

75 Years of India and the United Nations

Amb. Asoke Mukerji

India is one of the 51 original founders of the United Nations (UN). India, following the independence from Britain on 15 August 1947, “continued” as an original member of the UN.

Mrs. Vijayalakshmi Pandit, delivered independent India’s first major statement in the UN General Assembly (UNGA) on 19 September 1947. She noted that “the great Powers, instead of coming closer together, are drifting farther apart. There is tension, suspense and anxiety, and an uneasy awareness that things are perhaps moving towards some new and annihilating disaster for mankind...”. Rejecting attempts to make India part of the ideological confrontation of the Cold War, Mrs. Pandit said that “ideology is less important than practice. We cannot eat an ideology; we cannot brandish an ideology, and feel that we are clothed and housed. Food, clothing, shelter, education, medical services-these are the things we need.” Independent India had clearly articulated its vision of the UN as providing a supportive global framework for the socio-economic transformation of India.

This vision has been sustained during the past 75 years. Two major achievements stand as a legacy to India’s contribution to the UN so far. First, the successful campaign to democratize international relations enabling former colonial countries to become independent members of the UNGA with the historic unanimous Decolonization Resolution adopted by the UNGA in December 1960. Second, the incremental positioning of sustainable development issues firmly on the central agenda of the UN and its specialized agencies, encapsulated in the UNGA’s unanimous adoption of Agenda 2030 with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in September 2015. The SDGs represent a holistic matrix of human endeavour, covering health, education, gender, energy, employment, infrastructure, inequalities, urban growth, consumption, and the environment on land, sea, and air.

These two achievements were made possible by India’s proactive diplomatic engagement with other member-states of the UNGA on the basis of shared values and interests. In 1961, India became a co-founder of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) that rejected getting mired in the confrontational bloc politics of the Cold War. The NAM today has 120 of the

193 member-states of the UNGA as its members. In 1964, India joined 77 newly independent developing countries to establish the Group of 77 (G-77), which currently has 134 member-states in the UNGA. The driving force of the G-77 is the creation of an equitable new international order, based on the Charter of Algiers adopted by it in 1967, and Agenda 2030 is the G-77's core interest in the UN.

The inclusion of democracy and sustainable development added substance to the activities of the UN and its specialized agencies over the past 75 years. The Preamble of the UN's Agenda 2030 underscores that, "There can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development." Yet, international peace and security is increasingly under threat, primarily due to an increasingly ineffective UN Security Council (UNSC). Currently, over 50 conflicts are on the agenda of the UNSC, including in the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Mali, the Central African Republic, Libya, Syria, Yemen, the Middle East, Iraq, Afghanistan, Myanmar, and Ukraine. These conflicts have displaced almost 90 million people across the continents.

In South Asia, the rapidly deteriorating situation in Afghanistan brought about by the UNSC's refusal to uphold the Doha Agreement endorsed by UNSC resolution 2513 in March 2020 has left half of Afghanistan's population (about 20 million women) without their basic human rights of education and employment, which are integral to implement Agenda 2030.

Responding to these challenges to international peace, security, and development, Prime Minister of India Shri Narendra Modi proposed an ambitious project to "reform multilateralism" to make it human-centric during the 75th anniversary Summit of the UN in September 2020. The two main objectives of this are reforms within the UN, particularly of the UNSC; and reforms of interlinked multilateral organizations (the UN, its specialized agencies, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, and the World Trade Organization) to create a coherent global framework to respond to common challenges facing mankind. Developing countries, which form the vast majority of the UN membership, have a direct stake in reforming the UN and other multilateral institutions to make them more efficient and responsive. Agenda 2030's SDG 16.8 contains the unanimous commitment of the UNGA to reform multilateral institutions to "broaden and strengthen the participation of developing countries in the institutions of global governance".

On 12-13 January 2023, India hosted a virtual “Voice of the Global South for Human-centric Development” Summit. A measure of the importance of India’s initiative can be gauged from the fact that 125 countries responded to this initiative, including 47 from Africa, 31 from Asia, 29 from Latin America and the Caribbean, 11 from Oceania, and 7 from Europe. Participating countries were linked by common concerns regarding issues of sustainable development of priority to them, on which existing multilateral institutions have failed to provide significant outcomes.

