

JGi **JAIN**
DEEMED-TO-BE UNIVERSITY

Aventure

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BLENDED EDUCATION MODEL

THE WAY FORWARD FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

PRAKSHAY 2020

AYURVEDA LIFE SCIENCES FESTIVAL

KARNATAKA DEALING WITH CHALLENGES OF COVID-19





wear
your
mask



Six Feet
AWAY



WASH
SOAP
YOUR HANDS

Stay Safe and Stay Healthy

Editorial

Dear Readers,

The World Bank and UNESCO report of the 'Task Force on Higher Education and Society' has stated that 'Higher Education is no longer a luxury: It is essential to a nation's social and economic development today, more than ever, the wealth and poverty of a nation depends on the quality of higher education.' The Indian Higher Education System (HES) is undoubtedly poised for a revolution.

The Covid Pandemic has given us ample opportunity for a reality check, and despite the devastation, it has opened a wealth of opportunity for the HES. Efforts have been afoot to increase the gross enrolment ratio in Higher Education Institutions (HEI), especially in the context of foreign universities being the preferred destination for a large Indian student population to pursue higher studies, and the lack of access to higher education for a large underprivileged population of the country. Digitisation of education delivery and a sharp improvement in the quality of higher education and research in India is the need of the hour to retain talent as well as make higher education economically sustainable for the masses.

All efforts to take the Indian HES global, and simultaneously to the grass-roots of the Indian population, is in a big way impinging on technology. Overcoming the divisive impacts of technology, to harness it to reap rich dividends calls for a concerted effort from the academia, the policy makers and the industry. There has been a steady increase in the entry of several players offering technology-based education services into the HEI ecosystem, especially over the last couple of months. Reaching these services to increase gross enrolment ratio and, empower and enable the HEIs in tier 2, tier 3 cities and the rural areas of the country would restore equal opportunity and social justice in our country rid with socio-economic and cultural disparities.

With this backdrop in mind, in Centre piece we focus on the factors that make the blended education delivery model the future of HIE as well as how Jain (Deemed to-be-University) is continuing to deliver quality education to its students by seamlessly transitioning to the virtual delivery model in these unprecedented times.

Prasanna Harihar takes a look at how the healthcare industry, aided by technological innovation, is evolving towards a patient-centric ecosystem in the Bits and Bytes section.

Dr. K Sudhakar, Medical Education Minister, GoK in an interview talks about how the Karnataka government is coping with the pandemic, measures taken to treat Covid patients and to ensure the safety of its people.

Even as the world intelligensia is turning towards Eastern philosophy and wisdom, Dr. Radhakrishna Pillai, author and entrepreneur, through his numerous books has rendered the rather complex and esoteric body of Chanakya's *neeti* in simple language and style to reach it to the world. Dr. Pillai talks about his life and works in an interview.

Also included are a wide-range of features, interviews and reviews and before we wind up, we leave you with RearView, to dwell and reflect upon those shades of life and living that are off the palette.

We look forward to your valuable feedback.

Stay safe.

Thank you.
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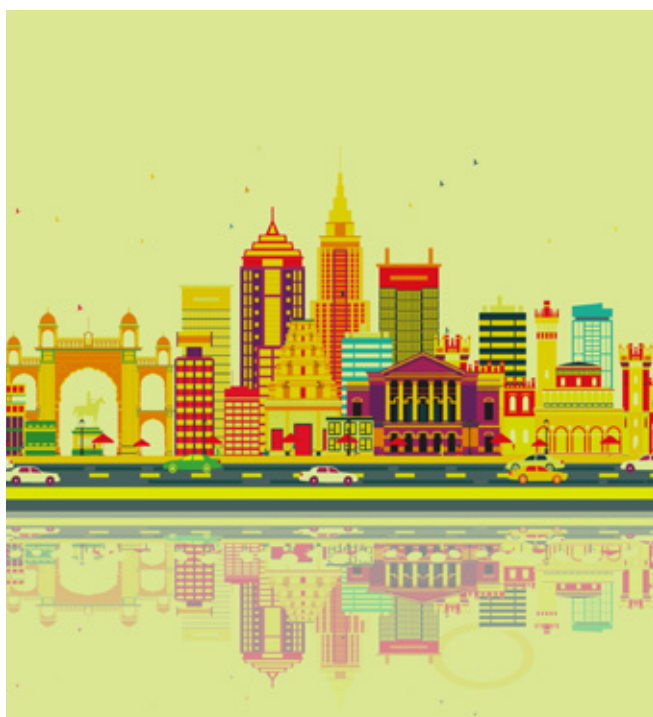


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“While the pandemic tightens its noose around the hapless population, the biggest priority of any country in the days to come would be to revive its economy and hopefully return to some kind of normalcy.”

”

“I have to be ready because no one knows how this is going to turn out, how this is going to end, how this is going to recede. So obviously I have to be ready, I cannot finish my story with these announcements,” said Union Finance Minister, Nirmala Sitharaman at a press conference in New Delhi as the novel Corona Virus (COVID-19) pandemic spread across the globe.

How things have changed since this address was made. Just a couple of months ago, people all over the world woke up to witness a brand New Year filled with hope, expectations and a longing to turn their lives around. Yet as fate would decree, within just a short period, everything changed. With the Corona Virus spreading rapidly in the country and the rest of the world, painting a grim reality for everyone, the future looks unreal. While the pandemic tightens its noose around the hapless population, the biggest priority of any country in the days to come would be to revive its economy and hopefully return to some kind of normalcy. It is an uneasy turn of events and the world must find ways to exist with this new reality. Not surprising, we call it the new normal.

Countries across the world, barring a few, have resorted to lockdowns and curfews with restricted movements as a measure to flatten the curve of the Corona Virus infections, confining zillions to their homes and freezing all economic activities. This has triggered a downside risk to just about every other activity. Businesses have taken a hit, consumption has seen a downfall and the education sector has been left grappling with its share of challenges. Yet all is not lost. In the ensuing scenario, the market scenes have begun to limp back. With determination and more result-oriented policies, our nation will fight this odd too.

For the education sector, we are presented with different permutations before we can return back to the classrooms. It is expected to happen eventually. In the

meantime, we are called upon to make use of this lull to address the issues of our children. Without a doubt, they must be processing this scenario in their own ways. The stress and the trauma that this pandemic has brought will surely live with them for sometime. The fear of the virus, loss of routine and the new normal of social distancing have left in their wake a frustrated lot. Concerns that this will take a heavy toll on these young minds are legitimate. So as parents and teachers, we should be aware of their mental state and help them wade through unscathed. At JAIN, our motto is, ‘to empower everyone to excel in their areas of interest by providing the best support’ to ride this tide as well.

Let us commit ourselves in thoughts and deeds that we will bounce back with flying colours, together!

Dr. Chenraj Roychand
Chancellor

Finding Our Feet in Flexible Learning



— “ —

“As an academic institution, we equally hold the responsibility to reinstate confidence amongst the student community who are under duress due to disrupted learning and educate them skillfully and intellectually for the difficult days ahead. ”

— ” —

“**S**tart where you are. Use what you have. Do what you can.” - Arthur Ashe.

These words of Arthur Ashe perfectly echo the fact that education is undeniably, perpetual and continuously evolving. In the blink of an eye, the universe we knew has changed. This pandemic

has given us an understanding of the world and how fragile it can become with the attack of a deadly virus.

This diminutive, invisible microorganism has grown to be an exclusive, solo and an ultimate health hazard that the contemporary world is encountering in decades. Being one of the pivotal contributing factors to the economic prospects of a country, the education sector is not an exception to have been critically disordered by the pandemic in recent times.

With the impending ambiguity of the educational institutions functioning at normalcy, the focus has been gradually shifting to virtual education and online learning, which proposes students with unlimited opportunities to receive education remotely. Across the globe, the education trajectory has been filled with myriad breakthroughs and most recently it wouldn't be an overstatement to say that, the teaching learning process has been activated by technology.

To incorporate flexible learning into our instructional system, we at Jain (Deemed-to-be University) have gone into an operative mode by embedding digitisation in education. Virtual learning is being integrated with the curriculum in various phases and utilising smart classroom equipment like digital training system, digital content, virtual classroom, online exams etc., has assisted the teaching faculty to create a consolidated learning system and improve the education scenario at our institution. The recent online fest of Ayurveda Life Sciences – Prakshay 2020, successfully conducted as a webi-

nar at our institution, stands testimony to the flexibility of the education system to adapt to the changing needs and reflects a paradigm shift in the education zone while opening doors for innovation.

As an academic institution, we equally hold the responsibility to reinstate confidence amongst the student community who are under duress due to disrupted learning and educate them skillfully and intellectually for the difficult days ahead. Human beings are gifted with the power of education and let's use this current situation as an opportunity to use that knowledge wisely.

Though the COVID virus has thrown down the gauntlet at humanity, it's time we make operational changes to the way we function and combat the virus. Using this as an opportunity to make long term amendments in the educational sector we must find our feet to create flexible educational strategies for the mobilisation of young minds.

Dr. N Sundararajan
Vice Chancellor

IT for Promoting Eco-Friendly Habitat



Fuelled by the excitement of encountering a new city and its aura deep down his heart, a 22-year-old youngster landed in Bengaluru. Before long he discovered that his fears of adapting to Indian society seemed baseless, because blending into the culture of Silicon Valley wasn't as hard as he had expected, for Bengaluru proved to be a vibrant, welcoming and accommodating city. Joseph Herve, from Cameroon from the Central African province, came to Bengaluru in pursuit of innovative, research-oriented higher education, cutting-edge technical possibilities and fresh multi-cultural experiences, which he certainly experienced at Jain (Deemed-to-be University).

An introvert by nature, the thought of socialising in unfamiliar terrain was quite daunting. Fortunately for him, the student community and teaching fraternity at JAIN welcomed him and supported him with the deep understanding that international students come from different societies and cultures whose way of life is significantly different from that of the Indians. "I took some time to familiarise myself to the rules and regulations here, but the team at JAIN eased me into the process and helped me adapt to the surroundings. This gesture helped me come out of my cocoon and forge friendly relationships with my fellow people in the college and the city," shares Joseph who is now far more confident of negotiating with the city and its people. Explaining his experience of working his way through at JAIN, in a nutshell, Joseph says, "It's been a truly wonderful and phenomenal experience studying at JAIN."



Before making inroads into JAIN, Joseph had completed a Bachelor's Degree in Information Technology through the distant education programme offered by the University of Greenwich, London. He realised soon enough that the degree equipped him with the business aspect of Information Technology. "Only after I completed BIT (Business in Information Technology), did I realise that I didn't have technical knowledge on par with industry requirements. I understood I needed to be theoretically and practically strong in my core subject if I am

to achieve something significant in the IT sector. This spurred me to do thorough research about the best colleges that provide world-class education in IT and what better place than Bengaluru - that echoes InfoTech in every nook and corner! I enquired at various colleges in Bengaluru, and chose JAIN after reading the history of the institution, its glory and predominantly the course structure, which seemed customised to suit my scholastic needs," shares Joseph with great clarity of thought.

Inside Campus



Though Joseph tried adjusting to the fast paced cosmopolitan culture and teaching pedagogy in the college, it was the technical language used to communicate the subject that seemed to be a challenge. But with the support of his classmates and lecturers who helped bridge the gap, Joseph overcame the hurdles and completed his Masters with a first class certificate. I probed him about what he intends to do with the post-graduate degree he has earned, and came his reply. "I want to have a successful career ahead, for which I will

now find a job so that I can practice what I have academically learnt. This professional stint will allow me to understand market agility. A few years from now, I would want to venture into business, establish my own IT structure."

The spark of optimism in his eyes is unmistakable. Joseph has a bountiful of business ideas and is pretty confident about them. "With the already existing business knowledge that I gained during my under graduation and with the recently picked up theoretical and tech-

nical knowledge at JAIN, setting up my own company would be a better idea," he says with foresight. Before I pose my next question, he contemplates, "I understand that it would be relatively risky for an amateur to start off as an entrepreneur in the IT sector, but it's a calculated risk and I am positive that at least one of my business ideas will




work.” His background in the Information Technology sector has helped him gain a perspective on how technological skill sets like artificial intelligence, programming apps, machine learning, data analytics, blockchain among others are quietly advancing and causing seismic transformations in the way businesses are impacting human life. Happy and

gratified about what he has learnt, Joseph is more interested in Artificial Intelligence. “In a developing country like mine, I would want to promote greenery through technology, especially through AI. When I was working on a project towards the completion of my post graduation, I harnessed the image processing technique and that’s when



this thought came to my mind.”

He explained meticulously his idea of promoting greenery through technology, “I intend to develop a technology which aims to utilise reusable natural resources for energy production so that natural resources do not deplete. While working on my project, I also wondered if I could use my knowledge in creating a system that would enable people to see live images of the city evolving or losing its green cover. This can give people real-time information on the impact of their actions on nature; the impact of their consumption of natural resources. Probably this could help us reduce the mass consumption of the available natural resources.”

“I would say that Bengaluru is one of the most lovable and livable cities as it is affordable, easy to get by and has many opportunities,” claims Joseph who came to Bengaluru for the job prospects that it presents and the exposure to contemporary cosmopolitan society, with access to the international job market. He now sees it as a medium for himself and many students who come from under-developed countries to accomplish what could not have been conceivable back in their home countries. 



Six Years On and Counting: Realising Dreams at JAIN

Ede Miracle Chibuike would perhaps be studying in one of the universities in the United States of America had his friends back home not shared with him fascinating tales of life and studies in the South Asian subcontinent of India. But life had other plans rolled out for him.



Hailing from Ezzilo in the city of Abakaliki, a place best known for its crude oil exploration, and entertainment in the West African country of Nigeria, Miracle had settled on studying in the Land of Dreams with entrepreneurship strongly ingrained in his mind early in life.

Having gone through his schooling in the city of Lagos in Nigeria, the exposure of living and studying in this cosmopolitan city possibly prepared the ground for his sojourn in distant lands. “It was not a hard decision,” he recalls. “Many of my friends had relocated to foreign countries for higher studies and my parents were not opposed to the idea.”

Surprisingly, it has been six fruitful years of studying in India and counting for Miracle with no breaks in between.

And now Miracle has set his sights firmly on his doctoral studies at Jain (Deemed-to-be University) to tap unending miracles of sorts.

Mirii (as he is fondly referred back home) first landed in India in the summer of 2014 in the city of Chennai, capital of the neighbouring state of Tamil Nadu to pursue a three-year Bachelor of Commerce course in Professional Accounting.

Just like most of his friends, Miracle too had plans to return home at the end of the course, only to place them on the backburner once the opportunity to further his learning emerged. An invitation from a friend in Bengaluru is all it took to scuttle that agenda.



“After studying in Tamil Nadu, I planned on a visit to Bengaluru. Once in Bengaluru, I learnt about JAIN and the career-oriented courses it offers. On a visit to the institution, I felt welcome

and decided to register for a two-year Master of Commerce course in Financial Analysis. Ever since I have been happy and the years have just flown by,” he says.

Inside Campus



Miracle insists that this city has not only accepted him but also prepared him for life ahead in myriad ways. Life was smooth sailing in the early years of his life because his parents took care of just about everything he required. Away from home, he has been forced to fend for himself and that he believes has made him the person he is today.

“Culture shock is as real as it can get,” says the youngster. “During the time I have been here, I have noticed that there are a lot of differences in the way of life and that can herald misunderstandings, which is why the best thing to do is to have an open-mind to co-exist with diverse cultures while learning to live within the set boundaries.”

Enamoured by the close ties he has built



over the years with his host city, Miracle, who until recently nurtured hopes of taking a short break to be with his folks back in Nigeria, but for the pandemic, believes the biggest takeaway from his long stint is the exposure.

“I can now fully comprehend why my friends spoke so highly about their sojourn,” he says even as he mirthfully

acknowledges his closeness to his adopted home. “I guess I have become a localite, to the extent that many things in my home country seem alien to me. Six years is a long time. When folks back home share pictures, I realise that it’s not the same place I spent my childhood.”

He believes he has a lot of stories to




that he has even tried his hand at making some of the dishes.

Miracle confidently says that his cherished dream has not changed and he is earnestly working towards it. He is determined and focused on becoming an entrepreneur. He believes JAIN has given him the direction and helped him stay grounded. Aside this, Miracle credits his family for enabling him to keep his options open about where to study and what to study.

“I am forever grateful to the people of the city of Bengaluru for helping shape my outlook to life,” he says. “Not everybody is the same but I consider it a blessing to have picked a thing or two from the people I continue to interact with. A mere entry or presence of a person in a room often lights things up for some people but for others, this may never happen. Nevertheless, I have to admit that people come with different viewpoints and one has to be open and adapt.”

During his free time, Miracle explores Bengaluru and its environs. “Although I have not visited too many places yet, I am happy to have made an attempt. Every city or place shelters a tale or two that you didn’t know and I plan to make use of my free time during the extended stay here to cover some ground.”

As for lessons picked up during his sojourn, they are aplenty. “Things may be different here, you may not have as much freedom as back home, you may have to follow rules, but you have to stay put and pave your own path to chase your dreams.” 

share from India upon his return home. The things he has learnt, unlearnt and how education in the country is revolutionary.

Reflecting on his time in the country, Miracle found it easier to adapt to Bengaluru than Chennai. Yet he insists that Chennai, being his entry point, has played a big role in helping him come to

terms with his long stay.

“I find it easier to remain engaged and involved with the people around me but that does not take away the demands and challenges of being on my own in a distant land. On arrival, I remember not being so comfortable with the food, because of the taste and spices, but I am used to that now,” says Miracle adding

Yoga at Home Yoga with Family

Definition and classification of Yoga can introduce us to a myriad of interpretations. While some baby boomers believe it to be a spiritual practice, Gen X views it as the Indian equivalent of Western work-out. Although it is considered to



be a way of living by the millennial, the present alpha generation practices yoga for the feel-good factor of body and mind. Regardless of the many perceptions that exist, yoga can help reform and untangle your routine and cataleptic patterns, and this remains an undeniable fact as yoga creates energy, knowledge and harmony of both mind and body.



There are many different kinds of yoga training methods which are widely practised the world over. One of the reasons why it has gained immense popularity across the globe is because there are modifications for every yoga pose, to suit the requirements of every practitioner.


Yoga offers a host of incredible benefits for everyone: cures physical and physiological ailments; enhances performance of sportspersons; increases focus and concentration of students; relieves stress, anxiety, depression and so on. Age is also not a hindrance to practise yoga. Yoga postures are practised from children as young as 6 years to nonagenarians. Though yoga poses are considered to be great for strengthening and relaxing the body, it has much more to offer. One of the finest advantages of yoga, aside from the physical benefits, is how it helps a person relieve the detrimental effects of stress on the body and the psyche.

Yoga, an effective tool for tackling stress of ambiguity and isolation and for maintaining physical well-being during the chaotic COVID-19 times, was practised with a new etiquette of social distancing, this International Yoga Day.

While this social distancing criterion to fight the COVID-19 pandemic has forced yoga centres and other public spaces to remain closed, yoga practitioners across the world turned to the resources of home practice and online yoga on this International Yoga Day.

Similarly, in adherence with the guidelines cited by the UGC, with regard

to International Yoga Day - 2020, Jain (Deemed-to-be University) observed the 6th International Yoga Day where not only students but also the teaching and the non-teaching fraternity practised Yoga in the confines of their respective homes with their families.

The 6th International Yoga Day was commemorated on the virtual platform by staying indoors. Teachers and students of various campuses of JAIN performed different *asanas, pranayama and dhyana* under the guidance of trained yoga professionals of Jain (Deemed-to-be University). Students from various departments shared their photos and videos on social media sites as well to promote public interaction as per the protocol issued by UGC. Yoga demonstrations were followed by special virtual guest lectures and workshops to encourage and highlight the positive transformative impact of yoga on the lives of people. 



Since its inception in 2015, the International World Yoga day has been celebrated with a different theme each year.

- 2015
Yoga for Harmony and Peace
- 2016
Connect the Youth
- 2017
Yoga for Health
- 2018
Yoga for Peace
- 2019
Yoga for Climate Action
- 2020
Amidst the COVID pandemic episode, adhering to the social distancing protocol, the theme for the International Yoga Day was 'Yoga at Home and Yoga with Family'.

JAIN Students Turn COVID-19 Warriors



The world today finds itself in a unique situation. With the onslaught of the novel Corona Virus (COVID-19), citizens from different walks of life have joined forces to ensure the health and welfare of the community.

For the students of Jain (Deemed-to-be University), it has not been any different; taking the challenge to do their bit to help the citizenry cope with the pandemic. Pegging their activities on awareness about COVID-19 and the importance of following the health and safety protocols and guidelines issued by the government, their efforts to help the citizens stay safe has not gone unnoticed.

The student volunteers were advised to strictly follow the health protocols as they embarked on the awareness campaigns.

In the month of April, an awareness programme on safety against COVID-19 was conducted in association with 2ed.in. The student volunteers were part of a team called the Pandemic Response Team, which supplies Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) such as face shields, PPE suits, face masks and sanitizers to doctors, police and other front line warriors of COVID-19. In addition, the team members have been on a mission to create awareness on the importance of psychological wellbeing besides offering them strategies for coping. This has been routed through MyGov. App.

