

# BIRADARI



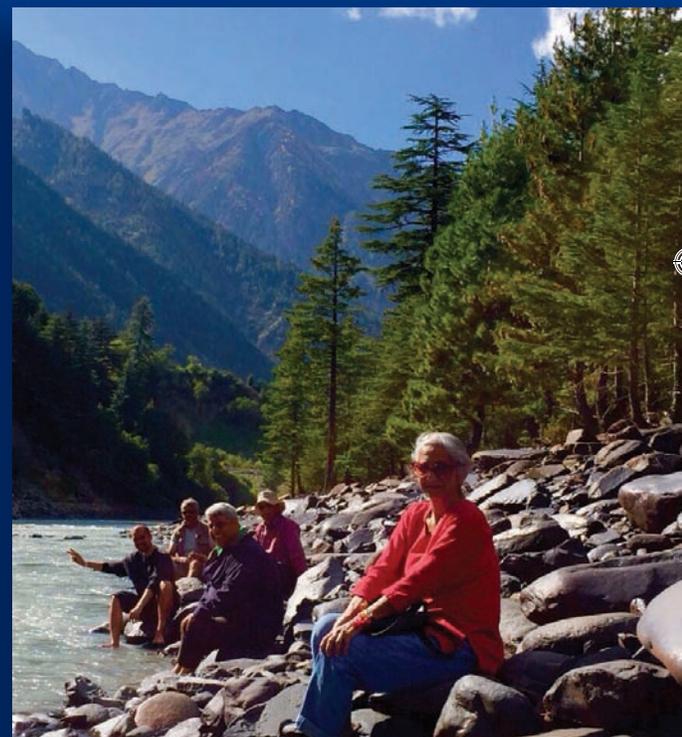
Issue: A Six-monthly Newsletter

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| DECEMBER 2017

## THE SUPER SEVEN IN LAHAUL-SPITI

**A KPA Adventure**



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Spotlighting a Kashmiri Artist  
Achievers, Movers, Shakers  
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## FROM THE DESK OF THE EDITOR EMERITUS

It has been an eventful year for the Association with the fast-changing environment in the Valley. Kashmiri Pandits are confident that in due course the conditions will be conducive for tourism, trade and *yatras*. For quite a few years we have enjoyed the hospitality of Pandit Neeraj Kishan Kaul whose official residence at Mother Teresa Crescent was the venue of numerous get-togethers. The spacious lawn, main room for bar, cemented side space for lunch/dinner and rear area for the kitchen was an ideal setting for the functions. We are also grateful to Mr Justice Sanjay Kishan Kaul for agreeing to host future functions at his official residence.

KPA President Vivek Kaul and his colleagues in the Management Committee organised some enjoyable musical performances, showcasing the hidden talent both in Hindi and Western music. Those of us in the audience could not help but clap with great gusto to the rhythm and beat of the artists. Special mention is due to Mr Ashima Munshi and her son who won our hearts. Ms Neeti Mubayi, Ms Preeti Haksar, Yaminey Mubayi and Shireen Mubayi enthralled us with their melodious voices. Noor Mubayi and Mahika Raina gave an excellent performance in Kathak. Aditya Mubayi anchored an interesting quiz with full participation of the *biradari*.

The Annual General Body Meeting of the Association was held on 10 September 2017 at the Civil Services Officers Institute, Kasturba Gandhi Marg, and organised by Ms Vandita Kaul. The following office-bearers were elected to the Executive Committee:

### OFFICE-BEARERS, KPA DELHI

**President:** Mr Vivek Kaul (re-elected for another two terms)

**Vice President:** Col Valmiki Katju

**Secretary:** Dr Vishnu Reu

**Treasurer:** Mr Utsav Dar

**Joint Secretary:** Mr Ajay Dar

**Senior Advisors:** Sarvashri Surinder Zutshi, Jagdish Taimni, Kailash Baqaya and Ajit Gurtu

The Association has made a beginning in arranging excursions and tours to places of interest and it is hoped that in the future, more members will participate in them.

— **Col Valmiki Katju**

# An Artist's Passion and Times

## A Biographical Sketch of Karuna Sundri Chak

BY VANDANA CHAK

At the turn of the 19th century, the movement to bring national emancipation had gripped India's imagination. The roots of the revival of fine art in India, neglected for over a century, lay in the intellectual foundations of this movement.

Among the first artists of this movement were the Revivalists<sup>1</sup> or the Bengal School. Abanindranath Tagore, Asit Kumar Haldar, K. Venkatappa, K.N. Majumdar, Nandlal Bose, Surendranath Ganguli, Ram Gopal Vijayvirgheya, Harihar Lal Merh, Gopal Ghosh, Jamini Roy, Abdur Rahman Chughtai and B.K. Mitra are among the prolific painters that represent the Revivalist movement with E.B. Havell, Anand Kumarasvami and Rabindranath Tagore as leading thinkers. They wanted to infuse Indian art with the breath of its own identity. They wanted it to establish a modern Indian identity.

Unwilling to develop an identity derived from colonial rulers they looked East<sup>2</sup> and found inspiration in their eidetic<sup>3</sup> traditions and techniques of imaginative expression of innermost values and emotion.

Havell, Abanindranath and Rabindranath encouraged Asit Kumar Haldar<sup>4</sup> to establish Kala Bhavan at Shantiniketan. Shri Haldar remained the principal of Kala Bhavan from 1911 to 1924. In 1923 he went for a study tour of England, France and Germany, and on his return moved to Jaipur as principal of the Maharaja College of Arts and

Craft. After staying there for a year, he moved to Lucknow as the principal of the Government College of Arts and Craft. In Lucknow his star pupil H.L. Merh was appointed professor of fine arts after returning from Burma where he spent a year on a government scholarship to learn the art of lacquer painting, and later was the principal of the college.



Artist and her husband on a cruise boat in New York harbour

It was under her guru Shri Merh that Karuna Sundri Chak studied for three years (1958–61) as his special student in fine arts, a distinction he offered no other pupil. Karuna had already earned a Masters in Hindi from Maharaja College and had in 1952 begun her formal training in art under Shri Ram Gopal Vijayvirgheya at Maharaja College, Jaipur, another star pupil of Shri Haldar in whom he reposed his confidence in Jaipur before moving to Lucknow.

Karuna was teaching at Maharani Gayatri Devi Girls School, Jaipur, when she was betrothed to Capt. Amar Nath Chak<sup>5</sup> of Lucknow, then aide-de-camp to the great poetess and leader of the emancipation movement, Governor of the United Provinces, Smt. Sarojini Naidu, until her passing, and then with Sir Homi Modi.

Karuna came to live in Lucknow when Amar was posted to Nagaland. She was respected for her artistic talents by her brothers-in-law, Pt. Triloki Nath Chak<sup>6</sup>, Pt. Parmeshwar Nath Chak<sup>7</sup> and their *chacha*, Barrister Kailash Nath Chak<sup>8</sup>

1 A term none of the artists wanted to be bound by.

2 Visiting Japanese artists Jorasanko, Yokoyama Taikan and Hishida Shunko displayed their watercolour techniques.

3 The vivid recalling of visual images in great detail, a Japanese art ideal, influenced Indian watercolour wash painters.

4 A renowned painter, poet, musician and theater writer, his paintings inspired the poems and writings of Rabindranath Tagore. Born in 1890 in Calcutta, he settled in Lucknow and passed away in 1964 in Lucknow. He was principal of Government College of Arts and Craft, Lucknow, from 1925 to 1945. Until Shri Haldar, no Indian had ever been allowed to head a government (British) art college. He became the first Indian artist to be elected Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, London, in 1934. If Abanindranath Tagore pioneered the renaissance of Indian art, then Shri Haldar took it to the three centres of northern India.

5 Pt. Amar Nath Chak retired as Brigadier in the Indian army. Youngest child of Barrister Manmohan Nath Chak, Lucknow, admitted to Middle Temple on the 16 January 1906 at the age of 19 years and 5 months, and was subsequently Called to the Bar on 17 November 1911. He was of Worcester College, Oxford, and of Chatai Mohalla, Cawnpore, India and was the second son of Pt. Pirthi Nath Chak of Cawnpore, United Provinces, India, Pleader.

6 Journalist at *The National Herald* during British Raj and until the newspaper closed. Second child of Manmohan Nath Chak.

7 Journalist at *The Pioneer* newspaper, First of five children of Manmohan Nath Chak.

8 Admitted to Middle Temple at the age of 19 on 17 November 1909 and was subsequently called to the Bar on 19 June 1912. He was of 111 Uxbridge Road, Ealing, West. He was then the only son of Pandit Sheo Nath Chak of Khetri, Jaipur, Rajputana, India, administrator of Khetri. (Archivist, Middle Temple).

at Lucknow. Pt. Kailash Nath, being a good friend of Shri H.L. Merh, made the introduction to encourage her to remain connected with and refine her deepest talent. She remembered how an appointment was made and Pt. Triloki Nath and Pt. Kailash Nath escorted her to Shri Merh's studio at Government College of Arts and Craft, Lucknow, to request him to admit their *bhabhi* and *bahu* to train under him. Shri Merh was of Gujarati descent, from the stock of Gujarati families who were early migrants to the United Provinces, primarily residing in Varanasi district.