The outcome of the New Delhi Global South Summit will be integrated into the G-20 process by India, which is the current chair of the G-20. It is significant that the next two chairs of the G-20 are also prominent participants in the New Delhi Global South Summit, with Brazil taking the chair in 2024, and South Africa in 2025. In parallel, India’s initiative provides a major input into the preparations for the UN’s “Summit of the Future”, planned to be held in New York in September 2024.

Achieving “reformed multilateralism” through these processes would require world leaders to review the international situation after the disruptions caused by natural and manmade causes over the past three years, which have set back the momentum of constructive international cooperation. In this context, a decision by the UN’s “Summit of the Future” to convene a General Conference of the UN in 2025, when the organization marks its 80th anniversary, would be appropriate. As a leading voice for diplomacy, dialogue, and development, India must play a major role in ensuring this objective.

[Ambassador (Retd.) Asoke Mukerji retired as India’s Permanent Representative to the United Nations in New York in December 2015 after over 37 years in the Indian Foreign Service.]

Sky is the Limit to India's Soft Power

Amb. Lakshmi Puri

When the Golden Globe Award for 'Best Original Song' was announced on 10 January 2023, the roar of applause for the winning movie 'RRR' was echoed manifold in India and the world. It signified the celebration of India's vibrant cinematic tradition—globally the largest, most prolific and variegated—but also of the richness and virtuosity of Indian art and culture itself. As India emerges from decades of diffidence to assume a more prominent position on the world stage, this victory feels like a new moment for India@75, a celebration of its soft power renaissance.

A country's soft power, according to Joseph Nye, rests on three resources: its attractive culture, the political values it lives up to, and foreign policies perceived by others as legitimate and having moral authority. It seeks preferred outcomes through attraction and influence rather than coercion or payment in international relations. PM Modi has consciously posited the idea of the civilisational state of India on the world stage and has sought to swell the tide of its consequential soft power in his global engagement strategy.

As he averred, "India is not only a nation, but also an idea and a culture." One of the oldest, largest and greatest civilisations, India—unlike other civilisations—has maintained continuity with its glorious past. It has built a unique, assimilative and universalist culture that extends beyond historical territory, ethnolinguistic groups, and modes of governance. From this 5,000-years-old tree of wisdom emanate various branches of social, political, spiritual and transcendental thought that govern everyday life in India. They manifest themselves in India's vision and policymaking on, and for, global public good.

The G20 theme of "One Earth, One Family, One Future" under India's presidency in 2023 adopts the core tenets of humanism. On issues of global primacy, especially on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in the spirit of Gandhian *Sarvodaya* through *Antyodaya* – India's self-belief and actions are being commended. Whether it is his vision for cleanliness, sanitation, housing, food, and energy for all, or digital and financial inclusion and skilling missions, PM Modi has pioneered solutions that are replicable to scale in the Global South.

Winner of the 'Champion of the Earth Award', PM Modi has drawn upon India's deep conviction about harmony with nature to espouse the causes of Green Development, Lifestyle for Environment Mission, and his *Panchamrit* Action Plan on climate action. This is now a priority theme of

India's G20 Presidency. His leadership on climate justice has won acclaim from developed and developing nations alike. Similarly, India's Vaccine Maitri, health cooperation, and humanitarian assistance have evoked appreciation.

The Modi government seeks to harness India's soft power on a wider canvas, to drive a positive India narrative, and to capture alignment in global and regional geopolitics as the global order is re-formed in the wake of the pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine conflict. The Prime Minister's pronouncement of "this is not the time for war" and propagation of the '*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*' philosophy has gleaned many international admirers. Soft power is complementary to and mainstreamed into India's military and economic capabilities. There is a paradigmatic shift in our strategic culture. He has led from the front, and has made concerted efforts to popularise India's soft power.

Yoga, of course, has become the most successful carrier of India's soft power. It has become global phenomenon with yoga chant echoing from Japan to the US and from Saudi Arabia to Brazil! The UN General Assembly resolution to make 21 June as the 'International Day of Yoga' with the highest support of 175 member-states testifies to its universal appeal. Ayurveda, beauty and wellness, and the flavourful palettes of Indian cuisine have captivated the world. Diwali is fast becoming a global festival.