Besides, the NCC cadets of JAIN were also part of an initiative to supply food relief to the underprivileged in the society. With this focus, food items were distributed to the needy at metro stations in Bengaluru. These deeds did not escape the notice of Prime Minister Shri. Narendra Modi's "Mann Ki Baat" address on April 26, 2020.

Closer home, the Alumni of JAIN raised funds and distributed food items and rations to the security personnel of JAIN stationed at different campuses. Building on these initiatives, the students and faculty members of JAIN in association with diverse groups received training on tackling COVID-19. A quiz on hygiene focused on various concerns such as 'spitting' and its ill effects was also conducted in association with Narayana



Health. The session delved on creating awareness about the harmful effects of spitting in public. Sambandh Health Foundation and Narayana Health then joined hands under the banner, 'Pledge for Life'.

Apollo Med skills conducted an online training programme in partnership with Skill India NSDC, ASSOCHAM that was

followed by an online examination. NSS programme officers, Director IQAC, Dean, Student Welfare and more than 500 students took part in the training and also cleared the online exam. A training session was also conducted by the Communication Resource Unit (CRU) -NIRD & PR and UNICEF Hyderabad field office. The training on risk communication for prevention of the spread of COVID-19 focused on stigmatisation, discrimination and post-lockdown-related activities.

In conclusion, a music video was rolled out by students of JAIN as their contribution in the fight against COVID-19. The video, which has been curated by Akshay B M, an MBA student features 21 musicians chanting, Shanti Mantra and has received much acclaim. The four-minute musical interpretation has been created keeping in mind disturbances arising from the nationwide lockdown and calls for calm and peace. 🇮🇳

Webinar on Changing Landscape of Libraries

Worldwide, libraries have had to reconsider their mode of functioning and respond to changing needs in society. Libraries were and continue to be the archives for treasured, transcribed, translated and researched books. Over time, the art of library management evolved into a science with a methodical and professional approach. Today, libraries are essential units of a society's socio-cultural infrastructure that connect communities and encourage knowledge-sharing, creativity and innovation. In the fast-paced digital and paperless world, the library espouses a new responsibility; it is now a space where people discover ideas, develop concepts and meet others with a similar drive. Librarians who were considered to be the wardens of books are now curators of passion and interest!

Embracing rapidly evolving digital technologies is inevitable, even as the love for the touch and feel aspect of books remains. In the context of the immi-

nent need for educational institutions to embrace technology for their libraries, the Learning Resource Center (LRC) of Jain (Deemed-to-be University) conducted a webinar recently.

Titled, 'From Artificial Intelligence to IoT: the Changing Landscape of Libraries', the webinar explored how Library and Information Technology Services (LITS) can be utilised in educational institutions and provided a platform to discuss how technology will change the landscape of libraries in the future.

Although the webinar was intended for a pan India audience, it witnessed more than 480 participants not only from India, but also from countries like Abu Dhabi, New Zealand, Qatar, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Nepal, Nigeria and the Philippines. Webinar participants were primarily officials responsible for integrated library and information technology services in academic institutions who acknowledged the paradigm shift that would occur in the next few years

and are devising a plan of action to be implemented to prepare themselves for the prospects.

The webinar was inaugurated with a welcome note followed by a brief introduction on how the approach to libraries has evolved over the years, from print to online resources, search to discovery, physical location to virtual space, classroom-based learning to online, by Dr. Meeramani N-Librarian and Programme Coordinator. The key factors that have affected the services of libraries were also a part of the introduction.

In addition, the application of the latest technologies in the Learning Resource Centre at JAIN was elucidated. Library services such as Web OPAC, Digital Library Services, Cloud Computing, Virtual Reference Services, Information Commons, Mobile Services and many more were other areas of a wide-ranging virtual discussion.

Dr. R Suchitra - Associate Professor, MSc - IT Department initiated the session with an introduction to artificial intelligence and machine learning. She conversed about technologies and pioneering trends that reflect developments in core areas of library services and management that would propel the progress of libraries towards an engaging, collaborative and cutting edge model. The session also threw light on leveraging machine learning for library applications, which would help libraries retain their technological relevance, take on new positions and programmes and prevent them from getting outdated.

Various technologies like Recommender System, Expert System, Voice-Controlled Technology, Social Media and Sentimental Analysis, Cloud and Data Analytics, Internet of Things, Digital Interfaces for printed books, drones and facial recognition technology were discussed during the webinar. The application of the aforementioned technologies in diverse fields including libraries was also reviewed during this session. A comparative discussion on Amazon lending library facilities with academic libraries and the usage of drones in the library arena was said to be an interesting part of the webinar. The usage of drones for delivery of books to the doorstep of a user spurred the interests of the participants and steered the discussion further.

Emphasising the importance of Artificial Intelligence (AI), the webinar also included a brief about the technology, which has already started influencing the approach that information can be



linked and found in even more exciting ways. Machine learning being a part of AI is said to provide systems the ability to automatically learn and improve from experience without being explicitly programmed. The power of AI lies in the fact that machines can recognise patterns efficiently and routinely at a scale and speed that humans cannot approach.

The fact that AI has found success at intellectual tasks such as computer-supported games or verifying a theorem proves that computers are an ideal channel for the trial and error phase. The application of AI technology in a space like library plays the role of intelligence interface or acts as a gateway for providing access to database and to obtain relevant information.

“Technologies have entered libraries in the form of chatbots that can handle directional questions on a library website, alert when a book is due, and point

a user to relevant library resources or answer simple informational requests,” said Dr. Suchitra.

“With the innovation of technology, the operation of online libraries would be in great demand in the coming days. Pioneering development in technological tools such as the use of augmented reality and artificial intelligence will mechanise many familiar services in a physical library.

Utilising such technologies will convert the library, which was until now a knowledge dispensing quarter, to a co-working space and a place for facilitating the move to the information age,” she asserted.

The last segment of the webinar emphasised on the importance of technology for the promotion of library services and its full application in academic libraries to enhance library service delivery by making it more effective and efficient. Dr. N Meeramani in her concluding session deliberated on how the libraries of the next decade will be different from contemporary libraries and libraries of the previous decades. “In light of the changing landscape of library science, the key challenge for a librarian is to adopt new emerging technologies in the future to provide better services to retain libraries and librarianship,” she expressed.

The webinar concluded with a Q&A session and with the distribution of E-certificates to all the participants. ■

Going Digital

Prakshay 2020

Ayurveda Life Sciences Festival



Jain (Deemed-to-be University) ventured into uncharted terrains by successfully organising a path-breaking online festival of Ayurveda Life Sciences.

Touted as the world's first-ever online festival of Ayurveda Life Sciences, Prakshay 2020 was conducted under

the banner JUxPrana, a digital initiative of Jain (Deemed-to-be University) Hub and Prana by Prana, an education hub of Ayurveda by Dimple Jangda. The objective of the festival was to create awareness of holistic lifestyles prevalent across the globe.

The two-day fest went online on 21-22,

June 2020 from 9 am to 6 pm across diverse digital platforms including Zoom. Acclaimed Bollywood Actress, Juhi Chawla was the Chief Guest at the landmark event, that drew a plethora of esteemed personalities, including Shri Gaur Gopal Das Ji - personal life coach, monk, author, lifestyle and motivational strategist, Dr. K Sudhakar - Minister



of Medical Education, Government of Karnataka, Tejasvi Surya - Member of Parliament - Lok Sabha, Bengaluru South and Dr. Chenraj Roychand - Chancellor, JAIN.

Speaking at the event, Juhi Chawla said: “Yoga and Ayurveda are sisters in philosophy and it is time for India to rise, shine and share its deep knowledge of wellness and well-being with the rest of the world.” According to Juhi Chawla, once again, the light of knowledge will herald better times.

Delivering his talk at the event, Gaur Gopal Das Ji said that times are changing and it is no longer just about adding years to your life but adding life to the years. “Ayurveda is not just about how long

we live but more importantly, it is about how well we live our life,” he stated. “The word spiritual is an amalgamation of the words ‘spirit’ and ‘ritual’. Our spirituality is meant to communicate our genuine desires and our heart’s intent. But if that fails to happen, then everything is merely just a ritual and translates to a lack of spirituality. This is why educational events like Prakshay hold so much importance today.”

The webinar hosted over 39 speakers and was well-received online, including on YouTube channel.

On his part, Tejasvi Surya said: “Ayurveda and Yoga have stood the test of time as they possess animate strength and add value to our lives. Ayurveda is not just a

curative therapy, it is a whole lifestyle with a philosophical approach. This is what makes it so appealing, especially to young people. I say this with certainty that in the coming days, with larger exposure and more extensive education options for these Life Sciences, they will be embraced by everyone; and festivals like this will go a long way in advancing the cause.”

Praising the initiative by JAIN, Dr. K Sudhakar said, “Prakshay 2020 has brought together an extremely renowned panel of guests and I consider it an honour to have been amongst the panellists.”

As envisaged by the organisers, the event provided a holistic and engaging experience to the participants to indulge in a better and more fulfilling lifestyle. Aside, it delved into a discussion of Ayurveda herbs, immunity, quantum science, healing, Ayurveda cooking, disease care, preventive care, skin and hair care, gynaecological health, mental and emotional health to mention but a few.

“Ayurveda is a manual of nature, it is a 5000-year-old life science that holds the secret to a healthier and happier life. We have joined forces with modern science to bring a revolution in the field of holistic wellness and Prakshay 2020 is our first step forward,” expressed Dimple Jangda while talking about the event.

Hopefully, this will be an annual affair instrumental in taking to the world the benefits of Ayurveda as well as promoting India as the destination for wellness and wellbeing. 🇮🇳

Blended Education Model The Way Forward For Higher Education

 Shubha Srikanth



The pandemic has created a world full of paradox. Even as it opens up opportunities, exploring and embracing them also means having to deal with the concomitant challenges

Among several such conundrums unleashed by the COVID pandemic is the dilemma of education delivery. All established and evolving systems have strengths and weaknesses; so does the prevailing education system. Future of education is also one among the numerous issues that have erupted since the global pandemic. By the time this article is published, it would be nearly four months since academic institutions shut down across the country.



India has over 250 million school going students, more than any other country. The academic year 2018-19, saw 37.4 million students enrol in higher education.

What is the future of these students?

India also has one of the largest networks of higher education institutions in the world. The number of colleges and universities in India reached 39,931 and 993, respectively in 2018-19.

What is the future of these institutions?

Answers to these questions were elusive and daunting in the early phase of the pandemic. But there has been considerable change in the mindset of all stakeholders as each of them is adapting and finding alternatives and solutions to the numerous challenges that arose.

It is becoming more and more apparent that even during the post-covid times, education, especially higher education and research, in India must transform to embrace Information and Computer Technology (ICT) in all its facets -content delivery, assessment, pedagogy,

admission process, fee payment etc. Most developed countries in the world have already instituted a well-established online higher education system. Although, most other sectors have benefited greatly from ICT, the education sector in India, as in other developing countries, has been left behind.

With such a strong and growing ecosystem of Education in India, which currently is the second largest in the world, digitisation of the education system has emerged a clear and ideal solution not only for the Covid-hit times, but for the future as well. A combination of synchronous (classroom and virtual classroom) and asynchronous (online classes, app-based learning and video-based learning with self-guided lesson modules, streaming video content, virtual libraries) learning methods is



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the way forward to cater to the wide spectrum of learners.

The blended delivery model in education has gained tremendous boost during the COVID hit times, it is only going to gain greater momentum in the future. All stakeholders are now under pressure to not only realign their perception of education delivery but also equip themselves with the requisite skills and also the most efficient and cost-effective infrastructure for the future. While several institutions have transitioned quite seamlessly and with ease, several others, are struggling due to limited knowledge and exposure to technology, and for want of financial aid.

The pandemic has opened a huge opportunity for India to take the leap to measure up to international standards and modes of education delivery. The future of higher education institutions (HEIs) in India is promising considering the two-fold impact it can have – democratization of education and making India a sought after education hub for the world.

Need for a Radical Shift in the HES

Incidentally, the world student population is nearly 2 billion. Nearly half of India's population is below the age of 25 years. Which means we have a huge student community who are born into the Information age, and who are the chief stakeholders of the education system. They are far more comfortable and savvy with technology than the earlier generation.

Opportunity

Democratisation of HE

The overheads in online education are lesser than that of brick and mortar education and the reach is also unlimited. Hence education can be made affordable, thus empowering the financially weaker sections of the society and ensuring equal opportunity for all.

Online education would reach the deeper rural pockets of the country, where there are no schools or colleges and these students lack the wherewithal to migrate to cities for education. Such students gain the benefit of online learning from reputed institutions offering high quality content.

Quality education would reach students from difficult geographic terrains, where rains and landslides often make commute impossible.

India is primarily an agrarian economy, with 61% of the population engaged in agriculture and agriculture related activities. Youth are often used as farmhands especially in the harvest season. Online education can benefit such youth, especially to gain skill based learning and higher education.

Hub for HE

The pandemic has put a stop to travel and emigration. It is the right time for the Indian education system to rope in students whose plans of studying abroad have been hit. It is the right time for institutions to establish their credibility of offering education that is on par with global universities. Building this credibility, will perhaps retain youth in the future as well. Besides, working professionals seeking to enhance their skillsets to keep abreast of innovation too will opt for Indian universities over foreign universities.

Research and innovation is the hallmark of the current ecosystem. The rapid pace of innovation in every discipline of study means that syllabus has to be upgraded constantly. New technologies, be it in medicine, engineering, new principles and strategies in management, new theories and perspectives in the arts are rendering the syllabus redundant. Hence, institutions will need to rope in

a large number of guest faculty who are trained in emerging knowledge areas to develop curriculum as well as teach.

Unlike yesteryears, learning stopped with a graduation or a post graduation and experience was rated very high in the job market. Today, learning is a continuous process, and the ratio between experience and knowledge has

become inverse. A senior employee with more experience may not be conversant in the latest technologies. Whereas, a fresh graduate is updated with the latest innovation in the marketplace. An important offshoot of continuous learning is that learning has to move online, since profession and learning will have to occur simultaneously.

Disciplines and professional roles are becoming more and more niche, hence specialization courses rather than broad spectrum courses are in demand. The one-size-fits-all has been replaced by customised courses and institution-centric model has been replaced by student-centric model, which best functions online.

Learning has become a more wholesome experience today with students having greater freedom and responsibility to choose and pursue their course of study. Since students are self-motivated, they also prefer a mentor who assists learning than a teacher who spoon-feeds information. Hence, the birth of the mentor-mentee model which operates on flexibility, maturity, creativity and responsibility.

Multi-disciplinary approach in learning– Creative independence is the most prominent trait of the contemporary student community. Hence the demand for a creative combination of subjects unlike the traditional demarcation of arts, commerce and science. Self-paced learning and multi-mode learning, such as combination is also an offshoot of this mindset.



The Way Forward

- Institutions will have to redefine themselves with a brick-and-mortar as well as a strong online presence.
- Content and design of curriculum will have to be recreated to suit the requirements of online/virtual/app-based delivery, since the preference is also for byte-sized information and multi-media experience.
- Curriculum creation or change can no longer be a five-year plan. It will have to be a six-month plan. Creating faculty bandwidth for such upgradation or roping in exclusive curriculum creators and designers is the responsibility of the institution.
- Providing faculty with requisite technology, either in the premises or elsewhere is again the responsibility of the institution.
- Training and upskilling faculty members with technology, pedagogy skills for online delivery, and online curriculum development should be a continuous program.
- The teaching faculty has to don multiple hats – as a transmitter of knowledge, mentor by guiding the way forward and troubleshoot problems, a counsellor who can address emotional issues and stress and as a liaison between student and job market and industry.

JAIN - Continuous Learning Despite Disruption

JAIN has always been at the forefront of innovation in curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, the three vital components of education. Striving to offer world-class quality education, Jain has consistently evolved to scale to the changing needs of students, the primary stakeholders of education and the demands of the larger environment of the education industry.

Having realized quite early on that global education was transitioning from the traditional chalk-and-board methodology and campus-centralized architecture (classroom, laboratory, library, cafeteria, A/V Room, auditorium – all inside the campus) to the technology-led and decentralised bandwagon, Jain embraced technology in various aspects of its curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. With the onset of the pandemic, the transition to the complete online model was a smooth one for Jain. Blended learning, flipped class, research based teaching among others have always been practiced to provide a wholesome learning experience for students.

Hence technology-based education delivery is not new for the students and teachers of Jain. However, the nature of the course has a bearing on the extent to which virtual/online learning approach can be adopted. For instance

teaching the sciences be it biological or physical completely online may equip students well in terms of theory, but it may not be as effective for lab work, which requires the hands on, touch and feel, ‘observe, experiment and learn approach’. “Being a science campus offering varied programmes we did implement blended learning to some extent,” says Dr. Asha Rajiv, Director IQAC and School of Sciences, Jain (Deemed-to-be University).

On the contrary, the CMS Business School, Jain (Deemed to be University) seamlessly moved on to the virtual mode by end of March this year. Faculty conducted their regular classes, revision

classes, summer internship viva for projects, and the final exam online successfully and results were declared to enable students take up jobs or pursue further education. “We transitioned most of the offline activities onto online with the latest tools and technology.

This seamless transfer was possible due to the vision of our honourable Chancellor Dr. Chenraj Roychand and the top management who gave us the resources and enabled us with the right training,” says Harold Andrew Patrick, Professor & Dean – Academics, CMS Business School, Jain (Deemed-to-be University).

The JAIN faculty members are using the following proprietary technologies: Jux platform for video sessions, learning management systems (LMS), content management system (CMS), social





media platforms, dedicated portals, third party licensed ZOOM, Google G Suit/ Classroom/ Meet, CISCO WebEx, MICROSOFT TEAM for engaging faculty, students, administrators, and all other stakeholders.

Since the management at JAIN has always encouraged the faculty members to imbibe a growth mindset and upskill themselves continuously, there has been no resistance to learn new technology;

instead, the faculty members were enthusiastic and proactive in learning technical skills. Says Dr. Patrick, “Most facilitators have corporate experience making it smoother to implement change. They are tech savvy, ahead of the curve and innovative in adapting to new technologies. Resistance, if any, from faculty has been eased with peer support. As a policy we have cross learning between faculties through faculty seminars, planned training

sessions at regular intervals by external experts who are roped in from India and abroad to facilitate faculty up- gradation in content and process.”

While teaching theory classes online is progressing quite smoothly, conducting practical classes is proving to be a challenge, especially for the physical and life sciences courses. “In my view, virtual labs offer only an indirect learning experience and is not enough

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to master targeted skills,” says Dr. Asha Rajiv. Dr. Rajiv proposes to shift all lab classes to the II Semester (in the hope that institutions will be able to reopen and function at least partially) and complete theory classes of Semester I and II in Semester I. This model will help particularly with wet lab, which has to be hands-on. In the event that institutions cannot function in-campus, virtual labs

are the only option where experiments are demonstrated and students are assessed online.

However, the approach to teaching-learning is rather flexible at the CMS Business School, Jain. “Being a business school most of our activities do not involve labs. In fact, every activity of business can be ported on to modern

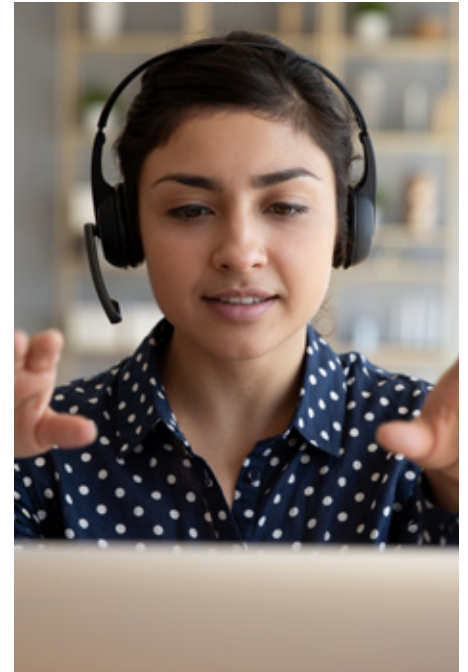
Online Assessment

“The entire exam process is online now, from paying exam fees via the payment portal to declaration of results on the student app,” explains Manjunath N S, Deputy Controller of Examination, Jain (Deemed to be University). Soon after the shut down, JAIN, with the help of Anveshana, a software company, built a propriety online assessment system called MyShiksha. The entire software was built in 6-days flat. The software comprises both subjective and objective question modules. Currently Jain is using only the objective question module.

Thousands of MCQs and subjective questions from each chapter of every subject are uploaded. The software generates question papers, based on parameters chosen (no. of question papers, no. of MCQs, test duration, etc) by choosing questions at random with unlimited permutation and combination. Each student thus gets a different question paper.

Questions are continuously uploaded into the question bank from the beginning of the semester to create a pool of question. For every test or exam the date of exam, modules/chapters included, total marks, time allotted and other relevant parameters are defined, based on which question papers are generated. Thousands of unique question papers can be generated at a time making the exam process secure. Measures have been put into place to prevent malpractice during exams. Every question is timed, and no two students will get a similarly sequenced question paper, copy paste option is disabled, etc.

