India Perspectives has been regularly presenting to the readers the magnificence of India’s landscape and the enchanting natural beauty of the country. As the tourist season commences in India, this issue of India Perspectives covers a few places of interest for those visiting our country, including the ever popular hill resorts.

The growing importance of biotechnology in India is evident in agriculture, health care, environment and industry. Concerted research and development effort has led to innovations and technology transfer to industries, and a strong base of indigenous capabilities has been created. Sachin Chaturvedi explores developments and policy issues in this area.

We offer a peek into the preparations for the Commonwealth Games as the city and the people of Delhi, and Shera, get ready to welcome participants and visitors for the Games next year.

Richard Holkar in this issue weaves the magic of Maheshwar textile tradition. Renowned photographer Benoy Behl delves into the philosophy of the art of the divine, while Radhakrishna Rao explores the significance of Nataraja, the cosmic dancer. Other well known experts and writers present further glimpses into varied aspects of India’s culture and heritage.

The radio has been able to hold its own even in the age of the twenty-four-seven visual media, evolving and innovating on its way. Danish Iqbal takes us into the widening world of FM radio.

Enjoy reading!
It is the sound of music that the hills inspire; a certain bliss that the mountain winds aspire. Whether it is for short breaks to revive one’s nerves, or long journeys towards searching for a soul, getting into mountain tracks or hilly terrains are part of a living psyche. And India has myriad experiences to offer in all cultures and expanses through the evergreen hilly crestlines of the Western Ghat ecosystem in the south, the Aravallis in the west and the more than sought after Himalayan mountains in north and north east India.

Come summer and the hills are alive with the sound of those who want to get away from the searing heat of the plains to some quiet and cozy corner – often replete with history – far away from the madding crowds.

Manali (left) and Solang (below) in Himachal Pradesh.

Climb every mountain

KANCHI KOHIL
Many places of retreat were “created” over centuries back by royal families and then the British settlers during the colonial rule in the country and have today become extremely popular hill stations. They attract hordes of tourists from different parts of India and even the world. But what is most intriguing is that these places were homes to diverse communities with diverse cultures that speak out through their food, clothing, craft, language and even the way they constructed their shelters. All of this is intricately linked to the habitats they live in, and continues to be till date.

Historically, the western Himalayan ecosystems have been and continue to be extremely popular. The imagery of the old church, the mall road, theatres and pine walks of Shimla are as charming today as before. The burgeoning of construction might have spread into the nearby forests and bothered the ecologically sensitive mindframe, but the popularity of Shimla does not seem to reduce. Its not the summer but even the winter that attracts people. The news of the first snowfall draws crowds from near and far to see how bit by bit the white snowflakes take over the landscape. What equally
The charms people in this stretch of mountains in the state of Himachal Pradesh are places like Kullu valley, Manali, Dalhousie, Dharamsala (and McLeodganj).

However, what Himachal offers are some quieter and lesser explored terrains. These are ecologically fragile and often frequented by people who are happy to be away from urban facilities. The experiences range from slow walks into the clouds and mist in the Solang or Tirthan valleys. Or strenuous but extremely stimulating hikes into the alpine forests of the Great Himalayan National Park (GHNP). In fact GHNP is a must if one is happy in wilder hill domains, which can be approached from the popular hill stations like Kullu. And if the agenda is to tuck one away from urban sounds then the multicultural town of McLeodganj has to be kept waiting for the walk upto the clouds of Triund.

Moving eastward to the state of Uttarakhand, where the Garhwal Himalayas have popular hill stations like Mussourie once known as the Queen of the Hills. There are also those surrounding the lake formations like Nainital (tal means lake), Bhimtal or Naukuchiyatal which over the years have been filled up by many people from Delhi and other urban areas establishing their second homes. The

The Nubra valley, Ladakh (below). Pahalgam (left above) and Shikaras in the Dal Lake (left below) in Jammu & Kashmir.
language and culture of the Garhwal Himalayas is very different from that of Himachal Pradesh, and so are the food systems. Garhwal is historically known to have over 200 varieties of Rajma (kidney beans), some of which can be got only by living in a Garhwali home. But if one is interested in a great drive into a wildlife circle, then move from Almora to a place called Binsar. The Corbett-Binsar-Nainital loop is known to be extremely rich in wildlife (including the tiger), with Binsar having the history of being once a summer capital of the Chand Rajas of the region.

Uttarakhand also has the Kumaon region, distinct yet again. Pithoragarh and Munsiari are places to look out for, though these hill areas are not the best connected by road or any other form of transport. Munsiari gives one great sights of the Panchachuli peaks and is also a gateway to a Milam glacier.

While the western Himalayas are often much more into tourism, it is the eastern Himalayas in the north east which offer the most spectacular and unique spots. The state of Sikkim is most known, with Gangtok as the capital attracting many visitors as it is a base to visit many Buddhist monastries, mountain passes and lakes. But before you get there, the hill areas of West Bengal are a desirable detour. Darjeeling and Kalimpong though crowding up, have there alleys and gullies that continue to be charming routes to the tea gardens.

However, a place to get to in Sikkim is Yuksam located in the far western corner of the state. It is an important base camp for trekkers tracing the path to the Mt. Kanchengjunga. In fact, Yuksam was the first capital of Sikkim and where according to the historical records, the first Chogyal of the Kingdom of Sikkim was enthroned in 1641 AD by the three learned lamas.
In the more recent years, it is the trans-Himalayan areas of Ladakh that have had visitors. The mountains here are stark, happily bereft of tree cover, as that’s what the habitat is: above the tree line. As a result mystical lakes like Pangong So or Tso Moriri are towered around with mountains in various hues of brown, blue or purple. Leh, the base town has lots to offer if one is to peek into the culture of the area, with the brilliance and architectural marvel of monasteries like Alchi. But this hill station has till date retained its purpose of not falling in to the trap of becoming a metropolis in the hills. Homestays and small guest houses are still very popular, along with organised treks into Nubra, Zanskar, Hemis and other places.

It is not that the hill stations in India have only been nestled in the Himalayan belt. The forests and grasslands of the rainforests in the Western Ghats are not just a world renowned biodiversity hotspot but also very appealing hill getaways. The Blue Mountains of the Nilghris (Tamil Nadu) which is a tea growing area in Southern India is one such place. It has steep hills, huge waterfalls and beautiful scenery, intertwined within the tea gardens. And if its coffee that you’re looking for then it is Madikeri in Coorg, Karnataka, the land of the Kodava community. The hill climbs of this area stand out from any other place one is familiar with in the southern part of the country, with the language, dressing and fun culture heartening to explore. Coorgi jewellery also has an appeal that many people get attracted to.

In Maharashtra, the hill stations that are extremely popular weekend getaways are Mahabaleshwar-Panchgani, with the strawberries being a big attraction. Mahabaleshwar is the highest hill station located in the Western Ghats. With one of the few evergreen forests left in the state, it had once been the summer capital of Bombay Province during the British Rule. Tucked away in Satara District, just 19 km east of Mahabaleshwar is Panchgani also amongst the most frequented hill resorts.

Surely, all the small and big, popular and unexplored hill stations of India cannot be subsumed in this short essay. But they are there, for us to find our calling. Be it the heaven on earth in Kashmir valley or the winding roads of Kodaikanal. They reach out with their beautiful presence and demand a natural respect. It is for us to realise that it is only for our sake that we save and not destroy these fascinating, social, environmental and cultural landscapes.

The writer is a social and environmental activist who has been working on environment issues.
Hyderabad

OLD TALES FROM A LIVING CITY

Text & photographs: RAMCHANDER PENTUKER

The area around the famous Charminar constitutes the heart of the historic city of Hyderabad. This part of the city encompasses reminiscences of the past reflected in popular Hyderabadi eateries, ornaments and attar.

The Old City – the historical core – the three square miles of original Hyderabad around the majestic Charminar, from which the city grew outwards, is a treasure trove of sights, smells, traditions and tastes. If you are planning to visit the city, I suggest, you go on a walking tour of this ancient part if for nothing else but to get a better view of the place.

The majestic Charminar (left) and Salarjung Museum (below).
Most of the tourists usually move out in a hurry after a visit to Charminar and other nearby monuments. In their rush for time, what they often fail to notice is beyond the amazing monuments. There are a lot more other intriguing features that lie hidden, unseen to all but the local eyes, in the labyrinth of lanes and bylanes near Charminar. Recently, having decided to move beyond the role of the curious tourist, I went on a day’s self-guided walking tour through some of the Old City’s bustling ancient bazaars and alleys, which usually tourists choose not to wander into (reason: they are always over-crowded). My journey took me through some old buildings, crowded cafes, workshops, palaces and traditions, which continue to breathe life into the centuries old history and culture of this place. Standing tall and firm like a solid rock right in the middle of the chaotic stream of traffic, Charminar is an amazing structure, dwarfing everything else around it. The ancient clock on the Charminar shows 8 o’clock. The businesses are yet to open. But the Farasha Cafe right in the shadow of the minarets where I sit sipping my morning Chai (cup of tea), is already crowded with the ‘Chai-holics’. There is no buzz, except the occasional gong of the bells from the Hindu temple under the Charminar. Farasha is one of the oldest eating joints in the Old City that serves the best Irani-Chai. Hyderabad is as famous for its Irani Chai as for its Biryani (rice and meat dish cooked with traditional spices). The muezzin’s call blares out from the nearby Mecca Masjid. I walk into its sprawling courtyard. The Old City has a sizeable number of Muslims. There are dozens of mosques, but people give immense importance to Mecca Masjid. They believe that by offering prayers at this mosque one gets the same spiritual benefits as from the pilgrimage to Ka’ba at Mecca. The Old City is a gourmet’s paradise. Some of the eateries here are landmarks by
themselves. The Pista House on Shah-ali-Banda road, for example, is an excellent spot for some lip-smacking burgers and Haleem (a dish prepared with meat, wheat and spices). For Biryani which the average Hyderabadi gorges on daily without batting an eyelid, Hotel Shadab and Madina are excellent spots, not very far from the Charminar. Dining at Farasha in the backdrop of Charminar during Ramzan is an experience in itself.

