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Kuwait-India Relations

A flourishing friendship that has withstood the test of time

THE TIMES REPORT

For much of the 18th and 19th century, Kuwait, with its natural harbor, its pearl diving and seafaring heritage, and its strategic location at the northern end of the Arabian Gulf, was an important trading port. Kuwait in its own unique manner developed strategic partnerships and engaged in mutually beneficial business practices with countries far and wide, principal among them being India.

Even before the period when Kuwait and India were conjoined as constituents of the British empire, a highly lucrative trade flourished between the two countries. Merchants from Kuwait, sailing their dhows propelled by the gusting monsoon winds arrived at ports along the western coast of India. They brought with them dates, pearls and other sea products in exchange for spices,



textiles and every other necessary commodity in Kuwait. Many of them sailed back on new ships built by Indian craftsmen using local wood, sailcloth, anchor ropes and navigational tools made by Indian artisans. Having to spend a considerable time in India engaged in trade, or as their new ships were being built, or until prevailing monsoon winds became favorable, many Kuwaiti merchants set up families and businesses in India and made the country their second home.

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Message of H.E. Sibi George

Ambassador of India to Kuwait

On the Occasion of the 72nd Republic Day of India

On the happy and joyous occasion of the 72nd Republic Day, I convey my warm greetings and best wishes to all my fellow Indians in the State of Kuwait.

At the outset, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the leadership, the Government and the people of the State



H.E. Sibi George

of Kuwait, for their steadfast commitment and support to strengthening the already close and friendly relations between India and Kuwait. I also convey my deep appreciation to all the friends and well-wishers of India in Kuwait for their immense contributions in further

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A weave revived

Fashion

A 500-year-old living tradition that tells the tale of the ingenuity of the weavers of yore. A luxurious yardage that hides in every warp and weave the stories of kings and communities, of battles fought and kingdoms lost. That is the heritage of mashru, a vibrant hand woven traditional textile that once flourished in Gujarat. A specialized mix of silk and cotton yarns, mashru, at one time, was the favorite of the royalty and the elite of the region.

Offering the lustre of silk on the outside, mashru has cotton on the inside, making the wearer feel comfortable. Known for its jewel colors and bold stripes, mashru was a popular fabric for clothing in its heydays.

It finds a stronghold in the state of Gujarat, where it was widely woven in areas around Patan and Mandavi. Used to create kurtas, sarees and lehengas, mashru has a golden history that faded over time. However, today, the simple yet elegant textile is being brought back into the limelight, revived by the efforts of a few fashion designers.

During the 16th century, the mighty Ottoman Empire, which

was spread across the Middle East, traded extensively with merchants in Gujarat. Along with spices, grains and sundry wares, the most prized commodity that was exchanged was silk. Its mesmeric sheen made it popular among the Islamic nobility of the empire. However, many of them believed that silk should not touch their skin. Also, it was an uncomfortable fabric to wear in the heat of their arid land. Craning a solution to this challenge, the ingenious weavers created mashru, a fabric that enabled people to honor their beliefs and feel comfortable, while being dressed in the sheen of silk.

Mashru uses silk yarn in its warp (vertical threads) and cotton in the weft (horizontal threads) fabric. The name mashru, derived from Persian, means allowed or permitted. Some say, it is derived from the Sanskrit word mishru, meaning mixed. Woven in a wide range of brilliant colors like green, red, yellow and indigo, mashru eventually became a symbol of luxury.

As the opulent dynasties of that era crumbled to dust, their arts and crafts were also lost in time.



In between, the weavers started weaving plain mashru fabrics for local tribal women, who used to stitch them into chaniya-cholis (skirt with a blouse). But that too declined, as cheaper man-made fabrics became popular. Today, the weaving of mashru on pit-based handloom is practiced by very few families living in Patan, Gujarat. Hasan Kaka, is



one of the few artisans who are still weaving mashru on a handloom.

Inside Hasan Kaka's dimly lit workshop, work starts at dawn every day. He is helped by his three sons, all of whom have a target to weave at least 3 meters of fabric in one day. "There are several types of mashru weaves. While kataria mashru has colored stripes obtained by using different warp threads, danedar is a dotted pattern in which four extra shafts are added to the loom," explains Muhammad Zubain, Kaka's son.

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ISHITA GOEL

A New Delhi-based journalist. After a brief stint with the Indian Express, she has been actively writing on disciplines across Indian heritage and current affairs.

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A plateful of tradition



Unlike conventional cuisines, a traditional Bohri cuisine starts with dessert. Influenced by the tastes, flavors and culinary practices of Gujarat and the Middle East, the Bohri cuisine has finally started to generate a following in the Indian gastronomic scene

When I was about 10 years old, I was asked by a classmate what religion I belonged to. I responded by saying I am a Bohri Muslim. My classmate probed further and asked what that meant and I had nothing more to add. When I returned home that evening, it was the first of many times that I began to ask more pointed questions to my parents about our community's roots. All through my adulthood I have wondered why our identity, culture and cuisine remained a mystery to many. Especially our food, which has several similarities with tastes of Gujarat, where our ancestors first settled, and also includes dishes popular with other Muslim communities of India, yet has an identity of its own. Equally interesting are our culinary traditions, which are followed even today.

In the Bohra community, meals start with dessert, followed by a small appetiser and then the main course. Bohris eat out of a large steel plate called the thaal around which diners (about seven to eight) sit, on the ground, shoulder to shoulder. It is a highly territorial experience where we break the thaal (figuratively) into several pieces, like pizza slices, and serve ourselves the dish that is served at the centre of the plate. Before the meal begins, the thaal is prepared with a set of condiments at the perimeter and a namak dani (a small container of salt) at the centre. Condiments can range from a mint and coriander chutney, kokum and potato salad and pineapple boondi raita (a salad with curd dressing) to a bowl of lemon wedges, pickled onions with jalapenos, Bhavnagri chillies stuffed with mustard paste and peanuts.