Besides, every grievance reported such as a technical snag, power outage, system hanging etc during a test is reviewed by the Grievance Cell, which then ascertains the genuineness of the case before proving the student with a re-exam,” maintains Manjunath



technology platforms for achieving the same results as effectively and efficiently. We have been successful and students and other stakeholders are highly satisfied,” points out Dr. Patrick. Coming to terms with the changed reality of learning and teaching process has been difficult for all the stakeholders of the education system. The biggest administrative challenge that the institution faced especially in the early days after Covid 19 pandemic disrupted regular classes was to determine and work out the modality, processes and systems through which to address the situation and not compromise on the education of the students.

According to Dr. Patrick, “The obvious challenge initially was coordination difficulties, particularly, for those activities that require physical presence, be it assessments, evaluation, admission process, group activities, observation

of nonverbal communication and team building. Some tools are trying to bring close enough simulation, however it remains a challenge. The best online platform to choose that delivers the best results was a major administrative challenge.”

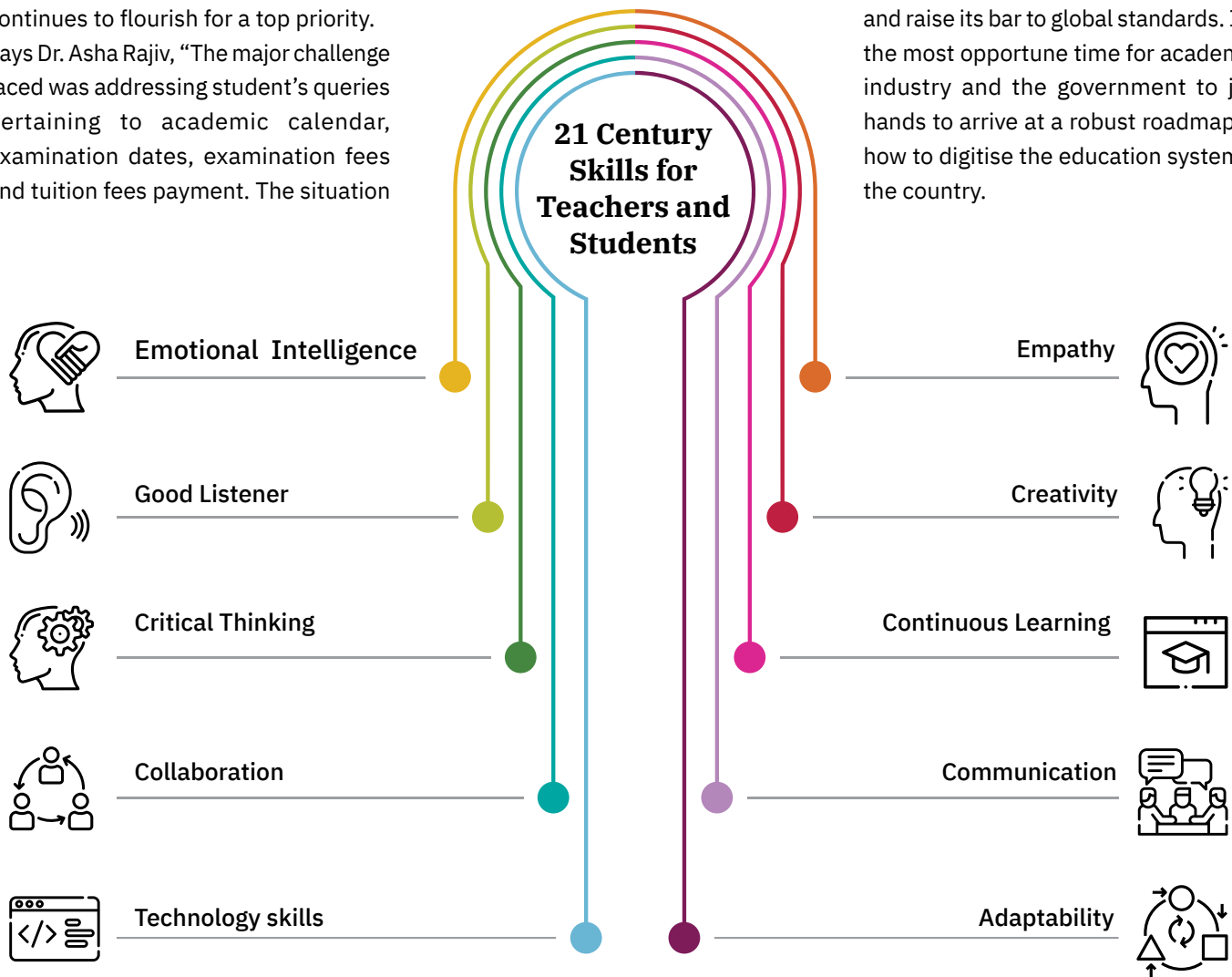
The other issue is making student community and parents to come to terms with new reality that instructions and assessments have been silently removed from the campus. What processes and systems to build in to ensure that the guru-shishya equation continues to flourish for a top priority. Says Dr. Asha Rajiv, “The major challenge faced was addressing student’s queries pertaining to academic calendar, examination dates, examination fees and tuition fees payment. The situation

led to consternation among parents and students who would watch the news channels, go through print media and start questioning about online classes and it needed to be addressed every now and then.”

What does the future hold for the education industry? Dr. Patrick says definitively, “In reality, most Western universities had predicted and implemented the growth/ shift to online/ distributed/ dispersed learning. In India too, there is more recognition for distance

learning and use of online methods. Universities need to be continuously evolving. In future it could be complete self-learning and seeking certification from universities or institutes. There will be a paradigm shift in the education world in knowledge seekers and its providers and the likelihood of multiple universities certifying assurance of learning. Faculty will have more time in engaging in research, training, consultancy and projects.”

The pandemic has opened up a huge opportunity for the country to evolve and raise its bar to global standards. It is the most opportune time for academia, industry and the government to join hands to arrive at a robust roadmap on how to digitise the education system of the country.



Teacher-Learner Interaction in an Exclusively Virtual Medium

Extensive discussions on media regarding the negative impact of online/virtual classes have left the student community more confused. Fortunately, the controversy is abating. The fact that the COVID virus is here to stay for an indefinite period and that we will have to learn to coexist is sinking in among the larger population. A sense of acceptance of the government directive regarding online/virtual classes is palpable among most stakeholders now, with the understanding that education is not a 'choice' and cannot be stalled any longer.

As Dr. S. Kalyanasundaram, practising psychiatrist and passionate teacher for four and half decades, states categorically, "We have no option but to take the route of technologically-driven education delivery. Having said that, I will not equate classroom learning enriched by teacher-student interaction at multiple levels, with online or virtual classrooms. In this mode, students become passive observers. And proactive participation is essential for effective teaching and learning." He quickly adds, "However, the complete virtual mode is only temporary, after which, a balance must be maintained between the traditional and virtual mode."

Teachers also say that in a classroom, observing the body language of the students gives them the vibes of whether students are understanding and

grasping a concept and, whether they are paying attention. Teachers are doing their best to make classes engaging and interesting. "To break the monotony I make sure we have discussions to build rapport; I encourage students to turn on their videos so there is a semblance of face to face interaction; once a week I give group activities so students can bond with one another. Students also enjoy case formulations," says a faculty member teaching graduate students.

In this context, the predicament of the teacher is best expressed in Dr. S. Kalyanasundaram's words – "Just the other day, I was teaching a bunch 35 psychiatrists in Mangalore online!

Eye contact which is of paramount importance in any interaction is missing. I was talking to a blank screen, presuming the students are listening. My strength is interactive teaching, and with the 'participation' component, it will be a mere 'parroting a class'. The challenge for teachers is about how to make the class interactive, interesting and engaging." There is a constant transmission and exchange of energy between the teacher and the students, and that is very crucial for effective teaching and improved comprehension. Students and teachers motivate each other and both become 'learners'.

However, it is a consolation that it is



only a matter of time that educational institutions will reopen and provide the essential socialisation with peers and teachers.

Having worked with teens and young adults for over two decades, Shobha Managoli takes a firm stand against parental concern about online/virtual classes. “Teens and youngsters need to learn. They need new experiences to grow. Can only parents at home or working parents at home provide those experiences? If we teach children the use of screen time for learning and restrict entertainment, we can put parental apprehension to rest and pave the way for children to learn online. Banning technology -assisted learning is not a solution. But the manner in which online or virtual classes are being conducted needs to be revisited and revised for maximum benefit.”

Student and Teacher Wellbeing - Psycho-Social Perspective


One of the biggest concerns of moving to the virtual or online platform is of course its impact on the “psycho-social development of the students who are in their teens or early adulthood,” says, practicing clinical psychologist, life coach, mentor and author Shobha Managoli. As much as we vouch upon the need for physical social interactions, social distancing is the norm today. Shobha, who has worked extensively with teens and young adults says, “Among the younger crowd today socialisation is largely experienced in the Virtual world. The time spent at the educational institution is where Real



socialisation would occur. Now that’s been removed. The quality of Virtual interaction, however, is not the same as Real. Every online interaction cannot be equivalent to in-person socialisation. Man as a social animal and needs face to face meeting to feel the vibes and the warmth at a multi-sensorial level.”

Online and virtual classrooms also deny students the non-verbal communication experience. “Non-verbal cues such as eye contact, facial expressions, gestures, the sense of physical space, the vibes of being understood and of understanding. This is an important area that teachers and educators need to bear in mind while in virtual classrooms,” adds Shobha Managoli.

There has been a steady increase

in teens and young adults visiting ophthalmologists ever since virtual classes began. “Prolonged exposure to laptop, ipad and phone screens cause eye strain,” says Dr. Namitha C Anagol, Senior Consultant, Nethradhama Superspeciality Eye Hospital. “The surface of the eye dries quickly due to continuous, concentrated watching. Normally the human eye blinks at a rate of 15-20 per minute, but while watching a screen with concentration and involvement, we resist blinking and hence the blinking rate drops to as low as 5-8 times per minute.” Irritability, the feeling of watery eyes and the feeling of the presence of foreign object in the eyes, all of which are symptoms of what is termed Computer Vision Syndrome are on the rise, she adds. 

Intersection of Religion, Politics and Sexuality

Nemat Sadat, ever since the publication of his debut novel, *The Carpet Weaver*, mid last year, has become a media sensation the world over. His identity is all too exotic for the media not to get hooked on to him. He knows only too well how the epithet, 'first Afghan gay writer' catapulted him to fame. That is not to discredit the literary and cultural merit of his novel or sincerity and passion for gay rights advocacy the world over. "As much as Indian media has been accepting of me and my work, it is no less in sensationalising me," he chuckles.

The Carpet Weaver is more than just a queer romance or 'a coming of age' story. Often, most queer fiction is reduced to the moment of coming out of the closet. For Sadat, it is only a starting point, to etch the complexity of being gay and of relationships. What makes the novel layered and textured is the beautiful, intricate and seamless weaving in of political strife, cultural dissonance, religious dogmatism that transcends

time and space, and the individual struggle to subvert and counter them. It is an empowering narrative for every reader, irrespective of his context.

In a freewheeling conversation with *Shubha Srikanth*, author, activist and former journalist, Nemat Sadat talks about the politics of identity, hegemony and cultural erasure.



The experience of being marginalised has been the norm all through Sadat's life. With the onset of the Cold War in Afghanistan, Sadat's mother fled to America with her two children. "I had to grapple with segregation as an 'Ethnic Minority Immigrant' growing up in a predominantly white Judean Christian society in the new land," he says. Even as he was negotiating with his social environment, his Afghan roots and religious identity of being a Muslim became hugely problematic when war broke out between his homeland and adopted country. "At the age of 20, my allegiance to my adopted country was severely questioned in the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks. It was a horrifying phase," he reminisces.

Having discovered his sexuality during his teens, like any other, by early adulthood Sadat had also come to terms with being gay. Even as a young boy his effeminate features and mannerisms invited the wrath of his family, who were to cut off all ties once he came out of the closet, one of the primary reasons being the belief that homosexuality is anti-Islam. Sadat even abdicated his religion in pursuance of his free will.

At this juncture, Sadat was influenced by W.E.B. Du Bois' concept of 'double consciousness', that encapsulated the 'conflict of identity' experienced by Afro-Americans. For Sadat, this experience operated at more than one level - a complex web of hierarchies and marginalisation - as an immigrant, a racial minority immigrant, a Muslim, and finally as gay. Further chaos struck when he embraced his sexual identity as a gay, in his immediate environment. "Apart



from being shunned and disowned by family and friends, it was a big let-down, that the supposedly ‘progressive’, ‘liberal’ White gay community of America marginalised me as an ethnic minority gay! It terrified me that there was a part of me that neither the Afghans nor the Americans were willing to accept.” Rather than succumbing to these pressures and conflicts, he alchemised this existential angst and confronted his personal world and the larger world head on. “This dual polarity has enriched my life. This crisis of identity that I experienced prompted my intellectual awakening,” he says. He spent the next decade educating himself and figuring out ‘who’ he was. He earned six university degrees, including the ones from Harvard, Columbia and Oxford!

With his new-found confidence and resoluteness, he returned to Afghanistan to teach at the American University of Afghanistan and more importantly, to build a support system for LGBTQI citizens, which he hoped, would eventually create an atmosphere of acceptance at least at the social level if not at the political. During the year that he lived there, 2012-13, he used social media to reach out to the LGBTQI community in Afghanistan, campaigned for their rights and also secretly met other gay men in coffee shops and hotels, to strategise on how to fight state-sponsored oppression and how their rights could be addressed without attracting the attention of the public or the government. “Through a non-profit organisation we created programmes around gender and health awareness, particularly related to this community.” Soon the Afghan establishment



discovered his sexuality, and he was persecuted for being outspoken and unapologetic about it. He faced extreme backlash. “Rumours circulated that I was an Israeli Spy, a Christian evangelist and a member of the Free Mason group of New York. People love conspiracy theories!” he says laughing out loud. Reminiscing the numerous curses, fatwas and death threats he received in Afghanistan and the world over from Muslim radicals, he says, “It’s horrifying that your mere existence is a threat to religious practice and political establishments.”

Yet today, ever since the publication of his book, not a single Muslim, from Pakistan or Afghanistan or anywhere else in the world has derided him or written hate comments against him. In

Afghanistan, despite the establishment continuing to suppress dialogue regarding LGBTQI and persecute the LGBTQI community, and the common folk are only embracing Sadat and his work. “A quiet revolution is taking place in Afghanistan. It’s remarkable how the society has evolved in this past decade.”

As an activist and author, he defines himself as “a voice in a vessel” for the millions of LGBTQI around the world and for anyone who is criminalised on the basis of their sexual identity or orientation and is deprived of legal recourse. “As an activist I want to build a support system and protect the millions across countries, be it those in Iran who are hanged, or those in Siberia who are publicly executed, or those despairing souls in Russian concentration camps.”

I ask him about ancient Afghan cultural narratives about LGBTQI, similar to depictions in ancient Indian narratives, for instance, be it in architecture (Kajuraho Temple) or literature (The Kamasutra), and the conversation veers towards Muslim conquest of Afghanistan. “Well, even if it was there, we have lost all of it.” When the Arabs conquered Kabul in the 7 Century, demographically it was predominantly Hindu, Buddhist and Zoroastrian. Talking about the politics of hegemony and erasure of plurality, he points out that the Arab invasion of Afghanistan was when this process of cleansing the Afghan cultural and ethnicity began and when Islam was irrevocably imposed. Afghan culture was plural, scientific and egalitarian. “However, all dialogue about this phase of Afghanistan is suppressed and evidence destroyed. Expats from countries like Afghanistan, Iran, Egypt and Syria who are liberal or are ex-Muslims have started a movement of expressing without fear of persecution from their respective Diaspora, the debilitating impact of Arab invasion on Afghan culture. Dialogue about these issues may not be possible in my homeland or in Bangladesh, for instance. Salman Rushdie is of course the ‘grand daddy’ of this movement.”

His face lights up, and he beams, “I had written a lengthy description of the beauty of Afghan culture of the pre-Arab times. I had to cut it short, of course. Well, you see, there is not much that remains of the pre-Arab Afghan culture. But the culture was rich and varied. For instance, archaeologists are now unearthing Buddhist monasteries and statues, which were equally or more

phenomenal, than that which the Taliban blew up. The Afghan culture was as rich as the Egyptian culture!” The beauty and truth about pre-Islamic Afghan culture is missing in most narratives about and from Afghanistan, and Sadat’s is an exception.

He goes back to my reference to Indian depictions of queer culture to point out that it’s not just the Arabs but also the West that is guilty of suppressing, appropriating and claiming as their own, several branches of knowledge and lived experiences that pre-existed in the Eastern cultures. “The propaganda by the West that the LGBTQI movement is America’s (the Stonewall Riots of 1969 in New York, being the starting point) contribution to the world is a myth.


Every nation, every community has evolved its own revolution in the space of minority sexual and gender rights.” He emphasises that it is essential to every community to evolve its own indigenous model to address LGBTQI rights rather than blindly adopt an existing model, be it Western or other.

At this point, he talks about how despite claims of being a super power, of being liberal and inclusive, and the ‘forerunner’ in LGBTQI movement, his book found no publisher in the U.S. and finally it had to be an Indian publisher, Penguin Random House, that brought the book to the world. “The reasons for rejection ranged from a very subtle, polite ‘we love the writing per se, but it lacks literary merit’ or ‘there is no market’ or ‘it’s not

commercially viable,’” he states with a wry smile.

He has great praise for the Indian publishing industry, the Indian readership and more importantly the LGBTQI scene in the country. “Indian publishing houses and the literary world honour distinction. The Indian readership is very broad-minded. Which is why India continues to publish Pakistani, Bangladeshi writers, and they are read extensively and are even being nominated for prestigious prizes.” What shapes this consciousness among our readers, I wonder aloud. “Perhaps, the multi-lingual heritage of the country. The readership is exposed to multiple regional language literatures, both in the original language and as translations, not to forget their rich and varied cultural heritage,” he observes.

I ask if he has finally been able to make sense and emerge out of the chaos surrounding him. He thinks for a moment or two, before saying, “Yes and no. I find myself still amidst chaos, somehow. I would say this is a moment I am celebrating; I am celebrating my achievements, the sacrifices I have made, the risks I have taken. But at the same time I have lost a lot of people along the way. That remains.”

He becomes a tad emotional and says, “At the end of the day, it is gratifying that through my storytelling and my activism, I have been able to create spaces for hitherto forbidden conversations, dialogues and narratives. My kudos to India for opening up such a space for me and for embracing me wholeheartedly. India is my home too.” 



Tapping the Tourism Potential of Bengaluru

**A Saga of Two Cities:
London & Bengaluru - Part 3**



Bengaluru is touted as one of the fastest developing cities, a global destination, the Silicon Valley of India and so on, yet in terms of promoting itself, attracting tourists and making itself tourist-friendly, it pales in comparison to London. Though younger than London, being only five hundred years old, it has a wealth of history, culture and built heritage. Bull Temple, Gavi Gangadhareshwara Cave Temple, St. Mary's Church, Halasuru Lake and the nearby Gurudwara, ISKCON Temple, Jawaharlal Nehru Planetarium, Vidhana Soudha, Govt. Museum, VITM, HAL Heritage Centre, Tippu Palace, Lalbagh, Cubbon Park, Lumbini Garden, Kadu Malleshwara Temple and Bengaluru are among the important tourist destinations in Bengaluru with rich heritage and history. However, not much effort has been made to project the same to the world. Attractively projecting and promoting the Garden City as a tourist destination is long pending.

London is one of the most sought after tourist destinations in Europe. Travel experts opine that any travel to Europe would be incomplete without at least a short stay in the city. Tourism plays a vital role in London's economy. The revenue generated by tourism in London is approximately 10 per cent of the city's gross value-added income. The tourism industry employs one seventh of London's workforce.

The 2,000-year journey of London is replete with struggle, chaos, confusion and upheavals. Infamous as the 'stinking city', overpopulated, filled with grime and filth and with reigning poverty, it wasn't

always the sought-after destination it is today. It is only over the last seven-eight decades that civic authorities have made concerted efforts to convert the city into a major tourist destination.

Let us consider two popular modes of exploring a city as a tourist.

Explore By HOHO

The most popular mode of commute in London is the HOHO (Hop-On-Hop-Off) bus tours. Tourist-friendly, pocket-friendly and convenient, the HOHO Buses are open-top and double-deck. They take a circular route with fixed stops at or near important landmarks of the city and allow tourists unlimited travel with a pass for 24, 48 or 72-hours to visit the capital's top attractions with the freedom to disembark at any stop and re-board another bus to continue their journey. The routes are the most comprehensive way to see the best

that London has to offer including the spectacular panoramic views from seven bridges on Thames River, The Tower of London, Big Ben, Buckingham Palace, St. Paul's Cathedral, Westminster Abbey, Trafalgar Square, Parliament House, Madame Tussauds, London Bridge, Globe Theatre, Piccadilly Circus, London Eye, among many others, that articulate scintillating tales of the city's past.

Free walking tours and a Thames River Cruise Pass are added attractions. While an experienced guide gives a full-length commentary in English, brochures and well-illustrated tourist guides with authentic information are made available either for free or a nominal fee at these locations.