Some people say that the Qutub Shahis built a secret subterranean tunnel connecting Golconda Fort with the Charminar and that it was used by the Sultan to meet his lover Bhagamati. While the romance of this story is still left to our imagination, almost every time a new foundation is dug in the areas around the Charminar, workmen regularly unearth bits of colourful bangles and beads which adorned some unknown beauty a thousand years ago. It is no wonder, because the area sits on its ancient tradition of the bangle industry.

The Old City’s venerable street, Lad Bazaar is home to traditional Hyderabadi bangles. This place has maintained its original character, image and ambience for over 400 years now. Quaint shop fronts with time-worn wooden-shuttered upper stories line the street. Its architecture and
glitz of commodities like bangles, bridal trousseau, handicrafts and bric-a-brac of woman’s finery, which are sold here are the biggest attractions of this bazaar. Look here for some Nawabi collection of antiques and local handicrafts, they are worth taking home as mementos.

A short walk from Lad Bazaar leads you to the famous palace of the Nizam, known as Khilwat, or Chowmahalla Palace, now restored fully for public viewing. This palace gives one an insight into the extravagance of a bygone era.

And before you call it a day, try out some local non-synthetic attar (perfumes) of the Old City. The attar sellers, “Shah Perfumes and Gems” near Machli-Kaman, attract passersby with their mysterious looking bottles of heavy perfumes. The shop owner, Syed Abdul Khader claims that he has a rare collection of attars, which include the costliest varieties namely, Ambar and Armani – each priced around Rs. 2000 per 10 gram. “Even a small daub on your wrist reeks for hours”, he says, proudly.

The last stop is at Gulzar House, the famous shopping zone where one can buy the best Hyderabad pearls and gold jewellery.

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Two major Indian economic sectors – agriculture and industry – have been witnessing the introduction of a new set of technologies from bio-resources. The developments in the area of biotechnology are particularly of great interest. This frontier technology has assumed importance in a developing country like India where agriculture, with stagnating productivity and crops confronting many biotic and abiotic stresses, aims for higher growth.

The introduction of biotechnology in a major way has brought about widespread changes in India’s agricultural and industrial sectors. The shift can be characterised as a move from chemistry driven development to biology-based development with a clear focus on biotechnology and genomics. The recently published draft National Biotechnology Development Strategy (NBDS) 2007 has outlined the importance being attached to the development of the biopharmaceutical sector. India recognized the importance of biotechnology for national development in areas such as health, agriculture etc. way back in the early eighties. The Sixth Five Year Plan (1980-85) was the first policy document to accentuate biotechnology development in the country. The plan document emphasized upon strengthening and developing capabilities in the areas of immunology, genetics, communicable diseases etc. In 1982, the Department of Science and Technology (DST) established the National Biotechnology Board (NBTB), for promoting biotechnology and to facilitate coordination at the apex level. The NBTB was replaced by the Department of Biotechnology in 1986, under the aegis of the Ministry of Science and Technology. DBT launched several measures to promote institutional and policy development in India.

While the DBT was given dual responsibility of promotion and regulation, there were several other agencies which supplemented DBT’s endeavour in different ways. They included Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), apart from many other educational institutions like UGC, etc.

The Government of India’s outlays for biotechnology education over the past decade have expanded in a major way. The rapid expansion of biotechnology industry in India, across various sectors, narrates the saga of spectacular achievements of Indian economy. The industry accounts for 1.5% of the $ 100 billion global biotechnology market. It is estimated that India would have a share of 10% by 2020.

The biotechnology sector in India is largely dominated by firms from biopharmaceutical sector and those from bioservices. The biopharmaceutical sector has on an average generated 60% of its revenue from exports while bioservices got almost one-fifth through exports. According to a bio-industry survey the investments both in R&D and infrastructure in the biotech industry have grown at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 29% in the last five years and touched almost US $ 500 million in 2006-07. The employment in the sector across major clusters is around 20,000 scientists. The total number of firms in 2007 were around 450 out of which biopharma has 142 firms followed by the bioservices sector (74 firms). The survey projects India to have over 400 companies by 2010 with employment around for 50,000 scientists.

Agriculture biotechnology in India is a fast growing industry that offers a wide range of opportunities and is likely to contribute towards economic development in a major way. However, there are several concerns often expressed by the NGOs and the civil society organisations about the potential irreversible impacts and scientific uncertainties associated with the technology. These diametrically opposite views pose several challenges in the formulation of policies towards biotechnology products and related governance.

The idea of setting up of a National Biotechnology Regulatory Authority (NBRA), as per the Swaminathan Committee Report, for coordinating efforts to ensure faster and responsible diffusion of biotechnology products is going around. It is now being discussed in India, that since different Ministries have different mandates to fulfil, such an agency may help in regulating the transboundary movement or bulk shipment in a far more effective manner. An effective national biosafety institution is crucial considering the fact that the safety, equity and related issues have emerged.
as key concerns at the current deliberations in the country.

In this context, India's experience with Bt seeds has been quite interesting. The new technology seeds of Bt cotton were formally released in India in 2002. Over the years, 274 Bt cotton hybrids have been approved which are being marketed by 30 private sector seed companies. Cotton covers 9.5 million hectares in 2008 cultivated by 6.2 million farmers with an average per hectare yield of 1.5. Production and yield gains are tremendous since the introduction of Bt cotton in 2002-03 which have seen a major jump without any substantive expansion in the area under cultivation.

The extra production of cotton with new seeds could readily find a major market for exports. The domestic consumption of cotton in India is around 20-24 million bales. However, with enhanced production of cotton, the total quantum of imports has consistently gone down. With Bt cotton India has achieved a major break through in technology application for reducing import dependence and enhancing the quality of fibre for export and domestic consumption.

In India, biotechnology policy in general and biopharma policy in particular is largely addressed by different government agencies. The Indian biopharmaceutical market is valued at around $1.05 billion and is growing at nearly 32%. In addition, public allocations for medical biotechnology have increased by 69% in the time period 2001-02 to 2005-06 and this may transform the innovative ability of the generics producing Indian drug industry enabling companies to move up the value chain.

These initiatives have paved the way for introduction of new products in the country. The huge number of patients and specialised knowledge has attracted a large number of clinical research organisations to India. It is estimated that by 2010 the CRO industry in India would be of Rs. 50000 million with 50,000 clinical research professionals and 400 clinical trials involving 100,000 patients and 300 sites.

It is becoming increasingly important to bring dynamism in the functioning of the science and technology system at the national level. The increasing role of knowledge in agricultural and industrial production, and the growing challenge of balancing that with the growing concerns for environment management, require judicious application of new technologies. While the existence of a strong physical infrastructure is necessary for the development of an effective S&T system, the critical factors remain the institutional set-up that supports this system and the cohesion between the overall developmental objectives and the R&D endeavours in different streams. In this context, one idea that emerges forcefully is the development and competence of public sector R&D institutions in the realm of frontier technologies.

In this light, it is also important to have accurate information and reliable statistical data about developments in this sector as that can only provide right feedback for desired policy formulations. With the rapid expansion of industrial base, India may require development of evidence based policy formulation process for effectively responding to growing production chains across agriculture and industry with the help of new technologies.

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Corbett
IN THE NATURE OF THINGS
BITTU SAHGAL

India’s oldest forest reserve has remained an unsolved enigma for most of the environmentalists and nature lovers as it has always surprised many with a large reserve of fauna and flora around.

I watched, through my binoculars, from the top of the Dhikala watchtower as the tiger set up its ambush. A sounder of eight wild pigs was rooting its way across the Ramganga grassland far below me, towards the cat that lay hidden behind tall grass some 200 metres from them. As the pigs began to angle slightly away from the cat in loose formation, towards a sliver of the Ramganga river, the cat belly-crouched through the grass to correct the trajectory. And then lay in wait for the pigs. Minutes passed as we watched this drama from our vantage point. At 15 metres, the cat exploded into action, grabbed one of the pigs by its haunches, rolled over once, squealing pig and all… only to lose the animal.

Watching the cat sit, perfectly poised, paws together, staring
at the backs of the now distant pigs, I thanked the Earth for allowing me to witness yet another one of its never-ending stories. The pig lived to eat another day. The cat to hunt again.

A national heritage: Over the past three decades, I have visited both Corbett and the nearby Rajaji National Park several times. Between them, these two exquisite parks hold India’s northwestern-most population of tigers, and one of the world’s most significant populations of Asian elephants. There are also enough adult Gharials (crocodile) in the Ramganga river to categorise Corbett as one of the world’s most crucial in situ Gharial breeding sites. But such immense conservation values convey only one aspect of Corbett – its biodiversity. In truth, forests such as these are the fount of virtually all of India’s art, culture, music, dance, religions and philosophies, which were inspired by nature.

Corbett is exceedingly special. It makes you feel grateful to be alive. The park exudes an indescribable vitality, with or without the kind of drama we witnessed on the main road. Sighting a tiger, leopard, elephant or bear in Corbett would pump as much adrenaline into my system as it would for first-time wildlifers. But the real joy, the real purpose of visiting Corbett, is to walk on the same soil and breathe the same air as nature’s living works of art.

Like so many others, my love affair with these forests and hills began long before I ever set foot in Kumaon or Garhwal through the gripping tales of Edward James Corbett. By the time I was 16, I had read every book Corbett had ever written, and I was more familiar with Kaladhungi, Nainital, the Bangajhala valley, Powalgarh, Rudraprayag, Mokameh, Champawat, Mohan and Kanda than the backstreets of Kolkata where I grew up.

Corbett is ‘mega-fauna’ country. The park is larger than life and so are its dominant animals. The waters of the Ramganga and Kosi, after being ‘treated’ by the forests of the Corbett Tiger Reserve, flow downstream to slake the thirst of millions, irrigate farms and meet the needs of industries. Every single species of plant and animal in the reserve, works to enhance the quality of this water in one way or another, through a magical, complicated system that scientists can only guess at, but do not fully comprehend. Those who understand this also know that before the evolution of modern humans, the land that we now call the Corbett National Park was part of a fully-functional ecosystem. In other words, it was the animals and plants that ‘manufactured’ and cared for this exquisite harmony, this ‘conspiracy’ for life that humans are losing respect and appreciation for so fast.

