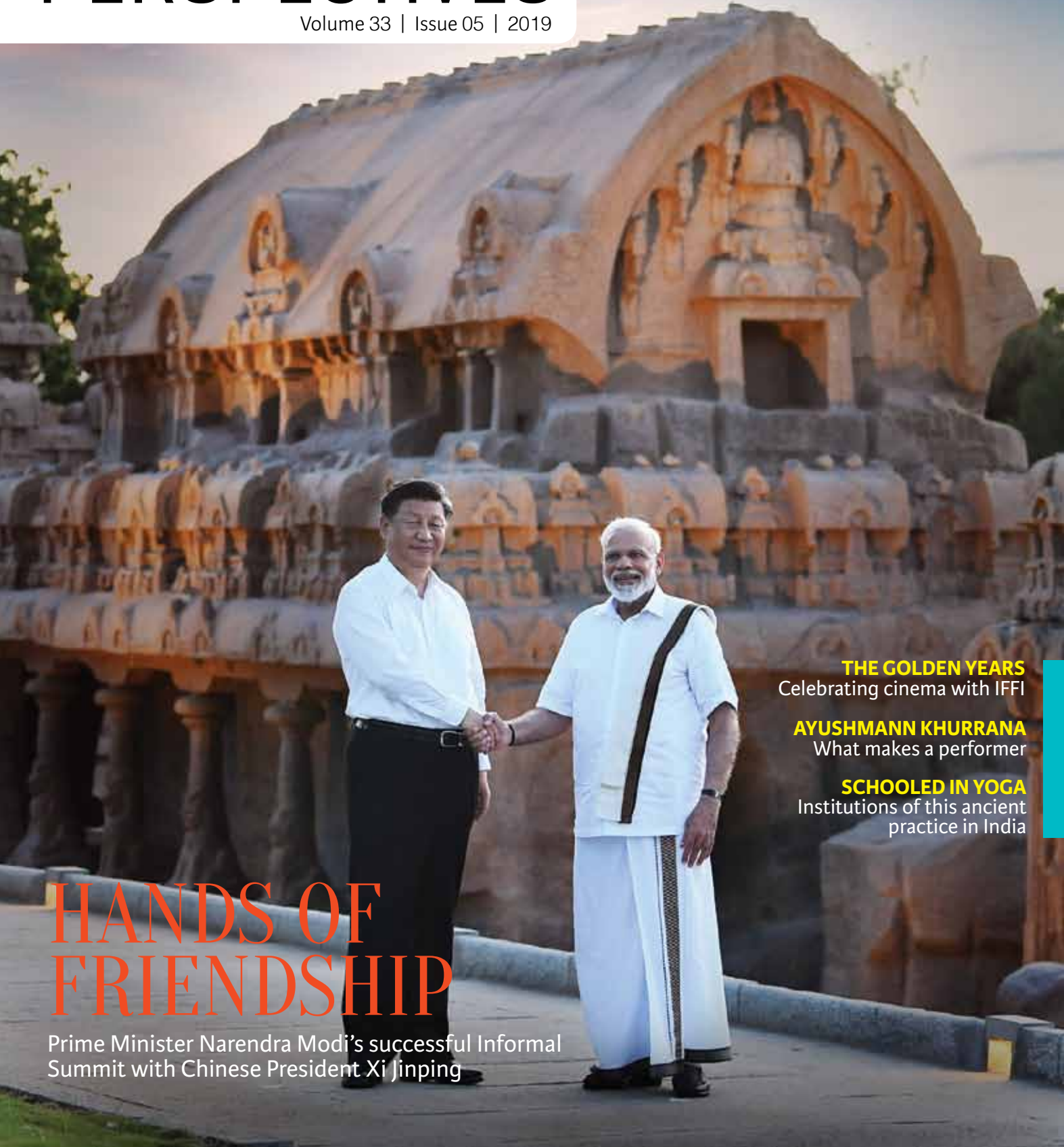


INDIA PERSPECTIVES

Volume 33 | Issue 05 | 2019



THE GOLDEN YEARS
Celebrating cinema with IFFI

AYUSHMANN KHURRANA
What makes a performer

SCHOOLED IN YOGA
Institutions of this ancient
practice in India

HANDS OF FRIENDSHIP

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's successful Informal Summit with Chinese President Xi Jinping

POTPOURRI



JANUARY, 2020

13

LOHRI

Lohri marks the beginning of the harvest season and is celebrated with much pomp and joy in north India, especially Punjab and Haryana. People dress up in their finest attire, play folk instrument, dance and feast. One of the rituals of Lohri is lighting a bonfire, around which people make merry.

WHERE: North India

26

JANUARY, 2020

REPUBLIC DAY

India celebrates the formulation of the Constitution with a grand Republic Day Parade, which is held in New Delhi's Rajpath. It features a spectacular display of gallantry by three divisions of the Indian armed forces - Army, Navy and Air Force. The Chief Guest at this year's parade is Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro.

WHERE: New Delhi



23-27

JANUARY, 2020



JAIPUR LITERATURE FESTIVAL

Satiate your love for the written word at this event that brings together some of the best literary greats from around the world. From book signing to reading sessions, from workshops to engaging discussions and from author interactions to musical evenings - there is something for everybody at this festival.

WHERE: Jaipur, Rajasthan



25-29 FEBRUARY, 2020

DECCAN FESTIVAL

The annual five-day festival, organised by the tourism department of Hyderabad highlights the arts, crafts and traditions of the state of Andhra Pradesh through vibrant displays of dances, crafting traditions and numerous food stalls. Another highlight is the mesmerising performances that showcase the rich musical heritage of Hyderabad

WHERE: Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh



1-17 FEBRUARY, 2020

SURAJKUND INTERNATIONAL CRAFTS MELA

A celebration of folk tradition and cultural heritage, this annual event chooses one Indian state as its 'Theme State' and one foreign country as 'Partner Nation'. The best of that state's and country's art, craft, cuisine, handcraft and textiles are showcased at this event through exhibitions and performances.

WHERE: Surajkund, Haryana

8 FEBRUARY, 2020

MADURAI FLOAT FESTIVAL

Locally known as Teppotsavam, the Madurai float festival is one of the most vibrant celebrations of culture in Tamil Nadu. Observed since the 17th century, the festival celebrates the annual boat ride of the various deities around Teppakolam lake. At dusk, the lake's shores are illuminated with thousands of clay lamps along with the ornamental raft before the deities are led back home in a grand procession.

WHERE: Madurai, Tamil Nadu



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FOREWORD

India in 2019 is home to a fifth of the world's youth, with 65 million of its total population below the age of 25; presenting the question of how relevant our ancient traditions are to the modern Indian population. With this issue of the India Perspectives magazine, we look at how a 5,000-year-old civilisation understands traditions and a culture that has been passed down through the generations.

During these months, the world turned its attention towards India as Prime Minister Narendra Modi welcomed Chinese President Xi Jinping for the second India-China Informal summit in Mamallapuram and Angela Merkel, the German Chancellor, for the fifth round of Inter-Governmental consultations. Both these meetings are new and innovative formats that have been implemented recently and serve as an example of India's reinvigorated approach towards strengthening diplomatic ties across the globe. We also travel to Bangkok as the East-Asian nations converge for the 14th East Asia Summit, to understand how our eastern partnerships affect India's global image. We then head to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia with the Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi for a two-day visit.

As Hindi cinema has always had a very relevant outlook of contemporary trends, we travel to Goa for the 50th edition of the International Film Festival of India (IFFI) which also focussed on the development of Indian regional films, filmmaking in the country and also recognised some of the most deserving cinematic productions from across the world. We then catch up with Ayushmann Khurrana, the National Award winning actor who has revitalised Bollywood with his movies that aim to connect and address with present-day problems and the people who deal with them.

Be it traditional schools of Yoga or localised art forms still practiced with immense pride in the nation's remotest corners or even the numerous festivals that celebrate the magnificent heritage of India's vibrant past; the relevance of our culture in the 21st century is self-explanatory, to say the least. India's literary pop-star, author Amish also shares his thoughts on the subject.

We then travel to the Trans-Himalayan region of Spiti and experience first hand, the resolute perseverance of a culture that has survived the test of time and has today become the perfect example of brotherhood, diversity and integrity. On our way back, we halt at various iconic destinations to witness the many-hued cultural mosaic of the country exhibited during some of the most colourful cultural festivals for our photo feature.



Raveesh Kumar



EASTERLY greetings

Over the last decade, India has made a significant effort towards establishing stronger ties with its eastern neighbours. With Prime Minister Narendra Modi travelling to Thailand for the East-Asia Summit recently, former ambassador **Anil Wadhwa** highlights the defining factors of the visit



Prime Minister Narendra Modi (sixth from left) enjoying a light moment during the photocall for the leaders of the 16th ASEAN-India Summit in Thailand



Over the last few years, India has made substantive progress in its ties with the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and its related frameworks like the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), East Asia Summit (EAS), and ASEAN Defence Ministers Plus (ADMM+). From a dialogue partner in 1996, India has come a long way to the status of a Summit-level Partner in 2002, and a Strategic Partner of ASEAN in 2012. India engages ASEAN in more than 30 high level dialogues in varied fields. Moreover, during the EAS, Prime Minister Narendra Modi also attended 16th India-ASEAN Summit, the 14th East Asia Summit, and the 3rd Regional

Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Summit.

STRATEGIC TIES

At the ASEAN-India Summit (November 2 to 4, 2019) PM Modi appreciated the mutual coordination of the Indo-Pacific outlook between India and ASEAN, which sets out the vision of the centrality of South East Asia. He mentioned utilisation of the USD 1 billion credit line offered by India in 2015 for physical and digital connectivity. He also reiterated that India would like to strengthen its relationship with ASEAN in areas

Left: PM Modi interacts with children from the Indian Community in Bangkok during his visit

The EAS participants, besides ASEAN, include India, China, Japan, Republic of Korea, Australia, New Zealand, United States and Russia



India, a strategic level partner since 2012, engages ASEAN in more than 30 high level dialogues in varied fields like the ASEAN Regional Forum, East Asia Summit, and ASEAN Defence Ministers Plus

Above: The Prime Minister interacts with members of the Indian community before the 'Sawasdee Modi' event in Bangkok during his visit to Thailand

of maritime security, blue economy, and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. India will offer 1,000 PhD scholarships to ASEAN students at the New Delhi-based Indian Institute of Technology, one of the most reputed technology institutes globally.

India needs deeper economic integration with the 1.85-billion strong people of ASEAN, with a combined GDP (Gross Domestic Product) of USD 3.8 trillion. The bilateral trade is currently at USD 81.33 billion. ASEAN has invested USD 68.91 billion between April 2000 to March 2018 into India and India has invested USD 36.67 billion in ASEAN between 2007 and 2015. India, however, has not benefitted

much from the ASEAN India FTA (Free Trade Agreement) in goods, and has been clocking deficits with most of the ASEAN countries. PM Modi, therefore, has welcomed the recent decision to review the ASEAN-India FTA.

The 14th East Asia Summit also focussed on security and cybercrime. There was a review of the future direction of EAS cooperation and exchange of views on regional and international issues. PM Modi proposed a new initiative for creating a safe and secure maritime domain in the Indo-Pacific region and also suggested an initiative to strengthen the blue economy (sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth). The EAS participants,



On the sidelines

- The Prime Minister reiterated the importance of the trilateral highway linking India, Myanmar and Thailand and expressed that India was working hard towards the timely completion of the project.
- At the 'Sawasdee Modi' community event in Bangkok, PM Modi unveiled the Thai translation of Thiruvalluvar's Tamil classic, *Tirukkural*



Clockwise from top: PM Modi addresses the Indian community in Bangkok during his visit; The Prime Minister meets Aung San Suu Kyi, State Counsellor of Myanmar; and Joko Widodo, President of Indonesia

Bilateral partnerships

- At the meeting with PM Shinzo Abe of Japan, PM Modi focused on the forthcoming India – Japan 2+2 dialogue and annual Summit meeting between the two leaders in December.
- Vietnamese PM Nguyen Xuan Phuc and PM Modi talked of extremism and terrorism and their commitment to support the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).
- Australian PM Scott Morrison and PM Modi reaffirmed their commitment to a transparent, free and open Indo – Pacific.
- State Counsellor for Myanmar Aung San Suu Kyi and PM Modi talked about air connectivity between them, and India's plan to host a business event for CMLV countries (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam) in Yangon, Myanmar, at the end of November 2019.
- PM Modi's meeting with Indonesian PM Joko Widodo concentrated on bilateral trade and highlighted the need for greater market access for Indian goods.
- In his meeting with Thai PM Prayuth Chan – Ocha, PM Modi emphasized the enhancement of connectivity between the two countries, including physical and digital connectivity.

besides ASEAN, include India, China, Japan, Republic of Korea, Australia, New Zealand, United States and Russia.

A RESOLUTE STAND

During his visit, the Prime Minister also participated in the 3rd edition of the RCEP Summit. The RCEP is a proposed FTA with the 10 members of the ASEAN, along with its six partners -- Australia, China, India, Japan, South Korea and New Zealand. However, on November 4, 16 of the participating nations issued a statement conveying that 15 among them had concluded text-based negotiations and will proceed to sign the agreement in 2020. After seven long years of negotiations, with significant issues that remain

PM Modi with Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan, during the EAS in November





14th East Asia Summit

4 November 2019, Bangkok / Nonthaburi, Thailand



INDIA HAS BEEN PROACTIVELY, CONSTRUCTIVELY, AND MEANINGFULLY ENGAGED IN THE RCEP NEGOTIATIONS SINCE INCEPTION BUT THE DRAFT RCEP AGREEMENT DID NOT FULLY REFLECT THE BASIC SPIRIT AND THE AGREED GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF RCEP EVEN AS IT DID NOT ADDRESS SATISFACTORILY INDIA'S OUTSTANDING ISSUES AND CONCERNS.

Narendra Modi
Prime Minister of India

The heads of state at the 14th East Asia Summit held in Bangkok in November

unresolved, the Indian delegation issued a final statement stating that its participation “will depend on satisfactory resolution of these issues”. Comprising half of the world’s population and accounting for nearly 40 per cent of global commerce and 35 per cent of GDP, the RCEP could have become the world’s largest free trade area, with India being the third largest economy, had it been a part of it. Interestingly, at the 14th East Asia Summit, India’s image was dramatically different from when the summit was first held in 2005. It was heartening to see the

independent representation that took into account associations other than ASEAN - be it recognising Japan’s importance as a sound capital base or the stoic exterior the country presented at the summit. The biggest takeaway from the summit was the acknowledgement of ASEAN leaders of India’s growing role in the Indo-Pacific region.



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

THE CHENNAI connect

With focus on bridging trade deficit and building trust, the second informal India-China summit in Mamallapuram between PM Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping heralded a new phase of cooperation in relationships between the two neighbours

BY MANISH CHAND



In the backdrop of the 7th-century rock-cut monuments and sculptures in the seaside temple town of Mamallapuram (Mahabalipuram) on the outskirts of Chennai in Tamil Nadu, the leaders of India and China sipped coconut water and shared their hopes for a new phase in

India-China relations, marked by win-win cooperation, greater trust and understanding of each other's core interests and aspirations. The chemistry between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping shone anew as the former took his honoured guest around the Group of Monuments

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Chinese President in front of a beautifully sculptured wall in Mamallapuram



Left: PM Modi gifted a large handmade silk shawl to the Chinese President on the concluding day of the summit. The shawl has an embossment of the image of President Jinping in gold zari on a bright red silk background and was made by weavers of a Coimbatore-based society. **Above:** In return, the Chinese leader gifted a porcelain memento, which had PM Modi's image on it

The warmth between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping shone anew at the summit as the leaders went around the heritage site overlooking the Bay of Bengal

at the UNESCO World Heritage site of Mamallapuram, followed by a sumptuous informal dinner at the scenic Shore Temple.

THE NEW DREAM

On the first day of their second informal summit on October 11, 2019, PM Modi and President Xi Jinping spent hours sharing their visions of national development and resurgence. The conversation focused on how PM Modi's plan to create a new India by 2022 to mark the 75th anniversary of India's independence and Xi Jinping's China dream opening new avenues for widespread cooperation between the two Asian neighbours are mutually beneficial. This informal conversation between the two leaders set the stage for wide-ranging delegation-level talks on October 12. The two leaders exchanged views in a candid

and in-depth manner on India-China relations and major international and regional issues of common concern in a friendly and relaxed atmosphere.

