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LET KNOWLEDGE COME FROM ALL THE SIDES

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LYAN ASHRAM ASSAM
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GUWAHATI





(1939-)

Noted American theoretical physicist and author of a number of popular works on *Quantum physics, Cosmology and Consciousness.*

Jack Sarfatti

I suspect that general **Relativity** and **Quantum theory** are two complimentary aspects of a deeper theory that will involve a kind of **cosmic consciousness.**

The cosmic consciousness or the **Mahat of India's Samkhya Philosophy** is the basis of entire creation.

Source: *Mysticism and the new physics*, by Michael Talbot



1736-93

Great French astronomer and politician, noted for his computation of an orbit for *Halley's Comet.*

Jean-Sylvain Bailly

The **Hindu systems of astronomy** are by far the **oldest** and that from which the **Egyptians, Greek, Romans and --- even the Jews** derived from the **Hindus** their knowledge.

Source: *The secret doctrine, Volume 3*, by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky

*

The motion of the stars calculated by the **Hindus** before some **4500 years** vary not even a **single minute** from the **modern tables of Cassini and Meyer.**

Source: *World as Seen Under the Lens of a Scientist*, by B. Vithal Shetty, Dr Vithal B Shetty

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Visionary Vision Document

The Constitution of India in the Article 366 (25) defines the Scheduled Tribes as those tribal communities or parts of or groups within such tribes or tribal communities who are scheduled in accordance with the Article 342 of the Constitution of India. The North East India is a region inhabited by around 240 communities speaking or writing in more than 185 languages. Notwithstanding the stark traditional and cultural differences, many commonalities in the ambit of socio-economic problems are remarkably visible.

In the 6th Schedule some specific qualities pertaining to tribes of the North East India are addressed. The Constitution sought development and progress of these, otherwise simple and good hearted, people in all ways possible. The government has been advancing different welfare Schemes to this effects. But, it is far off from the achievement of cherished goal.

Hence, it necessitates of having a distinct document for a clear Vision of development of our brotheren, rechristened collectively as 'scheduled Tribes'.

Happily and more expectedly the organisers have come out with a handy document of hopeful promises and prospects.

This document, as the organisers put it, is not a Charter of demands thrown at the table of the government, but a documented piece of ways, mean and wants that help the authority concerned to proceed to do the needful and at the same tme the communities bracketed by the generic term 'scheduled Tribe' (of the North East) know and aware of their rights and responsibilities to achieve it.

We hope this Commendable work will make the gap between the executors and achievers quite thin, and make the aims and ambition of the Constitutional provisions fruitful within a suitable timeframe.

Editor

Abolish Article 370. Give Kashmiri Pandits their Home Back

- Anupam Kher

Every time I go to Jammu and meet the internally displaced Kashmiri Pandit community, I am struck by two things. Their staunch patriotism, and their optimism. Here is a community displaced from their homes, torn out of their state and made to abandon their moorings.

For the past 26 years, they have been living in the most squalid conditions.

Here is where a new generation has been born, raised and educated in the most deprived conditions, and where they have gone on to get jobs all over India. A generation that should have been bitter, maybe

One of those who was killed by militants was a *pujari*. He was offered protection from the militants by a Muslim constable who asked him to convert everyday. When he refused, repeatedly, he killed him with his rifle butt.

The details of the murder were excruciating to listen to.

Another story was of a 23-year-old constable, who had come to meet his mother. He had gone to a shop to run some errands and was engaged in a conversation with the shopkeeper, who he thought was an old friend.

maimed many Kashmiri Pandits.

Even after all this, the displaced Pandits have not become terrorists. They have instead gone on with their lives, even though the world seems to have forgotten them.

Governments after governments have come and gone in the past 26 years. Promises have been made and not kept. But then Kashmiri Pandits are not a vote bank. There is no one to weep for their wounds.

And now, there is talk in Kashmir about reviving the state's special status, with the

“GOVERNMENTS HAVE MADE PROMISES ONLY TO BREAK THEM SINCE WE WERE NEVER A VOTE BANK.”

even turned to violence, has instead chosen the Path of Light. It is working towards the betterment of their own lives, that of their families, and ultimately, of the nation.

People talk of tolerance. I say, this is what tolerance is.

I went there recently again. And yet again, I was struck by their romanticism. There they were, dressed in their finest, 7,000 of them, talking, laughing and singing.

And yet, when we were remembering the ones who have fallen, the graphic descriptions of what had been done to their near and dear ones was unsettling. They read out the way their relatives had been killed, and I have to tell you, a shiver ran down my spine.

He was kept talking long enough till the militants could come and pump some bullets into him. These were not fatal wounds, which was intentional. His hands and feet were tied and he was dangled from a bridge where he was left to bleed, even as a crowd collected and watched him die in agony. His widow was there listening to these ghastly details with composure.

I asked the organisers why the horror had to be recounted in such detail. They told me it is important to keep the wounds alive.

Yet the leaders of the Kashmiri Pandit community have not become **separatists**, who, as the term suggests, separate people on the basis of religion. They walk freely in democratic India though they have raped, killed and

chief minister being called prime minister. ***I want to say to them that it is time to abolish Article 370. We have had enough of it! Kashmir does not need sovereign status.***

Kashmir needs infrastructure. It needs schools, hospitals and industry. I conducted a 24-hour Twitter poll on whether Article 370 should be abolished. Over 27,000 people voted and 83 per cent said it should be.

This is the only solution. It is the only way to undo the injustice wrought on thousands of Kashmiri Pandits who lost the right to call their home their own.

(<http://www.dailyo.in/politics/kashmiri-pandits-modi-anupam-kher-article-370-muslim-jammu-tolerance-refugees-twitter/story/1/8204.html>)

Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda

- Jyotsna Bhattacharjee

Swami Vivekananda was born on the 12th January, 1863, in a prosperous family in Calcutta. Initially his name was "Narendra", but later on he came to be known as "Vivekananda". His early life was not eventful. Since early childhood he was interested in physical culture and intellectual pursuits. He became proficient not only in literature and music, but also in riding, swimming and wrestling. He deeply studied the ancient Indian scriptures and learnt about traditional Indian philosophy. He also studied western literature. At the outset his mental disposition was that of a sceptic and a rationalist, combined onto one. Consequently, he was a kind of atheist.

In 1881 Narendra happened to meet Swami Ramakrishna Paramhansa. This meeting proved to be a turning point in his life. At the beginning he was rather dubious about the teachings of his master. But after a brief period of contact with Ramakrishna all his doubts disappeared and he took Swami Ramakrishna as his friend, philosopher and guide. And after some time Narendranath was transformed into Swami Vivekananda.

Very soon he became the most trusted and favorite disciple of Ramakrishna. After the death of his master, Vivekananda took the mission of working for the welfare of the country. To get acquainted with the social and economic conditions of the country, he exclusively toured almost the whole of India. After visiting various parts of the country he

realized that India, in spite of its rich spiritual and moral heritage, as well as the strong cultural history, had not been able to eradicate poverty, weakness and social evils. Hence he thought that to remove these evils, what was needed was a spiritual revolution and for that a strong spiritual leader was needed.

At that time, he came to know that a Parliament of Religions was going to be held in Chicago. He decided to go there to participate in the meeting to express the Hindu view of life. What happened there is history. He conquered the hearts of the participants from various countries with his eloquence and deep knowledge. The Parliament of Religions helped Vivekananda to assume the spiritual leadership of the Indian masses.

He travelled widely not only in India, but in foreign countries as well to learn their good things. After his return from foreign lands he established the Ramakrishna Ashram at Belur near Calcutta and started the work of social service and reform. He was not only a social reformer and a spiritual leader, but was a great philosopher as well.

Vivekananda's philosophy arose from the awareness of the social, religious and economic conditions of the Indian people. He believed that at least some of the evils arose due to orthodoxy, prejudice and superstitions prevalent at the time. He thought that these things happened because of the loss of faith in spiritual values. Consequently, he

aimed at a spiritual awakening to attain the highest values.

Vivekananda's thoughts were greatly influenced by the ancient Hindu philosophy, especially Vedanta. It can be said that Vivekananda was chiefly a Vedantist. The main ideas of his thoughts were derived from the Hindu scriptures, especially from the Upanishads and the Vedanta. His basic belief in the unity of everything indicates the monistic nature of the Reality, which actually owes its existence to Vedanta. His concept of "Maya" was also derived from the same source. Then he often made distinction between the 'empirical' and the 'transcendental' point of view to solve some apparent contradictions. Obviously this point of view was also derived from the Vedanta. It is true that he often talked about reinterpreting Vedanta according to the needs of time. Even then it is a fact that the basic ideas of his philosophy were based on Vedanta.

In a sense Vivekananda was influenced by the Buddhist philosophy as well. His philosophy contains a few ideas from the Buddhist thought. The first is the idea of mass-liberation that Vivekananda contemplated. It has similarity with the Buddhist ideal of "Bodhisattva", secondly, Vivekananda was much impressed by the Buddhist assertion that the raft, one user for crossing the river in a storm should be left for the use of others. It implies that even after attaining liberation one should work for the liberation of others. Buddha himself, after attaining

liberation, wandered around, helping the people in their struggle against sufferings. Vivekananda greatly appreciated such humanitarian and altruistic work.

