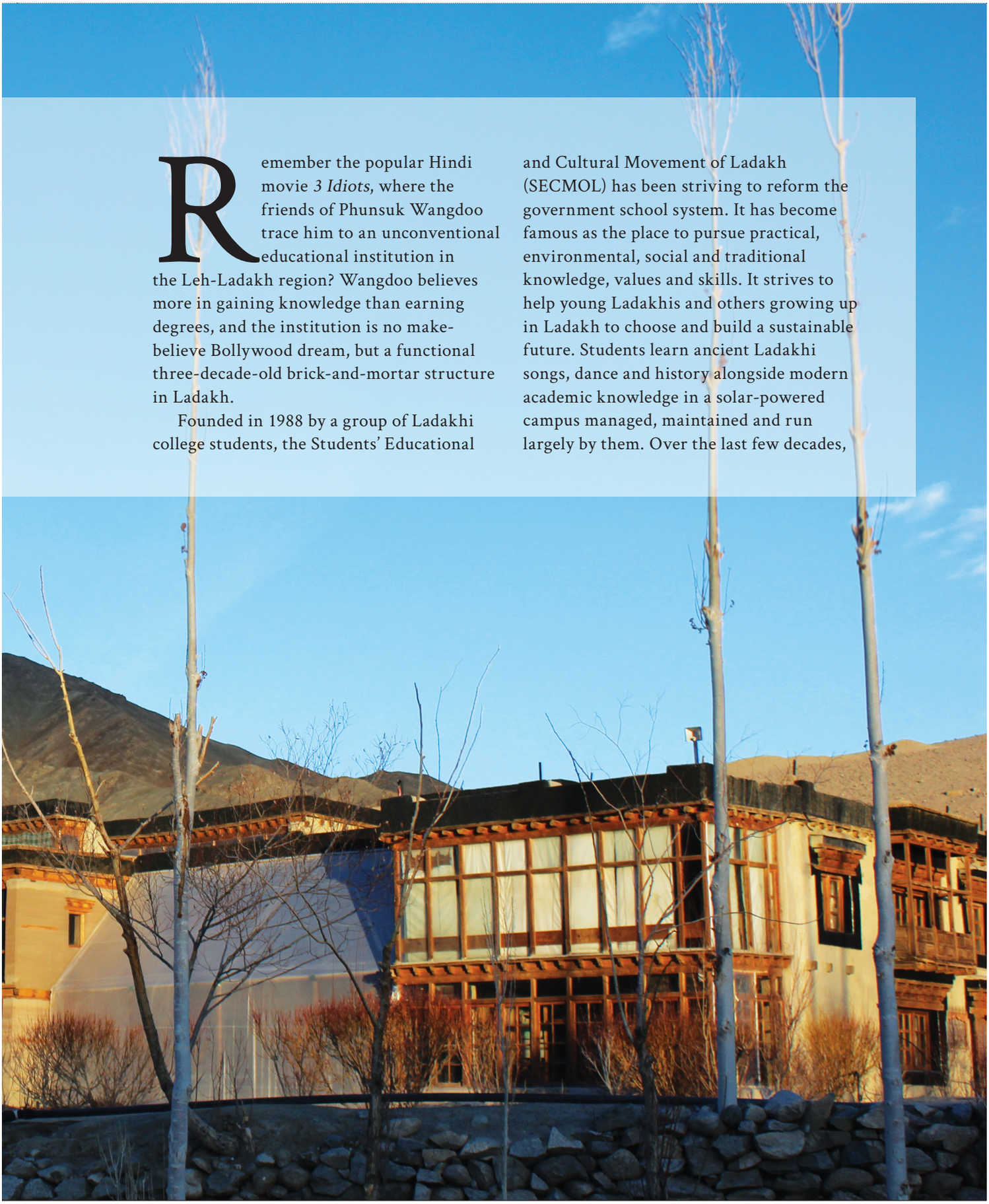

Remember the popular Hindi movie *3 Idiots*, where the friends of Phunsuk Wangdoo trace him to an unconventional educational institution in the Leh-Ladakh region? Wangdoo believes more in gaining knowledge than earning degrees, and the institution is no make-believe Bollywood dream, but a functional three-decade-old brick-and-mortar structure in Ladakh.

Founded in 1988 by a group of Ladakhi college students, the Students' Educational and Cultural Movement of Ladakh (SECMOL) has been striving to reform the government school system. It has become famous as the place to pursue practical, environmental, social and traditional knowledge, values and skills. It strives to help young Ladakhis and others growing up in Ladakh to choose and build a sustainable future. Students learn ancient Ladakhi songs, dance and history alongside modern academic knowledge in a solar-powered campus managed, maintained and run largely by them. Over the last few decades,

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the SECMOL campus has grown into an eco-village where students, staff and volunteers live, work and learn together.

Nearly 95 per cent students fail the class 10 exams in the state every year. To address this, SECMOL launched the Operation New Hope (ONH) movement in 1994, in collaboration with the state education department, the local government and village community members. In later years, SECMOL continued its work on educational reforms outside of the government framework. There has been a clear improvement – from 2003 to 2006, about 50 per cent of government school students in Leh district passed their matriculation exam, which has recently risen further to more than two-thirds of the students passing.