The two-day talks culminated in the Chennai Connect, a resonant reaffirmation of the Wuhan spirit (the first India-China Informal Summit at Wuhan, China, in April 2018) of "managing differences prudently" and enlarging areas of cooperation across the spectrum, including economic, strategic and cultural.

BRIDGING TRADE DEFICIT

The major takeaway from the summit was the decision to set up the High-Level Economic and Trade Dialogue mechanism to reduce trade deficit and enhance trade in goods, services and investment. The mechanism, to be chaired by India's Finance

PARTNERSHIP



Top: The two leaders pose with a group of local artistes after a cultural performance

Above: The two also visited an exhibition on handlooms and other handcrafted artefacts of Tamil Nadu at a resort in Kovalam

Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and China's Vice Premier Hu Chunhua, could be a potential game-changer for India-China economic relations, if China acts on its promise to open its market for Indian pharma and IT services. This mechanism will help India to reduce over \$50 billion trade deficit with China and enable Indian companies to gain greater market access to Chinese market. The two sides also agreed to encourage mutual investments in identified sectors through the development of a Manufacturing Partnership and

flesh out its contours at the first meeting of the mechanism.

STRATEGIC TRUST

Another important outcome of the second informal summit was the deepening and consolidation of strategic communication so that mistrust can be averted on issues of core interest to both countries. In this regard, the two sides agreed to enhance security and military-to-military cooperation. The two countries are set to enhance their collaboration on combating the twin scourge of terrorism and radicalisation.

Taking the long view, the two rising Asian powers are also set to strengthen their global partnership by enlarging their cooperation on a wide array of cross-cutting issues, including climate change and sustainable development. Amid rising walls of protectionism, the two countries decided to "strengthen the rules-based multilateral trading system" and to "work together for open and inclusive trade

An important outcome of the summit was the deepening and consolidation of strategic communication so that mistrust can be averted on issues of core interest to both countries



arrangements that will benefit all countries.”

CULTURAL CONNECT

Building on the Wuhan summit, which led to the setting up of High-level India-China People-to-People and Cultural Exchanges Mechanism, the Chennai summit provided a fresh momentum to positioning people at the heart of this burgeoning partnership. The two leaders agreed that public opinion should be rallied to broad-base the relationship. In this context, the two sides decided to hold 35 events each in their respective countries to mark the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. “The two leaders have decided to designate 2020 as Year of India-China Cultural and People to People Exchanges and agreed that the 70th anniversary of the establishment of India-China relations in 2020 will be fully utilized to deepen exchanges at all levels including between their respective legislatures, political parties, cultural and youth organizations and militaries,” said the statement by India’s Ministry of External Affairs.

The two leaders at Lord Krishna’s Butterball, a gigantic granite boulder dramatically perched on the slope of a hillock



PM Modi and President Jinping have a quiet conversation at the Pancha Ratha (five chariots) complex in Mamalapuram. The complex includes monolithic rock-cut temples that resemble chariots

Discussions & more

Both leaders deemed it important to enhance dialogue in order to foster cultural understanding between the two peoples.

Both agreed they can work together to enhance understanding between cultures and civilisations in other parts of the world

The two exchanged views on outstanding issues, including on the boundary question.

They welcomed the work of the Special Representatives and urged them to continue their efforts to arrive at a mutually-agreed framework for a fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable settlement

THE ROAD AHEAD

Looking ahead, the second India-China informal summit has underscored the role of direct interaction between the leaders of the two countries in steering multi-faceted India-China relations onto a higher trajectory. Xi Jinping stressed that the format of the informal summit will continue and invited PM Modi to visit China for the third informal summit next year.

The second informal summit marked a new realism in India-China relations and underlined that although the two Asian giants will continue to pursue their own agenda on trade and strategic issues which may occasionally conflict, the leaders' convergence, as crystallised in the Wuhan Consensus and the Chennai Connect, will ensure

that the focus stays on areas of cooperation rather than competition and conflict. "We will be sensitive to each other's concerns. India-China relations will be an anchor of peace and stability in region and the world," said PM Modi.

Going forward, the two leaders have set an ambitious and mutually empowering agenda for widening cooperation, but the key to the success of the Wuhan Consensus and Chennai Connect will be greater sensitivity by the two countries to each other's core concerns and interests.



Manish Chand is Editor-in-Chief of *India and the World* magazine and *India Writes Network*, a portal focused on global affairs



Prime Minister Narendra Modi (right) meets Saudi king Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud in Riyadh

Bonds of trust

On his two-day (October 29-30) official visit to Saudi Arabia, Prime Minister Narendra Modi held discussions with the country's king Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud on matters of bilateral cooperation and investment opportunities

Decades ago, a foundation had been laid for strengthening ties with the Middle East. Over the last few years, India has been successfully building upon the same framework by focussing on furthering strategic and diplomatic relations with countries like the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), Iran, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) etc.

On almost every occasion that the Indian Prime Minister has visited these nations, he has been conferred with some of the top civilian awards. During his last visit in April 2016 to Saudi Arabia, PM Modi was

conferred the King Abdulaziz Sash award, KSA's highest civilian honour by the current King, Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud. The ceremony which took place at the royal court was an example of the positive direction for diplomatic relations between the two countries.

It is important to note that since 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has visited eight West Asian countries which has resulted in a proportional increase in foreign investments directly made in India. This is a definitive advance on the path that was defined in the 'Riyadh Declaration' signed between India and Saudi Arabia in

PARTNERSHIP



Above: Prime Minister Narendra Modi meets Mohammad bin Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia in Riyadh

Below: During his visit to Saudi Arabia, PM Modi also met Abdullah bin Al-Hussein, King of Jordan, in Riyadh



2010. During his recent visit, PM Modi addressed the third Future Investment Initiative or 'Davos in the Desert' Conference as the KSA seeks to attract technology and investment to diversify its economy for the 21st century. During the visit of King Salman to India in February 2019, an announcement was made for an intention by Saudi Arabia to invest upto USD 100 billion in Indian infrastructure, energy and mining. The recent announcement by Aramco to acquire 20 percent of Reliance industries and a USD 44 billion west-coast refinery and petrochemicals project in Maharashtra with Reliance, Adnoc of UAE and Aramco indicates the shift towards strategic long-term investments. Indian companies are also exploring down and upstream oil sector participation in Saudi Arabia apart from IT, Pharma and healthcare sectors. In the defence sector an MoU was signed to strengthen cooperation in the military acquisition, production R&D and technology areas. It was also reported that B2B agreements worth USD 15 billion were signed on the sidelines of the Future Investment Initiative Conference. The MoU on RuPay card payments will benefit 2.6 million strong Indian diaspora and Haj pilgrims. A strategic partnership council to be led by PM Modi and Mohammed bin Salman has been established, which will ensure timely implementation of agreed and

prospective projects and removal of bottlenecks.

From the perspective of the Arabian giant, the Indian premier's visit is also of utmost importance

In his keynote address at the Future Investment Initiative Forum in Riyadh, PM Modi spoke about the goal of achieving the USD 5 trillion dollar economy

Right: Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, Mohammad bin Abdulaziz Al Saud signing the Strategic Partnership Council Agreement

Below: PM Modi meets Abdulrahman bin Abdulmohsen Al Fadley, Minister of Environment, Water and Agriculture of Saudi Arabia



as the KSA has been pushing for a massive diversification drive that aims to expand its largely oil-based economy into the sectors of manufacturing, technology and tourism. The more recent reforms easing the restrictions on FDI (Foreign Direct Investment), tourism and entertainment have come as precursor to the historic Strategic Partnership Agreement which was signed by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the latter's visit. A beginning has been made through the MoU signed between Riyadh and New Delhi on cooperation in the field of renewable energy between Saudi Ministry of Energy and Ministry of New and Renewable energy of India. Saudi Arabia now considers India as an attractive destination for

investments and a secure market for their oil supplies. Hence, both sides have moved to a strategic engagement in this sector. Saudi Arabia accounts for 17% of Indian oil imports. Saudi Arabia has moved quickly to fill the void in Indian oil imports due to sanctions on Iran as also to create India's second strategic oil reserve of about 6.5 million tonnes of petroleum.

Prime Minister Modi's visit to Saudi Arabia has been a precursor to the formation of an alternative, diverse and yet, more inclusive partnership with the country. The current government aims to further strengthen its ties with Saudi Arabia. Over the years, the diplomatic partnership that has been shared between the two countries has developed manifold; be it in the sector of defence, economy or cultural relations. India aims to further its ties with the Middle Eastern giant. The next meeting between the two leaders will be in Riyadh again in 2020 for the next G20 Summit.



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

STRATEGIC partnership

German Chancellor Angela Merkel recently visited India for the Inter-Governmental Consultations with India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Former ambassador Meera Shankar highlights the major milestones of this visit



German Chancellor Angela Merkel visited India from October 31 to November 1, 2019, for the fifth round of Inter-Governmental Consultations. This is a unique format chaired by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chancellor Merkel to bring together key ministers on both sides in a “whole of government” approach.

India is working towards accelerating economic growth, expanding the manufacturing sector and generating jobs for the millions of young people entering the job market. In this scenario, India sees a natural partner in Germany, a manufacturing power house. German companies can leverage India's highly-skilled technical manpower and prowess in the IT sector to enhance their competitiveness. In

Prime Minister Narendra Modi (fourth from right in the front row) and German Chancellor Angela Merkel (on PM Modi's right) along with the delegation members of the 5th Inter-Governmental Consultations in New Delhi. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar (front row, second from right) and the German foreign minister Heiko Mass (front row third from right) were also a part of the delegation

the polarised world of today, characterised by sharpening strategic and economic tensions, India sees its partnership with Germany and Europe exerting a stabilising influence.

Germany, as the largest economy in Europe, has acquired greater heft in European affairs. Politically, Germany has been an anchor of stability under Merkel's leadership. Of late, Germany has been faced with certain challenges, in the wake of which, the country sees value in its Strategic Partnership with India, both as an economic partner with a growing market and as a country whose participation is vital in addressing global challenges and supporting a stable, rule-based world order.

Germany is India's largest trading partner in Europe and the second-largest source of technical

Germany has focussed on promoting energy efficiency in India and has been a strategic partner in several developmental projects

collaborations for Indian companies. Around 1,800 German companies are active in India. During the visit, building economic synergy was at the centre of discussions between PM Modi and Chancellor Merkel. While there was no commitment to resume negotiations on the stalled India-EU Trade and Investment Treaty, both sides agreed to deepen efforts towards this end.

A key area of focus was jointly driving digital transformation through innovation and frontier technologies, particularly Artificial Intelligence (AI). Health, mobility, environment and agriculture were identified as areas for building synergies in

Bottom left: German Chancellor Angela Merkel with PM Modi at Rashtrapati Bhavan

Bottom right: The Chancellor receives a model of a Charkha as a souvenir at Rajghat



PARTNERSHIP



Right: The German Chancellor meets Indian President Ram Nath Kovind

Below: Prime Minister Modi and Chancellor Merkel, witness the Exchange of Agreements in New Delhi



Artificial Intelligence. It was decided that a Digital Experts Group will be set up as a business initiative to give recommendations for future policy initiatives. The two countries agreed to foster collaboration for start-ups too.

Cooperation on climate change was another substantive area for discussion. Germany, as the second-largest provider of development assistance to India, has focussed on promoting energy efficiency and renewable energy.

Germany agreed to provide additional assistance of Euro 1 billion to support Green Mobility infrastructure and strengthen institutional capacities for sustainable, inclusive and smart mobility solutions for Indian cities.

Both India and Germany are committed to promoting a sustainable energy transition away from fossil fuels. Germany has been a pioneer in renewable energy. PM Modi has announced a renewable energy target of 175 GW by 2022 and a new objective of raising it to 450 GW. Challenges remain because of the intermittent nature of renewable energy and the need for cost-effective storage solutions. Both countries agreed to cooperate in strengthening infrastructure to facilitate grid integration of intermittent renewable energy as well as on large-scale storage solutions. India also welcomed Germany's keenness to join the International Solar Alliance.

Strategic cooperation between India and Germany has been somewhat



Building economic synergy was at the centre of discussions between PM Modi and Chancellor Merkel

Prime Minister Modi and Chancellor Merkel before the meeting at the former's residence in New Delhi

limited given that Germany does not have a footprint in the India-Pacific region. However, Germany has been a part of NATO deployments in Afghanistan and has been active in seeking to facilitate an intra-Afghan dialogue that includes the Afghan government and ensures an inclusive Afghan-led and owned peace process. India welcomed these efforts.

A regular dialogue between the defense ministers of the two nations has been agreed to and an Implementation Arrangement on bilateral Defense Cooperation was signed earlier this year. Both sides were hopeful that this would provide an impetus to their security

cooperation. India and Germany expressed support for each other's candidature as permanent members of the UN Security Council and stressed the need for effective reform of the Security Council as well. Germany also expressed support for India's membership of the Nuclear Suppliers Group.

India and Germany have signalled their intent to strengthen their strategic partnership in the coming days. While implementing the ambitious agenda that the two leaders have laid out can be challenging, with constant and close cooperation, the goals can be achieved.



Meera Shankar served as India's Ambassador to the United States of America between 2009 and 2011, and to Germany from 2005 to 2009. She joined the Indian Foreign Service in 1973 and headed two important divisions dealing with the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

Diplomatic roundup

President of India Ram Nath Kovind visited
The Philippines and Japan



THE PHILIPPINES (OCT 17-21)

India has always enjoyed friendly international relations with The Philippines and President Ram Nath Kovind's visit on October 17-21, 2019, the first by an Indian President after Dr APJ Kalam's visit in 2006, furthered the high level engagement that we have maintained with our eastern neighbours.

The Philippines has been India's strategic partner amongst ASEAN with the total revenue from trade standing at USD 2.3 billion (with USD 1.7 billion from Indian exports). With the two countries growing rapidly on the economic front, special attention was reserved for the development of local complementarities like the Build-Build-Build programme in The Philippines and the Make in India campaign. During his visit, the Indian President also gave a keynote addresses at the India-ASEAN and India-Philippines business meets.

(Top) The President of India, Ram Nath Kovind with the President of Philippines, Rodrigo Duterte

(Right) President Ram Nath Kovind arrives at the Haneda International Airport in Tokyo, Japan

JAPAN (OCT 21-23)

President Ram Nath Kovind arrived in Tokyo on October 21 to attend the enthronement ceremony of Emperor Naruhito of Japan. His visit comes after President Ramaswamy Venkatraman's visit to Japan in 1990 to attend the enthronement ceremonies of Emperor Emeritus Akihito, who stepped down in April 2019. During his visit, President Kovind visited the Tsukiji Hongwanji Buddhist temple and planted a sapling from the iconic Bodhi tree in India for the occasion. After attending the enthronement ceremonies, the President also addressed members from the Indian community in Japan and assured them of passing their best wishes to the Emperor.



Vice-President of India Venkaiah Naidu visited Comoros, Sierra Leone and Azerbaijan



(Left) Vice-President Venkaiah Naidu being conferred with 'The Order of the Green Crescent', the highest civilian honour of Comoros, by Azali Assoumani, President of Comoros, in Moroni
(Bottom) Vice-President Naidu meets Ilham Aliyev, President of Azerbaijan, in Baku

COMOROS (OCT 10-12)

In the first high level visit to the Union of Comoros, Vice-President Venkaiah Naidu arrived in Moroni, the capital, on October 10 for a three-day visit. He was extended a ceremonial welcome and was received by the President of the Union of Comoros, Azali Assoumani, along with members of his cabinet. During the bilateral and delegation level meetings, the Indian VP underlined developmental grants that have been extended to the Island nation and the need to form stronger and strategic bonds to further the diplomatic partnership between the two countries.

AZERBAIJAN (OCT 25-26)

Vice-President V Naidu led the Indian delegation to the 18th NAM summit with the theme for this year being "Upholding the Bandung Principles to ensure concerted and adequate response to the challenges of contemporary world". He arrived in Baku, Azerbaijan on October 24 to address members of the Indian diaspora before delivering India's National Statement during the plenary meeting of the NAM Summit on October 25-26.