He was also influenced by Christianity to a certain extent. He was impressed by the strength of character of Jesus Christ, since it needed great spiritual strength to forgive the oppressor in the midst of acute physical suffering. Thus from Christianity Vivekananda took up the ideals of service and love. He was convinced that every man contains within himself an element of divinity. Then Gita's concept of "selfless work" was a source of constant inspiration to Vivekananda.

But the most profound influence on him was that of Swami Ramakrishna. It has been said that Ramakrishna brought about a spiritual transformation in the personality and mental attitude of Vivekananda. Ramakrishna initiated him to spiritual discipline and meditation.

It is very difficult to reduce the teachings of a social reformer and religious leader to the technical mode of academic philosophy. The reasons are simple. A preacher or a religious teacher does not merely want to satisfy the intellectual curiosity of man. He also appeals to feelings and emotions of man. So he does not feel the need of observing the rules of logic. Moreover, if one is interested in the practical aspect of life, he does not bother about the discrepancies involved in the theoretical aspect. In the comprehensive attitude of a religious leader all contradictions disappear.

Even then we may perhaps attempt to apply some metaphysical epithets to the philosophy of Vivekananda. His philosophy may be termed as 'idealistic'. Metaphysical Idealism holds that Reality is ultimately spiritual or ideal or mental in character. Then according to some idealists the Ideal Reality is of the nature of 'ideas' that is, ideas of some mind, finite, infinite or ideas as such, objective and universal. Berkeley can be cited as the supporter of the first kind and Plato of the second. Berkeley believed Reality to be an idea of some mind, while for Plato's ideas are universal and objective. Vivekananda was not an idealist in that sense. He can be termed as an idealist, because he believed in the ultimacy of certain ideal values and stated that sincere and persistent attempts should be made to attain such values. His idealism is therefore not unrealistic. It becomes unrealistic only when the ideal is nothing but a creation of one's imagination. But Vivekananda asserted his ideal to be capable of inspiring and attracting everyone.

Vivekananda's idealism is monistic. A strictly monistic idealism becomes abstract and it asserts that Reality must be indeterminate. According to this kind of idealism 'One' cannot have any distinctions or qualifications of any kind within it. Vivekananda often described Reality in this way like an absolute monist. But he made assertions about God's character. Hence it is difficult to decide whether Vivekananda's philosophy is monistic or monotheistic. But though this difficulty may present a problem

to a student of academic philosophy, it did not create any problem for Vivekananda. He did not perceive any opposition or contradiction between the two. For him monism and monotheism refer to different attitudes or dispositions of man; but difference in dispositions does not create any difference in truth as such. The difference lies in merely approach to truth. In fact, truth is objective, while the approach is subjective. Hence Vivekananda believed that one could very well be a monist as well as a monotheist.

It is philosophically unusual to treat Reality and God as identical. But in the philosophy of Vivekananda they are not distinct concepts. Traditional philosophy conceives reality as a metaphysical concept and God as a religious concept. For Vivekananda such distinctions are irrelevant. In fact, Vivekananda combined Monism and Theism. He was a pantheist, yet according to him God is personal. Consequently, we find two lines of thought in the philosophy of Vivekananda—one that resembles Advaita Vedanta and the other that resembles Theism of Bhakti-cult. For Vivekananda they are not two lines of thought, they are just two ways of looking at the Reality.

Almost like an Advaitin, Vivekananda asserted that Reality is one absolute Brahman. He emphasized the monistic character of Reality to such an extent that he declared Reality to be 'one', but not a 'whole'. The concept of a 'whole' implies parts, which when organized make up the whole. But according to Vivekananda the Absolute is a

perfect unity and therefore the distinction between 'whole' and 'parts' completely disappears. The concept of Absolute is reached by extending the process of abstraction to the maximum limit and that explains its strictly monistic character.

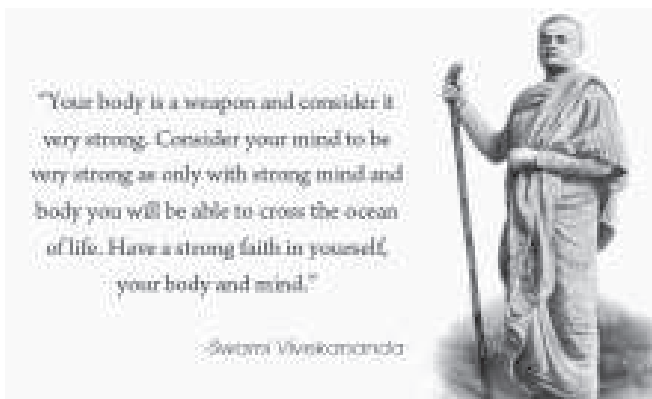
In Vivekananda's view the absolute or Brahman is beyond space, time and causation and as such it is changeless. But that does not imply that it remains the same all the time. What it means is that the question of time or space or causation is irrelevant to the concept of Absolute. He said, "God is neither outside nature nor inside nature, but God and nature and soul and universe are all convertible terms. You never see two things; it is your metaphorical words that have deluded you".

That is why the Absolute has been described as indeterminate. One cannot attribute qualities to the Absolute. To attribute qualities to the Absolute would amount to "knowing the Absolute". But "knowing the Absolute" is a contradiction in terms. Actually the Absolute is unknown and unknowable and it does not admit even internal division.

But Vivekananda believed that though the Absolute cannot be known, it can be described; like Sankaracharya, Vivekananda said that the Absolute can be described as Sat-Cit-Ananda. The concept of 'Sat' (existence) and 'Cit' (consciousness) are similar to the 'Sat' (existence) and 'Cit' (consciousness) of Advaita Vedanta. But the concept of

'Ananda' (bliss) was greatly enriched by Vivekananda. He said that love is the essence of bliss.

The reference to love takes us to the monotheistic character of God. Vivekananda asserted that the Absolute, that is, the impersonal Brahman is looked upon by the mind as the Creator, the Ruler, and as the Destroyer of the world. God is also regarded as the complete 'Cause'. He is supposed to take constant



interest in his creation. Thus along with the impersonal nature of the Absolute there seems to be a belief in a personal God.

Vivekananda said that the religious aspirations of man can be satisfied only by a personal God. In religion an emotional relationship between the worshipper and the worshipped is necessary. An impersonal abstract Absolute cannot satisfy the emotional appeal of the worshipper. In Sankara's Advaita Vedanta also the concept of God has been given a place, though it has been conceived as a product of Ignorance and Maya. The concept of God is not real from the real point of view (paramarthika dristi). But Vivekananda believed that the Absolute and God are not two entities and God is not a creation

of Maya. These distinctions arise due to ignorance, but knowledge means the realization of the irrelevance of such distinctions. Metaphysically speaking Reality is absolute Brahman. The same reality viewed from the religious point of view is God. The supremely real Being is also the object of devotion and worship.

That is why Vivekananda emphasized the all pervasive nature of God. He is present everywhere and in everything in conclusion we may say that Vivekananda was a deeply religious man and also a philosopher. It can be said that he was a monist as well as a monotheist. For him God and Absolute imply the same reality, Absolute of philosophy is the God of religion. Only the

approach is different. For religion a personal God is required to satisfy the emotional requirements of the people. But the God of religion cannot be a creation of Maya, since an illusory God cannot fulfill the needs of the devotees. The same Reality viewed from the philosophical point of view in the Absolute and viewed from the religious point of view the Absolute is known as God. For Swami Vivekananda the Reality is one and that Reality can be termed as God from the religious point of view. Hence for Vivekananda Absolute and God are identical.

(The writer is a former Head, Department of Philosophy, Cotton College, Guwahati)

(http://www.sentinelassam.com/op_ed/story.php?sec=33&subsec=0&id=254274&dtP=2016-01-20&ppr=1)

Ancient India's liberated women: In classical times India was more egalitarian than the West – at least in women's education

Two young women, Atreyi and Vasanti, meet by chance during a trip and start chatting. Atreyi tells Vasanti that she is travelling to the south in search of better education; though she is a student at an extremely famous university in the north. Her professor's preoccupation, with his ongoing novel means he has little time to teach her anything of use. Vasanti agrees that this move makes perfect sense.

These young women are not contemporary urban Indians. They were characters in an 8th century Sanskrit play, Uttararamacharita, penned by the dramatist Bhavabhuti. Atreyi's original professor was Valmiki, who had recently become immersed in writing the Ramayana, being firmly convinced that he was the adi kavi (first poet). A 'trip' to the south meant an arduous walk through hundreds of miles of forested land, braving constant threats from robbers, mysterious illnesses, and wild animals. However, this was a trip that Atreyi was very willing to make, hoping to learn more from southern Vedanta scholars like Agastya.

Though Bhavabhuti's story is fictional, plays were intended for the masses. The fact that an 8th century dramatist casually introduces female characters who travel far from home, alone, in search of education, suggests that audiences during his time would not be overly surprised or disturbed by such incidents. In another play of his, the Malatimadhava, a Buddhist nun,

Kamandaki, is close friends with the fathers of the male and the female protagonists, because all three had been classmates in their youth. If girls wanted to be admitted to Gurukulas, there was nothing stopping them from doing so.