Indian films are a significant cultural export and influencers of global mores and trendsetters. Raj Kapur and Satyajit Ray shaped the world of cinema forever. Actors like Amitabh Bachchan, Rajinikanth, Hrithik Roshan, Aamir Khan, Shahrukh Khan, Prabhas, and Ram Charan have fan following in Asia, Arab and African countries besides Europe, and North and South America. Internet, YouTube, OTT and social media platforms have further spread the popularity of Indian stories, and classical and modern music and dance. The wider creative industry of India, including design, textile, fashion, painting, sculpture, crafts, architecture, languages and literature, are admired and emulated for their original and rich aesthetic and design sensibilities with amenability to fusion.

India is leveraging its intrinsic intellectual capital and entrepreneurial genius in positioning the country at the forefront of global knowledge, ICT, and increasingly, Tech 4.0 capabilities that include AI. Unsurprisingly, many of the biggest industry and tech leaders in the West are of Indian origin. India is today the fastest-growing entrepreneurial ecosystem in the world. India's emerging economy story is buttressed by its cultural and historical people-to-people links with every corner of the world through trade, travel and

tourism as well as its flourishing diaspora of 32 million, with 2.5 million Indians migrating overseas every year – the highest in the world.

India's soft power as the mother of all democracies, and the world's largest, pluralistic and tolerant one, has come into sharper focus with its consensus building, and cooperative and mutual benefit ethos which is also the UN ideal. This is in stark contrast to the approach of some authoritarian large powers with their use of coercive power to further their national interests at grave cost to other nations.

It is imperative that India wins this battle of ideas and systems because it portends the success of India's own sustainable development model and the Indian way as much as it validates a viable democratic national and international order. As President Biden said to PM Modi during the Quad Summit in May 2022, India's handling of the pandemic showed that "democracies can deliver" and busted the myth that "autocracies can better handle the rapidly changing world." The Global South expects India to reinforce a model of collaborative development that does not reduce diplomacy to a zero-sum game. The Prime Minister himself acknowledged that, "the world is looking at India proudly and with anticipation....searching for solutions to the problems on the soil of India. This change in the world, in the thinking of the world is the result of our experiential journey of 75 years."

India is reaping both intended gains through well-executed government efforts but also many unintended gains from the soft power of 'brand India'. Given its huge potential of demographic dividend towards the goal of a 40 trillion economy by 2047, the reservoir of the largest youth and women power, matched with robust democratic institutions and strong military capabilities, India is on the pathway to becoming a leading power. Its burgeoning soft power will ensure that this rise is benign, benevolent and peaceful, one that strengthens a democratic, sustainably developed, and rules-based global order. India's farsighted thought leadership draws strength from Swami Vivekananda who foresaw "that form of Mother India, the Mother goddess, who shall once again be the Vishwaguru and would lead the world."

[Writer is a retired Indian diplomat, former Assistant Secretary-General at the United Nations, and former Executive Director of UN Women.]

Amrit Kaal of the Indian Economy

Dr. Bibek Debroy

Recently, India celebrated 75 years of Independence. The idea of Amritkaal extends that forward to the next twenty-five years, to 2047, when India will celebrate 100 years of Independence. The India of 2023 is different from the India of 1947 and the India of 2047 will be different from the India of 2023 in ways few can anticipate and project today. If one casts one's mind back, how many would have guessed changes wrought in India in the last twenty-five years? The world is uncertain and the long-run even more so. While the future is always uncertain, the current state of the world has been permeated with an additional dose of uncertainty – Covid, geo-political tensions, collapse of the multilateral system and regionalism, retreat of advanced countries from globalization and the dreaded expression of “recession” in some of those countries. These are external shocks that have been thrust on India, as they have on many emerging market economies, and underline collapse of institutions that provide global public goods, Bretton Woods Institutions included. In passing, global governance has yet to accept rise of economies like India. Lord Keynes is often quoted, usually out of context. A cliched quote is, “In the long run we are all dead.” If one reads the complete text (*The Tract on Monetary Reform*, 1923), one will find the intention wasn't quite what out-of-context quotes convey.