Trumpet calls: Sitting on the parapet wall of the Old Forest Rest House, I counted 84 elephants in all. They had probably been there all night, feeding and resting in a vast sea of grass, secure in the knowledge that they were safe from harm. Calves gamboled about without a care in the world, closely supervised by adult members of the herd.
Not a single one was ever left unattended. Elephants are social animals. The species survival depends on the zealous protection of the young, whether their own or belonging to others. Herds are invariably led by an experienced matriarch and DNA tests on Asian elephants confirm that blood relationships determine herd relationships. Adult cows that are sisters maintain life-long bonds, as do mothers and daughters. Bull elephants lead solitary lives, but will associate with the larger herds when invited in by cows in oestrus. I saw several sub-adult males in the group play-jousting, locking young ivory – to test their strength for the greater battles ahead. It was as peaceable a sight as I had ever witnessed in the forest. If we in India can find the space to allow the largest land mammals on Earth to live the way they were meant to – free to roam long distances, free from danger, free from human disturbance – we might even save ourselves.

Corbett is one of the most important Asian elephant-breeding habitats in the world. There are more elephants in the Brahmagiri, Nilgiris and Eastern Ghats belt (around 6,000 animals), than in the north of India (under 1,000), but ivory poachers are considerably more active in the south where herd ratios can be as low as one male to 60 or 70 females. In Corbett, the ratio is around one male to two or three females.

The Corbett inheritance: It was here in Corbett that Project Tiger was launched on April 1, 1973. Mrs Indira Gandhi had entrusted this task to Dr Karan Singh, one of India’s most eloquent spokespersons for nature. Today, estimates conducted by the Wildlife Institute of India suggests that the largest density of tigers anywhere in the world is to be found in Corbett and its immediate surroundings, but the value of the forests is greater than that. Apart from preserving biodiversity and clean water supplies, Corbett also locks up huge quantities of carbon within the biomass of its trees and under its soils. If this carbon were released into the atmosphere through deforestation, whether by timber felling, mining, or dam building, the problem of global warming would be exacerbated. Forest laws that prevent Corbett from being exploited to death are also, in fact, laws that help us fight climate change.

The cheapest, most efficient way to remove carbon from the atmosphere, while also helping to protect biodiversity is to encourage functioning ecosystems such as those found in the Corbett Tiger Reserve to expand outwards to colonise adjoining wastelands with natural vegetation. In an era of climate change, as the world grapples with floods, droughts, cyclones and food famines, the tiger holds out hope for humans. From forests such as this flows life itself. In the crucible of India’s civilisation are the attitudes that could save humanity from its self-inflicted Armageddon. Mahatma Gandhi’s reverence for life was not merely an emotional appeal to humans to protect “other” life forms. It was a strategy without which the future of Homo sapiens would be in question. This is the learning that India hopes to ‘export’ to the rest of the world in the decades to come and the fact that wildernesses like Corbett – with the densest tiger population in the world – exist in a country which probably harbours one of the densest human populations in the world, speaks volumes for the lessons passed down to us by our ancestors, which we should pass undiluted, down to our children.
Birla Institute of Technology and Science, Pilani

Dr. Ishwara Bhat

Birla Institute of Technology and Science, Pilani (popularly known as BITS Pilani) in Rajasthan is a premier institute in the area of Science and Technology, Management and Pharmacy. This privately funded, fully residential institute also has campuses in Hyderabad, Goa and Dubai.

The Institute started as a small Pathasala (school) in Pilani way back in 1901. The Pathasala evolved slowly and steadily into a High School in 1925 and became an Intermediate college in 1929. The Intermediate College developed into a Degree College in 1945 which was raised to postgraduate level in 1947. In 1950, Pharmacy courses were started in this college, and in 1952, it was bifurcated into College of Arts and the College of Science, Commerce and Pharmacy. In 1946, an engineering college was started. In 1964, all these colleges were amalgamated into a university and it was named Birla Institute of Technology and Science. During the early years of its inception, i.e. 1964 to 1970, the Institute with the support of Ford Foundation had the advantage of collaboration with Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), USA. As a result of this collaboration, the Institute introduced the semester system, internal and continuous evaluation, and structured industry partnership programs in the form of Practice School. New campuses were added in Dubai (2000), Goa (2004) and Hyderabad (2006). All the campuses have modern buildings, hostels, residential quarters for staff with neatly laid out roads, lawns and gardens.

Admission to the Pilani, Goa and Hyderabad campuses is based on a common online entrance test called, BITSAT, whereas admission to the Dubai campus is based on marks obtained in the Class XII examinations conducted by Central/State Boards.

Programs offered at the BITS Pilani campus are:

**Integrated First Degree Programs**
- B.E (Hons) (Chemical, Civil, Computer Science, Electrical and Electronics, Electronics and Instrumentation, Mechanical, Manufacturing Engineering)
- B. Pharm (Hons)
- M.Sc. (Hons) (Biol. Science, Chemistry, Economics, Mathematics, Physics)
- M.Sc (Tech) (Finance, General Studies and Information Systems)

**Higher Degree Programs**
- M.E. (Biotechnology, Chemical, Civil, Mechanical, Communication Engineering, Computer Science, Design Engineering, Electrical...
The doctoral programmes at BITS Pilani are designed for candidates having higher degrees of BITS or its equivalence. The structure of the doctoral programme includes thesis and seminar as an integral part, study of foreign language (if necessary). Course work may vary depending upon the input and prior preparation. A special scheme known as Ph.D. Aspirants’ Scheme is available for working professionals as well.

**Flexibilities, Dual Degrees and Transfer option:** BITS Pilani offers a number of flexibilities in taking additional courses and electives outside one’s study area. Dual degrees are possible. The dual degree programmes combining Science and Engineering take 5 years to complete. There is also the option to transfer from one program to another, and also to a Higher Degree/Ph.D. Usually applications for dual degree and transfers are accepted at the end of the first year. Transfer to a more sought after degree is possible in the case of meritorious students.

**Practice School Programme:** The Practice School Programme of BITS takes all its students to the industry for seven and a half months as an integral component of the academic curriculum. The aim of this programme is to involve students in problem-solving activities of direct interest and relevance to the organizations and orient students to the professional world. The Practice School programme has been widely appreciated. Practice School I is a summer internship undertaken for two months at the end of second year. About 1400 students undergo Practice School I every summer. Practice School II is the final year internship undertaken for five and a half months. About 1550 students undergo Practice School II in every semester along with faculty members of BITS. There are about 140 Practice School stations in various parts of the country and some are located even abroad.

**Off Campus Work Integrated Learning Programs:** The Institute participates in the human resource development activities of the industries by evolving several degree programs by integrating the working environment of the employees with the learning environment required by the Institute. Programs offered include First Level Diploma in Computer Applications, B.S., M.Sc. (Tech), M.S., M.Phil in various disciplines.

**Accreditation:** BITS Pilani has been accredited by National Assessment and Accreditation Council, with a CGPA of 3.71 out of 4 with an A grade. This is the combined grading of three campuses of BITS Pilani at Pilani, Dubai and Goa.

**Reputation and rankings:** In their ranking surveys of the top engineering colleges of the country in 2009, *India Today* and *Outlook* (news magazines), placed BITS at 7th and 6th position respectively.

**Research:** There are over 70 major research projects running in the institute and these are funded by UGC, CSIR, DST, ICMR, DRDO, ICAR, ICMR etc. The institute publishes the journal, *CURIE* (Journal of Cooperation among University, Research and Industrial Enterprises).

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Bali, the word causes excitement. Somehow it sounds like a western originated word, though it is essentially Indonesian. I think the whole issue is about the novelty and natural beauty of a place, which I discovered when I landed at Denpasar, as a member of an important delegation.

As a child I had heard a lot about Java and Sumatra, the main islands of Indonesia. The very word has an India connection. “Indos” means Indian and “nesos” means islands. The first thing to strike me on arrival was the value of the currency. It is the mighty Rupiah that runs in millions in Indonesia.

The next impression was India. It is spread out there everywhere, in everything – statues from the epic Ramayana at road intersections; greetings of Namaste; temples; the folk performance of Ramayana; wood craft; the confusion of shops coming right up the street and the unevenness of order. The reason was not far to find.

Indian traders brought in Indian culture and religion in the 1st century A.D. In the 7th century A.D. the Buddhist kingdom of Srivijaya in South Sumatra was epitomized in the building of the Borobudur Buddhist sanctuary. In the 13th century A.D. East Java saw the emergence of a Hindu empire of Majapahit, which lasted two centuries uniting Indonesia and parts of the Malay peninsula. The Indian
Government is helping to restore Prambanan Temple near Yogyakarta – to keep the tradition alive! Islam came in the 16th century, again with traders and today is the majority religion.

A break took me to Kuta Beach, which along with Jembaran, is a favourite spot for tourists. Crowded, confused, scared by the memory of the bomb blasts of 2005, the place still buzzes like a bee. A while later I saw the most stunning examples of woodcraft. Most of them celebrate the Jatayu bird’s sacrifice as it tried to protect Sita from being captured by King Ravana in the epic Ramayana. Hindu influence on art! Then the Rama-Sita couple, and many other Ramayana scenes were captured on wood.

The next evening I travelled almost an hour from Nusa Dua and reached a restaurant complex called Laka Leke, situated amidst the rice fields. Everybody sits here in spacious pavilions and witnesses the Kecak and Fire Dance. The venue is illuminated by flickering oil lamps. When the Queen enters on her palanquin, bare-chested men raise their hands and bow their heads in a welcome. Kecak is actually the Balinese version of the Sita captivity episode from the Ramayana. The half-naked men enact the monkeys saying ‘cak-cak-cak’ and circling around Sita.
capital Denpasar has many community temples exactly like India. The Pura Jagatnatha, for example, is dedicated to god Sang Hyang Vidi Wasa. The Taman Ayun temple in Mengwi, sits on a tableland. All temples have a turtle and two dragons in stone signifying the foundation of the world. The Balinese dress and dance at festival times – Galungan and Nyepi festivals are the main ones and are religion-based. The harvest thanksgiving festival is Makepung and held in August at Jembaran. The islands most famous sea-temple is Tanah Lot, where rituals are conducted and offerings given to the guardian spirits of the sea.