Earlier, the Upanishads (written about the 7th century BC) contain accounts of very learned women. No one in scholarly circles seems to have had any trouble accepting Gargi, an eminent woman philosopher, as one of them. The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad contains a lengthy account of Gargi's debate with the leading scholar of the age, Yajnyavalkya. The debate was arranged by King Janaka of Mithila, at whose court Gargi was said to be one of the navaratnas (nine gems).

She asked Yajnyavalkya such penetrating questions that eventually he was unable to answer, and had to resort to telling her that her head might fall off if she kept questioning the unknowable. This, however, seemed to be quite a common threat among Upanishadic debaters; men who disagreed with other men would employ it frequently. So, contrary to first impressions, there was nothing sexist about Yajnyavalkya's reaction. The fact that Gargi, an unmarried woman, was invited to conferences all over the country without exciting comment, seems to point to a liberal intellectual atmosphere.

Going back even earlier, the composers of the Rig Vedic

hymns included a number of women. Each hymn in the Rig Veda is attributed to a particular author, and the lineage of the author is mentioned. More than 20 women number among the authors credited with the composition of these hymns.

The Therigatha, written in 600 BC, is the earliest known collection composed solely of women's writing. These verses, written by early practitioners of Buddhism, were penned by women from a wide array of backgrounds. The contributors included a mother whose child had died, a former prostitute, a wealthy heiress who had renounced her life of pleasure, and the Buddha's own stepmother. Though women from royal families had access to informal education in most countries, the Therigatha shows that many ordinary women were also well educated in ancient Indian society.

In contrast to ancient India, the ancient Greeks and Romans had a different attitude towards female education. Though they had excellent public schools and gymnasiums for formal education, these were open only to boys, unlike the ashrams of ancient India where girls and young women could learn along with their male counterparts. Eminent Greek philosophers like Aristotle and Socrates thought poorly of the intellectual capabilities of women. Plato maintained that women had no souls, while the Socratic dialogue

(Contd. to Page 25)

The Rivers of India are its Temples and Cathedrals

Diana Eck has been a keen observer of India and its religious practices from the time she spent a year at the Banaras Hindu University in the mid-60s. She has since, written several books on India, including the compelling 'Banaras, City of Light', 'Darshan: Seeing the Devine Image in India' and most recently, 'India: A Sacred Geography'. She is a professor of Comparative Religion and Indian studies at Harvard University, and has Degrees from Smith, the School of Oriental and African Studies and Harvard.

In Mumbai this week to give a lecture on the sacred rivers on India, she was interviewed by Namita Devidayal.

Q: You will be speaking about how the sacred rivers of India form such an important part of the culture and tradition of Indians on the one hand, and the challenges they face in a world driven by urbanization and industrialization on the other. Please give us a preview.

A: I will talk about the importance of India's rivers for the sustenance and religious life of the people of India, especially the Hindu peoples, and thus the significance of the degradation of the rivers — no other culture uses its rivers in quite the same way as India. Nehru famously said that the dams will be the temples of modern India. But, especially for Hindus of many different traditions, the rivers are truly the temples and cathedrals of the faith. Ordinary temples of brick and stone may be destroyed or fall into ruin, but if the rivers are destroyed by human neglect,

something far more significant will be lost.

Q: Taking off from this idea, how do you find Indians negotiating this old world with the new? While their collective consciousness dwells elsewhere, they must also fit themselves into the artificial Diana Eck says she is attracted to India because there is always so much to learn and adds that India keeps changing, as does she constraints of a modern, secular English—speaking nation.

A: I don't think the 'modern' and 'secular' English speaking nation is artificial. India has always been dynamic, fluid, and multicultural, with change and growth just part of the weave of history. The encounter of Indian cultures and the 'West' was one of mutual learning and questioning. But the traditional, religious consciousness does not seem to be left behind in the faster pace of 'modern' life

Q: In India, the unseen is more significant than what is Seen. You write extensively about the imagined landscape that lives in people's hearts and the geographical landscape of actual places. Where do these two spaces intersect?

A: Of course, the imagined place and the real place intersect in the place itself. For some, the image of the Ganga, for example, is so strong in the mind's eye that one doesn't really see the reality of garbage and waste that pollutes the river. For others, the reality of pollution is so strong that they can no longer hold the spiritual significance at all. There

is too much of a jarring discontinuity between the two. Most of us are able to hold two realities in mind at once and use the imagined ideal as leverage to elevate the reality we confront.

Q: Some people travel to Disneyland, while Indians travel to pilgrimage spots. Would you say that, in India, the religious experience is as much about entertainment and about food and family?

A: I think that pilgrimage (tirtha yatra) is not just about entertainment. It is still one of the major reasons that ordinary people in India travel —not just for entertainment, but for Darshan — for seeing the place itself, the river itself. It is true that pilgrimage is often a family outing with all the trappings of a holiday, especially a pilgrimage to a Mela, such as the Ganga Sagar Mela. On the other hand, there are still many people for whom a pilgrimage is a solitary, spiritual matter that enables one to get away, from family and home and take on, if only temporarily, the life of renunciation.

Q: In your seminal book on Banaras, you wrote that you know the streets and lanes of that ancient city as well as you know Cambridge, Massachusetts. How do you find it changed from the time you first arrived there in the mid-60s? You are there right now, isn't it?

A: The physical infrastructure of the lanes of the old city of Kashi is about the same, except today they are filled with much more

(Contd. to Page 11)

Hindu gods forgotten in India revered in Japan

- Krishnendu Bandyopadhyay

Kolkata, Jan 11, 2016: Did you know that at least 20 Hindu deities are regularly worshiped in Japan? In fact, there are hundreds of shrines to Goddess Saraswati alone in that country, along with innumerable representations of Lakshmi, Indra, Brahma, Ganesha, Garuda and others.

Even deities forgotten in India are worshiped in Japan. A unique exhibition at Indian Museum here is set to throw light on the country's long lost history that survives in a foreign land.

The Japan Foundation and filmmaker and art-historian Benoy K Behl have collaborated to hold an exhibition of rare photographs that will be inaugurated on Monday and will continue until January 21.

"The exhibition will be a rare treat for the eyes and the mind," said Indian Museum education officer Sayan Bhattacharya.

The research that accompanies Behl's photographs reveals startling facts about the importance of Indian heritage in Japan.

For instance, the 6th century Siddham script is preserved in

Japan, though it has disappeared from India. 'Beejaksharas' (or etymology of alphabets) of Sanskrit in this script are regarded as holy and given great importance. Each deity has a 'Beejakshara' and these are venerated by the people, even though most of them cannot read it. Some Japanese tombs are adorned with the Sanskrit alphabet.

At Koyasan, they still have a school where Sanskrit is taught in Siddham, Behl's research revealed.

A number of words in the Japanese language have their roots in Sanskrit. In Japanese supermarkets, a major brand of milk products is called 'Sujata'. The company's personnel are taught the story of Sujata who gave sweet rice-milk to the Buddha, with which he broke his period of austerity, before he achieved enlightenment. "All this and more are revealed through Behl's photography," Bhattacharya added.

Apart from the language, there are deeper civilizational connections that can be traced to early developments of philosophy

in India, he said.

Behl wrote in his research, "In many ways, this philosophic understanding is most well preserved in Japan. Japan has not had the breakdown of cultural norms which India suffered when a colonial education system was created. Therefore, most Indians learnt about our own culture from the Western point of view. The dominant and admired language was English, which it remains till today."

The National Geographic had carried an 18-page story on ancient Indian art revealed through Behl's photography to the world. The exhibition will also explain how India's relationship with Japan.

"The deep-rooted spirit of the Buddha's teachings energizes the Japanese people. Buddhist temples are numerous, with a huge number of visitors every day. Besides the Buddha, many ancient Indian deities and practices (prevail) in their temples. An Indian feels quite at home in Japan," Behl wrote.

(<http://hinduexistence.org/2016/01/11/hindu-cult-in-japan-is-still-alive/>)

(Contd. from Page 10)

The Rivers of India are its Temples and Cathedrals

human and motorized traffic. The crowding of the old city, resting on its ancient infrastructure, is astonishing. Especially the presence of motorcycles in the lanes or galis of Varanasi is both astonishing and dangerous. There seem to be no regulations on the traffic that can be permitted

in the old city.

Q: What do you love most about India that keeps bringing you back? It seems to be a karmic connection. Tell us the secret behind your attraction.

A: I suppose it's because there is always so much to learn, and

because India keeps changing, as do I.

(Dian Eck will deliver the Annual Vasanth Seth Memorial Lecture at the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Museum in Mumbai on Tuesday, at 7pm.)

(*The Times of India*, 18.01.2016)

'How India shaped me'

- Marija Sres

As a child I knew India as 'Indija Koromandija', a synonym for "paradise on earth" in the minds of most Slovenians. Symbolically then, India was a promised land, whose "rivers flowed with milk and honey" - not water. And I received God's gift of spending the best and happiest years of my life there.

Was it really heaven on earth?

I lived in Sabarkantha with the Bhil adivasis, along the state border between Gujarat and Rajasthan. It was hill country, now sadly made barren by deforestation and drought. I lived here 40 years — the longest period of my life, enough time and opportunity to learn and adjust to the situation. I must also add that during those years I made bonds with people from all over India.

