

# INDIA PERSPECTIVES

Volume 35 | Issue 02 | 2021

## STROKES OF HERITAGE

Odisha's indigenous art of  
pattachitra

## TRAVELLING WITH THE BUDDHA

Buddhist linkages across  
Southeast Asia



## STRENGTHENING BONDS

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Bangladesh

## POTPOURRI



# 14

MAY, 2021

### ID-UL-FITR

One of the most important festivals in the Muslim calendar, Id-ul-Fitr, also called Eid al-Fitr, marks the end of Ramadan, the Muslim holy month of fasting. The day is celebrated by offering prayers, exchanging gifts and wishes, and donning new clothes. A special sweet dish called *sivayyan* (roasted vermicelli cooked in milk and garnished with dry fruits) is prepared on this occasion.

**WHERE:** Across the country

# 14-16

MAY, 2021



### DHUNGRI MELA

Held in the premises of the revered Hadimba Temple in Himachal Pradesh's picturesque town of Manali, the annual Dhungri Mela is celebrated to honour the birth of Goddess Hadimba. The three-day *mela* or fair features several stalls offering local delicacies and handcrafted products. The main attraction is the arrival of local deities, decked in ornate jewellery, from the surrounding villages in decorated palanquins.

**WHERE:** Manali, Himachal Pradesh

# 26

MAY, 2021

### BUDDHA PURNIMA

Celebrated on the full moon day of the Hindu month of Vaisakh (April/May), Buddha Purnima, also known as Buddha Jayanti and Vesak, marks the birth of Lord Gautama Buddha or the Enlightened One. Devotees visit temples, light candles and incense sticks, and offer prayers and sweets. Devotees also dress in white on this day.

**WHERE:** Across the country





21 JUNE, 2021

### INTERNATIONAL DAY OF YOGA

Observed annually by people across the country, and the globe, the International Day of Yoga (IDY) is a celebration of the ancient Indian practice of yoga that promotes not just physical but also psychological well being. Yoga camps, organised in various parts of the country, see participants from all walks of life. For the 7th edition of IDY in 2021, the Ministry of AYUSH, Government of India, had organised a 'Design the mascot for International Day of Yoga 2021' earlier this year.

**WHERE:** Across the country



21 JUNE, 2021

### HEMIS TSECHU

Touted to be one of the most vibrant festivals of Leh, the annual Hemis Tsechu or Hemis Festival marks the birth of Guru Padmasambhava, the Indian Buddhist mystic. It is held in the courtyard of the eponymous Hemis Monastery and features *cham* (masked dance) performances by monks who sway to the beats of drums and cymbals. The festival is popular among locals and tourists alike.

**WHERE:** Leh, Ladakh

24 JUNE, 2021

### CHAMPAKKULAM BOAT RACE

The oldest snake boat race in the state of Kerala, the Champakkulam Boat Race kick starts the annual boat racing season. This race is held in the waters of the Pampa river in Champakkulam (a village in the Alappuzha district) and sees participation of oarsmen - both seasoned and novice - from across the state. The boats are locally known as *chundan vallam*.

**WHERE:** Champakkulam, Alappuzha, Kerala



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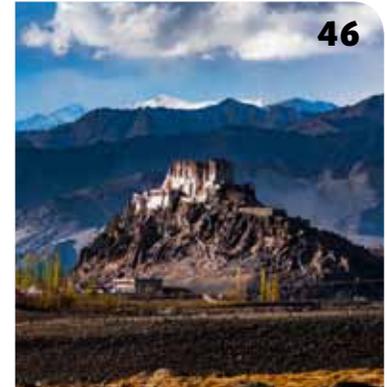
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# FOREWORD

In March 2021, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Bangladesh on the invitation of Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. The two-day visit (March 26-27), which marked PM Modi's first international visit since the onset of the pandemic in March 2020, coincided with Bangladesh's golden jubilee celebrations of independence; the birth centenary of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the iconic leader of Bangladesh's freedom struggle and the country's first Prime Minister; and 50 glorious years of India-Bangladesh diplomatic ties.

During the visit, PM Modi laid the foundation of a memorial dedicated to the martyrs of the Indian Armed Forces, who valiantly fought in Bangladesh's Liberation War in 1971, and inaugurated, along with Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina, a new train "Mitali Express" connecting Dhaka (capital of Bangladesh) and New Jalpaiguri (West Bengal, India) – reiterating India's close ties with the neighbouring nation. PM Modi also announced 1000 Shuborno Jayanti Scholarships for Bangladeshi students looking to pursue education/courses in India. In the partnership section of this issue, we cover the landmark visit of PM Modi to Bangladesh.

India has a glorious legacy of connecting with the world by sharing knowledge, philosophy, culture and traditions. The living embodiment of this legacy is reflected in the shared heritage of Buddhism. With Buddhist culture and philosophies having spread from ancient India across Asia, it forms a strong civilizational bond with several countries of South East Asia. In this issue, we explore the shared Buddhist heritage of India with South East Asian countries.

Also in focus in this issue are two very intriguing indigenous Indian traditions. In his recent radio addresses to the nation 'Mann ki Baat', PM Modi highlighted the heritage of Odisha's Pattachitra art form and Mon Shugu, about 1000-year-old paper-making technique of Arunachal Pradesh's Monpa tribal community. We delve into the intricacies of Pattachitra that is said to have begun with the establishment of the revered Jagannath temple in Puri and continues to be practiced traditionally even today in the small heritage village of Raghurajpur. We also look into the eco-friendly manufacturing process of the Mon Shugu paper, which is made from the bark of a local plant, thereby eliminating the need to cut trees.

Eco-friendly and sustainable products are the need of the hour. As we approach World Environment Day (June 5), we acknowledge the environment-friendly innovations of several Indian entrepreneurial ventures, who are redefining the term 'best from waste'. Their creative ideas are also furthering PM Modi's visions of Aatmanirbhar Bharat and Make in India.

These visions were also underlined in India's first toy fair that was launched by PM Modi in the virtual format. During the inauguration of the fair, PM Modi emphasised the role of Indian toys in the cognitive growth of a child and encouraged indigenous toy makers to keep alive their tradition. We throw light on some handmade Indian toys that not only entertain children but also reflect the local culture and tradition.

Equally distinguished and indigenous are Indian spices. Full of flavour and packed with numerous health benefits, they too are reflections of local customs. We bring you some of the lesser-known spices from the Indian subcontinent. Millets, like spices, are another integral part of any Indian kitchen. On the occasion of Year 2023 being declared as the International Year of Millets by the United Nations General Assembly, we bring forth the importance of millets in the Indian food chain, the regions where they are grown and the efforts of the Indian government in their promotion and cultivation.

In our persona section, we pay tribute to one of India's finest filmmakers Satyajit Ray. Bestowed with the Bharat Ratna and the Honorary Academy (Oscar) Award for Lifetime Achievement, Satyajit Ray was also a prolific author, illustrator, and musician.

Arindam Bagchi



# India-Bangladesh

## 50 YEARS OF FRIENDSHIP

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's two-day visit to Bangladesh in March 2021, coincided with the latter's golden jubilee celebration of independence, birth centenary celebration of the iconic leader of Bangladesh Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, as well as 50 glorious years of India-Bangladesh diplomatic ties



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi being welcomed by his Bangladesh counterpart Sheikh Hasina on his arrival to Dhaka on March 26, 2021

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently visited Bangladesh at the invitation of the neighbouring country's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

The main focus of the visit, apart from reiterating the strong bond – cultural and historical – that ties the two nations together, was the golden jubilee celebrations of Bangladesh's independence or liberation along with the birth centenary of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the iconic leader of Bangladesh's freedom struggle and the country's first Prime Minister.

The two-day visit (March 26-27), which marked the first international visit of Prime Minister Modi since

**“ WITH GROWING INCOME AND PROSPERITY, BANGLADESH IS PROGRESSIVELY REALISING THE DREAM OF BANGABANDHU, UNDER THE ABLE LEADERSHIP OF PRIME MINISTER SHEIKH HASINA. IT IS TIME TO ONCE AGAIN CHART A BOLD AMBITION FOR OUR PARTNERSHIP, AS BANGABANDHU WOULD HAVE DONE. WITH THE SPIRIT AND ENTERPRISE OF OUR PEOPLE AS OUR BHAGYA VIDHATA, THE DISPENSER OF OUR SHARED DESTINY, SUCH A FUTURE IS CLOSER THAN EVER. ”**

**Narendra Modi**  
Prime Minister of India



A cultural performance by noted Indian classical vocalist and Padma Bhushan recipient Pt Ajoy Chakraborty (centre) during the celebrations that marked 50 years of Bangladesh's independence and the birth centenary of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman

## PARTNERSHIP

**Right:** Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi offered prayers at the revered Jeshoreshwari Kali Shaktipeeth in Satkhira, Bangladesh, during his two-day visit to Bangladesh;

**Below:** Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi pays tribute at the National Martyr's Memorial, situated near Dhaka, Bangladesh



the onset of the pandemic in March 2020, also coincided with the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between two countries. Prime Minister Modi was the chief guest of the festivities which featured several cultural events.

Overall, the visit was a celebration of the special bond between the two countries while setting a new agenda for the

multifaceted bilateral cooperation for the times ahead.

In a bid to commemorate the shared history between two neighbouring countries and honour the martyrs of the Indian Armed Forces, who valiantly fought in Bangladesh's Liberation War in 1971, a memorial is being constructed at Ashuganj in Bramhanbaria, Bangladesh. The foundation stone of the memorial was laid during Prime Minister Modi's visit.

Improving connectivity and re-establishing old linkages that have been eroded by the passage of time were discussed as a priority area of bilateral cooperation during the visit. Both countries announced the decision to



**Above:** Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi (extreme left) and his Bangladesh counterpart Sheikh Hasina (centre) jointly inaugurated a digital exhibition on Bapu (Mahatma Gandhi) and Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman

**Below:** PM Modi planted a sapling of an arjuna tree at the National Martyrs' Memorial to commemorate the sacrifices of Bangladesh's martyrs



**“ IN A SPIRIT OF GOOD NEIGHBOURLINESS, WE HAVE RESOLVED COMPLEX ISSUES AMICABLY. OUR LAND AND MARITIME BOUNDARIES STAND SETTLED. WE HAVE SUBSTANTIAL COOPERATION COVERING ALMOST ALL ASPECTS OF HUMAN ENDEAVOUR. OUR TRADE HAS REACHED HISTORIC LEVELS, AIDING ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES IN EACH OTHER'S COUNTRIES. OUR PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE EXCHANGES REMAIN ROBUST AS EVER.”**

**“ INDIA WILL REMAIN BANGLADESH'S PARTNER AS WE JOINTLY MARCH TOWARDS THE GOLDEN FUTURE FOR WHICH BANGABANDHU, AND MILLIONS OF PATRIOTIC BANGLADESHIS, AND INDEED THOUSANDS OF INDIANS, GAVE THEIR ALL.”**

**Narendra Modi**  
Prime Minister of India

## PARTNERSHIP

“THE TWO SIDES HAD ACKNOWLEDGED THE POTENTIAL OF NEW AND EMERGING AREAS OF COOPERATION IN BILATERAL COOPERATION AND DIRECTED AUTHORITIES ON BOTH SIDES TO FOCUS ON AND AUGMENT COOPERATION IN CUTTING EDGE AREAS OF SCIENCE, ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE, PEACEFUL USES OF NUCLEAR TECHNOLOGY, BIG DATA, AND TECHNOLOGY-ENABLED SERVICES IN HEALTH AND EDUCATION.”

Joint Statement



**Left:** PM Modi and Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina at their bilateral talks

**Bottom:** PM Modi (centre) paid tribute at the Mausoleum of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in Tungipara, along with Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina (right)



connect the historic stretch of road between the town of Mujibnagar (Bangladesh) and the district of Nadia (West Bengal, India) and named it “Shadhinota Shorok”. The visit also witnessed the inauguration of a new train service named “Mitali Express” connecting Dhaka (capital of Bangladesh) and New Jalpaiguri (West Bengal, India) to further strengthen people-to-people contacts between two countries. During the visit, Prime Minister Modi also inaugurated Bangabandhu-Bapu Museum at the Bangabandhu International Conference Centre in Dhaka, along with his Bangladesh counterpart Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

As a result of similar language



**Top:** During his visit, PM Modi met with political leaders from Bangladesh to discuss diverse issues of India-Bangladesh bilateral relations;

**Above:** PM Modi presents the Gandhi Peace Prize, which has been conferred on Bangabandhu, to Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina (second from left) and Sheikh Rehana

and culture, and a shared history, the bilateral ties between India and Bangladesh are deeply rooted in people-to-people contacts and not just restricted to the boundaries of strategic consideration. During the visit, Prime Minister Modi stressed on deepening engagement among the youths of both countries. Some of the key initiatives to expand engagement with the youth included India's 'Swarna Jayanti Scholarships' for the youth of

Bangladesh for studying in India. A Memorandum of Understanding was also signed between Bangladesh National Cadet Corps and National Cadet Corps of India to increase interaction among youth of both countries.

For India's Act East policy, which aims at establishing better connectivity with ASEAN region and other countries of the Indo-Pacific, Bangladesh has emerged as a steadfast pillar. Guided by the shared past while keeping an eye on the future, the trajectory of bilateral ties between the two neighbours points upwards with mutual trust and amalgamation of strategic and economic priorities. Prime Minister Modi's successful visit to Bangladesh further strengthened this relationship that will aid South Asian cooperation for the greater goal of development and prosperity of the people of the region.



Young Buddhist monks in a pagoda in Myanmar

# Buddhism

## A SHARED CULTURE

With Buddhist culture and philosophies having spread from ancient India across Asia, a strong bond has been formed with Southeast Asian countries. Benoy K Behl explores the Buddhist heritage of the region and its contemporary relevance

A significant milestone in the process of man's evolution is the spread of ideas and thoughts across geographical and political boundaries. One of the greatest examples of this is the spread of Buddhism from the Indian subcontinent to countries of Southeast Asia.

The concepts *samsara*, *maya* and *mithya*, and the illusory nature of the material world, were crystallised in the Upanishads by the 8th or 9th centuries BC. The high purpose in life was to be able to see the eternal truth beyond the veils of illusion. Ones who were able to achieve this were known as 'Buddhas' or the Enlightened Ones and 'Tirthankaras' or Victors over the Fear of Death.



Image: Benoy K Behl



**Above:** The earliest representations of deity Saraswati in Indian art are seen in the Bharhut Stupa railings of Madhya Pradesh (as seen here) and in the railings of the contemporaneous Jain stupa at Kankali Tila, near Mathura, in Uttar Pradesh. Deity Saraswati continues to be one of the most popular deities in Buddhist temples across Asia

**Left:** The Mahabodhi Temple in Bodhgaya, Bihar, India. This is where, under the Bodhi tree, Lord Buddha attained enlightenment

## PARTNERSHIP

Image: Benoy K Behl



An 11-headed Avalokitesvara, at Cave 41, Kanheri Caves, Maharashtra, dating to the 6th century CE. This is the earliest-surviving representation of this deity

Maharashtra alone has more than 800 rock-cut Buddhist caves, each one of them a remarkable achievement, carved out of the hard rock of the Western Ghat mountains. The first Buddhist mandala of the world is located in Kanheri caves, on the outskirts of Mumbai. The earliest depiction of the 11-headed Avalokitesvara is also in the same caves. These depictions from the 5th-6th centuries are the earliest such depictions in the world.

There are more than 100 ancient and important Buddhist sites in Andhra Pradesh as well. The oldest Buddhist cave of the world, dating back to the 3rd century, is located at Guntupalli in Andhra Pradesh and new finds of Buddhist art are taking place in the state even today. The world's most important Buddhist heritage sites are located in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. Buddhist sites have been found in Gujarat, Odisha, Chhattisgarh and Tripura too.



**Above:** The temple town of Bagan in Myanmar boasts thousands of Buddhist temples decorated with intricate paintings and sculptures. Here, a Buddhist temple in Bagan

**Left:** The highlights of the Kyaik Pun Paya temple located in Bago, a city in Myanmar, are the four 100-ft-high sitting statues of Lord Buddha placed back to back

Over the following 2,000 years, this philosophy spread in the continent to present-day countries like Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, Indonesia, Nepal, Bhutan, Afghanistan, Tibet, Korea and Japan. The Northern-most frontiers to which this philosophic view travelled were Buryatia in Siberia and Mongolia. When scholars from across Asia came to study in ancient Indian universities at Nalanda and Takshashila, they took home with them Buddhist teachings, texts and

relics. Thus, Buddhism flourished across Asia and even today, finds a place of prominence in this region.

### MYANMAR

Myanmar was a crucible of Buddhist influences and art over the centuries. At the end of the First Millennium, Myanmar had a deep relationship with the centre of Buddhist faith at Bodhgaya in Bihar, India. In fact, the architectural form of the Mahabodhi Temple at Bodhgaya is followed by the 11th-12th century temples of

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## When scholars from across Asia came to study in ancient Indian universities at Nalanda and Takshashila, they took home with them Buddhist teachings, texts and relics, thus propagating Buddhism

Bagan, a temple town in Myanmar.

By the 12th and 13th centuries, with the fall of Buddhist centres in the plains of India, scholars and artists from India took refuge in the spiritual sanctuary of Myanmar. Bagan became a hub with thousands of Buddhist temples decorated with intricate paintings and sculptures. The 12th century paintings on the inner walls of the temples in Bagan revolve around the life of Gautama

Buddha and the Jataka stories.

In Yangon, the capital of Myanmar, stands the grand Shwedagon Pagoda. It is the most sacred Buddhist temple in Myanmar and is believed to enshrine the relics of the past four Buddhas. Whether it is the architectural style of the temples of Bagan or the paintings inside them, the Buddhist heritage of Myanmar very closely reflects the Buddhist heritage of India.

The beautiful Shwedagon Pagoda in Myanmar, which enshrines strands of Lord Buddha's hair and other holy relics



## PARTNERSHIP

### VIETNAM

In October 2018, an important facet was discovered of the lesser-known cultural connections between India and Vietnam. The journey through Vietnam of Bodhidharma, an important Indian Buddhist teacher had not been known to previous historians. Bodhidharma is said to be the founder of Chan Buddhism in China (Dhyana in Sanskrit), which is known as Zen Buddhism in Japan. Besides its influence in China, Chan/Zen Buddhism is believed to have been of great importance in forming the culture of discipline and national character of the Japanese. Bodhidharma travelled from India to China and spent time there in the

5th-6th century. However, the route Bodhidharma took to travel from India to China, is shrouded in darkness. It is generally believed that he must have taken the Silk Route.