Students, staff and volunteers live, work and learn together on the SECMOL campus

The solar-powered SECMOL campus uses solar electricity for heating, electricity, and pumping. Photovoltaic panels generate electricity for lighting, computers and TVs. Batteries store power for nights and cloudy days with a small generator for backup in case of extended cloudy weather or heavy usage. The campus is not connected to the grid or any other power source.

There are two solar cookers and water heaters for bathing, and the campus buildings use passive solar heating to stay warm through the coldest months of winter. Passive solar design absorbs the sun's heat and stores it for long periods, with no need of circulating water pipes, air blowers, or moving parts. These facilities have allowed SECMOL to successfully run its residential programmes every winter

Various activities carried out by SECMOL students

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Actors Kareena Kapoor Khan and Sharman Joshi during the shooting of Bollywood film *3 Idiots*

ONH'S AIMS AND OBJECTIVES:

- To organise the village communities for constructive participation in the running of schools by forming Village Education Committees (VECs).
- To train teachers in creative, child-centered, and activity-based teaching methods to make schooling less painful and more joyful for children.
- To produce Ladakh-relevant versions of primary textbooks and teaching materials.
- To use the above factors to revive the interest, strengthen the confidence, and enhance the dedication of Government school teachers.

for the last 15 years, even when the minimum outside temperatures fall to -25°C.

The south-facing windows keep the buildings warm (as the sun moves low in the southern sky in winter). Greenhouses are attached on the south side in winter, and removed during spring to prevent overheating. The skylights are covered with glass or clear plastic to keep warm air indoors, and the thick earthen walls and floors as well as insulation in the roof, outer walls and under the floor helps to store collected heat (thermal mass). Natural lighting obviates the need for electricity in the daytime.

Most of the buildings are at least three feet below ground level on the northern side, as the earth's temperature at that depth is relatively warmer in winter and cooler in summer. The dug-out earth is used to make the walls of the building, keeping them warm in winter and cool in summer along with moderating the humidity of the building.

The ceilings, outer walls and floor are insulated, protecting from heat in the daytime

The ceilings, outer walls and floor are insulated, protecting occupants from the heat in the daytime. The wood waste generated during construction is stuffed in the ceiling to stop heat loss, along with an insulating later in the floor comprising layers of various sizes of rocks. A top layer of gravel and cement acts as a heat bank. The gap between the walls is filled with low-cost insulation: saw dust, wood shavings or sometimes paper and plastic garbage like bottles and bags. At times, cow dung is used as an insulating plaster.

The drinking water supply comes from a borewell 130 feet deep. Solar panels power an electric pump that fills the domestic water tanks. Two concentrating reflector-type solar cookers cook much of SECMOL's food, and the large parabolic reflector, made of common mirrors, focusses the sun's rays to a secondary reflector under the pots in the kitchen. This design gives as much heat as a large gas burner and saves a lot of money while preserving the environment.

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Global celebs flaunt *Indian designs*

We explore how Indian fashion designers are dressing up celebrities across the globe and, in the process, redefining Indian textiles and handloom

text | **Pooja Kulkarni**

Today, fashion has crossed the borders of nation, culture and creed, and evolved to become one universal style. Fit and finesse is what seems to matter at the end of the day to fashionistas of the world and even to celebrities, including those from Hollywood and politics, who aren't thinking twice before flaunting works of Indian designers at important events in their lives.

Former US First Lady Michelle Obama thrilled India by arriving in New Delhi in 2015 wearing Rourkela-born Bibhu Mohapatra's creation. The Duchess of Cambridge, Kate Middleton, surprised one and all by donning a vibrant multi-coloured Anita Dongre dress during her royal India tour in 2016. Mumbai-based menswear designer, Troy Costa, became a household name after India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi flaunted his designs during his much-famed US tour of 2014. Leaving this aside, popular international actors and singers like Lady Gaga, Jennifer Lopez, Lupita Nyong'o and the like have also been lauding the work of Indian designers. So, what is making celebrities choose Indian designers over international labels? Speaking to us, Dongre, one of India's top fashion designers, says, "It's not only celebrities but even the everyday woman who is well travelled and has access to all international brands, who chooses to invest in Indian labels for her wardrobe. The history and heritage of Indian clothing makes it so unique to the world. When designers combine the reinvented silhouettes with traditional textiles and rich handicrafts, the outcome is inimitable. That's what makes iconic personalities choose Indian labels."

The popularity quotient of our desi designers has also gone several notches higher due to this. New York-based and

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Former US First Lady Michelle Obama and the Duchess of Cambridge, Kate Middleton, both wearing designs by Naeem Khan

Mumbai-born designer Naeem Khan, who has been a favourite with Michelle Obama for the last eight years, had said in an online interview, "When Ms Obama chose one of my creations for her first state dinner at the White House in 2009, I was actually super shocked. The whole thing went viral. For her to choose my brand and to put me on this world stage and today what has happened to the brand is just crazy. And that is because of her. It's important how she has actually cultivated and put the designers in front. The power of celebrity-backing has been crucial. I would say that 90 per cent of my brand recognition comes from celebrities wearing my pieces."