In Shri Merh, Karuna found a teacher of strong moral character and bearing. A grandmaster in all mediums and a devotee of the watercolour wash painting. His wash painting series on Meghdoot are housed as a permanent collection at the Lucknow Museum of Art. So Karuna learnt the wash form and was its devotee, mastered the skill of drawing, the European oil painting, portraiture, transfer to three-dimensional form in clay, and the technique of using watercolour on wood with lacquer, which Shri Haldar had learnt on his travels to Burma and taught to his students. Mastering techniques, applying them to different mediums, drawing inspiration from a world of philosophy, and basing it in the traditional art heritage of India to create an intellectual movement to establish contemporary Indian art, was what each of these artists were sworn to.

There was no holding back for these men and women. They travelled throughout India and held in reverence the art world of the Ajanta caves and the art forms preserved in rural India. They explored the world for knowledge and inspiration, and infused Indian art education with that learning. The quality of their work is indisputable. The quantity of their artworks is few as much of it has been lost in heat and dust, neglect of the artist and a larger lack of understanding of the value of preservation in a transitioning economy. It is not the quantity of artworks they leave behind, but how they chose to retain art aesthetics in their lives while rejecting the dulling of the senses from hardships, that makes them, the artists, the object of our reverence.

The strongest skill of a master of watercolour wash painting is a mastery in drawing.<sup>9</sup> Every stroke of a pencil, pen, brush or tool has to be imagined ahead and made exactly right. There is no going back as each hue of colour layered upon the other is absorbed eternally by paper and the underlying drawing can't be changed. Discrepancies in colour-absorption are 'stippled' by the point of the finest brush and it varies with different qualities of paper, a task of extreme concentration and time. The artist is creating an effect in hues with natural pigment to get as close to

capturing the beauty of nature and play of sunlight.

For visual arts, the technology of the industrial revolution had by 1905 excited it with inventing the bioscope. Cinematography in colour was capturing scientific imagination.<sup>10</sup> In this moment in time Indian wash painting had imagined and placed ahead of colour photography the visual goals technology had to achieve in colour transparency and three-dimensional imagery on flat paper. As colour photography advanced, the wash artists were unjustly ignored rather than held up as standard-bearers of modern Indian art and to technology.

Just as painting, so was modern Indian literature facing a century of neglect and was immersed in developing an identity. Chhayavad<sup>11</sup> literature had a strong influence on art expression as did contemporary writers and poets who together were heralding an intellectual movement all throughout India in each of their regional languages. Hindi and Urdu together were celebrated by the artist.

Hindi's attraction to Karuna was that the language in its origins grew from the languages of the common people, most suited to democratic ideals. Hindi language was to her the Indian nation's identity and she abided by her oath as a young freedom fighter to speak it rather than English. Karuna was deeply Gandhian in thought and action. On and after 11 September 2001, her keenness of observation and emotions linked her to the ethos of service in the American people, by her experience of the rescue efforts and thereafter. One day she thoughtfully surrendered that oath. It had served its purpose, she said. She had taught Hindi for over 30 years and among her other teaching subjects were History and Economics. She had also earned a second bachelor's degree in Education. She was one of the founding members of the Hindi Sahitya Academy, Jaipur, which later grew to be Rajasthan's Sahitya Academi. She knew fluent Gurmukhi and, in later years, had learnt Bengali.

Karuna taught fine arts to the senior classes at Loreto Convent, Delhi, when the subject was introduced as a graduating subject for high school (1979–89). For each year of her teaching, her class received the highest grades in art among all Delhi schools. From the syllabus, she had chosen drawing as the learning option. A school principal once asked her why she had not chosen oil painting over drawing, with the assumption that oils are eye-catching and may garner higher marks. Karuna had explained that mastery in drawing is the foundation of all painting. It would benefit students who opt for surgery, architecture and other forms of art. In a Delhi inter-school competition to celebrate with Sir Edmund Hillary his 1977 expedition up the Ganges,

9 In 1962, she joined Shri K.S. Kulkarni's studio at Triveni Kala Sangam, New Delhi. In 1973, she completed a five-year course by the British Institute of Engineering and Technology, Mumbai, in commercial art specialization.

10 Kinemacolor, a two-colour additive system employing red and green filters, patented by G.A. Smith in 1906 and launched publicly in 1908 by Charles Urban and Smith, was the first successful natural motion picture colour system. His greatest achievement was the colour film record of the Delhi Durbar of 1911, the spectacular ceremony held in India in celebration of the coronation of King George V.

11 Chhayavaad refers to the period of Neo-Romanticism (1918–37) in Hindi literature, of which Sumitra Nandan Pant and Mahadevi Varma are founding litterateurs. The period prior (1868–1900) is the transforming Bharatenduyug.

the works of her art-class students were adjudged best in expressing his expedition from 'Ocean to Sky'.

The artist had travelled to several places in America and had spent much of her time in New York City. At the Art Students League in New York City in 2002, she joined classes with renowned American watercolour artist Dale Meyers, who chose her painting of New York's early spring daffodils for the annual exhibition and once placed her signature triangle on one of Karuna's paintings done in class. Karuna regularly sat with artists on the Hudson River to draw it in watercolour.

The artist and her husband were evacuated from ground zero on 11 September 2001. In that experience, Karuna for the first time opened up to speak to her family of her experience of the Partition, when she and her sisters had to, on their own, travel through Punjab, then in flames and turmoil, that had seen women ravaged and lost. They were in boarding at Kanya Mahavidhyalaya, Jalandhar, and their parents were in Alwar, Rajasthan. Her mother had, in her wisdom, directed the family not to speak of the ills of Partition ever as a way forward, which she had internalized.

Karuna painted her sorrow with that of New Yorkers for several months in watercolour sketches. To rekindle the human spirit, a group of artists among whom was Karuna, were invited by Battery Park city to bring the activity of painting to Wagner Park that lay desolate and abandoned. Karuna's artwork of that day was featured by the *Battery Park Gazette*. An exhibition of her works on New York during this period was held by the New York Public Library in 2014. Earlier in 1998, the American Museum of Natural History, New York, had accepted her portfolio for an exhibition 'Explaining History through Art', a retrospective of 50 years of her art.

If the watercolour wash artist is passionate about capturing on paper the magical play of light in nature, then she consumes herself even more to capture movement. Within the washes of paint, the wash painter excels in capturing movement. If the subject is stationary, it will certainly exude emotion. All else is technique.

The pigeons of New York City... you cannot ignore as they scatter around you in constant motion with feathers as varied in colour as the clouds with shimmering sun rays piercing through them. Capturing their movement in a painting was her quest and towards

it she began to capture them first in drawing.

Her hand remained steady and her vision clear till the very end. She won praise from Shri M.F. Husain<sup>12</sup> for her caricature drawings of him and, in 1984, was winner of the TFAI caricature and cartoon competition, New Delhi. In 1983, she was winner of Andhra Pradesh's Lalit Kala Academy national artists' competition. In 2000 and 2003 she exhibited in a group show in North Carolina, USA, to celebrate the centenary of air flight.

Artist Vasudev Kamath observes that 'in Delhi and rest of Northern India, young artists do not make an effort to master watercolour. It requires a lot of hard work'. Praful Sawant, a watercolourist, says, 'Water is a complicated medium in today's instant age. The artist has to plan in advance the contrast of light and shade. Only those artists who have a clear concept of drawing can adapt.'<sup>13</sup>

To the question, 'Do you remember what your first drawing was?' shyly she would say 'Yes.'

What was it?

'Oh, it was just a stick figure like kids draw. A girl with a *dandi* in one hand and a *chhaata* in the other.'

Who encouraged you to draw at home?

'My uncle, Bhaiji.<sup>14</sup> He would give me a task to draw an object like a bicycle or a plant, and remember to ask me about it later and give me encouraging praise. He also understood my artistic nature and that I was frailer in physique than other siblings. He allowed only me to use his grand drawing room. I could lie on the comfortable *takht* all day with a fan blowing. I remember the shape of all the beautiful furniture in it. For a long time I had just two



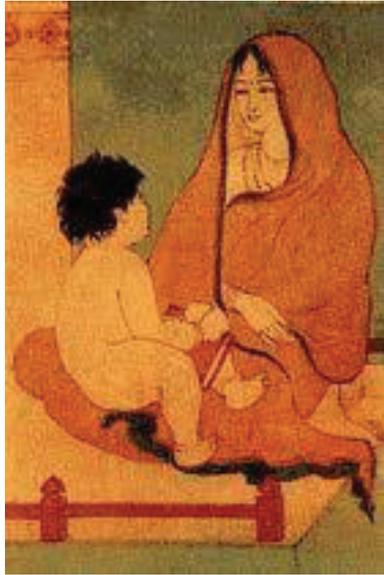
12 Winner of Lintas Limited's caricature competition 'Husain on Husain', judged by Shri M.F. Husain, IFACS, New Delhi, 1986.

13 Watercolour struggles to breathe in age of new media art by Madhusree Chatterjee, *Hill Post*, 30 July 2012.

14 Inder Kishen Wali, Sub Judge, Sialkot & Mianwali, Punjab.

colours, black and red to paint with. My first paintbox was bought by my brother Madan who always appreciated my doing art.'