However, a temple dedicated to Bodhidharma in Da Lat, Vietnam, throws some light on this mystery. There are numerous shrines dedicated to Bodhidharma in Vietnam, where he is revered as Bo-de-dat-ma. Buddhist traditions of Vietnam also believe that the great teacher arrived in Vietnam and went on to China.

**Below:** Linh Phuoc pagoda at Da Lat City, Lam Dong province, Vietnam

**Bottom:** A statue of Lord Buddha located at a pagoda complex on Mount Fansipan in Sa Pa, a town in the Lao Cai Province of Vietnam





The Borobudur stupa in Central Java, Indonesia

There was a constant movement of Buddhist scholars along the sea routes of Southeast Asia and Bodhidharma could have landed on mainland Asia in the erstwhile Champa kingdom of Vietnam, proof of which are the Hindu and Buddhist temples dotting south and central Vietnam.

### **INDONESIA**

Since ancient times, ships carried goods between India, Indonesia and China. Archaeological remains in Indonesia have confirmed close interactions with India from over 2,000 years ago.

In the First Millennium, Chinese pilgrims travelled by sea and land to holy Buddhist sites in India. When they used the sea route, they spent much time at the bustling ports of Indonesia, mentions of which are found in their writings. Hinduism existed in Indonesia in early times and Buddhism flourished from the 7th century onwards. Even today, the Indian epic Ramayana is the most important cultural tradition

of Indonesia. Scholars say it may have arrived in Indonesia around the 5th century.

In the 8th and 9th centuries, magnificent Buddhist monuments were constructed in Java, Indonesia. The Borobudur stupa in Central Java, one of the world's most magnificent Buddhist monuments, was built by the Shailendra kings in this period.

The Borobudur stupa beautifully explains the concepts of Buddhist philosophy. Featuring several thousand feet of intricate relief work, the stupa is planned like a mandala, which provides a graded path for ascent towards the final truth. Mandalas began to appear in Buddhist art from the 5th century, as can be seen in the Buddhist caves of Kanheri in Maharashtra, India. The Borobudur stupa demonstrates the most clear and beautiful continuation of ancient Buddhist philosophy from India.

### **THAILAND**

From the 13th to the mid-14th centuries, one of the greatest

There are numerous shrines dedicated to Bodhidharma in Vietnam, where he is revered as Bo-de-dat-ma. Buddhist traditions of Vietnam also believe that Bodhidharma arrived in Vietnam and went on to China



Buddhist centres developed at Sukhothai, Thailand. Some of the most graceful Buddhist art was created here in a style which is famous till today. Monasteries of that period were perhaps made of wood and have, therefore, not survived. What has continued, however, is the art of creating elegant and beautiful Buddha images. The lines of the Sukhothai Buddha figures have a vivid life of their own. The surfaces are smooth and gently curving, and the peaceful expressions of the Buddha are sublime.

In the mid-14th century, King U Thong of Thailand founded a new capital, around 85 km north of present-day Bangkok. It was named Ayutthaya, after the city of Ayodhya, the birth place of Lord Rama, in India. Amidst the ruins of Ayutthaya survive many impressive monasteries, which show the glorious Buddhist heritage of this region.

The temples of Thailand have numerous depictions of Garuda, Hindu deity Lord Vishnu's mount. Garuda has been a royal symbol in Thailand since early times. It might be mentioned here that there is a

The beautiful and ornate multi-coloured stupas at Wat Pho in Bangkok, Thailand



Garuda *dhwaja* (or regal flag on a staff) in the Bharhut Buddhist stupa railings. Golden-winged Garudas also feature prominently in many Buddhist monasteries of the 11th and 13th centuries, across western Tibet, and Ladakh, Lahaul-Spiti and Kinnaur in India.

The temple complex of the Reclining Buddha, the Wat Pho, is one of the most popular holy sites in Bangkok dating back to the 17th century. The centre piece of the Wat Pho is an almost 165-ft-long statue of Lord Buddha in a reclining position. The depiction is very similar to the artistic masterpiece of Lord Buddha's Parinirvana as seen in the Ajanta caves, Maharashtra. This tradition of depicting the Lord began in India and continues till today across Asia.

The most famous of the Bangkok temples is the one dedicated to the

Emerald Buddha or Wat Phra Kaew. The temple was built between 1782 and 1784 during the reign of King Rama I. The interiors of the temple are covered with murals depicting scenes from Ramayana. In fact, most Buddhist temples of Thailand are profusely painted with scenes from the epic. Even today, the Ramayana, or Ramakien as it is locally referred to, is a popular cultural tradition here.

### CAMBODIA

Cambodia is another country that has a rich history of sacred art and

A statue of Lord Buddha at the Wat Mahathat Temple in Ayutthaya, Thailand

**The Borobudur stupa in Central Java, one of the world's most magnificent Buddhist monuments, was built by the Shailendra kings in the 8th and 9th centuries**

## PARTNERSHIP



**Top:** A row of Devas in a depiction of Samudra Manthan (an episode from Hindu mythology) at the South Gate of Angkor Thom complex in Cambodia

**Bottom:** A statue of Lord Buddha inside the temple of Wat Phnom, which is perched on the only hill in Cambodia's capital Phnom Penh

architecture. While the royal family of Cambodia primarily worshipped Hindu deities, significant amount of Buddhist art was also created. The Hindu and Buddhist sculptures of Cambodia, from the 6th to the 8th centuries, are unrivaled in their sheer beauty and excellence.

In the early 12th century, erstwhile King Suryavarman II of Cambodia built one of the largest Hindu temple complexes, the Angkor Wat. It was dedicated to deities Shiva, Brahma and Vishnu, and was later used by Buddhists. The temple has magnificent relief, especially the open corridor of the first storey that has more than a kilometre-and-half of such narrative carving.

In the 13th century, King Jayavarman VII built one of the largest Buddhist complexes of Cambodia in his capital Angkor Thom, around 150 km from Angkor Wat. The “face-towers” of Angkor Thom have become the universally-

recognised symbol for what is today known as the Angkor Archaeological Park, which includes Angkor Wat and Angkor Thom. The carvings of the smiling faces look in the four cardinal directions, symbolising the universal benevolence of the Bodhisattva Lokeshvara. The Bayon, at the centre of Angkor Thom, is the king's own





sacred temple-mountain. It is one of the most magnificent monuments of Buddhism in the world.

## LAOS

In the centre of the peninsula of Southeast Asia is located the country of Laos. The people here are deeply spiritual and Theravada Buddhism is the basis of their culture. Monks, or those who have renounced the material comforts of life, are deeply venerated and receive regular alms, in keeping with the ancient tradition from the time of Lord Buddha in India. Laos has almost 5,000 Buddhist temples. Most men in Laos live, for some part of their lives, in monasteries to imbibe Buddhist ethics and a compassionate vision of the world. This is also reminiscent of the '*Brahmacharya ashram*' (ascetic period of life) of ancient India.

The golden That Luang Stupa is



a national symbol of Laos. Originally built in 1566, the stupa is 148 ft high and is believed to contain a holy relic of Gautama Buddha.

With Lord Buddha having spent most of his life teaching his philosophies in India, the country is known as the cradle of Buddhism. Though Buddhism declined in India after the 11th and 12th centuries, it

**Top:** The Bayon Temple in Cambodia

**Above:** Ancient stone faces of Bayon temple, Angkor, Cambodia. The faces are of the Bodhisattava Lokeshvara

### Though Buddhism declined in India after the 5th and 6th centuries, it flourished in neighbouring countries and has created deep cultural and historical bonds

flourished in neighbouring countries and has created deep cultural and civilisational bonds.

Buddhism is once again making a comeback and its growing popularity is linked to the peaceful nature of its philosophy and to its geographic spread over Southeast Asia, with around 98 per cent of the world's Buddhist population concentrated in the Asia-Pacific region. The shared heritage of Buddhism connects India beyond Southeast Asia as well,

with countries like Japan, Korea and even China.

Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Buddhism has been playing a prominent role in fostering a deeper engagement with ASEAN countries (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) as a part of India's 'Look East' and 'Act East' policies. In his keynote speech at the 2018 Buddha Jayanti celebrations, PM Modi had emphasised the importance of Buddhist linkages to India's relations

The golden  
Pha That  
Luang stupa,  
Laos



Image: author



Image: Benoy K Behl



**Top:** A rock-cut relief sculpture inside Cave 26 of Ajanta Caves representing the moment when Lord Buddha attained salvation.

This theme became extremely popular across all the Asian countries

**Below:** A Mahaparinirvana sculpture of Lord Buddha at Pha That Luang stupa in Vientiane, Laos. The statue of the deity is similar in appearance to the relief sculpture in the Ajanta Caves

with other (predominantly Buddhist) countries in Asia.

Along with becoming a catalyst for building greater interaction within the Asian community, Buddhism has immense tourism potential as well. Several steps are being taken to restore India's Buddhist legacies and links with other Buddhist nations. In February this year, at the virtual 8th ASEAN-India Tourism Ministers meeting, Prahlad Singh Patel, Union Minister of State for Culture & Tourism, GOI,

stressed on India's historical and cultural links with ASEAN countries and mentioned that ASEAN is a crucial market for Buddhist tourism in India as it generates significant tourist traffic for the Buddhist Circuit. The Ministry of Tourism has invested in a major way to upgrade infrastructure in the circuit. It also organises the International Buddhist Conclave to create awareness about India's Buddhist heritage and increase foreign tourist traffic to Buddhist sites. Buddhism facilitated cultural and philosophical connections beyond the geographical borders in ancient India and it can be used to successfully face the challenges of contemporary time as well.



**Benoy K Behl** is a filmmaker, art historian and photographer known for his prolific work over the past 45 years. He has taken over 53,000 photographs of Asian monuments and art heritage, and made 145 documentaries on Indian art and culture, including many for the XPD Division of the Ministry of External Affairs. These include the path-breaking film 'Indian Deities Worshipped in Japan'. His books on Buddhist subjects are published from London and Delhi. He is well-known for having documented the Buddhist heritage of the world, in 20 countries.

# REDUCE. REUSE. Recycle

The government, led by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has taken huge strides towards a clean environment and sustainable development. On the occasion of World Environment Day (June 5), we take a look at a few entrepreneurial ventures that are using waste material to make utility products and thus adding to the government's initiatives

BY SHRABASTI ANINDITA MALLIK



Ever since Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi took office in 2014, one of his aims has been to transform India into a cleaner nation. And to achieve the goal he had launched a number of schemes and initiatives, of which the most ambitious and successful is the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (Clean India Mission). Launched by PM Modi on October 2, 2014, on the occasion of Mahatma Gandhi's 145th birth anniversary, the mission came to fruition in 2019 when India was declared Open Defecation Free (ODF). The mission continues to

organise cleanliness drives and execute various sanitation projects across the country. Another pioneering initiative of the government is the Namami Gange Programme, an integrated conservation mission working to abate pollution, and conserve and rejuvenate River Ganges (Ganga).

While the government is focussed on the cleanliness drive at the mission mode, there are a number of small enterprises and entrepreneurial ventures that are, in their own way, contributing to not just the cleanliness of the environment but also the effective recycling of products that

**“ON #WORLDENVIRONMENTDAY, WE REITERATE OUR PLEDGE TO PRESERVE OUR PLANET’S RICH BIODIVERSITY. LET US COLLECTIVELY DO WHATEVER POSSIBLE TO ENSURE THE FLORA AND FAUNA WITH WHOM WE SHARE THE EARTH THRIVE. MAY WE LEAVE AN EVEN BETTER PLANET FOR THE COMING GENERATIONS. (SIC)**

**Narendra Modi**  
Prime Minister of India  
(tweeted on June 5, 2020)



Prime Minister Narendra Modi (centre) during the launch of Swachh Shakti 2019 programme at Kurukshetra, Haryana, on February 12, 2019

In India, a number of small enterprises and entrepreneurial ventures are contributing to not just the cleanliness of the environment but are also redefining the term “best out of waste”



**Clockwise from top:** At Phool's factory, based in Kanpur, flowers collected from temples and River Ganges (over 2.5 tons daily) in and around Kanpur are manually segregated by women before being processed into incense sticks and vermicompost; during Holi, the company introduced organic *gulaal* (coloured powder); Ankit Agarwal, founder of Phool

cause harm to both terrestrial and marine life. Here are a few examples of sustainable innovations from India that are redefining the term “best out of waste” and are creating employment opportunities in the process.

### THE FRAGRANCE OF DEVOTION

There is a line in a popular Hindu hymn that goes “*tera tujhko arpan* (what belongs to the gods, goes back to the gods).” This is the underlying philosophy of Phool, a Kanpur-based company that recycles flowers offered in temples and eventually immersed in the Ganges into incense sticks.

The idea of Phool, meaning flower in Hindi, was conceived by Ankit Agarwal in 2015 when he was visiting the Ganga *ghat* in Kanpur and witnessed a truck filled with flowers collected from temples in the vicinity being dumped in the water. “As soon as the flowers touched the water, their colours faded, which made me curious. On research, I found that these flowers were grown with insecticides and pesticides that cause havoc in the river and affect its biophysical state. That is when the mission for Phool was realised – to repurpose these sacred flowers into organic products.”



**Top:** Incense sticks are hand-rolled and dipped in a range of essential oils, including lavender, jasmine, Indian rose, oudh and citronella; **Above:** The processed and dried petals are powdered and mixed with natural plant resins to make the dough, which is then hand-crafted into incense sticks and cones

After the flowers are collected, they are first segregated by hand during which plastic and paper are weeded out. Then the flowers are sprayed with bioculum (an environment-friendly compound that speeds up the composting process) to offset chemical residues. Next, the flowers are carefully and thoroughly washed, petals are delicately broken and sun-dried. The dried petals are powdered and mixed with natural plant resins to make a dough, which is hand-rolled into incense sticks and

dried. The sticks are finally dipped in essential oils before packing.

Every day, Phool collects over 2.5 tons of flowers from temples in and around Kanpur. These flowers are converted not just into incense sticks but also to such organic products as incense cones, *gulaal* (powdered colour) and vermicompost. Along with doing its bit towards the betterment of the environment, Phool also employs local women. “While we were starting our factory, a group of women who earlier worked as manual scavengers approached us for work. The job was more than just increased wages; it meant respect and dignity for them. Starting from a group of 5, Phool has been a part of the transformation journey of over 173 women till date,” says Agarwal.

Of the many recognitions the company has received for its innovations, the most notable include United Nations Momentum of Change Award at COP 2018 and Asia Sustainability Award in 2020.

## Swachh Survekshan 2020

Swachh Survekshan is an annual ranking exercise taken up by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA), Government of India, to assess urban areas of the country on their levels of cleanliness and active implementation of *swachhta* (cleanliness) mission initiatives in a timely and innovative manner

### India's top cleanest cities (national, with over 1 lakh population)

Indore (Madhya Pradesh)  
Surat (Gujarat)  
Navi Mumbai (Maharashtra)

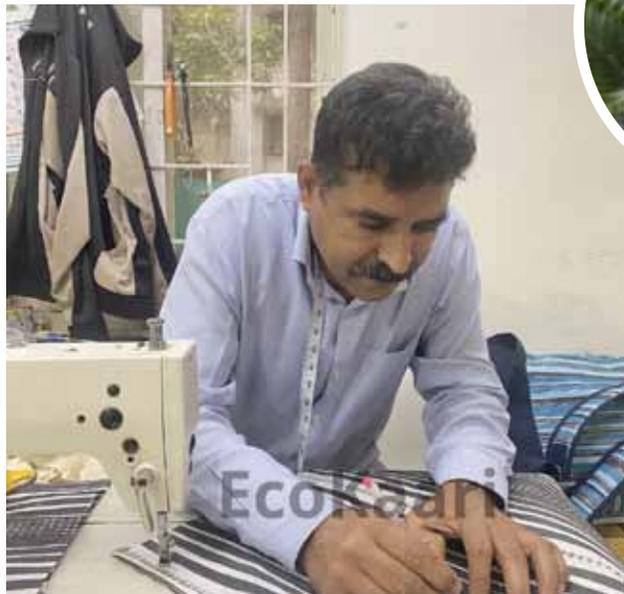
- Gujarat's Ahmedabad was named the 'Cleanest Mega City' (over 40 lakh population)
- Vijayawada in Andhra Pradesh was named the 'Cleanest Big City' (with 10-40 lakh population)
- Mysore (Mysuru) in Karnataka was named 'Cleanest Medium City' (with 3-10 lakh population)
- Ambikapur in Chhattisgarh was named 'Cleanest Small City' (with 1-3 lakh population)
- Gandhinagar in Gujarat was named 'Best State / National Capital or UT in Innovation and Best Practices'
- New Delhi (NDMC) was named 'Cleanest State / National Capital or UT'

## SUCCESS

### ALL IN THE WARP AND WEFT

It is often said that some of the best ideas germinate at the unlikely of times. And Nandan Bhat, founder of Ecokaari, a company that upcycles waste plastic into beautiful handcrafted fabrics, is an apt example. An avid trekker, Bhat frequented the northern parts of the country and during his hikes noticed the amount of garbage left behind by tourists. Bhat grew up in close proximity to nature in Kashmir and seeing the quantity of waste in the mountain areas disturbed him. "A large portion of any litter consists of plastic wrappers. Plastic bottles are a part too but they are collected by waste pickers and sold for money, which is not the case for wrappers. I decided to do something about the plastic that is not recycled by anyone," Bhat points out, adding that over nine million tonnes of plastic is generated every year in India and millions of marine animals die annually due to plastic pollution.

As a viable solution, Bhat combined his passion for traditional Indian handicraft and sustainable living, and in September 2020 set up Ecokaari (eco stands for eco-friendly and *kaari* for *kaarigar* or artisan). The collected plastics are first washed in biodegradable cleaner and dried, after which they are cut manually



**Clockwise from left:** Artisans at Pune-based brand Ecokaari design various styles of bags from the fabric made with upcycled plastic; plastic wrappers collected by the company are manually segregated by colour and thickness before being processed; Nandan Bhat, founder of Ecokaari

Based in Pune, Ecokaari upcycles a variety of plastic waste, including single-use plastic bags, multi-layered wrappers of food products and old audio and video cassette tapes



**Clockwise from left:** Ecolaari uses traditional handlooms to create sustainable and durable fabrics with upcycled plastic; the brand also turns old audio cassette tapes into cushion covers; a notebook cover made with food-grade plastic covers



into small strips based on their colour and thickness. Next, these strips are rolled on a *charkha* (spinning wheel) into bobbins. The final step involves fitting the bobbin in a shuttle and weaving fabric on a traditional handloom. “The uniqueness of this fabric lies in the fact that it is completely upcycled. While we use the plastic strips as the weft, for the warp we use threads made from recycled plastic bottles. The latter is the same material used to make dri-fit sportswear that is quick-drying and reflects water,” Bhat elaborates. The fabric is then cut into desired patterns and designed into yoga, tote and duffle bags, wallets, table mats, cutlery kit pouches, and cushion and table covers.