It is the ubiquitous approach of the designers that is leading them to come up with contemporary designs with universal appeal. According to designer Troy Costa, blending various looks is the way forward. "I believe that if you want to be part of an international space, you need to dress the part. Do you see a Japanese person wearing a kimono in an international context? I think not. On an international stage, I don't think an all-out traditional look is the best choice. You want to blend in," he had told a weekly lifestyle magazine. Dongre adds, "Fashion has naturally evolved to produce more styles that have a global appeal. To add to it, technology has blurred borders, making almost everything accessible to all. Just like we wear international brands here, our labels are also being worn by people internationally. We work with Indian textiles and embroidery techniques.

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Every season we reinvent the silhouettes to lend a contemporary look. These universal styles look just as good at wedding functions as they would on a red carpet."

In the process, designers are also reinventing Indian textiles. For a fashion show in New York, Khan had created 39 looks inspired by Indian body art motifs and paisley patterns. Talking about it, he shared with New York's leading daily, "It's all about the decadence and dust of India. The white circles and dots on some of the dresses are the patterns the Sadhus use on their bodies – I actually hand-painted them myself. A lot of the patterns are from body painting. I looked at tribal India and made it luxurious by using rich fabrics. This is the dust aspect. Then the paisley patterns on some of the pieces represent the decadence in India. So I've taken one element from the two sides and created a whole collection out of it."

It is the ubiquitous approach of the designers that is leading them to come up with contemporary designs

Finally, it's a labour of love. "The design process usually starts as a fantasy, with ideas that I dream of and visualise. These ideas become a reality by bringing various ingredients together, from the lifestyle, age and sex appeal, to the textures of the finest fabrics and embroideries that we produce in my family factories in India. Then add about 90 days, a few fashion sous chefs in the Naeem Khan studio, and the final outfit is a dish of beauty, love and craftsmanship," concludes Khan.

From top: Fashion designers Bibhu Mohapatra, Naeem Khan, Troy Costa and Anita Dongre

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The unlikely *star*

From his debut film *Ghashiram Kotwal* to his cinematic success in Hollywood, veteran actor Om Puri left an indelible mark on cinema in a career spanning more than three decades

text | **Nandini D Tripathy**

It is often said that acting is about immersing yourself in a character. When Om Puri portrayed sub inspector Anant Velankar in Govind Nihalani's *Ardh Satya* (1983), he represented a reality of the 1980s that saw a nation recovering from the Emergency and seeking a new sense of idealism. He was the face of *Everyman*— ordinary, familiar, standing up against exploitation— and became the angry young man of the 80s, New Wave cinema's foil to Amitabh Bachchan's proverbial inspector Vijay. Long before he found his niche as the unlikely hero in Hindi cinema, Puri had found his true calling in the craft of acting through the medium of theatre— and his journey had begun in his homeland, Punjab.

Om Puri seasoned his acting prowess at the National School of Drama

"Om was, I have been told, one of the most industrious members of Punjabi playwright Harpal Tiwana's group, Punjab Kala Manch, in Patiala, when he was still in college," says Naseeruddin Shah, who was Puri's classmate at the latter's next step towards perfecting his craft— the National School of Drama, Delhi. "And I was not surprised to hear that at all," he goes on, "because he remained like that in NSD, where we met in 1970. He had struck me immediately because of his remarkable face and had inspired in me a tremendous sense of admiration. He was the most sincere, punctual and painstaking actor in our entire class and I would find it amusing that he worked hard at everything - from expressions and diction to handling the menu at the mess and going around like the father of the bride, asking everyone how the food was! That was Om. Universally liked, thoroughly non-controversial and understated. And I was the

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exact antithesis to that. Ebrahim Alkazi would often cite his example to me and by the end of our three years there, I realised how much Om had developed as an actor and how little I had."

Actor-director MK Raina, Puri and Shah's senior at NSD, recalls that the actor's defining characteristic was his simplicity. "It was his greatest strength, along with his conviction that he could do anything if he worked hard enough at it. He would go to the open air theatre early in the morning, before most people had even woken up, to practice his speeches. Some of his finest performances on stage have been in the plays he was a part of at NSD," he recalls. Ask him if any one performance in particular has remained with him through the years and he responds immediately, "He was once part of a Kabuki play at NSD and it was an outstanding performance." Shah echoes the sentiment. "Kabuki is the Japanese equivalent of our Kathakali in terms of style, elaborate make up, headgear and so on. Om had about a month to prepare for that role and his performance was utterly incredible. It was the performance that convinced me that his approach to acting was the right one. And I have followed Om's example ever since," he affirms.

Puri's cinematic debut happened with the 1977 Marathi film Ghashiram Kotwal

While Om Puri's cinematic debut happened with Marathi film *Ghashiram Kotwal*, his first set of Hindi films led the New Wave of Indian cinema in the 1970s and 80s, a creative movement where he was accompanied by the likes of Shabana Azmi, Smita Patil and Naseeruddin Shah. "Om, Naseer, Shabana and Smita represented

Actors Om Puri, Manish Dayal and Helen Mirren in a still from the film *The Hundred-Foot Journey*

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A still from *The City of Joy*

many things, but above all they represented the poetry of the real," shares filmmaker Sudhir Mishra, who worked with Puri in his 1992 film, *Dharavi*. "I personally think *Dharavi* is Om's best performance. It is underrated because it is not bombastic. But that's what he was all about - he had a presence that never called attention to itself in a way that obstructed the storytelling." Actor Manoj Bajpayee, who has worked with Puri in movies like *Ghaath* (2000) and *Chakravyuh* (2012) finds the latter's rendition of Lahanya Bhiku in Govind Nihalani's *Aakrosh* (1980) his most compelling performance. "It is something every actor should see and learn from. He really set a tone for the kind of acting that completely changed the face of mainstream Indian cinema at the time, and inspired my entire generation. Fifty years from now, the relevance and greatness of that film will be the same," he opines.