After her birth, Karuna's growing years were spent in the beautiful locale of Suket in Himachal, then in Punjab state. She could recount every detail of Suket till her last day. The natural beauty of the mountains, flowers and streams permeated her being, her art. 'We would stop at Surajkund for a picnic, at Bilaspur meet our uncle and then the road went on to Lahore,' she

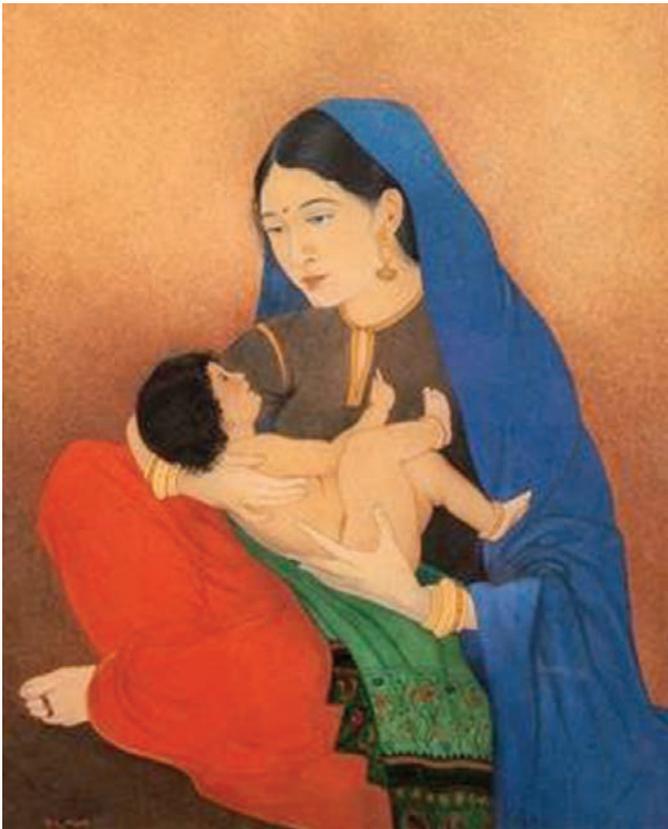


by Shri Asit Kumar Halder

recalled. She gratefully remembered how, when terribly ill with typhoid as a child in Sundarnagar, she was tended to selflessly by Dr. Katre<sup>15</sup> who came each day for months to review her condition.

She was the third child, born in 1929 to Lakshmi Wattal and Barrister Manmohan Kishan Wali. The Wali brothers of Lahore were known for their writings and intellectual expressions in support of women's education.<sup>16</sup> Punjab was in the midst of a social and political revolution with 1930 witnessing the hoisting of the Indian flag on the banks of the river Ravi amid strict cordoning of the area by Raj forces. Pt. Manmohan Kishan Wali was admitted to membership of Middle Temple on 26 October 1920<sup>17</sup>, and called to the Bar on 13 June 1923, working as a barrister's apprentice in that period. He was refused enrolment to the ICS exam as British records showed a name same as his to be associated with a Bengal revolutionary linked to Lala Hardayal. Even mere suspicion of such a connection would visit grave consequences on any Indian at that time.

Lakshmi Wattal had spent her childhood in Jodhpur, where her father, eminent educationist Suraj Prakash Wattal<sup>18</sup> married to Sukhibai Kak, sister of Pt. Sukhdeo



by Shri H.L. Merh



by Karuna Sundri Chak

15 Dr S. M. Katre was invited in 1930 to be resident doctor of Suket state, as the state had none. His son Lakshman Madhav, born to him in Gurdaspur, Punjab, in 1926, rose to the rank of Air Chief Marshal of the Indian Air Force.

16 *The Kashmiri Pandits. A Study of Cultural Choice in North India* by Henny Sender p. 230.

17 He was then aged 23 years and was the second son of Pt. GopiKishan, of Sharakpur, Lahore, government servant.

18 Suraj Prakash Wattal, b. 1863, son of Pt. Rattan Lal ji, deputy collector in UP and great Persian scholar. M.Sc. Chemistry, Muir Central College, Allahabad, gold medalist. Prof of Chemistry at Muir. Founding Principal, Jaswant College, Jodhpur, 1893-1926. Established education in Marwar. Superintendent of Darbar schools in Marwar. He started the College and established high schools and primary and middle school education in towns districts. The Rajput School came into existence under him. Member of the first senate of Allahabad University. Conferred title of Rai Sahib in 1925. He passed away on 17 November 1930. His son Anand Prakash Wattal was chief engineer, irrigation, UP, and supervised the design and construction of the Gang Canal network that exists today. His son Inder Prakash Wattal, B.A. J.C., 1921, engineer in Tata Iron Works, Jamshedpur, In-charge of ice factory - Jodhpur.

Prasad Kak of Jodhpur, lived. Karuna would often say how artistic and perfect her mother was in her embroidery and held her as an example of doing work with perfection. Her father she idealized for his education and progressive thinking on the role of women and understanding of Indian culture.

In Karuna's art the vibrancy of colours, she herself said, came from impressions of Rajasthan, the *gaathas* of Prithviraj Rathore, the Gangaur, the camels, the sheet of stars in a clear sky and the twirling forms of women dancing. For her, Rajasthan came alive in Alwar where her father had moved to as chief administrator of that state and thereafter had joined the Indian judicial service in 1947, moving to Banswara, Karoli and Jaipur where he settled, the family having lost all their possessions in the forced displacement from Lahore.<sup>19</sup>

The Revivalist constructed the aesthetic of modern Indian art. The most revered, an Indian 'mother and child'. The metaphors of the child and a mother's *anchal* and *goadh* were transformed to the visual, and the poetic imagination of the beautiful Yashodha and Krishna were painted. If for a moment we take our sight away from form and colour, we are left with one question. What emotional relationship does the artist express in the mother-child relationship? That emotion is the magic touch.

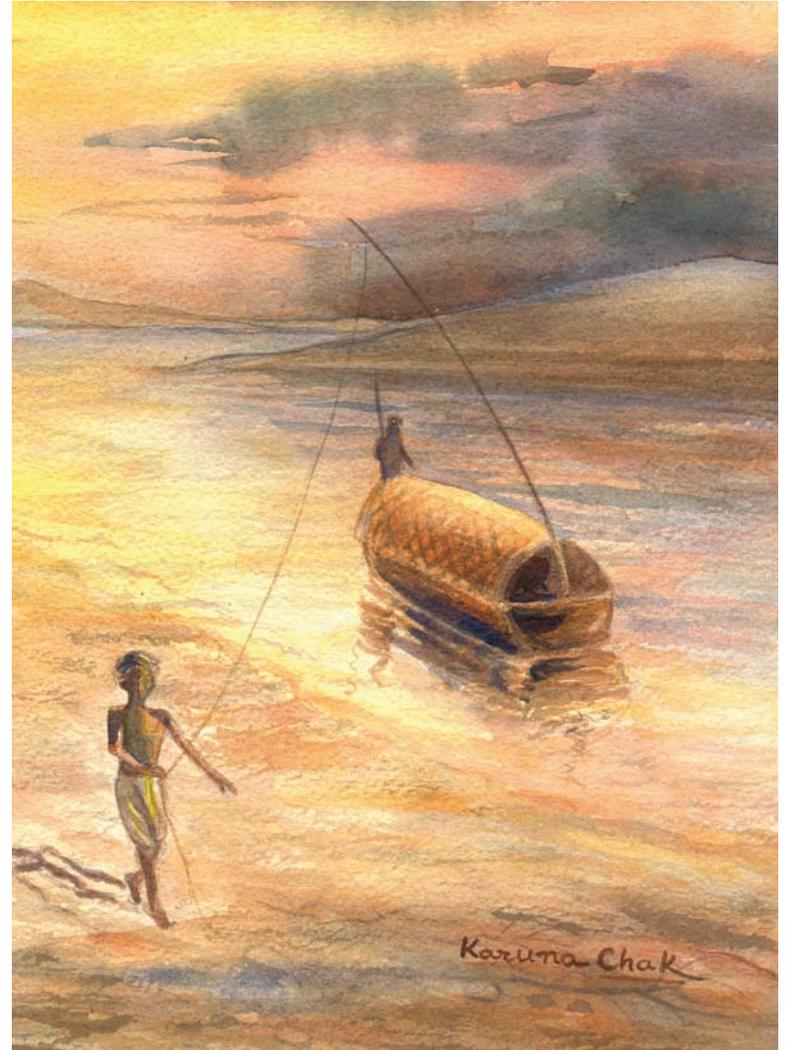
Kakuzo Okakura, Japanese philosopher and artist, had a profound influence on expounding Eastern ideals of art appreciation, which the Revivalists imbibed:

'At the magic touch of the beautiful, the secret chords of our being are awakened, we vibrate and thrill in response to its call. Mind speaks to mind. We listen to the unspoken, we gaze upon the unseen. The master calls forth notes we know not of. Memories long forgotten all come back to us with a new significance. Hopes stifled by fear, yearnings that we dare not recognise, stand forth in new glory. Our mind is the canvas on which the artists lay their colour; their pigments are our emotions; their chiaroscuro the light of joy, the shadow of sadness. The masterpiece is of ourselves, as we are of the masterpiece.'<sup>20</sup>

Each artist-heir of this art form linked in art history over 150 years, whose paintings we see above, worked on achieving a finer translucency in colour on paper and to bring forth a three-dimensional look in painting. Shri Merh's work, in several washes of perfection, covers the entire paper. So is it in Shri Haldar's work. In Karuna's work, the three-dimensional form is emphasized and the artist has conceptualized light by leaving the paper uncovered for white, applying wash to colour. More importantly the child's form in Shri Merh and Karuna's rendition follow remarkably the same form as that of Shri Haldar.