This world was vastly different from the people I previously lived with. My world view and my values were also so very different from theirs, so that it required a complete change of heart from me to enter into their world.

What was their world?

It was a feudal, patriarchal world. A world where women were still looked down upon, were illiterate and treated as cheap labor by contractors for roadbuilding and construction, were sexually exploited, were harassed by government babus for the smallest concession - and where women considered themselves of little worth. Their existence was one of survival.

How so many women could

smile and survive in these situations is something I have no words to describe, but only a deep appreciation for. My challenge was to build up, not only their economic well-being but their sense of dignity as well, and I did this with their help and support. In turn, they made me see how many of the things I wanted were not really necessary. I simplified my life, I learned to do with less. The cornerstone of their lives was their deep love for life. For them, life was a gift, be it ever so hard. They were grateful for it, enjoyed it and expressed it in work, smiles, dances and songs!

This led me to see the values of relationship: to take time for each other, to share and know that "everything depends not on what you do, but on who you know".

But people are unpredictable; so you need to embrace uncertainty. This means that "nothing goes according to plan.

India is a big country, a continent by itself. So lots of travelling is necessary for one who goes there. And travelling in India is difficult and uncomfortable. When you travel, open your mind: India is a sensory overload. You learn a lot by just being there.

Another value is to know how to wait. For us Westerners, this is the most difficult thing. Everything in India moves at a slower pace, like in the stories. To make most of time, lose track of it. Throw away your clock, maybe also your

calendar!

Value the family. It's not a choice, it's a necessity, a way of life. Lack of commitment to family is not just dishonor; it's a personal shortcoming.

And yet, paradoxically, I have also learnt very much how to be alone even in the midst of a crowd - alone with oneself and alone with God. My image of God grew tremendously. Not God in a temple, but the Divine Spirit everywhere, as the adivasis see Her. God accepts each and every one with the same loving care. We are all precious in her eyes. The spirituality we aspire to is so much above the petty piety of externals.

I marvel at the Indian genius for thinking, for inventing, and am puzzled as to why this country is still so poor. There is so much wealth here - the richest man in the world happens to be an Indian; but so is the poorest woman! Such inequality, such discrimination. The most beautiful women in the world reside here (note how many Miss World and Miss Universe competitions we have won), but the ugliest and most polluted cities are also in India. Truly a continent of contradictions!

It was in India that I became a writer. As I said often, I came into myself here, realized my potential, and wrote from my heart. That's how the stories about my Adivasi women, their children and their men, the people I lived with - better, I

(Contd. to Page 14)

Are Sikhs a minority in Punjab?

SC to Examine Demand that could have Far-Reaching Consequences

- Dhananjay Mahapatra

New Delhi: It may sound ridiculous at first blush, but the Supreme Court on Monday (12 Jan 2016) agreed to examine whether Sikhs were a 'minority group in homeland Punjab', saying the question had far-reaching importance and consequences.

A Constitution bench of Chief Justice T S Thakur and Justices FMI Kalifulla, A K Sikri, S A Bobde and R Banumathi initially countered the plea by senior advocate Rakesh Dwivedi for treating Sikhs as a minority in Punjab by asking, "Can Muslims be treated as minority in Jammu and Kashmir?"

"For that matter, Christians, who are the majority in the states of Nagaland and Meghalaya, be also treated as a minority community in these two north-eastern states? Sikhs may be a minority in other states but can they be treated as a minority group in Punjab?"

But Dwivedi pointed out that another Constitution Bench judgment had erroneously fixed twin criteria - whether the group was numerically a minority and whether they were dominated by other groups - to determine if a

community was in minority while taking a state as the geographical entity for such determination.

He said the numerical strength of a community within a state should be the criterion and not whether they were dominated by other communities. "A minority community may be affluent and not dominated in a state. This doesn't mean they can be denied the right to protect and further



their cultural and educational rights as a minority group guaranteed under the Constitution," he said

Dwivedi said Sikhs were those who owed allegiance to Guru Granth Sahib, and were enlisted as voters with Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee. "The sub-sects and followers of Dera Sacha Sauoda, Radha Soami and similarly placed persons are not considered Sikhs even though they were born to Sikh parents," he added.

When the bench was deliberating on whom to appoint as amicus curiae for assistance in adjudication of this tricky and complex constitutional issue, senior advocate K K Venugopal said it surely presented an issue that had far-reaching consequences for many states.

'In Kerala, Christians are in minority but own majority of the educational institutions. If Christian-owned educational institutions, turn into minority educational institutions, then it will have a telling effect," he said and agreed with the bench that former solicitor general T R Andhyarujina would be best suited to discharge duties as amicus curiae in this issue.

The bench issued notice to the Ministry of Minority Affairs and sought its response within four weeks. It also requested attorney general Mukul Rohatgi and senior advocate Andhyarujina to assist the court in deciding this question.

A three-judge bench of the SC on August 8, 2005 had said in Bal Patil case, "It was not in contemplation of the framers of the Constitution to add to the list of religious minorities."

(The Times of India 20-01-2016)

Seven Buddhist caves found near Kanheri

Seven caves have been discovered in the forests of the sprawling Sanjay Gandhi National Park, Borivli, on the northern fringes of the Mumbai city. The caves are Buddhist 'Viharas' (residences for monks) with only one of them showing the remains of a 'Harmika' (the top railing of a stupa). They are believed to have been constructed before the Kanheri Caves nearby and probably served as a monsoon shelter for the monks.

While a formal approval from the Archaeological Survey of India (A.S.I) is awaited for detailed exploration and documentation of the new caves. The team that has discovered the caves, date them between 1st century BCE (or BC) and 5th-6th century CE (or AD). The discovery was made by a three-member team last February

2015 under an excavation programme jointly conducted by the Centre for Archaeology, Mumbai University, and the department of Ancient Indian Culture, Sathaye College, Vile Parle; the Head of the Department, Suraj Pandit, led the team.

"The newly discovered caves may have been older than the Kanheri Caves as they were simpler in form and they lacked water cisterns, which are found in the more evolved architecture of Kanheri. Moreover, we found monolithic tools which were prevalent in the 1st century BC. The absence of water cisterns also indicate that monks lived there in the monsoon," said Pandit.

Pandit said the seven new caves were not an accidental discovery, but rather the result of

a systematic survey of the area.

Before beginning actual field work, the team carried out documentary research for three months, which included a study of the area's topography and water resources as most Viharas were constructed close to a water source. *The Kanheri Caves, which date between 1st century BCE and 10th century CE, are famous for their water management and rain water harvesting systems.* This helped to zero in on areas where they were most likely to find caves. The team also referred to Pali texts, which describe caves around Rajgir in Bihar, as Viharas (residences) of Buddhist monks and expected to find similar Viharas, either natural or man-made, around Kanheri.

(The Times of India-18-01-2016)

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'How India shaped me'

walked with - were written. My writings brought our tribal Dugri Garasiya Bhils into Gujarati literature, as a dear writer-friend once told me. But not just Gujarati - into other languages like Marathi, Tamil, Slovene, English and Spanish. Their stories went around the world. I feel so proud of them!

Finally, dream and be hopeful in this land, lit by the warm sunshine, washed by the gentle rain. Why? Because in India we say, "Everything will be all right in the end". So if things are not all right, it means it's not yet the end. So there's still hope!

What I am today is because

of what India and its people shaped of me: a happy woman who worked hard, laughed and cried, danced lots, and learnt how to love and enjoy life. I know that I have left my heart here, with my adivasi women among their barren hills. And my home will always be where my heart is.

For this is what "home" truly is, is it not? More than a place on earth, one is truly at home in the hearts of friends, and only there. For there are many who pass in and out of our lives, but we only remember those who leave their footprints in our heart. My mind races back over the years to the faces and voices of Indian friends

I shall never forget.

Yes, I am grateful to this great land, where "milk and honey" flow not only in the big rivers and little streams but in the veins of my hands and feet, for I am the daughter whom India took into her home.

Thank you, thank you, aabhara, shukriya, dhanyavaad.

(Marija Sres, a Slovenian, spent four decades empowering the Bhil adivasis of Gujarat. The views expressed are personal. She now lives in the town of Beltinci in Slovenia in central Europe)

(The Sentinel, 07.01.2016)

Cultural Sequence of Sarnath Identified: ASI

VARANASI, Jan 3, 2016: Fresh excavation works to ascertain the actual age of Sarnath, the site where Lord Buddha delivered his first sermon, has identified the tentative cultural sequence of the site from 4th Century B.C to 6th Century A.D.

The earlier known history of Sarnath dates back to 3rd Century BC to 12th Century AD and the excavation was aimed at finding the cultural sequence.

Sarnath, located about 12 km from the ancient temple town of Varanasi, is the place where Gautam Buddha preached his first sermon after attaining enlightenment.

“ASI makes a conservation program every year and we give first preference to the sites which are in danger. In the Sarnath circle, excavation work has been done six-seven times,” as ASI official told PTI.

The last excavation works at Sarnath began on February 19, 2014 under the direction of B R Mani, Additional Director General of ASI, New Delhi, and under the supervision of Ajay Srivastava, Superintending Archaeologist of Sarnath Circle, Varanasi.