Shah adds that Puri breathed life into every kind of character he took up, even when it was least expected of him. The 1983 cult dark comedy, *Jaane Bhi Do Yaaro*, saw him as the corrupt builder Ahuja and his talent for comic improvisation shone through. It became a marker of his versatility, and would be followed up by an array of comic roles (*Chachi 420*, *East Is East* and many more) where Puri would stand out with his masterful comic performances. Shah recalls, "The immortal coffin scene— a lot of it was ad libbed by Om right there! He really brought that character to life and no one expected something like that of him after seeing *Ardh Satya* or *Aakrosh*. After that, even though I had started my career before him, he really became the first star of the New Wave."

In the years that followed, Puri dabbled not only in mainstream Hindi cinema but also managed to make a mark in Hollywood as well

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A still from the 1996 Hollywood movie *The Ghost in the Darkness*, Puri sharing the frame with Val Kilmer

as the British film industry, receiving an honorary Order of the British Empire in 2004 for his contribution to British cinema with films such as *My Son The Fanatic* and *East Is East*. In Hollywood, films like *City of Joy, Wolf, Charlie Wilson's War* and most recently, *The Hundred Foot Journey*, also established him as a performer to reckon with. Actress Juhi Chawla, who made a guest appearance in *The Hundred Foot Journey* as Puri's on-screen wife, recalls that while he delivered an excellent performance as an actor, it was really his humility and sensitivity off camera that made an impression on her. "The unit had come down to Mumbai after most of the film had already been shot. I was a little awkward since everyone knew each other very well and I was the odd one out. But Om Puri *ji* made it a point to come, sit and chat with me so that I would feel at ease," she shares.

Puri was equally famous in Hollywood having appeared in a number of movies

In a tweet posted in December 2016, about a month before his sudden demise, Om Puri wrote, "I have no regrets at all. I have done quite well for myself. I didn't have a conventional face, but I have done well, and I am proud of it." His words echo across India's film and theatre fraternity as fitting testament to a truly fulfilling professional life lived by a truly gifted actor.

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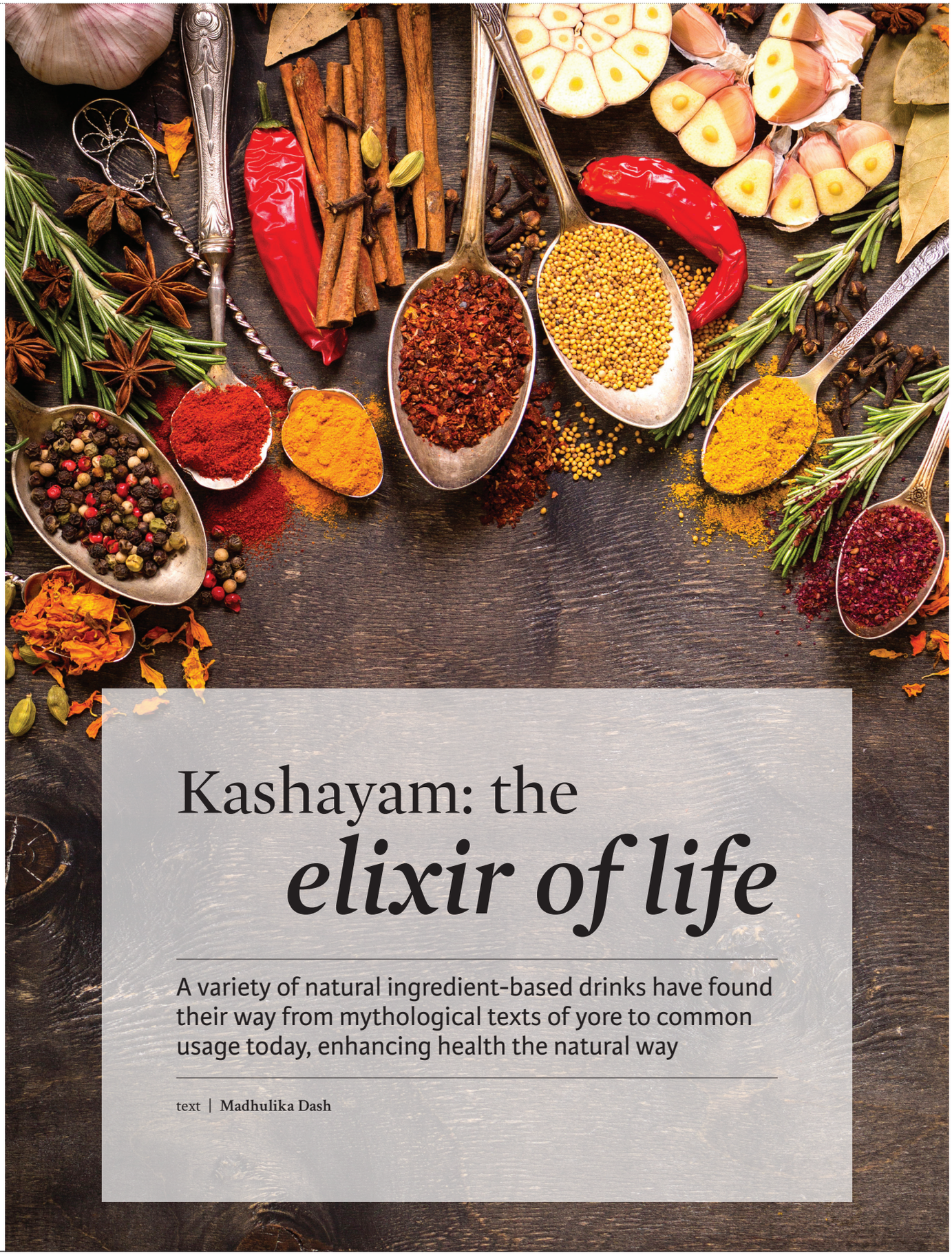