Based in Pune, the company upcycles a variety of plastic waste, including single-use plastic bags, multi-layered wrappers of food products and old audio and video

cassette tapes. “We also work with plastic packets from large online e-commerce portals, apart from accepting donations from people who share the same vision of a plastic-free environment,” Bhat adds.

Along with upcycling plastic waste, Ecolaari is also keeping the traditional Indian crafts of handloom weaving and *charkha* alive. “It is a humble attempt to pass on the heritage of the handloom to the future generation because they have lost interest in it after the advent of the powerloom,” says Bhat, who was a SEED Low Carbon Award Finalist, a recognition accorded by UN SEED, in 2019.

### **A USE FOR EVERYTHING**

‘Reduce. Reuse. Recycle.’ may have been the catchphrase of a popular 1990s animated show, but for 27-year-old Gujarat-based Binish Desai, it is no less than a mantra. An

## SUCCESS

innovator and self-claimed social ecopreneur, he has been creating sustainable and utility products from waste materials since he was 11 years old.

Today, he is making headlines for his latest invention - Brick 2.0. Made by using discarded face masks, which have become a necessity since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, these bricks come at a time India, and the world at large, is grappling with the issue of pollution caused by what is termed as 'corona waste'. "When the lockdown began last year, initially everyone looked at the decreasing levels of air pollution. But all I could think of was what the rising demand for PPE suits and masks would lead to," says Desai, founder of the company Eco-Eclectic Technologies.

His innovative solution to the problem began with studying the manufacturing material of the masks,

which is a non-woven fibre. He then collected a few masks and dipped them in a bucket of disinfectant for two days before conducting a series of experiments to determine the appropriate combination of binders to ensure the tenacity of the end product. "The successful ratio turned out to be 52 per cent PPE/ masks, 45 per cent paper waste and 3 per cent binder," points out Desai, who has been featured in the Forbes '30 Under 30' Asia 2018 list of successful social entrepreneurs.

After the success of the experiment, Desai got in touch with municipal corporations and local civic institutions across Surat and Valsad to set up eco bins for the collection of PPE waste. The gathered materials are shredded after being thoroughly sanitised. Next, paper waste, which is obtained from industrial paper mills, and a special binder created in his own



**Above:** Binish Desai, founder of Gujarat-based company Eco-Eclectic Technologies and inventor of Brick 2.0 that is made from PPE waste

**Right:** In 2012, Desai received a certificate of appreciation from PM Modi (then Chief Minister of Gujarat) for constructing houses and lavatories with his ingenious P-bricks





**Left:** Women at Desai's Eco Lights Studio, a women empowerment centre, learning to make jewellery from waste materials;

**Below:** A Brick 2.0 block



laboratory are mixed with the shredded PPE waste. "The mixture is set aside for about six hours before setting it in moulds. The moulds are dried for a few days before use," elaborates Desai, who claims that Brick 2.0 is fire retardant, recyclable and absorbs less than 10 per cent water.

This is, however, not the first time Desai has fashioned bricks from waste materials. Around 2010, he had developed a different kind of brick from paper waste, leftovers of chewing gum, organic binders and plant extracts. He called it P-bricks and used it to construct over 10,000 toilets and buildings in rural Gujarat, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh. Moreover, Desai's

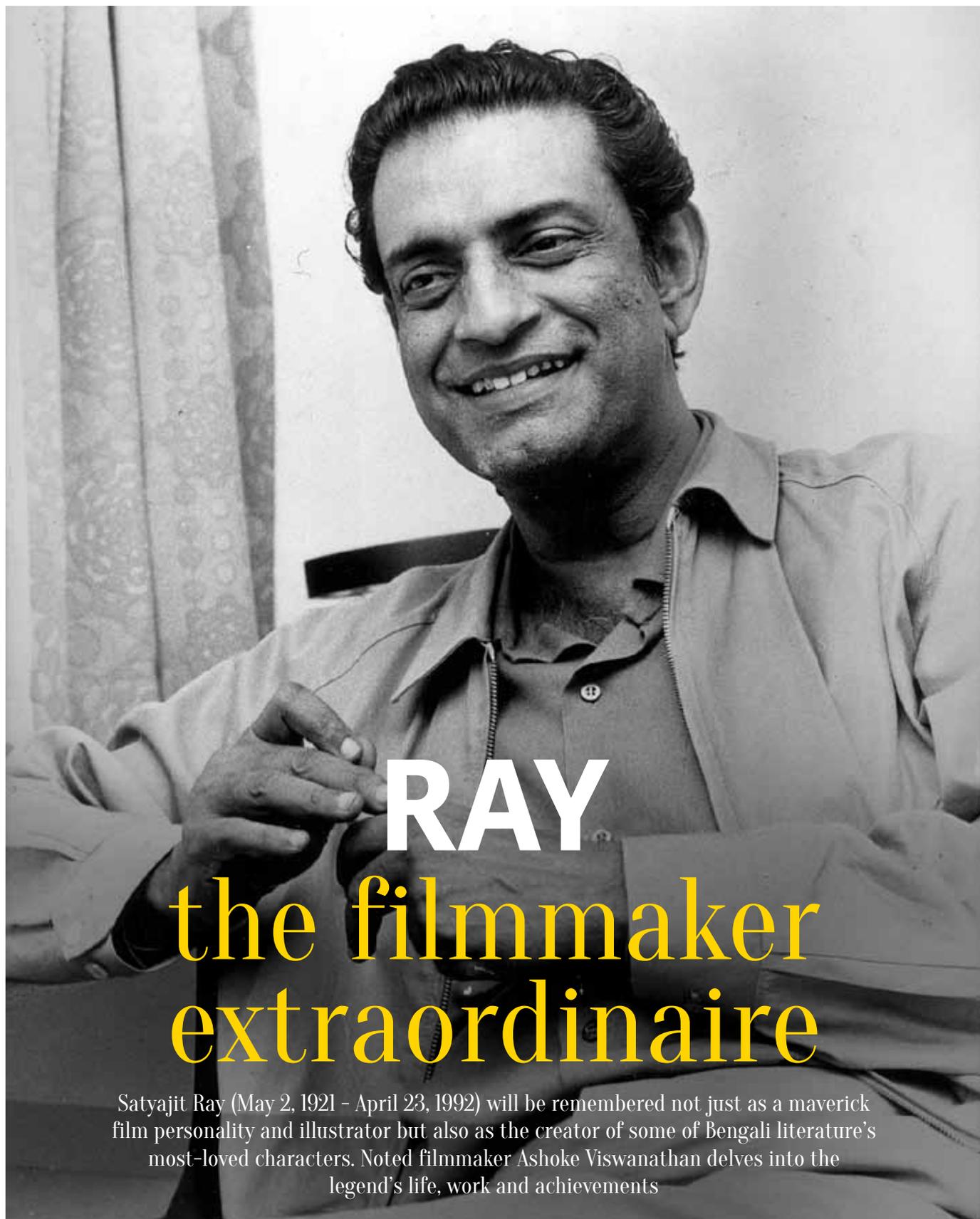
inventions are not just limited to environment-friendly bricks. By his own admission, "With a little R&D and a few experiments, my team and I can turn any form of waste into something useful." From lamps and jewellery to wall clocks - the results are varied.

The most wonderful aspect of Brick 2.0 is its affordability – INR 2.8 a block! And the number of enquiries and pre-orders rolling in from architects and interior designers across India is testament to its utility and sustainability.

These are three of the numerous entrepreneurial initiatives that are not only furthering PM Modi's vision of Clean India Mission but are also contributing to his Make in India and Aatmanirbhar Bharat initiatives.



A graduate of the Indian Institute of Mass Communication, **Shrabasti Anindita Mallik** has worked with MYCityLinks, a Bhubaneswar-based tabloid, and New Delhi-based *The Pioneer* newspaper. She actively writes on travel, Indian culture and traditions, music and any subject that intrigues her.



# RAY

## the filmmaker extraordinaire

Satyajit Ray (May 2, 1921 - April 23, 1992) will be remembered not just as a maverick film personality and illustrator but also as the creator of some of Bengali literature's most-loved characters. Noted filmmaker Ashoke Viswanathan delves into the legend's life, work and achievements

An archival image of Satyajit Ray

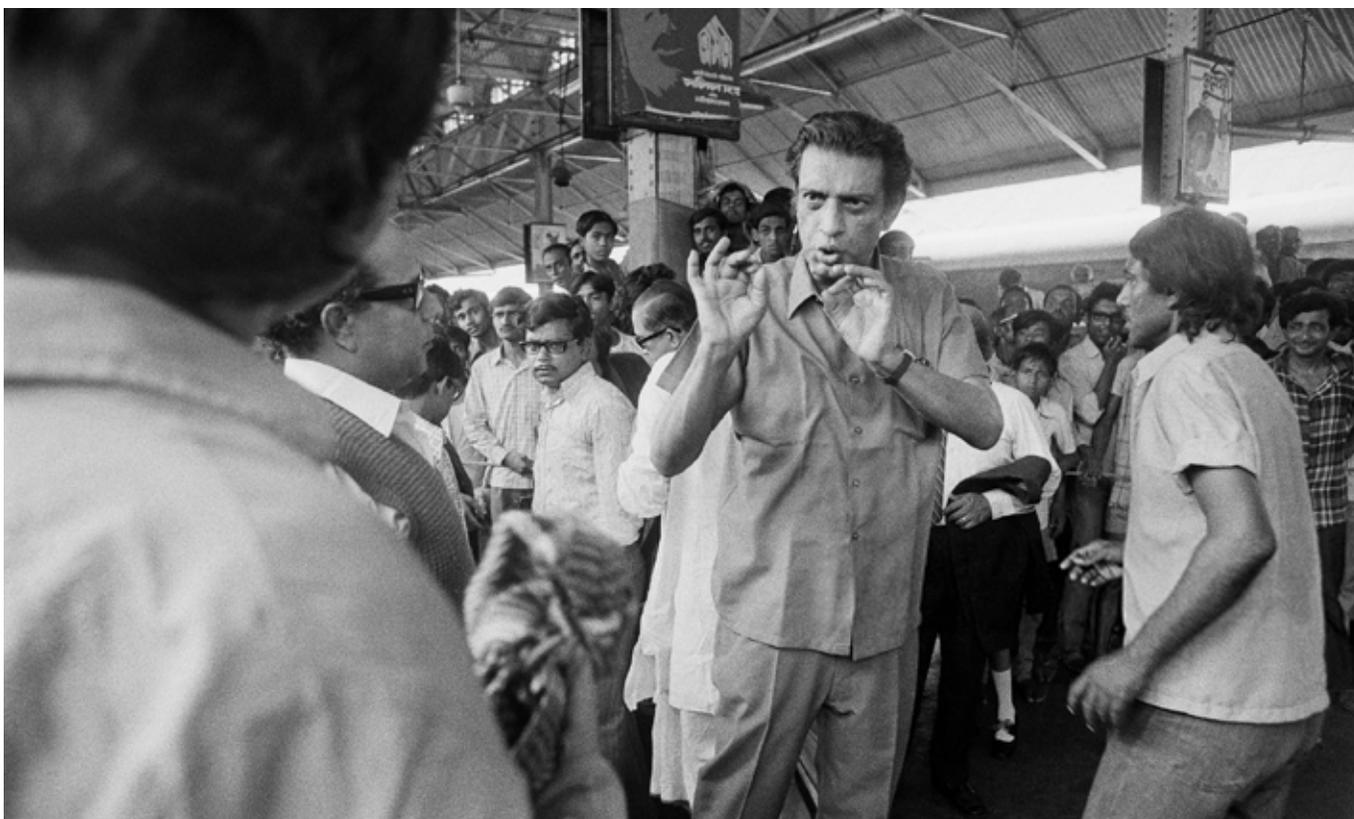
There are some people who are exceptional not just because they are different but because they are never satisfied with their own achievements. Satyajit Ray, the filmmaker from West Bengal, was a towering personality in more senses than one. He was so committed to his art that anything that fell short of excellence met with his disapproval. Ray is easily one of the greatest Indian film directors of all time and among the most eminent filmmakers of the world, having been honoured with an Oscar (in 1991) for his remarkable body of work. He has won major awards at several international film festivals, including Venice and Berlin

besides being honoured at Cannes in recognition for his nomination as one of the 10 best directors in the world in 1982.

Apart from his filmmaking skills, he was a screenwriter, an operative cameraman, a music composer and a designer. He was, also, an author of incredible popularity, a translator of poetry, a lyricist, a musician and an expert at typography!

It is quite difficult to categorise Ray as a filmmaker as he is one director who has dealt with a variety of subjects in different styles. Belonging to a family of artistically-inclined legends, his ancestral tapestry is fascinating to say the least. His grandfather Upendrakishore Roychowdhury

Satyajit Ray filming a scene of his movie *Sonar Kella* or *The Golden Fortress* (1974) in Calcutta (present-day Kolkata). *Sonar Kella* is one of the most popular stories in the *Feluda* series. Created and penned by Ray, the *Feluda* series chronicle the adventures of the Bengali detective Prodosh Chandra Mitter, lovingly called Feluda



Noted British film director Lindsay Anderson (extreme left), renowned Japanese film producer Madame Kawakita (centre) and Satyajit Ray at a reception hosted by the Indian Documentary Producers' Association at the Third International Film Festival in New Delhi in 1965



### Awards and Felicitations

Satyajit Ray's films have bagged 32 National Awards, out of which 6 are for Best Director.

The Government of India honoured Ray with the Bharat Ratna (the highest civilian award in the country) a few days before his demise on April 23, 1992.

Ray was presented with the Honorary Academy (Oscar) Award for Lifetime Achievement in 1991.

He was awarded the Légion d'honneur (Legion of Honour), the highest French decoration, by the Government of France in 1987.

In 1978, Oxford University conferred an honorary Doctorate on Ray, making him the second film personality to receive the honour after Charlie Chaplin.

was a lyricist, printer, author and painter, and his father Sukumar Ray was an iconic poet with a penchant for 'nonsense verse'. Satyajit Ray's epoch-making film, *Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne* or *The Adventures of Goopy and Bagha* (1968) is based on his grandfather's nuanced story of two village nitwits turning into magnificent musicians with the help of a wish granted by *bhuter raja* (king of ghosts).

Ray was educated at Presidency College (present-day Presidency University), Calcutta (not Kolkata yet), and then at Visva Bharati, Santiniketan, where he had the opportunity to learn painting in an environment that boasted such greats as Nandalal Bose and Benodebehari Mukhopadhyay.

His journey into cinema began with writing scripts of feature films for his own pleasure until he

started working on the script for *Pather Panchali* or *Song of the Road* (based on the novel of the same name by celebrated Bengali author Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyay) aided by the ever-curious cinematographer Subrata Mitra, who was honoured with a National Film Award in 1986.

In fact, the Apu trilogy comprising *Pather Panchali* (1955), *Aparajito* or *The Unvanquished* (1956) and *Apur Sansar* or *The World of Apu* (1959) is replete with exquisite visual exploration, brutally-stark realism, shades of lyricism and even faintly mystic strains. Visuals of trains, rural Bengal, the majesty of the city of Benaras, the dichotomies of the developing metropolis of erstwhile Calcutta, the *jatra* (a form of folk-theatre popular in West Bengal) — all create a magnificent monument of contemporary art in the trilogy.

Ray drew from the brilliant writings of Bandopadhyay in the Apu trilogy and, later, again in *Ashani Sanket* or *Distant Thunder* (1973). Not just Bandopadhyay's works, Ray made engaging cinematic adaptations of *Jalsaghar* or *The Music Room* (1958) written by renowned Bengali novelist Tarashankar Bandopadhyay and *Pratidwandi* or *The Adversary* (1970) penned by popular Bengali author Sunil Gangopadhyay, among others.

Ray's camera, sometimes relentlessly tracking forward as in *Charulata* or *The Lonely Wife* (1964), gliding hand-held as in *Jana Aranya* or *The Middleman* (1975) or locked in near-melodramatic close-ups as in *Ashani Sanket*, serves nothing less than a tool for sociological analysis, probing into the milieu and making revelations regarding the zeitgeist.

Satyajit Ray has an urban quadrilogy too – *Aranyer Din Ratri* or *Days and Nights in the Forest* (1969), *Pratidwandi*, *Seemabaddhha* or *Company Limited* (1971) and *Jana Aranya* – that is also a postmodern



**Above:** Ray (extreme left) with noted Bengali film actors Rabi Ghosh (extreme right) and Tapen Chatterjee at the Berlinale (Berlin International Film Festival) on July 27, 1969;  
**Left:** Ray at the opening night of the Cannes Film Festival on May 15, 1982, France

exploration into formal narrativity and mise-en-scene. The filmmaker was able to bring out the turbulent nature of the 1970s with the restlessness of urban youth and the shadow of urban unemployment looming large.

However, not all of Ray's cinematic works were adaptations. Ray has also written several original screenplays like *Kanchenjunga* (1962), *Nayak* or *The Hero* (1966), *Agantuk* or *The Stranger* (1991) and *Shakha Proshakha* or *Branches of a Tree* (1990) along with books on the art of cinema, namely *Bishoy Challachitra (Subject Cinema)*, *Our Films, Their Films* and *Ekei Bole*

*Shooting (This is Called Shooting)*.

The first of these – *Kanchenjunga* – deserves special mention as it uses the famous Greek cinematic construct of 'unity of time' to express a quasi-existential theme. Moreover, this film, quite ahead of its time, succeeds in probing the mindset of a bourgeois family while resting, often enough, on somewhat subaltern characters and some free spirits.

*Nayak* is in the mould of noted Swedish director Ingmar Bergman's *Wild Strawberries* (1957) but the influence of Academy Award-winning Italian filmmaker Federico Fellini is palpable in the dreams,



A behind-the-scenes shot of Ray (extreme right) during the making of the film *Apur Sansar* or *The World of Apu* (1959), which marked the cinematic debut of Soumitra Chatterjee (extreme left) and Sharmila Tagore. In fact, Chatterjee went on to work with Ray in 14 films



Image source: Niyogi Books

Aside from being a world-class director, Ray was also an expert illustrator – be it sketching for his novels, hand-drawing minute details of his cinematic sets or designing posters for his films. Here, he sketches a profile of Soumitra Chatterjee during the shoot of *Ashani Sanket* (1973)

## The Indian film fraternity speaks

### Soumitra Chatterjee

(1935–2020, Bengali film and theatre veteran)

Before [Satyajit] Ray, there had been good acting in [West] Bengal, but confined to a few gifted persons. Ray's achievement is that he made the whole cast act in the naturalistic mode – the novice and the seasoned buttressing each other. He brought stylistic unity to their cinematic expression.