The simplicity of Bali’s music is another refreshing memory. A man sat making music out of slit bamboo which were arranged in do-re-me fashion face-up and as he struck them lightly there arose the music of the forests. There is another one, made again of slit bamboo and this is held in the hand and shaken to release musical notes – Angklun it is called.

I carried our Angklun back home and whenever I think of Bali, I just go and shake it to drown in the memories and ambience of Bali!

The author is a senior bureaucrat and travel writer.


Sri Ganesha, the elephant God of prosperity and success revered by the Hindus.
For the first time in the chequered 80-year sporting history, India’s bid (India beat Canada 46-22) and preparations for the prestigious 2010 (16-disciplines) Commonwealth Games (October 3-14, 2010) is absolutely timely and appropriate: both potentially and physically. This is great going, according to renowned international sports officials.

Since the start of the new millennium, there is a kind of awakening for sports in the country’s government and non-government sectors. Corporates are willing to invest in sports and support sportspersons. Some industrialists, non-resident Indians (NRIs) and Indians have already started sponsoring talented and promising stars. This is a healthy development and one that augurs well.

The bar in certain disciplines, particularly in shooting, weight-lifting, wrestling, boxing, badminton and tennis, has been sufficiently raised to help stars win laurels in international competitions. This sudden rise in sporting standards and culture has caused widespread surprise worldwide. India is now on the march trying to adhere to the Olympic slogan of ‘Faster, Higher and Stronger’.

In the last Commonwealth Games in Melbourne (Australia) in 2006, India shocked all, including its ardent admirers, by winning 22 gold medals, 19 silver and 11 bronze (total 42 medals). In its backyard with enthusiastic support from keenly-poised spectators, there is a wave of optimism that Indians will secure no less than 50 medals.

Delhi is decking up to stage the 2010 Commonwealth Games. Indian sportspersons and enthusiasts too are not far behind. Everyone is gearing up for the show of shows.
Asia is on the march and its performers are effectively rubbing shoulders with the best of the west. Three Asian countries have already held the summer Olympic Games. Tokyo (Japan) was first in 1964, Seoul (Korea) was second in 1988 and Beijing (China) was third in 2008.

All six 1982 Asian Games-created stadia – the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium, the National Stadium (Dhyan Chand), the Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium, the Talkatora Indoor Stadium, the Cycling Velodrome and the Karni Singh Shooting Ranges – are being modernized with ultra-modern gadgets. In fact, the infrastructure is being revamped and some new stadia are being added.

The Games Village, modern and spacious in every sense, is being constructed so that ‘rooms and apartments with unusual and sophisticated surroundings will be more eye-pleasing. Chefs are vying with each other to announce that they will provide such ‘delicious dishes’ that occupants will refuse to vacate the rooms. New Delhi looks newer with the Metro, the overbridges, flyovers and subways providing the needed shine.

For most renovated and new stadia, the work is progressing, according to schedule. Despite some glitches, all the facilities will glitter on the eve of the Games. All participants, officials, spectators, will be heard saying: “Ever dreamt, never hoped, such bliss would be ours!”

The Olympic and Commonwealth Games officials are optimistic that India’s mascot the Tiger will roar to make the Games a big success.

*The writer is a veteran sports journalist.*
Thrissur Pooram held in the Malayam month of Medom (April-May) brings alive the tiny township of Thrissur with Goddesses mounted on caparisoned elephants accompanied by grand ensembles of Chendamelam or drum beating.

A festive gathering in the temple courtyard with caparisoned elephants (left) and colourful umbrellas (below).
Thrissur city situated 55 kms from Kochi in the center of Kerala state is also the cultural capital. The tiny township comes alive, throbbing with gaiety and festivity, when it plays host to the annual festival Thrissur Pooram (literally meaning a festive celebration). There is no match for its visual splendour, the grand assembly of caparisoned elephants and spellbinding ensembles of percussion instruments. One cannot find a festive gathering and celebration on such a scale anywhere else.

The name Thrissur is derived from ‘Thiru-Shiva-Perur’, which means “The city of Lord Shiva”. It has a large number of well known temples like Thiruvambadi temple, Vadakkunnathan temple and Paramekkavu temple and two churches. The temple of Vadakkunnathan is situated at the center of Thrissur city. It is Lord Shiva or Vadakkunnathan who presides over the Thrissur festival, providing it with its vast arena, though the Lord himself has no role in the whole affair. The two Goddesses from the nearby Thiruvambadi and Paramekkavu temples play the major roles in the Pooram, and the festive occasion is used to celebrate the annual meeting of the two Goddesses at Vadakkunnathan temple.

The Thrissur Pooram celebrated in the Malayalam month of Medam (April- May) is a grand assembly of deities from various villages and towns in and around Thrissur. These deities make their annual visit to the Vadakkunnathan temple on caparisoned elephants accompanied by grand ensembles of chendamelam (drum beating) and panchavadyam (a sophisticated musical art form consisting of five different instruments). The performers are highly respected and usually a huge crowd gathers to watch and listen to the performance.

The two major participants at the Pooram, are the Goddesses from Thiruvambadi and Paramakkavu temples. The movements of these Goddesses mounted on elephants are majestic affairs that punctuate the festive tempo of this festival. Each year these temples vie with each other in all areas of the Pooram including display of umbrellas atop the elephants and fireworks. The celebrations continue non-stop for 36 hours until the final fireworks and the Pooram by day the next morning after which all deities make their way back to their home grounds.

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The author is a noted photojournalist and writer.

Photographs depict deities and other rituals performed during the Pooram festival.
Beauty of the Divine

Text & Photographs: BENOY K BEHL

In Indian philosophy, our experience of beauty when we respond to a sunrise or to a great work of art is seen to be a moment when we perceive the Grace which underlies the whole of creation. In that moment, the veils of illusion of the material world are lifted and we see beyond...

An artist presents the world around him, shaped by how he sees it: by his perceptions and beliefs. The early art of India is a valuable record of the vision of one of the most ancient civilizations in the world. What makes it most fascinating is that this is a culture which continues till today.

The art of ancient India brings before us a vision of great compassion. It is a view of the world which sees a harmony in the whole of creation. It sees the same which is in each of us, perceived and brought to us by our senses. This information provided by our senses is of a personal and not an objective nature. Absorbed in this, we are blinded to the reality beyond. The primary illusion is the perception of ourselves as individual entities, which leads us on a path of egoic existence. On this path, we are distilled from the truth.

The high purpose in life is to seek reintegration with the One, to perceive ourselves as part of the beauty of the One, the divine. To see oneself as a part of the divinity of existence. And thereby to lose the pain of a life caught in the web of endless desires.

The aesthetic experience is considered to be of great value in Indian thought. It lifts the veils of illusion which hide the truth from our eyes. Our experience of beauty when we respond to a sunrise or to a great work of art is seen to be a moment when we perceive the Grace which underlies the whole of creation. In that moment, the veils of illusion of the material nature of the world are lifted and we see beyond...

In that instant it is not our material preoccupations which fill our consciousness and thereby blind us to the greater reality.

The moment of the aesthetic experience is stated in Indian thought to be “akin to Brahmaandha”, or the final ecstasy of salvation itself. Therefore art has played a

Yakshi, Railings of Bharhut stupa. Early Indian art abounds in images of the abundance and fertility of nature. The woman and the tree against which she stands both represent the bounteous, regenerative qualities of the natural world. (Collection: Indian Museum, Kolkata).
Riders on elephants, pillar capitals, Karle chaitya grha. Wonderful figures, full of the ease and natural grace of life, are seen on the pillar capitals of the chaitya grha. They are warm and uninhibited. Men and women are seen with their arms freely around one another. It may be noted that women express themselves easily as freely as men in the art of the ancient times in India (above).

Joyous devotees, Panigiri, 1st century AD. Recent excavations of the Department of Archaeology, Andhra Pradesh Government, have unearthed well-preserved exquisite reliefs on stupa railings and pillars of the 1st century AD. There is a sophisticated sense of design and the figures are full of activity. They convey the joy and flourishing culture of the Krishna Valley in that period (right).

Mahishasuramardini, Bhunara, Madhya Pradesh, 5th century. The buffalo demon represents the evil of the ignorance, which is the impediment on our path towards the Truth. Durga, who represents the force and vigor within us, slays this demon. The majesty and stillness upon her face, even while she vanquishes the buffalo, are remarkable. Collection: National Museum, Allahabad.

Joyous devotion, Panigiri, 1st century AD. For the Indian sculptor, the grace of divinity is everywhere. The stone before him contains the image of the Divine and it is for him to but remove the outward aspects and to release that form which is within. It is not only a personal joy of discovery and creation, it is also one of sharing the beauty inherent in the world with others.

The creation of art in India has been a process of meditation: a process of a life spent in worship and discovery. The creation of the beauty of form is for the sculptor, a joyous rediscovery each time of the glory and beauty which is divine.

The creation of art in India has been a process of meditation: a process of a life spent in worship and discovery. The creation of the beauty of form is for the sculptor, a joyous rediscovery each time of the glory and beauty which is divine.

The sculpture of India is naturalistic in a vastly different way from the art which attempts to portray only the transitory shapes of the objects of the world. Here naturalism is the expression of that sense which moves beneath the surface of objects, that inner being of the trees, animals and people: the spirit which moves the whole of creation.