The delicious lagan ni seekh – a popular Bohri dish made with marinated minced mutton set in a casserole and topped with beaten eggs before being cooked carefully over a slow flame.

Before the first course begins, the youngest person sitting at the thaal is encouraged to pick up the namak dani and offer salt to the rest. The idea behind starting a meal by tasting salt is attributed to its anti-bacterial properties but more importantly to its ability to activate our taste buds before the actual meal begins. After the salt tasting, we consider it auspicious to begin the meal with a sweetened rice dish called



sodannu (100 grains of rice). Cooked with ghee (clarified butter), this fragrant dish represents the Bohri tradition of kharaas-meethas, where we alternate savory with sweet. This is done to constantly reset the palate and make sure that each course is packed with flavors. Bohri legend also says that having a little bit of sweet between the meal aids digestion.

The more ambitious Bohri thaals either replace the sodannu or follow it up with ice-cream or a souffle. This is followed by the first round of starters (or kharaas) – usually a plate of smoked mutton kheema paui samosas (flavored and smoked minced meat stuffed inside a hand-wrapped filo pastry). We take our food very seriously; a fact proven when you see a seasoned Bohra community member squeezing a few drops of lemon into a samosa (a deep-fried triangular savoury pastry stuffed with spiced vegetables or meat) before biting into it. The logic being that the lemon's acidity activates the smoke treatment given to the meat. The samosas can be accompanied with a second kharaas – a Russian cutlet (shredded chicken in a gooey white sauce with mixed



MUNAF KAPADIA

Munaf Kapadia is the CEO (Chief Eating Officer) at the Bohri Kitchen, a homestyle eatery where 14 people are treated to a mouthwatering six-course meal. Munaf let go of his 4.5 year career in Online Advertising to pursue his love for the culinary arts and keep his mother occupied with her sincere cooking skills.

A weave revived

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2

"It takes about one and a half months to complete a stretch of fabric," says 72-year-old Hasan, adding that a saree can take up to three months to be ready! "The work is tedious and the money we get is very little," he says, a reason why he is reluctant to let his sons pursue the craft. Compared to today's scenario, when there are hardly 25-30 weavers left in Patan, the picture of a few decades ago when almost 400 weavers worked in rhythm to produce colorful fabrics in the stark desert, seems hard to believe. Yunus bhai is the owner of Gamthivala, a small colorful shop set right in front of Rani-no-Hajiro, a popular tourist site in Patan. "During my grandfather's time, our family made its fortune by selling mashru. From one tiny

shop, we expanded to three plush stores, all thanks to the demand of the fabric. However, today, no one asks for it. But I am afraid that if the scenario does not improve, in a few years, mashru will only be seen in museums."

However, all is not lost as customers, especially in urban India, are slowly recognising mashru's magic. A few local designers have started experimenting with designs and colors and are also complementing the base fabric with tie and dye and block printing designs that are much appreciated in local markets.

One of the more popular designers experimenting with mashru is Sanjay Garg, of the label Raw Mango. His work with "the most luxurious fabric in the world that was worn by the royals" has endeared it to many buyers and is bringing this heritage gem into the limelight.



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REPUBLIC DAY!**

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Walls that speak



chains have added artistic elements like holographic projections and custom designed souvenir boxes to their previously monotone interiors. The district has brought new respect to street art in the national capital, with mega events like the India Art Fair organising walkthroughs of the area in February and galleries readily representing street artists in their gallery roster.

What started out as a three-wall experiment in 2015 gave shape to the idea. The people behind the project, the NGO St+art (Street+Art) India, realised Lodhi Colony had everything an art district would need: expansive walls, wide streets and an uncluttered layout. In 2016, as part of the Lodhi Art Festival, the art expanded to 25 works and in 2016, the art district took shape. This year, international artists too were invited at the Lodhi Art Festival, to lend their colors to the walls. Today, the area includes works by Indian artists such as Sajid Wajid, Sameer Kulavoor and Hanif Kureshi, and international artists like Daan Botlek from the Netherlands, Singaporean artists Yok and Sheryo, and Japan's Yoh Nagao, among others.

A flute seller stands by the roadside selling his ware; a sardarji sits behind a pile of books reading a newspaper; a little distance away a shopkeeper keeps an eye on her spread of sweets even as a cow indolently stares... There seems to be nothing out-of-the-ordinary in this quintessential scene from any Indian town or city. The only unique aspect being that all the vivid figures are much larger than life and are part of a street mural. It is unbelievable but these gigantic and colorful works of art have completely transformed a quiet residential colony in New Delhi. From being a nondescript neighborhood with uniformly boring buildings, today Lodhi Colony is a buzzing kaleidoscope of a parallel world; a living canvas that brings to life stories from around us and beyond us. The blank walls along the streets have become a canvas for artists from India and across the world, who have turned the area into one of India's most vibrant public art districts.

The Lodhi residential area in South Delhi was built around the 1940s to house government employees. The complex, the last residential neighborhood built during the British era, reflects neoclassical construction with barrack-like placement

of houses, which was a standard feature of colonial-era architecture. Today, after sections of it were painted by artists as part of a public art project, the colony stands transformed. With its walls, lanes and bylanes bursting with eclectic colors,



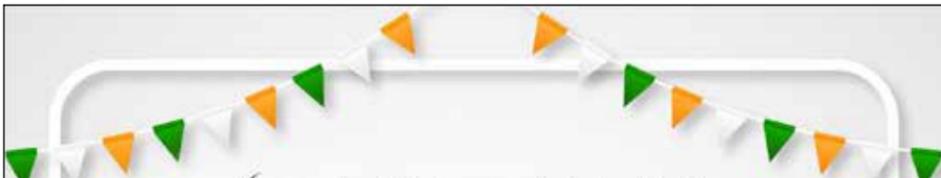
quirky shops and cafés turning themselves into art galleries and a steady trickle of visitors, the neighborhood has shot up the popularity charts and has got itself a new moniker: the Lodhi Art District.