### Utpal Dutt (1929–1993, Indian film and theatre legend)

He [Ray] has handled socio-political themes in the most striking ways. The quality of restraint that he brought into Indian cinema does not in any way lessen the force of the depiction. I have never seen a more passionate scene than the one in *Pathar Panchali* when the father hears that his girl is dead. He screams at the sky in despair. Charulata throws herself on the bed and weeps for the man she loves. Ray knows that passion is not cheap. He uses it with intensity but only where and when it is necessary.

(Dutt worked with Ray in *Joi Baba Felunath* [1978], *Hirak Rajar Deshe* [1980] and *Aguntuk* [1991])

### Sharmila Tagore (Indian actor)

Satyajit Ray, with his rich legacy, meant many things to many people. For me, he was Manik da, who gave me a new life. He taught me how to look at cinema, how to be in front of the camera, how to think in character, how to enjoy a language and taught me the importance of the 'moment'. He led by example and from him I learnt the value of commitment to one's work.

(Tagore made her debut in Indian films with Ray's *Apur Sansar*)

one of which may seem a trifle literal but visually and orally is quite breathtaking. Legendary Bengali actor Uttam Kumar plays the lead and does so quite magnificently.

Ray, like Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore, was a true renaissance artist. Painter, author, music composer, film director, cinematographer and creator of fonts (like Ray-Roman), he never went overboard; he never allowed any one of his personae to

subsume any of the others. He had a wonderful sense of humour, perhaps inherited from his father, and his dialogues have always been exemplary.

Finally, if there is one quality that sets Ray apart, it is not his numerous international awards (including his back-to-back Silver Bears at Berlin in 1964 and 1965) but his music. In his cinematography and editing, his narrativity and his dialogue, there is an inherent musicality, which is close to divine!

### The world film fraternity speaks

**Akira Kurosawa** (Renowned Japanese director)

Not to have seen the cinema of Ray means existing in the world without seeing the sun or the moon. I can never forget the excitement after seeing *Pather Panchali*. It is the kind of cinema that flows with the serenity and nobility of a big river.

**Sir David Attenborough** (Noted British historian, naturalist and broadcaster)

I was honoured that one of the world's greatest directors was eager to direct me. I submitted myself totally to him and found him to be a true actor's director. His sense of the script and details are unparalleled. (Attenborough played the part of the antagonist, General Outram, in Ray's 1977 film *Shatranj ke Khilari*)

**Martin Scorsese** (Celebrated American director and producer)

In the relatively short history of cinema, Satyajit Ray is one of the names that we all need to know, whose films we all need to see. And to revisit, as I do pretty frequently... His handling of a variety of subjects with finesse, within small budgets unimaginable in Hollywood, is superb.

**Francis Ford Coppola** (Famed American filmmaker)

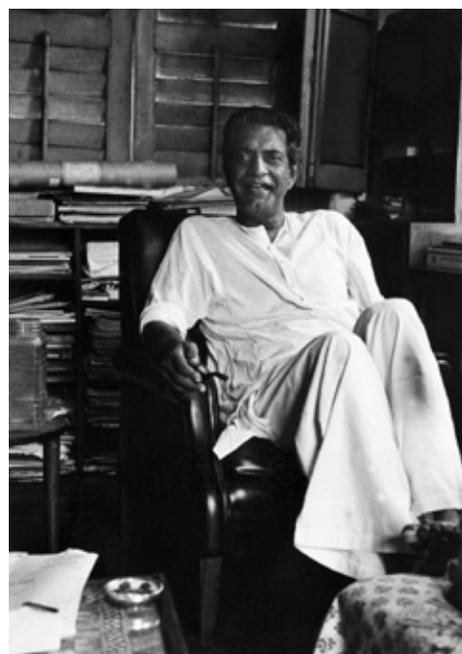
Whenever someone speaks from Kolkata, I remember Satyajit Ray's call, praising me for *Godfather I*... We know of Indian cinema through Ray's works and, to me, his best is *Devi* [1960]...

This quality of tunefulness is quite abstract; it is a product of Ray's meticulous organisation. Right from the design of the sequence, there is a noticeable and unique pattern that is felt even in the editing and sound applications.

Consider the film *Charulata*, based on a story titled *Nashtanirh* (*The Broken Nest*) by Tagore. The denouement is a longish sequence comprising the following: a letter from Amal (Charu's cousin-in-law) on a small table that establishes the epistle as an index of foreboding and forecasts Charu's volatile propinquity to Amal; Bhupati's (Charu's husband) perusing of the letter

and his innocent remarks about Amal's engagements before stepping out; and Charu's eventual reading of the letter during which she is overcome by a paroxysm of emotion and breaks down screaming out her 'forbidden love' for Amal. At this point, Bhupati returns, unexpectedly, having forgotten something and is horrified at the revelation of Charu's love, and in a situation of extreme dejection and shock, wanders about in a phaeton (an open four-wheeled horse-drawn carriage).

When he returns, in a scene fraught with uncertainty and ambiguity, Charu, with fear and guilt writ large on her



**Left:** Ray received the Golden Lion, the highest award accorded to a film at the Venice Film Festival, for his film *Aparajito*, on September 9, 1957; **Right:** An archival image of Ray at his home in Kolkata



**Above:** Ray (centre) with noted French actor Gerard Depardieu (left) and French film producer Daniel Toscani du Plantier at his Kolkata home in 1989. Ray's 1990 film *Shakha Proshakha* or *Branches of a Tree* was produced by Depardieu and Plantier

**Right:** A screengrab from the film *Charulata*



countenance, gestures to him to come inside. Bhupati enters but Ray freezes the moment even before Charu's and Bhupati's hands can meet, thus symbolising "the broken nest".

Words are insufficient to express the aesthetic pattern of this resonant *mise-en-scene*, just as it is near-impossible to describe the luminance of Ray's composite oeuvre.

Ray was a prolific writer as well, having created quite a few of Bengali literature's most-loved characters – Feluda (a detective), Lal Mohan Ganguly or Jatayu (an adventure novelist and Feluda's friend), Professor Shanku (a scientist and inventor) and Tarini Khuro (a lovable uncle with a fondness for narrating stories peppered with supernatural elements). Ray's stories and his characters are equally popular in Bangladesh too. In fact, Ray's ancestral house is located in

the Masua village of Bangladesh's Mymensingh district. Last year, the Federation of Film Societies of India (FFSI), decided to initiate an international campaign for the restoration of this iconic landmark.

Ray was, without a shadow of doubt, a true renaissance personality. He was multifaceted but never averse to learning something new. Plus, his meticulous eye for classical visual design made him an iconic artistic personality. In the tradition of Tagore, Ray ventured wide but never lost sight of his roots.



Ashoke Viswanathan is a national and international award-winning filmmaker who is currently professor and Dean at Satyajit Ray Film & Television Institute (SRFTI), Kolkata.

# India

## THE SPICE BOWL OF THE WORLD

Flavourful and aromatic with a host of health benefits - Indian spices are one of a kind. While some seasonings are popular, there are a few indigenous ones that are rarely used. Celebrity chef and Padma Shri awardee Sanjeev Kapoor explores a few of India's lesser-known spices



Of the many new-age recipes that incorporate the use of turmeric, vegan ice creams spiced with cinnamon are one of the most popular

India is popular for myriad aspects, including its traditions, rich heritage and diverse culinary styles. People from outside the country are extremely curious about the “secret” ingredients used in Indian dishes that make them so uniquely flavourful. But what they often tend to overlook is that it is the indigenous spices, which make Indian food so irresistible.

When we talk about spices, the one thing that is common in every Indian household is a *masala dabba* (spice box). A quintessential part of every *desi* Indian kitchen, *masala dabbas* are fascinating. And even though these spices are added in *chutkis* (pinches), they play a very big part in turning a dish from just palatable to simply delectable. Apart from the wonderful aroma and flavour, Indian spices also have medicinal and immunity-boosting properties.

For generations, Indians have traditionally used commonly-available kitchen ingredients to prepare healthy concoctions like *kadha* (a healing Ayurvedic drink made with herbs and spices) and *haldi doodh* (turmeric milk) to cure common cold.

Such popular spices as *jeera* (cumin), *saunf* (fennel), *sarson* (mustard) and *methi* (fenugreek)



facebook.com/afoodiesdiary

As per Ayurveda, *khus*, called the ‘wonder grass’, cools the body, especially during summer, and ensures good blood circulation



**Top:** *Bhut jolokia*, one of the spiciest chillies in the world, is popularly pickled with oil, salt and vinegar

**Bottom:** According to an article published in news18.com, *bhut jolokia* is also known to improve mood by releasing endorphins

## CUISINE



feature in *masala dabbas* across the country, and much has been said and written about their exceptional culinary properties. Therefore, here we explore some of the lesser-known indigenous spices from various parts of the nation, which will prove once again that India, truly is, the ultimate land of spices!

### RAJA MIRCHA

Since we're talking about spices, let's begin with the ultra-spicy pepper

or *raja mircha*, quite popular in the Northeastern part of India. Also known as ghost pepper, Naga chilli and *bhut* (or *bhoot*) *jolokia*, it was recorded in the Guinness Book of Records as the hottest chilli in the world in 2007. It is best when freshly-plucked as it tends to lose its intensity with time. Another popular way of savouring this spice is by pickling it with oil, salt and vinegar. Nowadays, people are experimenting with it, which has led to the making of the *bhut jolokia* tea by a Guwahati-based tea company. When consumed in limited quantities, it is said to help in improving blood circulation and digestion, lowering blood pressure and boosting metabolism.

### KALPASI

Also known as *daagar ka phool*, *patthar ka phool* or black stone flower, *kalpasi* is the Tamil word for lichen.

**Top:** *Kalpasi* is one of the spices in the mixture used in the preparation of the delicious Chettinad *meen kuzhambu* (fish curry)

**Bottom:** Lichens, called *kalpasi* in Tamil, are important indicators of atmospheric purity and will not grow when the air is polluted. They require a slight elevation above sea level, which is why Ooty and Kodaikanal in Tamil Nadu are important catchment areas for the spice

(Source: [mariyamhreshii.com/the-mystery-spice-kalpasi/](http://mariyamhreshii.com/the-mystery-spice-kalpasi/))



This special yet rare spice, which aids digestion, reduces inflammation and acts as a pain reliever, is primarily used in Maharashtrian and Chettinad cuisine (of Tamil Nadu). The upper surface of this spice is dark green or black in colour. It has a strong earthy aroma and a dry texture, and is incorporated in the preparation of such popular indigenous spice mixes as Maharashtra's *kala masala* and *goda masala*, and Hyderabad's *potli masala*.

### LAKADONG AND SALEM TURMERIC

Turmeric or *haldi* is probably the most common Indian spice. It enjoys a pride of place in every *desi* household and deserves more appreciation than otherwise given. It is rich in curcumin, which has antioxidant, anti-inflammatory and immunity-boosting

properties, and also imparts a beautiful yellow hue to every dish that it is added to! The two varieties of turmeric that are said to be the best in India are Lakadong from Meghalaya and Salem from Tamil Nadu. This humble superfood has travelled from traditional Indian kitchens to global food hotspots and has found a place in several international recipes like Morocco's



**Top:** Cinnamon turmeric ice tea is a refreshing and nutritious summer drink. Not only does it cool the body but also boosts immunity

**Bottom:** According to a study published by the Directorate of Horticulture, Department of Agriculture, Government of Meghalaya, titled *Mission Lakadong*, Lakadong turmeric promotes brain function and reduces inflammation

## CUISINE



**Top:** *Radhuni*, a spice indigenous to West Bengal, has an aroma similar to parsley, tastes like celery and has a striking resemblance to carom seeds. It is used in the preparation of several dishes including *daal* (lentil soup)

**Bottom:** The brilliant red colour in north India's popular meat-based dish *rogan josh* is imparted by the root of the alkanet herb, also called *ratan jot*



*pastilla* (spiced meat and apricots wrapped in filo pastry), Sri Lanka's *kiri hodi* (dried Maldivian fish cooked in coconut milk gravy) and the extremely popular turmeric latte.

### RADHUNI

A spice that finds a special place in Bengali cuisine yet continues to remain obscure to the rest of the country, *radhuni* is often confused with *ajwain* (carom seeds) because of their similar appearance. *Radhuni*, seeds of wild celery, forms an integral part of the quintessential Bengali *paanch phoron* – a traditional five-spice mix comprising *kalo jeere* (nigella), *rai* (mustard), *mouri* (fennel), *methi* and *radhuni*. This indigenous spice aids digestion, and helps reduce pain and inflammation.

### RATAN JOT

Alkanet root or *ratan jot* is a unique spice from north India, especially Jammu & Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh. It is a herb that comes from the borage plant family and its roots produce a unique red colour, which has made this spice so popular. The flavour is more earthy than spicy. *Rogan josh*, the classic Kashmiri meat dish, gets its rich red colour from this spice! It has also been used as a medicine since ancient times for treating infections, skin wounds, rashes, burns and several other health problems. Perhaps, it is a precious '*ratana*' or jewel after all!

### KUDAM PULI

*Kudam puli* or Malabar tamarind is a popular souring agent in South India and is often used as a substitute for the regular *imli* or tamarind. Its appearance



One of the main ingredients of the Malayali fish curry is the *kudam puli* or Malabar tamarind

is similar to *kokum* but it has a strong smoky flavour and is added to a variety of fish curries, which is why it's also called 'fish tamarind'. This spice is known to not only aid weight loss but also promote cardiovascular health and boost energy.

### KHUS

Another indigenous gem from Indian spices is *khus* or vetiver, which is also considered a must in Indian homes during summer. *Khus sharbat* (drink) is very popular during summer for its refreshing quality. In several households, this *sharbat* is a must-serve during Holi! As per Ayurveda, *khus*, called the 'wonder grass', cools the body and ensures good blood circulation. *Khus* also boosts

immunity, helps control thyroid-related issues and can also be used to keep diabetes in check.

Indian spices pack in more than just flavour and aroma. They are treasure chests of wellness too. And although they vary in taste, pungency and usage from one part of the country to another, it is certain that no Indian cuisine is complete without them.



**Sanjeev Kapoor** is a celebrity chef, author and TV show host. In 2018, he had the honour to prepare meals for Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the latter's visit to the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The chef was invited by His Highness Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces.

# A FEW SECRETS OF Ladakh

Ladakh's capital Leh, and its surrounding areas, is a land of vivid landscapes and an even more vibrant culture. Travel enthusiasts Anurag Mallick and Priya Ganapathy take us on a trip to explore unknown facets of Leh's heritage and tradition with local residents



The iconic Leh Palace. Also called Lachen Palkar Palace, this massive nine-storey structure lies at the base of the Tsemo ridge and demonstrates the finest building technology and craftsmanship of Ladakh

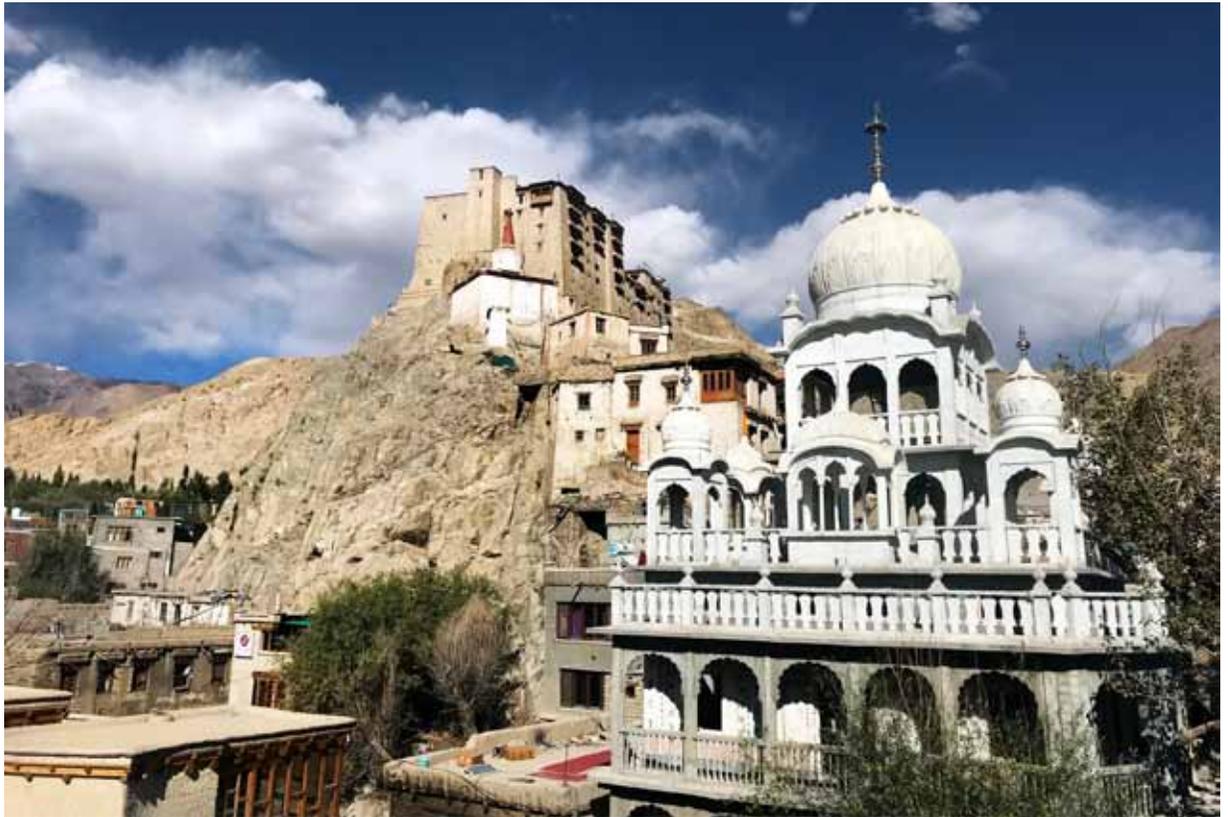


Image: authors

**H**emmed in by the Karakoram and the Himalayan ranges, the mountainous region of Ladakh was once a harsh no-man's-land visited only by nomadic tribes. Even today, this dramatic terrain has one of the lowest population densities in the world. During winter, the region remains enveloped in snow and it's only in summer that tourists arrive. Since the region was opened for visitors in 1974, Ladakh, especially Leh, the main city of the Union

Territory, attracts large volumes of tourists (between the months of May and September), who are mesmerised by the unique landscape, the thrilling adventure options and the vibrant culture. From exploring the surreal mountainous landscape dotted with many Buddhist monasteries and high-altitude mountain passes to the region's unique culture – Ladakh offers varied experiences. However, one of the most enriching ways to travel is with the locals, who offer a glimpse of their life and also

Gurudwara Sri Datun Sahib as viewed from the Central Asian Museum

Of the 180 heritage houses in Old Town, 40 have been conserved.  
The pilot project, a metal craftsman's house, won a UNESCO  
award for best conservation practice

Chilling's craftsmen fashion statues and stupas across Ladakh, besides musical instruments for monasteries, and supply brass and copper utensils to nearly every Ladakhi kitchen

help explore unknown facets of the region. Here are a few off-the-beaten-track experiences of Leh.