As the ego and belief in one’s identity is considered to be an illusion of our limited sensibilities, the focus was never on the individual. For about a thousand years in early times, vast quantities of art were produced in India. This depicted deities, mythical creatures, animals, plants, trees,
forms which combined these beings in a great harmony, and also common men and women. Yet this art never depicted the kings who patronized the art. Nor was the name of the artist mentioned. According to the ancient treatise on art-making, the Chitrasutra, personalities are too unimportant to be depicted in art. The purpose of art is a noble one, to show the eternal beyond the ephemeral. Thus, works of art were meant to convey the Truth as experienced yet again by the artist. No thinker or artist claimed that it was solely him who had seen the Truth. Each teacher of the ancient period in India states that he only follows in the footsteps of others who went before him. The emphasis was on the loss of the ego and not the perpetuation of it. And art was a prime vehicle of the communication of these ideas. Images from the material life are very often used in the art. The achievement of knowledge...
is likened to a victory. We see images of deities trampling the demons of ignorance. However the demons smile as they are vanquished. In this world, perception of the material world is not denied. The interchanging perceptions in our minds and senses of the ephemeral and the eternal, is described as a ‘lila’, a dynamic play. In the search of the truth, the experience of this ‘lila’ cannot be avoided and there is no attempt to deny this reality.

One of the greatest contributions of this philosophic stream is that there are no contradictions seen between the spiritual and the world of the senses. This philosophy does not seek to deny our response to the beauty we perceive in the world, including the human forms around us. In fact, it sees this beauty as a reflection of the glory of the divine. The beauty of the human form, which is constantly before us in life, is not presented in a manner which would awaken base desire and pull us down with its burden. This art sees the grace in all human and other forms as an aid to awaken a joyous understanding within us. It seeks to elevate us through our aesthetic response. There is evidence everywhere in Indian monuments of a great cosmopolitan culture from earliest times. Influences of art from everywhere were received warmly and some of them continued in the main flow of art through the centuries. Artistic styles, motifs and iconography spread swiftly in early times to all corners of the country. Therefore we find that there were pan-Indian themes and artistic styles since ancient times. Regional variations and colour add further richness to these traditions. What survives today of the early art of India is only a
small fraction of what would have been created. Yet it consists of such vast numbers of monuments and sculptures that it staggers the mind. The corpus is gigantic and spread to every corner of the Indian subcontinent.

The story of art is the story of humankind: of man’s perceptions and thoughts. From the early river valley civilization onwards we see the foundations of the art of one of the oldest civilizations. We see a vision of the world and the roots of a culture which has survived more than 5000 years till today. It is a culture based upon the belief of an underlying unity of the whole of creation. Joyous surrender to the natural order, rather than assertion and control over forces around us, mark the vision of life and the art of ancient India.

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The author is a renowned art historian, film-maker and photographer.

The Five Rathas, Mamallapuram, mid to late 7th century. These five temples, misnamed rathas or chariots, depict the various forms, which the south Indian temple structure had taken by then. These are cut out of huge boulders, in imitation of structural temples. There would have been many structures of these shapes made out of wood and other ephemeral materials, which have not survived. The numerous kinds of temples seen here, along with rock-cut relief and caves, give a fairy-tale like quality to this fascinating town of divine structures (left).
The icon of Nataraja depicting the cosmic dance of Shiva is quite popular with the connoisseurs of art and lovers of dance the world over. The divine progenitor of dance, Nataraja has fascinated and captivated the Indian mind down the centuries. Indian art and culture is replete with references to various forms of dance performed and perfected by Nataraja—the creative originator of dancing.

There are many shrines and temples dedicated to Nataraja in the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu. The most venerated among the Nataraja temples is the magnificent shrine at Chidambaram where Shiva is known to have performed Ananda Tandava or the dance of Bliss. Located at a distance of 200 kms. from Chennai, the Nataraja temple also called Kanaka Sabha (golden hall of dance) is intertwined with the country’s art, culture and architecture and the very foundation of the Hindu spiritual tradition.

Chidambaram is foremost among the five holy abodes of dancing Shiva in Tamil Nadu. Here in the ancient shrine of Nataraja, Shiva denotes the element of Akasa (Ether) while the four other places are Kancheepuram as earth, Thiruvanaikoli as water, Thiruvannamalai as fire and Kalabasti as wind. In the Hindu spiritual tradition, these five vital elements referred to as Pancha Mahabhutas, constitute the bedrock of life.

The Nataraja shrine at Chidambaram being the most honoured is referred to as Ponnambalam, meaning golden temple and Kanakasabha, meaning the golden dancing hall. Behind the image of Nataraja, separated from it by a veil is Akasa Linga—the celebrated secret of Chidambaram. The abode of Akasa Linga is called Chitsabha. The Kanakasabha is the frontal complement to the Chitsabha. It is a small porch built on the same stone basement with a wooden door.
The Nritya Sabha or the hall of Dance is a most aesthetically designed artistic structure. This edifice known to have been built by Kulothunga Chola is a graceful hall with 56 pillars decorated with figures representing various moods and manifestations of Lord Nataraja. Indeed Chidambaram temple has a central place in the art of dance with the presiding deity Nataraja meaning the King of performers, standing as symbol of the art of dance.

The esoteric significance of Nataraja is pregnant with great spiritual meanings – the drum in the right hand of Nataraja symbolises that he is the savior and protector of the world. The skin wrapped round his waist signifies the annihilation of Aham (ego). The right leg trampling the malignant dwarf implies the destruction of evil. In ancient times Chidambaram was known by different names such as Tillai Ponnambalam, Vyagrapuram and Chitambaram. Tradition has it that it was the son of Madhyandina Rishi, who found a self manifested Shivalinga under a banyan tree in the forest of Tillai and prayed to god, seeking a boon of tigers feet and claws to climb
up trees and pluck flowers for worship even before bees could taste their honey. His prayer was granted and he became Vyagrapada meaning one endowed with tigers’ feet.

There is another fascinating legend as to how Shiva performed his first ever dance at Chidambaram. The three eyed Shiva who represents the principle of destruction in the Hindu trinity once wanted to teach a fitting lesson to the sages at Darukavanam who had become arrogant on account of their knowledge. Assuming the form of a beggar and accompanied by Vishnu disguised as Mohini, Shiva went to Darukavanam. The wives of the sages were enamored of the beauty of the divine couple which enraged the Rishies (Sages). In a fit of jealousy they tried to destroy the pair. They raised a sacrificial fire from which emanated a tiger which pounced on Shiva. But Shiva peeled off the skin of the tiger
and wrapped it around his waist. Then the sage set against Shiva an Apsarakara Prapita or malignant dwarf. Shiva killed him effortlessly. At this the sages confessed defeat. Thus began the enthralling majestic cosmic dance of Shiva which all the Gods and Rishies witnessed to the full content of their hearts.

Meanwhile Adisesha, the serpent couch of Vishnu who heard the vivid description of Shiva’s dance from Vishnu desired to witness the dance and prayed to Shiva to allow him to see the dance. Shiva then told him he would perform the dance before him at Tillai. Adisesha was born as Patanjali and went to the forest at Tillai where he was joined by Vyagrapada. Both of them began to worship Shiva and when the time came for Shiva to perform the dance before his devotees, the guardian deity of the place Bhadra Kali, would not allow him. Thereupon they entered into an agreement, according to which both Shiva and Kali should participate in the dance contest and the winner would get the right of the place. Accordingly Shiva performed Ananda Tandava (dance of bliss) before his devotees and defeated Kali to take possession of Tillai.

The magnificent Meenakshi, Sundareswara temple at Madurai has a shrine of Nataraja that occupies a position next only to Chidambaram temple. This shrine is called Rajatha Sabha (Silver Hall). Here the idol of Nataraja is seen standing on his right foot while in all the other four halls he is shown standing on his left foot.

In the Shiva shrine at Kutralam Nataraja is known to have performed his vibrant Tripura Tandava dance in the celebrated Chitsabha. At the Kailasanatha temple at Mahabalipuram near Madras one can see a myriad range of dancing forms as performed by Nataraja. It is a sculptural tribute to the cosmic dance of Shiva.
Known as the “Jewel of India”; Manipur, in the north-east of India, is a valley of traditions and cultural patterns best represented by its classical dance form – Manipuri. The history of Manipuri revolves around myths and legends, which are very often represented through its art and culture. The dance

Manipur
THE CLASSICAL DANCE FORM

Text: D. BANERJEE
Photographs: DEEPAK MUDGAL

Originating from Manipur, often referred to as the jewel of India, the Manipuri dance form contains myth and traditions and has a unique style of its own.
style of Manipuri has gained a place of honour and distinction among the classical dance styles in India for its delicacy, grade and subtle nuances of mood.

According to the legend, once Lord Shiva and Devi Parvati visited the earth. Roaming through the countries, they came upon Krishna and Radha while dancing. Deeply impressed by the movements, Parvati wanted to dance with Shiva in the same manner. The Lord created a place for them and they enjoyed dancing there for days and nights. Following their footsteps, the ritualistic dance is composed by people ever since. The legend also incorporates the story of princess Thoibi and her beloved Khamba. They were believed to be reincarnations of Shiva and Parvati for their undying love for each other.

Beauty, softness and profound religious belief are the main themes of this dance form. The
whole style is based on simple and tender movements.

It is the special feature of Manipuri, that even a few complex movements are performed with spontaneous simplicity. According to some, it is basically a folk dance. Though it is very difficult to distinguish folk art from the classical art, a few gestures of Manipuri gives a notion of folk art yet the style and composition demands to be classical in nature.

Lai-Haroba – the most important among the dance dramas, is a traditional stylized dance for appeasing gods and goddesses. It depicts the story of man, birth, youth, marriage, arts and learning. Performed during the Spring, Lai-Haroba contains both nritta (the rhythmic movement of body in dance) and abhinaya (the dramatic element of the performance) to portray the love story of Khamba and Thoibi and their tragic end.

The classical dance style of Manipuri will remain incomplete without the mention of Ras-nritiya. The activities of the mythological figures, Lord Krishna along with his beloved Radha is reenacted through it. Ras-nritiya depicts the separation and reunion of Radha and Krishna in an enchanting romantic style.

The costumes of Manipuri dance are extremely gay and very different in appearance. The slow swaying rhythm makes Manipuri a distinctly Lasya dance form. It will not be an exaggeration to say that the state of Manipur has gained a special recognition for its classical dance form.