Street art or public art, as it is now popularly known across the world, was born out of a simple idea that art cannot be confined only on canvases for a select group of people. It has now acquired legal and social acceptance and hence differentiated itself from the graffiti-inspired vandalism of



the 1960s. It is said that public art adds joy to intense cities, bringing relief in the lives of busy metro residents. At Lodhi Colony, this change is visible all around.

The artworks at Lodhi Colony have not only made the walls of the colony beautiful, they seem to have made the neighborhood cleaner and happier as well. The residents, street vendors, shopkeepers and municipal workers have made community-collective pride one of the major intangible outcomes of the project. Art now permeates the social fabric of the colony. From residents who make sure the exteriors of their homes are well-maintained and children who take pride in preserving the art, to local shop-owners proudly displaying artworks and paintings that were collecting dust in shut cupboards, the entire neighborhood is celebrating art. Even popular café



Our ability to reach unity in diversity will be the beauty and the test of our civilisation.
- Mahatma Gandhi



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A flourishing friendship that has withstood the test of time

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This shared history of strong business ties and familial lineage, then a major component of Kuwait-India relations, was further cemented during the colonial era. In the sea-saw battle by European powers, contending for domination, control and pre-emption around the world, British India extended its reach to the Gulf region through the protection treaty signed between Great Britain and Kuwait in 1899.

For the next many decades, political and economic interests of strategic importance to the British Empire overshadowed and dominated all other relations between Kuwait and India. It was only after British domination ended with the independence of India in 1947 and Kuwait in 1961 that relations were brought back on an even keel. Following independence the ties between Kuwait and India were further reinforced, through visits and discussions by leaders and officials of both countries on issues of common interest and means of strengthening bilateral relations in all spheres.

India and Kuwait not only share a historical affinity, cultural empathy and buoyant mutual trade, we also share democratic values, religious tolerance, equal opportunities, an open media, free and fair elections and, yes, a fractious parliament. Farsighted leaders at the helm in both countries have a clear appreciation of international economic trends like globalisation and its trade practices, of global advances in information technology and of changes driven by a knowledge based economy.

Both India and Kuwait are also aware of their youthful demographic dividend, and the

enormous potential for trade to create strategic partnerships around the world. Both countries are also conscious of the fact that geographical size alone is not a guarantee of economic prosperity, and, nor is it a constraint to creating economic opportunities.

In today's globalised world and liberalised economic environment, any country given the right fundamentals can become a center of economic activity. This realisation has allowed both countries to provide new direction and impetus to their economies by opening up their markets and embracing changes consistent with international practices. Also, to ensure inclusive growth for its people both countries have renewed their emphasis on economic development by reinvigorating the private sector, widening their industrial base and generating additional venues and opportunities of employment for its youth.

India has consistently been among the top-ten trading partners of Kuwait. Bilateral trade in fiscal year 2018-19 which stood at US\$8.76 billion marked a 2.7 percent year-on-year growth. Of this trade, Indian exports totaled \$1.33 billion while imports stood at \$7.43 billion, mainly oil and its derivatives. Indian exports to Kuwait included food items, cereals, textiles, garments, electrical and engineering equipment, ceramics, machinery and mechanical appliances, cars, trucks, buses, tyres, chemicals, jewelry, handicrafts, metal products, iron and steel, and others.

To Kuwait, India is not only a major trading partner, Indians also account for the largest expatriate community in the country. By the end of 2020, the size of the Indian community in

Kuwait reached almost a million contributing to the economic growth of Kuwait.

Given the strong historical ties and trade links between Kuwait and India and the people to people contacts, Kuwait and India share a relationship that is both unique and special. Among the many areas that could be developed to take the relationship to the next level are: accelerating institutionalised and strategic consultation mechanisms, fostering better business to business interactions, facilitating joint research and academic cooperation in scientific, technological and healthcare fields, supporting human resource development and training in medical, educational and defense spheres, as well as promoting trade exhibitions and cultural exchanges through regular events in both countries.

There are also a number of areas where Kuwait and India could cooperate to confront the challenges facing them bilaterally and on the international arena, including the environment, agriculture, human resources and their shared concerns for security and stability in the region. Focussing on the economic dimension alone, it soon becomes apparent that there is enormous potential for the two countries to work towards their mutual benefit.

Kuwait, situated at the vanguard of a hinterland teeming with a young and vibrant population yearning for change and economic prosperity, could become a production hub for many knowledge-based industries and a platform for value additions to medium and small enterprise sectors in the region.

Besides the substantial scope for joint venture partnerships in innovative businesses,

collaboration with its skilled manpower and exchange of technical and managerial expertise, India also offers Kuwait one of the best investment platforms in the world. India, the fourth largest global economy in terms of purchasing parity power and the seventh largest country in size, is a market of a billion plus people with a seemingly insatiable demand for goods and services. In addition to its size and large population, India also has one of the fastest growing economies in the world.

Kuwait's Sovereign Wealth Fund, which is among the largest in the world, will find India an ideal investment destination. With strong financial fundamentals, robust legal framework and a booming economy propelled by intrinsic growth brought on mainly by consumption and capacity demand, there are very few places in the world with investment potential as promising as India.

As the two countries remain poised to mark the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations, it bears remembering that the destinies of Kuwait and India are inter-linked by centuries of historical ties, close geographic proximity, strong cultural affinity and an open and broadminded viewpoint that embraces diversity and pluralism.

The overarching vision that Kuwait and India have for a future is also defined within the shared parameters of peace, stability and economic prosperity, democratic values and a global outlook. To ensure a stable and secure regional environment and continued economic prosperity for its people, Kuwait and India must consciously work towards nurturing and developing these strategic relations that have epitomised their interactions for centuries.