Karuna's world took her to live and travel in numerous

regions of India, bringing in each experience the beauty of our Earth and its people to her. The artist in Karuna absorbed the constant in a world of turmoil. The green fields of the Punjab, the expanse of water in Assam, the colours of the Rajasthan desert and India's villages captured her soul. Women emerge as the central figures in her works. Her works are in several mediums: paper, canvas and clay, in colour and ink. She combines in each the poetic, the romantic and the real. She often remembered the artists of excellence in her art form at Lucknow, among them a few women, always ruing the fact that she had not heard of them in art appreciation circles. It was a neglect she felt deeply disappointed about.



'Barak Boatman'

© All art work in this article is protected and may not be used without consent. Shri Mehr's work is represented in public catalogue of Mallams Ltd., Oxford, and that of Shri Haldar at in.com

19 The Wali family had its ancestral home in Lahore city in Sahalmi Gate, which was burnt down in 1947. Karuna, as a child, would look out from the top floor window fascinated by the bustling *gali* below and watch with bated breath the impossible scene of *tonga*-horses scraping their way out in reverse steps.

20 The Book of Tea by Kakuzo Okakura.

# KASHMIR

BY DR MEENA WANCHU

The word gave pleasure to many, once upon a time,  
It was a standard sublime, once upon a time,  
No thought was complete, no creativity constructed  
Without once mentioning the paradise, once upon a time.

God conceived and created the place,  
Then it was cultivated by a pure race,  
Including sages, craftsmen, kings sublime;  
All's endeavour resulted in a seedling sanguine.

Their touch brought tints in the vale -  
The green, the saffron and white at best;  
The climate also favoured and flavoured their sales,  
By cutting them a cut above the rest.

A race that was produced, time will tell  
Its greatness and deeds, nothing to compare,  
Its fragrance attracted many ogres  
Who brought with them violence and vengeance.

The invasion brought devastation full,  
Overnight, humanity and faiths were culled,  
Some could survive hiding in the caves,  
Perhaps incapable to defend themselves.

Many ran down, now where is the crown?  
Working in fields to save their graces;  
But how long the ordeal will run wild  
Making them all the suffering faces.

The exodus brought tears in most eyes,  
Where there were dreams, now all deluged;  
Their future in rickety skiff seems to drown  
The hopes, the habits, the friends and towns.

Others were happy; perhaps their creed has won,  
Not knowing, they cannot divide the sun,  
The hand that fed them, they cut off -  
Now the feeder's turn it was to scoff.

A roar that could be heard at the centre -  
Now was the time of realization and action;  
The military was deployed to end aggression;  
Orders stern, not to make dearth of the heaven.

Thus started the inexhaustible battle  
To keep the tranquility but rout the invaders,  
The vale is on fire, no one seems to care -  
Each one has lost, all is devoured; left bare.

God must never have conceived this end of the vale,  
Which was full of innocent laughter and gale,  
Is altering pain, bloodstains and death unavoidable -  
Would there be a normal Kashmir ever?

# Kheer Bhawani

## A Unique Island-Temple Pilgrimage

BY GAUTAM KAUL

There are two places of worship Kashmiri Pandits must visit in their lifetime. It is a choice in priorities: Should it be first the Shankaracharya Temple and then Kheer Bhawani? Or Kheer Bhawani first and then the other?

My choice, and that of at least a few lakh Pandits all over the world, is to call on Kheer Bhawani first.

The Himalayas are dotted with temples dedicated to one or the other '*ishta*' *devis*, and Kheer Bhawani is one such in the Valley. Of all the centres of Hindu worship in the world, this place is architecturally the least impressive, but once you know it, you cannot miss its place in the sun.

Kheer Bhawani is 17 kilometres off the main highway between Srinagar and Baramulla. As you approach the 17th milestone, a signboard beckons you to the left, marking the name of Tula Mula. The word Tula Mula is a distortion of 'Tul-Mul', meaning 'a place of importance'.

Taking this small path for another four kilometres on a gentle slope, one arrives at the village of Tula Mula. On a *cul-de-sac*, the road ends at the temple forecourt itself. This one-road village boasts of about three dozen shops, all owned by Muslims, catering to the needs of pilgrims who stream in from all parts of the country and some from abroad, too, having heard of the glory of the place.

Both the Shankaracharya Temple and Kheer Bhawani provide for the strangest legends. It is popularly claimed that Swami Shankaracharya visited Srinagar and marked the place with this temple. Historically, Swami Shankaracharya did not visit this temple town. When the Swami approached the northernmost point of the Subcontinent, he camped at Jammu. Some Pandits from Srinagar came down from the Valley to greet him and accompany him back into the Valley. It was around this time that

the Swami received news that his mother was very ill and desired to see her son, anticipating her approaching death. He turned back to meet his mother, and never made it back to Kashmir as he himself passed away at a young age. The Swami's followers, however, went ahead and constructed the temple in his memory. When Muslim invaders from Afghanistan took charge of the Valley and its assets, they destroyed all semblances of Hindu and Tantric places of worship but found the Shankaracharya Temple difficult to obliterate. Instead they adopted it as their own and called it 'Takht-e-Sulaiman'. The visit of Swami Shankaracharya marks a significant connection between the Valley of Kashmir and the people of South India.

The legend of Kheer Bhawani is perhaps more fundamental to all Kashmiri Pandits, and that is why it is my favourite, too.

The Pandits hold that Lord Shiva's consort Parvati manifested herself in twelve forms, which go by the nomenclature of '*ishta* *devis*'. Kheer Bhawani is the seat of Ragnya Devi, one of those manifestations. Then, one can assume that Kheer Bhawani ought to be acknowledged as a Shaivite shrine, but in reality, this temple is recognised as a Vaishnav centre. Puranic sources show that Ragnya Devi had her abode in (Sri) Lanka and was worshipped by both Lord Rama during his exile, and by king Ravana. As Ravana committed a sin and was killed in battle for it, Ragnya Devi decided to abandon (Sri) Lanka and move north to find an alternate abode for herself in the Valley. Her express wish was accepted by Lord Rama, who asked Hanumanji to take the *devi* to Kashmir. Kheer Bhawani, therefore, has a strong cultural link with the people of South India and it is to the credit of our cultural traditions that they bind us so closely, surmounting geographical distances and language barriers. With such an amazing origin legend, it is no surprise that Kheer Bhawani is recognised not only as the abode of Ragnya Devi but also as the temple for blessing those who seek knowledge.

Kashmiri Pandits have a daily ritual of, after having purified themselves, visiting their domestic place of worship and chanting, '*Namaste, Sharda Devi, Kashmir punarniwasi,*

*prathnaye nitya vidya dan cha de hi may'*, meaning, 'O Sharda Devi, whose abode is in Kashmir, I pray to you to bestow upon me knowledge as your donation'. While the whole world asks its various gods to give them wealth, fame and good health, the Kashmiri Pandit worshipper seeks a daily quantity of knowledge from his family Devi. There is no other instance where a community rooted in its ancient traditions seeks the blessing of knowledge rather than money, renown and vigour. The priorities of the Pandits are fixed, and they are distinct from the rest.

The Kheer Bhawani seat of worship is mentioned in the texts of *Rajatarangini*, or 'River of Kings', a historical chronicle of the northwestern Indian subcontinent, especially the kings of Kashmir, written in Sanskrit by Kashmiri historian Kalhana in the 12th century CE. In the *Ain-e-Akbari*, dated to the 16th century, there is again a record of the existence of the temple. These dates help us to ascertain the place as being one of continuous worship. The original site had a small temple in ruins until it was rediscovered in 1902 by Maharaja Pratap Singh who had a small structure constructed. The premises were given a more formal look during renovations carried out in late 1940s by Maharaja Hari Singh. Now the place is managed by a Trust created by the Dogra king to look after all the temples in the state.

Kashmiri people, being given to mysterious beliefs, irrespective of their faith, hold Kheer Bhawani as sacred. The temple gives local Muslims a means of livelihood by providing for Hindu pilgrims who come to this small town, including opening their homes to them as a *sarai*, or trading goods for daily use. The Muslims also view Kheer Bhawani with awe, for it is a popular belief that whenever a major catastrophe is imminent in the Valley, the milky waters of Kheer Bhawani turn dark. The last time this happened was when, in 1994, the Valley was hit by a huge flood.

**Kheer Bhawani,  
up close**



The Kheer Bhawani complex consists of eleven natural springs, most of them located outside the physical complex. They discharge their waters continuously, but in summer the water quantity drops, leaving the area as a marsh. River Sindh, a main tributary of river Jhelum, flows a kilometre away. A stream of river Sindh goes round the temple complex, thus making it a small river island. Tall *chinars* planted about 300 years ago provide the needed shade and a home to monkeys that sometimes intimidate pilgrims.

You may call Parvati's manifestation by any other name, such as Sharda, Ragnya Bhagawati or Maharagnya, but there is no second name to Kheer Bhawani. The small rectangular pond of waters, charged from a small water spring, protects the marble image of the *ishta devi* and no one goes near it save for the priest in charge who, using a special ladder, cleans the small structure.

The temple priest was a hereditary profession, but in 1990, Muslim militants had forced the family of the priest to vacate the complex. The priest shifted temporarily to Jammu in 1993 when the militants killed a local pilgrim and pilgrims stopped coming here. The Government then got a CRPF contingent posted to guard the temple. In 1997, when I was the CRPF in-charge of North India and visited the place, I got a Yadav Head Constable, who was conversant with the tradition of conducting worship, posted here to resume the daily *arti*. When news of the *arti* being resumed here reached Jammu, a trickle of pilgrims returned to offer their prayers. By 1999, Kheer Bhawani was restored to its glory and the Jyestha Ashtami mela attracts more than 30,000 pilgrims in a week. If you are not fortunate enough to be able to go then, the best time to visit Kheer Bhawani is during Navarati in October when the air is crisp and the Valley is splashed in brilliant yellow and orange autumn colours.