Kashayam: the *elixir of life*

A variety of natural ingredient-based drinks have found their way from mythological texts of yore to common usage today, enhancing health the natural way

text | **Madhulika Dash**

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Traditional Indian drinks (*top to bottom*) turmeric and milk, amla juice and rasam are recommended in Ayurveda

November 2015. The Government of Tamil Nadu faced a dire situation. Incessant rains had led to an increase in cases of fever and a threat of dengue. It was a state of emergency as NGOs and medical centres set about dispersing medicines, including Ayurvedic ones. In a short time, a total of 17,500 people, including 8,742 students in 21 schools were administered with the dosage. How was such an effective dispersal carried out? With Nilavembu *kashayam*, one of the oldest Ayurveda-approved medicines that, for centuries, has been an effective go-to wellness drink for high fever and any conditions with dengue-like symptoms.

***Bhaang*, a popular Holi drink today, is one of the oldest kashayams known to numb aches and pain**

Kashayam is a name for concoctions that can be administered for good health and used as a medicine in cases of illness. Also mentioned in Ayurveda, it has remained with us since the start of the century as what we fondly term as *dadima ke nuskhe* (grandma's treatments), and is still as effective as it were then. *Haldi doodh* (turmeric and milk) or "golden milk" as the West popularly addresses it these days, is one of the finest and the most relatable examples of *kashayam*.

Although many purists do not see milk-based wellness drinks as *kashayam*, given the diktats of Ayurveda that define the making of *kashayam* as boiling of the herb (or a blend of a few) in water till it reduces to one-fourth of its original

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quantity, *Charak Samhita*, the book of surgery and medicine from ancient India, claims otherwise. According to this old text, any drink that has managed to harvest the wellness properties of a particular herb, vegetable, leaf, grain or even lentil and is in an easy-to-digest state can be called a *kashayam*. In fact, old texts talk about drinks made of barley, *sattu* (flour made of roasted gram) and even cannabis that were used to treat people in cases of common illnesses. *Bhaang*, a popular drink served during the festival of Holi these days, in fact, is one of the oldest cannabis-based *kashayam* recipes that was known to numb pain — and was extremely beneficial in conducting surgeries or even treating people suffering from painful conditions. *Sattu* on the other hand was among the strength gainers, and was used generously to treat Gautam Buddha and other monks. *Varanadi kashayam* is another magical wellness drink that is still used to treat a wide variety of conditions that range from headache to obesity and even a weak digestive system. The honey-ginger-lemon drink that is popular for its weight reduction miracle is said to be a simplified version of this 4,000-year-old *kashayam*. Another perfect example of this ancient health mocktail is the *rasam*. The tasty soup-based dish from southern India is, in fact, one of the oldest *kashayam*s made to restore strength and immunity, which has been made the same way ever since its inception in the early years of the Tamil civilisation.

Honey-ginger-lemon drink, popular for reducing weight, is said to be a simplified version of a kashayam

Left to right: *Aam panna*, carrot juice and cucumber juice are also good for health

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Of course, in the list of around 3,000 wellness potions that were mentioned in *Charak Samhita* and eventually included in the practice of Ayurveda is *Amruthotharam kashayam*, a classic wellness dish that could treat an array of conditions, including chronic fever, constipation and appetite loss. And much like *Abhiyangam*, a traditional oil massage used to align the *doshas* in our body, *Amruthotharam* was designed to be the first line of wellness and cure. But *kashayams* were widely used in wellness, and eventually inspired pleasure drinks. The reason for this transition, say experts, is the fact that ancient doctors were well aware of the body's ability to absorb nutrients when not only ingested but given in a state where the complex nature of these properties are broken down into simpler elements and, thus, act faster. *Kashayams* were prepared mostly from fresh herbs and other ingredients, thus allowing the benefits of these natural products to be absorbed by the body better and quicker.