**OLD TOWN**

In the early 15th century, the then ruler of the kingdom of Ladakh, Dragpa Bumdey, built the first fortifications in his capital Leh as well as the small Tsemo castle. In the 17th century, King Sengge Namgyal built the massive nine-storied Leh Palace or Lachen Palkar Palace. While the palace was abandoned by the

royal family in the mid-19th century, even today, the impressive structure stands surrounded by remnants of the earth wall fortification

that weaves through the Old Town, which was once where noblemen of the kingdom lived. While the palace is one of the must-see sites of Leh, the historic Old Town is often missed. It is locally called Kharyog, referring to the residential houses and community spaces. Earlier, the houses were located within the fortified wall that had five gates facing different directions. The wall has almost entirely disappeared, except for small portions hidden in the labyrinth of narrow alleyways

A stunning image of Leh at sunset



Image: authors

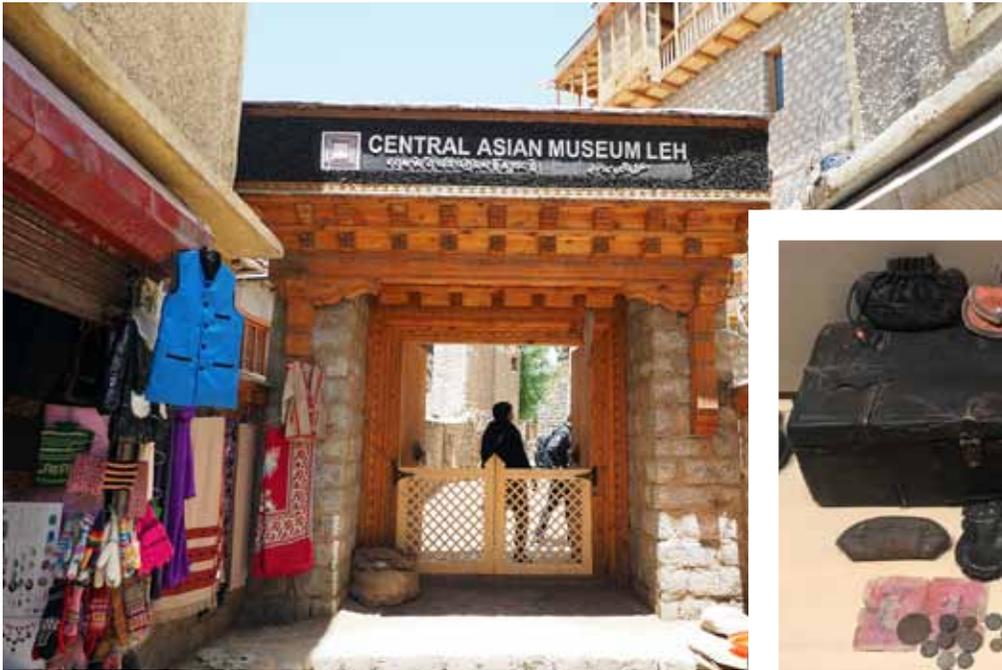


Image: authors

**Top left:** The Central Asian Museum boasts a stellar collection of artefacts and manuscripts from Central Asia, Tibet and Kashmir dating back to the 18th and 19th centuries;

**Top right:** Displays at Jigmat's Textile Museum

**Bottom:** Buddhist monks with traditional musical instruments during a celebration at the Thiksey Monastery, Ladakh

and maze of buildings. The perfect introduction to Old Leh is a heritage walk. Guided by Sonam Gyatso, a former Economics teacher who is now dedicated to preserving Ladakh's cultural legacy, the walk takes tourists through the maze of alleys in the old city. Dating back to the 17th century, Leh's Old Town is a complex of around 200 residential

dwellings made of mud, stone and timber enclosed within rammed earth walls at the base of Leh Palace. Despite years of decay, Leh's Old Town is one of the few surviving examples of an intact Tibeto-Himalayan urban settlement.

Of the 180 heritage houses in Old Town, 40 have been conserved, including Onpo (astrologer) House, Sofi (merchant) home and Hor Yarkandi house, which belongs to the descendants of a family that migrated to Ladakh from Yarkand in China over 100 years ago. The pilot project, a metal craftsman's house, won a UNESCO award for best conservation practice.

### CENTRAL ASIAN MUSEUM

Located at the crossroads of caravan routes from Central Asia, Ladakh was shaped by trade from the ancient cities of Samarkand and Bukhara from present-day Uzbekistan, Tibet, parts of China and Afghanistan with many of these routes converging at



## Local innovations

Ladakh is also home to Sonam Wangchuk, an engineer, innovator and education reformist. In 2015, he created a 64-ft-high ice stupa (a dome-shaped structure) to address the issues of climate change and shrinking glaciers. Ice stupas are a form of glacier grafting technique that creates artificial glaciers for storing winter water (which otherwise would go unused) in the form of conical-shaped ice heaps. This structure is designed in a way that it remains frozen until the sun warms the fields during spring, making irrigation and cultivation manageable for farmers. Today, with the support of the government, there are over 26 such structures across Ladakh. Wangchuk's recent feat was in February 2021, when he built a solar-powered 'military tent' in an attempt to provide respite to the soldiers of the Indian Army posted in high-altitude areas from freezing temperatures. The portable tent, which weighs less than 30 kg, can accommodate 10 soldiers and can function at temperatures as low as -14 degree Celsius.

Held in the compounds of the Hemis monastery, the vibrant annual Hemis Festival attracts tourists from all over the world. Hemis Festival is on June 20-21, 2021

Leh. Over a period of time, Leh became a cultural cauldron. The Central Asian Museum Leh has been set up to commemorate and preserve this important facet of Ladakh's history. Supported by the Ministry of Culture, Government of India, this four-storey museum is built in the Tsas Soma Gardens, which was once a camping ground for caravans. Designed in the shape of a Tibetan-Ladakhi fortress tower, it is built with traditional Ladakhi construction materials like stone, timber and mud.

Inside are housed relics from the caravan trade, old window frames, granaries and a Ladakhi kitchen - with its immaculate collection of gleaming vessels -

where you can order lunch. The museum records Leh's role in the Silk Route trade and also houses in its precincts Leh's oldest mosque and a sacred tree known as the Datun Sahib, said to be 500 years old. It is said in 1517, on his journey to Tibet, Sikh Guru, Guru Nanakji passed through Leh and planted his *miswak twig datun* (toothbrush) at a spot near the current museum. The twig grew into a tree and offered shade to caravans. The site is marked by Gurudwara Sri Datun Sahib.

### CARPET LANE

Mostly overlooked by tourists is one of Leh's oldest lanes, Nausher Street, which is home to a profusion of carpet shops,



Image: authors



Images: authors

**Top:** An artisan from Chilling stands with her products (right). In Chilling, artisans pour water in a trough of apricot and submerge the utensils overnight, giving the products a brilliant shine

**Below:** Elderly carpet sellers in Leh

a reason why it's also known as Carpet Lane. Local fashion designer Jigmat Norbu, who runs a Ladakhi couture store, says that there stood an old revenue gate here for tax collection, which no longer exists. However, you can visit the 120-year-old caravanserai, the last surviving heritage building here.

Right next door, near the Polo Ground, is Jigmat's residence housing an impressive textile museum that took him five years to set up. Incorporating elements from Ladakhi architecture, it documents Ladakh's glorious couture through fashion mood boards. Visits are only by invitation, much like their private dining and curated trails.



### CHILLING - A VILLAGE OF METAL CRAFTSMEN

In Chilling, a village about an hour away from Leh, metal craftsmen have crafted musical instruments, statues and household utensils for centuries. In the 16th century, King Deldan Namgyal invited five skilled Newari metalsmiths from Nepal to build a two-storey copper statue of Lord Buddha for the Shey monastery located near Leh town. Greatly impressed by their skill, he offered them land to settle permanently. They chose a particular valley by the Zaskar river rich in copper deposits (*zang* is Tibetan for copper and *skar* means valley). The place where they



The stunning Basgo monastery located around 40 km away from Leh town

## Winter sports

### Zaskar Winter Sports & Youth Festival 2021:

The picturesque Zaskar Valley of the Union Territory of Ladakh, for the first time, hosted the Zaskar Winter Sports & Youth Festival 2021 from January 18 to 30. Organised by the Department of Sports & Youth Services, under the 'Khelo India' banner, in collaboration with the Ladakh Tourism Department, this event featured trekking on the frozen Zaskar river, ice climbing, ice hockey, snow sculptures and an ethnic food festival.

settled was called 'Chilling' - *chhi* meaning foreign and *ling* meaning place - or 'Land of Foreigners'. Over the centuries, their descendants blended with the local community and today worship Lord Shiva, albeit in Buddhist style. Chilling's craftsmen fashioned statues and stupas across Ladakh, besides music instruments for Nubra and Hemis monasteries, and supplied brass and copper utensils to nearly every Ladakhi kitchen.

Tsewang, who hails from a family of metal craftsmen, takes tourists around his home-museum that showcases his family's heirloom utensils. Without modern tools or devices, using handmade implements and techniques since the 16th century, they churn out

a dazzling array of metalware in combinations of copper, silver and brass. On display are various types of cutters, drills, hammers and *zong* (nails) besides *thungbo* (ladles), *chang* (pots), *pheyphor* (barley containers) and *phang* (weaving spindles). A closer look at the *zomal* (foundry) reveals an interesting process - the artisans pour water in a trough of apricot and submerge the utensils overnight; the resultant acid eats away the grime giving the products a shine.

### CLAY POTTERY

Around 40 km away from Leh town is Basgo monastery (gompa), near which is Likir, where King Jamyang Namgyal encouraged pottery, as clay was readily available here. The hill on



Images: authors

**Top:** A group of Ladakhi women in traditional attire during the Naropa Festival. Held at the Hemis monastery, this event celebrates the life and teachings of Naropa, a revered saint and scholar; **Bottom:** A beautiful thang-ka painting at the Hemis monastery. Thang-kas are religious painted scrolls depicting Buddhist deities. They are one of the most popular crafts items available in Leh

which the monastery stands is coil-shaped. Legends say that the gompa is guarded by two serpents (*nagas*) Nanda and Taksako, hence its name Klu-kkhyil or ‘encircled by *nagas*’. Sixty-year-old Lamchung Tsepail, aided by his son Rigzin Namgyal, has been crafting clay-ware since he was 15 years old and is a lone crusader of the 350-year-old tradition. It’s tedious work as dung must be collected from the mountains for firing his pots. “In the old days, lamas demanded bigger spouts for the *tibril* (kettle) so butter [used to prepare tea] wouldn’t obstruct the brew from flowing easily,” he chuckles.

Ladakh's culture has been shaped by the transmission of goods and ideas from across the neighbouring countries, connected by the various roads of the Silk Route. However, over the centuries, some of its cultural identities have been pushed into oblivion and heritage sites almost lost. Today, guided by the government, and with the effort of local residents and scholars, the region's history and tradition are being restored and preserved for the future.



**Anurag Mallick and Priya Ganapathy** work closely with tourism boards and publications to help promote travel and tourism. They contribute to leading Indian publications - both newspapers and magazines. Their social media handle is: @red\_scarab

# PRESERVATION OF an ancient craft

Mon shugu, a 1,000-year-old papermaking tradition from Arunachal Pradesh, has got a new lease of life with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi discussing it in his monthly address to the nation. Local crusader Maling Gombu, who was praised by the PM for preserving the tradition, takes us through the journey of this craft



Women of the Monpa tribe in front of the Thupsung Dhargye Monastery, Dirang, Arunachal Pradesh

**A**runachal Pradesh, popularly referred to as India's land of the rising Sun, is rich in traditional handicrafts, art forms and natural resources, which have the potential for developing village-based industries and aiding to rural economic development. The state is also home to several tribal communities, including Wancho,

Nocte, Tangsa, Singpho, Khampti, Mishmi, Adi, Galo, Padam, Minyong, Memba, Apatani, Nyishi, Tagin, Aka, Miji, Sherdukpen and Monpa, with each exhibiting distinctive culture, language, customs and traditions. Several of their crafts have remained confined to their communities for ages and it's only now that they are being showcased to the world. Monyul Tawang, a frontier

An elderly woman from Arunachal Pradesh's Monpa community spinning prayer wheels at a monastery in Tawang

**FOR CENTURIES A TYPE OF PAPER CALLED 'MON SHUGU' IS MADE IN THIS [TAWANG] HILLY REGION OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH. THE LOCALS HERE MAKE THIS PAPER FROM THE BARK OF A PLANT NAMED SHUGU SHENG, HENCE TREES DO NOT HAVE TO BE CUT TO MAKE THIS PAPER. BESIDES, NO CHEMICAL IS USED IN MAKING THIS PAPER, THUS, THIS PAPER IS SAFE FOR THE ENVIRONMENT AND FOR HEALTH TOO. THERE WAS A TIME WHEN THIS PAPER WAS EXPORTED BUT WITH MODERN TECHNIQUES, LARGE AMOUNT OF PAPER STARTED GETTING MADE AND THIS LOCAL ART WAS PUSHED TO THE BRINK OF CLOSURE. NOW A LOCAL SOCIAL WORKER GOMBU HAS MADE AN EFFORT TO REJUVENATE THIS ART, THIS IS ALSO GIVING EMPLOYMENT TO TRIBAL BROTHERS AND SISTERS THERE.**

**Narendra Modi**  
Prime Minister of India



## HERITAGE



Images: author

**Above: (left)** An important process in the manufacture of mon shugu is the beating of the raw materials into a pulp, which is later flattened to make the paper. Here, local women artisans oversee the beating process at the Handmade Paper Centre in Tawang; **(right)** Women artisans taking out the wooden frame that separates the pulp from water

district in Arunachal Pradesh that shares borders with Tibet and Bhutan, is inhabited by the Monpa tribe. Despite the remoteness and inhospitable terrain of the district, the region has become a popular tourist destination and is making appreciable strides in economic development while pursuing its traditional skills.

One of their traditional crafts, which was brought into the limelight recently by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in one of his monthly radio addresses *Maan Ki Baat*, is the art of making mon shugu, a handmade paper from a local shrub called *shugu sheng*. As the Prime Minister

explained, mon shugu is not just a cultural heritage but a sustainable practice that reaps dual benefits - it protects the environment and can generate employment.

### THE HISTORY

Almost 1,000 years old, this indigenous art form of paper-making of the Monpas uses the bark of a local shrub called *shugu sheng* (*Daphne papyracea*). The process of turning the dry bark into paper is a tedious one and not many practice it today. While most artisans have given up the skill, the forests surrounding Mukto, a village perched at an altitude of 10,800 ft in Tawang district, grow the *shugu sheng* shrub, and a few artisan families still practice this craft.

Traditionally, this coarse

The Monpas, who are the predominant community in the high hills of West Kameng and Tawang districts, are skilled in wood carving, painting, preparing religious scrolls, bamboo work, carpet making and weaving

handmade paper has been used in Buddhist monasteries for religious scriptures, manuscripts, prayer flags, and sometimes as a part of flag poles and prayer wheels. Not just local monasteries, mon shugu was in demand in countries like Tibet, Bhutan, China and Japan as well. In ancient times, the paper was used for writing mantras, sutras and Buddhist epics. At present, it is also used for artistic purposes and for making exquisite gift items.

However, the long process of turning the bark of the shrub into a pulp, then to boil, beat, dry and cut the paper, all by hand was time-consuming and not financially viable. Thus, many artisans shifted to alternative sources of income.

## THE PROCESS

The process of making the paper is very systematic and follows centuries-old traditions.

The harvesting of the bark starts between March and April, and continues till December, before the season of flowering. During the stage when flowers and then fruits appear on the shrub, the bark is not harvested, so as to let the plant regenerate.

Bark harvested during the earlier part of the year is used for paper-making in the rest of the year. To get around 1.5 kg of bark, around four to five plants are required, depending upon the size of the plant. At least two sheets of paper (62 cm long and 51 cm wide) can be made from the bark of one plant.

After harvesting, the barks are scrapped off the outer layer and the soft insides are thoroughly washed and dried in the sun. The bark is then passed through ash-water, soaked and cut into smaller pieces before being boiled. The residue is then beaten into pulp and then

## The process

**Collection (*khopa*):** Stems of 5 to 6-year-old plants are harvested; the stem is broken and the bark is peeled down to the roots.

**Scrapping (*khogo*):** The outer layers of the barks are gently scraped or removed by knife (*khyauchong*) or dao (*khyaub*).

**Washing (*chheyu*) and drying (*chromo*):** The scrapped barks (the inside part) are washed to remove any residue or dust. It is then sun-dried for 2 to 3 days.

**Ash water preparation (*bla paa*):** Ash, prepared by burning (*sheng toto*) any type of fuelwood, is collected in a tin with holes in the bottom and water is allowed to pass through it. The filtrate is called ash water.

**Soaking (*che jaso*):** Dried bark is soaked in water for softening to make it breakable.

**Making pieces (*tapu*):** The soaked bark is cut into small pieces (4 to 6 cm in length).

**Cooking/boiling (*tsogu*):** About 6 kg of bark is mixed with 6 to 8 litre of ash water in a pan (*langa*) and boiled for about 3.5 hours or until the bark becomes sticky, soft and brown. It is then poured in a bamboo basket (*sheng jang*) for complete drainage.

**Making pulp:** The boiled bark is beaten (*thungu*) with a wooden hammer (*ruelong*) on a flat stone plate (*gorlim*) into a pulp and kept in an aluminium tub (*shuk nema*).

**Making of paper sheet (*shuk chhusu*):** Rectangular frames (69 cm x 56 cm) are prepared with wood/ bamboo and plain cloth/galvanised net and floated on a small water tank (*shokang*). About 150-200 g of pulp paste is poured into the net and stirred first by a bamboo rounder (*borma*) and then by hand for even distribution.