As the COVID-19 crisis hit the city, the bus companies modified the tour pattern in accordance with the norms set by the city's administration. They ran the trips with reduced seating and only during





specific time slots to avoid overcrowding and provided single-use masks and gloves. The HOHO tour format was suspended, and the tourists had to stay put for the duration of the entire tour. After complete lockdown was imposed, the buses were parked off the roads and many old areas looked like a Ghost City. Tour operators, as well

as the tourism department, are waiting with fingers crossed for the Corona to disappear, so that tourism can begin again, like elsewhere in the world.

In Bengaluru, bus services exclusively for a tour of the city were not as popular and well organised as in London. However, since the last two decades, HOHO buses have been playing a major role in catering to the travel needs of visitors in Bengaluru. Mr. K Dhanpal, who has been a driver cum guide for the last fifteen years, says that every year a large number of tourists from the state of Uttar Pradesh opt for these bus trips. Some foreign visitors also avail this service. However, since March 2020, these services have been completely suspended.

Explore on Foot

“Sir, if you wish to have a just notion of the magnitude of this city, you must not be satisfied with seeing its great streets and squares, but must survey the innumerable little lanes and courts. It is not in the showy evolution of buildings, but in the multiplicity of human habitations which are crowded together, that the wonderful immensity of London consists.” From James Boswell’s *Life of Johnson* (1791)



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Boswell in Lichfield

Discovering a city by foot is an experience in itself for a leisurely traveller. Heritage walks offer an immersive experience of the culture and history of a place, with the added dimension of the local community. The walks make it easier for tourists to link themselves to interesting places and important nodes so that they become aware of the value and importance of the older urban nucleus, for instance, the Majestic area and the Krishna Rajendra Market area.

In both cities, old structures and modern structures co-exist. Near London Museum lies a portion the original Roman Wall. A little behind is a building in medieval architectural style. Next to that stands a modern skyscraper. Thus one can get the representative structures of three different eras of history in one frame. In Bengaluru too, Kasturba Road lies between the 150-year old Government Museum building and an ultra-modern multi-storey structure.

London sits right on the top of an ancient Roman Town, and every time land is dug up to lay the foundation for a gleaming tower of glass and steel, part of the city’s ancient heritage is revealed underneath. The city is built up in heaps with layers of history buried under one another. It is said that no stone ever leaves London, it gets reused, adding to piles already there. As a result, much of its story is hidden or at least not obvious at first glance. For instance, The London Museum is built on the rubble of the old city destroyed during the Second World War.

Stephen Millar, a scholar of London has

explored and thoroughly researched about twenty-five such walks/trails. They are published in two volumes titled *London's Hidden Walks* and are very popular handbooks to walk 'from sunny squares to quiet hidden corners', and also discover how 2 millennia of colourful history has shaped the city.

Hidden Walks in London are so popular and in such great demand that there are about twelve companies that offer these walking tours. Very old companies like London Walks conduct walks on all seven days of the week throughout the year. Many reputed authors, historians, artists and officials take pride in leading many of these walks.

Till a few decades back, walks or trails were not a popular mode to explore Bengaluru. In 1996, I was perhaps one of the earliest persons to have started the 'Walk the Talk' outings, covering about 10 circuits through the NGO AARAMBH (An Association for Reviving Awareness about Monuments of Bengaluru Heritage) that I founded in 1991. I conducted these walks for nearly two decades, mostly for school and college students. I have accompanied many senior citizens such as Sri. L T Karle (Karle Industries), Mr. Narendra Babu, an elected representative of Rajajinagar, Sri. Channabasavaradhya, a veteran businessman Maya Jayapal, a popular author of an illustrated volume on the history of Bengaluru, some government officials, and youth leaders.

Like in London, we can easily earmark about 50 Heritage Walk areas in Bengaluru to explore its hidden treasures. However, factors like lack of



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Milestone near Albert Hall, London

approach roads, hygienic restrooms, improper or no maintenance of heritage sites hinder the popularity of HW. Yet, since the last decade there has been immense progress and about ten organisers are regularly conducting walks covering about 10 circuits.



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Heritage Walk Guided by Moona

Lalbagh, Cubbon Park, Basavanagudi, Malleswaram, Chamarajapete, Old Bengaluru (Majestic area), Avenue Road, Fort, MG Road, Shivajinagar, Frazer Town, Halasuru, Bengaluru Palace, Bull Temple Road are a few popular walk trails in Bengaluru.

There are many that are lesser-known and each is embedded with its own thrilling tale. Frazer Town, for example, is a suburb in Cantonment, formed in 1906. It was named after S M Fraser to honour the services he rendered as a tutor and guardian for the young Maharaja of Mysore, Krishna Raja Wadiyar IV. Later, he also served as the Resident of Mysore Province.

The Colonial Heritage of the area like Coles Park, the Foundation Stone, which was laid in 1910, are all familiar to Heritage Walkers. But the little known hidden history lies in Ratan Singh Road, a small lane in this locality.

Ratan Singh was a Municipal Councillor of Civil and Military Station during 1890s. When the plague broke out in 1898, Ratan Singh gave financial aid to build temples for 'Plague Amma' because the general public believed that the epidemic would recede if offerings are made to the deity. To honour his service to society, this road was named after him.

On Ratan Singh Road was also located 'Vireswara Nilaya', the residence of the general secretary of Vedanta Society, Dr. Venkata Rangam. He founded the Society in March 1901 along with many luminaries including the then Dewan of Mysore, Sri V P Madhava Rao. The Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Movement, which is now widely spread all over the city, originated here the same year. His house was the centre of all activities connected with The Ramakrishna Order. Dr. Venkata Rangam had documented day to day activities of the centre, the monks who visited the city, and many

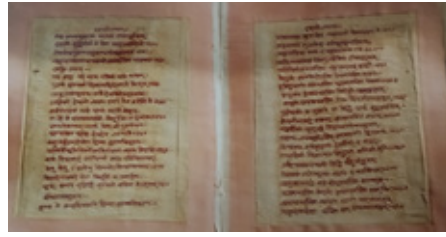
Community & Culture



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DR. P Venkataraman

such historically relevant details from 1901 to 1931 and published the same. Two of his five daughters, Sunanda Devi and Suvrata Devi were directly initiated by Sharada Mata, the divine spouse of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. They were very talented and had started a school for girls in Narayanapillai Street. Suvrata Devi had woven eighteen chapters of the Bhagavad Gita in eighteen coloured silk threads on canvas sheets, which won several prizes in exhibitions during the 1930s. In 1990, I met the last of the five sisters, Yogeshwari in the same house. She was around eighty six years old at that time. She has shown me the Silk Thread Bhagavad Gita and allowed me to photograph the same. Though Vireswara Nilaya does not exist now, Ratan Singh Road gives this little-known fascinating story of Ramakrishna Movement in the City.

Purnaiah is a very small stretch in Majestic area close to Upparpet Police Station and reveals the lesser-known stories of Vivekananda's visit in 1892, the century-old Purnaiah, Krishna Temple, Tulsi Thota (Chik Lalbagh), a Pond and Metro station. Walks can also be conducted along



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Silk Thread Bhagavad Gita

specific themes. 'ART in Heart' walk is one such I curated for India Art Foundation in 2018. The hotspots of this trail were Gavi Gangadhareshwara (GG) Cave Temple, Hari Hara Gudda (hillock), Ramanjaneya Gudda and Kalamandira (a century-old art institute). Although



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Statue of Swami Vivekananda at Ramakrishna Math

all these landmarks fall within a mere kilometre, they carry numerous tales of art and history. In 1792, British artists James Hunter and Daniel did excellent works of art in colour on GG Temple and Hari Hara Gudda. Since the last five decades, Ramanjaneya Gudda has been an active centre for performing arts, painting and theatre movement. Kalamandira, started by A N Subba Rao, a veteran artist of the city, about a hundred years ago, is still going strong, training passionate youth to pursue different forms of art. This trail fills

the heart with the immense joy of art experience, true to its title, 'Art in Heart'. Food Walk, Pub Walk, Floral Walk, Folk Walk are some of the other popular thematic walk programmes conducted in the city.

Short coverage area with a good number of historical and heritage structures, clean and hygienic restrooms, easily accessible transport facility, parking space, a limited number of participants, and most significantly, a guide with in-depth knowledge of the walk trail, are the important factors to be considered while arranging a walk.

Promoting the Cities through Icons/Merchandise

The history, diversity and vibrancy of London make it a city of iconic landmarks. More than sixty landmarks are represented as attractive souvenirs and sold all over the city. Union flag, The Red Phone box, London Bus, Buckingham



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Kempegowda Watch Tower, Lalbhag Botanical Garden, Bengaluru

Palace, The Black Taxi, Big Ben, London Eye Wheel, Royal Guardsman, London Bobbies (London policemen) are highly sought after mementoes. They are available for sale at all museums, gardens, squares, footpaths, bookstalls among others. Even the route map of Tube Trains has acquired the status of an icon. A wide variety of merchandise such as gift wrapping paper sheets, pillow covers, pickle jars, porcelain plates and mugs carry pictures of the symbols of the city.

What attracted me more was the Timeline of London History sold in the form of a pamphlet for just about one Pound. It gives a comprehensive glimpse of the city's history, printed in colour schemes representing the periods of rulers. For each period, one or two representative monuments, their pictures and brief literature is provided on the pamphlet.

Attractively illustrated booklets on more than forty topics like Monuments, Heritage, Gardens, Walks, etc., are also made available. All these merchandises promote London very effectively.

Much remains to be done in promoting Bengaluru's heritage and contemporary tourist sites. If Eifel Tower is for Paris, London Bridge for London, then Kempegowda Tower is for Bengaluru. When the City Corporation was formed in 1949, Kempegowda Tower was unanimously selected to represent the City. Vidhana Soudha, High Court, Bangalore Palace, Clock Tower of Central College, State Central Library and Statues in Cubbon Park, are all iconic structures

of the city.


Ironically, we do not find any souvenirs or booklets or pamphlets being sold at any of the tourist centres. Manufacturing souvenirs can be a lucrative venture for a startup. In addition to doing business, they will also be doing yeoman service in promoting the city.



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Pillar mounted with replica of Kempegowda Watch Tower, Hudson Circle, Bengaluru

According to my friends living in London, though the pandemic has left a deep scar, attempts are being made to reach at least a semblance of normalcy. Promising all the established safety measures, packages with several concessions are already being offered to lure tourists back to London.

Every crisis comes with a silver lining. The 1890 plague outbreak was a blessing in disguise for Bengaluru because in a bid to decongest the city, new exten-

sions like Chamarajapete, Basavanagudi and Malleswaram were formed. The planning of these areas at that time was considered to be very progressive and advanced. Thus, the plague resulted in the expansion of the city. Similarly, COVID-19 now appears to cast a positive effect on the tourism sector too. Since tourists from other states and countries are not likely to pour in, in large numbers in the near future, the Karnataka Tourism Ministry has decided to develop and promote Local Tourism. A press note to this effect was released in the media in May 2020. This move, if implemented effectively, will improve the scenario of Heritage Precincts, generate employment and instill in the minds of citizens, particularly the youth, a sense of pride, regard, respect and belongingness towards their city. 



Suresh Moona

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The Musical Bauls of the Northeast

Revitalising Traditional Livelihoods - Part 3

Bengal has been home to an array of religious traditions, all of which have shaped and impacted the worldview and lived experiences of the local people. Bengal was rooted in Shaivism and Buddhism before Islam and Vaishnavism took over and their varied philosophies and literatures provided fertile ground for the amalgamation and emergence of new cultures.

One such is the singing and dancing Bauls, who have been practising a syncretic form of religion, with shades of Vaishnavism, Buddhism and Sufism and have been known for their unconventional spiritual and social mores. Locally known as *Kortabhojas*, references to the Bauls in Bengali texts can be found from as early as the 15 Century.

The beginning of the Baul movement is attributed by some researchers to Birbhadra, son of a Vaishnavite saint. Others suggest that the 8 Century Persian minstrels called Ba'al may have been the first Bauls. The word 'Baul' seems to have originated from the Sanskrit word *vyakula* (restless) and *vatula* (madcap). While Birbhum district in West Bengal is considered the heart of Baul emergence and presence, they spread to Bihar and Orissa, and Bangladesh. Some elements of their culture were popular in the neighbouring states of Jharkhand, Tripura and Assam.

Between the 14 and 17 Centuries, their ideas were disseminated widely, casting impressions on literature, poetry and music. Baul music reflects both the Hindu Bhakti movement and Sufi musical traditions. Rabindranath Tagore acknowledged the influence of Baul music on his works and also published several works of Lalon Fakir, a famous Baul, in his *journal Prabasi*.

Bauls come from different regions of Bengal, inheriting specific leanings to certain poets and musical formats and thus belong to one of the three *Sampradayas* (lineages): Bauls of Birbhum (the place of origin of Bauls); Navadvipa (has a strong Vaishnava influence and found in Nadia and Murshidabad districts); and Fakir (popular in Bangladesh).

Spiritual Quest through Music

The Bauls emphasise individual intellectual inquiry and perceive the physical body as the supreme temple within which God resides. Hence, they have never practised temple or idolatry worship. They seek spiritual freedom by pursuing their instincts, unfettered by socio-cultural mores. Bauls were influenced by Tantric Buddhism and later by Islam and Sufism. They also have a great affinity to Devi or the embodiment of the principle of *Shakti*. They believe that enlightenment is achieved through *sadhana* (meditation), *yoga* and *tantra*. A unique and tender aspect of their worldview is the power of love—not reasoning or knowledge—as fundamental to the pursuit of truth; truth becomes a reality and meaningful only when the person lives it.

Biswas Das, a Baul we met in Shantiniketan explained this practical approach, “Since there is no prescribed or written philosophy, there is little need for a guide, preacher or guru, towards whom we would practice devotion and dedication; everyone is free to evolve their own understanding of themselves and of society and be responsible for it.” Biswas Das pursues his divine quest, dancing and singing with the *ektara* in

liberation through the abandonment of all conventions in their search for God, with music eventually becoming the medium of worship. In time, they developed a body of poetry and songs expressing their quest for the meaning of life. A Baul’s belief and philosophy of life is influenced by his musical mentors and his understanding and interpretation of the works of other Baul poets.



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Baul singer in Shantiniketan

his hand and the tinkling bells on his feet, transporting himself to a world of his own, unaware of and liberated from the trappings of his surroundings.

The Bauls chose a path of spiritual

Lifestyle

Some Bauls live as householders while others choose to be sanyasis, renouncing the world and wandering through the countryside as nomads, sharing their folklore and philosophy. They support themselves through *madhukari* (alms) as an expression of self-sufficiency,

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rather than receive institutional support.

Bauls also live in communities, in spaces called *akhra*, where men and women cohabit in spiritual oneness. Although frowned upon by society earlier, it has now gained greater acceptance as a non-conformist way of life. However, it is no surprise that women choosing to become Bauls face great difficulty in convincing their parents. One of the primary reasons is that the freedom accorded to the Bauls is contrary to the traditional gender roles prescribed for women even today. Besides, Bauls have no stable incomes, since opportunities for performances are irregular.



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Baul singer in Bishnupur

Soumir Baul whom we met in Bishnupur, supports himself only through *madhukari*. Ripe in age, he is no longer able to wander far and perform, and lives around the temple and the visiting tourists are his only source of income. After having travelled extensively and been witness to the various transformations of the Baul culture over several

decades, he observes, “Not many people choose this way of life anymore. Most Bauls, barring a few, have become professional performers. Even though community life is receding, our music is evolving and is being recognised.”

The Bauls can be recognised by their distinctive clothing, usually a *dhoti* and *kurta* or a long robe known as *alkhalla*, worn by men. Characteristically, Baul men and women have long, matted hair tied into a top-knot and a *tulasi* bead mala around their necks. The bells on their ankles or toes are a traditional and functional accessory used as an accompaniment for their singing, besides folk instruments, including the *ektara* (single-stringed) or *duitara* (double-stringed). They are often accompanied by others playing small drums known as the *khawmok*, *anondo lahiri* or *gubgubi*.

These drums are special in that they produce various tonal qualities, as the skin of the drum can be held at varying degrees of tautness by pulling a string. Bauls treat their musical instruments with great reverence.



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Baul Guru

In Soamir Baul’s house, his Ektara and other instruments were kept in a special space. A picture of their mentor also finds a place among the instruments.



Parvathy Baul is a renowned woman Baul, in a world dominated by men. A *saadhak* (practitioner), who was always in search of truth and compassion right from her youth, she found transcendence from the mundane by breaking all boundaries, through Baul music. She discovered unity of her physical, mental and spiritual self, through surrendering ego and communing with the divine through poetry.

Her knowledge of the works of Baul poets is at once vast and deep, and her passionate musical rendering is touching and mesmerising. The music conveys all the shades of human understanding and feeling in the metaphorical analogies drawn by the poet. As Parvathy Baul says, change is constant in this world and that “impermanence is truth.”

Born in Assam and raised in Bengal she was attracted to this way of life as a student in Shantiniketan. Now, Parvathy has made Kerala her home and travels widely spreading her spirituality through music and dance.

She bequeathed the tradition from her guru who recognised her staunch faith in the Baul tradition. She has been very successful in communicating her philosophy to people, a directive from her guru Sanatan Baba, which she fulfils with immense energy and commitment. Immersed in this realisation, Parvathy Baul radiates compassion and humility, inspiring people to “make life a prayer”.

PC - Srivatsa Shandilya

Music

Themes of inclusion, spiritual love, self-realisation and oneness exemplify Baul music, according to Sengupta (2015). Baul poetry commonly expresses the journey of transcending the ego and the struggles of the oppressed.

Baul poets and singers are mystics, and their performances are compelling and memorable. With deep emotion reflected in their voices and accompanied with gestures and facial expressions, they leave a great impact on the audience. Composed in simple language, the common man is encouraged to understand and reflect on the philosophy.

One of the most renowned and revered Bauls was Lalon, who lived in today's Bangladesh. A philosopher as well as a songwriter, he inspired people with his songs of unity and togetherness. His songs express his belief in harmonious living, transcending barriers of caste, religion and even geographic boundaries. Of the 2000-3000 songs he wrote, only about 800 have survived through oral tradition. An annual festival is held on his death anniversary on the Dola Purnima day commemorating the onset of spring in the month of Falgun (March).

Though several books have been written about the Bauls, there is only one book of Baul songs, *Bhaber Git*, meaning ‘Songs of Ecstasy’ by Dulal Chand, published in 1882. This is known to be the only published collection of Baul songs by a member of the community.

Over time, the Baul identity has become diluted. However, with renewed interest in Baul music and a growing inclusive mindset, society has begun to rediscover this community. Old compositions are given their due, and the style is gaining acceptance and appreciation all over the world. Greater efforts to document the life and works of the Bauls will go a long way in keeping their legacy alive.

Lalon Fakir, who criticised the superficiality of religious divisions, sums up the spirituality of Baul music in the following poem –

Everyone asks, “What religion does Lalon belong to in this world?”
Lalon answers, “What does religion look like?”

Everyone asks, “What religion does Lalon belong to in this world?”
Lalon answers, “What does religion look like?”

*I've never laid eyes upon it.
Some use Malas (Hindu rosaries),
others Tasbis (Muslim rosaries),
and so people say*

*they belong to a different religion.
But do you bear the sign of your religion
when you come (to this world) or when
you leave (this world)?*

– Lalon 🇮🇳

(Alamgir, Mohammad. “Ahsan Manzil”, Banglapedia.)
banglapedia.net/HT/A_0124.HTML



Asha Malatkar

A sociologist and researcher, she runs a skill development training and awareness programme for women and other target groups. She is also working with three villages near Kengeri, Bengaluru providing support to anganwadis and schools. Previously, she was a teacher.

Pictures: Vijaya Gowri



Thus Spake 'Chanakya' Pillai

To his friends and family, he is the humble 'Radha': ever ready to lend a helping hand or offer valuable advice. To the rest of the world, he is Dr. Radhakrishnan Pillai, teacher and leadership trainer, entrepreneur and educationist, business consultant and mentor, and best-selling author of over 15 books on Chanakya's philosophy. 'Chanakya' Pillai, as he is fondly called in the literary circles, Dr. Pillai is as simple as they come. But hidden behind this unassuming veneer is a wealth of knowledge of the ancient times!

His maiden national bestseller *Corporate Chanakya* took the country by storm. A much-awaited first-of-its-kind book, it holds the national record for the highest number of pre-launch sales for any first book by an author. What's more, it has been read and used worldwide, across age groups and segments, and continues to be on the national bestseller list even a decade after its release. He has managed to influence every section of society with a *Chanakya-inspired book*: be it *Chanakya in You*, *Chanakya in the Classroom*, *Chanakya in Daily Life*, *Chanakya and the Art of Getting Rich*, *Inside Chanakya's Mind*, or his latest, *Chanakya Neeti*, among several others; every book an effort to reach Chanakya to the common man.

“The Ramayana and Mahabharata are simple to understand. They are at once for the classes and the masses. In Chanakya’s *Arthashastra*, on the other hand, I discovered deep wisdom that was otherwise lost to the common man. My greatest contribution is not writing these books but unearthing various aspects of Chanakya’s knowledge and reviving it, albeit with a modern narrative,” expresses the author.