Turmeric milk is one of the most relatable examples of kashayam

In fact, during the Mauryan period, which saw the emergence of pleasure drinks, aside from rice wine that was made in almost every household, the basic principle followed was borrowed from *kashayam*. This ensured that the drinks not only tasted good but didn't harm the body as much as other intoxicating drinks.

A popular folktale talks about how Chanakya used *kashayam* to develop emperor Chandragupta's immunity to poison by administering to the king small dosages of a special post-

KASHAYAM VS MODERN MEDICINE: WHICH IS MORE EFFECTIVE?

While both Ayurveda and modern medicines are considered effective streams of treatments, says Dr Rahul Dogra (Ayurveda specialist, Kairali), "each of them has its own pros and cons when it comes to the 'necessity' of a treatment. While modern medicine is more effective for instant relief, especially in chronic diseases, the advantage of Ayurveda is long-term prevention since the treatment works to eliminate the root cause rather than the immediate symptoms."

However, when it comes to *kashayam* and modern pharmaceuticals, the former works as effectively as the latter. And the reason for this, adds Dr Dogra, is that "*kashayam* contains water-soluble active principles of the herbs. As water-soluble components are readily absorbed from intestines, *kashayam* can work as effectively as allopathic medicines."

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Left to right: Neem leaves in mortar and pestle with neem paste, and herbal tea with fresh mint

meal digestive concoction. It is said that the political strategist had a team of *ved*s (doctors) to study the effect of poison and its antidotes. Yet another anecdote talks about how emperor Harshvardhan introduced a special day-time drink for students to abate lethargy and concentrate better.

That drink was close to the modern-day herbal tea. *Kada* (a homemade medicinal drink to treat cough and cold) is another impressive *kashayam* that has remained popular through centuries. It is said that in ancient and even medieval ages, Indian kings maintained a bevy of *ved*s and hakims to develop *kashayams* to treat various health problems.

It is said that Chanakya used kashayam to make emperor Chandragupta immune to poisons

In fact, each change of season or beginning of a battle would mean long sessions with the *rakhbadar* (chief royal cook) and *ved*s and hakims who would find newer herbs, spices, plants and *kashayam* that would be given to the king to prepare him for the next venture.

The use of bark, roots, leaves and even pollen of a plant in cooking came as a result of *kashayam* that aided the emperor to maintain his command: be it in the battlefield or handling a family of a thousand.

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Padma Awards

A sneak peek into the system of awards, a primary recognition from the Government of India

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The government of India, on the recommendation of the Padma Awards Committee, constituted by Prime Minister – headed by Cabinet Secretary and Home Secretary, Secretary to the President and a few eminent persons, awards some people with special honours on the eve of Republic Day every year. These are the civilian awards with which the government honours its people for exceptional service in any field of human endeavour. The recommendation of the committee are submitted to the Prime Minister and the President of India for approval.

History and relevance

Instituted in 1954, the two civilian awards were Bharat Ratna and Padma Vibhushan. The latter had three classes namely *Pahela Varg*, *Dusra Varg* and *Tisra Varg*. These were subsequently renamed as Padma Vibhushan, Padma Bhushan and Padma Shri later on January 8, 1955. The Padma Vibhushan is given for exceptional and distinguished service, Padma Bhushan for distinguished service of a high order and Padma Shri for distinguished service in any field.

Padma Awards

Everyone without distinction on the basis of race, occupation, position or sex is eligible for these awards. Government servants including those working with PSUs, except doctors and scientists, are not eligible for these awards. The disciplines in which awards seek to recognise service are:

Art – music, painting, sculpture, photography, cinema and theatre.

Social work – social service, charitable service and contribution to community projects.

Public affairs – law, public life, politics.

Science and engineering – space engineering, nuclear science, information technology, research and development in science and allied subjects.

PADMA AWARDEES 2017

Padma Vibhushan

Name	Field	State
Shri KJ Yesudas	Art – Music	Kerala
Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev	Others – Spiritualism	Tamil Nadu
Shri Sharad Pawar	Public Affairs	Maharashtra
Shri Murli Manohar Joshi	Public Affairs	Uttar Pradesh
Prof. Udipi Ramachandra Rao	Science & Engineering	Karnataka
Late Shri Sunder Lal Patwa (Posthumous)	Public Affairs	Madhya Pradesh
Late Shri PA Sangma (Posthumous)	Public Affairs	Meghalaya

Padma Bhushan

Name	Field	State
Shri Vishwa Mohan Bhatt	Art – Music	Rajasthan
Prof. (Dr) Devi Prasad Dwivedi	Literature & Education	Uttar Pradesh
Shri Tehemton Udwadia	Medicine	Maharashtra
Shri Ratna Sundar Maharaj	Others – Spiritualism	Gujarat
Swami Niranjana Nanda Saraswati	Others-Yoga	Bihar
H.R.H. Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn (Foreigner)	Literature & Education	Thailand
Late Shri Cho Ramaswamy (Posthumous)	Literature & Education – Journalism	Tamil Nadu