The author is a freelance writer.
Bengal has a rich heritage of folk-art and folk culture which is the product of the innovative resourcefulness of her people. They developed different arts and crafts at different stages in history both for recreation and as a means of making a living. One of the outstanding forms of traditional folk art is the scroll painting or “Patta-Chitra” which emerged and flourished all over Bengal in the late medieval period and continues its existence even today. Its survival has been helped by its wonderful capacity for assimilation of past tradition and modern changes in tastes and fashions.

Scroll-painting is more a craft than an art, for, the people engaged in it since its inception made use of it as their principal vocation. In the past the scroll-painters variously called ‘Patidars’, ‘Patikars’, or ‘Patuyas’, lived in clusters in different localities, mostly rural, and formed guilds of their own to protect their interests and help one another in every possible way. This art form or craft having received popular patronage in those days, the ‘Patidar’ community was able to carry on its existence but it never was an affluent community. In order to enlist a larger patronage, the patidars move from door to door showing their picture to the accompaniment of narrative songs or ballads explaining the themes depicted in the pictures. The verses were either composed by themselves or collected from folk singers as an attempt to impress the people. The paintings were also sold to lovers of arts. As a means of augmentation of their income the ‘Patidar’ also made clay models and terra-cotta dolls. Today scroll painting has lost its pristine glory
Bengal. The puranic gods and goddesses like Siva, Chandi, Manasa appeared again and again in their pictures. Scenes from the Ramayana, Savitri-Satyavana episodes from the Mahabharata, Behula-Lakhindara episode of Manasa-Mangala and the Kamale Kamini vision of the Chandi-Mangala were very common subjects of painting with the ‘Patidars’. In modern times they have changed their outlook to some extent and used important historical events and cult-figures to cater to modern tastes or to exploit modern sentiments. Episodes from India’s struggle for freedom have a prominent place in the modern scroll-paintings. This is clear proof of the ability and flexibility of the painters to move with the times. The Kalighat patas also mark a modern development in this field.

The styles of the painters varied from place to place and group to group. Generally, however, they were fond of depicting heavy monumental figures of the deities with rich ornamentation in bright deep colours with a view to making an immediate and abiding impact on minds of the simple rural people or exploiting their religious sentiments. The Kalighat variety of Patachitras also use this old style with brush outlines and broad modeling, showing its distinctiveness. Most modern painters, however, employ less ornate styles and use light water colours for the sake of serenity and sobriety reflecting an awareness to live up to the changed modern tastes. Another style of pata-painting is current in Vishnupur, which appears to be more lyrical than picturesque, the figures being drawn for iconic effect. For instance, a scroll depicts the Goddess of learning seated on a throne in a lotus pond with sky above her head sketched in shades of appropriate colour. A disc or halo has been used to heighten the grace of the goddess.

The scroll generally consists of a piece of cloth 12x2’ in size with a piece of paper of equal size pasted on one side. Two sticks are attached at two ends of the scroll to facilitate smooth and quick folding and unfolding. Sometimes durable paper scrolls are also used as in the case of Kalighat patas.

A noteworthy fact about the patidars is that they transcend all religions and barriers. Most of them have both Hindu and Muslim names and are usually found to observe Muslim rites and offer prayers at mosques. But they make use of Hindu gods and goddesses and the stories of Hindu mythologies for their art. They also follow Hindu marriage rites. Many of them have Hindu names by which they are commonly known. Thus, they offer a unique example of religious and communal harmony for which they have an easy access to both Hindu and Muslim communities. This intermingling of Hindu and Muslim cultures is, of course, a familiar feature in many parts of rural India.

Scroll painting is a notable contribution of the indigenous talent of Bengal and forms an integral part of the Bengal culture. It has not only popularized the stories of the Indian mythologies in Bengal, but has served to generate among its people a sense of oneness with the rest of India as well. The pata-art has great charm and grandeur, besides a flavour of creative imagination. It has tremendously enriched Indian folk-culture. The skill displayed by the painters is simply astonishing. It speaks volumes for their innate gifts... to preserve a valuable tradition of folk art that has enriched Indian culture and kept up the spirit and vision of India’s bygone glories.

The author is a noted journalist.
Maheshwar
HERITAGE AND HANDLOOMS

RICHARD HOLKAR

Maheshwar’s handloom tradition exudes a touch of genius. In fact, the small town is busy reviving the centuries-old handweaving art.

The Maheshwari textile is the descendant of one of India’s oldest handwoven textile traditions, dating back around 1500 years. The valley of the Narmada river, in central India, has been growing cotton since the early years of the Christian era, and Kautilya, India’s great economic and social historian, spoke of the cotton fabric woven of Maheshwar during the 7th Century AD.

We have no record of Maheshwari textiles for the past 1000 years or so, but in 1760, the famous Indian queen Ahilyabai Holkar, who ruled in Maheshwar, encouraged the local weavers. Maheshwari saris and turban cloths became famous throughout Western India, and weavers prospered under the patronage of the royal house of Holkars. The gift of a Maheshwari sari was the sign of friendship and respect, and these fine fabrics found their way into most of the noble and wealthy families of central and western India. The tradition of gifting Maheshwari saris was to continue till shortly after the end of Royal India. As royal patronage disappeared, the weavers of Maheshwar fell upon bad times. They began to leave their homes on the banks of the sacred Narmada, looking for work in Bombay and Gujarat.

In 1978, Shivaji Rao Holkar, descendant of the Queen who ruled in Maheshwar, along with his American wife Sally, started a project to revive the famous sari tradition of Maheshwar. Old saris were unearthed from family dowry trunks, and orders were given to the weavers to recreate these treasures. Some six months later, an exhibition of these textiles was held in New Delhi, to much public
acclaim. Within the next six months, the Holkars established a foundation, Rehwa Society, with four objectives.

• Re-establish the Maheshwari textile as one of India’s finest;
• Create for the Maheshwari textile, an all-India market which would ensure that all Maheshwari who wished to weave would find a good demand for their production;
• Empower Maheshwari women weavers by giving them employment and an income which would improve their families’ lives; and,
• Provide education and healthcare for the weavers and their families.

Over the next 20 years, the foundation, Rehwa Society, grew to employ 130 weavers, and provide sustenance for more than 500 people. The textile of Maheshwar achieved an even greater renown than it enjoyed in Ahilyabai’s time. Through international funding as well as revenues earned from sale of the fabric, Rehwa was able to build houses for the weavers, create a school for their children and provide free medical services to them and their families.

For the last five years, the range of textiles has grown. While retaining the traditional geometric patterns and fine quality cloth, Maheshwar’s weavers are now producing shawls, scarves, beach wraps, draperies and chemises. The range of fabric goes from pure cotton, to cotton mixed with silk, silk/wool combinations and pure silk.

India is Maheshwar’s primary market. Yet there is a growing demand for such fine quality hand-woven textiles from specialty designers abroad. Young Indian textile designers are also looking at this skilled weaving centre where they might develop new fabrics.

Purchasing a fine hand made Rehwa textile contributes to all areas of Maheshwari living: employment for the women, schooling and health care for them and their families, and continuing research into the development of this fine fabric.

◆ The author is a scion of the royal family of Indore and Maheshwar and well known for promoting traditional art of weaving in Maheshwar.
Theatre’s Own Magic

UTPAL K BANERJEE

Modern Indian theatre, like its counterparts elsewhere in the world, is changing to encompass a whole gamut of texts ranging from the verbal to the musical, as was witnessed in the recent Mahindra Theatre Festival where 10 plays of the 200 entries from across India vied for attention.

Theatre has always held its own magic with spectators. As a live art form, it establishes direct communion with the audience and, unlike other arts like music, dance, mime, painting, sculpture and the like, can be quite composite, imbuing all the individual genres. In the process, its main vehicle is the spoken word provided by the playwright. When Hamlet ponders, with a skull in hand: To be or not to be…, the viewer is bemused.

Or, as Macbeth utters the anguished cry: Out, out, the brief candle…, it casts a spell on the entire auditorium. But the director can, and does, put his embellishment, as Peter Hall situated A Midsummer Night’s Dream in a circus arena and a strong visual text took over the medium. Then there is the Wild Duck by Ibsen – next only to Shakespeare in importance – where ‘symbols’ are organic and the actual animal can be loved or hated, or A Doll’s House that is an ‘image’ which reflects the suggestive meaning of his play but cannot be used in action. By the end of 19th century, modern theatre embraced both in its symbolic text. Finally, there emerged movement text, drawing from the choreographed action on stage and musical text: created in response to spoken words and actors’ movements.

In a modern play, all these texts – verbal, visual, symbolic, movement and musical – may play their relative roles and frequently interleave with each other, providing fascinating vignettes. But how crucial are their overlaps or individual manifestations, and how pivotal are they to the central theme? An opportunity occurred when a large cross-section came together in the recent Mahindra Theatre Festival in a fiercely competitive...
Over 200 plays video-based entries were submitted from all four corners of India, in the regional language-category from Marathi to Manipuri to Malayalam, from Gujarati to Garo, besides the enthusiastic crop in Hindi, Urdu, Bengali and English. Reputed directors of the land entered the fray, including Habib Tanvir, M.S. Sathyu, Shyamanand Jalan, Kirti Jain, Devendra Raj Ankur, Rajat Kapoor, Anup Hazarika, Sohag Sen, Goutam Halder, and a whole host of others: even dance-dramas and puppet-theatres were there as entries. After a litmus test — for quality, virtuosity, contemporaneity and other factors — ten were selected and showcased. What did one find at the end?

The gloriously time-honoured verbal text — constructed from the dialogue of the original script — was still supreme, with a veneering of symbolic text for some. *Madhyabartini* (the Middle Woman), an Assamese play under Baharul Islam as director, is a classic Tagore story about a childless man being egged on by the anxious wife to marry again for procreation purposes. When the new bride arrives, she claims all and leaves nothing to others. After her inadvertent death, her invisible presence still lurks between the man and his wife. Action built around the ramshackle bed in the mid-stage, surmounted by the daily knick-knacks, construes symbolic text, bordering on naturalism.