*A nation's culture resides in the hearts
and in the souls of its people
- Mahatma Gandhi*



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Armed With Navic, India Asserts Self-reliance!



constellation of nine functional satellites to provide foolproof satellite-based navigation signals. It was following the successful launch of navigation satellite IRNSS-1G on 28 April 2016 that Prime Minister Narendra Modi named the new system 'NavIC' (boatman in Hindi) dedicating it to the people of the country and said SAARC countries can also take advantage of its services. PM Modi expanded 'NavIC' as 'Navigation with Indian Constellation'. With the launch, India joined the elite group of nations, like the US, China, Russia and the European Union, to own a satellite-based navigation system. But the journey was not smooth.



Three atomic clocks on-board IRNSS-1A to be used for precise coordination and to account for the effects of general relativity, failed. To replace it and complete the constellation of seven satellites, the IRNSS-1H was launched on 31 August 2017.

This was the Indian Space Research Organisation's (ISRO) eighth navigation satellite and the first of its kind in the country to be built by the private sector and supervised by the space research organisation. However, the satellite was not able to complete the fourth stage of its orbital placement.

But that did not, in any way, mar ISRO's spirit. Living up to its reputation, it pooled in all its resources and within eight months, launched IRNSS-1L on 12 April 2018, completing the NavIC constellation of eight satellites. The 1,425-kg satellite was made by Bengaluru-based Alpha Design Technologies in collaboration with ISRO and is the second satellite to be actively built by the private industry.

NavIC, built indigenously, is aimed at aiding



terrestrial, aerial and marine navigation, vehicle tracking and fleet management, disaster management, mapping and geodetic data capture, and visual and voice navigation for drivers. Also capable of being integrated with mobile phones, NavIC is all set to be the perfect navigation tool for hikers and travellers across India. A restricted service providing enhanced access will be used by the military for missile delivery and navigation and tracking of aircraft.

Interestingly, compared to the American system, NavIC covers only India, the Indian Ocean and its surroundings, and is, thus, considered to be more accurate. It will provide standard positioning service to all users with a position accuracy of five metre. The GPS, on the other hand, has a position accuracy of 20 -30 meters. India's NavIC uses dual frequency (S and L bands). When a low frequency signal travels through the atmosphere, its velocity fluctuates due to atmospheric disturbances. NavIC measures the difference in delay of dual frequency and can assess the actual delay. NavIC, therefore, is not dependent on any model to find the frequency error and hence more efficient than GPS.

Along with NavIC, the country's space agency is also working on the GPS Aided Geo Augmented Navigation (GAGAN) project as a Satellite Based Augmentation System (SBAS) for the Indian airspace. If that is not ambitious enough, India has also initiated the process to develop the Global Indian Navigation System (GINS), which, according to ISRO, is an independent regional navigation satellite system being developed by India to provide accurate position information service to users in India as well as the region extending up to 1,500 km from its boundary. This, when implemented, will catapult the nation onto an all-powerful platform at par with some of the most powerful countries in the world. India has surely arrived and is all set to rule, even in space – the final frontier!



GAJANAN KHERGAMKER

Editor, Solicitor and Documentary Film-maker heading think-tank DraftCraft International. He is the Founder Editor of The Draft. He writes across borders on law, diplomacy, Public policy and international affairs.

Developments in India's aerospace has not only proven the country's mettle in scientific research, but also ensured the nation a place at par with some of the most powerful in the world

Soon you will not be checking GPS (Global Positioning System) in your smartphone or car, instead, you will be using an indigenous version of the same developed by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO).

Global standards body 3GPP, which develops protocols for mobiles, has recently approved India's regional navigation system NavIC (Navigation with Indian Constellation) for commercial use by international and domestic mobile device makers.

While today ISRO rejoices in this achievement, the story of NavIC started in 1999, when Pakistani troops positioned themselves in Kargil. The Indian military sought satellite data of the region from the US-owned Global Positioning System (GPS). The navigation system would have provided vital information about the situation on the Indo-Pak border, but India was denied the data. This made the nation realise the need to have its own homegrown satellite navigation system.

Then, on 1 July 2013, India launched IRNSS-1A, the first satellite in the Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System (IRNSS) followed by a series of satellites over the next six years till finally IRNSS-1L launched on 12 April 2018, completing the



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Rooted in traditions

From yoga and Ayurveda to Vastu Shastra and philosophies of ahimsa, knowledge from ancient India has been influencing the modern way of living in India since time immemorial. Here are a few aspects of the past that can be followed today for leading a more balanced, aware and healthier life ...

Just after US President Donald Trump returned to America after visiting India, he surprised the world by announcing that the Indian way of greeting with folded hands is ideal to maintain social distance and would prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus. The image of President Trump's namaste went viral online, and photographs of other world leaders doing the same started making the rounds.

In Britain, Prince Charles opted to use the Indian greeting over a handshake and so did French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The word namaste (or namaskar), is a form of traditional salutation and is mentioned in several ancient Hindu texts, including the Rig Veda. The Vedas

say that 'namaha' or the act of bowing to god or the creator removes all egos. Experts say that when we fold our hands in a namaskar, various pressure points in our palms and fingers, connected to our eyes, ears and brain, are pressed, which help us to remember the person we are meeting for a longer period of time.

Not just the namaste, today, several philosophies from the ancient Indian value system, that our elders used to practise and advised us to follow, seem extremely relevant. While yoga has been gaining global popularity in recent times as a natural booster of health and well-being, currently the focus is also on traditional breathing exercises that are a part of yoga.

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Message of H.E. Sibi George Ambassador of India to Kuwait

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enhancing the bilateral relations and transforming it into a vibrant ever growing partnership of mutual convergence.