According to a recent report by the ASI, there were two main objectives of carrying out the excavation. Firstly, to ascertain the cultural sequence of the site prior to Mauryan Period, if any.

The second objective was to conduct horizontal excavation to trace out the structural remains, antiquities, potteries and other archaeological remains belonging

to Buddha’s time or before, if any.

On the basis of the excavation, the tentative cultural sequence of the site has been identified, and can be divided into four periods.

The first is Pre-Mauryan (4th Century B.C. to 3rd Century B.C.), second Mauryan (3rd Century B.C. to 2nd Century B.C.), third Sunga-Kushana (2nd Century B.C to 4th Century A.D.) and fourth Gupta Period (4th



Century A.D to 6th Century A.D.), the report said.

On the basis of excavation done at a particular location at Sarnath, the ASI found a Black Ware dish of medium size, and in the interior of the dish there was a stamped design, similar to marks found in Pre-Mauryan punch-marked coins. Besides this, an earthen hearth of Pre-Mauryan Period was found.

To corroborate the existence of Mauryan Period, the ASI found remains of architectural activities and ruins of burnt bricks and brickbats, suggesting that during this period the houses were made by burnt bricks by using mud as mortar.

Also, in the trenches laid on the North-Western side of the Ashokan Pillar and almost 30 meters towards Malgandh Kuti shrine, the surface level appeared as the remains of Sanga-Kushana Period. The potteries of this period are dominant and are mostly Red Ware, Dull Red Ware and a few of Black Ware.

Period IV, at Sarnath excavation represents the Gupta period, mainly with Red Ware and Red Slipped Ware as the common potteries found. At one place, six images of Buddha made in typical Gupta style were found. In these, the figures of Buddha are shown slender with a swaying body, representing the main features of Sarnath School of Art.

In addition to this, many bricks with molded and chiseled decoration belonging to the Gupta period, were recovered.

According to official records, the archaeological significance of the place was first brought to notice in 1798 by J Duncan, who gave an account of the casket of green marble inside a stone box exposed by the workmen of Jagat Singh, the Dewan of King Chet Singh of Benaras while dismantling the Dharmarajika Stupa to exploit building materials.

The antiquities recovered from Sarnath have been preserved in the adjoining site museum maintained by the ASI.

(http://articles.economicstimes.indiatimes.com/2016-01-03/news/69486397_1_excavation-lord-buddha-sarnath-school)

China in 2016

- Karishma Saurabh Kalita

Indian experts forecast a slowing down of the giant Chinese economy during 2016 as Beijing has girded up to implement its decision to scrap the almost four-decade-old one-child norm in the face of an ageing population. China watchers also saw Beijing continuing to flex its muscles in the South China Sea where it has disputes with neighbours Japan and Vietnam while Sino-Indian relations were likely to see an upswing with cautious movements in the strategic and security domain.

One of the biggest milestones in China's history was the scrapping of the 37-year-old one-child diktat on October 29, 2015, and proposed implementation of a relaxed two-child principle later in 2016. The Communist Party of China (CPC) proposed this scheme in an attempt to balance population development and offset the burden of an aging population.

"This change was definitely important in the socio-political domain. The need to scrap the one child policy was absolutely necessary due to China's growing aged population. But the demographic dividend will be only seen after 25-30 years and not in the near future," noted strategic expert C. Uday Bhaskar, director, Society for Policy Studies (SPS), told IANS.

A final plan for the change will be ratified by China's top legislature in March after which it will come into affect officially. It has been estimated that it would raise the population from the

current total of 1.37 billion to an estimated 1.45 billion by 2030.

"Data has shown that 64 percent of China's total population still prefer the one child policy. The country will need an absolute majority for this to become a total success," Professor Srikanth Kondapalli, Centre for East Asian Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, said.

China's strength, its economy, took a beating when the yuan was devalued on August 11 by lowering its daily mid-point trading price to 1.87 percent weaker against the US dollar. The next day, it faced its second devaluation as it pushed down by another 1.62 percent against the US dollar. The devaluations resulted in Chinese exports getting cheaper and imports into China more expensive by that amount.

"China's economic slowdown will persist even in 2016. In 2010, the gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate was a 10.8 percent. I expect at least a 6.5 percent rate or possibly even lower in 2016 as market confidence is decreasing. The yuan is coming back to its actual position, and even if it may not get devalued this year, the actual value will decline," Kondapalli said.

According to Arvind Yelery, associate fellow, Institute of Chinese Studies, the country's economic growth will also depend on how the country manages its excessive commitments that it has made to complete by this year in terms of trade, communications and science and technology.

There is speculation that a lot of fluctuations will occur after the third quarter of 2016.

On December 1, the International Monetary Fund included the yuan in its Special Drawing Rights (SDR) basket that will make it the fifth reserve currency after the dollar, the euro, the pound sterling and the yen. However, the final inclusion will take another six to eight months.

China's campaign of island building in the South China Sea has caused concerns among other regional contenders.

"China's claim towards the South China Sea is a matter of muscular assertiveness. The complex geo-political situation here will remain," Bhaskar said.

China claims most of the South and East China seas. Other countries in South East Asia have competing claims for the Spratly Islands, Paracel Islands and Scarborough Shoal, which are thought to have resource-rich waters around them.

According to Kondapalli, China will not agree to others asserting claim over the South China Sea. This tussle will continue and the issue will be clinched with military power.

China completed construction of two lighthouses in October and the government has reiterated that China's construction completely falls within its own sovereignty.

In 2015, China also moved closer in terms of bilateral relations with South Asian nations

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Girl child Trafficking: Assam-Arunachal border in Lakhimpur becomes a haven

- Farhana Ahmed

NORTH LAKHIMPUR, Dec 20 - Lakhi (name changed), a 12th standard passed girl in her early twenties returned home to Koilamari Tea Estate on the Assam-Arunachal Pradesh border in Lakhimpur district from a household in Delhi six months ago where she had been engaged as a domestic help.

Lakhi was promised a job with a decent salary by Ursula Tete of No 2 Labour Line of the same tea estate and sent to Delhi after her educational certificates and PAN card were taken away. But in reality, Lakhi was forced to work under inhuman conditions in Delhi and not allowed to speak to her parents back home over phone. Her parents were only intimidated by Ursula when Lakhi fell ill six months ago. Lakhi's parents rushed to Delhi only to find her in a critical condition. They took her back home without getting any salary for her work as a domestic help. Ursula has also not returned Lakhi's educational testimonials and her PAN card after her return. Lakhi's mother, who went to Delhi to rescue her, tells about trafficked girls from various parts of the country kept in a house of a woman from Jharkhand in Delhi. She also alleges that the trafficked girls, who were promised good jobs, were actually force into flesh trade in Delhi. For her, Ursula is solely responsible for the plight of her daughter.

Ursula Tete, when contacted, appeared to be unaware of the fate of the girls that she used to send to placement agencies in

Delhi. A woman in her early forties, Ursula has been active in this illicit trade for the last two years and has reportedly earned two lakh rupees as commission from the placement agencies. She admitted her role of accompanying the girls to the Guwahati railway station from where they are picked up by others. Ursula also informed that ten more girls were to be sent to Delhi from Bihpuria region of Lakhimpur district soon.

The Doolahat Tea Estate, 15 km north-west from North Lakhimpur and stretching to the inter-State border with Arunachal Pradesh has become a red zone of girl child trafficking. Here hundreds of girls have been trafficked over the last two decades with no news of their return. Most of the trafficked girls are reportedly sent to neighbouring Arunachal Pradesh.

Roopali Barla, daughter of late Remes Barla of the Doolahat Tea Estate has the same story. She has not returned home ever since she was taken away by a local agent 12 years ago. Her widowed mother has no idea of her whereabouts. Similarly, Hawamani, daughter of Nandalal, the sweeper of the same tea garden was taken away by a local agent named Paul ten years ago. Hawamani has not returned home ever since. Tinu Karmakar, a labour from No. 20 Line of Doolahat Tea Estate is also waiting for his daughter Teresa taken away by an agent Simanta Tanti six years ago.

The No. 20 Labour Line of Doolahat Tea Estate has earned the dubious distinction of a girl child trafficking zone in Lakhimpur district. Dozens of girls are found to be trafficked by a local agent named Monica. Chiragjyoti, daughter of Baha Lohar, Bhani, daughter of Lal Dhan, Arati, daughter of Rubul Tanti, are some of the unfortunate girls from this labor line who might still be languishing in some unknown places. 'Reformed' local agents like Samuel, Stephan from this area are still alleged to be involved in this trade.

Trafficking of girl children from the tea garden and other remote areas of Lakhimpur district is also going on an individual basis. Temu, a woman labor from Zoihing Itabhata lost her daughter Tuntuni five years ago when she was eight years old. According to her, a man working in a mobile tower construction site near her home took Tuntuni away. Now Temu has only a worn-out photograph of her lost daughter Tuntuni.

Carlos Dhela, a labour from Zoihing tea estate lost his seven-year-old daughter Suman as somebody had kidnapped her from the road in front of his home. In one case, an official from the management of a tea garden was also found to be involved in forcefully keeping one girl as domestic help away from here.