As one of the founding members of NAM, the largest gathering of world leaders after the UN, India's stand at the summit is widely respected.



Mathew Sahr Nyuma, Deputy Leader of Parliament of Sierra Leone meets Vice-President Naidu

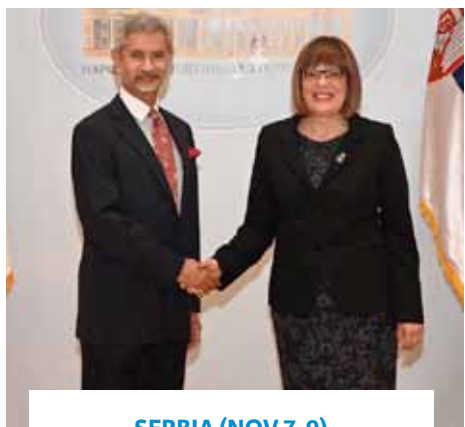
SIERRA LEONE (OCT 12-14)

Travelling onward, Vice-President Venkaiah Naidu arrived in Freetown, Sierra Leone on October 12 for the second leg of his tour as part of India's Africa Outreach policy that is aimed towards strengthening diplomatic engagements with African countries covering an increased number of sectors. During the three-day visit, the Vice-President called on the President of Sierra Leone, Brig (Rtd) Julius Maada Wonie Bio and met with the speaker of the Sierra Leone Parliament Abass Chernor Bundu and foreign minister Nabeela Farida Tunia.



PARTNERSHIP

External Affairs Minister of India Dr S Jaishankar visited Serbia, The Netherlands and France in November



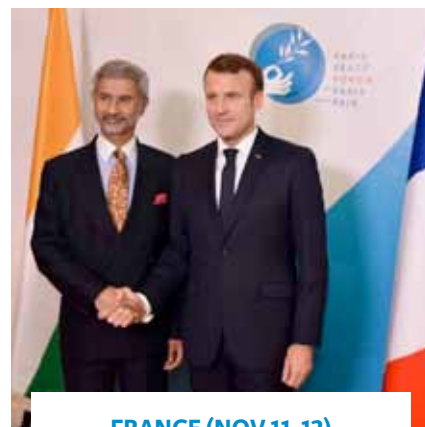
SERBIA (NOV 7-9)

EAM Dr S Jaishankar meets Maja Gojkovic, Speaker of the Serbian National Assembly, in Belgrade. EAM held talks to further parliamentary cooperation and boost defence ties between the two nations.



THE NETHERLANDS (NOV 9-11)

EAM Dr Jaishankar meets Stef Blok, minister of foreign affairs for The Netherlands, during his visit. They discussed mutually beneficial regional and global strategies.



FRANCE (NOV 11-12)

EAM Dr S Jaishankar calls on Emmanuel Macron, President of France, during his visit to Paris, where he spoke at the Paris Peace Forum on the benefits of digital vigilance and governance.

EAM Dr S Jaishankar also visited Italy, United States of America, Canada, Iran and Oman in December

ITALY (DEC 6-8)

EAM Dr S Jaishankar visited Rome, Italy, on December 6-8 to attend the 5th edition of the Mediterranean Dialogues (MED), organised by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs & International Cooperation. Dr Jaishankar addressed a special session on India at the MED conference, highlighting India's interests in the region. EAM also met with the Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte and discussed the enhancement of relations between the two countries.

Right: EAM Dr S Jaishankar and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh with the US Secretary of State Michael R Pompeo and US Secretary of Defense Mark T Esper



Bottom: EAM Dr S Jaishankar with the Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte

USA (DEC 18-19)

EAM Dr S Jaishankar embarked on an official visit to the USA along with India's defence minister Rajnath Singh. The two dignitaries arrived in Washington, DC for the second 2+2 Foreign and Defence Ministerial Dialogue on December 18. The US Secretary of State, Michael R Pompeo, and Secretary of Defense Mark T Esper co-hosted their Indian counterparts. The two sides agreed to deepen cooperation on issues related to global threats, terrorism, disaster relief and advance maritime security.





CANADA (DEC 20-21)
EAM Dr S Jaishankar visited Canada on December 20 for a two-day visit and held meetings with his Canadian counterpart, François-Philippe Champagne in Ottawa. During their meeting, the two dignitaries discussed issues related to cross-border terrorism and security. He also met with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and trade minister Mary Ng to discuss avenues to expand bilateral trade and investment.

Left: EAM Dr Jaishankar meets Canadian trade minister Mary Ng in Toronto, Canada

IRAN (DEC 22-23)

EAM Dr S Jaishankar visited Iran on December 22-23 to co-chair the 19th India-Iran Joint Commission meeting along with the Foreign Minister of Iran Dr Mohammad Javad Zarif. They discussed the progress achieved with regard to the Shahid Beheshti Port and also talked about the accelerated efforts to complete the Chabahar port (of which the former will be an integral part). Both these sea-ports have the potential to act as a gateway between the Indian subcontinent, Iran, Afghanistan, Central Asia and Europe.



EAM Dr Jaishankar meets Mohammad Javad Zarif, Foreign Minister of Iran



EAM Dr Jaishankar in a meeting with Yusuf bin Alawi, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Sultanate of Oman

OMAN (DEC 23-25)

EAM Dr S Jaishankar visited Muscat on December 23 for a three-day visit. The visit was the EAM's first to Oman after taking charge in May 2019, and focused on enhanced engagement with the Gulf region and cooperation with Oman in the field Maritime Transport. EAM and Yousuf bin Alawi bin Abdullah, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Sultanate of Oman, reaffirmed their shared interest in the stability and security of the Gulf region.

SCHOOLED IN Yoga

Yoga has established India on the world wellness map and thousands from across the world want to learn more about this ancient science. Here are some traditional institutions in the country that offer training and research facility on yoga

BY DR RAJEEV RASTOGI



Yogis have been practicing *dhyana* (meditation) for millennia. A silhouette of a practitioner of Yoga meditating with the setting sun in Goa

Yoga, the ancient Indian science of overall wellness, is amongst the six great Indian philosophies. In recent times, yoga has gained immense international popularity, due to its strengths in preventive, promotive and curative health care. A resurgence of interest in yoga, owing to such varied health benefits as increased flexibility, stress relief and overall fitness, is being witnessed across the country, even among the younger generation.

Hundreds of enthusiasts travel to India from around the world to learn this ancient science which has evolved from being a Vedic practice of *Dhyan* or meditation to a holistic discipline aimed toward one's general well-being. While there are various institutions working in the field of yoga within India and abroad, there are some that deserve a special mention, who are not only preserving the traditions of yoga, but are also contemporising its philosophies for modern-day relevance.

From Kashmir to Kanyakumari and from Dong to Dwarka, the spiritual science of yoga is practiced with immense faith as an ideology. Yoga is not merely a physical exercise in India, but a way of life



The Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi participates in a mass yoga session along with other practitioners to mark International Yoga Day in New Delhi



Swami Niranjan (center in cap) with other swamis from Australia and around the world, walking in the grounds of the Mangrove Mountain Ashram (Australia). Swami Niranjananda Saraswati was the President of the Bihar School of Yoga

EAST AND NORTHEAST

Sri Ramakrishna Mission, Kolkata

(West Bengal): Swami Vivekananda established the mission in 1897. The mission conducts extensive work in health care, disaster relief, rural management, tribal welfare, elementary and higher education and cultural development in India. The mission has several campuses across India, with an important one being in Belur in Hooghly district, near Kolkata.

Bihar School of Yoga, Munger

(Bihar): Established in 1963 by Swami Satyananda Saraswati for promoting

yoga and Indian culture, the Bihar School of Yoga is a reputed centre for yogic studies today. It conducts health management courses, *sanyasa* training courses, advanced yoga sadhana courses and offers a ashram-style (very basic) lifestyle.

Umachal Yogashram, Guwahati

(Assam): It was founded by Swami Shivananda Saraswati Maharaj in 1929. The institution has been conducting scientifically accepted research in the field of yoga. Its yoga publications are very popular and also includes India's first Yoga Hospital and College.



At the Ramakrishna Mission in Kolkata, yoga is taught every morning on a day-to-day basis and short-term courses (mostly for 3-6 months) are also conducted

The Ashram Lifestyle and Yoga Satsang Week are highlights at the Bihar School of Yoga. It also conducts academic courses. Munger is around 190 km from the state capital Patna

Several institutions affiliated to the Umachal Yogashram offer diploma course in yoga that are very popular among local residents and international students

WEST

Ramamani Iyengar Memorial Yoga Institute, Pune (Maharashtra):

Established in 1975 by yoga guru BKS Iyengar, the institute is considered to be at the heart of the popular Iyengar style of yoga. The institute conducts courses on yoga and Iyengar-certified yoga teachers are propagating yoga across the world.

The Yoga Institute, Santacruz, Mumbai (Maharashtra): The oldest yoga centre in India, it was founded by Shri Yogendraji in 1918 to propagate the vision of yoga. Running several yoga courses

for both learners and trainers, the institute is recognised by the Ministry of AYUSH, Government of India. The courses are taught in both Hindi and English.

Kaivalyadhama, Lonavla, Pune

(Maharashtra): Founded by Swami Kavalayananda in 1924, this institute focusses on amalgamating the traditions of yoga with modern science with a scientific understanding and approach. It includes a government-recognised yoga college that offers short-term and long-term diploma and degree courses. It also offers teachers' refresher courses.



Short and long courses are offered at the Iyengar Memorial Institute. The teachers' training courses are very popular. Pune is around 150 km from state capital Mumbai
bksiyengar.com

The institute in Santacruz conducts teachers training courses for yoga apart from regular therapy classes for the masses
theyogainstitute.org

Regular yoga sessions are held for the masses by the Kaivalyadhama in Lonavla
kdham.com



A teacher or Aacharya instructing a Yoga class on the Varkala beach at sunset

Imparting wisdom

International Center for Yoga Education and Research, Puducherry:

Swami Gitananda Giri founded the centre in 1967. The institute conducts regular yoga teachers training courses and has affiliated centres all over the world.
icyer.com

Vipassana Yoga Research Institute, Igatpuri (Maharashtra):

Established in 1985 by SN Goenka. Vipassana Research Institute is one of the world's largest centres for the practice of Vipassana, offering 10-day meditation courses throughout the year. The institute also has a long-term course centre, Dhamma Tapovana, offering advanced long courses.
vridhamma.org

Swami Vivekananda Yoga Anusandhana Samsthana, Bengaluru (Karnataka):

Established in 2002 by Dr HR Nagendra, it is the leading research institute of yoga. The aim behind establishment of the institute is to understand and document the scientific evidence behind yoga practices. Started initially as VK Yogas nearly 25 years ago with Arogyadhama, it now is a deemed university of yoga, offering graduation and post-graduation courses in yoga, spirituality and medicine.
svyasa.edu.in

Morarji Desai National Institute of Yoga, New Delhi:

Established by the Ministry of AYUSH in 1970, this institute is one of the most reputed yoga education and research centres in India. The institute promotes yoga philosophy and offers training and advanced research on the subject. It offers foundation, advanced courses and both diplomas and degrees in yoga education.
yogamdniy.nic.in



A view of the meditation centre at Auroville. Puducherry was the residence of Sri Aurobindo and is now the operational base of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram

SOUTH

Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Puducherry (Tamil Nadu):

Founded in 1926 by Sri Aurobindo, a freedom fighter, philosopher, yogi, guru and poet, the ashram conducts regular yoga sessions for residents of Auroville; has a yoga practicing centre called Auromode and offers sessions in various forms of yoga.

NORTH

Patanjali Yogpeeth, Haridwar (Uttarakhand):

Founded by Baba

Ramdev in the year 2006, Patanjali Yogpeeth is one of the largest yoga institutes in India. Named after the Maharishi Patanjali, the institute's purpose is to practise and research in the field of yoga and Ayurveda.

Sadhana Mandir Trust, Dehradun (Uttarakhand):

Swami Rama established Sadhana Mandir Trust and the Himalayan International Institute of Yoga Science and Philosophy in 1966. Trained in the tradition of the cave monasteries

The first known appearance of the word “yoga”, with the same meaning as the modern term, is in the Katha Upanishad, composed in fourth to third century BCE



The Patanjali Yogpeeth offers graduate and post graduate courses in Yoga and Ayurveda. divyayoga.com

The Sandhna Mandir Trust offers short and long retreats. Its 5-day Yoga Retreat is very popular. sadhanamandir.org

The Divine Life Society conducts sessions everyday in the forenoon and in the afternoon. Discussions are also held on yoga. sivanandaonline.org

The Yoga Mandiram in Chennai offers customised Yoga therapy interventions for adults and children. Several teacher training programmes are also conducted. kym.org



of the Himalayas, he taught the Upanishads and Buddhist scriptures and had also studied Tibetan philosophies. The Trust offers specialised retreats where one can learn yoga.

Divine Life Society (Sivananda Ashram), Rishikesh (Uttarakhand):

It was founded in 1936 by Swami Shivananda, who was a student of medicine and joined the sanyasashrama under the guidance of Swami Vishwananda Saraswati. He established the Divine Life Society and Yoga-Vedanta Academy.

Krishnamacharya Yoga Mandiram, Chennai (Tamil Nadu): This was established in the name of T Krishnamacharya, an Indian yoga

teacher, Ayurvedic healer and scholar, in 1976 by TKV Desikachar. The institute propagates yoga as a holistic science. The other great personalities under this parampara are BKS Iyengar and Pattabhi Jois.

In the past decade, yoga has morphed from being a once-in-a-week exercise to a healthy lifestyle. These yoga institutes are striving to offer the best courses in that are specially crafted to generate interest in pupils of all ages.



Dr Rastogi is an Assistant Director at the Central Council for Research in Yoga and Naturopathy, under the Ministry of AYUSH, Delhi. He has authored several books on the subject like 'Surya Namaskar' and 'Food principles for Healthy Living'.

The Vipassana International Academy, also known as Dhamma Giri, is a Vipassana meditation center located in Igatpuri Nasik, Maharashtra. This was the first Vipassana meditation center in India that was set up at Igatpuri by SN Goenka

Ancient Indian epics like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata are immortalised not just with creative renditions but also through iconic statues, like the Shri Krishna statue at the Trinveni *Ghat* in Rishikesh, Uttarakhand



THE RARITY OF A Living Culture

Amish, one of India's bestselling authors, who delves into mythology for inspiration, and whose *Shiva trilogy* has been the fastest selling book series in the publishing history of the country, pens his thoughts exclusively for India Perspectives, on the contemporary relevance of ancient Indian texts

So, what is truth? “*satyameva jayate*”, says the *Mundaka Upanishad*. Truth alone prevails. Who would disagree? As the ancients would remark, “*nissandeha*”, without doubt. But what is truth? Is it my truth or your truth? Is there such a thing as universal truth? Is the opposite of truth, falsehood? Is truth related to facts? To verifiable data? Or could it be archetypal? The truth of intentions?

I don't know. But our rich *itihas* makes us arrive at a sophisticated understanding by taking us

back to the ideas of our forefathers and foremothers. These ancient stories are an invitation to engage in the search for answers that will always be current and relevant. Because they help us understand life and our role in it. Which is why they remain alive and vibrant in our collective imagination.

Consider the state of other ancient civilisations. Thor (the Germanic god) has been banished from Scandinavia, the Sun god, Ra's has set in Egypt and Zeus lies buried in the snow at Mount Olympus. But stories of Lord Rama reign strong in India; Lord Krishna continues to entice and the magnificent Lord Shiva, has not ceased his dancing in the precincts of our hearts. An *Akhand Ramayan*

reading in an Indian household slows time even in these busy times and Indians never tire of dissecting the confounding characters of the Mahabharata.

Why are most ancient civilisations left holding the soulless shell of their primordial heritage in the palm of their hands, while in India we remain endlessly enticed by the vibrant kernel of these millennia-old memories that continue to guide our everyday lives? In simple terms, why are we among the very few ancient cultures that are still alive?