*Shakkar Ke Panch Daane* (Five Grains of Sugar), a Hindi play under Manav Kaul, creates five familiar characters through a powerful monologue and suddenly makes sense out of the most commonplace situations. ‘Otherwise, who would have imagined that one could address the imagery of lowly ants and extract riveting dramas by playing around simple sugar grains and thereupon deliver a lyrical flow of language: seldom heard after Badal Sircar? It is a triumph of symbolic text.

*Layla Majnun*, an Urdu play under Ram Gopal Bajaj, draws a delicate balance among verbal text in lyrical Urdu about a celebrated love-theme of two young people: hemmed in by unkind people, inhospitable locales and cruel nomadic customs; visual text...
of the rugged Middle East of 7th century: with brilliant period-costumes; and musical text with recitations of the chorus and an evocative Indo-Arabic music. The mortal Layla is forgotten and transcends, as Allah, into Majnun’s heart: in the fullness of love and light.

Ayussinte Pushtakam (the Book of Life), a Malayalam play under Suveeran, etches another balance between verbal text of Biblical parables that are used to de-construct the oppressive mechanisms of religious orthodoxy and symbolic text of life’s whirlpool drawing villagers into its vortex. The hush-hush incestuous rape by the granddad on the unsuspecting girl builds into a complex web of finally seeking redemption.

Aao Sathi Sapna Dekhe (Let’s Dream, Friends) demigrates verbal text further down into a narrative by Sutradhar (story-teller) of boy-meets-girl kind. The Hindi play, under Swanand Kirkire, uses everything – singing, gestures, sounds, words, screams, light and darkness – to re-discover the most naked manifestations of human emotions. Says the director, “An emotional intimacy and a collective nostalgia are what one achieves by creating an energetic lively theatre where laughter and pain, song and dance, cries and whispers are all whipped up on stage in their purest visceral form”.

The Absent Lover, an English play under Preti Vasudevan, also relegates verbal text to the wandering story-teller who invites the viewers into a mysterious forest glade, ~ invoking the magical wood-sprites to reveal the ancient story of love from the pods of a magical tree, Like Aao Sathi…, it re-creates the Urvashi-Pururava episode from Kalidasa’s Vikram Urvashiyam, where the heavenly nymph has left the mortal Pururava and the latter searches, as if in a dream, through magic-forest for his beloved, leading to bizarre encounters. His ordeal becomes a metaphor, a burning crucible of self-examination. Through pain and desires, he journeys towards redemption.

Hamlet – The Clown Prince (adjudged ‘Best Play’), under Rajat Kapoor, sends the Shakespearean text tumbling down into the realms of chaos! It is about a score of clowns, trying to put up a show of Hamlet somewhere – mixing and misinterpreting the English text, dovetailing new meaning into it, beginning to understand it and most often making a mess of it – in that order. The play has a powerful visual text – with multi-coloured charlatans romping around and generally creating mayhem – and an intense movement text with myriad patterns and multiple planes. Strangely enough, they eventually master the art of stumbling upon the truth and discover their own sanity.
All About Women, an English play under Hidaayat Sami, is ‘of the women, by the women and for the women’. It is a totally symbolic text – using verbal text only as a surrogate tool – with a lacerating cross-examination of the feminine psyche: life and love (seldom found); suffering and torture (often willfully inflicted); seduction and sex (professedly uninhibited), and, on the whole, unabashed exhibitionism, leading to some surprising self-discovery.

The remaining two plays are where verbal text has been virtually banished, yielding to the other four texts: visual, movement, musical and symbolic. Afsaneh – Bai Se

Bioscope Tak (Tales from Courtesans to Celluloid), a Hindi play under Akarsh Khurana, is a face-to-face encounter between two faded divas from the bygone era, who recount and provide rejoinders on their abiding popularity as singers and dancers in the halcyon days. Their interfaces are lit up by skilled Kathak danseuses and a musical narrative built by a hugely talented singer at both popular and classical levels. Dances, blended with spoken words, provide a riveting visual treat.

Kalivesham (Impersonation of Kali), a Malayalam play under Kavalam Narayana Panikkar, is an out-and-out movement text – solidly based on vintage Kathakali – interspersed with Sopanam music and visual text crafted on a nearly bare stage. The verbal allusions are from an interpretative extension of the Puranic theme of Nala Gharitam, which focuses on the life-experience of a chaste actor, known for his role as the evil Kali. In an almost Faustian sense of possession of soul by Mephistopheles, here is a tussle between the invisible Kali and the Brahmin-dancer whose caste prescribes a strictly religious life and who is yet destined to don the role of a wicked character. The sublime art of transformation in theatre provides symbolic text per excellence.

◆

The author has written extensively on Indian art and culture and was awarded the Padma Shri in 2008.
A recent book on A. R. Rahman, India’s only Oscar winning musician shatters a lot of myths about the man.

A. R. Rahman – The Musical Storm by Kamini Mathai, published by Penguin Books is neither a conventional nor an official biography but a well-researched mélange. It is a herculean effort on the part of Kamini Mathai to put together a flawless narrative with insights from the maestro’s producers, directors, musicians, friends, himself – but not many foes. The gradual unfolding story of an enigmatic phenomenon who “never spoke and hardly smiled; who lost his father and his faith at the age of nine; who had to work day and night to support his family.” The book is like a film script of sorts told in a flashback and takes us back to “Mundakanni Anuman Koil street where it all started” in the house of R.S. Sekhar, a musician. The child Dileep who began to mystify everyone with his natural flair for music was not an ordinary child. He was a musical prodigy, “the musical storm” who would one day be hailed as “Mozart of the East.” There is an apt description of Rahman’s studio which is like a railway platform where people wait endlessly for his darshan. There are stories and stories about this waiting, some hilarious, some painful. “Everybody has a ‘waiting for Rahman’ story...”

She then recounts a yarn from lyricist Javed Akhtar which excels in irony in terms of waiting. Flautist Naveen is, perhaps, the only one who has learnt to counter the patience game. She also recounts how “Subhash Ghai once came down from Mumbai for two days to meet Rahman. The only person in Chennai he didn’t get to meet during that trip, which lasted two weeks, was Rahman.”

“It is a surreal world inside A. R. Rahman’s studio. Work begins in the evenings and ends in the mornings. Midnight sees the height of activity.” There are other peculiarities like the studio is sprayed with incense, the home and studio smell of attar” and “it’s almost as if Rahman is trying as hard as possible to live his life as close to the life of the Prophet.”

“From a one-man composer named Dileep, A. R. Rahman has now grown into a full-fledged industry.” In his own words: “It is not that I am not on a spiritual path right now and that I will pack up my music and leave. I will be here as long as I am needed.”

Subhash Ghai, one of the most successful mainstream Hindi film makers, sums up the Rahman phenomenon: “From rags to riches, from scrap to success, from ordinary to extraordinary, A. R. Rahman is the right story to be known, read, written, to be studied and finally to be followed.” And Kamini Mathai has succeeded in lyrically weaving together a journey that started “with a dot but ends with a star.”

◆

The author has produced and directed documentaries and mini-television serials and has written extensively on Indian cinema.
Guru Nanak Dev, the founder of the Sikh religion, accompanied by his disciples was on his preaching rounds somewhere in the Terai area of present day state of Uttar Pradesh. Tired after a hot day in the sun, the Guru and his disciples sat down under a reetha tree. After some rest, one of his disciples asked for food. The Guru told him to pluck a fruit from the tree and eat it. Hesitant at first because the reetha fruit is not sweet, Bhai Mardana the disciple tasted the fruit. Strangely, the reetha fruits were sweet on the side where the Guru was sitting and sour on the other side. The fruits had become sweet due to the miraculous touch of the Guru. Today, the place is venerated by the followers of Sikh religion who have raised a shrine named Gurdwara Ritha Sahib at the spot which is located near Loha Ghat in eastern Uttar Pradesh.

Reetha
BITTER SWEET Magical FRUIT

K.L. NOATAY

With unique and indigenous medicinal qualities, the fruits of the Reetha tree have been used by the people of the country from time immemorial to wash woollens, shampoo hair and even treat various maladies.

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Reetha is a unique and indigenous medicinal tree. Better known as soap-nut tree, it has various names: dodani or dodan or doda in local Indian dialects. Scientifically, it is known as Sapindus mukorossi. The dried reetha fruit is the most valuable part of the plant. Its fleshy portion contains ‘saponin’, which produces lather and is used as an alternative to washing soap. In fact, in villages, the skin of this fruit is used as a natural home product to wash hair and woollen clothes.

The fruit also has medicinal values. It is used in many ayurvedic medicines for the treatment of colds, facial pimplies, irregularity in salivation, chlorosis, epilepsy, constipation, nausea, etc. While it is also used as an expectorant and enthelmintic in small doses, it is utilized commonly to fight dandruff and keep hair tangle-free.

Reetha is one of the very important trees of tropical and sub-tropical regions of the Indian subcontinent. It is widely cultivated in the upper reaches of the Indo-Gangetic plains, Shivaliks and Sub-Himalayan tracts. The reetha tree is quite common in northern India and present in the Shivaliks and outer Himalayas of Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir.

The species flourishes well in areas with an annual rainfall of about 150 to 200 cm. Propagation wise reetha seeds germinate easily. However, for ensuring cent per cent germination, the seeds are soaked in lukewarm water for 24 hours and then sown, either directly in already prepared pits or sown in polythene bags filled with clayey loam soil mixed with farmyard manure or similarly prepared nursery beds. While the trees flower between May and June, the fruit appears in July-August and ripens by November-December. The fruit is collected during winter months for seed and sold in the market as soap-nut.

As far as its parts are concerned, the bole (main trunk) of reetha is straight and cylindrical. Its bark is fairly smooth. Its wood, light yellow in colour, is close-grained, quite compact and rather hard and is utilized for modest rural building construction, oil and sugar presses, agricultural implements, etc. The tree can reach an overall height of 20 to 25 m in nearly 60-80 years of its existence.

Considering its benefits, the Forest Departments with the efforts of the Central and State Governments, raise sufficient stock of the seedlings of this plant, amongst other useful species, to meet the requirement of land owners, village bodies or individual farmers.