**Drying:** After dispersing well in the net, the frame is taken out carefully for drying in sunlight. After 2 to 3 hours of drying, the paper sheets are peeled slowly from the frame, collected, bundled and made ready for sale.

After the frame is taken out of the water, it is pressed with cloth, which absorbs the moisture



### Vocal for local

The revival of mon shugu in Tawang was also taken up in earnest by the KVIC that has set up a papermaking unit to train locals. At the unit, local artisans are employed who make a living producing mon shugu. To begin with, 12 women and two men from local villages have been trained to make this paper. The Monpa handmade paper unit also serves as a training centre for the local youth. KVIC provides marketing support and plans to set up more such units in future.



Image: author

Local women artisans working on the pressing machine at the centre. The pressing machine squeezes out excess water from the pulp and makes it smooth

laid out as a sheet of paper. The entire hand-crafted process results in paper that has a unique texture. The smoothness of the paper surface depends on drying - generally, one side of the paper is like cloth and the other, is slightly rough with long fibre-like texture. In a day, around 100 sheets of paper can be prepared and dried if the weather condition is suitable. Mon shugu paper is sold in the local area at INR 15 to 25 per sheet.

### CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

Mon shugu is a non-timber forest product (NTFP) and a natural one developed without any chemicals. Compared to conventional paper, mon shugu's lifespan and durability are much longer, and it is said to have immense tensile strength. With

these are also connected traditional knowledge and practices, which are important in prudent resource use and biodiversity conservation. Currently, wood is by far the major raw material for the global pulp and paper industry, and non-wood fibres are a minor part of raw material supply.

The Tawang-based voluntary organisation, Youth Action for Social Welfare, has been working towards preserving this unique cultural heritage. Efforts are being made by the Khadi and Village Industry Commission (KVIC) and Kumarappa National Handmade paper institute (KNHPI) as well. But there are several hurdles, the most prominent being that many communities do not allow their forest produce to be taken outside the villages. A solution

The shugu sheng plant, whose bark is used to make the mon shugu paper, grows in abundance in certain parts of Arunachal Pradesh



Image: author

could be encouraging plantations of the shrub, and finding a suitable commercial market. *Shugu sheng* is a very important indigenous species as its fibrous bark is used for paper making, the stem for fuel wood, and the flowers for the preparation of perfume. The plant has mostly been observed to grow in a closed canopy, so people can cultivate it, derive fuel wood as well as use the leaves for mulching in agricultural fields. Thus, it can reduce the pressure on natural forests to some extent. There is a local market for this paper since it is used in daily prayers and packaging of special items like butter. But there is also an international market for it in countries like China and Japan where it's used for writing scriptures. Japanese artists use this paper for calligraphy.

Planned cultivation of this shrub and its marketing could support the Monpa tribes financially and the eco-friendly technology can act as a sustainable production system. It can result in overall socio-economic development without compromising the ecological pristine in the mountainous region. Once, the product becomes financially viable, artisans will return to their craft. However beyond economics, what matters more is the preservation of this 1,000-year-old tradition, a living heritage that is intertwined with the culture of an ancient community.



A lawyer by profession, **Maling Gombu** is chairman of Youth Action for Social Welfare, Tawang. He has been recognised by Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his efforts to conserve, protect and promote the art of making mon shugu paper and keeping this indigenous craft alive



# THE INDIAN toy story

India boasts a rich heritage of toy making. With the launch of the country's first virtual Toy Fair, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi highlighted the important role traditional Indian toys play in the development of a child and also encouraged traditional toy-making communities to carry forward their craft. We bring you a few of the lesser-known indigenous toys from across the country

BY SUDARSHAN KHANNA AND SURABHI KHANNA

Indigenous Indian toys often act as windows to the culture and tradition of the region they originate from. Here, a wooden toy from Rajasthan depicting the ethnic attire of the state

“The best thing a child can do with a toy is break it,” believes Arvind Gupta, scientist and toy inventor, who was awarded the Padma Shri in 2018 for his unique contribution to education. Toys are an integral part of childhood. It helps in developing decision-making abilities as well as aids in the cognitive growth of a child. Indian toys, popularly believed to date back 5,000 years, also serve as a medium to acquaint a child with the myriad culture, traditions and communities of the country. Take, for example, the wooden and clay dolls and figurines from Krishnanagar (West Bengal) and Kondapalli (Andhra Pradesh) that beautifully portray people from varied walks of life and depict, to the very last detail, their dressing styles and professions.

The importance of Indian indigenous toys and the role of local toymakers in the Indian economy

was highlighted by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi when he inaugurated the country’s first Toy Fair recently, in the virtual mode. “Our [Indian] toys reflect reuse and recycling that has been a part of the Indian lifestyle. Most Indian toys are built out of natural and eco-friendly materials. The colours used in them are natural and safe,” PM Modi had said during the inauguration ceremony. The Prime Minister also

Characters from Hindu mythologies and epics are among the most recurring themes of Kondapalli toys. Here, a Kondapalli toy set depicting (from left) Lord Lakshmana, Lord Hanumana, Lord Rama and Devi Sita - characters from the Hindu epic Ramayana. Each part of a Kondapalli toy set is carved separately and then joined together with the help of *makku* (an adhesive prepared with crushed tamarind seed powder and sawdust). Kondapalli toys and dolls, created from a soft wood known as Tella Poniki, received the Geographical Indications tag in 2006



**IF THERE IS A DEMAND FOR MADE IN INDIA TODAY, THEN THE DEMAND FOR HANDMADE IN INDIA IS ALSO INCREASING EQUALLY. TODAY PEOPLE DO NOT ONLY BUY TOYS AS A PRODUCT BUT ALSO WANT TO CONNECT WITH THE EXPERIENCE ASSOCIATED WITH THAT TOY. SO WE HAVE TO PROMOTE HANDMADE IN INDIA AS WELL.**

**Narendra Modi**  
Prime Minister of India

## HERITAGE



**Top:** Terracotta handicraft is also practiced in Bankura and Bishnupur districts of West Bengal. Here, terracotta dolls depicting tribal men with bows and arrows

**Bottom:** Kathputli or a puppet made of wood is one of the most iconic forms of entertainment of Rajasthan. These puppets, dressed in traditional Rajasthani attire, are manoeuvred by strings



urged toy manufacturers to use less plastic and more recyclable material in their products during the inauguration address.

Toys are a nation-wide interest, and a nation which encourages the manufacture of indigenous toys is one that exhibits signs of growth and happiness. In most societies today, toys and games are manufactured in factories, leading to the action of global and mass consumption, making communities industrial in nature. Earlier, toys and games were designed and made by children, families and local artisans. Today, most toys are mass manufactured. But like the silver lining in every grey cloud, there still exist, albeit in fewer numbers, a handful of self-organised and artisanal sectors that continue to be rooted to their toy making traditions, thereby retaining their

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Toys are a nation-wide interest, and a nation which encourages the manufacture of indigenous toys is one that exhibits signs of growth and happiness

own unique identity. Here are a few lesser-known indigenous Indian toys.

### KONDAPALLI TOYS

A cultural icon of Andhra Pradesh, Kondapalli toys – delicately carved from wood and hand-painted – derive their names from the eponymous village where they originated over four centuries ago. The themes of these beautiful and expressive toys range from such iconic modes of transport as lorries,

rickshaws, *palkis* (palanquins) and bullock carts, to episodes from Hindu epics and mythologies and even depictions of rural life, animals and birds. The Dasavatharam (ten avatars of Lord Vishnu) set is the most elaborate and popular Kondapalli toy.

### ASHARIKANDI TERRACOTTA DOLLS

Tucked away in Assam's Dhubri district is Asharikandi, a village

An assortment of Channapatna toys, including models of vintage cars, motorbikes, contorting toys and xylophones. Channapatna toys and dolls received the Geographical Indications tag in 2006



### Toy is one of the 24 focus sectors in which India wants to become self-reliant and reduce imports

Small toys made from jute are colourful and eco-friendly, and can be crafted to create any shape and form. Here, jute toys shaped like Lord Ganesha

popular for its unique terracotta dolls. Terracotta is believed to be one of the world's oldest craft materials and is the result of baking a special type of soil called *hiramati*. Created using such traditional tools as *kodal* (spade), *khota* (a thin bamboo tool used for removing impurities) and *pitna* (a tool used to shape to the clay), the artisans of Asharikandi deftly craft figurines of local deities, animals, birds and also objects from daily life. But one of the most iconic and popular Asharikandi terracotta

toys is the *Hatima putul* (*putul* in Assamese means doll). A symbol of cultural significance, the *Hatima putul* depicts a mother with an elongated face and elephant-like ears holding a child in her arms or her lap, and, in some designs, a child on one side and a *pradipdani* (earthen lamp) on the other.

#### CHANNAPATNA TOYS

An iconic production of the Channapatna town of Karnataka, these delightful toys are said to





## Indian toys aim not only to serve as objects of entertainment but also of education

trace their origin to the reign of Tipu Sultan (1782-1799), a prominent ruler of South India. Traditionally, these durable toys were made from ivory but over the years have evolved to incorporate woods of trees like rubber, sycamore, sandalwood, teak and pine. Minutely carved and finished with a coat of glossy paint, some of these toys are also educational. Artisans in Channapatna, also known as Gombegala Ooru or 'toy town', create trains and rocking horses along with such utility objects as pen stands and candle stands.

### THANJAVUR DOLLS

The most unique feature of Thanjavur dolls is their bobbing heads, which is why they are called



**Top:** The art of puppetry is practiced by a society of agricultural labourers in Rajasthan. Known as the Bhats, these artisans originally hail from Nagaur and travel all over the country with their craft. They are also called kathputliwalas and use puppets to narrate tales of Rajasthan's history and local traditions

**Bottom:** Babushka dolls, also known as Russian nesting dolls, carved from wood are a speciality of Haryana

## HERITAGE



**Top:** The most popular variety of Thanjavur moving dolls represent traditional dancers

**Bottom:** Rocking horses are iconic Channapatna creations

Thanjavur *thalayatti bommai* in Tamil, which translates to Thanjavur head-shaking doll. Originating in Thanjavur, a city in Tamil Nadu, these dolls are hand-modelled using materials like clay, marble and wax to resemble figurines of Bharatanatyam and kathakali dancers. Thanjavur dolls also include roly-poly figures

of a couple appearing like a king and queen, symbolising the royal dynasties that reigned in Thanjavur. Such is this toy's distinctiveness that it received a Geographical Indications (GI) tag in 2008.

### NATUNGRAM DOLLS

Originating in Natungram, a village in the Burdwan district of West Bengal, is another indigenous range of toys carved out of wood, minutely painted with vibrant hues and named after the eponymous village. The Natungram dolls date back to the wave of Bhakti Movement that flourished in Bengal during the 15th and 16th centuries, and began with a pair of wooden figures depicting Gour, a revered Indian saint Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, and Nitai, the saint's disciple and friend. Although the variety of Natungram dolls range from Lord Krishna and his consort Radha to soldier dolls influenced by the erstwhile royal



**Right:** Carved idols of Lord Krishna are one of the most iconic representations of Natungram toys

**Bottom:** The most popular Natungram toy, however, is the wooden owl, which was earlier bought as religious objects as the nocturnal bird is the vehicle of Lakshmi, the Hindu Goddess of wealth. Now, it is used as objects of home decor



kingdom of Burdwan, its most popular product is an iconic pair of owls.

Indian toys aim not only to serve as objects of entertainment but also of education. And the government, led by PM Modi, is leaving no stone unturned to popularise Indian toys and encourage local craftsmen to carry forward their artistic heritage. In fact, toy is one of the 24 focus sectors in which India wants to become self-reliant and reduce imports. Working towards the cause,

the country has already increased the import duty on toys from 20 per cent in 2020 to 60 per cent and established a Quality Control Order, according to which, all toys and associated materials for children below 14 years of age will be certified by the Bureau of Indian Standards.

With support from the government and institutions like the National Institute of Design, India's toy making industry will not continue to flourish but will also add to the Prime Minister's visions of Aatmanirbhar Bharat, Make in India and Vocal for Local.



A pioneer in the research of indigenous toys and crafts communities across India, professor **Sudarshan Khanna** was Head of Toy Innovation Centre at the National Institute of Design (NID), Ahmedabad. In 1996, he was conferred the National Award for his lifetime work for design-science by the Department of Science and Technology, Ministry of Science and Technology, Government of India.



**Surabhi Khanna**, is a designer and faculty member at National Institute of Design Haryana (NIDH). She has been working on heritage and culture-based designs since 2011.

# ART OF the gods

One of India's oldest forms of painting, *pattachitra* is said to have begun with the establishment of the Jagannath Temple in Puri, Odisha. Bhagyasri Sahoo and Shrabasti Anindita Mallik explore the intricacies of this traditional art form that has its roots in the heritage village of Raghurajpur in the Puri district



Although most *pattachitra* paintings are vibrant, some are also done in black and white, demanding utmost concentration and focus as they require an artist to create minute yet detailed strokes to bring out the features of the artwork

India's artistic heritage is rich and diverse with almost every region of the country steeped in its own distinct style of creative expression – from Bihar's Madhubani painting and Maharashtra's Warli art to Rajasthan's miniature painting. But one of the most ancient, indigenous and vibrant among them is Odisha's art form of *pattachitra* (*patachitra*) that found mention in one of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's

recent radio addresses to the nation, *Mann Ki Baat*.

*Pattachitra* has its roots in the small village of Raghurajpur in Odisha's Puri district. Such is the passion of the villagers about this art form that they live by what they claim – "*Painting nahi to kuch nahi* (there is nothing more to life other than painting)." In fact, Raghurajpur is one of the few art pockets in the country where every village member is engaged in this traditional craft.

**LOOK AT BHAGYASRI SAHOO OF ROURKELA, ODISHA. ALTHOUGH SHE IS A STUDENT OF ENGINEERING, IN THE PAST FEW MONTHS, SHE STARTED LEARNING THE ART OF PATTACHITRA AND HAS MASTERED IT.**

**Narendra Modi**  
Prime Minister of India



Lord Jagannatha is one of the most recurring themes in *pattachitra* paintings

Image: Snehta Kothari

## More than pattachitra

A few families in Raghurajpur even conduct workshops. The duration of these workshops, aimed at propagating the art form and keeping it alive in the hands of the new generation, can either be a day-long course or an extended residency.

Raghurajpur was declared a 'heritage village' in 2000 by the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH).

The village is also the home of Odissi legend and recipient of the Padma Vibhushan – Kelucharan Mohapatra. The remains of his house where he grew up is an attraction in Raghurajpur.

Almost every house in Raghurajpur village is an art studio with nearly all members of the family are engaged in the craft. And not just on the *patta*, *chitrakars* also paint on papier mache masks called *kagaja mukha*

Almost every house in the village is an art studio where artisans not only offer visitors a chance to see the work but also sell their craft. No wonder that the facade of every home in Raghurajpur appears like a mural displaying episodes from Hindu folklores. What sets the art of *pattachitra* apart is the immaculate depiction, attention to detail, vivid hues and a century-old heritage.

Legend has it that the tradition of *pattachitra* art began with the establishment of the revered Jagannath Temple in Puri, a reason why one of the recurring themes in

*pattachitra* painting is the portrayal of the Jagannath Temple or *Thia Badhia*. Brightly-coloured episodes from Hindu mythology and epics have always been the dominant themes of this art form – Lord Ganesha depicted as a five-headed God (*Panchamukhi*), scenes from the life of Lord Krishna (*Krishna Leela*), Goddess Kali and the ten avatars or incarnations of Lord Vishnu (*Dasabatara Patti*) being some of the most popular ones.

This native art, which derives its name from the Sanskrit words '*patta*', meaning cloth or canvas, and '*chitra*', meaning painting, is a



Raghurajpur *chitrakars* stay true to tradition and use colours derived from natural sources for their paintings

labour-intensive process and requires the unflinching focus of a *chitrakar* (as *pattachitra* artists are called). It begins with the making of the *patta* for which water-soaked tamarind seeds are pounded, blended with water and boiled in an earthen pot till the mixture reduces to a paste-like consistency. *Chitrakars* use this paste to bind two pieces of cotton cloth together and coat it with clay powder several times till it becomes stiff. The treated cloth is then given a final polish, first with a hard stone and then a soft one or wood, to render it smooth and ready to be painted upon. Depending upon the size of the *patta* and the narrative that a *chitrakar* has in mind, the entire process — right from the making of the *patta* to the completion of the painting — can take anywhere between a few days and a couple of months.

For *chitrakars*, it is imperative to



**Top:** Traditionally, Raghurajpur *chitrakars* use coconut shells to store their colours while painting;

**Bottom:** Not just religious themes, *chitrakars* in Raghurajpur also depict traditional tribal motifs, daily lives or dance forms on plastic, glass or earthen bottles



*Pattachitra* derives its name from the Sanskrit words ‘*patta*’, meaning cloth or canvas, and ‘*chitra*’, meaning painting

stay true to the roots, which is why they try, as much as possible, to use colours derived from natural sources. White pigment is sourced from conch shell powder, black is obtained from the soot of a *diya* (earthen lamp), red is extracted from either *hingula* (a mineral) or *geru* (earth) and yellow from *harital* (a kind of stone). Even the brushes are made by the artisans. The root of the *keya* (screw pine) plant is used to make the brush and bristles are made of buffalo hair (for thick broad strokes) and mouse hair (for finer and minute lines).

As is with every style of painting, *pattachitra*’s defining traits are prominent figures.

According to an article titled “*Patta Chitra – It’s Past and Present*” published by the Government of

Odisha, “The human figures are generally presented frontally, and although the faces and legs are shown side-wise, the elongated eyes are drawn from the front. Sharp noses and round chins are prominently depicted. Typical hairstyle, clothing, ornamentation, beards and moustaches are used



**Top (left):** Raghurajpur is also famous for the art of *talapatachitra* where intricate patterns and designs are delicately carved on dried palm leaves; **(right):** Paintings are also made on coconuts that are used for decorative purposes;

**Bottom:** On any given day, artists in Raghurajpur can be found engaged in artwork in the small open spaces in front of their houses



Almost all houses in Raghurajpur boast murals depicting scenes from Hindu mythology and epics, giving the village the appearance of an open art studio. Here, a man engages in worship with a larger-than-life mural of Lord Jagannatha in the backdrop

for different characters so that they are easily identifiable as either a king, a minister, a sage, a royal priest, a common man or deities of the Hindu pantheon.” Attention is also paid to the expressions and appearances of the characters. The ornate and intricate patterns that are drawn along the borders of the *patta* are another distinct feature of the craft.