There is much that is uncertain, in the present and in the long-run of the future. But there is much that is also certain. Within that band of certainty, it is impossible to dispute India's inexorable economic rise. At one point, much was made of the Goldman Sachs report, on dreaming with BRICS and path to 2050, authored in 2003. (1) In that report, the average real rate of GDP growth for India was around 5.5%, the explosion in aggregate GDP and per capita GDP by 2050 explained by the nature of the exponential function. (2) That report didn't have a figure for 2047, but did have one for 2045. In 2045, India's aggregate GDP was projected to be 18.8 trillion US dollars and per capita GDP of just over 12,000 US dollars. (3) None of the reasons behind optimistic projections have been nullified by the present uncertainty – increase in savings/investment rates as a result of demographic transition and income growth, growth drivers in more efficient land, labour and capital markets and productivity enhancement. To use an economist's expression, India is still within the production possibility frontier, not on it. To state it differently, aggregate growth for India is a summation of growth in States and States are within their respective frontiers, providing

plenty of endogenous slack for growth. Had the external world been more benign, India might have grown at 9%. Typically, one tends to extrapolate the gloominess of the present to the future. It is by no means obvious that the external world will continue to be difficult for the next twenty-five years. But even if that were to be the case, India might not grow at 9%. What real growth rate seems reasonable?

The answer depends on the person making the projection and the assumptions. A nominal figure depends on assumptions made about inflation, which is why projections are often in real terms, in today's dollars. A dollar figure also depends on assumptions made about the dollar/rupee exchange rate, which is why projections often assume the current exchange rate. (Goldman Sachs assumed rupee appreciation vis-à-vis the dollar.) A PPP (purchasing power parity) exercise is naturally different. With inflation and exchange rate changes out of the way, what trajectory of real growth sounds reasonable? The pessimistic forecaster will point to state of the external world and domestic inefficiencies and opt for 5.5%. The optimistic forecaster will point to empowerment through ease of living and provision of basic necessities, ease of doing business, supply-side reforms, and Union government's capital expenditure and opt for 7.5%. That's the rough range, with the recognition that as one grows, growth rates slow. As one moves up the development ladder, it becomes more difficult to grow as fast, with the caveat that different States are at different levels of development and there is plenty of slack. To return to the certainty of the long-run, one can plug in one's own assumptions about real growth, say something like 6.5%, between the two extremes of 5.5% and 7.5%. In 2047, India's per capita income will then be something like 10,000 US dollars. The total size of the economy will approach 20 trillion US dollars. These numbers are roughly in the same range as the Goldman Sachs one. In Goldman Sachs, the role of exchange rate appreciation was relatively more. In such projections, the role of real growth is relatively more.

If reforms drive the Indian growth trajectory to higher than 6.5%, and that *Citius, Altius and Fortius* possibility cannot be ruled out, the corresponding numbers will be higher. Even with the relatively conservative numbers, this means India will be the third largest economy in the world, after United States and China and this will naturally be reflected in India's global clout. If one does a PPP ranking, India will be the second largest, after China. The annual rate of population growth has slowed and is now less than 1%. Nevertheless, in 2047, India will be the most populous country in the world, with a population of something like 1.6 billion. Expressions like "developed country" are rarely used these days. The term no longer has a specific definition. The World Bank uses terms like middle-income. Today, India is

classified as a lower middle-income economy. In 2047, India will move to the upper middle-income category. Once one approaches a per capita income of 13,000 US dollars, the status becomes high-income. That's when India can be said to be "developed". In 2047, India will fall short, but the face of poverty, as we know it, will be completely transformed.

Measurement of poverty is based on the notion of a poverty line and using a multi-dimensional poverty index, UNDP has recently documented the sharp drop in number of poor people in India. As economies develop, the notion of a poverty line is of course moved up, beyond a subsistence level of consumption. However, officially, the poverty line used is still the Tendulkar poverty line. Unfortunately, consumption expenditure data, used to measure poverty, do not exist beyond 2011-12. Therefore, different people have used different assumptions to measure poverty today. If one uses PLFS (periodic labour force survey) data and the Tendulkar poverty line, the poverty ratio (percentage of population below the poverty line) is around 17% now. By 2047, this ratio will decline to around 5%. SDG (sustainable development goal) reports, among others, have documented pockets of deprivation in selected geographical regions, targeted by the government through the aspirational districts programme. India is heterogeneous and despite provision of basic necessities (physical and social infrastructure, financial inclusion, access to markets, technology, digital access) and the overall message of empowerment, there will be pockets of poverty, even in 2047. But the nature of that poverty will be very different. India will achieve universal literacy, or be pretty close to it. UNDP uses HDI (human development index), an aggregate measure, to gauge human development, moving beyond poverty ratios. Today, India is in the medium human development category, judged by HDI. In 2047, India will move to the high human development category.