The stories of our gods and goddesses have constantly evolved, retaining the best of the old, but adding in the attractiveness of the new

Modern day renditions of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana incorporate the original values of righteousness, love and compassion, while showcasing them with contemporary elements like 3D figurines and state-of-the-art light and sound systems, for example, this still from a play on Lord Krishna's life



TRADITION



Top: A contemporary production of the age-old tradition of Ramlila (a dramatic rendition of the Ramayana) is common in India which has kept these epics alive

Bottom: The sacred pond at Jyotisar, one of the most revered holy sites of Kurukshetra, Haryana where Lord Krishna delivered sermon of *Bhagavad Gita* to Arjuna, still sees thousands of devotees flocking to its shores every year

A lazy analysis might suggest that our culture and stories are rich in comparison to those of other ancient civilisations such as Greece and Egypt. But I would guard against this hubris. No doubt, our stories are delightful. But so are the Greek myths of Zeus and his cohort from Olympus; and just as

magnificent and profound in their meaning. The hammer-wielding Thor was an inspiring figure from Norse mythology (some believe that Thursday's root is actually Thor's day). Why did these powerful gods retreat into anonymity?

I believe, it is because they lost their relevance in the lives of their people.

But why did this not happen in India? According to me, it was due to our genius for modernising and localising our myths. Let me make my proposition with one of our most popular epics, the Ramayana. A television serial in the 1980s modernised Lord Rama's story to our age. The series was based largely on the *Ramcharitmanas* written by sage Tulsidas in the 16th century; but Tulsidasji himself had made significant changes from the original



These ancient stories, these epics, are an invitation to engage in the search for answers that will always be current and relevant



Top: Bollywood actor Amitabh Bachchan with author Amish Tripathi during the success party for the global success of one of his books.

Bottom: A large rock relief carving in Mamallapuram, Tamil Nadu, that showcases Arjuna's Penance. Mahabalipuram (Mamallapuram) still remains one of the major tourist attractions in the state

TRADITION



Left: A painting from the late 18th century depicting Lord Rama, Lady Sita and Lord Lakshmana at the Hermitage of Bharadvaja

Bottom: Ancient murals depicting scenes from the Ramayana and Mahabharata on ceiling of Chennakeshwara temple in Belur, Karnataka

Valmiki Ramayana, thus modernising the story of Lord Rama for the time that he lived in. The *Kamba Ramayana* from the South, localised the epic to the sensibilities of the 12th century. There are possibly

hundreds of versions of the Ramayana across Asia, in which the core thoughts have remained the same, but the body that encases them has been tweaked to suit changing times. Thus, the stories of our gods and goddesses have constantly

evolved, retaining the best of the old, but adding in the attractiveness of the new, therefore keeping our *itihās* relevant, ever-contemporary and alive.

Consider the Mahabharata, which pulls us away from the lure of judgement into the welcoming arms of compassion and understanding; where nuance becomes possible. We see weaknesses in the Pandavas too, and strengths in the Kauravas as well. We are confused by Lord Krishna and confounded that even Shakuni (an extremely intelligent but devious character from the Mahabharata) had a story that made him crave, some might hold,

We celebrate modernisation and localisation, while stubbornly holding on to the best practices of our ancients; thus, keeping our theology relevant, and hence, alive





Above: The magnificent Jatayu Earth Centre named after the divine eagle from the epic Ramayana, in Kollam, Kerala, is home to a massive 200ft long bird sculpture said to be the largest bird sculpture in the world

understandable vengeance. And yet, had the Kauravas won and the Pandavas lost, something would have not seemed right...

The debate goes on, and life still bemuses. Our struggles go on, and only the deepest corners of the heart know whether our actions are fuelled by ego or love. The Mahabharata eschews an easy understanding. The *Gita* offers answers, but also some questions. Doubts are good, though, for they spur the spirit of investigation, if navigated with wisdom. It takes a mature and wise individual to truly understand our texts. For they do not treat you like a child who needs definitive orders; instead they treat you as an adult, who needs encouragement to evolve. This spirit of evolution opens the space for respect for different truths; which is the ultimate guarantor of liberalism. And liberalism opens the

space for evolution. It is a circle; a circle that has kept our ancient culture alive.

Therefore, our *itihās* stays alive, because religion and liberalism have not been historically at war in India. Consequently, different religions have learnt to co-exist and be open-minded; we celebrate modernisation and localisation, while stubbornly holding on to the best practices of our ancients; thus, keeping our theology relevant. Counter-intuitively, it is possible for liberalism to feed religiosity and vice-versa. And our India, this beautiful country, has always been counter-intuitive!



Amish (Tripathi) is the award-winning author of the *Shiva* trilogy and the *Ram Chandra* series. An avid reader and researcher himself, Amish is the current Director of the Nehru Centre (London) that promotes cultural exchanges between India and the United Kingdom.



THE LEGACY OF THE Golden Screen

From classic world movies and retrospectives of noted Indian directors to award-winning regional films highlighting lost languages, the 50th edition of the International Film Festival of India offered much more than just good cinema

BY GAJANAN KHERGAMKER

CINEMA

In the Land of
POISON WOMEN

LOUISE
BROOKS

कुम्हार
जाण

AN UNTOLD LOVE STORY OF A POSTMAN 'GOPAL'
WHO FOUGHT ALL ODDS 132 YEARS AGO TO MAKE HIS
'ANAND' INDIA'S FIRST FEMALE DOCTOR!

MADE IN
GREAT
BRITAIN
BLACKMAIL
SEE HEARD
HOLD YOUR
TONGUE
FRIDAY
JUNE 21 at

SCHOOL FOR
ANAND

ओंगा

A FILM BY NATIONAL AWARD WINNING DIRECTOR

Maitree Productions
Presents

Director
Shiraj Lalan Paul
Producer
Shiraj Lalan Paul
Arin, Binaman, Mahajan

3
sec

From classic world movies and retrospectives of noted Indian directors to award-winning regional films highlighting lost languages, the 50th edition of the International Film Festival of India offered much more than just good cinema

BY GAJANAN KHERGAMKER

Aveek & UDF
Presents
4243
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WINNER
NATIONAL FILM AWARDS
BEST ANIMATION FILM
1975
EK ANEK AUR EKTA

HELLARO
(Bengali)

mai ghat
CRIME NO. 103/2005
A TRUE STORY...

OFFICIAL SELECTION
OFFICIAL SELECTION
OFFICIAL SELECTION

ONCE YOU TURN BRUTAL
YOU ARE NO LONGER THE POLICE

Official Selection
EAI
Busan
International Film Festival

SHANKAR LALL GOENKA'S
LEWDHU
Live Your Story

What began 50 years ago as a platform to showcase some of the best international cinematic productions in India has today become one of the world's most reputed film showcases. The International Film Festival of India (IFFI) raised the curtains on its 50th year on November 20 in Panjim, Goa, with an inaugural star-studded ceremony that was graced by the likes of such stalwarts of India's entertainment industry as Amitabh Bachchan and Rajnikant. Organised by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, and Goa government, IFFI is not only one of the first film festivals of Asia but can also be said to be the most significant, offering a platform to films of disparate genres and letting even the silent find a voice.

WOMEN AND THEIR DREAMS

More than 200 movies from 76 countries were screened at the event. But the main takeaway was the sheer number of films that were either helmed by a woman or had

a woman-centric narrative - over 50 (from across the world)! These films highlighted the incredible stories of women and their dreams. Two of the most noteworthy ones include *37 Seconds* by Japanese film director Hikari and *At Five in the Afternoon* by Iranian filmmaker Samira Makhmalbaf. While the first is a heartwarming tale of a young Japanese woman's struggle to realise her dreams and her duties towards her family, the latter tells the story of an Afghan girl, who wants to become the country's president.

There were several others which focussed on women who have dared to dream, including Abhishek Shah's *Hellaro* and Sameer Vidwans' *Anandi Gopal*. *Hellaro*, which traces the journey of a young woman from a hamlet in Kutch (Gujarat) who finds her expression through *garba* (an Indian folk dance), is Shah's debut venture and fetched him the coveted National Award too. The Marathi movie *Anandi Gopal* is based on the life of Anandi Gopal Joshi, India's first female doctor who studied at the Woman's Medical College in Pennsylvania in the late 19th century.



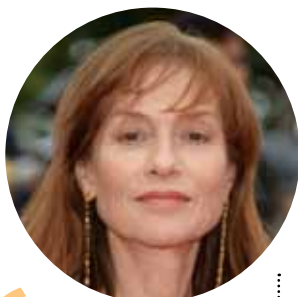
“ I AM HONOURED TO BE HERE [IFFI, 2019]. I THANK THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA AND THE GOVERNMENT OF GOA FOR INVITING ME. FILMS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN AN INTEGRAL PART OF SOCIAL LIFE. A FESTIVAL OF THIS MAGNITUDE IN GOA ALSO SERVES THE PEOPLE OF GOA; TO KNOW AND BE EXPOSED TO WHAT IS HAPPENING IN THE WORLD AND ALSO GIVES US AN OPPORTUNITY TO MEET AND MIX WITH PEOPLE”

Amitabh Bachchan
Indian film actor and Padma
Visbhushan recipient



“ THE OBJECTIVE [OF IFFI] IS TO SHOW THAT THE ORIGIN OF ENTERTAINMENT COMES FROM INDIA WHICH CAN BE TRACED TO THE NATYASHASTRA, WRITTEN MORE THAN 2,200 YEARS AGO”

Amit Khare
Secretary, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting,
Government of India



“I HAD SO MANY WONDERFUL MOMENTS IN MY WORK LIFE, IT IS HARD TO PICK UP ONE, I HAVE WORKED WITH SO MANY GREAT PEOPLE, GREAT DIRECTORS...GO AND WATCH FILMS. THAT’S A GOOD MESSAGE”

Isabelle Huppert
French actor



“WE ARE USED TO CO-PRODUCING FILMS & IT’S NICE TO EXCHANGE EXPERIENCES BETWEEN DIFFERENT PEOPLE. ALTHOUGH WE ARE FAR, WE ARE OF THE SAME FAMILY WHO UNDERSTAND FILMS”

Goran Paskaljevic
Serbian film director, *Despite the Fog*

REGIONAL FOCUS

The festival has always focussed on promotion of regional Indian films and this year too this was reiterated. Five Marathi movies were screened in the event’s Indian Panorama (feature films) section, making it the largest in the number of regional cinema at the festival. Two noteworthy mentions include National Award recipient directors Ananth Mahadevan’s *Mai Ghat: Crime No 103/2005* and Shivaji Lotan Patil’s *Bhonga*. Preserving India’s vernacular heritage was the focus of several regional films. Three films from Northeast India screened at the festival highlighted lost languages. The most-talked about was National Award-winning Assamese filmmaker Manju Borah’s *In The Land of Poison Women*, which is set in a remote corner of Arunachal Pradesh and uses the almost

disappearing Pangchenpa dialect. Noted Assamese filmmaker Utpal Dutta’s *Bohubritta*, which is filmed in the unique poetry style was the second while National Award recipient Pradip Kurbah’s *Lewduh*, made in Garo/Khasi language was the third. Also a part of the repertoire were a movie each in Paniya and Irula languages from Southern India.

LOOKING BACK

Between the 1950s and late 1970s, Indian cinema saw a rise of a new league of directors, whose films presented a stark contrast to commercial ones in terms of story, actors and budget. Such stalwarts as Mrinal Sen, Adoor Gopalakrishnan, Shyam Benegal and Mani Kaul belonged to this category. A special section was curated, “Retrospective



Left: Pema Tseden received the Special Jury Award at IFFI 2019 for his movie *Balloon*, which narrates the story of a Tibetan family’s attempt to deal with a seismic event. **Right:** Directed by Blaise Harrison, *Les Particules* (or *Particles*) was awarded the Golden Peacock at the festival. This French movie, set on the Franco-Swiss border, narrates an adolescent coming-of-age story



A cultural show from IFFI 2018, during which a curtain raiser was presented on the 50th edition

IFFI 2019: The winners

Award category	Winner
Golden Peacock Award	<i>Particles</i> (French)
Best Director Award	Lijo Jose Pellissery (for Malayalam film <i>Jallikattu</i>)
Best Actor (Male) Award	Seu Jorge (for Brazilian film <i>Marighella</i>)
Best Actor (Female) Award	Usha Jadhav (for Marathi film <i>Mai Ghatt: Crime No. 103/2005</i>)
Special Jury Award	Pema Tsenden for <i>Balloon</i> (Chinese)
Best Debut Feature Film of a Director	Amin Sidi Boumediene for <i>Abou Leila</i> (Arabic) Marius Olteanu for <i>Monsters</i> (Romanian)
Special mention	<i>Hellaro</i> (Gujarati)
The ICFT –UNESCO Gandhi Medal	<i>Rwanda</i> (Italian)
Special mention under ICFT-UNESCO Gandhi medal	<i>Bahattar Hoorain</i> (Hindi)

of the new wave in Indian Cinema”, wherein 12 movies from eight such directors who dared to push the envelope, were screened. It opened with Ghatak’s Bengali movies *Ajantrik* and *Meghe Dhaka Tara*, played Benegal’s Hindi productions *Bhumika* and *Ankur*, and Gopalakrishnan’s *Swayamvaram* (Malayalam) among others.

In a series of firsts — the fest witnessed the India premieres of 90 films, six world premieres and 11 Asia premieres, and also screened three silent films accompanied by live music. Not just that. This year also saw the introduction of a filmmaking competition titled “Mini Movie Mania Short Film Competition”. The topic for the film was given during

The festival has always focussed on promotion of regional Indian films and this year too this was reiterated with movies from across the country

On-ground attractions

In focus

Russia was the ‘Country of Focus’ at IFFI 2019 and eight movies depicting the cinematic excellence and the country’s contribution to world cinema were screened.

The filmmaker in focus at this year’s festivities was Takashi Miike. Hailing from Japan, he is touted to be one of the most outstanding filmmakers in the world.

Miike’s repertoire spans across dramatic to family-friendly films, of which *First Love*, *Audition* and *Dead or Alive* were showcased during the festival.

Say it without words

Silent Films with Live Music, a highlight of this year’s festivities, was a section curated specially to pay homage to a once-favoured form of film viewing. In this section, three classic silent movies – Alfred Hitchcock’s *Blackmail*, Sergei Eisenstein’s *Battleship Potemkin* and GW Pabst’s *Pandora’s Box* – were screened, which was accompanied with live music by a pianist.



the event and the participants had to submit their films within 72 hours of the announcement. The festival has always been regarded as not just a platform for film screenings but also an independent forum for discussions and exchanging of creative views. With the participation of powerful voices from across the international creative fraternity, IFFI allows the fulfilment of cinema’s primary objective -- to mirror society, reiterating Satyajit Ray’s words, “The raw material of cinema is life itself”.



Gajanan Khergamker is an Editor, Solicitor and Documentary Film-maker heading think-tank, DraftCraft International. He writes across borders on law, diplomacy, Public policy and international affairs.

MORE THAN just a star

Ayushmann Khurrana is a living testament to the popular dialiougue mouthed by many, “Don’t underestimate the power of the common man” and Khurrana is one actor who seems to be living the dream

BY AARTI KAPUR SINGH



An epitome of humility, Ayushmann Khurana is often found flipping through the pages of his favourite books at his beautiful home in Andheri, Mumbai

His blood, toil, tears and sweat won him India’s most prestigious award for cinematic brilliance, the coveted National Film Award for Best Actor (which he shared with Vicky Kaushal for *Uri: The Surgical Strike*) for his performance in *Andhadhun*. After his win, Khurrana acknowledged, albeit humbly, his absolute delight by saying, “It’s truly humbling and hugely gratifying to win the coveted National Award. As an artiste, I’ve always tried to back content that stands out for its quality. The National Award is a validation of my hard



One of the most versatile actors in Bollywood today, Khurrana did not stop experimenting with his choice of scripts over the years. Seen here are some of his recent movies that do not follow any discernible pattern except that of pure ingenuity

work, my belief system, my journey in movies and my reason to be an actor in the first place. Over and above my personal win, I'm thrilled that both the films that I have done [Andhadhun and Badhaai Ho] have won at the prestigious National Awards. It again validates that people of our country want to see cinema that entertains, that they can cherish, discuss and endorse."