The Gulf is a very important region for us. It is part of our extended neighborhood. With the State of Kuwait we have a historic relationship which can be traced back to several centuries. Geographic proximity, historical trade links, cultural affinities, people to people connect, and growing cooperation in key areas of mutual interest continue to strengthen and broaden our partnership. At the root of our friendly ties are civilizational connect and vibrant people-to-people linkages which have expanded and deepened with the passage of time. The Government of India is committed to further strengthen and expand this multifaceted relationship, which has over the years evolved as a long standing dynamic partnership.

Today we celebrate the Republic Day of India. It was on this day, the 25th day of January in 1950, India experienced one of its finest moments in history. A day when a young, independent nation became a Republic, which today stands as a beacon of hope to the entire world. On this day, the people of this nation gave unto themselves the most prized possession of all, a Constitution. The Constitution, which is based on our civilizational values and ethos, gifted to its future generations

a 'Sovereign, Socialist, Secular, Democratic, Republic' which secures to all its citizens JUSTICE social, economic and political; LIBERTY of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship; EQUALITY of status and of opportunity; and to promote among them all; FRATERNITY assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the nation. Today, it is an eternal source of guidance and inspiration for the 1.3 billion people of India.

This year we celebrate the 72nd Republic Day; it is not just another year or a number in mere statistical terms, it is an important milestone in our continuous process of nation building and societal advancement. This year particularly is an important one as we face one of our toughest challenges ever, not only as a nation but as a human race due to the evolving COVID-19 pandemic.

I thank the leadership and the Government of the friendly State of Kuwait for taking care of the large Indian community in Kuwait during the COVID-19 pandemic. I also thank our dear doctors, nurses and other medical personnel in Kuwait who worked day in and day out to save lives. I thank the many community members and various associations who individually and in coordination with Indian Community Support Group (ICSG) took several steps to help our brothers and sisters in need during the most difficult days of the pandemic. The crisis is still not over. We should spread the message to people not to panic and to remain calm and confident.

At this critical hour, our nation's true character of resilience has come to the fore in the face of adversity. We, Indians, should be proud of the fact that we not only managed to face the epidemic with great fortitude but we did this staying true to our Constitutional spirit of fraternity and our age old philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, where we always see the world as one big family. An 'all country' decisive and prompt approach led by Hon'ble Prime Minister of India Shri Narendra Modi has helped India in addressing the challenges posed by the pandemic. We have one of the lowest fatality rates and the highest recovery rates in the world; the daily fresh COVID-19 infections are firmly on a declining trend; yet we continue to remain vigilant until this battle is decisively won by us.

During these testing times, India was the first responder to calls of help and assistance from other countries. We sent medicines and medical supplies to over 150 countries in the world. Our medical professionals traveled all over the world to augment and support healthcare infrastructures of other countries. Whilst we organized the world's largest ever repatriation exercise, — Vande Bharat Mission — successfully bringing home more than 4.5 million Indians stranded in different parts of the world, including from the State of Kuwait; we also assisted in repatriation of foreign nationals from India. And now, when most parts of the world await vaccine against this deadly pandemic, India has once again risen to the occasion and by producing vaccines not only for itself but for the rest of the world, it has displayed extraordinary commitment to this idea of universal brotherhood which once again echoes from our values finding its clearest expression in our Constitution. We are now well and truly the 'Pharmacy of the World'.

The global economy was hit particularly hard by the pandemic; the normal way of life and business is all but forgotten. Indian economy also faced pandemic related headwinds. However, timely intervention and support from the Government through special economic packages are coming to fruition with the economy now showing clear signs of revival. Hon'ble Prime Minister's clarion call for 'AatmaNirbhar Bharat' (Self-Reliant India), which envisages a merger of the local with the global, has played the role of catalyst in this economic revival. Innovation and adaptability to the situation has been a key mantra in our holistic approach to this challenge.

Despite the pandemic, India retained its status as the primary destination for global capital with record breaking foreign direct investments into India during the year. The Government continued to remain committed to introduce major structural reforms, including through introduction of simpler tax systems, creation of a capable human resource base, development of a strong financial system and building of hard and soft infrastructure, to achieve the vision of a self-reliant India. Our business environment has seen a remarkable positive transformation with several positive measures introduced by the Government, which is reflected in India's unprecedented improvement on the Global Ease of Doing Business rankings where we are now placed at 63. We are well poised to soon enter the top 50!

The vision of creating an environment of peace and security to ensure a better world for the entire humanity has been the guiding spirit of India's foreign policy. India places an undeterred faith and belief in multilateral approach and has

always taken the lead on issues of global concern such as fight against terrorism, climate change, energy security, food security, and the reform of multilateral institutions, including the UN Security Council.

India-Kuwait relations continued to enhance and strengthen during the year 2020. Despite the pandemic, institutional engagements continued to take place during the year. As we work towards a strategic partnership, our bilateral trade and investment ties continue to remain strong despite the headwinds from the cascading adverse ripple effect of the pandemic and its associated precautionary restrictions/lockdowns. Embassy of India launched a dedicated series of events under the themes of 'AatmaNirbhar Bharat' and 'States Facilitation', and successfully organized a number of trade and investments promotion events in hybrid/virtual formats. The overwhelming response from the business communities of the two countries was heartening to see and it signalled the resolve of our businesses to conquer the challenges and return to normalcy.

This year, 2021, marks the 60th Anniversary of Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between India and Kuwait, the Embassy aims to celebrate this momentous milestone in a befitting manner with year-long commemorative events. We also look forward to celebrating the 75th anniversary of our Independence with the participation of all Indians and friends of India in Kuwait.