Padma Shri

Name	Field	State
Smt. Basanti Bisht	Art - Music	Uttarakhand
Shri Chemanchery Kunhiraman Nair	Art - Dance	Kerala
Smt. Aruna Mohanty	Art - Dance	Odisha
Smt. Bharathi Vishnuvardhan	Art - Cinema	Karnataka
Shri Sadhu Meher	Art - Cinema	Odisha
Shri T K Murthy	Art - Music	Tamil Nadu
Shri Laishram Birendrakumar Singh	Art - Music	Manipur
Shri Krishna Ram Chaudhary	Art - Music	Uttar Pradesh
Smt. Baoa Devi	Art - Painting	Bihar
Shri Tilak Gitai	Art - Painting	Rajasthan
Dr Prof. Aekka Yadagiri Rao	Art - Sculpture	Telangana
Shri Jitendra Haripal	Art - Music	Odisha
Shri Kailash Kher	Art - Music	Maharashtra
Smt. Parassala B Ponnammal	Art - Music	Kerala
Smt. Sukri Bommagowda	Art - Music	Karnataka
Shri Purushottam Upadhyay	Art - Music	Gujarat
Smt. Anuradha Paudwal	Art - Music	Maharashtra
Shri Wareppa Naba Nil	Art - Theatre	Manipur
Shri Tripuraneni Hanuman Chowdary	Civil Service	Telangana
Shri T.K. Viswanathan	Civil Service	Haryana
Shri Kanwal Sibal	Civil Service	Delhi
Shri Birkha Bahadur Limboo Muringla	Literature & Education	Sikkim
Smt. Eli Ahmed	Literature & Education	Assam
Dr Narendra Kohli	Literature & Education	Delhi
Prof. G. Venkatasubbiah	Literature & Education	Karnataka
Shri Akkitham Achyuthan Namboothiri	Literature & Education	Kerala
Shri Kashi Nath Pandita	Literature & Education	Jammu & Kashmir
Shri Chamu Krishna Shastry	Literature & Education	Delhi
Shri Harihar Kripalu Tripathi	Literature & Education	Uttar Pradesh
Shri Michel Danino	Literature & Education	Tamil Nadu
Shri Punam Suri	Literature & Education	Delhi
Shri VG Patel	Literature & Education	Gujarat
Smt. Eli Ahmed	Literature & Education	Assam

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Dr Narendra Kohli	Literature & Education	Delhi
Prof. G. Venkatasubbiah	Literature & Education	Karnataka
Shri Akkitham Achyuthan Namboothiri	Literature & Education	Kerala
Shri Kashi Nath Pandita	Literature & Education	Jammu & Kashmir
Shri Chamu Krishna Shastry	Literature & Education	Delhi
Shri Harihar Kripalu Tripathi	Literature & Education	Uttar Pradesh
Shri Michel Danino	Literature & Education	Tamil Nadu
Shri Punam Suri	Literature & Education	Delhi
Shri VG Patel	Literature & Education	Gujarat
Smt. V Koteswaramma	Literature & Education	Andhra Pradesh
Shri Balbir Dutt	Literature & Education-Journalism	Jharkhand
Smt. Bhawana Somaaya	Literature & Education-Journalism	Maharashtra
Shri Vishnu Pandya	Literature & Education-Journalism	Gujarat
Dr Subroto Das	Medicine	Gujarat
Dr (Smt.) Bhakti Yadav	Medicine	Madhya Pradesh
Dr Mohammed Abdul Waheed	Medicine	Telangana
Dr Madan Madhav Godbole	Medicine	Uttar Pradesh
Dr Devendra Dayabhai Patel	Medicine	Gujarat
Prof. Harkishan Singh	Medicine	Chandigarh
Dr Mukut Minz	Medicine	Chandigarh
Shri Arun Kumar Sharma	Others-Archaeology	Chhattisgarh
Shri Sanjeev Kapoor	Others-Culinary	Maharashtra
Smt. Meenakshi Amma	Others-Martial Art	Kerala
Shri Genabhai Dargabhai Patel	Others-Agriculture	Gujarat
Shri Chandrakant Pithawa	Science & Engineering	Telangana
Prof. Ajoy Kumar Ray	Science & Engineering	West Bengal
Shri Chintakindi Mallesham	Science & Engineering	Andhra Pradesh
Shri Jitendra Nath Goswami	Science & Engineering	Assam
Shri Daripalli Ramaiah	Social work	Telangana
Shri Girish Bhardwaj	Social work	Karnataka
Shri Karimul Hak	Social work	West Bengal
Shri Bipin Ganatra	Social work	West Bengal
Smt. Nivedita Raghunath Bhide	Social work	Tamil Nadu
Shri Appasaheb Dharmadhikari	Social work	Maharashtra
Baba Balbir Singh Seechewal	Social work	Punjab
Shri Virat Kohli	Sports-Cricket	Delhi
Shri Shekar Naik	Sports-Cricket	Karnataka
Shri Vikasa Gowda	Sports-Discus Throw	Karnataka
Smt. Deepa Malik	Sports-Athletics	Haryana
Shri Mariyappan Thangavelu	Sports-Athletics	Tamil Nadu
Smt. Dipa Karmakar	Sports-Gymnastics	Tripura
Shri P R Shreejesh	Sports-Hockey	Kerala
Smt. Sakshi Malik	Sports-Wrestling	Haryana
Shri Mohan Reddy Venkatrama Bodanapu	Trade & Industry	Telangana
Shri Imrat Khan (NRI/PIO)	Art-Music	USA
Shri Anant Agarwal (NRI/PIO)	Literature & Education	USA
Shri H.R. Shah (NRI/PIO)	Literature & Education-Journalism	USA
Late (Smt.) Suniti Solomon (Posthumous)	Medicine	Tamil Nadu
Shri Asoke Kumar Bhattacharyya (Posthumous)	Others-Archaeology	West Bengal
Dr Mapuskar (Posthumous)	Social work	Maharashtra
Smt. Anuradha Koirala (Foreigner)	Social work	Nepal