The proximity of the tea estates to the inter-State border makes

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ONCE-UPON-A-TIME KINGDOM

The Last Attempt

- Karunamay Sinha

Like most other uprisings in the Northeast during the first half of the twentieth century, the Reang uprising too had the colonial factor at its roots. Tripura, though not directly ruled by the British, had its tail tied to British interests in the region. The Ratanmani thing happened — and went up in flames — among the Reangs when the Second World War broke out and the British called upon the king to come up with all kinds of assistance — monetary as well as military.

The king had to make sure that supply of provisions to British and American soldiers did not fall short of the quota assigned. So he issued orders for procurement. The fulfillment of the kingly obligation resulted in nèute food shortage in the hills.

For Khagendra, it was right moment to put on show his inalienable loyalty to the king. He and his brigade did all they could to make sure that they lived up to the king's expectations. -

Then came orders for conscription. 'Rajya Rakshi Bahini', 'Chaturdash Devatar Dal', etc were the names the maharaja gave to the forces he proposed to raise. Their primary job would be to help the British in the Second World War.

Some people, however, say, the king had his own goals. With the advent of Nationalist movements, particularly the 'Quit

India' movement of 1942, the Maharaja was worried about the rising nationalist forces in the kingdom. He knew that a big change was going to take place in the political firmament of the subcontinent, and it sure was going to trigger a tumultuous geopolitical reshuffle. He wanted to ensure safety of his kingdom. Perhaps he had sensed that his subjects, particularly the hill tribes, would not be able to find their place in the new world order. The ignorant lot 'had been for centuries dependent on the king in every practical sense. The king wasn't a mere political entity; he was the last word for all their sociocultural and religious customs and laws. First thing he needed for the protection of his subjects was a strong force under his command. In the guise of helping the British he thus wanted to add to his military reserve strength.

Khagendra and his minions surpassed themselves in their endeavor to recruit Reang youths for the king's newly-raised forces.

Now, for the Reang youths, Khagendra was the last man whose words they would willingly obey. Khagendra sought the king's help saying Ratanmani was doing everything to dissuade the Reang youths from joining the king's forces. He was against the king. He had connections with the advancing Ajad Hind Fauz. He was anti-British. He was 'swadeshi'.

The king extened all kinds of help and Khagendra, with help from the king's administration, did all he could to create a reign of terror in the Reang villages.

Ratanmani sent three of his most reliable disciples to Agartala — Khushi Krishna, Handai Singh and Kanta Rai. They would try to influence the Missips and other nobles who would enlighten the king as to the real nature of the unrest prevailing among the loyal Reangs.

Alas! None at Ratanmani's camp were aware that the three names topped the list given to the king by Khagendra as ones who had attacked his house. The moment they reached the capital, the king's police arrested them.

Forty-eight days, they remained shut in there until Brajalal Karta, an influential nobleman, ensured their release. Some Ratanmani followers in the capital, it is said, influenced Brajalal Karta who after much persuasion agreed to interfere in the matter.

Things took a truly militant turn when Khushi Krishna, Handal Singh and Kanta Rai returned from Agartala, devastated and heartbroken. Finally, and conclusively, the Reangs realized there was no one to give them justice. They would have to earn it. Enough of going about begging for it.

(The Sentinel, 03.01.2016)

Scholars Brainstorm on Bishnupriya Folk Culture

GUWAHATI, Dec 27: A brainstorming session of folk culture delved deep into folk cultures of various ethnic groups at a programme organized by Nilachal Kala Kendra, Beharbari, Guwahati at District Library in the city today. Nagaland University (NU) associate professor Dr. Upasana Bora and noted artist Sunil Sinha spoke the essence of folk culture in general; Tezpur University professor Smriti Kumar Sinha, SP Pratap Sinha and journalist Ramlal Sinha were specific to the Bishnupriya Manipuri folklore. Chaired by social activist Shanti Kumar Sinha, the discussion on the topic could bring out something that can bring about desired efforts to preserve folklores.

Dr. Bora was quite clear when she said that 'culture is something that lies in our soul, i.e. core... Our culture is always in a

transitional phase. With the emergence of popular or new cultures, every folk culture is facing a challenge'. She, however, said: "There's nothing to worry on the extinction threat to any folk culture. The best will continue to survive." Giving a brief description of the general characteristics of folk culture as a whole, noted artist Sunil Sinha said: "The Manipuri Dhrupadi Nritya is based on Vainavite rasa. The Manipuri dance gurus got inspirations from Govinda Lilamrit of Krishnadas Kabiraj, Bhakti Rantnakar of Narahari Chakravarty, Haribhaktibilas etc. These are some of the scripts that have enriched the Manipuri culture." Since he is an artist by profession, he was asked to give a brief account on the artists of the community he belongs to. He was nostalgic when he remembered renowned artist Bimal Sinha.

Prof. Smriti Kumar Sinha had to adopt a pick-and-choose method as he had to discuss on the folk elements that were left by his preceding speakers. He talked about folktales, folk attire, folk beliefs with special reference to the Bishnupriya Manipuri folks.

Speaking on the same vein, SP Pratap Sinha spoke on folk songs, material folk elements etc., while journalist Ramlal Sinha, as the opening speaker of the discussion, gave an account on Bishnupriya Manipuri folks, its commonness and differences with Meitei folks, childlore, folk music, folk number line of the Bishnupriya Manipuris etc.

The discussion was followed by a cultural programme that was inaugurated by noted writer and film producer Prabhas Kanti Sinha. (*The Sentinel*, 28.12.2015)

N.E. ST's Vision Document released

GUWAHATI, Jan 24: Meghalaya and Manipur Governor V Sanmuganathan has said that the social system of the Scheduled Tribes (STs) in the Northeast India is much better than that of the so-called developed society elsewhere in the State.

The Governor said this after releasing the Vision Document for STs of North East India at a function at the Vivekananda Kendra in Guwahati today. The Vision Document for scheduled tribes of Northeast India, an

outcome of a social initiative under the leadership of Akhil Bharatiya Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram. The document is based on a number of papers submitted by scholars at a conclave held in Guwahati from August 7 to 9, 2015 when a series of meetings, seminars, panel discussions etc., discussed development issues of the scheduled tribes of the region. The basic purpose of the conclave was to prepare a Vision Document for the scheduled tribes, intended for the policy makers, scholars and

researchers for their better understanding and judgment. Sanmuganathan said: "The document is going to help understand the way of thinking, value system and problems of the tribals in the Northeast."

Atul Jog, the All India Joint Organizing Secretary of Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram was also present in the event. Najendra Nunisa, President Kalyan Ashram Assam, presided the meeting. Longki Phangcho IAS (Rtd.), the president of the Vision Document

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Pranav Dhanawade makes Cricket History with 1,009 runs

Kalyan: Young Pranav Dhanawade, is the toast of the cricketing world after becoming the first batsman ever in the history of the game to score a thousand runs in an innings.

The student of K C Gandhi English High School, who amassed 652 runs on Monday, went on to pile up an unbeaten 1,009 on Tuesday as his school reached a record 1,465 runs for three wickets and registered a massive 1,362-run victory over

Arya Gurukul in the Thane district Bhandari Trophy Under-16 Inter-School Cricket Tournament match at Wailay Colony Ground, Kalyan.

The highest individual score prior to Pranav's feat was 628 by A. E. J Collins in 1899. The highest score in school cricket belonged to Prithvi Shaw, who scored 546 runs for Rizvi Springfield in the Harris Shield tournament in 2013.

Pranav's father Prashant is a

rickshaw driver and his mother Mohini supplements the family income with her catering business. Prashant was an aspiring cricketer too but poverty and the lack of facilities in Kalyan put paid to his ambitions. "Today I am happy that my son made me proud. I am happy that a rickshaw driver's son can also set a world record," said Prashant.

(<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/top-stories/Pranav-Dhanawade-makes-cricket-history-with-1009-runs/articleshow/50462757.cms>)

Shanmuganathan Calls for End to Conflict

SHILLONG, Feb 1: Meghalaya Governor V Shanmuganathan today said that the tribals in the Northeast are attached to their lands and the environment even as he said that conflicts should come to an end.

Recalling the experiences he encountered through his various visits to the far flung villages of Meghalaya and other Northeastern States, Shanmuganathan stated about the attachment that the villagers of the Northeast have towards their land and the environment on which they depend majorly for food and shelter.

"The world should become one family. Conflicts and contradictions must be eliminated. Love your neighbours. Love others", Shanmuganathan said.

Shanmuganathan was speaking at the inauguration of the four day conference on Oral Traditions: Continuity and Transformations- North East

India and South East Asia held at the State Convention Centre in the city today.

The Governor in his address cited the interpersonal relationships that exist in the society and reminded the fact of culture and tradition has evolved through generations with knowledge of the same being handed over from one generation to the next via oral traditions.

He also said that women are held in high esteem in this part of the country with the absence of female foeticide, and the girl child's rights over property bearing testimony to that fact. Earlier in the programme, the Governor released a book named Shadow & Light- a Kaleidoscope of Manipur. It may be mentioned that this conference on 'Oral Traditions' is organized by the Indian National Trust for Art and Heritage (INTACH) in collaboration with the Centre for

Community knowledge, Ambedkar University, Delhi and supported by DONER Ministry, Govt of India, Don Bosco Centre for Indigenous Cultures, Shillong and Lady Keane College, Shillong.