For the uninitiated, Chanakya (a.k.a Kautilya and Vishnugupta) was a teacher, economist, philosopher, and a ‘kingmaker’ from around the 4 Century BC. The *Arthashastra* by Chanakya is a compilation of his teachings, a massive manual of sorts for Management, Law, Foreign Policies, Economics, Warfare and Defence.

Settling down to a *tête-à-tête*, Dr. Radhakrishnan Pillai reveals his tryst with Chanakya and Kautilya’s *Arthashastra*. “I was never a brilliant student at school; just a good boy who would do his work well, and on time. What made a difference to my life, though, was my spiritual upbringing,” he says. Dr. Pillai’s association with Chinmaya Mission from early childhood opened a trove of rich ancient scriptures. And this, he says, laid the foundation for the rest of his life. While he got himself well-acquainted with the epics and the Upanishads, and other sacred texts early on in life, it was a chance find of a translated copy of Kautilya’s *Arthashastra* much later at an Indology bookstore in Mumbai that kick-started his fascinating journey. Intrigued, he read the book a couple of times but could not make much sense of it. Determined not to give up, he visited

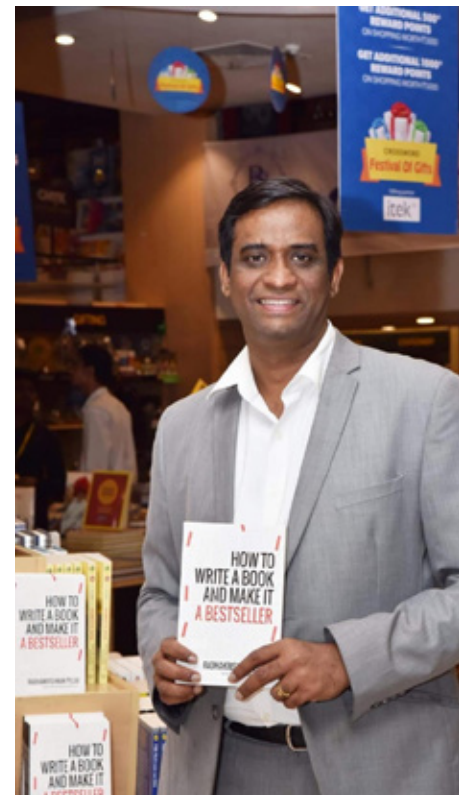


libraries, sought out more literature, and even enrolled himself at the Chinmaya International Foundation, Ernakulam - Kerala, to study Chanakya’s *Neetishashtra* and *Arthashastra*.

“What motivated me to take up Chanakya’s works is my background in management and my first project, Atma Darshan Cultural Discoveries Pvt. Ltd., in Mumbai. Atma Darshan is an Indian cultural tourism venture that I co-founded with my friend S Venkat (Co-founder of Practus and my CFO), but our processes were borrowed from the West. I had looked in vain for books on Indian administration models so I could use the strategies in our business. But when I started reading the *Arthashastra*, I knew I would find my answers in Chanakya, India’s real management guru,” Dr. Pillai beams. Sure enough, Chanakya’s philosophies have guided Atma Darshan for the last 20 years with over 30,000 tourists from all over the world undertaking pilgrimages and making their own cultural discoveries

across India’s heritage-rich soil.

With his own venture well in place, he started finding opportunities to spread Chanakya’s teachings to over 200 organisations as a business strategy consultant. His research paper on the *Arthashastra* in 2004 caught the attention of the then Business Editor of Mumbai Mirror, and Dr. Pillai became a columnist by invitation. Over four years, he published around 200 articles on Chanakya’s principles. In 2009, he was conferred with the prestigious Sardar Patel International Award for his unique contributions to the field of Management and Industrial Development. Soon he was approached by Jaico Publishing House, Mumbai, to write a book on Chanakya’s philosophies. Thus was born Corporate Chanakya, and the rest is history.



Conversation



With the phenomenal success of the book, Dr. Radhakrishnan Pillai had found his true calling. Chanakya had become an intrinsic part of his life and thoughts. He co-founded the Chanakya Institute of Public Leadership in Mumbai, with his friend Ranjit Shetty (Chairman of Gangotree Energy Projects and Founder-Partner at Kalpottam Agrisearch). It was a five-year research project to train future world leaders by institutionalising ancient Indian spirituality with an accent on practical application to create a sustainable model society. Graduates have taken their leadership skills to the political arena, academics, social activism, and even to the grassroots under the institute's social entrepreneurship initiatives, successfully bringing about a visible change in rural India.

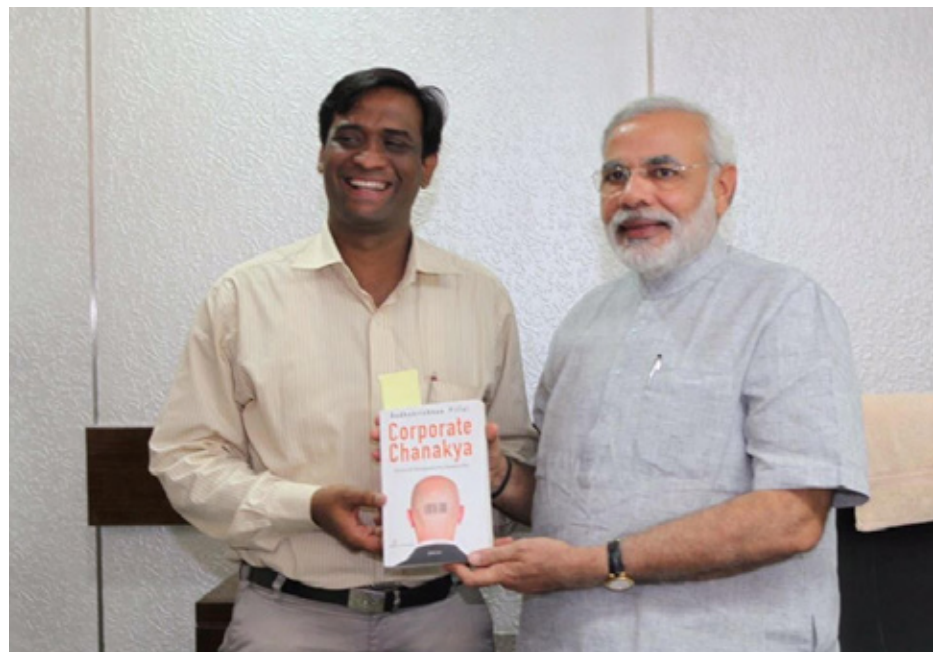
Armed with a Master's degree in Sanskrit and a Doctorate in Leadership Studies (with a Gold Medal in Arthashastra),

he was instrumental in setting up the Chanakya International Institute of Leadership Studies at the Mumbai University in 2016, offering a Masters' programme in Leadership Science based on the *Arthashastra*. One of the main tenets of the course is *Aanvikshiki* or the right way of thinking. "The *Arthashastra* seems to have borrowed from Bheeshma's *Raj Neeti* lecture to Yudhishtir from his deathbed of arrows in Kurukshetra. Chanakya acknowledges that this *Raj Vidya* is the *Param Vidya* for a leader, and yet *Aanvikshiki* is the *Pratham Vidya*, knowing 'how' to think," emphasises Dr. Pillai.

Dr. Pillai feels that India's administration at the national level is a remnant of the British Raj and there is a need for an overhaul based on an Indian model such as that of Chanakya's. "The nation has matured with time. We are undoubtedly world leaders in the IT sector, are well-respected, and are not perceived as a threat to anyone," he

says. However, it is the onus of every generation to restructure the system from time to time to suit contemporary requirements. Dr. Pillai teaches his students the importance of Chanakya's concept of *Vijigishu*, by encouraging them to become world conquerors and not settling for anything but the best.

And while it seems Dr. Pillai has himself conquered the world, he affirms there is more to be done. Besides continuing his foray with more books on the anvil, he is presently occupied with Neeraj Pandey's upcoming movie on Chanakya as part of its Research and Scriptwriting teams. He is also working on an updated version of Chanakya's Chakkravyuh, India's first financial board game that he co-created to change people's attitude towards finance. There is also the Li'l Chanakya game for younger children to teach them positive values about money. He is hopeful that the seeds of the ancient scriptures that he has thus sown will continue to inspire people





I ask: Thus spoke Chanakya or Dr. Radhakrishnan Pillai? The award-winning author laughs, “I have lived and breathed Chanakya and his works for the past 20 years. I no longer need to

Dr. Radhakrishnan Pillai has represented India at national and international conferences including the World Philosophy Congress in Athens, Greece, the Academy of Management in San Antonio, Texas, USA, the Afro-Asian Philosophical Congress, as well as the Indian Philosophy Congress, and teaches/taught at Dubai, Muscat, Singapore, Indonesia, the Heidelberg and Cologne universities in Germany, and Oxford, Cambridge and United Kingdom

and ethics. In a way, it is like going back to the gurukul system where Dharma was considered above all else.”

Dr. Pillai preaches *Chintan* or thinking over *chinta* or worry to live stress-free. He lives the life he preaches and lets *Aanvikshiki* guide him always, devoting time each morning to ‘think’! He is up even before dawn to welcome the Sun with meditation and deep thinking, something he has practised even before Chanakya came into his life. His main mantra is to make spirituality a way of life: “The earlier one starts on the spiritual journey the sooner they will attain spiritual and worldly success,” bearing testimony to his own words! **A**

for generations to come. “Children should be initiated into spirituality at a young age so that lessons stay with them and guide them for life.” His book for children, *Chatur Chanakya* and the *Himalayan Problem* introduces the concept of *Aanvikshiki* at a very basic level through interesting characters. “Parents should understand that their children are in a different era and that their past is not their children’s future,” Dr. Pillai grins. He labels the generation gap to be merely a ‘communication gap,’ rather than a ‘value gap’. “Values never change. They are only understood differently by each generation. Parents cannot guide their children today based on their understanding of the same values from yesterday. The world in which their children live today is very different. We owe it to our children to look at life from their perspective and learn about their generation before we can teach them anything.”

Some pearls of wisdom, this! And

refer to his works; it all comes naturally to me.” But this also puts a great deal of responsibility on Dr. Pillai. His narrative and style of writing may be simple, but its impact can be life-transforming. Of all the feedback he receives, one that he particularly remembers is that of a young man who stopped short of attempting suicide after listening to Dr. Pillai’s audiobook *Chanakya for the Youth*, where he stresses that Chanakya would never accept suicide in society.

Dr. Pillai thinks that a revamp of our education system is long overdue and that the rigours and anxiety of exams should end. The goal of education should not be to just secure a job or go abroad but to gear oneself towards making a difference with whatever one does. “The future of education is in research, values



Vidya Shanbhag

With over has over 20 years of freelance and professional experience in the field of communication, she has worked as a senior journalist, senior instructional designer, and technical writer. Presently based in Singapore, she is into academic and research editing and writing.

Attupokatha Ormakal

Unsevered Memories by
Prof. T J Joseph

 Greeshma Sukumaran

On July 4, 2010, Prof. T J Joseph was returning home from Sunday mass with his family in Kerala's Idukki district when a group of seven men stopped his car, dragged him out and chopped off his right hand at the wrist. Prof. Joseph, a Catholic and Head of the Department of Malayalam at Newman College in Thodupuzha, was accused of blasphemy for insulting Prophet Mohammed in a question paper that he had set for the students. The incident was widely condemned.' - As reported by a leading newspaper.

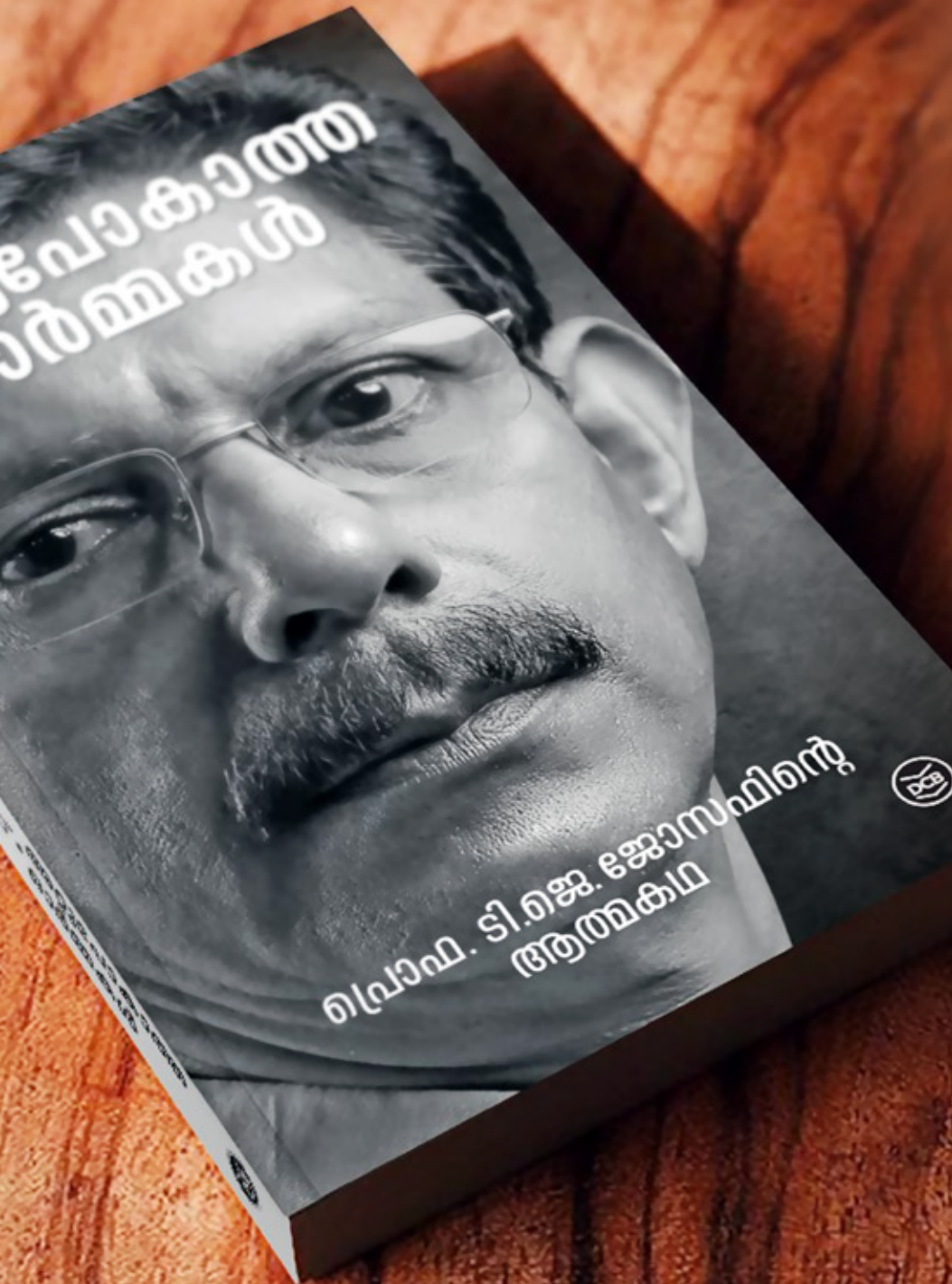
Back then, I was in the final year of my graduation and this incident, just like it did to everybody, shook my conscience too. Even though mob lynching



incidents have continued to rake my mind, Joseph Master's case has remained like a lump in the throat. So when the book Attupokatha Ormakal, which loosely translated into English means 'Unsevered Memories', hit the stands, I could not have missed getting a copy.

Just like its title and cover image (the cover image shows the reattached hand of Prof. Joseph), the book does not hide anything and, probably, that is what makes it a fabulous read too. For instance, the graphic details of the gory incident and the events that led to that fateful day. Even as there is all-pervading love, there is despair, and there is also despondency, but above all, there is pain written in every line and between the lines. One cannot finish the book without feeling the pain, especially that experienced by Salomi, Prof. Joseph's wife, a victim of reckless religious vigilantes, which will continue to haunt you long after reading the book. The book has two parts - the first narrates the details of the events preceding the horrifying attack on his life, the life before and after, his experiences with family, friends, superiors, and colleagues; and the second part narrates his early childhood, studies, quest for jobs, all of which resonate with the readers.

From the first chapter, the book describes the actions and events that culminated in the central scene of action. In the chapter titled Parashuramante Mazhu (Axe of Parashurama), the author gives us the blood-curdling details of the day, a gory image of blood, cries of despair and smoke (to create panic, the assailants burst crackers).



A Question Paper, Blasphemy Charge and a Fateful Day

In March 2010, Prof. Joseph set the said controversial question paper for an internal exam for second-semester Bachelor of Commerce students. Prof. Joseph, who was not comfortable copying questions from the previous year papers decided to make his own. He chose a passage from a book by award-winning filmmaker PT Kunju Muhammed to test students on grammar. The passage is a conversation between a man suffering from schizophrenia and Padachon or Allah. The man asks Allah an inane question, to which Allah responds, referring to the man as a 'son of a dog', an insult in Malayalam. In the original text, the man is given no name, but Prof. Joseph named him Muhammed in the question paper. He chose Muhammed because it was also the name of the author of the essay, Kunju Muhammed,



but he had decided to shorten it. He says that the essay was one of his favourites, which was also on the recommended reading list for postgraduate students of Malayalam. However, things took an ugly turn thereafter.



Prof. Joseph, even in his wildest dream had not thought that the passage he chose would be considered an affront to any religion.

The news spread like wildfire. Everything turned upside down overnight despite the question paper having been vetted by Prof. Joseph's superiors. Massive protests were organised across the state and PFI, a radical organisation led the charge. Prof. Joseph went underground, fearing arrest and managed to finally find shelter at a lodge in Palakkad district. That frightful night Joseph went to bed after his usual prayer, but he couldn't stop thinking about the raging storm and why his God had not indicated the troubles that were to follow, when he set the paper.

Although the media reported that the police arrested Prof. Joseph after an extensive search, the book offers a different version. After much deliberation and thought about his own protection and putting an end to the anxiety that had gripped the entire state of Kerala and beyond, Prof. Joseph had surrendered. Subsequently, he was remanded to custody. His son Mithun, daughter Aami and many family members and friends enter the narrative here on. Prof. Joseph had many edgy moments in jail and was released on bail later, only to return to a life without a job. The college had suspended him in March that year on charges that 'he had created enmity between two religions and had engaged in blasphemy'. In the following months, on different occasions, a group of men came to his house under various pretexts. Although Prof. Joseph had managed to avoid them, in a relentless

fourth attempt, the attackers severed his hand. Prof. Joseph says he was expecting such an attack anytime. The book gives a graphic description of the horrendous act. Prof. Joseph's car was waylaid and he was drawn out of the car and attacked in front of his family, just a few meters away from his home. Although the assailants had planned to chop his right hand, at first they accidentally attempted to cut his left hand. Upon realisation, they severed his right hand.



His detached hand was surgically reattached within hours of the attack. He spent months together at the hospital, in an enduring process of healing both inside and out. It was not easy for him and the family. But things didn't end there. The worst was not yet over for Prof. Joseph.

At the beginning of this controversy, the Syro Malabar Church and the college management rallied behind him, vouching for his integrity. However, the church authorities changed their stance later and decided not to antagonise PFI and other radical Islamic outfits in the state.

Prof. Joseph, his wife, two children and aged mother were ostracized after the church anathematized him. Although a trial court acquitted Prof. Joseph in the communal hatred case later, the college and the management were not kind. They refused to take him back and sacked him.

His wife Salomi sank into depression. The continuous legal battle and financial troubles took a toll on her. A week

before Prof. Joseph was officially due for retirement Salomi ended her life after returning home from a review visit to the hospital. This sparked widespread outrage among the people in the State and the college was forced to allow Prof. Joseph to return to work for just one day, so he would be eligible for his retirement benefits. But it was again a long struggle before he finally received these benefits, which ensured his financial stability.

Don't Ever Give Up

The trial court convicted 13 people accused in 2015 and acquitted 18 others. But Prof. Joseph pardoned those who assaulted him. He says he forgave

them after seeing their families crying when they were taken to jail. Joseph now drives his car and has gained the strength to do his daily chores using his surgically attached hand. He also worked on this book using his reattached hand.

The autobiography Attupokatha Ormakal is not a book that only chronicles the life of Prof. T J Joseph. But it is a book that talks to the reader of the importance of forgiving and a subtle reminder of the known truth, but often forgotten, nothing is constant - life, love, grudge and pain. By not playing the victim card Prof. Joseph never tried to show superiority in this book; but he speaks directly to the reader and has laced his narrative with subtle humour, giving it the intimate feel at times, that stands in contrast to the harsh reality.