From being an art form traditionally done on treated cloth, *pattachitra* has come a long way. Today, this style of art finds application on such decorative objects as bottles, kettles, stones and light bulbs as well as on tusser silk fabric.

*Pattachitra*, in the truest sense, has stood the test of time, and

Raghurajpur continues to serve as not just the custodian of the art but also its propagator. The Indian art community’s new-found interest towards the nation’s indigenous artworks is encouraging *pattachitra* artists to expand their expertise and cater to both the domestic and international markets, which, in turn, is furthering PM Modi’s missions of Vocal for Local and Aatmanirbhar Bharat.



**Bhagyasri Sahoo** is a self-taught *pattachitra* artist from Odisha, who was appreciated by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi during one of his monthly radio addresses. A resident of Rourkela, she is currently pursuing an Engineering degree from Dhenkanal and paints during her spare time.

# MIGHTY MILLETS

## Super Grains of Power



A millet field in India. As per the Food and Agriculture Organization' data, the global millet production stands at about 90 million tonnes, of which India's share is about 19 million tonnes

Recently, the United Nations General Assembly adopted an India-sponsored resolution to mark 2023 as the International Year of Millets. We delve into India's millet production, their nutritional value and how the Indian government is promoting millets and its cultivation

BY RAJEEV K VARSHNEY



Images: ICRISAT

**S**uper-grain, super-food and wonder-grain are some of the adjectives often used to describe millets, one of the oldest foods known to humans, and probably the first grain used for domestic purposes.

The unanimous adoption by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) of the resolution to declare 2023 as the International Year of Millets, a proposal sponsored by India and supported by over 70 nations, underlines the international community's support to recognise the importance and benefits of these grains for the global food system. Speaking on the subject, India's permanent representative to the UN, ambassador TS Tirumurti, said,

“There is an urgent need to promote the nutritional and ecological benefit of millets to consumers, producers, and decision-makers, to improve production efficiencies, research and development investments, and food sector linkages”. He expressed gratitude to all the co-sponsors, especially Bangladesh, Kenya, Nepal, Nigeria, Russia, Senegal and all member states of the UN for their strong support.

Millets can be used to prepare a wide array of healthy and delicious recipes. Here, **(top)** a mouth-watering dish of millet couscous with roasted carrots, and **(above)** bell peppers stuffed with millets and chickpeas

**The Government of India has been promoting the cultivation of millets to achieve nutritional security, following recommendations by a committee headed by NITI Aayog**

### While the government and research organisations work towards higher productivity of millets, nutritionists and chefs are contributing towards the promotion of unique millet dishes

In India, traces of millets have been found in the archaeological sites of Harappa and Mohenjo-daro, and several ancient Indian scriptures make references to millets. For many years, millets were a part of our daily diet. Today, there is a growing realisation among Indian farmers that cultivating millets requires fewer inputs and it is also an economically viable

option, especially in harsh and dry environments. This is supported by the new-found knowledge on the health benefits of millets. Also, over the last few years, the Indian government has been making extensive efforts to encourage the cultivation of millets.

The Union Government of India, headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, had declared 2018 as the National Year of Millets to boost production of the nutrient-rich grains.

#### A SMART FOOD

Millets are an important staple cereal crop for millions of smallholder dry-land farmers across Asia and sub-



**Top:** Traditional Gujarati khichdi prepared with barnyard millet (sama chawal)

**Right:** A tribal woman from Nagaland displays various types of millets in Mawphlang, Meghalaya



**Top left:** Finger millet (*ragi*) dosa is one of the most popular millet dishes and is served in several parts of the country, especially South India

**Top right:** Rice is often replaced with ragi in the preparation of idli (a South Indian steam cake)

**Bottom:** A farmer in South India with his harvest of healthy finger millet (*ragi*)

Saharan Africa. They are also called nutri-cereals or dry-land cereals, and include sorghum (*jowar*), pearl millet (*bajra*), finger millet (*ragi*), foxtail millet (*kangni*), proso millet (*chena*), barnyard millet (*samvat ke chawal*) and kodo millet (*kodon*), and offer high nutritional benefits. Millets are also referred to as 'Smart Food', which are good for the consumers, the planet and the farmers. For

instance, finger millet has three times the amount of calcium as in milk, and most millets have very high levels of iron and zinc, low glycemic index, good levels of protein and fibre, and are gluten-free.

Millets can also contribute to addressing some of the largest global issues in unison: poor diet (malnutrition to obesity); environmental issues (climate change, water scarcity and environmental degradation); and rural poverty. They have a low carbon footprint and have the ability to survive and grow in warm climate with very little water. They are climate-smart and hence constitute a good risk management strategy for farmers as compared to rice and wheat crops, which need higher quantities of water and fertiliser supplements.

### INDIAN MILLETS AT THE FOREFRONT

Efforts to bring Indian millets to the international forefront



Image: ICRISAT



**Left:** Ragi can also be included in the preparation of breakfast porridges and garnished with dry fruits

**Right:** Flatbread or roti prepared with jowar



began in October 2017, during the Committee on Food Security event in Rome. A series of meetings involving the Government of India (GOI), the agricultural research body International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) and other stakeholders were organised at the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the UN to identify the process of promoting the idea with FAO departments and the Indian Embassy in Rome. Following this initial step, in November 2017, the Government of India's then Union Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh wrote

to the UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, requesting the inclusion of the proposal in the UN General Assembly agenda for an International Year of Millets in 2018. Although this process can typically take five years, the GOI, ICRISAT, the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) of the Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare and its millets research institute, ICAR - Indian Institute of Millets Research (IIMR), along with others pursued the cause, which came to fruition in 2021.

**Millets are climate-smart and hence constitute a good risk management strategy for farmers as compared to rice and wheat crops**

It is encouraging to note that the world is talking about depleting natural resources like arable land and water, and the pressing need to produce more to meet the food and nutritional requirements of the growing population. Staple crops like rice and wheat are part of our traditional diets but are known to be water guzzlers, challenging our farmers, consumers and policy makers to explore ways to diversify our cropping system. Millets suit this requirement.

### **EASY TO CULTIVATE**

Tolerant to drought and high temperature, and other climate change vagaries, millets are mostly cultivated on low-fertile land, mountainous, tribal and rain-fed areas of India like Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Haryana,

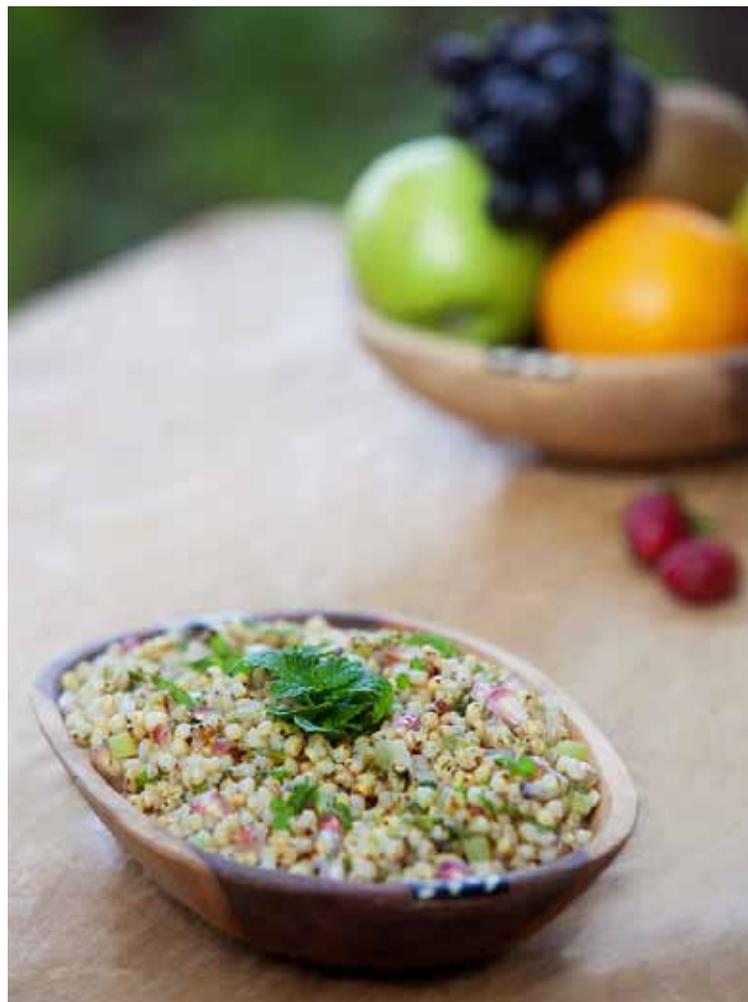


Image: ICRISAT



**Top:** A bowl of healthy sorghum (*jowar*) salad

**Bottom:** Laddoos, an Indian sweet, prepared with foxtail millet flour

### Millets facts

Due to its high resistance against harsh conditions, millets are sustainable to the environment, to the farmer growing it, and provide an economical and high nutrient options for all.

Millets are less sensitive than wheat to rising temperatures, and a kilogram of millets requires just 250 litres of water.

Millet is fibrous in content, has magnesium, Niacin (Vitamin B3), is gluten-free and has a high protein content.

Millets can provide nutrition security as it is rich in calcium, minerals, iron, fibre and beta carotene. It is far superior to rice and wheat in terms of nutrition value.

India is one of the largest producers of pearl millet in the world and Rajasthan is the highest producing state in the country.

Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Telangana. As per the Food and Agriculture Organization' data, the global millet production stands at about 90 million tonnes, of which India's share is about 19 million tonnes.

However, as productivity for a majority of millets is very low, several Indian and international organisations have been working towards enhancing crop productivity by using multi-disciplinary approaches. For instance, the Pearl Millet Genome Sequencing Consortium, comprising 30 institutions, decoded the genome of pearl millet and identified genes for drought- and-heat-tolerance that may be useful not only for millets but also for other major cereals. These researches have contributed to

developing several high-yielding hybrids and improved varieties of several millets that are grown by farmers in India.

### MISSION MILLET

At the national level, the Government of India has been promoting the cultivation of millets on a mission mode to achieve nutritional security, following recommendations by a committee headed by NITI Aayog. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi dedicated 17 biofortified varieties of eight crops, which included two varieties of finger millets and one variety of little millet, on October 16, 2020, on the 75th anniversary of the FAO. As a part of the government's initiative under the National Food Security Act, state governments have been advised to procure millets at minimum support price



Chefs often use millets as a replacement for rice. Here, a bowl of fried foxtail millet (*kangni*) prepared in the style of fried rice

**Top:** Sorghum is also used to make sweet treats. Here, delectable bite-sized sorghum buttermilk pies

**Bottom:** Millet can also be used to prepare decadent treats like cookies



Image: ICRISAT



Image: ICRISAT

and distribute them under the public distribution system (PDS). India's National Nutrition Mission, POSHAN Abhiyaan, has also advised state governments to include millets under large public system delivery channels such as Integrated Child Development Services, Mid-Day Meals etc.

While the government and research organisations work towards higher productivity of millets, nutritionists and chefs are contributing towards the promotion of millets by creating

unique millet dishes. Promotions are being done on easy ways to cook millets, convenient tasty millet recipes, and word is being spread about their nutritional benefits and environment-friendly qualities among all stakeholders - both at the national and international level. The UN Food Systems Summit 2021 also offers additional opportunity to make the food systems sustainable and resilient. The declaration of 2023 as the 'International Year of Millets' will certainly support all these efforts and make millets a popular and healthy food choice for all.



*Prof Rajeev K Varshney, is Research Program Director at the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT), Hyderabad, India, and Adjunct Professor with Food Futures Institute, Murdoch University, Australia. An elected fellow of more than a dozen science academies/ societies of India, Germany, USA, etc. and recipient of several prestigious awards, Rajeev is one of India's most prolific researchers. Collaborators on this piece: Joanna Kane- Potaka, Arabinda Padhee, Nilesh Mishra, Rohit Pilandi and Geetika Sarin.*

# A VISIT TO remember

Museums serve as more than just portals to the past. They preserve the remnants of the bygone era for posterity and offer a glimpse of the country's glorious history - be it musical, monetary, military or cultural. On the occasion of International Museum Day (May 18), we bring you some of India's most unique museums

BY SHRABASTI ANINDITA MALLIK



**Left:** Exhibits at the RBI Monetary Museum in Mumbai are accompanied by information about the origin and evolution of money, and its role in India's economic history

**Bottom:** A display depicting the evolution of Indian coins beginning from the Gupta period to the Mughal era and from the British era to present day at the museum

## THE RESERVE BANK OF INDIA MONETARY MUSEUM

Mumbai, Maharashtra

This unique museum was set up by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to capture the journey of the monetary system in the Indian subcontinent. The interactive exhibits that range from coins and paper money to e-money allow visitors to view and understand the evolution of currency in the country over millennia. The displays also acquaint visitors with the various systems of barter, trade and commerce that flourished over the years. One of the main attractions of the museum, which also organises informative quizzes and slide shows for children, is the coins section that displays coins dating back to the 6th century BC. Entry is free and the museum is closed on Mondays.





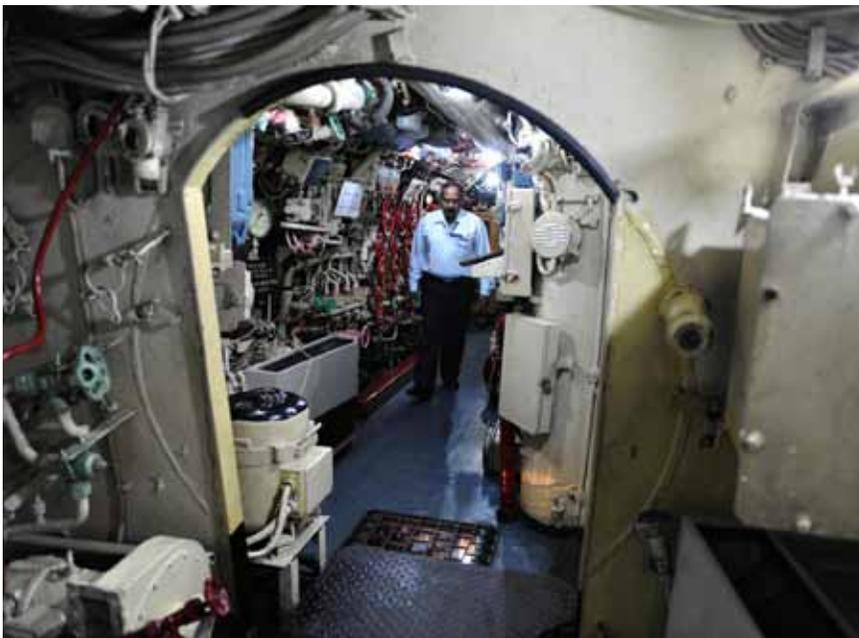
**Top:** The INS Kurusura Submarine Museum has been recognised by the Indian Navy as a War Memorial

**Bottom:** The INS Kurusura submarine was hauled from sea to land with all its original weaponry and fittings. Here, a glimpse of the museum's interiors

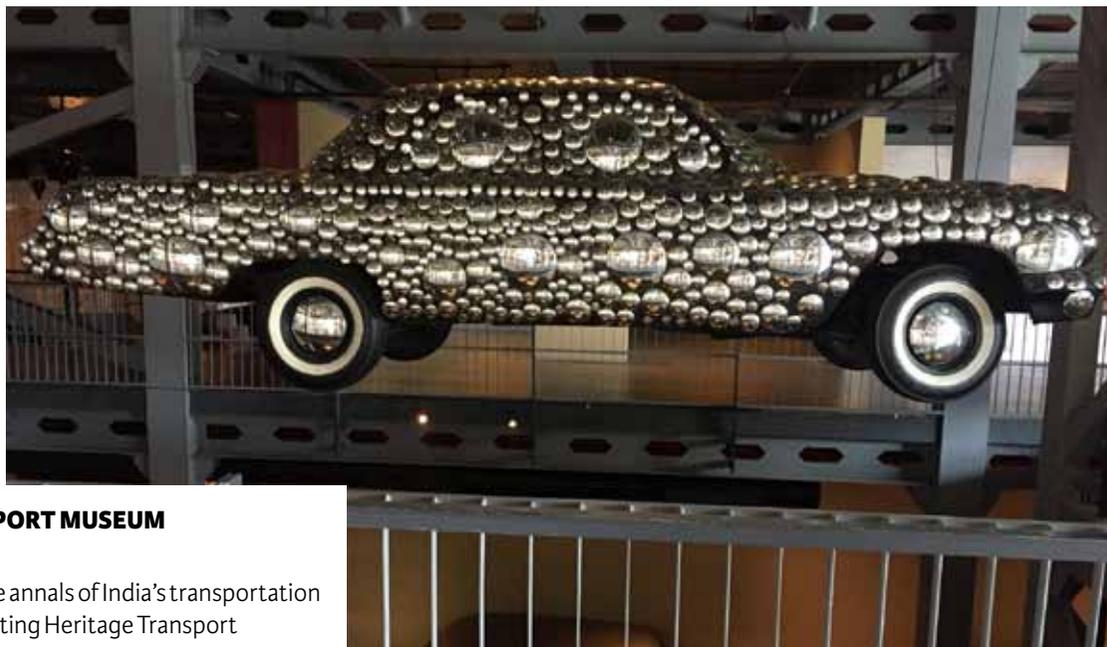
## **INS KURUSURA SUBMARINE MUSEUM**

Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh

This unique museum, touted to be the first-of-its-kind in South Asia, is housed inside a real submarine! INS Kurusura Submarine, a Soviet built-I-641 class submarine, was inducted into the Indian Navy on December 18, 1969, and was decommissioned after 31 years of glorious service on February 28, 2001. The museum chronicles the milestones, achievements and services rendered by the submarine to the nation through a stellar display of artefacts, photographs and written scripts. The tour guides of the museum are retired officers of the Indian Navy who offer visitors an immersive experience of life in a submarine. Various parts of the submarine like the radar room, sonar room and control room are on display in this museum, which is closed on Mondays.