It all started in 2012 when Khurrana made his big Bollywood debut with *Vicky Donor*, and there has been no looking back for him. In fact, with every movie he has done since then has not only pushed the envelope and broken several stereotypes of what a typical

Bollywood hero should be like, but has also given the audience a glimpse of the skills he possesses as an artiste. A reason, perhaps, why, he is slowly turning into one of tinseltown's most bankable stars. Such successive hits as *Badhaai Ho*, *Andhadhun*, *Shubh Mangal Saavdhan*, *Bareilly Ki Barfi* have collectively gathered more than INR 3.25 billion at the box office in just over a year. And now with each of his films, the 35-year-old actor is leaving the audience wanting for more.

REMOULDING THE MOULD

A classic Bollywood hero saves a damsel in distress and fights with the bad guys. But Khurrana's characters

have had him play a video store owner, a printing press owner and even a writer who churns out horror stories – characters who are relatable and strike a chord with the audience. And he credits his small-town upbringing and “exposure to reality” for his ability to make his characters seem real.

“It was growing up in a small city, touring with my theatre group and interacting with people from all walks of life while I was an RJ that came together,” says Khurrana, adding that these experiences helped him stay rooted and in touch with reality. These are what allowed him to imbibe the mannerisms of the people that he interacted with. “Life is the biggest workshop, you have

to observe life. You have to be one with the milieu more than anything else,” he points out.

SWIMMING AGAINST THE TIDE

It was perhaps a specific cultural moment that also contributed to the acceptance of Khurrana’s talent. His is a success that has to be read alongside the rise of a new kind of independent movies made in Bollywood. These small-budget, character-driven films, which are rooted and addresses socio-economic realities seem to be doing well.

One would think that it’s just the script of a movie that appeals to the actor, but, for Khurrana, it is the novelty and uniqueness



An accomplished vocalist as well, the multi-talented Khurrana during the Hindustan Times India’s Most Stylish Awards 2019 in Mumbai

Ayushmann Khurrana—

- Not willing to take away the hard work of directors that he has worked with, Khurrana says, “I have been lucky that I have got to work with directors who have encouraged my spontaneous approach to the characters. “Whether it was Sharat Katariya in *Dum Laga Ke Haisha* or Sriram Raghavan in *Andhadhun*, all the directors I have worked with have allowed me the freedom to freefall. For instance, Raghavan would often not give me the exact lines. He would ask me to improvise and do it my way. That allowed me to spread my wings and push the envelope,” the actor reveals.
- Khurrana might never have played the role of a cop in his Bollywood outings but for *Article 15*, the actor did do some serious homework. He read Om Prakash Valmiki’s book *Joothan*. “It is about the kind of prejudices he [the author] faced in his life. It had me thinking a lot about the narrative and I could not sleep while shooting for this film. But it did help me build the character. Also, I met real-life cops including senior IPS officers in New Delhi and some cops in Uttar Pradesh. I keenly observed the way the proceedings go on at a police station. I also saw this amazing documentary called *India Untouched: Stories of a People Apart*, which was an eye-opener for me,” he points out.

And it is not just the classes or intellectual critics who are happy, the crowds are cheering from the front rows as well. Khurrana, very humbly, says, “I think this is a good period for Hindi cinema. A lot of it has to do with the tide of realism that films are now riding on; they are increasingly becoming ‘unshowy’. Most of my films thrive on reviews; they are word-of-mouth films. I get commercial acclaim because of critical acclaim. It’s a chain reaction. So far the films have been gliding along this trajectory, gathering momentum as days pass and praise fuels more people to come and watch.”

One would think that it’s just the script of a movie that appeals to

the actor. But he politely differs. For him, what matters most is novelty and uniqueness. “The story has to be different. Take *Badhaai Ho* for example. The story was about the protagonist’s [Khurrana’s character] parents. So, the script comes first, me later. I feel that there has to be a certain value creation and balance – a good marriage between content and entertainment. There has to be no reference point in earlier films in Indian cinema,” he explains.

GIVING IT HIS ALL

Khurrana is not a dedicated method actor but he admits that a lot of effort goes into getting into the characters he plays on the big

(L-R) Bollywood superstar Shahrukh Khan, director Anubhav Sinha attend a special screening of the film, *Article 15* with Ayushmann Khurrana, the movie’s lead actor





The ever-evolving actor has always believed in sticking to his guts and following his sensibilities strictly, rather than following the conventional formula, like he does during a promotional shoot for his movie *Badhaai Ho*

screen. He says that the roles may not necessarily be the person he is in real life, but “are more about drawing from the experiences I have had at some point in time in real life”. He elaborates, “I care about how much can I relate to who I am in real life with who I am on screen. Barring *Andhadhun*, I have been able to relate with most of them.”

He refers to his film *Article 15* (a movie about the life of a police officer posted in a village), where he plays the role of a righteous cop, and mentions how contrary the role was to his real self. He continues, “When I was doing

It was growing up in a small city and touring with his theatre group that helped the actor stay rooted and in touch with reality

theatre in Chandigarh, I always played negative and aggressive characters, something that nobody could imagine me in. I did picture myself playing a cop but maybe people did not. Anubhav Sinha [director of *Article 15*] also never envisioned me in the role of a tough cop. And that was the challenge. More than the character, it was the subject that intrigued me.”

Ask the actor how he feels about all the adulation he has garnered over the years and he breaks into a smile and ever so shyly, says, “I never asked for this much myself. I was a small-town boy and even a small amount of love would have been okay. But this much? I am quite pleasantly surprised myself. It’s surreal and a whole lot of fun.”

After *Bala*, a satire on premature balding, which united him once again with former co-stars, Bhumi Pednekar and Yami Gautam, Khurana is all set to traverse new grounds. In the immediate pipeline are Shoojit Sircar’s *Gulabo Sitabo* and Hitesh Kewalya’s *Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan*.



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



INVESTING IN our culture

More and more corporates are supporting India's cultural heritage with tangible and intangible investments. Industrialist **SK Munjal**, the man behind Serendipity Arts Festival, a multi-disciplinary arts event, speaks about the importance of such support

Historically, India has had a rich tradition of cultural patronage. From ornate temple architecture under the Chola kings to the legendary musician Tansen, who was attached to the court of Mughal emperor Akbar, Indian cultural heritage has always found support in common people and royalty. There are several artistic lineages that have thrived under monarchies, which invested in the progress of art and culture. Today as well, even as culture flourishes with state support, individuals

and corporates are taking up the mantle of being the custodians of our culture.

Over the last 300 years, India has lost about 30 per cent of its cultural heritage (in arts and craft) for various reasons. Therefore, it becomes even more crucial for us to preserve and promote our traditional art forms.

As I was growing up, I enjoyed the good fortune to receive an education that exposed me to arts both at home and at school. Having learnt to appreciate the beauty in all artistic expressions at an early age, it was

Sunil Kant Munjal (centre) with music curator Aneesh Pradhan and percussion players from across the country at the curtain-raiser for the Serendipity Arts Festival

Only when the general public starts talking about the arts in daily conversations would we be certain that we're having an impact

easier for me to devote my time and efforts towards the arts while being constantly involved with their propagation. I had the opportunity to experiment with the preservation of arts early in my life. In 1999, I helped launch a performing arts platform called the *Ludhiyana Sanskritik Samagam*. This experience made me delve deeper into the idea of preserving Indian heritage. Thus was born the Serendipity Arts Foundation in 2014, with the aim to reclaim dying artforms, widen the idea of inter-disciplinarity interaction among various art streams and offer artistes a platform to experiment. The mandate of the foundation and the Serendipity Arts Festival (SAF) is to cut across disciplines, regions and demographics and find ways to support the Indian arts ecosystem, and in the process bring greater national and international attention to arts and culture of the country.

Bollywood actors Amitabh Bachchan and Jaya Bachchan during the launch of author Siddharth Shanghvi's (centre) book at the 9th edition of Tata Literature Live! in Mumbai. This is one of the prominent cultural events promoted by the Tata group of companies



More than just an idea

Total Indian companies with CSR contribution in the field of heritage, arts and culture 2017-18

494

Total contributions in various states

INR 1.29 billion

Pan-India contributions in culture projects through CSR

INR 1.04 billion

Largest contributions in a state (Gujarat)

INR 833 million

Total contribution made across India in FY 2017-18

INR 2.84 billion

More than

2x increase within 2 years

Total increase in contributions from FY 2015-16

INR 1.64 billion

Figures from www.csr.gov.in



Culture investments

Corporates across the country have realised the value investing in culture, and have slowly but steadily increased their funding of the arts through varied initiatives.

Godrej has set up centres like the Godrej India Culture Lab within its campuses

ESSAR has created bodies like Avid Learning, which organises workshops, panel discussions, and other programmes to foster creative learning across cultural fields

Apeejay Group has incorporated culture into its commercial activities: the Oxford Bookstore chains routinely have book readings, while the new Park Hotel chain conducts an annual cultural festival

Mahindra & Mahindra sponsors festivals like the Mahindra Blues festival and set up awards like the Mahindra Excellence in Theatre Awards to maintain a sustained engagement with the cultural sphere



(Top) 'Ephemeral' a photography exhibition curated by Rahaab Allana at the Serendipity Arts Festival, 2018. **(Bottom)** An art installation titled *Jamdani across new Horizons*, curated by Pramod Kumar at the 2019 SAF

UNIFIED EFFORT

When it comes to sustaining any artform, the need for patronage is acute. A joint and ideally unified effort must be made by the private sector, public sector and individuals with the capacity to promote the arts. While lots of efforts are being made from various quarters, a more cohesive and national action is required across states and regions through multiple initiatives. The private sector must be made an integral part of this process, through CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) of the companies. With large organisations that are working

towards creating a better economic future for the nation and its people, it is always important to include within their organisational plan, a proposal to help build a society that develops in all aspects and not just economically.

NEED OF THE HOUR

In today's age, to make arts more engaging as a practice and profession, we need to build audiences and transmit knowledge and information through word of mouth. Only when the general public starts talking about the arts in their daily conversations would we be certain that we're having an impact.

This is where multi-disciplinary platforms are required to showcase our traditional and contemporary art and craft forms; to engage with and help artisans with design and process inputs; to connect them with markets both in India and overseas, and in the process, build sustainable livelihoods for them and their families.

A joint and ideally unified effort must be made by the private sector, public sector and individuals with the capacity to promote the arts to preserve India's cultural heritage



(Top) A performance from the Mahindra Blues festival in Mumbai. Supported by the Mahindra group, it is one of the most reputed blues festival in Asia

These unique festivals attract the youth and it's only when youngsters immerse themselves in real experiences, can they appreciate the value of traditions and heritage. Exposure leads to inquisitiveness and this leads to greater interest and involvement in the future. Serendipity is one such multi-disciplinary platform that makes art inclusive and accessible to all.

FUNDING THE CHANGE

However, preserving and promoting cultural heritage is not a simple task. The first hurdle is that it's not remunerative — at least in the short and medium-term. Lack of funds is forcing artisans and craftsmen to give up their skills. A festival like SAF is not just about valuing the arts and crafts, it's also about creating real economic

opportunities for artistes. India needs millions of new jobs every year; a requirement that can't be fulfilled by agriculture or industries alone.

If through programmes, events and festivals we can help make art and culture highly remunerative; by connecting the arts with the market and helping with technology and ideas, there is a possibility that we can create a self-sustaining industry. This sector requires visible financial support, so corporate philanthropy and impact investing must be actively promoted.

THE FUTURE

I foresee significant changes in the arts ecosystem and certainly, the value attributed to art will grow. What we are attempting at SAF is just the tip. We need similar movements in every state to make any actual impact. There are many fantastic initiatives being launched around the country and each one of them, irrespective of the scale or the focus, is important to bring back arts and culture into our daily conversations.

The fourth edition of Serendipity Arts Festival was held at Panaji, Goa from 15-22 December 2019. (serendipityartsfestival.com)



SK Munjal, one of the founder promoters of the Hero Group, chairs several boards across academic and cultural institutions. He has made significant contributions towards the preservation and propagation of performance arts across India.



CELEBRATING tradition

The vast treasure trove of Indian traditions is often showcased as cultural highlights during local festivals. We travel around the country to experience some of the most popular festivals this season that define our cultural and yet incredibly artistic lineage



PUSHKAR CAMEL FAIR

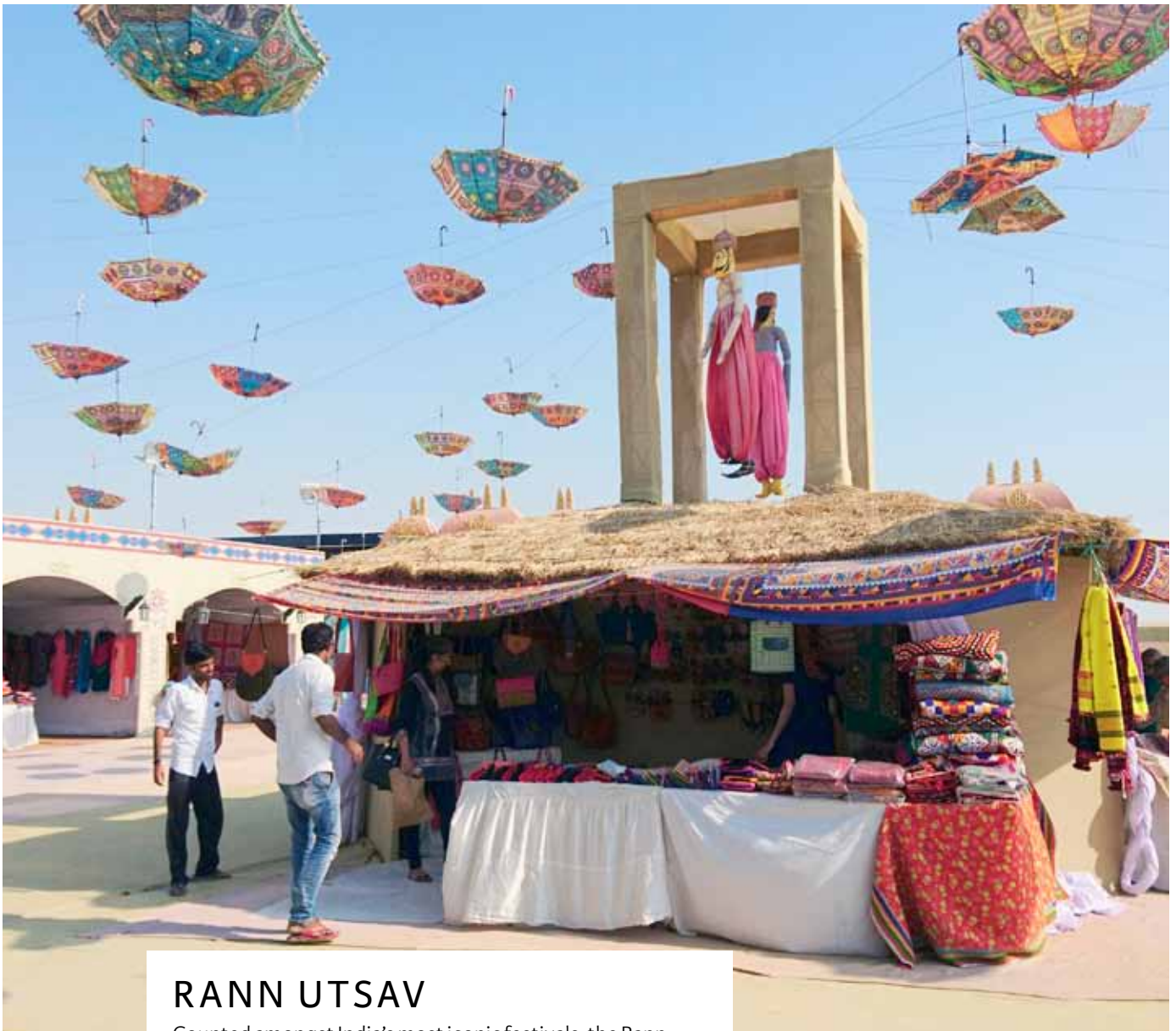
Started as livestock fair, the Pushkar Mela has grown manifold to become one of the largest and most iconic celebrations of Rajasthani traditions in India and the world. The cultural extravaganza is started off with a camel race that officially opens the various exhibitions for art and crafts, textiles and several cultural events.



COVELONG POINT SURF FESTIVAL

Started to introduce surfing to Indian youth, the Cavelong point festival has grown to become one of the largest events for surfing and beach enthusiasts in India. Over the years, the festival has absorbed some of the best alternative sporting and cultural events like slacklining, yoga and paddle boarding.