The book Attupokatha Ormakal clears the air about the tragic incident and the author's tribulations. It can be seen as an attempt to make his stand clear. Some people, he believes misunderstood him. The 432 page book is an account of the ordeal he faced and also speaks volumes about the injustice in society. 📖



Book: ATTUPOKATHA ORMAKAL

Author: PROF. T J JOSEPH

Category: Autobiography & Biography

Publishing Date: 06-02-2020

Publisher: DC BOOKS

Number of pages: 432

Language: Malayalam

Antharanga

Exploring Movement, Wordlessly

The first dialogue in *Antharanga* comes a full 15 minutes into the play after most of the main characters have already been established on stage. As the lights fade in, we are introduced to a family of five - husband, wife and three children, including a newborn baby - winding down for the day. Just a regular, happy family going about their normal routine in their home. The first

word, however, is uttered not by any of them, but by an old man observing them from outside through the windows - his words not only puncturing the protracted silence but also the illusion of serenity. In fact, throughout the play, the only characters to speak are those standing 'outside' the house, while the members of the family 'inside' become outsiders to their own imminent grief.





Antharanga is an adaptation of Belgian playwright Maurice Maeterlinck's *Interior*, originally written in French. Translated into Kannada by Madhava Chippali, it has been directed by Sankar Venkateswaran for *Ninasam* Maru Tirugata 2020.

Maurice Maeterlinck was a celebrated European playwright whose work was crucial in shaping the Symbolist theatre movement during the late 19th Century. Written in 1895, *Interior* explores fatalism, a recurring theme in Maeterlinck's plays. In keeping with the philosophy that fate is more powerful than human will, Maeterlinck is said to have eliminated the need for real actors by designing the play for marionettes. Just as the forces of fate control all our lives, he believed, the puppeteers would pull the strings of the marionettes used in his play.

In the play, a young girl is found floating dead on the village river. The shocked village-folk send the elders to inform the family of their daughter's death. But their mission is riddled with bigger questions: How does one speak of death in a house

filled with life? How does one rip this order apart and fill it with chaos? But the loss, and the grief following is inevitable and before the body reaches the house, the villagers must decide how to break the news of the unfortunate incident. Their profound dilemma is juxtaposed with the calm unawareness of the family. While there are hints that the girl's death could have been a suicide, the play never clarifies it.

Sankar's *Antharanga* examines the idea of multiple 'interiors' and asks more than it offers. What interior are we looking at? Who is watching whom? Is

it the physical, and more obvious, one - the house where the family is being watched? Or is it a metaphysical one - the emotional predicament that we see the villagers in? Whose lives are more open to scrutiny? The peaceful family cocooned by its walls and doors but bared through its glass windows or the villagers whose anxiety and misery the night cannot hide?

The stage is split diagonally to show a separation of the inside of the house from the garden outside. But on either side of this imaginary line, we also see the contrasts of life and death, darkness and light, happiness and sorrow, peace and conflict. Sankar keeps the interior white, bright and well-lit, and the exterior sombre. But this representation is turned on its head when you realise that the parents, who remain ignorant of their child's death until the very end of the play, have actually been in the dark throughout. At this point, it seems there could be another kind of interior - the one where we, as the audience, slow down with the play, come alive to the stillness within us and begin to ponder over these questions.





This is not the first time theatre director Sankar Venkateswaran has worked with the students of Ninasam. His previous productions include *The Water Station* (TWS) by Japanese playwright Shogo Ohta and *Gurutillade Nadedda Ghalige* (GNG). To his audience, Sankar's work may seem like attempts to further explore his fascination with the relationship between the body and space. Excruciatingly slow motions are a striking feature of all his plays - like in TWS. On the other hand, in a play like GNG, he gradually works up to a frenzied pace taking his audience to a crescendo before bringing them back to an almost still-like state but not before leaving them emotionally and physically exhausted, much like his actors.

In *Antharanga*, too, he stretches time and facilitates the meditation between the space and the body through prolonged silence. As silence takes precedence and the body, voice and mind become one, actors use the space to breathe life into imagination and make the story more

real for the audience.

While TWS and GNG were both completely wordless plays, *Antharanga* uses minimal dialogues. Yet, Sankar succeeds in keeping its physical theatre alive by separating the *angika* (body movement) and *vachika* (speech) aspects. The dialogues of each of the four main performers are voiced by different speakers seated at the right corner of the stage, allowing the actors to focus entirely on their engagement with space and body.



With such deliberately measured and unhurried movements, you would think you have more time to focus on the actors. But surprisingly, even as your brain is dialling down its need to engage constantly with the activity on-stage, there is a simultaneous pressing need to look hard, observe and follow the actors' movements lest you miss a transition, physical or emotional, if you looked away. The absence of a sudden and 'normal' pace of motion or gesture and very little speech, forces you to pull yourself together and invest in the play



completely. So leisure is a luxury one can't afford while watching plays like these, where even the tiniest of twitches and jerks are of huge importance.

Owing to the COVID-19 lockdown, I watched the play on YouTube. This was not only my first time watching a play online but also my first with a multicamera set-up. Though an ideal alternative during a pandemic, there are of course limitations to such a "guided" viewing when compared to the traditional theatre experience. In a live show, the audience has the power to choose which actor or part of the stage



they make their focal point and how frequently their eyes wander between moments of action. In a multicamera recording, however, the video is edited to show us the area of immediate movement on stage. So the viewer is being spoon fed the visuals she needs to see, almost like a movie. This may not seem like an issue while watching most other plays. But in a production like *Antharanga*, where constant and subtle movements are intrinsic to the rhythm of the performance, it makes a huge difference. For instance, in shots where the camera cuts to capture the

mood of only the *vaachika* performers, the audience may completely miss out on certain nuances that are occurring off the frame.

Sankar's powerful adaptation of *Interior* is backed by an exceptional cast comprising the best of Ninasam's students. The project was also supported by India Foundation for the Arts through Arts Practice Project. So as an absurd, experimental theatre that is conceptualised bearing in mind the demands of an IFA project, where boundaries of art are pushed and



reinvented, the play works fine. But a regular theatre-going audience may find the performance encumbered by its pace and laborious to get through initially. One is even more sceptical of its appeal as a Maru Tirugaata production that will be travelling the state of Karnataka. In smaller towns and villages where the repertory tours, many among the audience are experiencing theatre for the first time or have only been exposed to more conventional plays, complete with dialogues, live music and songs. So a play like *Antharanga*, meticulously designed and directed for the 'trained eye' with an emphasis on craft, may fail to hold the attention of such an audience. Meanwhile, for those who wish to watch the play online like me, the only way to truly appreciate it is through submission of the self: Fight it and boredom may consume you, but surrender to the slowness of the 'bahiranga' and *Antharanga* may just open itself up to you. **A**



Nalme Nachiyar
 Freelance journalist and an aspiring Kathak dancer. She was formerly a sub-editor with Deccan Herald.

The Language of Cinema

A Few Shots from
Bengaluru
International
Film Festival, 2020
Part 2



Shindisi

Language: Georgian

Director: Dito Tsintsadze

Duration: 101 minutes

What has defined our legacy? Is it our persistent pursuit of peace? Or is it the cavernous cauldron of torment we have populated our history with? Our poster child: war. It astounds us and it appals us. War is humankind's unifying fixation. Riddled with its fever, we have rarely sought a cure. War is a grisly spectacle. Cacophonous, never quiet, never still.

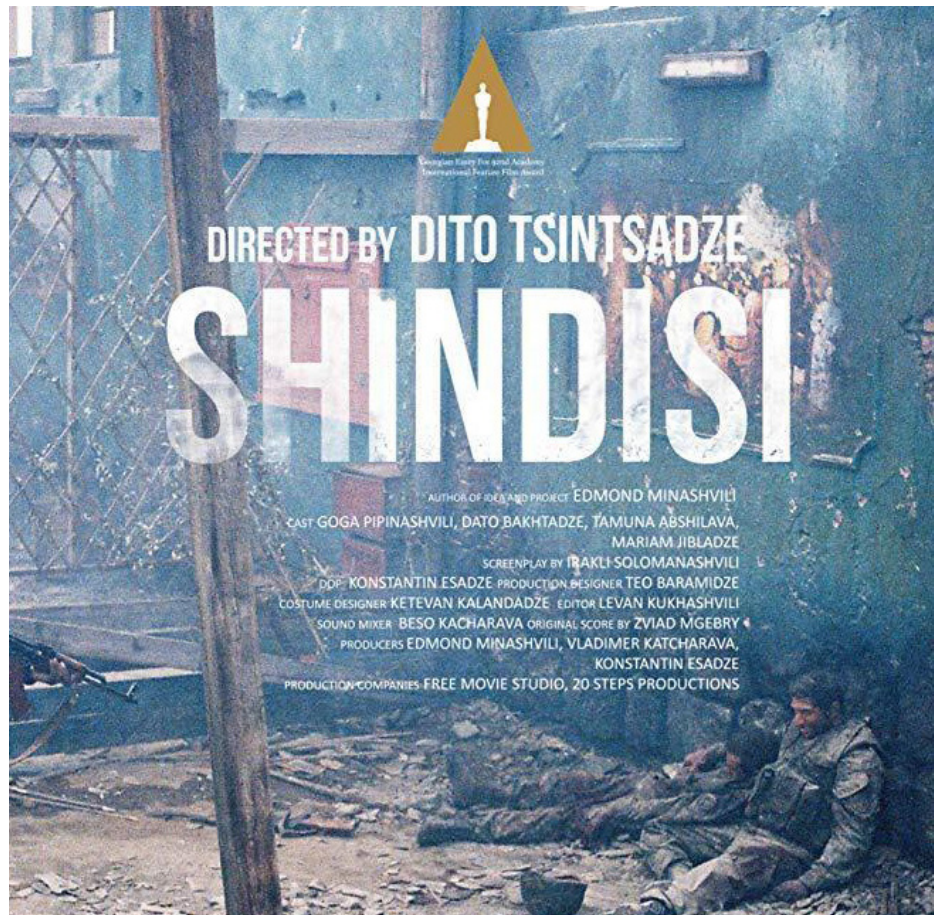
Director Dito Tsintsadze sifts through the rare silence punctuating the carnage during the Russo-Georgian War in 2008. We are led to the serene countryside village of Shindisi. The wind stirs with lethargy. Cattle bellow. A small sapper unit of combat engineers learns about

a cease-fire that will allow them to exit the combat zone without any imminent peril. But that is not to be, for silence and worth of life in war is an aberration. The lightly armed unit is tricked into an ambush. The Russian forces emerge, brandishing contraptions of death far more lethal than the prey they have ensnared. Death is affirmed when we hear the lumbering tread of a tank. There is no refuge from the bullet tempest and shrapnel. No gods descend to lend mercy. The Russians inch closer, circling the hapless Georgian soldiers who make a doomed last stand, their meagre ammo dwindling, empty gun magazines clattering.

Tsintsadze and cinematographer Konstantin Esadze frame the battle – the only fight sequence in the film – in a startlingly matter-of-fact fashion. There is no grand Nolan-esque flair or the sheer visual marvel of the recent Sam Mendes helmed film titled *1917*. Instead, Tsintsadze and Esadze adopt the immediate terror and grime of



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Dito Tsintsadze, Director



Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* but dismantle that palette further down until we find ourselves in the scorching heat witnessing invisible bullets tearing through flesh with resounding glee. Tsintsadze's camera is like us, merely a mute spectator. Esadze lights the sequence with only the mercy of the raging sun. We taste the dust when the tank turns everything in sight into a smouldering wreck. The camera trembles and veers wildly, mimicking the onslaught on display. The sequence looks ugly, devoid of style, but that is the intent. Soon, most of the Georgian soldiers are dead, strewn across a ruinous landscape. A handful stranded inside a battered building refuse to

surrender. The Russians comply and launch a swift and final assault. Grenades are hurled. Machine guns whine. Silence prevails. Death is satiated. The Russian forces move on.

In *Shindisi*, dread runs rampant. Villagers are frantically packing what they can and fleeing their homes as the Russian forces begin to arrive. Two families stay. Calm and resigned. Badri with his ailing wife, Khatia and the shambling drunk Vazja who brings his daughter Mariam to Badri's home. The rattle of the battle reaches their ears. Badri finds one injured Georgian just outside the village boundary.

Before Badri can drag him towards the possibility of safety, the soldier succumbs. His limp body collapses. Badri stands immobilized. His eyes are stark pools of anguish. Actor Goga Pipinashvili plays the character devoid of dramatic bombast. His eyes relay torment and swiftly fading hope. Vazja joins him as they realize that a precious few Georgian soldiers are clinging to life. Vazja, played by Dato Bakhtadze, always appears drunk and exhausted but conjures remarkable fortitude and compassion hauling the injured soldiers from the scorched battlefield to safety - inside Badri's home.

Tamar Abshilava imbues Khatia with simmering grit. She is ill but her resolve is a stalwart. While tending to a soldier, a helicopter descends, generating a vicious swirl of wind threatening to expose the presence of the Georgian. Khatia covers him with vegetation and when that fails against the ruthless power of the helicopter blades, she covers the soldier with her large skirt. When the Georgian Orthodox clergy come for the dead, they assist the family to keep the soldiers hidden from the several patrols led by a general raring to unleash woe if his mood dictates him to. Such men are dangerous, harboring a treacherous disposition. Hence, ensuring the safety of the remaining Georgian soldiers becomes more precarious than it already is.

When the film begins, footage from a mobile phone shows us the sapper unit on a break, resting by the roadside. "What are we waiting for?" asks one of the soldiers dryly, certain that there is no satisfactory answer. "I don't know,

peace, I guess," suggests another. He probably does not believe his own self when the words leave his mouth. They know where they are. A home is one projectile away from becoming rubble.

Tsintsadze allows his actors to employ dialogue sparingly, instead choosing to follow their faces, documenting every wince and twitch of a muscle and the terror in the eyes tucked away to accommodate courage. Badri knows death is familiar there. He knows he must glare at it when it surely arrives. The world may forget but he will not.

Measure for Measure

Language: English

Director: Paul Ireland

Duration: 103 minutes

"Not of an age, but for all time."

Ben Jonson was right when he wrote the famous quote about William Shakespeare. Five hundred years after his death, Shakespeare's body of work continues to be mined for adaptations across every feasible medium. You can seemingly find yet another film adaptation of yet another play every year. Hamlet alone has well over 50 film adaptations. Director Paul Ireland burrows through the play "Measure for Measure" and attempts a modern spin set in and around the Melbourne housing commission flats. An addict, spiralling out of control, goes berserk, gunning down several people. The horror is witnessed by our main characters and their lives are inevitably entwined. Hugo

Weaving plays the crime boss Duke with subtle intimidation and spouts dialogue with frightening precision and impact. "I love a good cup of tea, don't you?" A simple enough line but the range of Weaving's face and voice ensure that yes, we too must seek a good cup of tea. After the aforementioned tragedy, he must briefly go into hiding to allow the frailty of the situation to simmer down. He hands the reigns to his twitchy and neurotic protégée, Angelo. Mark Leonard Winter, blessed with a remarkably expressive face adorned with curious eyes, makes us uneasy - you cannot predict what he may decide to do. Sometimes he is feeding ducks and sometimes he is beating his associate to a bloody pulp. Claudio, a young dreamer who composes music and Jaiwara, a refugee, forge a relationship. But it is a Shakespearean romance; disaster will thrive.

The film loosely emulates the plot and structure of the original play. However, there is barely any hint of wit. Paul



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Paul Ireland, Director



compositions. Instead, the lenses remain stoic, merely gathering the visual data in an acutely uninspired fashion. The film is plagued by clichés. How does one show a character’s end is nigh? Have them cough into the bathroom sink and spit a spattering of blood into a tissue. Then, of course, the character must gaze into the mirror for a while. Claudio is a music maker, clearly passionate about his art and the film forgets about it soon after he has made Jaiwara listen to it who apparently loves his work after holding the earphones for a few seconds.

William Shakespeare’s work will endure and outlast us all. We will continue to dig in with eager shovels. **A**



Soban Gul

A graduate in journalism, he works as scriptwriter and editor for studios like Netflix, Sony, Warner, Disney, BBC etc. Through Digicaptions India Pvt. Ltd. He has directed a documentary titled Kalakaar Ki Katha that was shortlisted for the Filmfare Short Film Awards, 2018. His Haiku poems have been published in ‘Poets International’.

Ireland infuses the film with melodrama that quickly becomes unabashedly sappy. Scenes are tense, characters brood, gazing into the distance or mirrors, and many times the dialogue is contrived and delivered weakly. It is a damning thought what the film would be without the services of the great Hugo Weaving. The script gives him scraps but somehow he summons ingenuity and impeccability for his role. The film is also edited with a strange weariness. Some scenes continue for far too long. A dozen minutes could be trimmed from the film without any impact on the

general progression of the plot. “If the audience is aware of the editing, the editor has failed,” writes Ken Dancyger and it is excruciatingly evident as the film continues towards its conclusion. The romance between Claudio and Jaiwara is hurried and devoid of affection. Director Paul Ireland strives for a nuanced social-realist take but surrenders the possibility to an inconsistent melodrama that grapples with its own identity.

The film is shot with a tedious eye. The camera is adamant in its quest to bypass the prospect of engaging shot

Healthcare – Time is Ripe to Drop the “I” in Patient

An unwavering focus on patient well-being should form the bedrock and the quintessence of all developmental efforts by healthcare professionals and the industry at large. In today’s healthcare ecosystem, it is time to drop the “I– Illness” in patient and focus on “Patent” to create a new paradigm in the value chain spanning many sub-vertical players such as pharmaceutical companies, hospitals, insurance companies, laboratories, etc. It calls for a new collaborative approach in an industry that has seen the entry of many players engaged in delivering value-based outcomes – the right care at

optimal quality and at a lower cost for better health - “Wellness” of the population. An ideal balance between quality service offering and cost is the need of the hour and this can undoubtedly be achieved by harnessing technological advancements that have also furthered the progression of players.

We are right now grappling with the massive spread of Coronavirus across the globe that has mandated the World Health Organisation (WHO) to tag it a ‘pandemic.’ An unprecedented situation, it has challenged the healthcare delivery system as much in advanced

countries as in developing countries, where, of course, the stress on the system is far more evident. In the absence of a vaccine or a drug, innovators are accelerating research studies in labs and on animal models, and just stepping into human-based trials of a hitherto unknown SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) virus. The race among the many players to the finish line is to crunch an average 10-year development lifecycle into a meagre 10-12 months.

Global healthcare spend is slated to increase by leaps and bounds – at an

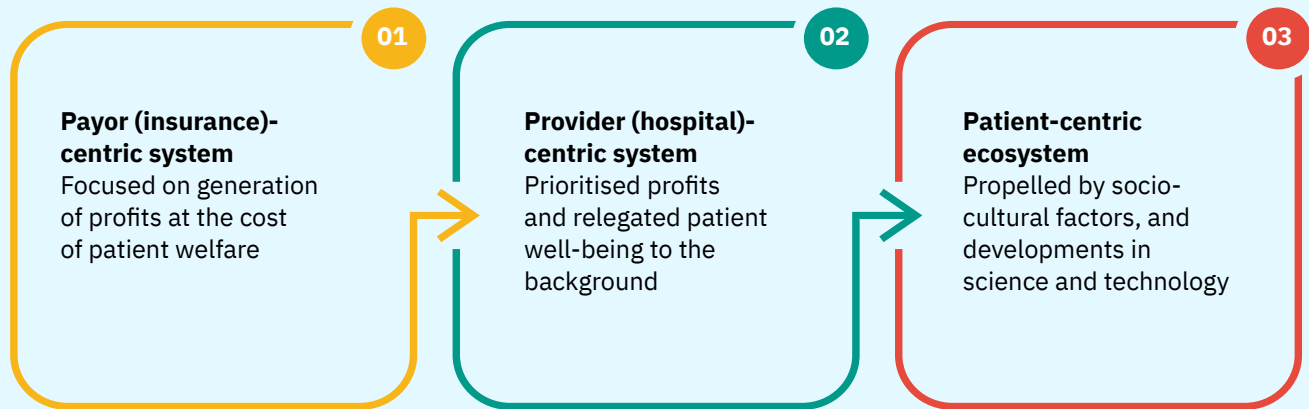
annual rate of 4.1% in the 2017-2021 period as compared to 1.3% in the 2012-2016 period. Under the current situation, will the industry repurpose its dollar-spend or pour in additional amounts is something only time will tell.

The ecosystem has today become dynamic and complex because it has access to large amounts of personal health data generated from personal health monitoring systems/gadgets and health apps.



The movement ‘from Illness to Wellness’ should be the Healthcare mantra, especially during such turbulent times. The confused patient left with a hodgepodge of options searches on Google for the right answers, only to be confused further and fires a barrage of questions to the caregiver, and many a times causes more self-harm. It indeed is a perfect storm situation – what are the timeline options and who are the players ready to take the big step in this direction, given that baby steps like digitisation, digital adoption, newer players accelerating the pace etc. are already in place. However, what we are waiting for with bated breath is the coming together of the forces to provide the best care to the patient.

Journey Towards Patient-Centric Healthcare Ecosystem



Developments in the Healthcare System

Population Health – Dispensing with the one-size-fits-all notion, the system proactively focuses on the risk factors of subgroups within a population and analyses their susceptibility to a disease condition and the treatments. For instance, epidemics, outbreaks, and localised patterns can be identified and treated.

Precision Medicine – Advancements in pharmacology, genomics, proteomics, bioinformatics, etc., help map the individual gene make-up to deliver customised medicine for better results. For instance, cancer diagnosis and treatment with gene-sequencing and gene therapy is entering into mainstream therapy.