There are five transitions going on and these will be even more marked in 2047. First, there is a rural to urban shift and urbanization is correlated with development. By 2047, almost 60% of India's population will be urbanized. Delhi and Kolkata with populations of around 35 million, Mumbai with more than 40 million. The mind boggles and the government's programmes are meant to ensure that urbanization is managed better. Second, there will be greater formalization of the economy. Yet again, formalization is correlated with growth and development. Individuals will have formal job contracts. MSMEs will graduate to become legally registered. Indian companies will become larger and more efficient, integrated into global supply chains. Third, the percentage of the population that earns a living from agriculture will decline. Agriculture's share in GDP will decline to something like 5% and the percentage of population that earns a living from agriculture will not

be more than 20%. Fourth, within agriculture, there will be a shift away towards commercialization and diversification and larger farms. Fifth, there will be greater citizen participation in governance with the “*sabka prayas*” theme. For years, there was a colonial chip on the shoulder. But the present India is a proud India, a resilient India, an aspiring India. Amritkaal is about that and the country is making great strides on economic front with greater confidence and entrepreneurship.

[Bibek Debroy is the Chairman, Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister, Government of India.]

India Takes World Centre-Stage with G20 Presidency

Amb. Ashok Sajjanhar

Introduction

India assumed the Presidency of G20 (the Group of 20 countries comprising 19 large economies and the European Union) for 2023 from Indonesia on 1st December, 2022. While accepting this responsibility, PM Narendra Modi said that India's G20 presidency will be "inclusive, ambitious, decisive and action-oriented."

India's assumption of the G20 presidency has decisively signaled its emergence as a significant player on the global stage. While most countries in the world, both developed and developing, have found it difficult to effectively handle the challenges thrown up by the Covid-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine conflict, India, through its bold leadership and prudent policies, has been able to successfully navigate the headwinds it has encountered over the last three years.

What is the G20?

The G20 is an international forum which represents the world's biggest economies encompassing both industrialized and developing nations. Its core mandate is to address the major challenges related to the global economy, developmental issues and financial architecture, such as international financial stability, climate change mitigation, sustainable development etc.

Together, the G20 members represent 85% of the global gross product; 75% of international trade, and two thirds of the world population.

Because the G-20 is a forum, its agreements or decisions are not legally binding but they do influence countries' policies and global cooperation.

The Setting

The Bali G20 Summit in November, 2022 was held at a particularly difficult and uncertain moment in international politics and economics.

The world has been subjected to huge instability and volatility over the last 3 years *inter-alia* due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict has had global implications through high inflation, shortages of food, fertilizers and energy, unsustainable debts, supply chain disruptions and more. In addition, the challenges of climate change, terrorism, nuclear

proliferation, achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and others continue to unsettle the global economy and community. It is in these circumstances that India has been entrusted with the responsibility of steering the activities of the G20.

The Summit

India emerged as a “leader, solution provider and consensus builder” at the Bali Summit. The shadow of the Russia-Ukraine conflict loomed large over the deliberations in the run up to the Summit. It was not found possible to arrive at a mutually acceptable language on the conflict in several of the G20 meetings that preceded the Summit. India was able to act as a bridge between the opposing sides on the issue. A compromise solution was achieved which reiterated the assertion by PM Modi to Russian President Vladimir Putin in Samarkand on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Summit that “today is not an era of war,” and that the solution to the conflict should be found through “dialogue and diplomacy.”

The Declaration, a 19-page document addressed in considerable detail, the major challenges confronting the global economy and financial system.

In his remarks in the first session on Energy and Food Security, PM Modi clearly stated that the United Nations had failed to resolve the political and economic challenges afflicting the world. It is because of the failure of the multilateral organizations that the significance of G20 has increased. PM Modi exhorted the countries to evolve a new world order as had been done after the Second World War.