(The Sentinel, 02.02.2016)

(Contd. from Page 19)

N.E. ST's Vision Document released

Reception Committee welcomed the audience with a short introduction to the motive and intention of the seminar held. Sunil Basumatary, Nareswar Brahma were present and presented their views. Devotional songs by young artists kept the programme alive and pleasant.

India has given Spiritualism, not Communalism to world: PM Narendra Modi

MUMBAI: Against the backdrop of 'intolerance' debate, Prime Minister Narendra Modi today said India's contribution to the world is not communalism but spiritualism which can resolve all problems and invoked former President APJ Abdul Kalam to underline his point.

He regretted that the world has failed to understand the people of India properly as he praised the saints and religious leaders for their contribution to the country's legacy.

"India is a country, which has not tried to bind the world in a particular sect ... We are the people whom the world has probably not understood in the manner in which we should have been understood," Modi said while addressing via video conferencing a book release event here.

"India has given the world neither community nor

communalism. Our saints and sages (Rishis and Munis) and traditions have given the world spiritualism and not communalism," he said, adding sometimes, sect leads to problems while spiritualism resolves the same.

The Prime Minister's comments assume significance as these come against the backdrop of debate on 'intolerance' and allegations of growing communalism in the country.

"Saints, hermits and religious leaders have blessed the world with spirituality, a legacy in which our former President Dr APJ Abdul Kalam believed and said that the problems of human beings can be neutralised by the spiritualization of mankind," he said.

Modi, while addressing the event to mark the release of a

book titled 'Maru Bharat Saru Bharat' written by Jain Acharya Ratnasundersuriswarji Maharaj, described the monk as a "great social reformer and spiritual leader" who has expressed his views about all concepts and objects of the universe through his various books.

"National religion is above all religions and Guruji has lit the candle of national religion through his writings, as it has been the glorious tradition of our country," he said.

The book, 'My India, Nobel India', in four languages - English, Hindi, Gujarati and Marathi - was released at the Somaiya Grounds in Sion-Chunabhatti area here during the 'Sahitya Satkar Samaroh' programme on the concluding day of the 10-day-long religious and spiritual conclave.

(<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/India-has-given-spiritualism-not-communalism-to-world-PM-Narendra-Modi/articleshow/50521191.cms>)

(Contd. from Page 16)

China in 2016

including India. A golden moment in cementing India-China relations was when Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited China in May and inked a record 24 bilateral agreements, held summit level talks and signed 26 deals worth \$22 billion.

"China and India have moved very cautiously in terms of bilateral agreements. The two countries will definitely engage more in the trade and economy sectors but when it comes to

strategic and security domain, issue will definitely prevail for China's support towards Pakistan," Bhaskar said.

China-Pakistan relations took a new turn with President Xi Jinping's visit in April 2015 to Islamabad, where he envisaged investments worth \$45 billion and signed 51 agreements. The investments were expected for the projects that constitute the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

"China-Pakistan relations will remain almost the same, but when Modi visited Islamabad on December 25, 2015, it did create a ripple effect. For China-India relations to flourish better, political investments are of the utmost importance," Yelery said, adding the economic front looks very optimistic as China will look to compete with the already existing and successful Japanese investments in India.

(The Sentinel, 28.01.2016)

In Kerala, a hotel that refuses to put a price on kindness

Malappuram: Technical engineer Akhilesh Kumar recently chanced upon a cell phone photograph of a restaurant bill he had clicked three years ago. He posted it on Facebook with a brief note. Ever since the man, now in Dubai, posted it to the 'Right Thinkers' page on the networking site, social media has been abuzz with his act of kindness. Kumar however, is more surprised by what the cashier - yet to be identified - has done.

It was a long day for Kumar. He was in Perinthalmanna, Malappuram for an official meeting, which his post in Malayalam described as "mechanical and tiring." He returned to the hotel he was put up at, took a table in its restaurant and ordered a plate of Kerala paratha and chicken curry.

It was then he caught a pair of eyes looking through the window

at the food being served. As their eyes met, he gestured the other - a boy aged around 10 - to join him. The malnourished boy reluctantly walked into the restaurant, holding the hand of a girl - apparently his kid sister. Kumar asked him what he would like to eat, and the boy pointed at the paratha and chicken curry.

Kumar ordered food for his little guests. The girl, who remained silent, nudged her brother and gestured towards the washbasin. Both marched away hand in hand, and joined Kumar back after washing their hands. The man watched the kids eat, and he learnt that the boy was a rag picker, and his sister, aged around six, accompanied him. The children left the restaurant soon after finishing their food.

Kumar said he felt happy seeing the children leaving the

place contented. He finished his supper and the waiter brought him the bill folder. The bill caught the engineer off guard. Instead of the amount, it had two sentences in Malayalam. "We don't have a machine to bill a humane act. All the very best," it said. "It was an epiphanic moment for me. I realized there are still people without mechanical hearts," he said in a Facebook chat.

Kumar's post has now gone viral with more than 1,000 shares.

"I am happy that my post is being shared. It reaffirms my faith in humanity" he said. When contacted, the hotel mentioned Kumar's post, Sabrina on Pattambi Road in Perinthalmanna, said it was impossible to know who had issued the bill since the incident occurred years ago.

(The Times of India 24-01-16)

Is Modi the destiny's child?

The day the Year 2016 dawned, the Sun was brighter giving way to the winter chill to a warm morning. It was a peaceful morning and the birds twittered sweetly. To be a great surprise there was the cooing of a cuckoo which is supposed to arrive only in spring which is not far away. Is it ominous? No, it was propitious. It gives us hope and joy because coming days are going to be pleasant and promising. That is the hope of a billion or more Indians on the New Year. If the Cuckoo had arrived this early during the Cultural Revolution in

China, it would have died a painful death or imprisonment like Liu Shaoqi. But then it led to the purge of unwanted elements from the Chinese society and put Mao Zedong back to an assertive power when Liu along with Deng-Xiaoping conspired to bring an end to Mao's rule in Communist China. This alliteration has a something to do with our country even though it is neither ruled by Communists or the so-called pretty-faced liberals who change values as we change our undergarments.

The alliteration is also relevant

here because like during the Cultural Revolution of China, we too saw a great change as the young men and women of the country rallied around a single man. Call him all the names you, like "mauth ke saudagar, fascist, communalist... and so. "China would not have happened if it was not for Mao Zedong. Today, a little more population than India, or to simply put, the largest populated country under the Sun, it has made great strides. That was the Great Leap Forward. This happened because he was a

(Contd. to Page 23)

Tripura Minting Huge Profit from Bamboo Nursery, Plantation

Agartala: Farmers and youth in Tripura are engaging themselves in bamboo nursery and plantation activities to make an earning. In several villages in remote Kanchanpur sub-division, once a den of the militants, young entrepreneurs are getting involved in bamboo nursery and plantation business.

Farmers who were once engaged with paddy and vegetable

cultivation are now turning into bamboo growers as it is more profitable and there is huge demand for bamboo-made products traditionally as well as in industrial and construction activities.

“Here, bamboo groves have succumbed to flowering and fruiting. We have started a nursery of bamboo sapling to sell them to people those who want to grow bamboo. We hope to make profit out of this and a total of four persons are involved with it,” said Surajit Kumar Nath, bamboo nursery farmer in recent

times in Tripura, there was a huge crisis of bamboo particularly after the gregarious flowering followed the death of the entire grove. With the State Government's initiative under Bamboo Mission for bamboo plantation to fill the forest area beside river embankments

created a rivalry between the tribal and the non-tribal. At present the situation is peaceful and we are growing bamboo nursery here. The forest department here has huge demand for bamboo sapling as they are going to plant it to stop

breaking of river embankments by plantation of bamboo throughout the river banks. Besides

HUGE DEMAND

With the State Government's initiative under Bamboo Mission for bamboo plantation to fill the forest area beside river embankments there has been a huge demand for bamboo sapling which the State Government nurseries are finding tough to fulfill.

there has been huge demand of bamboo sapling which the State Government nurseries are finding tough to fulfill the demands. “We have grown bamboo sapling in nursery for running our family better, I am a house wife and side-by-side, I also work in this nursery to help my husband who had setup the bamboo nursery with the hope that we can make profit and develop,” said Sulekha Nath, a bamboo nursery owner.

“Our village was attacked by NLFT (militants) in which 10 non-tribal people were killed and that

various pandals, construction works, fencing, and at present demands for bamboo in small scale industry for producing various decorative items of bamboo like sofa, chairs and many others is there and so the return from bamboo is also very profitable,” said Rajesh Das, another bamboo nursery worker.

Moreover, with the setting up of bamboo based industries in the State, the demand is on the rise, turning bamboo into a lucrative item.

(Eastevn Chvonicle 18-01-2016)

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Is Modi the destiny's child?

pragmatist and he loved his country and its people as they loved him and cherished him unlike our former liberalist rulers, who occasionally borrowed a word or two from Lenin's collected works and his socialist ideology.