Patient Engagement – The patient is a ‘connected’ individual, who needs to be continuously engaged by the eco-system to impart better education and aware-



ness, sustain patient interest, and deliver desired outcomes. Pharmaceutical companies have endeavoured to monitor patient progress and treatment path by sharing education material, webinars, chatbots, informational videos,

online conversations, KOL (Key Opinion Leader) platform for knowledge-share, etc. Hospitals and clinics are striving to reduce wait-time by leveraging digital scheduling models and tools, to make their operations transparent. The goal

of a better-engaged model is to enhance patient experience.

Prescription Adherence – Compliance to the prescribed medication and dosage is crucial to achieve intended outcome. The lack of adherence gravitates to a grim situation with spiralling healthcare costs and receding patient wellbeing. Every player in the system has his pulse here to ensure 100% adherence through digital means.

Digitized Clinical Trials – Collecting clinical trial data using digital tools is a necessity where multi-site centres around the world help to orchestrate better collaboration. The pandemic has made this an absolute requirement and of prime importance.

Technological Advancements in Healthcare

Developments in the industry, aided by innovative technologies have the potential to make a difference between life-and-death, provide the most efficacious options, in terms of awareness and treatments.

Blockchain – Blockchain, through its decentralised approach, records a digital footprint of the assets or blocks created, as it transacts and changes hands using cryptography. Clinical trials of the Pharma industry stand to benefit enormously due to its multi-country, multi-ethnicity coverage, as well as among healthcare providers for quick and easy exchange of data.

Artificial Intelligence – AI aided com-



puter systems can iteratively program themselves upwards from self-learning and build on its vast experience gained through continuous transactions. Greater the data fed, more insightful are the outcomes. Chatbots are just one example of a bridge between doctors and patients. Image analytics to sift through thousands of MRI/X-Ray/CT scans to connect with patterns of previously known cases, for instance cancer growth is an immediate area to explore.

Mobility – Smartphones with advanced features, processor speeds, etc. have connected people around the globe and opened new possibilities. They can help monitor and record many basic health parameters.

Cloud and IoT – Internet of Things (in simple terms, physical devices embedded with electronics, software, sensors,

and network connectivity which enables them to collect and exchange data) is here to stay and the question that technology players are betting big to answer is likely via ‘co-opetition’ (cooperative competition) with the domain players and other eco-system actors. Cloud solutions to store patient data for easy access and quick retrieval at the point-of-care have enticed numerous players. Bed-side access to case studies around the world enriches the doctors’ knowledge. Privacy and data security aspects are addressed, albeit a few sporadic instances. Better response time to emergencies, remote patient monitoring, proactive management in dealing with mental disorders, fall detection in seniors are a few areas that will benefit. A simple discipline of hand-sanitization in a hospital environment to help arrest the infection-spread is an example to illustrate this technology.

Bits and Bytes

Virtual / Augmented Reality – If reality can be brought closer virtually, or if the experience can be further enhanced, then healthcare is waiting to embrace this technology. Medical education and training of professionals through these technologies is a new wave in the healthcare industry and has found numerous takers. Post-traumatic stress disorders among military personnel have been addressed remarkably through this technology.

Tele-health – Telecommunication technologies provide enhanced access to rural areas to deliver healthcare, education for awareness, and increase the reach in urban areas. The transportation of immune-compromised patients during the COVID crisis is a further strain on the system. The model of a 'connected patient' in a remote monitoring paradigm is ideal in the context of the skewed doctor-to-patient ratio. Enhanced security protocols are essential for patient data confidentiality.

Wearable gadgets – Belts and patches to monitor temperature, sugar levels, even sleep and breathing patterns, are also programmed to inject medicine with micro-needles and are fast gaining acceptance. Even wound management techniques using flexible electronic sensors integrated with woven bandages are now mainstream in developed countries, and a matter of time before it hits the rest of the world markets. Fall detection sensors as wearable belts or devices help elderly patients within the precincts of their own homes.

Analytics – Huge quantities of patient data is generated 24x7 with the advent

of umpteen tools discussed above. This data become useful only with easy data collection, easy access, quick analysis, generation of insights and trends, and the final derivation of results.

Progression of Players in the Ecosystem

Traditional players are being pushed to their performance limits with the advent of new players or fringe players who are expanding the gamut of their service offerings.

Insurance companies have leveraged technology to get better insights into patient behaviour. They use analytics to control and reduce fraudulent claims, better understand patient journey on the medical path, gain insights into patients' drug-switching and drug-substitute decisions.

Hospitals, having adopted patient-centric healthcare delivery models, engage

with other players to deliver enhanced post-operative care, to convert patients into repeat customers.

Pharmaceutical companies are now channelling their funds towards drug discovery and development, optimal manufacturing methods and digitising the value chain. They have outsourced peripheral activity along the value chain to reduce costs. With technology, they get better insights into patient population and can monitor sentiments that would impact their overall 'brand reputation' through extensive use of social media.

Contract Research / Manufacturing Organisations offer end-to-end services to pharmaceutical companies in drug research and development and operationalise the costs incurred. They have progressed from clinical trial centres to key enablers offering scientific might along with use of digital tools.



Infomediaries collect volumes of prescription and drug usage data from insurance companies and hospitals, based on which they analyse, model and profile the purchase and usage patterns of the patient population. Based on this valuable data, pharma companies align their R&D and marketing and advertising strategies. In the Indian context, this link in the value chain still needs to transform into organised sector.

EHR/EMR Entities help capture and manage electronic health/medical records to create a mammoth medical bank and a potential single repository of patient health records. Hospitals were benefited from the analytics derived from this data. However, the big blow came when due to inter-operability issues, several instances got created. Another discussion that is still open-ended is who would be the keeper/owner of the records; and about granting these rights to the patient.

Laboratories generate volumes of clinical data of patients from various tests. Use of instrumentation and ICTs has necessitated better ways to handle this data and derive useful patient longitudinal insights. Network of laboratories owned by corporate entities has enabled the movement and exchange of data.

Technology players like Apple, Microsoft, Samsung, and Google have taken the onus to enhance the overall experience of the net-resultant forces in the eco-system via their technology and service offerings.

Entities like NGOs, university researchers, domiciliary care-providers, online


pharmacies, prescription delivery outfits, organised caregivers, venture capitalists, etc. have driven the discussions in the direction of an empowered patient, and have directed the investment funds to ride the crest of research work.

The chain is as much broken as there are efforts to keep it integrated with the immense challenge of keeping an end-to-end view of patient data. There is an imminent need for newer partnership models to meet the needs of a smarter patient - all this for a cost-effective, future-proofed, and sustainable healthcare to improve community wellness, rather than be drowned in reactive treatment methods.

Illness to Wellness

Dropping the “I” in patient, we have ‘Patent’ which implies that the focus should shift towards research and development, innovation, out-of-the-box methods to solve healthcare problems. Whether to help identify brand new drugs for new methods of treatment or cures for uncured diseases or pulling better outcomes for the tough disease conditions that help improve patient quality of life or to find newer less-invasive methods to treat chronic illnesses, the race is towards a ‘gravity-defying’ collaborative approach.

The journey from ‘Illness to Wellness’ must be carefully manoeuvred to reach the patient’s desired destination in an informed, intellectual, and ethical manner. The ecosystem right now is resting on fertile ground that is ready to take the ‘sow’ and deliver the ‘harvest.’

The patient community has been long waiting for a brand-new world of healthcare, which gives the drug, the service, the treatment, or the workflow or even the synergy a new shape for a marked difference in the overall health. Patients have waited to receive a new kind of care that is palatable and promises aspired outcomes. The healthcare industry is at a true inflection point that would point towards the removal of illness from the patient and create patentable artefacts for people’s wellness and the society at large, a win-win situation. 



Prasanna Harihar

Consultant with over three decades in healthcare and related industry. His experience in leadership roles at leading technology companies like IBM, Wipro, Harman, and combined with industry knowledge at a US-biotech company and Syngene, a Contract Research Organisation in the pharmaceutical world positioned him at the intersection of IT and healthcare. He is based in Bengaluru, India.

Karnataka Dealing with Challenges of COVID-19

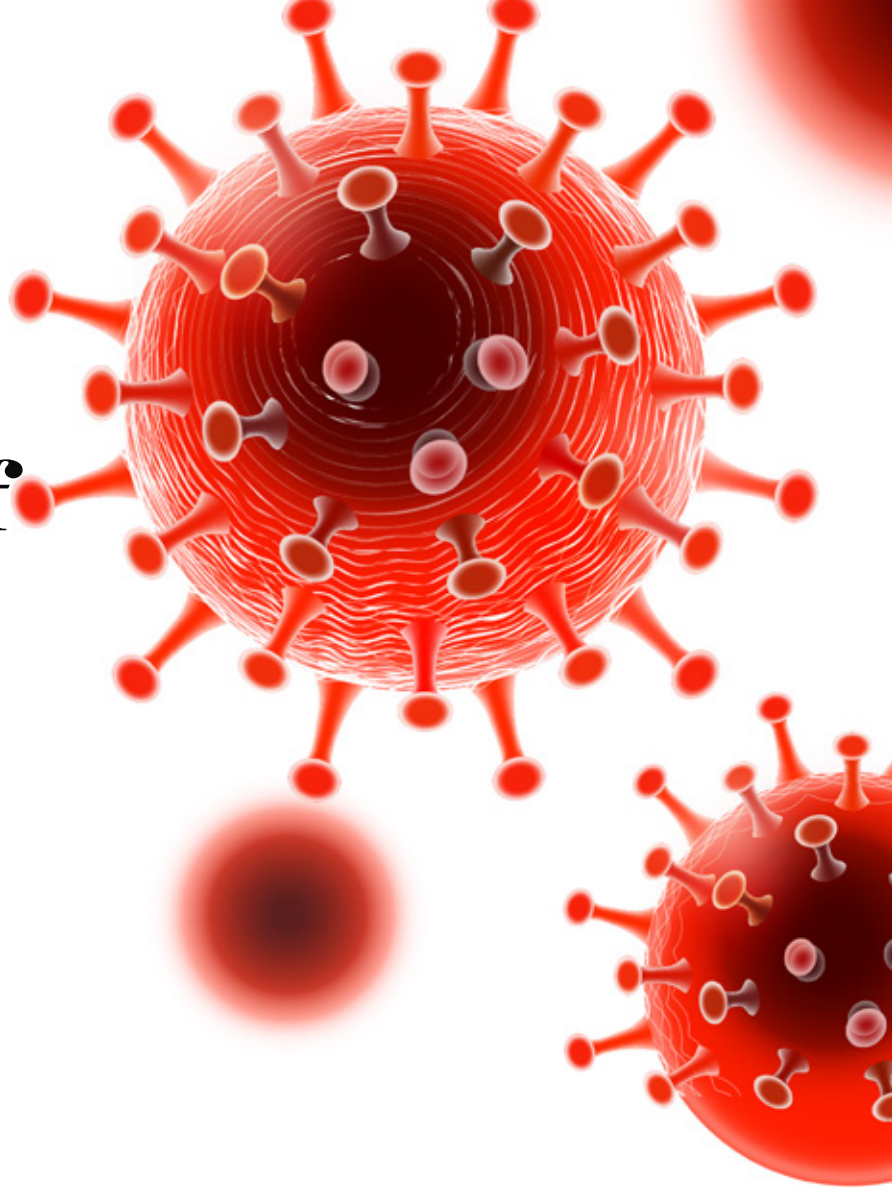
In the early days when COVID-19 had just struck China, and was quietly spreading to the rest of the world, it spurred wisecracks from many across the globe and a bountiful of humour. The fact that it shared its name with an alcoholic beverage, gave reason enough for people to create memes and troll the name of the disease too. I clearly remember the witty discussions I had with my colleagues and friends about the disease, which soon turned out to be a deadly pandemic causing panic, and hemmed the atmosphere with anxiety in a very short time-span. It was only when the entire city of Wuhan in China, the birthplace of this deadly virus was locked down and people started dying in thousands that the world began to realise the gravity of the situation, including myself.

A few days into the lockdown of Wuhan, the virus spread like wildfire catching the global healthcare sector off guard. Even as I write this special interview, the number of coronavirus cases has reached over 3 million globally, and as it seems, the contagion would continue to escalate at an alarming rate.



Researchers around the world are still trying to understand the dynamics of the impact of the virus on the human body. Although, stray instances of successful vaccines make to the headlines now and then, and though every country is working tirelessly towards developing one, no success story has been reported so far.

Dr.K.Sudhakar, Medical Education Minister, Government of Karnataka speaks to Shwetha HC about how Karnataka is dealing with the challenges posed by COVID-19



Which phase of pandemic are we currently in, in India and how is it likely to manifest from here on?

Different parts of the country are in different stages of transmission. The recent survey by ICMR indicates that there is minimum trace of community transmission in India. More than 60 percent of the positive cases are found in 10 cities of India and this only indicates that the urban centres of the nation are carrying the burden of COVID-19.

Would it be right to say that the lockdown period deferred the peak?

The lockdown period has undeniably saved many lives and facilitated the State and the Central Government to ramp up the healthcare infrastructure. It fetched us the much needed time to procure PPE kits and ventilators, identify and prepare dedicated Covid treatment hospitals, reserve beds, and ICUs. Most importantly lockdown helped us create awareness among the masses about the pandemic and the precautions to be taken.

How long will this outbreak last? When is this pandemic likely to see its downturn in India?

The healthcare safety measures taken by the Indian Government and the same followed by the citizens unfailingly in India have been very effective in curbing the spread of the virus and keeping the mortality considerably low as compared to the numbers of positive tested patients. We should avoid speculating about the downturn time of the pandemic because, unlike other countries, India is complex in terms of its geography, demography, and infrastructure

that vary vastly between India's various states.

How is the healthcare infrastructure prepared to contain the spread of Covid in Karnataka?

The Government is well prepared to face any kind of unexpected spike in cases. We already have more than one lakh beds ready for the inflow of patients in all hospitals put together in Karnataka. Although it was estimated that our state would record nearly 80,000 cases by April-end, we are glad that we didn't proximate that record back then. Testing and contact-tracing has been levitated up in order to map the spread and provide healthcare accordingly.

Only Government hospitals were utilised for the treatment of Covid patients till now and now private hospitals are also being utilised to treat Covid patients.

Cost of testing and treatment has been fixed by the Government and stringent measures add are taken against hospitals that exploit people by charging exorbitant prices and also refuse to admit corona patients. The private sector has joined hands with the Government in this battle against the pandemic and similarly it is also the responsibility of every citizen to help themselves by staying indoors and by staying safe.

What is the way forward for the Government under the prevailing circumstances?

In the short term, we focussed on educating people and de-mystifying public perception about Covid. We will continue to ensure that there is no dearth of health care facilities for symptomatic patients, and low-risk asymptomatic positive patients will be placed in dedicated Covid care centers



so that beds are available to those who need it. Private hospitals are instructed to have dedicated treatment facilities for the infected patients and the cost of treatment will be regulated by the Government.

ogy, for which we need to keep up the momentum that has been gained due to the war-footing work done during a pandemic. Revamping medical education both qualitatively and quantitatively is the need of the hour.



In the medium term, our focus was on ensuring high flow oxygen lines for all facilities including primary health care centres community health centers, and taluk hospitals, enhancing ICU capacity and equipping district hospitals with ICU & ventilator support facilities.

Now, in the long term, the Covid crisis has provided us a window to restructure and strengthen the healthcare sector. To build a robust healthcare system for the future we need to focus on structuring a strong infrastructure and technol-

ogy needs would require emphasising the triple helix model of innovation, which is, amalgamating the government, academia, and industry, now more than ever.

The pandemic has demonstrated that accurate, reliable, and real-time public health data is the key to evidence-based policymaking. In Karnataka, we are working towards having a comprehensive “State Health Registry” which will be the repository of health data of all citizens.

What is the Karnataka Government doing to persuade people to take adequate precautions and safety measures?

Karnataka Government is taking various measures to create awareness among the public about the pandemic and precautions to be taken. We have issued separate guidelines for precautions to be taken in public places like parks, hotels, malls, workplaces, etc. Medical Education Department has created a lyrical video by roping in various film artists and sportspersons. The government also observed Mask Day on June 18 and various awareness programmes are being conducted at taluk and district centers.

Clinical criteria for identifying the disease have been expanding day by day. What is the reason?

We are dealing with an invisible and unknown enemy. I agree that there is a lot of ambiguity on various issues like isolation and treatment of asymptomatic cases, the treatment protocol for patients in different stages, etc. In Karnataka, we have an expert committee to advice on these matters. We will have more clarity as we get more clinical evidence.

Can you bust the myth around the use of Hydroxychloroquine in helping the Covid patients recover?

As I said, there is no one-size-fits-all treatment protocol for all cases. People should be wary of fake news and misinformation. I suggest people not to take over the counter medicine and those having symptoms should visit fever clinics and get tested.



maceutical companies across the globe are exploring the treatment and vaccine or medicine options. Personally, I urge people to fight this infection naturally by increasing their immunity level and this can be done by consuming protein-rich diets and immunity boosters based on your biological design. Though we are at the least a few months away from a vaccine, I am confident that we will have a vaccine or medicine soon, but until then wearing masks, using sanitizers, maintaining cleanliness around us and social distancing is vital.

Is there any correlation between the blood type and disease strength?

I don't think there is any conclusive clinical evidence about the correlation between blood type and disease strength.

Some patients are being tested positive after being cured. What are the reasons for this?

As Global healthcare is still in the process of finding a vaccine or medicine to this particular infection, the treatment for an infected patient is customised. Studies have found that the virus may be reproduced within some surface cells of the respiratory tract due to the weak immune system of some patients and the medical treatment may not be severe enough to allow the body to develop a strong antibody reaction to stop the relapse. Hence the majority of the relapse cases are linked to lower immunity levels of patients. Though there are reports of relapse of infection in recovered persons in other states, Karnataka has not witnessed these as of now. **A**

What is the role of systematic steroids in Covid patients at an early stage of the disease?

Recent trials from the UK have indicated that low-dose steroid treatment using dexamethasone can be life-saving for critical patients. This could be a big relief if proven true. However, we need to wait for ICMR and our expert committee to look into it.

A North-western Medicine study suggests that corona virus poses a global threat that it attacks the entire nervous system and its neurological symptoms may appear before fever or cough. How far is this true?

There are a lot of studies and research work going on across the world and we have new reports every day. However, nothing is conclusive yet. Let us not create panic.

What is the existing clinical method of treating Covid patients in Karnataka?

We follow guidelines provided by ICMR

and the advice of our expert committee in the state. The primary importance is given to symptomatic patients and among them those with co-morbid conditions. Tailored treatment is delivered for different kinds of patients based on their medical history. Since asymptomatic patients don't need much treatment, they are kept under observation and their oxygen levels in the blood are checked on a day to day basis. Counseling centers have also been established to help them avoid fear and anxiety.

Are antibiotics effective in treating or preventing Covid?

People should refrain from taking over the counter medicine and any other self-medication for prevention or treatment. People with ILI or SARI symptoms should visit fever clinics and get themselves tested.

What are your thoughts regarding discovering a vaccine for this pandemic?

Many research organisations and phar-

Are You Game?

An observation on the resurgence of indoor board games in the #Covid19 world and its impact.



“I am not what happened to me, I am what I choose to become.” – *Carl Gustav Jung* (Father of Analytical Psychology)

The biggest hope COVID-19 has given the world, in spite of its disastrous strike, is to bring individuals and families together. The concept of family, familial traditions and togetherness has surged to an all-time high, giving strength in these adverse times.

In the wake of a quarantine period, which was initially meant to be for a short time, and then becoming an indefinite and a continuous mandate, people have *learned-to-live*, as the saying goes. One of humanity’s greatest assets is the ability to adapt and thrive. New patterns of living, new experiences and a whole wave of resurgence have replaced the old ways.

From Nuclear to Nucleus

“One of the biggest changes I see now is how families have developed enhanced bonding, inter-dependence and a holistic approach to an otherwise individualistic mode. This creates a sense of wellbeing and increases contentment for all members, especially children,” says Dr. Geetha Simha, Medical Consultant at various IT Organisations and Enterprises in Bengaluru.

The loss of an established routine, daily interaction with diverse people and exposure to external conditions has now given way to a closed-in circuit, which has to energise itself to happiness. Board games at home have now been brought out of the closet into the living room, across the globe.

Integral to the Collective Consciousness

Board games have been played by all societies and cultures and have been part of the collective consciousness of humanity. The earliest board game known to humanity is the Senet from ancient Egypt. The Senet is depicted in a fresco belonging to as early as 3000 BC.



The gameboard is a grid of 30 squares, arranged in three rows of ten and has two sets of at least five pawns each. Mehen is another Egyptian game with a coiled-snake-shaped board, played with pawns and small marbles. However, not much is known of the rules and strategies of these games.

The oldest artefacts of board games come from the East, going back 6000 – 10000 years ago, during the Neolithic Age. Some stones or plaster slabs pecked with rows of shallow divots have been unearthed. This perhaps served as mancala-like (a strategy based game) games. During the Bronze Age, at a 5000-

year old grave in Turkey were discovered 49 small stones, sculpted and painted to resemble animals along with dice and tokens. Many games belonging to the Aztec empire have been uncovered such as patolli with pebbles, mat painted with squares and so on.