The Great Rann of Kutch presents the region's abundant ecological and cultural heritage. The Utsav celebrates the region's kaleidoscopic magnificence with distinctive folk dances and intricate arts and crafts



RANN UTSAV

Counted amongst India's most iconic festivals, the Rann Utsav is an annual celebration of traditions, customs and lifestyle of the Great Rann of Kutch. Carefully crafted for visitors of all ages, the festival is organised from October to February every year.

The Kabir Yatra takes its Inspiration from various community practices, like the *Jaagran/Satsang*, an all-night event where singers from different communities come together to sing and discuss mystic poets

RAJASTHAN KABIR YATRA

A modern day cultural fest, the Rajasthan Kabir Yatra is a traveling folk music festival that recreates the artist's trail from Jaipur to Jaisalmer with multiple folk musicians and singers. The festival aims to revive the rich artistic heritage of Rajasthan by dissolving boundaries of caste, class, religion and identity.





WANGALA FESTIVAL

Also known as the 100-drum festival, Wangala is a post-harvest celebration to thank Misi Saljong, the sun god for blessing the people with a rich harvest. A highlight is the 100-drum performance featuring 10 drummers from each of the 10 tribes at the festival.



SNAPSHOTS

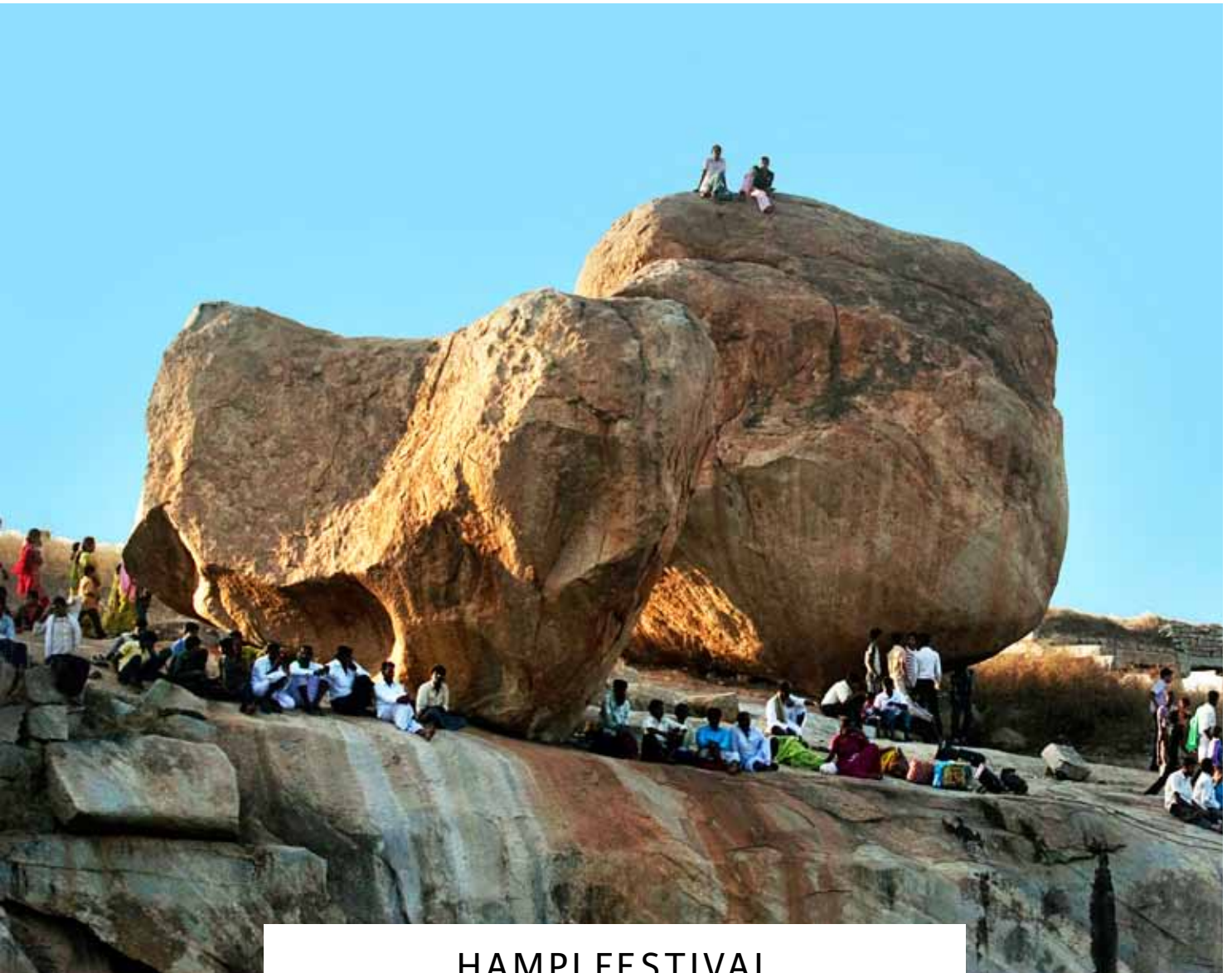


KA POMBLANG NONGKREM

Commemorating the start of the winter season, the Khasi tribe from Meghalaya assemble to celebrate the ancient five-day festival. Located just 20kms from Shillong, the Khasi village hosts the Nongkrem festival to appease Goddess Ka Blei Synshar for a bountiful harvest and continued prosperity of the people.



Hampi Festival or Hampi Utsav is also known as the Vijaya Utsav and has been celebrated since the Vijayanagar reign (1336-1614). The entire region comes alive with energy during three-day event



HAMPI FESTIVAL

One of the largest celebrations in the region, the Hampi festival offers a variety of adventure sports along with cultural events like puppet shows, pomp processions and vibrant displays of local traditions. There are special events that incorporate rural sports and indigenous crafts.



Tribal flavours

Traditional cuisines of India's tribes are nutritious and balanced, and can be developed to reduce growing pressures on the environment. **Sangeeta Khanna** delves deeper into the nuances of this food heritage

The menu of the day was dal, rice and *tungrymbai*. While the first two, staples at almost all Indian homes, were familiar, it was the third that roused my curiosity. I was on the outskirts of Shillong, Meghalaya's picture-perfect capital, and had stopped for lunch at a *Kong* shop or local food

joint. The lady manning the stall heaped sticky rice on a clean plate, along with a little *dal* and two ladles of a dark and thick curry. "That's *tungrymbai*. It's very tasty," informed my girl guide. A paste of fermented soybean, slow-cooked with sesame seeds, pork and *tungtap* or dried fish chutney, *tungrymbai* is common in homes of Khasi tribe members in the

Above: Women of a Naga tribal community cook over a traditional wood-fired stove at Kisama Heritage Village, Kohima, Nagaland

state. The dish has a strong aroma, but the flavour stays with you long after the meal is over. A local delicacy, this dish is nutritious and easy to prepare. These two features are common among most traditional food items favoured by tribal communities in India.

India is home to several tribal communities, with each one boasting a cultural heritage that includes a rich repertoire of flavours, which reflect a fine distillation of the community's geography, climate, history, religion and folklore. Natural and nutritious, cultivated and uncultivated forest food is what these tribes have been

dependent on since ages. Cooked with very few spices and mostly had raw, semi-cooked, roasted or fermented – these tribal dishes preserve the flavours of the ingredients. “Simplicity of ingredients and cooking methods are the mainstays of tribal cuisine. Traditionally, tribal communities have lived around forests and rivers, and sourced their food from around them. The dishes, thus prepared, are not only nutritious but also balanced and have evolved according to the local climate,” says nutritionist Kavita Devgan.

In Northeast India for example, rice, which is cultivated in abundance, is a

Clockwise from left: Local quinoa and black millets on sale at the Dhurwa tribal market in Pandripani village, Chhattisgarh; Bonda (Bonda) tribal woman shopping at the weekly market in Malkangiri, Odisha. For tribal communities, weekly markets are the focal point of the neighbouring villages with villagers gathering to exchange items of daily need and also news.; A Gond woman collects *mahua* flowers in Markadeda village, Chhattisgarh



CUISINE



Clockwise from top left:

A tribal woman deep frying *bhaji* (fritters) rolled in a leaf at the Pandripani village market in Bastar, Chhattisgarh; Assamese tribal village women crush herbs in a traditional stone mill in Majuli island, Assam; *Chapura* (red ants) being sold as a snack in Tokapal market in Chhattisgarh

staple, with many variations – steamed, cooked like a stew or in bamboo tubes (the process being called *kholam*). The most popular, however, is the wild sticky rice. In Meghalaya, a popular rice dish is *jadoh*, made with pig liver. In Assam, the *onla wangkhrai*, a rice powder and chicken stew, is common in Bodo homes. In Arunachal Pradesh, *dung po* or steamed rice cake is very common.

As these communities were mostly hunters living near forests with abundance of wild animals, meat is an integral part of their cuisine, with stress on pork. The meat is often fermented or smoked to preserve it over several days between hunting sessions. However, Northeastern cuisines are

heavy in vegetable dishes as well, with fermentation being a predominant cooking method. *Sinki*, a fermented dish made of radish, is very common in Sikkim. In Meghalaya, the Garo tribe members love their vegetables, with *yam* and fresh greens used in large quantities. Fish, too, is very popular in this region, with fresh water catch being barbecued in banana leaves in several states. Dishes made with fish intestines and dried fish pickles are relished as well.

In northern India's hilly regions, lentils and wheat are common in traditional rural cuisine. For the Jaunsari community (a tribe of Uttarakhand), *koprothi* (millet roti) with fresh *dahi* and *pahadi namak* (salt) is a complete meal, accompanied with mountain lemons called *galgal*. These meals are served in plates made of dried leaves pinned together with sticks or *kansa thali* (bell

metal plate) and best enjoyed sitting on a wooden floor. If you are travelling anywhere in Himachal Pradesh and come across an outdoor feast, feel free to join the diners relishing the eclectic *dhaam* (a festive or wedding feast cooked by the local community called bothi). The menu will be the same in each of these -- *teliya maah* (black lentil curry), *chane ka madra* (chickpea curry), *maahni* (sweet and sour split black gram curry) and *mittha* (sweetened rice garnished with nuts). There are variations of the Himachali *dhaam* among communities but what remains a constant is the religious reverence for the earth and sacredness of the local produce.

Chefs from mainstream restaurants across the country are realising the relevance and nutritional benefits of these balanced traditional cuisines

In fact, all the tribes across the country consider their food to be sacred – a true reflection of the tribal culture that has protected their sacred groves and nurtured forests even though they procured all their livelihood from there. The perfect balance of reaping the land and resources and yet nurturing it religiously is something that is reflected in tribal and rural cuisines.

States like Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh too have interesting tribal

Bottom: Members of the ethnic Angami community having food and beverages at the annual Hornbill festival at Kisama in Nagaland. In these communities, traditional utensils made of animal bones, horns, leaves, stones and wood are common



The tribal affair

Indian subcontinent is inhabited by over 53 million tribes belonging to over 550 different communities under 227 ethnic groups, who reside in about 5,000 villages in different forest vegetation types.

Indian tribes utilise over 9,500 wild plants for various purposes including medicinal, fodder, fiber, fuel, edible, essence, cultural and other purposes. Out of this number nearly 3,900 wild plants are used as edibles.

WILD FOOD FESTIVALS

BAIF Food Festivals,
Maharashtra (July-September)

Bihar food festival, Patna
(December)

Uying Giidi at Boleng,
Arunachal Pradesh (February)

Reh Festival of the Idu
Mishmi tribe at Roing,
Arunachal Pradesh (February)

Nyokum festival of the
Nyishi tribe at Yazali and
Seppa, Arunachal Pradesh
(February)

Slow Foods Festival at
Kotagiri (Nilgiri Biosphere
Reserve), Tamil Nadu
(December)

cuisines. The local *paniya roti* that is made with cornmeal, patted on the local butea leaf and baked in an open pit-style oven, makes a hearty combination with wild fowl curry and red ants chutney. Another such combination is *bafle* -- whole wheat dumplings that are first steamed and then baked to achieve a unique texture, along with a dal made with various lentils and *ghee*. The *dal* and *bafle* combination has become popular in urban homes too.

One of the most prolific produce of forests all across central India is *mahua* (or Indian butter tree). The flowers of the tree when fermented produce an alcoholic drink. Its fruit is highly nutritious. The raisin-like sun-dried mahua flower is used as a sweetening agent in desserts and snacks like *kheer* and *meethi roti* or *mahue ki pakodi* (fried fritters). In Madhya Pradesh's tribal

areas, a porridge-like dish is made with mahua along with either soaked gram or wheat.

A variety of mushrooms are also used in tribal cuisines. The katarua mushrooms are extremely flavourful. Also known as Indian truffles, these mushrooms are used for a curry known as *katarua ki subzi* in the Himalayan terai regions. It is as meaty as the rugda mushrooms of Jharkhand that are harvested after monsoons.

Gond or Gondwanas, the largest surviving tribe in India, are traditionally forest dwellers and live in complete harmony with nature. This is echoed in their food habits that consist of varieties of grains and pulses, and their unique cooking methods also reflect this balance. Gond diet has two staple millets – *askodo* and *kutki*. Packed with proteins, they are often cooked



A farmer from a tribal village in Madhya Pradesh puts maize to dry



Right: Different types of rice and other grains being dried under the sun at the Jakhama tribal village in Nagaland

Bottom: A woman selling a variety of dried fish at the Dhurwa tribal market in Chhattisgarh



like a broth or served like dry cereal with vegetables. The madia tribe of Maharashtra forage for moth larvae and roast them along with basic seasoning wrapped in wild leaves. This becomes a snack or a meal with rice or even millet porridge.

With rapid urbanisation and constant population migration, chefs are realising the relevance of these balanced traditional cuisines. As these cuisines depend on local produce, pressure on the agricultural sector can be reduced. Also as stress is on using every part of a food produce, there is very little wastage. A reason why tribal cuisines are being talked about today and promoted at food festivals across the country. Chefs are trying to preserve these tribal cuisines and modify them for urban platters.



Sangeeta Khanna has a master's degree in Botany and is a trained microbiologist. She has worked as a nutrition coach across the world and helped many people manage lifestyle diseases by making them revert to old-fashioned home-cooking.



STORIES OF

solitude

With Lahaul valley's vibrant flora on one side, Pin valley's diverse fauna on the other, Kullu Valley to the west and Kinnaur to the south, Spiti's cold desert is the perfect destination to embark on a journey of self-discovery

BY VINAYAK SURYA SWAMI

Nature has been harshly benevolent to Spiti - a small valley in Himachal Pradesh - that is a stark yet surreal paradise, divided by the jagged peaks of snow-capped Himalayas and united by steep mountain passes. With this in mind, I embarked on a journey to Spiti Valley from New Delhi.