## SNAPSHOTS



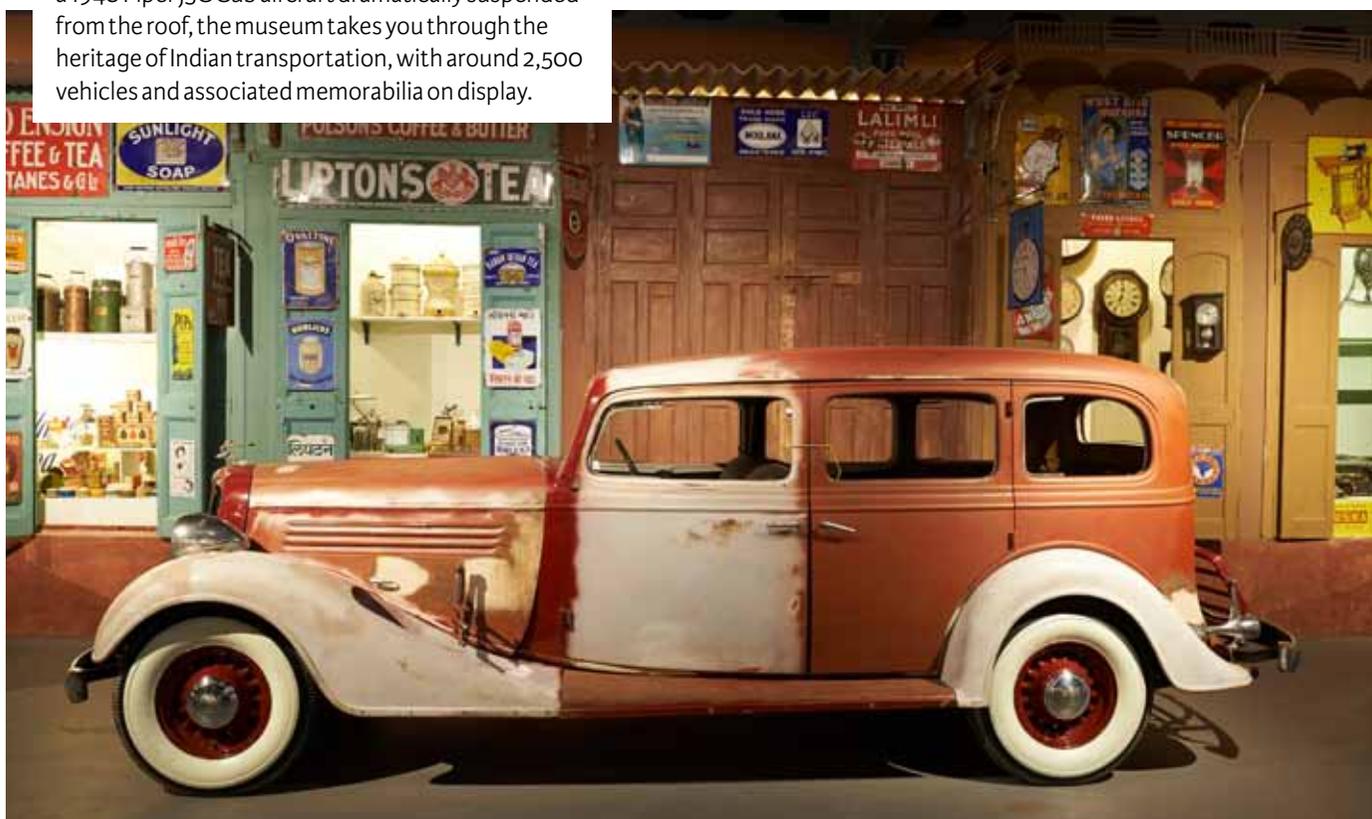
### HERITAGE TRANSPORT MUSEUM

Taoru, Haryana

Take a drive down the annals of India's transportation history at the fascinating Heritage Transport Museum, where a vintage Morris Minor serves as a reception desk, motorcycle handlebars are used as door handles and headlights are positioned as room lights. Located at Taoru, near Gurugram, Haryana, this museum is curated by automobile enthusiast Tarun Thakral and is a visual treat for all ages. From vintage cars, scooters, buses and a railway coach to bullock carts, horse carriages, *palkis* (palanquins) and a 1940 Piper J3C Cub aircraft dramatically suspended from the roof, the museum takes you through the heritage of Indian transportation, with around 2,500 vehicles and associated memorabilia on display.

**Top:** One of the most attractive displays at the Heritage Transport Museum is that of a 1962 Chevrolet covered in dome mirrors suspended in the atrium

**Bottom:** A 1934 Buick Limousine on display at the museum





### SAROD GHAR

Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh

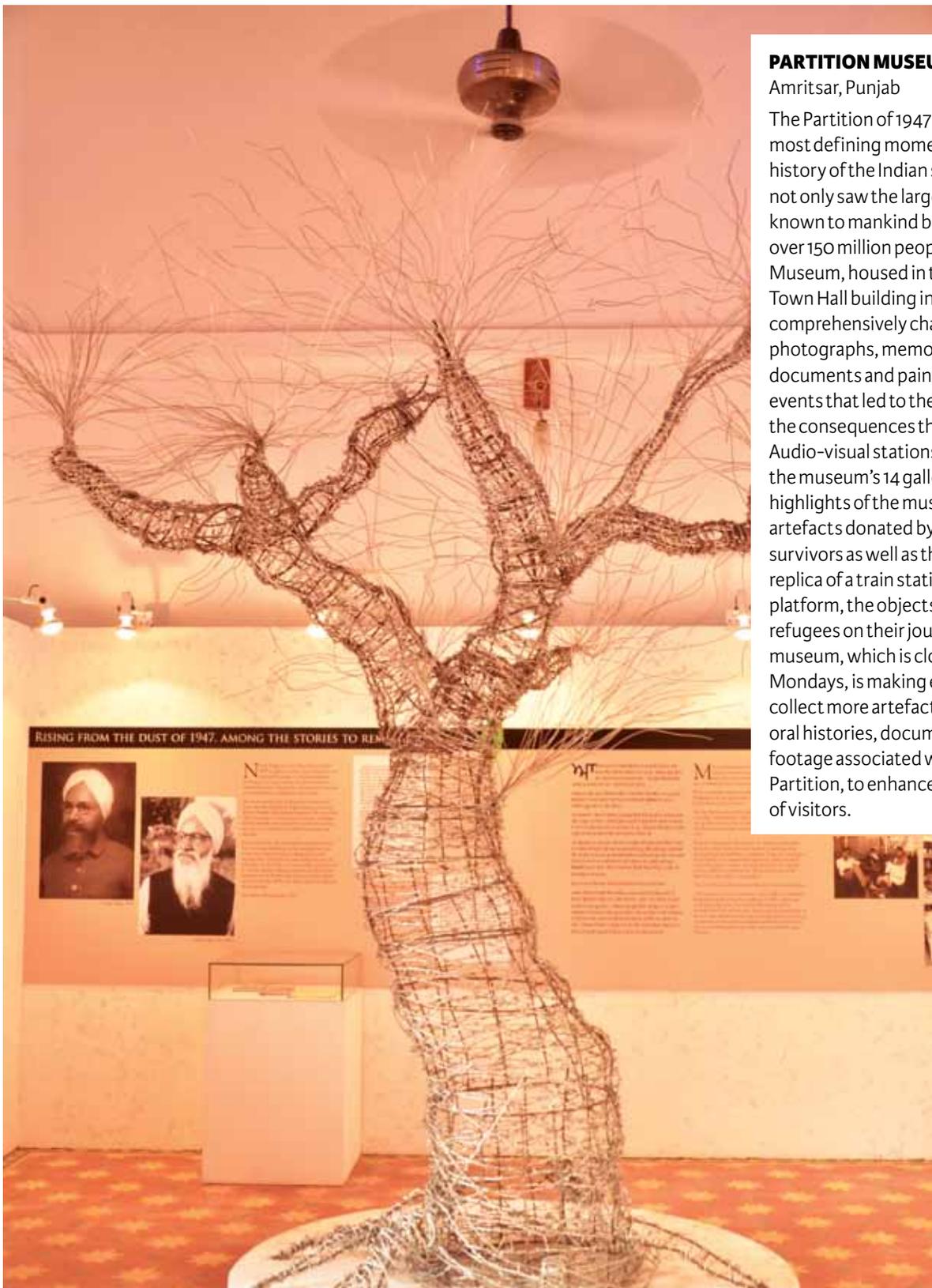
Sarod Ghar, also called Sarod Museum, is a haven for aficionados of Hindustani classical music. It displays instruments of some of the most iconic and illustrious figures of Indian classical music. From the sarod (string instrument) of renowned sarod master Ustad Haafiz Ali Khan and the *surmandal* or *swarmandal* (an Indianised version of the harp) belonging to legendary artist Ustad Bade Ghulam Ali Khan to the violin of noted multi-instrumentalist Ustad Allauddin Khan and the *ghungroos* (strings of small metallic bells tied to the ankle while performing Indian classical dances) of kathak doyen Pandit Acchan Maharaj - this museum is a treasure trove of India's rich artistic heritage. Musical events and live performances are regularly organised here. In fact, the central courtyard is designed as an open-air auditorium for the latter. The museum is closed on Sundays.



**Top:** Exhibits of Indian traditional musical instruments at Sarod Ghar. The museum is also working on compiling a database on classical music in books, articles, audio and audio-visual recordings

**Above:** The museum is housed in the ancestral home of noted sarod master and Padma Vibhushan recipient Ustad Amjad Ali Khan, who is also the son of Ustad Haafiz Ali Khan

## SNAPSHOTS

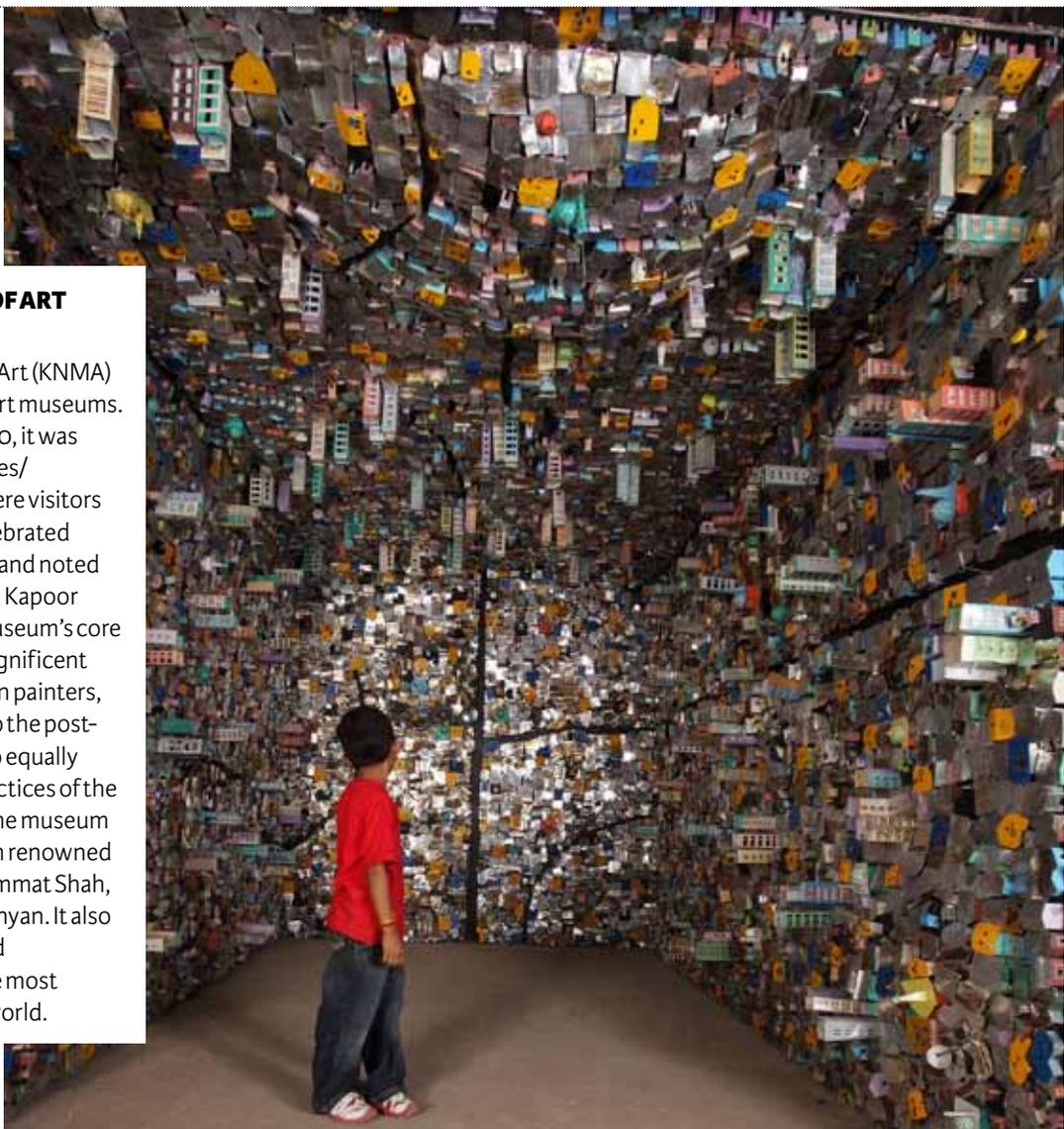


### **PARTITION MUSEUM**

Amritsar, Punjab

The Partition of 1947 is one of the most defining moments in the history of the Indian subcontinent. It not only saw the largest migration known to mankind but also affected over 150 million people. The Partition Museum, housed in the historic Town Hall building in Amritsar, comprehensively charts - through photographs, memorabilia, official documents and paintings - the events that led to the Partition and the consequences that followed. Audio-visual stations are set across the museum's 14 galleries. The highlights of the museum are the artefacts donated by the families of survivors as well as the life-size replica of a train station and, on the platform, the objects carried by refugees on their journeys. The museum, which is closed on Mondays, is making efforts to collect more artefacts, including oral histories, documents and footage associated with the Partition, to enhance the experience of visitors.

The barbed-wire tree called *Tree of Hope* is the *piece de resistance* of the Partition Museum's Gallery of Hope (the last gallery). Visitors are encouraged to pen down messages of love, peace and harmony on leaf-shaped papers and hang them on the branches of the tree



## KIRAN NADAR MUSEUM OF ART

New Delhi

The Kiran Nadar Museum of Art (KNMA) is one of India's first private art museums. When it opened doors in 2010, it was among a handful of art centres/ museums in the country where visitors could enjoy the works of celebrated artist Jamini Roy (1887-1972) and noted 20th-century sculptor Anish Kapoor under one roof. While the museum's core collection highlights the magnificent works of 20th-century Indian painters, including those belonging to the post-Independent decades, it also equally engages in the varied art practices of the younger contemporaries. The museum showcases the works of such renowned artists as Dayanita Singh, Himmat Shah, Jeram Patel and KG Subramanyan. It also organises engaging talks and discussions with some of the most influential voices of the art world.



**Above:** One of Kiran Nadar Museum of Art's treasured art pieces is an installation titled *8'x 12'* (2009) by late Indian artist Hema Upadhyay. It is an interactive piece created using maquettes of tin houses made from aluminium sheets, car scraps, enamel paint, tarpaulin, pieces of metal, and other objects collected from Dharavi in Mumbai

**Left:** Renowned Indian visual artist LN Tallur's installation titled *Veni, Vidi, Vici (I came, I saw, I conquered)* is another prized piece of the museum. It is created with terracotta roof tiles

## SNAPSHOTS

### CLICK ART MUSEUM

Chennai, Tamil Nadu

Claimed to be India's first 3D interactive 'trick art' museum, the Click Art Museum is an interactive space where the exhibits are aptly called trick art or optical art – two-dimensional images that play with the illusion of a third dimension when seen from a certain angle. Take a picture with a chimp, accept a rose from Charlie Chaplin, receive blessings from Mother Teresa or evade a kick from Jackie Chan – let your imagination run wild and free here. And unlike any other museum, visitors are permitted to touch the exhibits and even pose with them. This fun-filled museum has about 24 such engaging exhibits curated by AP Shreethar, who is an artist himself. The trip of the museum begins with a quick tutorial regarding how to position oneself and the camera for maximum effect of the illusions.





**Top:** The Chanwar Palkiwon ki Haveli, which houses the Anokhi Museum of Hand Printing, has earned a UNESCO award for 'Cultural Heritage Conservation' in 2000

**Bottom:** The museum organises block printing and block carving demonstrations everyday



## **ANOKHI MUSEUM OF HAND PRINTING**

Jaipur, Rajasthan

Located inside the beautifully restored Chanwar Palkiwon ki Haveli near the historic Amer Palace Fort, this unique museum is dedicated to hand block printing. The exhibits display a varied selection of block printed textiles that portray the evolution of block printing in the textile town of Sanganer in Rajasthan, associated images, tools and related objects – all curated to offer an in-depth look into the intricacies of this ancient craft tradition. Highlights of the museum's permanent collection include a range of natural and chemical processes like the traditional *dabu* or mud-resist printing, gold and silver embellishments, and wooden and brass blocks with carving tools. The main attraction here, however, is the archive section that acts as a rich repository of clothing and home furnishings dating from the early 1960s to the present day.

**Disclaimer:** The operation of the museums listed here is subject to the local restrictions due to pandemic in their respective states

# INDIAN IMPRESSIONS

Know India a little more with these interesting facts



Image: pmindia.gov.in

## DOSES OF CURE

On April 11, 2021, India launched the novel Tika Utsav (vaccination drive) on the suggestion of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi as an attempt to speed up the nationwide vaccination drive to contain a resurgent coronavirus disease. The four-day drive that concluded on April 14 was a huge success with the cumulative number of vaccine doses administered in the country surpassing 11 crore on the last day, according to the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW), Government of India.

## OF GRIT AND RESILIENCE

- The story of Ranjith Ramachandran from a night watchman to an assistant professor at IIM, Ranchi, is nothing short of inspiring. The 28-year-old, who has a doctorate in Economics from the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Madras, was applauded by TM Thomas Isaac, Minister for Finance and Coir, Government of Kerala, after the former posted about his achievements on social media.
- Thirty-eight-year-old Ankita Shah's tale is no less inspiring. She has defied all odds to become the first differently-abled female auto driver in Ahmedabad, Gujarat. She was a year old when she lost her right leg to polio but that did not stop her from earning a degree in Economics. Today, she is not just the primary breadwinner of her family but also a beacon of hope and positivity for society.



L to R: Ranjith Ramachandran; Ankita Shah

Image (left): facebook.com/, (right): betterindia.com



Image: quora.com

## AN ENGINEERING MARVEL

In a bid to boost connectivity to and from the Kashmir valley, the Indian Railways recently completed the construction of an arch for a railway bridge over the Chenab river. Perched at an elevation of 359 m (1177.82 ft) above the river bed level, this bridge is touted to be the highest of its kind in the world. The bridge is a part of the Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla Rail Link (USBRL) project, which is scheduled to be completed next year. According to an official statement from the Ministry of Railways, "This achievement is a major leap towards the completion of the 111-km-long winding stretch from Katra to Banihal."



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