The Embassy has in recent weeks set up four outreach platforms ICN, IPN, IBN and ISN. ICN (Indian Cultural Network) as a platform to highlight our cultural diversity and art forms and to recognize and promote the artistic skills within our diaspora. IPN (Indian Professionals Network) as a platform to learn from the expertise and experiences of our distinguished professionals here and imbibe the best practices. IBN (Indian Business Network) as a platform to showcase India's economic and scientific transformation and to highlight the billion opportunities that India offers for business partnership. ISN (Indian Sports Network) as a platform for all those interested in sports. Similarly, in order to promote Indian culture and our rich literary heritage, we have launched a Thematic Library project, which projects and promotes Books on India.

The Indian Community in Kuwait has played a commendable role in building the bilateral relations between the two countries. The people-to-people dimension forms the bedrock of this close and vibrant partnership. There is generous appreciation of the Indian Community in Kuwait and a recognition of their contribution towards the economic progress of the State of Kuwait. The Embassy is your 'Home Away from Home'; we place the highest priority on the welfare and well-being of the Indian Community in Kuwait. For the Embassy, those who need help and support are not liabilities, they are not strangers; they are our brothers and sisters; they are not problems, they are our priorities. During the year, we have continuously endeavored to further improve the quality of our consular services and will continue to do so in the future.

Once again, on this joyous and proud occasion of the Republic Day of India, I wish every Indian national in Kuwait good health and happiness. I also take this opportunity to convey my best wishes to the leadership and to the friendly people of the State of Kuwait.

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Rooted in traditions

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

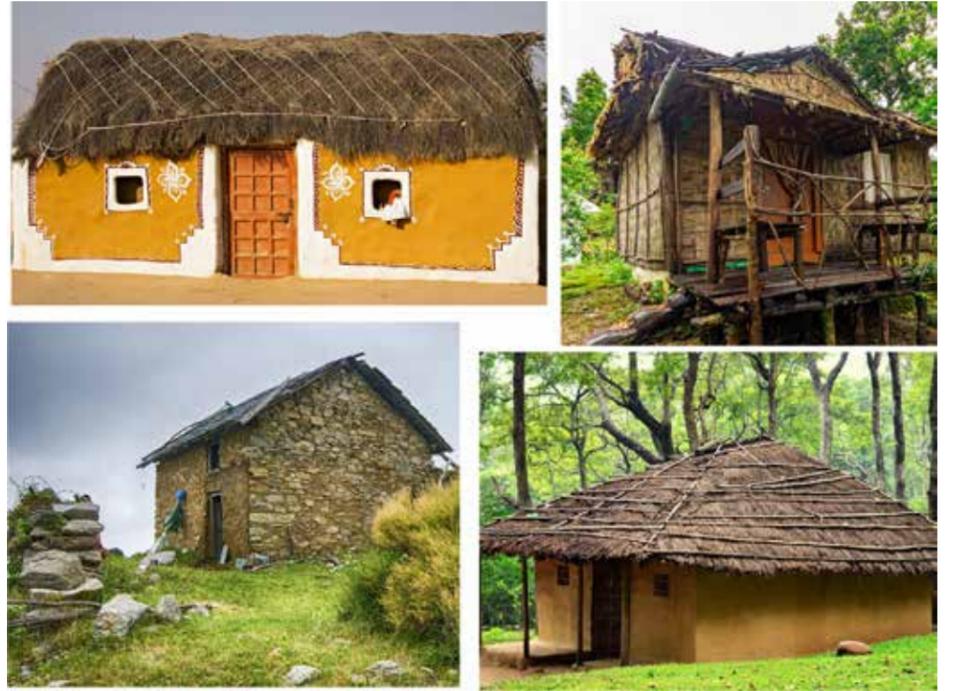
Medical practitioners often stress on the importance of controlled breathing to keep stress at bay and strengthen our immune system. Another example that comes to mind is the common advice to wash hands and feet immediately after entering the house. In some households, shoes would be removed outside the main entrance and hands and feet would be washed there. It is an ancient Indian custom for people returning home from outdoors to wash their hands and feet before entering the house. In villages, entrance to houses had a small area with a tap or a vessel filled with water where one could clean up. The same practice is followed while entering a place of worship in several religions. The logical purpose behind this is applicable in recent times too – we may have passed by filthy and unhygienic locales, brushed past many strangers and harmful germs may have entered our body through our hands and feet. Taking a bath and washing our clothes ensure that we are clean and do not let the microbes spread in our surroundings. Also, the traditional practice of drying clothes out in the sun is more effective in killing germs

family of a deceased person. This period was often referred to as the time when a departed soul finally passed over from the realm of the living. From the point-of-view of modern-day medicine, it can be viewed as a protection period for others to check if any infectious diseases or microbes were present and as such, have been eliminated. During this time, family members close to the deceased were kept away from touching or cooking food for others, and on the 13th day they would be allowed to cook and pray for moksha of the departed soul. Today, time constraint often forces us to give up this practice born from a deep and scientific thought process.

If vegetarianism is widely prevalent in India, it can be attributed to ahimsa or non-violence – the mind-set of not to harm any living being. Hindu sage Patanjali says in his Yoga Sutras, compiled in 400 CE, that getting to grips with ahimsa can tame wild animals and render vicious criminals harmless. He says it is a benevolent approach towards the much-needed universal compassion. As youngsters we have been admonished from eating from the same plate, taking a nibble from a friend's lunchbox or a sip from a common glass. This practice of avoiding eating jootha (food eaten by one person) can be related to the fact that several diseases get transmitted via spittle.

Another ancient philosophy is Vastu Shastra – a systematic and precise study of directions to generate positive vibes and a sense of well-being in one's living area and surroundings. It deals with the concept of balancing the five elements of nature – air, water, fire, earth and space – to bring about equilibrium, for maximum advantage. For instance, the most ideal direction for the cook to face while cooking is supposed to be east to allow the morning sun's UV rays to destroy harmful microorganisms in food. The tulsi (holy basil) tree worshipped in every Hindu house, has over the years ensured that every house has access to the leaves of the tree, which have many beneficial properties.