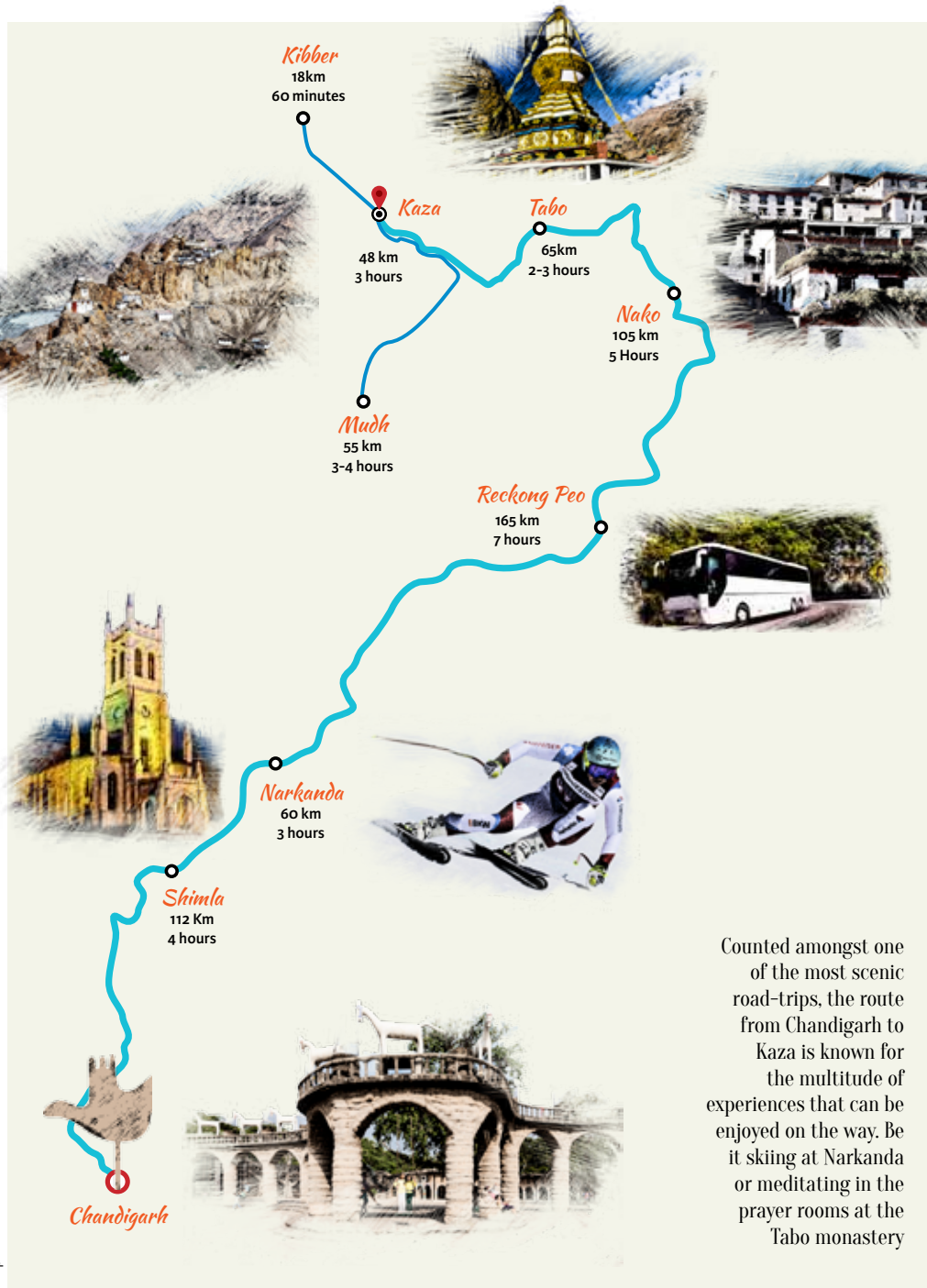
Since I was backpacking alone, I decided to visit some of the lesser known destinations along the way and not let my experiences be defined by those who had walked these roads before me. The first leg of my 20 to 36-hour journey took me to Chandigarh from New Delhi. My first stop after that was the transit town of Reckong Peo, or simply Peo. The bus terminal was a simple structure, with a smiling HRTC (Himachal

Road Transport Corporation) official manning the ticket counter. With a Bollywood-themed horn that blared at every sharp corner, the bus climbed on towards Spiti valley, passing through a picturesque landscape. As the road became steeper, outside the window, green turned brown, looming peaks came closer and the air became rarer. The beautiful forested hills were replaced by barren mountains so steep that the distinction one associates between the sky and the earth was all but blurred. Tiny specks of white and sometimes gold, appeared from time to time on the slopes, only to manifest themselves into Buddhist monasteries, as we neared. A fellow traveller, a young monk, volunteered as my travel guide, pointing out the unique philosophy of Tibetan

Opening page: The quaint village of Nako and the Nako lake in Spiti valley

Bottom: A view of NH 5 as it winds between the badlands between the villages of Nako and Tabo





map not to scale

Counted amongst one of the most scenic road-trips, the route from Chandigarh to Kaza is known for the multitude of experiences that can be enjoyed on the way. Be it skiing at Narkanda or meditating in the prayer rooms at the Tabo monastery

The transcendental beauty of the landscape has to be unraveled slowly, making Spiti Valley an idyllic spot for positive introspection

How to reach



Via Shimla

Spiti Valley is accessible through Reckong Peo all year round via NH 44 and NH 5 that connect the international border with China.

State transport buses run once daily from Chandigarh to Reckong Peo and from Peo to Kaza.

Nearest Airport: Shimla

Nearest rail head: Shimla



Via Manali

Kaza is also accessible through the Rohtang Pass via Manali. Although state transport buses do not run on this route, it is fairly popular among adventure and off-roading enthusiasts. Rohtang Pass is open from June till October, as there is a chance of the roads being snowed in throughout winter. On this route, you will also have to cross the mighty Kunzum Pass at 4,551 m that serves as a connection between the twin valleys of Lahaul and Spiti.

Nearest airport: Bhuntar (Kullu)

Nearest rail head: Chandigarh

architecture! He explained that each house and monastery painted an image of a deity and resembled a face (with the square windows as eyes and the doors offering a warm, protective embrace of shelter). Although, I was journeying into, what many describe as one of the hardest habitable terrains, I realised my confidence had been boosted by the warmth of the locals. From children in school uniforms to monks in magenta robes, everyone was welcoming and offered guidance. After a six-hour bus journey, I decided to halt for the night at a small village called Nako. A cluster of traditional Tibetan mud houses built around a lake overlooking the eponymous monastery, Nako was a delight. Although Nako offers every comfort a traveller needs, it has an air of timelessness about it. In Nako, I made the first friends in the valley, friends who stay in touch even today!

Early next morning I started for Kaza, the administrative centre of Spiti, to experience life as it is in the valley, I

decided to squeeze myself into a local supply truck that would stop at every village on its way to Kaza. On my way, I made pitstops at Chango and Sumdo, where our entourage stopped for some snacks and exchanged anecdotes with personnel from the CAPF battalions posted there. As the truck halted at monasteries, monks came over to collect supplies and struck up warm conversations with me, which gave me an insight into their simple lives. The 1,000-year-old monastery in Tabo was a sight to behold. Unlike the imposing monasteries elsewhere, the Tabo Gompa offers a humble perspective into Buddhism with its low-rise temples. The main prayer and assembly halls at the

Bottom left: A small bridge that connects the village of Tailing with main road through Pin Valley National park (Photo by: Vinayak S.)

Below: The milky way as seen aligned with the Buddha statue in Langza, a quaint village nestled in the upper reaches of Spiti Valley



TRAVEL



Top: A young ibex photographed in the arid regions around Pin Valley national park

Below: The Post Office in Hikkim. Situated at 14567 ft, it is the highest functional PO in the world

monastery are devoid of any artificial light and the sun-lit interiors add to the mystique of the simple construction dating back to AD 996.

I arrived at Kaza at 8 PM and headed to Moustache hostel, which was my home for the next week. There, I met Rohit, the smiling proprietor from Lahaul. Consistent with the local sentiment, he offered me a special tea made from seabuckthorn, a berry indigenous to the region, that was a welcome relief. As I sat down to a hot dinner, I realised that this journey through one of the highest cold deserts in the world while battling a fickle climate may be extremely challenging, but the joys were unparalleled -- of sipping warm tea while being wrapped in a cosy blanket at 3,800 m above sea

level, laughing aloud with a group of people who I had not known a week ago, but who had accepted me for who I was and had opened up their hearts and homes to me. The next day, I opened my eyes to a bright morning with the massive peaks of Spiti valley staring down upon me. There was an air of activity throughout the hostel as everyone wanted to head out and visit the maximum number of tourists spots to make the most of the near perfect weather. I settled on a different approach, with a steaming cup of Seabuckthorn tea in hand, I headed to the terrace where I enjoyed a light breakfast and was later joined by Rohit, the proprietor with whom I now share a strong bond of friendship. He interrupted my





Right: The picturesque view of the Key Gumpa Monastery (4166 m) at sunset

Below: A shot of the famous Chandrataal lake in the summers capturing the unimaginable beauty of the landscape

Unlike the imposing monasteries elsewhere, the Tabo Gumpa offers a humble perspective into Buddhism with its low-rise temples.

explanation for some quiet time and suggested that I visit the Pin Valley National Park, some 70km away and graciously offered me his '72 Enfield for the day.

Kicking the 50-year-old beast to life, I eased into gear and started on what was to be my life's most beautiful ride. Pin Valley, with its majestic peaks that unlike Spiti's were covered with multi-coloured flowers, came as a pleasant surprise. The motarable road ran on till the village of Mudh where I parked the bike and proceeded onward towards the Pin-Bhaba pass on foot to test my fitness.

Although, the rarefied air at 4000m had me gasping for breath in less than an hour, I did chance upon the majestic Himalayan Ibex, a rare breed of horned alpine goats

indigenous to the region. Alas, all I could do was click a picture as it stared curiously at me before galloping up the steep slopes of the surrounding mountains.

On my way back, I crossed Kaza and proceeded onward to the village of Hikkim. Situated around 25km from Kaza, Hikkim is home to the highest post-office in the world at 15,000ft.

As someone who has always been a fan of sending and receiving letters, this trip was nothing short of a pilgrimage. It might not seem much, the tiny post office, but this was Hikkim's connection to the world, it was here that the people received their passports and children their admission cards for various examinations. A 'runner' would take the day's post in an



What to see



Pin Valley National Park

Situated amongst soaring peaks, the Pin Valley National Park is home to wide variety of flora and fauna and offers a welcome relief from the arid landscapes of Spiti. A motorable road runs till the village of Mudh, at the periphery of the park.

Distance from Kaza: 49 km



Ki Monastery

Ki Gompa as it is locally called, is the largest monastery in Spiti and is built around a conical hillock. Due to the unique construction, the entire settlement appears to be more like a reinforced fort. The Gompa is home to almost 350 monks and students.

Distance from Kaza: 16 km



Chandartal Lake

Situated at 4,270 m, this glacial lake lies on the road from Manali to Kaza and offers spectacular views of the surrounding peaks along with mirror-perfect reflections in the crystal clear water. Camp for the night in the open for a mesmeric experience under a star-lit sky. There is also a 10-12km hike that takes you to the lake.

Distance from Kaza: 85 km



Left: School children enjoying a light moment near the Kungri Gompa in Pin Valley (Photo by: Vinayak S.)

Bottom: Entrance to the Tabo Gompa (monastery) - 1000 year old monastery in near Kaza in Spiti Valley

You can visit the iconic Langza village that boasts a massive statue of Lord Buddha or the small settlement at Hikim, the world's highest post office



Right: At 14200ft above mean sea level, Kibber is one of the highest continuously inhabited villages in Asia

Below: The road leading away from Mudh Village in the Pin Valley National Park. Mudh, like most villages in the remote trans-Himalayan region, is an oasis of irrigated green fields in a stark rocky mountainscape



short distances, the many 'short' one hour walks that enable the people and the culture to stay connected (however remotely) and live on.

The following day, I opted to hire a scooter for exploring Spiti. My first stop was Ki Gompa, one of the largest monasteries in Spiti valley and as I stepped into the prayer hall, the cosy interiors coupled with the rhythmic chants immediately calmed me. The monks at Ki opened an ancient meditation room for me. Illuminated only with the sunlight from small windows, these meditation rooms make for the perfect setting to explore one's soul.

When I had started this trip, I had wondered if I would have a good story to tell, but sitting at Rohit's ancient albeit massive dining table that night, I realised all I needed for a story was to look up and there it was; a lifetime of travel-tales!

hour to Kaza from where it would then be shipped off to Peo and onward to its destination via Shimla.

As I started down the steep, winding road to Kaza, it was already dusk and the same peaks that had proudly looked down upon the valley now seemed slightly exhausted of resolutely guarding this beautiful valley from all sides. It was here, on this narrow albeit well-maintained road, with the arid mountain-scape illuminated by the bright pink rays of the setting sun, that I realised the importance of these



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

A JOURNEY OF Light

In the age of start-ups, societal issues directly impacting development in rural India are now being tackled with clean-tech start ups from around the country

BY ISHITA GOEL

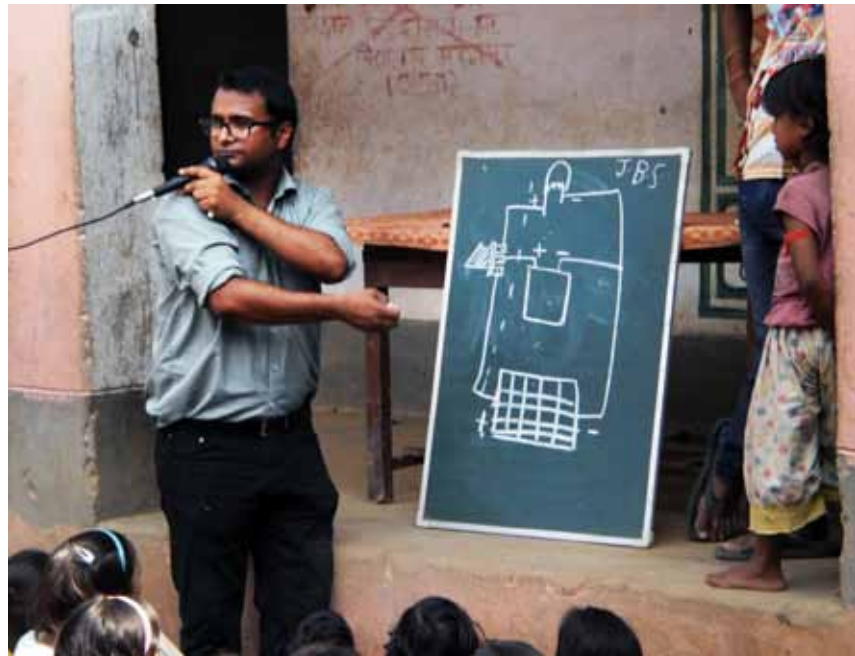


Above (left to right): Young innovators attending a workshop on solar lamps conducted by LEDsafari

In a small school tucked away in Bihar, the ringing of a bell announces the beginning of classes. As students scramble to the classroom, you can see them carrying used tin cans, cracked glass jars, wires of all sorts and a motley of reusables. At the teacher's call for silence, they squeeze against each other and excitedly set to work, expertly assembling their reusable materials, like lego blocks, to make solar lamps.

This scene, set in a far-flung, unelectrified village in the state of Bihar, is hard to believe. Yet, the children proudly present their lamps to the pedagogue, thrilled that they get to take it home.

"This is what we aim to do at LED Safari Innovation - decentralise solar energy and make technology accessible to all corners of the world by innovatively breaking it down to the simplest form of tin cans and wires, which can be assembled even by children," explains Govinda Upadhyay, Founder & CEO of the clean-tech social start-up. "The name has been borrowed from Swahili language (spoken in East Africa) and means a journey of light. We teach people how to create their own source of light, then they teach it to others - this way, the whole world gets illuminated and empowered."



LIGHTING DARK CORNERS

Hailing from Madanpur, a small village in Arah district of Bihar, that was unelectrified at the time he was growing up, Upadhyay realised the importance of energy early on. "It was clear to me that, if we want to bring clean energy, it has to be a bottom-up approach where technology needs to be democratised. This way, we can bring a change at the village level," says the sustainable energy expert, who featured in the Forbes 30 under 30 in 2016.

Above: Govinda Upadhyay giving a training session in Madanpur Village, Bihar, on a DIY solar lamp

Govinda Upadhyay has been merited Asia 21 Young Leaders 2016, Asia-Pacific's foremost network of diverse change-makers who are dedicated to making the world better

Going 'Sun Smart'



LEDsafari's new venture, SmartHelio is committed to the idea of bringing "light without heat", by accelerating the adoption of sustainable energy. With smart solutions, it is working towards channelling the free and unlimited resource of sunlight into viable energy sources.

"With this goal, I started LEDsafari Innovation, with multi-level missions of training the locals in the usage of clean energy, thereby generating employment and using technology to fight climate change," adds Upadhyay.

REACHING THE REMOTEST

With a global shift towards reducing carbon footprints, India is at the forefront, aiming for 175 GW Renewable Energy by 2022, as PM Narendra Modi reminded the world at the 2019 United Nations Climate Action Summit in New York.

The likes of Tata Power and Rockefeller Foundation are investing heavily in this burgeoning space and have announced that they will provide clean power to nearly 5 million households, by setting up

10,000 renewable micro-grids. In such a scenario, the role of LEDsafari Innovation becomes instrumental.