In India, the Fatehpur Sikri Fort built

by King Akbar has a complex called the Pachisi Courtyard. It is said that during festivals this whole courtyard was used to actually play the game Pachisi. Other games like *Chaturanga*, *Backgammon*, *Gyan Chaupar* were an intrinsic part of the Indian culture throughout the princely reign. Indian ambassadors presenting Chaturanga to Khusrow I, King of Persia, finds mention in various Persian manuscripts.

Indian art has always depicted games, especially among Gods. Many historical places have Lord Shiva and Goddess Parvati playing a game of dice. In Maihar, Madhya Pradesh, there is a sculpture

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that portrays Shiva and Parvati playing the game. It is said that 3 Century text, *Kamasutra of Vastsayana* lists skills at dice and other games among the 64 polite arts of a human being.

Board games were almost forgotten, with adults and children banking heavily on gadgets, social media and outings. The erstwhile tradition which brings people of all ages for a 'precious time of togetherness' was almost extinct.

Indian Memory, Full of Board Games

Every culture has its own tradition of games that have developed over generations. Some of these names, hitherto unknown are now resurging to life. As a result, there is a spike in demand for Board games, globally. In India, too, there is a huge rise in interest for these games. Board game owners and stores are now prepping up to fulfill orders arriving from across the length and breadth of the country.



Sunanda, a 72-year old grandmother, spends her evenings with her teenage granddaughter *Aarya*, and the games include *Kavade* and *Algulimane*, as she guides her to hop between the squares of a grid to play *Kuntepille* popular as

hopscotch and of course, hours of storytelling. 8-year old Eesha, after returning this summer from the US, is learning about traditional games and activities at her maternal grandmother's home in Kottayam, Kerala. She has just tried her hand at *Pallankuzhi*, a game played by two players, with a rectangular board of 146 counters, two horizontal rows and seven vertical columns.

The collective cultural memory in India is splashed with a vast repertoire of board games. Of course, the one ranking high in popularity and recall is the board game played in *Mahabharata*. In the *Rg Veda*, 14 verses called *Aksha Sukta* is dedicated to the dice game; the turning point in the epic *Mahabharata* happens during this game, damaging the fortunes of the *Pandavas*.

Pagade, popularly known as the Traditional Indian Board Game, enhances





strategy and reasoning skills. Another interesting game is the *Navakankari*, a game that induces curiosity, enhances reasoning and strategic skills in children. Also called as Nine Men's Morris, this game can be played by anyone over 5! Alu *Guli Mane* or *Mancala*, another traditional game and is easy-to-carry-around too. *Chowkabaara* is one of the oldest and most popular games

in our cultural history. The grid of 5x5 or 7x7 squares can be drawn on the floor with chalk and is played by using cowrie shells as dice and any tiny object serves as pawns, from tamarind seeds to a variety of small shells. You must definitely get hold of it, if not already.

And then, there are games we have always played whose traditional names

you may not be aware of. *Ashtapada*, a very old game almost like Chess, played with 8/8 grid of squares and is mentally invigorating. *Chaturanga*, another form of Chess was popular in ancient times, and did you know that the very popular Snakes and Ladders, is called *Moksha Patam* or *Parama Padam*?

Saalu Mane Ata or Char-Par in Kannada and is popular as *Navakankari* in various parts of India. A game that requires 2 players, where each player is given 9 coins who try to achieve as many points as possible by getting 3 coins in a row on the game board. It is a complex game that requires strategic thinking.

For *Ameya*, a 26-year old Marketing professional, returning from Germany to pursue her career in India meant a sense of deep-rootedness. She did not want to lose her connect, and in the process has been learning folk songs, enhancing her culinary skills for forgotten recipes too. *Ameya* chanced upon some interesting games played inside homes or in the porches including *Gutte* (played with 5 stones), *Chaupat* (a variation of the dice game, with a colourful cloth-made board). The pieces to play with are made of wood and some are even decorated or made up with intricate artwork. She actually pulled it off from the dust-filled trunk in the attic, while accidentally looking for black and white photographs. She's been able to reconnect with her aging grandmother just with the games, played almost in silence and great concentration.

The interaction, trust and bonding increases when the games force people to play with the rules and of course, win.



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Traditional games were classified as Counting games - Aliguli Mane (Mancala), War games - Chaduranga & Sixteen Sepoys, Race game - Pagade, Chauka Bara & Panchi, Alignment games - Nava Kankari & Kattam Vilayattu, Hunt games – Adu Huli Ata & Ane Kattu, Solitary games - Nakshatra Ata & Seetha devi Ata and Morality games – Parama pada & Devi Sayujya Ata.

Popular Board Games of the Boomer Generation

There is a huge list of games people can play indoors. Monopoly, Business, Chess, Carrom Board, Puzzles, Scrabble, Pictionary, Snake & Ladder, card games like UNO and more have emerged as top favourites across generations. Cluedo is a popular murder mystery board game where you can enjoy playing the detective and applying your deductive reasoning skills.

Scrabble is the perfect game for enriching vocabulary and improving focus. Pictionary enhances the skills of visualisation and creative thinking along with memory building. While playing the game is fun, it gives the much-needed exercise for the brain.

Playing board games aids the development of essential cognitive skills, decision making, strategic thinking, logistics, reasoning and analytical thinking. Studies have shown that playing also stimulates brain functions like memory formation, and helps in the development of complex thought processes.



These games also build other skills that may have a direct bearing on the individual's emotional intelligence like patience, learning to respond in a stress-free manner, become responsive than reactive and more! It also significantly develops the creativity quotient and adds a whole lot to the individual's self-confidence.

Games Alien to the Internet Citizens

There is a huge list of games people The entire generation that is born, growing and stuck to the Internet may not be aware of these games. To them, games have always meant 'virtual'.

Interestingly, the internet too offers intelligent games, engaging and





challenging ones to seekers. The one quality that will be missing is the touch-and-feel element. One of the biggest aspects of physical board games is that it brings people together, teaches diverse life skills unconsciously and above all, makes playing and learning fun and light. Board games are said to sharpen an individual's thinking and response time. It reduces stress in individuals and the family dynamics as a whole and is a valuable intervention to help a child's holistic development. It is said to promote cognitive skills, enhances brain functions, improves strategic thinking, and more importantly, problem-solving – a key life skill needed for our children, to cope with stressful environments and situations.

Resurgence of Board Games due to COVID19

Millennials are happily taking a 'digital break' and sitting on the floor playing board games now, as they are finding means and ways to deal with the overwhelming COVID19 scare.

It has literally frozen people from all that they would call 'normal.' People started exploring ways to give them and their families comfort, a relief from all sorts of stress as a result of a complete change in lifestyle.

New concepts in board games is picking up the heat. Re-roll, is a Bangalore-based board games collective that has lots of people glued in.

Storytelling

Another major comeback of a deeply personal, engaging and impacting experience is that of storytelling. The curtains are drawn up again on this imaginative and vivid experience, especially for younger children. With more time available for parents during late evenings or nights, this activity has gained a lot of interest and revival. "I started telling stories to my 7-year old every night, especially a few days after the lockdown began. Now she refuses to sleep without a new story from Indian mythology or Jataka tales, it has become a pattern. I actually read up some original stories myself to ensure I give her a satisfying experience," says a banker mother of two, Anitha.

It is also a new experience globally to have so many people together at home, for long periods of time. In the

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urban context, especially, there is hardly an opportunity where this kind of togetherness happens unless there is a festivity or a celebration. One of the most natural leanings and inclination was to pick up

the board games to set the evenings, literally going!

There are thought-provoking stories or puzzles rendered in old folk songs or light-songs sung in various regional languages. This treasure-trove keeps the children's minds active, invigorating as they struggle to decipher the meaning and the sheer pleasure of solving the puzzle is equally exciting. These are small snippets sung in melodious tunes. Make sure you access the CDs or song collections and make it a part of your engagement activities for young kids.

Modern Board Games

There are a set of modern board games that are ruling the roost right now! *Carcassonne* involving two to five players, is a deceptively simple game with a competitive spirit at its core. *Fog of Love*, a romantic comedy board game, where players create fictional



characters and drive the story to a happy ending. *Azul*, a challenging game where players compete to build the most aesthetically laid, pleasing square of tiles. *Gloomhaven*, another riveting game involves players teaming up for hours of fantasy adventure! Others include *Splendor*, *Ticket to Ride*, *Catan*, *7 Wonders*, *Patchwork* and more.

Modern board games are entertaining, competitive, challenging and complex in nature. Concepts of probability, analytical skills, negotiation, handling stress are engrained in the game, so-to-speak!

Board Games Growth Trends

Industry experts and observers say that the global market for board games will cross \$5.81bn during 2020-2024. This year itself, it is estimated to specifically grow over 25 per cent considering that people are spending more quality time at home, in the light of COVID19.

There is a surge in demand globally, especially with the continuing seasons of COVID19 lockdown. The opportunities the games provide for collaboration,

engagement and early learning seems to be one of the key factors driving the demand during the lockdown.



National Game of India

Pachisi is called the national game of India, played on a board and shaped like a symmetrical cross. A player's pieces move around the board based upon a throw of six or seven cowrie shells. The name of the game comes from the Hindi word pachis, meaning twenty-five, the largest score that can be thrown with the cowrie shells. Thus, this game is also known by the name Twenty-Five.

Historians believe it to have originated around 4 Century AD. This game comes from *Chauhar*, a game played even today in Indian homes. It is said that in royal Princely India, when the kings and princes were out waging wars for months together, the queens would bond amongst themselves, with the local women, domestic help and play these games for hours as a way of relaxing and passing time.

Rediscovering Simple Pleasures

Psychiatrists and psychologists are observing trends across the world that unfortunately is brimming with loneliness and depression, frustration and agitation, inability to cope with the new 'free time' or 'long lonely hours' inside a home or a facility. Panic attacks, bouts of anxiety, low motivation, and inability to concentrate and connect with the new paradigm are some other experiences people are citing in the context of the lockdown. This has to be

dealt with in as natural ways as possible, to ensure that there are no deep or intense wounds caused by months of a changed lifestyle.

Modern games, gadget-driven games, games at pubs are all experiential and marked by speed, heightened excitement and even graphic violence. The hallmark of traditional board games is irreplaceable for many reasons – including that they are made from natural products like wood, clay, cloth, fibre, recycled paper, cardboard and plant material. Some games are played on the floor and involve creative designs and artwork too. There is absolutely no e-waste and the experiences are entirely human, taking interaction, bonding and emotions to new heights.

A new trend in this space, prior to the pandemic, of course, was the emergence of board-game clubs, restaurants and cafes, where you can play board games with family, friends or other enthusiasts,



even as you enjoy a drink or snack. A popular haunt in Koramangala, Bengaluru has stacked up over 450 board games, like Word On The Street, Headbandz, Splendor, Catan, Ticket 2 Ride, Pandemic, Scythe, Sushi-Go, “so that you can put down the phones, tablets, and laptops for a while and get back to being socially interactive.”

Irrespective of the cause, board games have only gifts to give people. A simple act of sitting together, staying away from gadgets and bonding over a game is now precious. Inadvertently, people especially children learn to live with diverse people, understand differences and learn to accept them.

So, go on, play a board game NOW. **A**



Aparna Shivapura

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Hampi – The Hometown of Glory

 Shwetha H C



As someone who grew up reading the glorious history of Vijayanagara and spending summers watching Dr. Rajkumar’s film Sri Krishnadevaraya on television, my fascination for the capital city of the erstwhile Vijayanagara Empire only doubled with this trip. The curiosity to explore Hampi, a genuinely self-sufficient and awe-inspiring Hindu city that blossomed amidst unparalleled governance and prosperity took me through a profound voyage.





- the town that you've read in history books. The other is the Hippy Island, a haven for solo travellers, backpackers and a place to meet like-minded people. You can spot foreigners in hordes here; most arrive in groups and stick together and rarely interact.

Set in the backdrop of the rugged topography of vast swathes of granite boulders, Hampi is brimming with travellers throughout the year and is bound to unleash the adventure junkie hidden deep inside you. While the town can be explored by foot, bicycle, bike or auto, cycling down the alleys cast with patterns of light and shadow of the seeping sunrays through the green canopy is an experience in itself. The slow-paced life is a relaxing, pleasurable experience for the urbanite. Traversing the capital of the Vijayanagara kingdom on the breaks is not only the most revitalising way to get from one place to another, but is also surprisingly the fastest, and you also get your share of adventure, punctuated with essential pit-stops.

The first day of my Hampi exploration, I spent reconnoitring the cultural side - the numerous temples dedicated to Virupaksha, Achyutaraya, Badavilinga, Lakshmi Narasimha, Hazara Rama, Balakrishna, Kadalekalu Ganesha and the underground Shiva temple. The architecture exhibits the amazing skill and unmatched craftsmanship of the architects and sculptors of the Vijayanagara Empire and the majestic ruins are an incredible sight to behold. The wrecked walls of the sanctuaries of Hampi are extensively crowded with figures, with rich religious, mythological and historical connotations, hardly

A UNESCO World Heritage site, Hampi is a strange mix - majestic ruins surround by an unearthly landscape of massive granite sarsens perched perilously over vast stretches of undulating terrain; the serene Tungabhadra; design and engineering architectural marvels; and, the thriving hippie culture. In addition, mythological anecdotes and stories from the bygone era have captivated passionate travellers for decades.

Hampi, located around 350 km from Bengaluru, is a culturally-rich town, and yet hosts a modern locale. Spread over a mere 26 km, the town is divided by the Tungabhadra River, upon which tourists paddling coracles and locals casting fishing nets during the early morning rushes, are a common sight.

The two parts of Hampi are poles apart in terms of culture. One is filled with temples, heritage sites and evocative ruins

Travel

discernable to the amateur eye. The sculptures at the Hampi temples swerve between the sanctified and the profane. While you spot a carving of Lord Vishnu brawling with the devil on one side, you also witness dancers with playful poses on the other. Trained eyes can easily recognise the amalgam of civil, military and religious representations in Hampi's architecture. It is estimated that Hampi has over 2,500 temples and monuments scattered in about 4,000 hectares of land. Interestingly, it was considered the second biggest city in the world in the year 1500!

Though hiring a guide is the easiest way to understand and appreciate the rich culture, heritage and ruins of Hampi, discovering it all by yourself, if you understand the local language, is an intriguing affair.

After an exciting cycling experience in the scorching heat amidst the tarnished tones of the boulders offset by jade-green palm and banana plantations and paddy fields, I reached the Vijaya Vittala Temple that houses the world-famous monolith chariot in its front yard. Touted to be an emblem of art, this shrine stands tall to portray the richness of the golden era of the Vijaynagara Empire and is dedicated to Garuda - the carrier of Lord Vishnu. This is one of the three famous chariots in India, while the other two are in Konark (Odisha) and Mahabalipuram (Tamil Nadu). Being a UNESCO Heritage site, you can reach the temple only by a hired eco-friendly vehicle and the temple closes at 5 in the evening. The stone chariot sports intricate details of design and if you are someone who adores paying attention to details, you



are sure to spend hours just admiring it. The temple is a masterpiece in terms of architecture and grandeur and the musical pillars are an additional attraction, though you are not allowed to touch them. Since I had stay put at the Hippy Island, I crossed the river in a coracle and reached the room and called it a day.

The following day, I decided to discover the Hippy Island, locally called the Virupapura Gadde on a two-wheeler and hired one. On Hippy Island, a trek to the birthplace of Lord Hanuman, Anjanadri Hill at Anegundi is a must. Anjanadri is

believed to be named after Anjana Devi, the mother of Lord Hanuman, and is said to be older than Hampi, and has a few pre-historic archeological remains. The hill is also the habitat of hordes of monkeys that double as your convoy for your expedition to the peak!

Surrounded by the splendour of the green countryside, combined with the inimitable warm light of the yellow sun and deep blue sky, I trekked up 600 easy steps to reach the hilltop, crawling on all fours amidst boulders in some places to make my way. The temple not only





offers a great view of the sunset, but you can also see one of the floating stones used for the construction of Ram Setu to Lanka.

A ride on a two-wheeler, with cool breeze caressing and soothing you, by the bluish-green Sanapur Lake, gives you the typical Ladakh feels, minus the cold weather. Serene and secluded, Sanapur Lake is a great place to take a dip and get a tan while sunbathing on the granite boulders.

Though the name Hippiie Island resonates urbanity, it is filled with oodles of narratives from the past, which progressively mix with myths and subtly amalgamate with mythos. Filled with cool cafes strikingly bedecked with wall paintings, hanging lantern, stunning shacks for relaxed conversations, bakeries and food joints, Hippiie Island is an extravaganza for foodies. The economically priced small huts or camping tents, away from expensive lifestyles,



make you fall in love with the natural ambiance.

Day 3 in Hampi led me to experience that which stands in contrast to the urban party culture of Hippiie Island - the royal enclosure and step wells, Lotus Mahal and Queen's Bath and Elephant Stables, structures built in impressive Indo-Islamic style. The Lotus Mahal and Queen's Bath were used by the royal women of the Vijayanagara dynasty to spend leisurely time. While the Lotus Mahal is positioned in an enclosed area called the Zenana, the women's barrio, Queen's Bath is arcaded underneath ornate vaults and borders a large central pool.

The shady trees around the Mahal double as a picnic spot. A few of the surviving landmarks in Hampi, indicative of cultural exchange between the Vijayanagara domain and the Deccan Sultanates, are amongst the many archeological marvels concealed to the uninitiated. While the former Vijayanagara architecture style is considered to be gallant and bristly, gradually a more decorative, urbane and ambitious style evolved. The architecture throughout Hampi stuns you to remind you that our architects and sculptors were the best-in-class.

After the 3-day ardent visit, I was back to the grind at Namma Bengaluru the next morning. A visit to Hampi is more like a visit to an open museum or to the backyard of your granny's house in the village. Just exploring the place at your own pace and recognising the charisma not only feeds your soul but also pushes you to embrace the serenity. ▣

Caught in the Middle

 Greeshma Sukumaran

Sitting at home and rooted in my favourite spot, I stare through the window to find a world whose routines have become all the more alien. If it is not about people being thrust into situations they had never been exposed to before, then it is their relationships that continue to be thrust further away.

And it is very scary, to say the least. Bengaluru, a city I have known to be home has always been the heart of everything that is India – a repository of its legendary hospitality. But thanks to the COVID -19 pandemic, the city like many others across the globe is spewing on us unheralded challenges. With its salubrious weather, the outpouring of IT jobs, the steady influx of immigrants and being a pensioner's penchant for its leafy environs, the images that defined the city are also fading fast.

As the global lockdowns become the new routine, so too have their forces combined, to ravage old ways of life, the 'high fives', 'hugs' and 'handshakes'. They have vanished even as the city is being transformed literally from the inside out. On the positive side, I am glad the decibel levels have gone down, the roads are less crowded and the once polluted, grim and hazy air is becoming breathable. Yet the question that keeps me vexed is the absence of my folks.

We may be living in the same city, state, country or world, but we are bereft of contact and it seems ages since we last made any meaningful contact. In the process, I have also lost a sense of how they look.

While exploring the new reality of life in today's circumstances, a thought struck my mind. A little distance away from my abode is a three-storey building that is a shelter for the elderly. I have always resisted looking in the direction of this dwelling, since it is hard to comprehend the situation in which the residents find themselves. How does one come to terms with the thought that there would come a time when you have to leave everything that you proudly considered was yours or that you would be abandoned by those for whom you worked so hard to give a footing in life?

While I have been engrossed in my work and routine chores, I came to realise in this home there are many others trying to sew the pieces of their broken lives together. And the lockdown just handed them another hurdle to surmount.

Now that I am home with all the time in the world for even mundane tasks, probably the major change has been mustering the courage to look in the direction of this home for the elderly and offer greetings to some of the most 'vulnerable' in the society who often go unnoticed. More so, because I know they have been in this 'isolation' not by choice. Yet even in these times, visitors and the remnants of their family maintain distance to shield them from exposure to COVID-19 considering their ripe age. The effect of such isolation on the elderly

can be devastating. As is often the case, they are prone to anxiety and depression arising from multiple factors, including a feeling of being abandoned. And with COVID-19 showing no signs of abating, things might have just got worse.

But all is not seemingly lost. Even at times like these, the feeling of inclusiveness is more important and a smile for all you know could change a lot for those less-privileged in our midst. In my case, the prevailing situation has made me realise that just about anything - small or big, tangible or intangible - is equally important in life. Surprisingly, it has taken me this while to wake up to the reality that even a small gesture can make a lot of difference. But as the age-old adage goes; it's never too late to start anything.

If you have been seeing your friends and colleagues trying to stay productive during these unprecedented times by engaging in cooking, baking, organising their cupboards, working out, dancing and so on, appreciate their efforts. This is the new normal. And if you are not doing any of these, be at peace. It is normal too.

I have not done anything worthwhile that would befit the former group of people but I take time to talk to the elderly. Watching their toothless chuckles makes me forget all the worries this world keeps throwing in my direction. I guess it helps to rest contentedly in the knowledge that you could be the reason for somebody's smile.

For once, it is not only the 'BIG' things that count but just about everything else matters!

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