# A Nauroz Night to Remember





# The Lahaul-Spiti Adventure

BY GYANI ZUTSHI

In September, six others and I set off on a trip organized by KPA President Vivek Kaul. During the trip, Vivek asked me to write an article on the trip for *Biradari* magazine. I couldn't say no; Vivek is one of my favorite persons. I have never done this before so it felt like another adventure after an adventure. For several days I did not know how to do this, but now here goes from the heart and as it happened.

## THE SPITI SUPER 7

Young Vivek – leader and decision-maker, nearly super senior citizens Gyani and Roma Zutshi, recent senior citizens Ajay Gurtoo and Harsh Tankha, young but older than Vivek – Sadhna Tankha and the youngest by far Utsav Dar – this was the Super 7 team. All were well-travelled and knew that this trip was not for the faint-hearted!



## THE PREP

The trip involved going to altitudes as high as 15,000 feet and staying at some 10,000-foot-high locations for most of the trip. For many persons this may be a concern, especially if they are suddenly exposed to high altitudes. Of course, for Kashmiri bones and lungs, fed on an abundant diet of rogan josh, koftas and *methi goli*, this concern was minimal. Even so, being naturally cautious, Vivek chose the route by which the ascent was gradual and provided ample time to acclimatise to high altitudes. The other option would have

involved relative rapid ascents to Keylong and Kaza. As expected, not one of us complained of even a teeny little bit of altitude sickness. Some did suffer dried noses and sunburn but took that on the chin. The oxygen cylinder we took was not unloved but was untouched.

Three Innova taxis were hired to ensure that we would all have a window view and space for luggage. As it turned out this was a good decision because it also provided space for drivers to sleep at night. We were booked into government hotels except in Nako (where we stayed in tents) and in Keylong (in a private hotel). The drivers told us that unlike

## A FEAT OF FEET!

The 11-night, 12-day itinerary was full of 'high' points:

- Catch the Shatabdi from Delhi to Chandigarh on 21 September 2017 and then the taxi to Fagu at 8,000 feet.
- After halting for the night, leave next day for Sarahan at 7,600 feet and stop for the night.
- Then on to Kalpa at 9,700 feet, to stay for two nights.
- March on to Nako at 12,000 feet for a sleepover.
- Kaza beckoned at 12,000 feet, for two nights.
- Forward to Chandratal Lake at 14,000 feet and Kunjum Pass at a staggering 15,000 feet.
- Pause for two nights at Keylong at 10,000 feet.
- On to Nagger near Manali at 6,700 feet for another two nights.
- 2 October: back to Chandigarh and Delhi.

private hotels, government hotels do not provide boarding and lodging for them.

## RIVERS RUN THROUGH IT

We drove alongside beautiful rivers. First the Sutlej, then the Spiti merging into the Sutlej, then the Baspa flowing into Spiti. We saw the Chandra flowing out of the beautiful Chandratat mountain lake, and joining Bhaga to become the Chandra Bhaga, which joins the Chenab. Finally, the Beas river in Manali, the river that halted Alexander in his conquests!

## JUST A LITTLE FOGGY FAGU

21 September saw Vivek announcing: '*Aaj pehli navaratri hai - shubh din* to start the trip!' Forward from Chandigarh, we stopped for lunch in Barog at Pinewood Hotel, a stopover with scenic views. The weather was very nice, so we asked if we could have lunch outside in the lawns. The manager said that was not possible due to the 'maunkey' menace (mind you, I have not misspelled monkey). Even so, we all enjoyed a great lunch in the restaurant.

The hotel in Fagu, too, was superbly located. The morning view of the mountains covered with a patchwork of clouds viewed through the gauzy fog was very beautiful. But here, too, we could not have breakfast outside due to the monkeys.

We saw many apple trees from the hotel but no apples, as all the apples had been harvested. This is also mushroom country (so I had to order mushroom on toast for breakfast!).

## ON WAY TO NARKANDA, RAMPUR AND SARAHAN

Since we were now in apple country, there was a clamour to buy apples. Narkanda was earmarked as the place to buy them. We did not see any shop selling apples when we reached Narkanda - only apple grading and packing places. All locals have apple trees and it seems no one needs to buy apples. So adventurous Ajay bought a *pahari mooli*, washed it under a tap, borrowed a knife, peeled it, and we relished the juicy and sweet radish.

Hmm... so lots of apples around but none to be had. Anyway, these were Shimla apples - sour apples. We set our sights higher to buy higher-altitude and higher-quality Kinnaur apples at Kalpa. We were going for higher ground all round.

In Narkanda, where we took a break at a hotel, we chanced to see a Himachali wedding, a simple and colorful affair with folk dancing and gentle music. We were invited to have the starters, which were pakoras, aloo *tikki* and jalebi. On the way out of Narkanda we did see

roadside apple vendors, but we had set our hopes higher.

Shortly after Narkanda we joined the Sutlej river and from then on the road ran alongside it upstream. It looked a very pretty river, slim, alive, and busy rushing and foaming over boulders in a picturesque valley.

We arrived at Rampur and stopped for lunch in the restaurant attached to the palace of Virbhadra Singh. We asked for Himachali rice but no luck. The palace was small and gorgeous but shuttered up. We took photos and selfies in the lawns and the gazebo outside and then headed on to Sarahan.

The balcony in the hotel room here had a fine view of the mountains and the valley below, so we decided to have our tea when we arrived there. It appeared that the seat cushions had not been changed since time immemorial... the cushions had deep and rounded depressions from being well sat upon by countless guests like us, sipping tea in the balcony and enjoying the panorama.

That evening we went to the Bhima Kaliji temple, a stunning building with a big clean courtyard. We took part in the spectacular *arti*, resounding with the blowing of huge horns.

This hotel had an inviting bar and a sit-out, so we decided to have a drink before dinner. Ajay, who has a doctor-inflicted yearly quota for alcohol, exhausted his entire quota that evening!

## APPLES AND ADVENTURES

We arrived at Karcham, at the confluence of Sutlej and Baspa rivers, boasting a huge hydroelectric project and dam. Here we witnessed the hitherto slim, hastening Sutlej widen and slow into a water reservoir. We carried on to Kalpa, chasing the Sutlej upstream up to Reckong Peo, where it again became the lively, slender, hurrying river.

Reckong Peo, a big town in Kinnaur, was perfect for a Chinese lunch as a change from parathas, followed by Baba



choco-bars (Amul is unheard of in these parts). Just to complete the apple saga, Vivek did manage to buy a *peti* of apples here before we headed to Kalpa.

Kalpa was just about 15 kilometres uphill from Reckong Peo, and all fogged up and freezing. The hotel smelled strongly of freshly applied varnish, especially in the dining room. Making the best of it, we played court-piece and *teen-do-panch*, had dinner in Vivek's room, ate dried apricots and – at last – got to eat Kinnaur apples just harvested in Reckong Peo.

Next morning turned out wet and foggy. The hotel was girdled by apple orchards and the trees were loaded with red apples, not fully ripe, not ready to eat, but they looked so good anyway. We took walks around the hotel and the orchards. The Kinner Kailash peak, which is a *shivling*, could usually be seen from the hotel but that day was covered in clouds.

The next day we were to go to Sangla Valley and Chitkul.

We had breakfast in the dining room – now sans the smell – and discussed what to do. Vivek and Utsav decided to stay put, while the remaining five decided to brave it, never mind the weather. We set forth in two of the Innovas, following the Baspa river after Karcham. When we entered Sangla Valley – lo and behold, the rain stopped, the fog cleared and the sun smiled on us. The valley was there in all its splendour with green, yellow and red fields, houses with green and red slanting roofs and gently sloping mountains with many streams ribboning down into the Baspa river.

We continued to Chitkul, the last village before the China border, where we had a good lunch prepared by Bengali cooks. The 'masterchef', after repeated requests, obliged us by serving Himachali rice he had actually bought for himself. On the return leg we met up with Vivek and Utsav in Sangla town. Later on, they had also decided to come and see Sangla Valley but had to miss out on Chitkul.

Next morning, the weather did clear up and we saw





Kinner Kailash against a clear blue sky. We could tick that one off, too, on our wish list.

In Kalpa and Recking Peo, we bought *petis* of apples to take home, along with *kagzi badam*, dried apricots, and hand-knitted yak-wool socks and gloves for the colder weather ahead.

### CAMPING OUT IN NAKO

We arrived in Nako and checked into our tents, with a chilly wind blowing all around. We sat in the common covered area in front of the tents, relishing tea and pakoras. Then we went for a walk in the village to see the lake, the centre of attraction, and a monastery. A wedding was in progress in the village and the whole village and around was going to it, the monks of the monastery included. We were also invited to join for the dancing, tea and dinner. We had tea, saw the bride and wished the groom well. Back in the tent, hot-water bottles helped to keep the bed warm. The toilets were sort of... air-conditioned!

### TO KAZA

Now we were truly in Spiti. The views were awesome, with majestic mountains up close and deep valleys, with the Spiti river way down looking ever so willowy. The landscape was mostly barren with high snow-covered peaks, but hats off to the hard-working people living there. Wherever it was possible, we saw patches of green mostly planted with apple and willow trees.