"The biggest problem with the effectiveness of micro-grids or other solar assets in remote areas is monitoring them, which is very expensive and cumbersome," says Upadhyay. "There is an immediate need to integrate these grids with solutions powered by Artificial Intelligence and IoT (Internet of Things), so the lifespan of the solar assets can be increased."

For this purpose, LEDsafari has developed an AI-enabled hardware device, HelioHealth sensor, a cost-effective solution that helps monitor solar rooftops and mini/micro-grids responsible for clean energy power supply; tracks output from solar panels; reports remotely to maintenance



Above (left to right): Proud children posing with their solar lamps made using discarded everyday materials like bottles and jars.

Left to right (clockwise):

Upadhyay confers prizes to the top students at a training workshop in Bihar

Upadhyay conducting a similar training session in Rwanda

A solar lantern made using an old plastic bottle in a Rwandan refugee camp

Upadhyay, after a successful training session in Kenya



involved in training local youth to effectively maintain microgrids and solar panels. “Locals are the key users of our technology, who can be trained as micro-entrepreneurs to maintain the electrification process in a sustainable manner.”

“Foremost, we identify locations where there is little access to clean energy and lesser jobs. We train people on how technology can be utilised to improve their livelihood. This can range from teaching them how to design a battery system to helping them learn how solar energy can be harnessed and utilised in solar panels, bulbs, lamps, etc. This way we help build up the economic activities of the area.”

With an eclectic team of nationals from across the world, all of whom are committed to utilising technology for a greener future, LEDsafari Innovation is paving the way for integrated and comprehensive solutions that will give future generations a fighting chance against the dominoes of climate change.

service providers; analyses the data, and makes recommendations when corrective action is needed, improving the output by 20 per cent.

WORKING IN REFUGEE CAMPS

Upadhyay’s work has taken him to many war-torn and refugee areas in Africa and South America. “At nights, it is quite dangerous for women and children to step out without light. They really need affordable solutions. When you train them to build it themselves, you can see an immediate change. They feel empowered!”

GENERATING EMPLOYMENT

LEDsafari Innovation, has been actively

“PEOPLE REALLY NEED AFFORDABLE SOLUTIONS AND WHEN YOU TRAIN THEM TO BUILD IT THEMSELVES, THEY HIGHLY APPRECIATE IT AND YOU CAN SEE AN IMMEDIATE CHANGE. THEY FEEL EMPOWERED!”

Govinda Upadhyay

Founder and CEO, LEDsafari Innovation



Ishita Goel is a New Delhi-based journalist. After a brief stint with the Indian Express, she has been actively writing on disciplines across Indian heritage and current affairs

DANCING THROUGH the ages

For Malaysian dance maestro Ramli Ibrahim, dance is an evolutionary process. Trained in contemporary dance forms like ballet, the Padma Shri awardee's contemporary renditions of classical Indian forms are perfect examples of modernity in traditions

BY SHRABASTI MALLIK



Malaysian dancers Ramli Ibrahim and January Low performing Odissi dance during the opening of the International Dance Festival in New Delhi

Traditions are to be studied, practiced and preserved through relevant adaptations and enhancements. Specially with India, where there are layers of traditions, customs and art forms that can be drawn upon whenever the need arises. A reason why, artistes and thinkers from across the world have been inspired by and adopted Indian traditional practices. On the global stage, India's cultural wealth has often been associated with the ever-evolutionary traditions and an artistic heritage that has only grown with time.

An apt example of such collaborations can be readily seen in the classical dance forms. Through the years, there have been several dance legends who have not been born in India but have trained in Indian dance forms and given them their unique

spin. While some have retained the pure classical essence, others have experimented with modern concepts and taken the dance forms to greater heights.

One such artiste is Malaysian, Datuk Ramli Ibrahim, who was conferred the Padma Shri in 2018 for his contributions to Odissi, a genre of performance art, where the performers and musicians play out a mythical story from ancient Indian texts. A dedicated Odissi performer and choreographer, Ibrahim, over the past three decades, has been pushing the boundaries of the dance form, experimenting with productions, incorporating contemporary sensibilities to appeal to today's cosmopolitan audiences. Also trained in ballet, Ibrahim's contemporary explorations have helped make Odissi even more relevant today on a global stage.

Innovators of Indian classical dances, like Rukmini Devi, Mrinalini Sarabhai and Kumudini Lakhia were modernists, who functioned within the fold of tradition and contributed to its evolution

The modernists of yore

Rukmini Devi

With numerous reforms to her credit in Bharatanatyam, Rukmini Devi gave special attention to the music accompaniment, the choice of songs, costumes and stage presentation. As a composer of dance and dramas, she established Kalakshetra in 1936 for revival of Indian arts.



Mrinalini Sarabhai

A renowned Indian classical dancer and one of the first contemporary choreographers, Sarabhai was known for experiments with classical dance forms. She was trained in Bharatanatyam, Mohiniyattam, Kuchipudi and Kathakali, being one of the first women to perform this dance.



Kumudini Lakhia

Her choreographic works tried to achieve a synthesis of traditional techniques and modern themes. These choreographies are now considered classic, and many of the innovations she premiered in them have become ingrained in Kathak performances.



DANCE



Right: Ibrahim with his students at the Sutra Dance Academy in Malaysia

Bottom: Ibrahim conducting a workshop for children at the Worli school in Mumbai



fabric as Ibrahim went on to study Bharatanatyam under noted practitioner Adyar K Lakshman. “Insights on both ballet and western modern dance were influential markers that helped guide me. All these were concurrent with my growing appreciation of western contemporary and classical music, as well as my exposure to philosophy, myths and theatre forms as living contemporary art expressions.”

But Ibrahim continued his search, ultimately discovering his passion for Odissi. “I knew that learning and performing Indian classical forms can be challenging and requires life-long dedication. I had to try even harder as I was not from India,” he says.

Ibrahim chose to follow legendary Odissi guru Deba Prasad Das, who was closely associated with introducing Odissi to the world. “We didn’t know history was being created. We were just doing what we loved

Says Ibrahim, “My journey with dance started as a student with ballet. I was studying engineering in Australia when I discovered the power of movement and I followed this as my destiny. I joined the Sydney Dance Company. But I was also very interested in Asian civilisation, their history and mythologies. This drew me to India and its traditions.”

Being a part of a major ballet troupe did not define his creative



Mixing ballet and Odissi, Ibrahim's performances are a visual spectacle. The maestro during one of his contemporary renditions of Odissi in Malaysia

“ I ALWAYS FEEL THAT CONTEMPORARY ARTS REPRESENT THE FUTURE AND CONTEMPORISING PERFORMANCE ARTS WILL COME AS PART OF A NATURAL PROCESS. IT IS CONSIDERED AS A FUNCTION OF THE EVOLUTION OF THE DANCE FORM

Ramli Ibrahim

Artistic director, Sutra foundation

best. We were flowing with the events, which were taking us to our prescribed destinies. I guess we were merely engaged in doing what we passionately wanted to do,” says Ibrahim.

His background in ballet has enabled the Malaysian artiste to incorporate within his renditions, a new creative edge. Interestingly, while Ibrahim’s productions are based on Odissi and Bharatanatyam, he often addresses himself as

a contemporary dancer. “Many ‘traditional’ artistes and dance makers consider themselves simultaneously contemporaneous with their environment. They believe they are creating works which are contemporary to their milieu. Innovators of Indian classical dances, like Rukmini Devi, Mrinalini Sarabhai and Kumudini Lakhia were modernists, who functioned within the folds of tradition and contributed to the positive evolution of the tradition. I am also a modernist in this manner, especially in my approach to the presentation of my traditional works.”

Comparing the classical dance forms of Malaysia and India and their evolution, Ibrahim says, “Both Malaysia and India are increasingly redefining their contemporary modern dance

The temporal movement

Sutra Foundation

It was in 1983 when Ibrahim started the Sutra Dance Theatre. Bequeathing it to Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur he moved with a realisation that traditions across the world were rapidly evolving with time and that a centre for performance arts needs to be connected with the cutting edge burgeoning creativity that are taking place not only in India but with other dance centres. Over the years the Sutra Foundation has grown to become a resource centre with creative artistes, national and international, performing or interacting in workshops.

Dancing with destiny

In 2018, Ramli’s efforts transcended borders and he was awarded India’s highest civilian honour, the Padma Shri. The award only added to a growing list of international accolades. India’s foremost authority on performance arts, the Sangeet Natak Akademi, also recognised Ibrahim’s efforts and his contributions to Odissi which were instrumental in transforming the dance scenario in both countries.



President Ram Nath Kovind presenting the Padma Shri award to Datuk Ramli Ibrahim during the Civil Investiture Ceremony at Rashtrapati Bhawan



Ramli Ibrahim chose to follow legendary guru Deba Prasad Das, who was closely associated with introducing Odissi to the world and its contemporary revival

Above: Ibrahim often collaborates with Indian dance institutes. Here he is seen with the performers of 'Odissi on High', a production that showcased the collaboration between Malaysian Sutra Dance company and the Bhubaneswar-based Rudrakshya Foundation, founded by Guru Bichitrananda Swain, a veteran Odissi performer and choreographer

identities inspired by their Asian perspectives rather than Western sources. Also, Indian traditional dances are undergoing tremendous creative evolutions. They are now recognised as examples of how traditional dances can creatively thrive in modern society.”

As the dancer keeps merging the sensitivities of Odissi with contemporary presentation styles, re-imagining dance productions for a worldwide audience, we ask him about the source for his constant motivation. With the ever-present twinkle in his eyes and an effortless charm, the 66-year-old artiste remarks, “I guess it is not something I can pin point but is a force larger than myself that propels me to move forward. The needs of the hour and the necessities of others

always hold precedence. However, I have realised, the more I give, the more rewards I reap from life. My cup runneth over, so to speak..”

In today’s times, with artistes joining traditional schools of arts across the country as a conscious decision, it is highly probable that dance as an art form is being developed and propagated. Every new dancer offers the art form some new innovations, for example, fusions of various dance styles or experiments without damaging its traditional patterns and the age-old values associated with each dance form.



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

A TICKET TO TOKYO Olympics

Hope is high and so is the pressure to perform as the men's and women's Indian hockey teams qualify and get ready to shine in Tokyo next year

BY DHANRAJ PILLAY



It is common knowledge that India has won more Olympic gold medals in hockey than any other country! India has won eight gold medals in hockey in the history of Olympics, which is the highest in the world. While this may have happened decades ago, the country demands an encore and after many years, our players seem geared up to deliver. A glimpse of the same was witnessed at the qualifiers for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics that were held on November 1 and 2 in Bhubaneswar, Odisha, and saw India's men's and women's teams crush their respective opponents, Russia and USA. A clean victory for the men's team and an aggregate victory for the women's team has earned them a place in the Tokyo Olympics.

Though the men's team has felt the apprehension and exhilaration of a strong public focus in the last three to four years, the women's team, ranked ninth in the world, has gotten the lesser of the disproportionate share. However, their progress over the past two years has not left any doubt about their skill and strength. Add to this, the glittering win of the Asia Cup in 2017, runner-up at the Asian Games, an eighth spot at the World Cup and a win at the FIH Series Finals against Asiad winner Japan; the team is blazing a fast route to the Olympics.

There are a few in the women's team who deserve a special mention, including captain Rani Rampal. The young blood is performing very well and I am very sure they will shine in the 2020 Olympics.

Bottom (left to right): Indian women hockey players Navjot Kaur, Savita Punia, team captain Rani Rampal and Navneet Kaur after winning the final of the Women's Asia Cup Hockey Tournament against China; Rani Rampal during a workshop at the Khalsa Hockey Academy in Amritsar



The Indian government, over the last few years, has offered a lot of support and motivation to boost hockey in the country

SUCCESS

If the think tank - coaches, administrators, trainers- are able to draw out the best possible strategy and convert the maximum penalty corners, our girls and boys can relive Indian hockey's golden era.

The current Indian hockey fraternity has no shortage of talent or leadership. We have coaches like Graham Reid (men's team) and Sjoerd Marijne (women's team), who have successfully altered the mindset of players to be more aggressive and confident of their skills. We have had

Mandeep Singh, Indian hockey forward takes a shot during the final match of FIH Series Final

one of the best line-ups in the men's team right now. Manpreet Singh Pawar, the captain of India's men's national field hockey team, is a strong player. Sreejesh Parattu Raveendran, SV Sunil, Chinglensana Singh Kangujam, Amit Rohidas and Amit Gowda are all seasoned players. As far as this team is concerned, it has had good international exposure and very strong skillsets and I think we have an excellent chance at the Olympics. As we saw in the qualifiers, our boys made light work of their opponents Russia

and the Russian team's lack of turf action in the past few years was more than evident!

At the ground level too we are seeing more talented youngsters playing hockey.

The young blood is performing very well and I am very sure that they will do good in the 2020 Olympics





Top: Harmanpreet Singh (second from left) and Kumar Varun (far right) pose after winning Hero Top Score after the final match between India and South Africa

Bottom: Mandeep Singh (right) of India celebrates with his teammate after scoring a goal during the 2020 Olympic qualifiers



There was a phase when children who were sports-oriented would only aim for cricket. However, that scenario is changing and tide is turning for hockey again.

The Indian government, over the last few years, has offered a lot of support and motivation to boost hockey in the country. This is the reason we are seeing such positive results and can expect even better performances ahead. When the *Khelo India* campaign was launched, athletes got a fair opportunity, be it at the school or varsity level. Several policy changes have taken place and

infrastructure has been upgraded to facilitate the progress of athletes and the coaching staff as well.

For any game, a player has to be prepared in all spheres. I prepared myself for a game from the night before. You have to ensure that you take the right amount of water and nutrition to be able to play soundly on the field. One should also plan his/her strategy, how much risk has to be taken, etc. Once all is in perfect proportion, you will go forward with full confidence and perform very well. While there is a lot of pressure on both the men's and women's teams, specially now that the Olympic schedule has been declared (the women's team will open its campaign against world champions Netherlands while the world number 5 men's team will face New Zealand in its first match) hope remains strong that India will clinch medals.



Dharaj Pillay made his debut in 1989 with the national team. As captain, he led the squad to conquer the Asian Games of 1998 and 2003 and has been awarded the Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna and the Padma Shri.

INDIAN IMPRESSIONS

Know your country a little more with these interesting facts



NOTES OF DEVOTION

For the residents of **Sri Bhaini Sahib**, a village in Ludhiana, Punjab, the day begins and ends with music. However, what truly sets Bhaini Sahib apart is a unique tradition where every child is initiated into classical music from an early age. From vocal training to learning to play such traditional instruments as dilruba, sarangi, sitar, taar shehnai and rabab - music is a way of life here. Children in this village, along with going to school and enjoying games, never miss attending music classes.



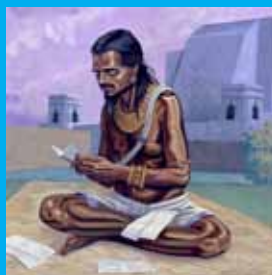
TAKING INITIATIVE

- The first general elections in India were conducted from October 25, 1951 to February 21, 1952. Over 75 million voted for 1949 candidates contesting for 489 seats in the Lok Sabha making it the largest electoral exercise at the time.
- The first Indian research team comprising of 21 members reached Antarctica on January 9, 1982. Led by the S Z Qasim, the director of the National Institute of Oceanography, the team set up the first Indian research station in Antarctica and named it Dakshin Gangotri.
- Sir Chandrasekhara Venkata Raman became the first Indian to win Nobel prize in Physics in 1930 for his path breaking work on the scattering of light called the '**Raman effect**'

A BEAUTIFUL MIND

Indian mathematician and astronomer **Aryabhata** was the first person to say that the Earth is spherical and revolves around the sun.

Brahmagupta, best known for his work on mathematical astronomy called *Brahmasphuta siddhanta*, hails from the Indian state of Rajasthan. He was the first to use zero as a number and even laid down the rules to compute with zero.



Born in 1939, **Shakuntala Devi** was a prodigy in mathematical calculations. By the time she was eight years old, she had demonstrated her skills at University of Mysore and Annamalai University. In 1980, she solved the multiplication of two 13-digit numbers (picked at random) in 28 seconds, which finds mention in the Guinness Book of Records.



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