Today Indians can be proud of

a Prime Minister who can be compared to Mao in certain aspects. Narendra Modi is not a communist but our Indian communists would have loved him to be their leader (frankly speaking) but is tempered in the Hindutva mould. Yet he has proved he is neither. He was

elected as our Prime Minister on May 26, 2014. He loves India and Indians and vice versa. No caste, creed or religion. A billion people have reposed their faith in him and our destiny is in his hands. The days are getting warier. Jai Ho.

(The Hills Times 02-01-16)

Manipur Farmers to Revives a Dead Lake

- Sunzu Bachaspatimayum

Yaralpat is one of the many erstwhile lakes of Manipur whose charms are reminded only by history books and folk songs. The dead lake is now seemingly coming back to life, thanks to community effort.

Once upon a time, the entire valley area of the State was one big lake, so goes the Manipuri legend. Gradually, the waters receded, leaving behind a magnificent system of wetlands. No wonder then that the small hilly state Manipur has Loktak lake, a Ramsar site of International significance.

Unfortunately, the State is fast losing its valuable wetlands. Even the attractive Loktak lake is dying with the government making a last ditch effort to save it, spending over Rs 300 crores in dredging and clearing bio masses from the lake.

At a time when the State, which has a sublime climate throughout the year, is fast feeling the heat of climate change and water scarcity, the Kombirei Environmental Development Organization (KEDO) is setting a trend in community efforts in livelihood generation and ecological restoration.

Located 8 kms from the capital city Imphal, Yaralpat was a lake with surface area 0.4 sq.km, famous for its flora and fauna. Amongst its floral varieties, Kombirei is a purple-coloured lily that had completely vanished from the area.

Although people who gradually took possession of portions of the lake area experimented with

agriculture for years, the yields were never encouraging. Nevertheless, some continued working the fields, while others sold them off to buyers who were willing to wait for the area to become developed. During this period, most of the erstwhile lake area remained dried and unused. This encompassed over 70 hectares of land lying barren.

When experimentation with paddy cultivation failed to yield positive results, people who took ownership of the dried up lake areas began to think about reviving the original lake itself. In 2010, eleven farmers came together and resolved to restore the wetland and rejuvenate the bio-diversity of Yaralpat. They named their group, 'Kombirei Environmental Development Organization (KEDO)', contributed Rs 50,000/- each and began reclaiming the lake by digging 11 hectares jointly owned by them. Although the project area was dry land, the moist lake soil made for difficult digging. Even heavy duty earth movers could not be used because of the moist soil. After three years of digging during the dry seasons, KEDO's efforts are at long last bearing fruits.

Now in the middle of the once barren area, around 11 hectares have become a perennial water body where pisciculture is thriving. Because of the revived water body, migratory birds and other local species are making it their destination, gradually bringing back the semblance of the erstwhile Yaralpat.

Appreciating KEDO's yeoman

service, the Manipur Forest and Environment department and the Agriculture Directorate are encouraging the group with technical inputs, guidance and help in reclaiming works of the lake. Plans are also afoot to develop the area into a tourist spot where boating and bird watching activities can be done.

'Besides environmental development of the Yaralpat area, we are also trying to introduce integrated community farming. Now that our project area has become a perennial water source, it can irrigate neighbouring paddy fields. We are proposing to introduce rabi crops in these fields', said KEDO's Secretary, Y. Binod Kumar.

KEDO's President, N. Raghmani Singh stressed upon the organization's focus on restoring the flora and fauna of the area which will in turn transform the area into a popular tourist spot. "In the last few years, we've seen a variety of migratory birds coming here. We're also trying to replant the once popular Kombirei lilly that was synonymous with Yaralpat. At present we're making a Kombirei nursery for large scale planting in our project area."

KEDO's example is good news for Manipur which is poised at a crucial crossroad between increasing population and fast receding biodiversity, particularly the wetlands that regulate climate.

(The author is a National award winning filmmaker and a Manipur based journalist.)

(The Sentinel, 30.12.2015)

(Contd. from Page 9)

Ancient India's liberated women: In classical times India was more egalitarian than the West – at least in women's education

'The Symposium' concludes that women were incapable of providing men with intellectual companionship.

In later times, Khana, who is sometimes rumoured to have become a victim of domestic violence, was a noted poetess and astrologer of near legendary abilities. Though details of her life are hazy, she appears to have lived in southern Bengal, where many of her writings are still household sayings.

Much later, in 1150, Bhaskara II, the most renowned Indian mathematician of his age, composed the Lilavati – perhaps the only math book in the world whose problems were mostly addressed to young girls. An example of such a problem: "Beautiful and dear Lilavati, whose eyes are like a fawn's! Tell me what are the numbers resulting from one hundred and thirty-five, taken into twelve? If thou be skilled in multiplication by whole or by parts, whether by subdivision of form or separation of digits, tell me, auspicious woman, what is the quotient of the product divided by the same multiplier?" This was to be the prime math textbook in Indian schools for the next 700 years.

It is interesting that as far as gender discrimination goes, ancient Indian society seemed to be much more egalitarian and balanced than other ancient societies, at least in the field of education. Hopefully, this balance is something that could be sustained and enhanced in modern times.

The writer is Associate Professor of Economics at Jawaharlal Nehru University. Today is International Women's Education Day.

(<http://blogs.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/toi-edit-page/ancient-indias-liberated-women-in-classical-times-india-was-more-egalitarian-than-the-west-at-least-in-womens-education/>)

(Contd. from Page 17)

Girl child Trafficking: Assam-Arunachal border in Lakhimpur becomes a haven

buyers from the neighbouring State visit and roam the labor settlements easily. The indifference of the tea garden management to these activities is also responsible for increase in this trade. The local agents make false promises of a better life ahead of the girls to their parents with lure of money. The poor and mostly alcoholic parents easily succumb to these alluring words and hand over their daughters to the buyers coming from Arunachal Pradesh. But unfortunately, these girls never return home thereafter. The geographical remoteness of these inter-State border areas of Lakhimpur district and the prevailing socio-economic conditions of the people living there make them easy prey to the predators of human trafficking.

Poverty, economic hardship coupled with alcoholism has made most of the parents here vulnerable to the lure of money in exchange of their gild children to the world of slavery and abuse across the inter-State border. The easy availability of spurious IMF liquor from Arunachal Pradesh as well as the locally-made one make things worse for these people, who sell their most precious possessions in lieu of drinks.

The apathy of the concerned authorities– the police and the Excise department, the Social Welfare department, the Health and Child Welfare department and mostly the tea garden management has made the inter-State border areas of Lakhimpur district a haven for girl child trafficking from Assam.

(The Assam Tribune, 21.12.2015)

The Elephant and the Sparrow

A couple of sparrows lived happily in their nest on top of a huge tree in a jungle.

The female sparrow had laid her eggs in the nest and they were expecting their newborns soon.

On a particular day, unable to bear the heat of the summer sun, an elephant went berserk.

He crashed into all trees in his way. On his way, he broke the branches of the tree that supported the nest of the sparrow couple.

As the branches fell, so did the nest and all the newly laid eggs smashed against the ground.

Although the sparrows managed to escape by flying away, they were heart-broken to see that they had lost the eggs. The female sparrow began to cry and wail loudly.

A woodpecker, who was at a little distance, was touched by cries.

He went to her and said, "Dear good sparrow! There is nothing you can do by crying. What is destined to happen, will happen for sure."

The female sparrow replied, "That is indeed true. But all my children were killed by this wicked elephant, this is also true. We had done no harm to him."

"If you consider yourself to be a friend", continued the female sparrow, "Please suggest me a way to destroy this elephant and avenge the death of my children".

"So I will", replied the woodpecker, "I have a fly as a

friend. Let us go and ask for her help to destroy this cruel elephant".

Thus, the woodpecker and the female sparrow went to meet the fly. The woodpecker explained, "My friend, please meet this sparrow. She is a dear friend of mine. Her eggs were destroyed by a wicked elephant; please help us find a way to destroy this cruel elephant."

"I will certainly help you", the fly said after hearing the events, "How can I be your friend, and yet not help you when you need me. I have a frog as a good friend, let us seek his help to destroy this wicked elephant."

Thus, the female sparrow, woodpecker and the fly went to the frog, and explained him of all the events for which they had come to him for help.

The old frog said after hearing everything, "The elephant is big, but he is alone. What can this elephant do, if we work together to destroy him? I have a plan!"

He explained, "Fly! When the sun is scorching, your task would be to buzz in his ears. When he closes his eyes in sheer ecstasy, the woodpecker's task would be to peck his eyes and make him blind. In this scorching summer, he will certainly search for water, but being blinded already he will not



be able to do so. I will then sit on the edge of the nearby pit and croak at the top of my voice."

He continued, "When the thirsty elephant hears me, he will think there is a pond or lake nearby and follow my voice. And when he does so, he will fall into the pit and perish. This way, we can avenge the death of the sparrow's children!"

The others agreed to the plan, and organized to do their part of the tasks as laid by the old frog.

They executed their tasks successfully, and the elephant fell into a muddy pit to eventually die.



The wise indeed say:

Even the low and humble achieve results when they work together.



Seven caves have been discovered in the forests of the sprawling Sanjay Gandhi National Park, Borivli, on the northern fringes of Mumbai