On the way to Kaza we stopped at Tabo to visit the Tabo Monastery and make a lunch of grilled

**On the way to Kaza we stopped at Tabo to visit the Tabo Monastery and make a lunch of grilled sandwiches of yak-milk cheese (milk of *churu*, as the yak is called there), made in Nepal.**



sandwiches of yak-milk cheese (milk of *churu*, as the yak is called there), made in Nepal. We went on to the Dhankar Monastery, which was earlier a fort high in the mountains. We arrived in Kaza in good time to shop for shawls, stoles and yak-wool socks.

Next day we went to Lang Za, with its centrepiece statue of the Buddha, where the whole village was busy threshing *jau* (barley), and bought yak-milk cheese, a kind of dried paneer. We went to Komic, the highest organic restaurant in the world, and tried sea buckthorn tea and ginger lemon tea. We also visited the highest post office in world at Hikkim. We bought postcards and addressed them to ourselves. But there were no stamps, so in good faith we left money with the postmaster to buy stamps for us when available and post the cards. We are still waiting to receive them...

We returned to Kaza for a great lunch at Deyzor Hotel. It had a hot-air hand dryer, and that, too, was labelled as the highest in the world.

**KAZA TO CHANDRATAL LAKE, KUNJUM PASS AND KEYLONG**

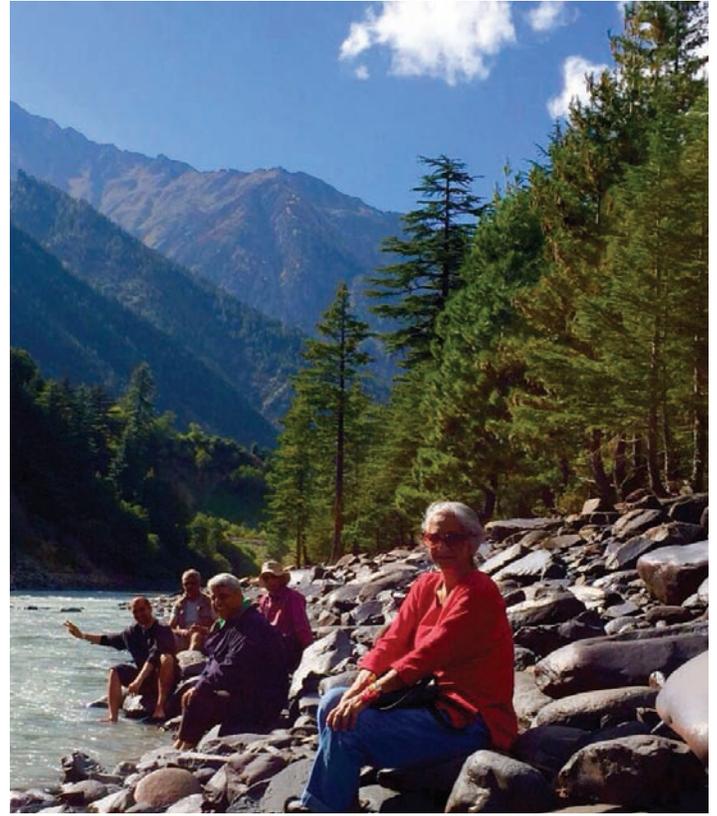
This was going to be a long journey, so we made an early start at 6:30 am, stopping for breakfast after Losar. On the way, we spent time at the cold and windy Kunjum Pass at an altitude of 15,000 feet, and were well rewarded with breathtaking views.

We pressed on to Chandratat Lake, some 14 kilometres off the main road. This was a single road that widened at intervals just enough to let oncoming cars pass, so it was slow going. From the car park, the lake is a kilometre's laboured trek to an altitude of 14,000 feet, but it was all

worth the trouble. The beauty of the lake is beyond words. Ajay took a dip in the lake, and Utsav a longer dip and a short swim (he did not want to stop!). Seeing their antics gave me the jitters as It was seriously cold up there.

We then proceeded to Keylong, with lunch on the way. On this stretch there is really no road for long distances, just a dry river bed, made up of small boulders, which had us bouncing and lurching sideways in our seats. Some parts were hilly. To make matters worse, the pelting rain made the mountain *nallahs* flood over on the road at many places. And the sky darkened.

The going seemed never-ending. A kilometre seemed like ten. The Border Roads Organisation had signposts on



the road with the warning that this was one of the most treacherous roads in the world. So when finally we hit the tarred Leh highway, there was a roar of delight from Ajay. After about 14 hours we made it from Kaza to Keylong. Were we not glad and relieved to reach the hotel!

Next morning, we visited the Trilokinath Temple, supposed to have been built by a Kashmiri king, though

## The going seemed never-ending. A kilometre seemed like ten. After about 14 hours we made it from Kaza to Keylong.

no sign there indicated this. We also visited Mrikula Devi Temple, an ancient-looking structure, said to be made from the wood of a single tree. There is a spring at the location, now reduced to a drop-by-drop trickle. The signs said that if one drank from the spring, one's wish would come true, and so we did.

We went on to visit Chhota Manali, a nice spot shaded by pine trees by the banks of the Chenab river. We sat in a row on the bank, dipped our feet in the cold river and relaxed for over half an hour. It was great fun.

### TO NAGGAR AND MANALI

Sunday saw us at Rohtang Pass, rather crowded and with good views, but not as spectacular as Kunjum Pass. Now we were entering trout territory and had it for lunch on the way. For Sadhna, Harsh, Roma and me, this was the first non-veg meal after nine Navaratri days. We stayed at Naggar Castle, a heritage site and now a hotel, and it was the best place we stayed at on this trip. It was Ajay's birthday and a celebration was in order with wine and rum in the courtyard overlooking the beautiful Kullu valley, followed by Ajay treating us to a fine dinner in the German Bakery nearby.

Next day we divided into three groups, with Sadhna, Harsh and Ajay going to Kullu for shopping, Roma, Utsav

and I catching some sightseeing in Naggar and Manali, and Vivek deciding to take it easy.

We visited the Roerich Museum and Art Gallery, an illuminating experience about the movement to spread peace, and protect culture and heritage around the world. I found the many well-proportioned, massive and majestic fir-type trees at this site truly striking. We also went to

the Vashistha Temple where Utsav swam in the hot water spring and got a lot of *gyan* from a local sadhu. The next stop was Van Vihar, where we relaxed, sitting on boulders, with the Beas river raging past us.

We also went to visit the rather charming and old-world Old Manali and had lunch in a small restaurant perched beside the rapidly flowing Beas river. After stopping at the Hadimba and Ghatotkacha Temples, we headed back to the hotel.

The next day, with a packed breakfast, we left at 8 am, skipping lunch to be well in time at Chandigarh railway station.

Our adventure was concluding. The trip, truly recommended for the brave-hearted, had been the journey of a lifetime.



## RETROSPECTIVE

# The Man, the Vision, the Brand

## Pandit Ajit Narain Haksar

BY COL VALMIKI KATJU

**26** August 1982 was a momentous day for the Indian Tobacco Company and its shareholders. The special meeting in Calcutta was attended by 3,000 staff and shareholders as it was the final address of its legendary Chairman, Ajit Narain Haksar, after leading the company as its boss for 13 years.

Under Haksar, a stagnant company had come to life, become vibrant and dynamic, and made forays into new ventures till then unheard of. His speech gave confidence to his subordinates, spurring them to innovate, increase output and come out with products of high quality and finish. As he was about to conclude his speech, the emotion of parting made him break down repeatedly, collapsing into his chair, turning away from the hushed crowd to bury his face in a handkerchief. The man who was tough as nails could not restrain himself at the thought of leaving.

The crowd was in no mood to give in. How could a mother leave her children when they were on the threshold of making their name in a highly competitive corporate market? Slogans against his retirement kept on being aired and the Board had no option but to declare that the father-figure would be given an honorary post as Chairman Emeritus.

Pt. Ajit Narain Haksar's ancestor Pt. Mahesh Haksar was originally a resident of Srinagar in Kashmir, where he used to live in Tankipora locality near Kani Kadal around 1680. He was a highly religious person with a sharp intellect. His great-grandson, Pt. Sita Ram Haksar, came to the imperial capital Delhi in 1804 to seek employment in the Mughal court (perhaps Bazar Sita Ram is named after him). He found the Mughal Emperor Shah Alam II (1759–1806) almost a puppet in the hands of the British.

Finding employment opportunities quite dim in those uncertain conditions in a war zone, Pt. Sita Ram Haksar, after living in Bazar Sita Ram for a couple of years, moved to Gwalior State to try his luck there. His grandson Pt. Bishan Narain Haksar came back from Alwar to Delhi and found his ancestral haveli badly damaged and completely ransacked



**He was a man with a vision and extraordinary managerial skill, and soon started showing his potential as a marketing expert by evolving new strategies in the field of marketing, based on his studies and expertise.**

by the British soldiers, leaving it totally unfit for living. The then commissioner of Delhi, C.B. Saunders, helped him in getting a generous compensation from the British Government. Using that money, Bishan Narain purchased a big plot of land in Gali Prem Narain and built two havelis, 'Rang Mahal' and 'Sheesh Mahal', besides a temple of Lord Krishna in Mathura in 1870. He passed away in 1890 at the age of 85 years in Gwalior.