While in today's age we embrace modernity and contemporary values of living, our curiosity has helped us find the intelligent and simple logic behind the many traditional practices that were until recently, thought to be of religious significance only. It is important to remember these traditional habits, to incorporate them in our day-to-day routine as they are rooted in scientific values and logic that promote a healthier, more holistic lifestyle.



GITA HARI

Gita Hari curates healthy Sattvic cuisine for premium hotels. Her recipes have been featured in the health columns of leading newspapers. The recipient of Women Achievers' Awards, Hari has conceptualised, scripted and hosted shows on television and the digital platforms as well.

▲ Homes across rural areas in India are often constructed using locally sourced materials as the best defence against the elements. Seen here are village homes from Jaisalmer in Rajasthan painted with slaked lime; in Sohra, Meghalaya, made with bamboo, in Munnar, Kerala, made with clay, and in Dalhousie, Himachal Pradesh, using stones and mud



Prime Minister of Ireland Leo Varadkar (left) and US President Donald Trump greeting each other with a Namaste gesture at the White House in Washington DC during the former's visit to the US (March 12)

than in an electric dryer, a fact supported by modern science as well.

Most evaluations of the incubation period for several bacterial and viral infections range from one to 14 days. The incubation period is actually the time between getting infected and beginning to have indications of the syndrome. Is it not surprising then that way back our ancestors took precautions for the precise number of days. Among Hindus, a 10-day isolation period used to be strictly observed by the



Across India houses traditionally have a tap or a vessel to wash oneself at the entrance before entering; Children washing before entering a mosque during the month of Ramadan in Patiala, Punjab. The purity and sanctity of places of worship is often maintained by requesting devotees to thoroughly wash themselves before entering; Painting on a wall of a temple in Jaipur, Rajasthan, requesting visitors to remove shoes outside the premises

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Bamboo the wonder grass



Bamboo has been an integral part of India's culture for centuries. The government, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, is working towards strengthening India's position in the global bamboo market by implementing schemes that not only benefit the cultivators but also provide impetus to craftsmen and entrepreneurs to display their art in urban and international markets.



Heartiest Greetings
to the Government and
citizens of India
on the occasion of the
Republic Day



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Bamboo, often referred to as the 'green gold', is an integral part of India's culture and heritage. According to ancient Indian tradition, bamboo is associated with a person's everyday life, from birth to death. It is said that in the Vedic period, after childbirth, the umbilical cord was cut with a bamboo knife, owing to the plant's antibacterial properties. Among Hindus, the last rites of a person are traditionally carried out on a bier (platform) made with bamboo poles. Not just this, from being used as a food ingredient to being required in construction, this wonder plant forms an integral part of rural Indian lifestyle even today.

Applications of this versatile grass include the traditional manufacture of toys, tokris (baskets) and khatiyas (beds), and the creation of such modern-day utility objects as toothbrushes, pens, keyboards, desk organisers, straws, and even watches and speakers. Recognising the versatility of this plant and its importance to the growth of the rural economy, the Indian government has taken several steps to promote its cultivation.

In his Mann ki Baat address made in July, 2020, Prime Minister Modi highlighted the benefits of bamboo products created in the Northeastern states of Assam, Tripura and Manipur, and lauded the artisans. Bamboo-based products not only contribute to the Indian economy but also to the Prime Minister's Make in India and Atma Nirbhar Bharat Abhiyan through self-reliant agriculture.

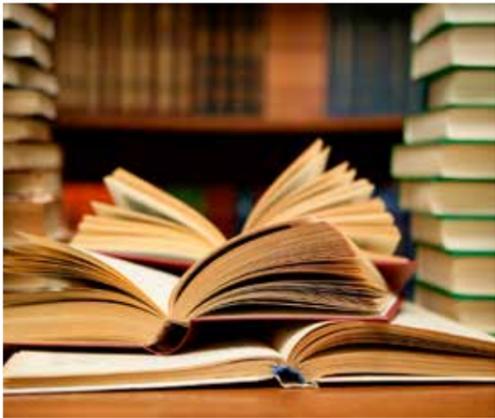
One of the biggest steps that the government, led by Prime Minister Modi, has taken towards the benefit of bamboo cultivators has been to amend the Indian Forest Act, 1927 that identified bamboo as a tree. After the amendment, bamboo is now recognised as a grass. This rectification made in 2017 removed several restrictions and confusions that hindered the trade and transportation of bamboo. This much-welcome move now allows bamboo farmers to transport their produce anywhere in the country without the hassle of obtaining a pass. This has also benefited several indigenous manufacturers and contributed to the country's overall economy, too. In India, kite-making is a high revenue-generating business (approximately INR 700 crore). With the earlier law in place, bamboo, which is used to make the frame of the kite, could not be transported from other cities and had to be imported from China. Declaring bamboo as a grass has not only curbed the import but has also added to the production value.

The government launched the restructured National Bamboo Mission (NBM) in 2018-19 for the holistic development of the sector. The Mission is being implemented in a 'hub (industry) and spoke' model, with the main goal of connecting farmers and increasing supply of appropriate raw material to domestic industry. The Mission has been adopting various schemes to promote the bamboo product industry. It envisages promoting holistic growth of the bamboo sector by adopting area based regionally differentiated strategy, increasing the area under bamboo cultivation and marketing.

Under the Mission, steps have been taken to increase the availability of quality planting material by supporting the establishment of new nurseries and strengthening of existing ones. To address forward integration, the Mission is working to strengthen the marketing of bamboo products, especially handcrafted objects. The restructured NBM was launched with an outlay of INR 1,290 crore to promote the industry. Along with this are the capacity-building and training programs to enhance the skills of artisans to manufacture value-added products that can tap into both the Indian urban market and the global one.