Source: www.padmaawards.gov.in

Trade and industry – banking, economic activities, management, promotion of tourism and business.
Medicine – medical research, distinction/ specialisation in ayurveda, homeopathy, sidhha, allopathy and naturopathy.
Literature and education – journalism, teaching, book composing, literature, poetry, promotion of education, promotion of literacy, and education reforms.
Civil service – excellence in administration etc. by government servants.
Sports – popular sports, athletics, adventure, mountaineering, promotion of sports and yoga.
Others – fields not covered above and propagation of Indian culture, protection of human rights, wildlife protection/conservation.

The awards are conferred posthumously only in highly deserving cases. The awards are presented by the President of India usually in the month of March/April every year where the awardees are presented a certificate and a medallion. The total number of awards given in a year (excluding posthumous awards and to NRI/foreigners/OCIs) should not be more than 120.

Selection criteria

The government invites recommendations from all state/UT governments, ministries/ departments of the Government of India, Bharat Ratna and Padma Vibhushan awardees and Institutes of Excellence. Recommendations received from them and central/state ministers, chief ministers/ governors, MPs, as also private individuals and bodies are placed before the Padma Awards Committee, which looks for lifetime achievements of an individual while making a selection. There ought to be an element of public service in the achievements of the person to be selected. The award is given for 'special services' and not long service. Persons selected for the awards are also subjected to verification with a view to ensure that their character and antecedents are above board.

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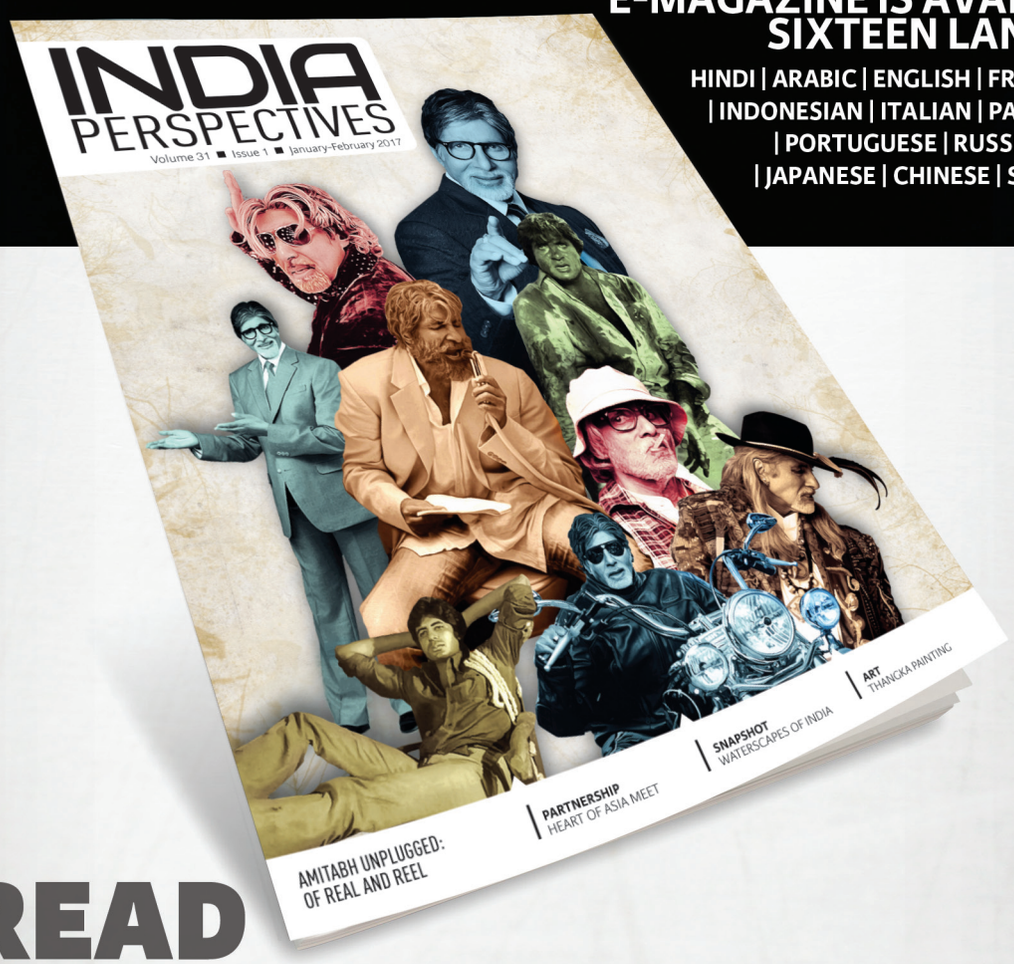

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