Pandit Ajit Narain Haksar, popularly known as 'Babboo Haksar', the great-great-grandson of Pt. Bishan Narain Haksar, was born on 11 January 1925 at Lashkar, Gwalior, to Pandit Iqbal Narain Haksar, the younger brother of Sir Kailas Narain Haksar. He passed his Senior Cambridge examination from The Doon School, Dehradun, in 1940, and then completed his Intermediate from Victoria College, Gwalior, in 1942. Moving on to Allahabad, he did his BA in Humanities from the University of Allahabad in 1944, from where he went on to the USA for an MBA from Harvard Business School in 1948.

After coming back to India he started his career as a trainee in the marketing department of the Imperial Tobacco Company of India in September 1948. He was a man with a vision and extraordinary managerial skill, and soon started showing his potential as a marketing expert by evolving new strategies in the field of marketing, based on his studies and expertise at the time. He gave a new fillip and direction to this division of the company.

In 1949, Ajit Haksar was married to Madhuri (Maddho), the daughter of Pandit Trijugi Narain (Bhaiya) and Kishan Sapru, from the house of Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru at 19 Albert Road, Allahabad. Bhaiyaji himself was a renowned lawyer of Allahabad and was also a part-time lecturer in the Law Faculty of Allahabad University. Every day after court he was at the centre of debates and discussions, among young students, over a cup of coffee at India Coffee House in Civil Lines at Allahabad. For Sir Tej it was the last wedding in the family over which he presided, a wedding to be remembered. The Kashmiri

*biradari* and well-known figures in Indian politics attended the week-long celebrations.

Maddho was a beauty in her time and one of the favourites of her grandfather, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru. Along with being an asset to her husband, she held her head high and stood her ground in front of her husband on matters dear to her heart. Babboo accepted her position and did not cross the clear lines drawn between each other's domains.

In 1954 Babboo Haksar was made the Marketing Director of the company to implement policies and programmes more vigorously, with the result that on 27 October 1954 the company was converted into a Public Limited Company. Apart from manufacturing cigarettes and smoking tobacco, it started a lithographic printing business. Ajit Haksar then became the Deputy Chairman of the company around 1960. He diversified the business of the company by opening up new avenues and adopting new business priorities. He went on to become the first Indian Chairman of a British Company in September 1969. Under his Chairmanship the name of the company was changed

from the Imperial Tobacco Company of India to the India Tobacco Company in May 1970.

Some interesting strategic aspects of Haksar's leadership, quite ahead of the time, were:

- He stressed management by objectives, with the focus entirely on the consumer.
- He decided product pricing strategically to attack and subdue competition.
- The focus was on the environment and the government.
- He maintained the clean image of the company by giving licences to only those suppliers who matched up to his exacting standards.
- For him the interests of the country came first, and above those of the company.

The Mughal Sheraton, Agra, which boasted of not only *methi goli* on its menu but also a 'Babboo Pulao'



By his own admission, Haksar, on taking over, faced some serious challenges that had to be addressed at the earliest:

- ITC was a company with a legacy of style over performance, which did not suit the changed environment of a fast-emerging market.
- India was a country where doing business was difficult.
- ITC had an obstructionist overseas shareholder with a colonial mindset in its parent company.

So, how did he overcome such formidable obstacles?

- Haksar possessed that rare and nearly ethereal leadership quality that appreciated the importance of human resources. A bunch of capable and humane senior leaders were entrusted to craft a strategy to invest in effective human capital.
- Recruiting, mentoring and coaching were taken seriously. The young managers were fast-tracked across businesses and functions relatively early and were consistently groomed for selection to leadership roles.
- He encouraged professional managers to be entrepreneurs who could take calculated risks, and talent was retained.
- Investing in long-term relationships and building an *esprit de corps* was part of the organization's DNA – whether it was with employees, consultants, advertising agencies, customers or vendors. An environment of interdependency and shared values prevailed.
- He borrowed from Ted Levitt's book *Marketing Imagination*, the adage 'The purpose of business is to create and retain consumers at a profit.'
- He understood brands and their role. He believed brands must deliver palpable benefits, and as a consummate marketer, he mastered the fine art of romancing the brand with the consumer.
- Haksar abhorred selling cheaply or on credit and building volumes aimlessly.
- His great achievement was building a learning organisation. He was a voracious reader and recommended inculcating the habit.
- Haksar suggested that one should develop the art of disagreeing without being disagreeable, including with one's seniors.

Keeping strategic objectives in view, with Haksar's untiring efforts and meticulous planning, the company

entered into the hotel business in 1972 and built a chain of hotels in the country. In 1979 the name of the company's chain of hotels was changed from WelcomHotels to WelcomGroup and the company entered into a marketing service and reservation agreement with the Sheraton International. He also saw a future in marine products (prawn and seafood), both good foreign exchange earners for the Government. ITC also ventured into paper boards and a new company, ITC Bhadrachalam, was set up, functioning on its own once the capital was provided, although its finances were controlled by the parent company. A new company under the name Gujarat Hotels was incorporated under a joint-venture agreement signed between the company and Gujarat Industrial Corporation to build hotels in Gujarat. In 1986, the company signed a joint venture agreement with the Madhya Pradesh Industrial Development Corporation for setting up four hotels in Madhya Pradesh. The company also added 30 rooms to the unique and stunning Mughal Sheraton in Agra.

Haksar was without doubt dominant, demanding and unforgiving. Those who did not come up to his expectations were eased out and he did not have time to suffer incompetence. Included in this category were average Britishers who were shown the door, much to the chagrin of the parent company, British American Tobacco Company Limited (BAT). He had a soft corner for competent and aggressive female executives and encouraged them to take bold decisions. He was successful in changing their image from docility to an air of confidence. This included their attire: the same rules applied to the gentlemen and the ladies. They could come to the workplace in casual but decent dress. A change from trousers, coats and ties, to slacks and colourful blouses, became the order of the day. At a party to celebrate International Women's Year he got a photographer to surreptitiously take snaps of the lady executives. The photographer was specifically instructed not to answer any questions. The ladies got a pleasant surprise when their photographs appeared in the Annual Report of the company. It was an exercise to raise the self-esteem of the ladies towards even higher levels of performance. He moulded British culture to suit the Indian environment but refused to cow down to it.

Haksar had a cordial but strictly formal relationship with his boss Sir Richard Dobson, Chairman of BAT. The British recognised Haksar's talent and the latter told them that to survive, they would have to change according to the way the country was changing. The company had to be competitive, but whatever their policy, they had to be responsive to Government policy. However, Dobson was on a different path. He made it clear that he did not want a government decision that would favour the Indian subsidiary and adversely impact the British company. He purposely introduced Vazir Sultan Tobacco Company (VST), which attacked and competed with ITC, thus milking and taking away the profits. Haksar communicated with the Indian government, explaining how ITC was benefitting the Indian economy. That started the downward trend of VST and the popularity of their famous brand Charminar.

Sir Richard Dobson retired and the Board of BAT

appointed Sir Patrick Sheehy, who did not take kindly to Haksar, leading to friction. Haksar was firmly ensconced in the saddle and Sheehy could not remove him. Soon the BAT Chairman lost interest in India and the parent company sold 60 per cent of its shares to ITC. In 1983 when rights issues were floated, BAT did not subscribe to it as they did not see much of a future in it. However, in 1986 BAT tried desperately to get control of ITC, but Haksar did not allow them to succeed.

After retirement, Haksar also ventured into real estate and, in collaboration with builders, got constructed the most modern housing complex of that time in Gurugram, called Garden Estate.

Ajit Narain continued to work in an advisory capacity in a plethora of companies and fields. He was the President of Bengal Chamber of Commerce and Industries for two years. He was a Member, Board of Directors of Reserve Bank of India, Industrial Development Bank of India, Indian Airlines and Heavy Engineering Corporation, Ranchi. He was also Chairman, Board of Governors of the Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur, and Indian School of Mines, Dhanbad. He was Member, Board of Governors of Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta, and Hyderabad Staff College. He was a Member of the National Committee on Tourism and Government Committees on Public Sector. The Honorary Membership of the Indian Institute of Industrial Engineering was conferred upon him in 1981. He was given *Business India's* First Businessman of the Year Award and later was elected to the World Hall of Fame in 1982 and 1983. He became an Honorary Fellow of All India Management Association in 1987–88. He received the Udyog Ratna Award in 1988 and a Lifetime Achievement Award in 2005.

On the eve of his retirement the two claimants to the coveted chairmanship of ITC were Jagdish Sapru and Ramesh Sarin. Haksar had to be extremely careful in choosing his successor as Sapru was his wife's younger brother. The Sarin lobby felt that their nominee was more capable and a better

**Haksar was very fond of Kashmiri cuisine. After starting the hotel division, he wanted the chefs to learn to prepare traditional Kashmiri delicacies that could be served in the main restaurants.**

choice to lead the company. Haksar called a meeting of the directors and asked for their choice. An overwhelming majority favoured Jagdish Sapru and Haksar could ward off the charge that he was being partial to his brother-in-law. Sarin quit the company and took over Voltas, which he led admirably.

Haksar was very fond of Kashmiri cuisine. After starting the hotel division, he wanted the chefs to learn to prepare traditional Kashmiri delicacies that could be served in the main restaurants. A member of the community happened to visit Agra and decided to have a meal at a restaurant in the Mughal Sheraton. On seeing the menu he was pleasantly surprised to notice '*methi goli*' as an item. He was intrigued and wanted to know who was instrumental in instituting this typically Kashmiri dish on the menu. The chef informed him that it was the 'big boss' who had got this item included, along with a pulao named 'Babboo Pulao'.