Worldwide, the bamboo market size was valued at US\$68.8 billion in 2018 and is expected to grow at a CAGR of 5 percent between 2019 and 2025. Growing investments focussed on infrastructure development, increasing use of sustainable construction resources, and rising consumer awareness regarding the uses and benefits of bamboos are expected to drive the market growth over the forecast period.

Linguistic landscape of India



India's society, culture, history and politics have continuously been shaped by the multiplicity of her languages. The country is home to speakers of about 461 languages. Of these, 447 languages are actively used in daily communication, while 14 are extinct in that they no longer fulfil any communication need. Among these, 121 languages have more than 10,000 speakers and 22 of these are officially recognised in the Indian Constitution. These include Assamese, Bengali, Bodo, Dogri, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Konkani, Malayalam, Manipuri, Marathi, Maithili, Nepali, Oriya, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Santali, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu and Urdu. These are referred to as the 'scheduled languages' and according to the nation-wide census conducted in 2011, 96.72 percent Indians speak any one of these languages as their mother tongue.

Hindi is spoken by a majority of the Indian population (26.6%), followed by Bangla (7.94%), Marathi (6.84%) and Telugu (6.68%). Of the scheduled languages, Hindi is recognised as the national official language; English is used at the national level as a subsidiary official language. Post-independence, several of India's states followed the linguistic line, making the language spoken by most people of the state its official communication tool: Marathi in Maharashtra, Bangla in West Bengal, Kannada in Karnataka and so on. Hindi and the other scheduled languages are also used as official languages in the states – they are used in regional administration and education. Thus, unlike many monolingual countries that have a single official language (eg Japanese in Japan, French in France and so on), there is no single 'Indian' language.

Enumerating languages in India poses a unique challenge, largely because of the blurred distinction between language and dialect. Hindi and Urdu are regarded as separate languages in spite of very strong linguistic similarities between them, as are Marathi and Konkani. The Tangkhul dialects spoken in the state of Manipur are not all mutually intelligible, but the speakers regard these varieties as constituting a single language. According to the census of 2011, 43.6 percent of the people speak Hindi as their mother tongue – this includes more than 40 dialects of Hindi such as Angika, Awadhi, Bagheli, Bhojpuri, Braj, Chhattisgarhi and so on.

A large segment of Indians use their multilinguality to index multiple identities – local, regional, national and so on. Very often the knowledge of multiple languages is acquired not in school but in multilingual

neighbourhoods. For example, a child belonging to a Bengali family living in Mumbai will converse in Bengali at home, speak the local language Marathi with neighbors and friends, and learn English and Hindi in school. This linguistic division is very characteristic of the Indian society.

Languages carry signatures of the varied ancestries of the people of the land. Hence, like people, languages can be classified into various 'families' based on the genealogical similarities among them. The main language families of India are the following: Indo-Aryan – this family includes major languages such as Hindi, Punjabi, Nepali, Marathi, Oriya, Bangla and Axomiya, as well as tribal languages such as Bhili and Katkari. These languages have descended from the classical language Sanskrit via the Prakrits. In present times, the speakers of this language family spread from Northwest India to the Northeast of India, occupying the plains of North India. The Dravidian family of languages includes four major literary languages in southern India – Tamil, Malayalam, Kannada and Telugu – as well as a number of tribal languages such as Toda in the Nilgiri Hills and Gondi in central India. The Daic family of languages in Arunachal Pradesh and in Assam and the Andamanese language family in the Andaman islands are two smaller genealogical groups in the country.

Interestingly, all these Indian language groups share ancestry with languages from other parts of the world: Indo-Aryan languages are historically related to languages in Europe, which were derived from Latin and Greek. Thus, Bangla, Hindi, Persian, English, German and Dutch are all distant cousins. The Munda or Austro-Asiatic languages are genetically related to languages in Vietnam and Cambodia, while the Tibeto-Burman languages are relations of languages spoken in Nepal, Myanmar, Bhutan and China. The Munda group of the Austro-Asiatic languages includes Santali, Mundari, Ho and a few other tribal languages spoken in central India. The Tibeto-Burman family of languages is represented by languages such as Manipuri, Bodo and almost a hundred other tribal languages spoken in Northeast India. Speakers of the different language families are said to have arrived in the Indian sub-continent at different times in history; the ancestors of the speakers of the Great Andamanese language belonged, perhaps, to the first migration of humans out of Africa into South and South-East Asia.

The new National Education Policy (2020) aims to reintroduce regional/local languages into the country's education system

Language in India has a complex relation with writing. Not all Indian languages are written, though they have a rich oral tradition. The development of writing is associated mainly with commercial record-keeping rather than any religious or social activity. Scripts used in the present day for writing all Indian languages are predominantly derived from the Brahmi script. Devanagari or Nagari, its modern derivative, is used to write Hindi, Marathi, Konkani and Sanskrit.

The recitation of Devanagari system follows a phonetic order in which vowels



precede the consonants. Symbols of the writing system are ordered such that sounds produced at the back of the mouth cavity (ka, kha, ga, gha) are followed by those produced progressively in the front of the mouth cavity (cha, chha, ja, jha and pa, pha, ba, bha). Another characteristic of the writing system is that the vowel is inherently present in the consonant symbol. Local scripts were devised and adopted for some languages, for example, Ol Chiki for Santali in Jharkhand, West Bengal and Orissa; Kaithi and Tirhuta for Maithili. Some Indian languages are written in more than one script – Devanagari and Perso-Arabic for Sindhi; Devanagari, Malayalam, Kannada, Perso-Arabic and Roman for Konkani.

Irrespective of their varying ancestries, the speakers of the various Indian languages do not live in isolation. Over millennia, they have intermingled for social, economic and other reasons. In the process, their languages have been enriched with words and constructions from the surrounding languages. Such processes of assimilation and convergence define the Indianness of the multitude of languages, highlighting the unity underlying the country's linguistic diversity.



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