◆ The author is a freelance writer specialising in the agriculture sector.
“I love exploring other people’s minds and worlds. When I am not walking, I am reading. When I am walking, I am listening to radio,” says Varsha Mitra.

“I can not survive a day without books and of course radio,” says Sanobar.

These two young ladies of Delhi University’s young and restless brigade are not the exceptions as unlike old AM Radio of yore, its new FM avatar (version) is patronised more by young people. Youngsters like Varsha and Sanobar want a disconnect with the immediate profanities of their surroundings and at the same time maintain a connect with a pleasing world of their own which has irreverent laughter, incessant young chatter and trendy music.

Headphone-wearing, mobile-wielding, getting talky-chirpy with RJs, songs full time... the new “avatar” (version) of radio is getting popular among youngsters thereby providing laughter, chat-chat and trendy music.

Two thousand kilometers away at Dindigul’s, ‘Pasumai FM’ (The People’s FM), is empowering the illiterate migrant labourers. No TV can provide the personalised connect to young Kanan as ‘Pasumai FM’ does with liberal sprinkling of tribal music and in his own dialect and idiom. On the other end of the spectrum is Harbinder Singh, an IT professional and connoisseur of music, who gets his daily fill of classical music and soft melodious ghazals from niche Satellite radio.

Great music, great content, great time and great connect – the hallmark of new resurgent radio. Be it Talk radio, niche Music radio, Web radio, Satellite radio or Community radio, new radio is a medium which is on the move.

Mobile telephone revolution and car radio has dramatically transformed the audience profile. Now radio is a must-have and trendy in-thing. Its popularity is evident from the fact that no mobile set can become successful unless it provides surround quality FM connect to the technologically demanding clients.

July 6, 1999, is an important date in the history of Indian broadcasting when the Government announced that it would allow private players to run FM Radio stations across the country with near total control. This indeed was a turning point which further added variety to the FM bouquet.

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Simran is one radio veteran who has seen it and done it all. The love of radio took her to launching Radio Mirchi, one of the first private FM stations, as Programming Head, and then making Red FM, a force to reckon with as Creative Head and then becoming one of the most popular breakfast show RJs of today.

Simran believes that opening up of regulations in 2009, especially by way of multiple frequency ownership and a more liberal offering of news and current affairs on radio in phase III, will encourage radio operators to set up niche and differentiated product offerings. Pervaiz Alam, the London-based broadcaster from the BBC, has got some words of caution for the current FM programming. He says, “Indian FM needs substance. What’s the FM scene in India at the moment? It’s songs, songs and songs, interspersed with teenage-minded chat. Doing programmes for a certain age group is fine but to treat all segments of audiences as just one single entity is a blunder. I strongly believe it’s time for the FM market to grow up.”

AIR’s FM Gold is more in the mould of what Harbinder and Pervaiz Alam want. It is a station that promises to relieve listener frustration over narrow playlists and “same old melodies” and attempts to break down some of the rigid categories that more visible

Talk radio format is also on the move in India. Many stations are successfully using this interactive format. On Talk radio, a host becomes a friend, a mentor and a confidante. So, it calls for great skills to be catty and sarcastic and yet to be warm to the listeners.

Anil Kapoor, Irfan, Jaishri Sethi and others rely more on the magic spell of individualistic expression than technology. For them words are the best playlist. With the upsurge of interactive talk shows these words also belong to listeners now. And here lies the USP of radio: live-on-the-boil programming and unparalleled listener participation, which no TV can match.

Jaishri Sethi vividly remembers her Jaipur days when after her Dubai sojourn, she tried serving the city something new. Her Radio City started a show called City Of Joy where they played spiritual music. To start with the station used to play bhajans from films and later played trance, fusion and maestros of world music like Prem Joshua and others. Jaipuris could not stomach this. They protested and said, “We will protest… Why don’t you play the bhajans sung at Jaipur’s famous Khatu Shyam Jee temple instead of this loud jarring music?”

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FM stations have built up. This channel provides an intoxicating mix of the golden era of Hindi film music with some intellectual stimulus. RJ Irfan calls these numbers “forgotten tracks of our intangible heritage which you can't hear on any other channel.”

AIR still happens to be the mainstay of Indian broadcasting with its mammoth 315 stations. It is estimated, that till 2010 India is likely to have more than 500 radio stations and in the next five years, it may cross 1000 mark. On the other hand, community radio is a harbinger of silent social change and empowerment and will usher in a new and changed world.

Most radio experts point out that in developed (and in developing) countries, the size of the market and the share of ad spend has grown with the increase in the number of stations. But according to Simran what is more important, and this is something no amount of media calculation can ever do justice to, is the fact that because of the personal connect and one-on-one interaction, radio is able to build permanent connect with its listeners.

Pervaiz Alam, who is currently heading a BBC drama project in Delhi, will be producing more than 150 radio plays for a leading FM network of India. He reiterates what Upal said. “In the absence of news and current affairs, the FM programmers haven’t got many options. But, I’m sure, the moment New Delhi allows private FM operators to carry their own programmes of news, features, sports and business affairs, this same FM would sound so meaningful and relevant,” says Alam.

Sanobar who is always on the move either in the Metro or on her Scooty, says, “I do not like watching TV much as it is ‘chewing gum for the eyes’… radio I can’t live without.” Her friend Varsha Mitra too cannot live without radio, which she prefers to call ‘Ear Candy’. The question is when will Ear Candy become “Mind Candy?”

The writer is a radio veteran and has headed the dramatic division of All India Radio. He is also a National Award winning playwright and has won two awards for his radio documentary dramas.

India and the Wine Era

MAGANDEEP SINGH

Wines have had a chequered history in India. Under wraps for a long time, wines have found their place on Indian tables and today, vineyards from Mabarashtra produce some well-known varieties.

For long wine has broached the Indian subcontinent without quite entirely penetrating it. I guess you can say the best landings are the slowest. Wine has settled well into the Indian scenario.

While wine may have finally made its presence felt in India, it still has ground to cover on the Indian dining scene. The main reason lies in the ambiguity of the term ‘Indian cuisine’ itself. It is not one generic product but a term that denotes almost a dozen different cuisines, without accounting for micro-cuisines which deviate...
and branch off from the main cooking styles.

Then, to compound the problem, Indian food isn’t exactly had in courses. The presence of spices also makes pairing difficult. With so much happening, little surprise then that many proposed sweet syrupy wines as the best accompaniments to Indian food. But after much experimentation and research, it has been established that for Indians (and others) who don’t find Indian spiciness too daunting, pairing is not just a probability but a distinct possibility. Grüner Veltliner from Austria is one very successful grape as also is Viognier from France and recently, from Australia. In reds, soft fruity wines are more preferable. Barbera from Italy, Pinot Noir from France and New Zealand work well with curries whereas the big boisterous reds like the Cabernets and Shirazes are best with the rich meaty kebabs or with tandoor-cooked preparations.

Winemaking in India is definitely catching on for commercial and agricultural reasons, but not without passion. Rajiv Samant, the man behind Sula, one of India’s most recognised brands, came back from Silicon Valley to handle the family orchard in the Nashik Valley. The pioneers of the Indian winemaking industry, the Chowgules and the Grovers, both were families imbued with a vision to see India as a leading wine producer in this part of the world. Several other names that come to my mind are all reflective of this same heady mix of the entrepreneur with the artist.

But a lot of work is to be done, a lot of ground to be covered if Indian wine is to become more recognised on the world scene. For the time being, we make wine that can at best be described as free of flaws but without a sense of the land where it comes from. If I were to draw a parallel, it needs to model itself on our tea and coffee industry. One sip of a good Darjeeling can almost transport the person to the estate where the leaf was plucked. Such a deep-rooted understanding of our local “terroir” would be the key to help make quality wines. With technical enhancements, experience and foreign collaboration, winemakers are fast getting their act together. The Riesling by Sula that I tasted upon release was definitely a good sip. Grover’s has consistently won accolades for their red wines while Indage manages a great sparkling wine that sells well from the UK shelves.

Most of the winemaking would seem confined to the Nashik belt in the state of Maharashtra. Personally, the region reminds me of Napa, long flat rolling planes with high temperatures. The cooler climes of the Nandi hills in the state of Karnataka are another vine-suited area. Himachal and Uttaranchal in the North too, are starting off their wine wizardry and this is where I would bet my personal modest money. The cool climes of the North are more akin to the continental European climate that benefits grapes the most. The only problem that remains is then to follow the cycle of cultivation of the southern hemisphere as the monsoon in India is timed such that if we were to plant and harvest as in France in September, the crop would be watered and diluted, if not entirely washed away with the rains.

Another thing that has of late become quite the rage is wine tourism. While wineries are still small and “boutique-ish”, they well understand this alternate source of revenue and marketing and are investing in it. From a modest guest house to elaborate manicured setups, they are not holding back on the fantasy of a walk in the vineyards to sell the experience and, of course, the brand.

Wine, then, is not just a passing phenomenon in India. It is fast winning over Indian hearts and setting them aflutter for a sip more.

◆

The writer is India’s first French-certified sommelier who divides his time conducting wine workshops, wine trainings, wine events and also writes for various newspapers and magazines. He also hosts a popular TV food show on international cuisines.
Hyderabad, by virtue of its unique geographical location and topography, abounds in wonderful rock formations. They are not only amazing but awe-inspiring making them, in fact, one of the most striking features of the land.

People visiting some highland areas of Hyderabad, like the Banjara Hills and
Jubilee Hills, for example, are immediately struck by many beautiful balancing boulders perched on low granite ridges, rocky knobs and rounded hills. Some boulders stand so precariously balanced that it seems as if they will topple over any moment even with the slightest gust of wind. Up close, they loom ominously overhead. But there is absolutely no such danger.

One of nature's infinite wonders, these rocks have remained balanced for ages. They appear as if some giants have been playing marbles, or have idly piled rocks, one on top of another. Many of them were formed where they stand, long time ago—thousands of millions of years ago, much before there were men or even dinosaurs on earth.

Unfortunately, man's needs have spelled doom for these delicately balanced boulders.

The author is a noted lensman.