Even after retirement Haksar led a hectic life. He was an active member of the Kashmiri Pandit Association, Delhi, where he mingled with the young and old, revelling in light-hearted conversation and giving his views without being aggressive. He enjoyed the Kashmiri spread of *kofta*, *kabargah*, *matar keema*, *rogan josh*, *dum aloo*, *methi chaman*, *khatte baingan*, *haak*, *nadru kurkuri*, *ghuti hui arhar dal*, *rice* and *phirni*. He would mix with everybody – the young, the old and the ladies – and make conversation to suit the interests of his listeners and in turn listen to them in a way that showed that he was really interested and getting enlightened. With his charismatic charm and ready wit he won the hearts of all who came in touch with him, until he passed on 20 May 2005 in Delhi due to a brain haemorrhage at the age of 80 years.

Ajit Haksar was a thorough gentleman with pleasing manners. He always recognized the dignity of labour and encouraged promising young people to achieve excellence. The qualities of his head and heart made him dear to everyone. He commanded great respect among his colleagues as well as subordinates. Work was the motto of his life. He was truly a man with a mission.

**Acknowledgements:** I am grateful to my sister Vilas Handoo who requested her friend Nanna Bammi to ignite a spark of enquiry about Mr Ajit Haksar. Nanna contacted her ITC friends, Raj and Amrit Sujana, to help me out. The couple was spontaneous in narrating to me the lighter side of Babboo Haksar. I must also thank Pandit Harsh Tankha who contributed his bit on Babboo Haksar's fondness for Kashmiri culinary preparations. But for their help this article would never have seen the light of day.

### HAKSAR'S WORDS OF WISDOM

- The best teachers are competitors, their products and businesses. They are equally talented people.
- Put the interest of the nation ahead of the business – it pays. Put the interest of the people who are in your charge ahead of your own – it builds institutions.
- It is wise to build sustainable businesses and happy teams. Careers follow.

# Amazing Achievers

As a new initiative, KPA introduced Lifetime Achievement Awards to extraordinary achievers in the community, whose life and work are both replete with countless, immeasurable accomplishments in their area of expertise, occupation or vocation. The first Lifetime Achievement Awards were given to Mr A.N.D Haksar and Mrs Kiran Hukku.

## MR A.N.D. HAKSAR The Statesman-Scholar

Straddling the worlds of international diplomacy and vernacular literature, Mr Aditya Narayan Dhairyasheel Haksar truly exemplifies multi-dimensional and extraordinary talents.

Born in 1933 in Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh, he is a graduate of The Doon School, Allahabad University, and Oxford University, UK. Following this, he joined the Indian Foreign Service. As a diplomat, he was India's High Commissioner in Kenya and the Seychelles, Minister in the United States, and Ambassador in Portugal and Yugoslavia. He also served as Dean of India's Foreign Service Institute and President of the UN Environment Programme's Governing Council.



He moved seamlessly from brilliant statesmanship to peerless scholarship. As a translator of Sanskrit classics, which he has brought forth into modern readership, he is not just well known but venerated for his translated works that include *The Shattered Thigh and Other Plays*, *Tales of the Ten Princes*, *Hitopadesha*, *Simhasana Dvatrimika*, *Subhashitavali*, *The Courtesan's Keeper*, *The Seduction of Shiva*, *Raghuvamsam* and *Shuka Saptati*, among others. He has also compiled *A Treasury of Sanskrit Poetry*.

His Kashmir-related works include *Three Satires from Ancient Kashmir* and 11th-century Kashmiri poet Ksemendra's *Darpa Dalana*, titled *The Ending of Arrogance* in English.



## MRS KIRAN HUKKU Symbol of Selfless Service

The best student of the year in her school in 1956, Mrs Kiran Hukku grew up to join the Cancer Patients Aid Association (CPAA). The CPAA is a registered charitable NGO working towards the total management of cancer as a disease. Established in 1969, CPAA has a tradition of untiring service to needy cancer patients from all over India, and neighbouring Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and Pakistan. It is an empathetic non-medical presence that has supported the treatment and overall needs of more than 3,00,000 cancer patients to date.

Not surprisingly, CPAA were recognized as the Best NGO by SAARC Nations and represented India in the UICC (Union of Cancer Care) where they have received many awards and accolades.

At the forefront of this enduring, dedicated and diligent endeavour stands Mrs Kiran Hukku. She started CPAA's Delhi Branch in 1979 and its activities were kicked off in partnership with the Rotary Club at the Rotary Cancer Hospital. Today these activities have been extended to the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), where Mrs Hukku leads the tremendous effort of total management of poor, suffering cancer patients for their treatment at AIIMS. Her exemplary commitment, over decades, to the care and welfare of needy cancer patients, and her humanitarianism, are an inspiration to us all.

## YOUNG WINNER! DIVIJ KAUL

### Excellence in Entertainment

Divij Kaul, 30, son of Nishi and Sanjay Kaul, has made us proud by winning the 'Best Promoter-Delhi/NCR' award from the India Nightlife Convention & Awards (INCA) in September 2017, for his company Limn Entertainment. Divij, who has been Djing as a hobby for the past ten years, heads Limn, an events and entertainment company based in Delhi. His passion for music and entertainment goes back to 2007, when he began taking lessons for DJing, during his undergraduate studies in Malaysia post which he went on to do his Masters degree from the University of Exeter in the UK. After this he finished his MBA from the SP Jain Global School of Management across Sydney, Dubai & Singapore and went on to found Limn Entertainment. For those who are wondering, 'Limn' is an English verb that means to 'emote or describe in paintings or words.'

During its over three-year existence Limn has proudly serviced clients such as The British School, Farzi Café, Masala Library, PaPaYa, Made in Punjab, Red Bull, Budweiser, Tinder, Air Asia, St. Columba's School, Marriott Jaipur, Le Meridien Hotels, Radisson Hotels, Helpage India, Navjyoti Foundation and Monkey Bar, among others. Limn has also worked with the biggest music festivals across India such as Sunburn Festival, VH1 Supersonic, Electric Daisy Carnival, Enchanted Valley Carnival, Magnetic Fields Festival, NH7 Weekender and more.

Limn as a company is a bunch of like-minded individuals that seek to bridge the gap between the various segments of people in the live entertainment space. From hosting live shows in the music and comedy space to helping food festivals such as the Asian Hawkers Market, along with private functions such as weddings, corporate and brands events, Limn is the one-stop shop for all your entertainment related needs.

A decorative graphic featuring a large red bow at the top left, followed by a gold heart, a red heart, and a smaller gold heart. Below these are several red and white flowers with green leaves. The entire graphic is set against a light pink background with a gold border.

## PERFECT MATCH!

Matrimonial alliances are waiting to be forged on the KPA website!

The coming new year will ring in new things! KPA is delighted to announce the introduction, very soon, of matrimonial ads on the website [kpadelhi.org](http://kpadelhi.org). You will be able to upload the details of the to-be bride and groom, and be able to reach members of the community comfortably and intimately. The date for this service going live is: **10 December 2017.**

### Classified Ads

Classified advertisements, to publicise goods and services by members of the community, for members of the community or of specific interest and relevance to the community, will also be launched on the KPA website: [kpadelhi.org](http://kpadelhi.org). You are all invited to use this facility.

Tariff (for six months) for matrimonials/ classifieds:

- \* For KPA Members: Rs 2,500
- \* For KP Non-members: Rs 1,500

## THOSE WE MISS



### ANUBHAV MASALDAN

*'Whom the Gods love die young'*

Born on 9 Feb 1982 to Virendra (Chunnu) and Vandana Masaldan, Anubhav was like any other youngster of his generation, interested in reading, numismatics, philately and travelling. An alumnus of DPS, Mathura Road, and a chartered accountant by profession, he worked with PricewaterhouseCoopers and Wipro.

What set him apart is the fact that even during the course of the treatment for his illness, between his chemotherapy sessions, he would enthusiastically make travel plans to far-off places like Chennai, Sikkim and Uttarakhand. An unusual trait in a person so young was his keenness to know family history, and *biradari*-related activities and customs. From his family trip to the Valley, he brought back a seven-generation Masaldan *shajra* from Mattan. He enthusiastically participated in all *biradari* gatherings, always extending a helping hand, especially to the elderly.

Few people would know that Anubhav

had been battling a malignant brain tumour. His demeanour, attitude and activities never gave one the slightest inkling of the pain, discomfort and trauma he had been enduring since 2011 due to the disease and its aggressive treatment. Anubhav finally passed on to the world beyond on 31 July 2017. May his soul rest in peace and may the Almighty give strength to the family to bear this irreparable loss.



### PRAKASH NARAIN GURTOO

Prakash Narain Gurtoo, son of late Shyam Narain Gurtoo and Kamla Gurtoo, was born on 15 January 1925. He passed his Senior Cambridge from Boys' High School, Allahabad, and BSc from Allahabad University. He was married to Chunno Aga. He joined Odisha Administrative Service and retired as Deputy Secretary, Finance. He is survived by his three sons, Ratan Kumar, Ajay Kumar and Ranjeet Kumar. He passed away on 14 September 2017.

May his soul rest in peace and may God give strength to the family to bear this loss.

## Advertise in *Biradari*

### TARIFF

**Back Cover Full Page:** Rs 15,000

**Inside Front Cover Full Page:** Rs 15,000

**Inside Back Cover:** Rs 15,000

**Inside Full Page:** Rs 10,000

**Inside Half Page:** Rs 5,000

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