While speaking on the need to make digital connectivity truly inclusive, PM Modi asserted that “digital transformation is the most remarkable change of our era. The proper use of digital technologies can become a force multiplier in the decades-long global fight against poverty. Digital solutions can also be helpful in the fight against climate change.” PM Modi asserted that India’s experience of the past few years has shown that if digital architecture is made ‘inclusive’, it can bring about socio-economic transformation. He declared that the principle of "Data for development" will be an integral part of the overall theme of India’s Presidency "One Earth, One Family, One Future". Batting for sustainable growth, PM Modi stated that LiFE i.e. 'Lifestyle for Environment' campaign can make a big contribution to this. He encouraged the global community to make sustainable lifestyle a mass movement.

India’s Presidency

During its Presidency, India will aspire to deliver outcomes in areas of critical interest such as integrating the climate and development agenda,

accelerating progress towards achieving the SDG 2030 mandate, furthering development cooperation, supporting small and marginal farmers, enhancing food security and nutrition, addressing global skill gaps, women empowerment, promotion of blue economy and coastal sustainability, digital health solutions, green hydrogen and tech-enabled learning.

India hit the ground running on assuming the Presidency of the G20. Even before taking over charge, India organized a Special Briefing for envoys of G20 and invitee countries and International Organisations in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands on 26th November, 2022. Starting with the first 4-day Sherpa meeting in Udaipur from 4th December, 2022, India has already organized several substantive meetings including the first Finance and Central Bank Deputies Meeting in Bengaluru; first Meeting of the G20 Development Working Group in Mumbai; first Global Partnership for Financial Inclusion in Kolkata, and several more.

India has also emerged as a strong and clear voice of the global South. There is a persistent feeling among several small countries that their concerns and problems do not get the attention they deserve. In a remarkable path-breaking initiative, India organized the “Voice of the Global South for Human-Centric Development” virtual Summit on 12th-13th January, 2023. The theme of the Summit was “Unity of Voice, Unity of Purpose.” The Summit brought together 125 countries of the global South to share their perspectives and priorities on a common platform across a whole range of issues. The Summit, as is evident from the numbers, received a strong, positive response across the world. This initiative was inspired by PM Modi's vision of ‘Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas, Sabka Prayas’ (the support of everyone, development for everyone, trust of everyone with everyone’s effort), and was also underpinned by India's philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (The World is One Family). The Summit was a platform to exchange ideas and solutions, and to unite in voice and purpose, the issues of concern and priorities for the Global South.

In his Opening Address, PM Modi declared that the Voice of the Global South will be the Voice of India and the priorities of the developing countries will be India’s priorities. PM Modi gave a call for 4Rs - ‘Respond, Recognize, Respect and Reform’ in context of various priorities of the developing world. Prime Minister also announced a number of new initiatives by India. These include – AarogyaMaitri whereby essential medical supplies will be provided to any developing country affected by natural disasters or humanitarian crisis; Global South Centre of Excellence for research on development solutions to be implemented around the world; Global South Science and Technology Initiative to share expertise in areas such as space technology

and nuclear energy; Global South Young Diplomats Forum; and Global South Scholarships.

While assuming the Presidency, PM Modi had said that India's G20 priorities would be shaped in consultation with not just G20 partners, but also with our fellow travellers in the Global South, whose voice often goes unheard. This Summit was an opportunity for those countries that are not part of the G20 process to share their ideas, concerns, aspirations and expectations. Several developing countries like Bangladesh, Egypt, Mauritius, Nigeria, Oman and the UAE have also been invited as “guest countries” by India to the G20 Summit in September this year.

Conclusion

Accepting the G20 Presidency, PM Modi declared that India will organize more than 200 G20 meetings in 55 different cities on 35 different themes around the country. Visitors to India will get the full experience of its amazing diversity, inclusive traditions, and cultural richness. He invited all G20 members and international organizations “to participate in this unique celebration in India, the 'Mother of Democracy' ”.

Assuming charge of the G20 at this critical moment is a huge challenge. It is also a great opportunity. The world is looking at India with hope and expectation to effectively deal with the turbulence engineered by the Covid-19, Russia-Ukraine conflict, global economic downturn, and climate change. India is committed to reach out to all countries of the North and the South, the East and the West to ensure as PM Modi said at the Bali G20 Summit that “next year when the G20 meets in the holy land of Buddha and Gandhi, we will all agree to convey a strong message of peace to the world.”

India will hand over the baton to Brazil at the end of November, 2023. It is for the first time that the troika comprising of the current, past and future Presidencies of G20 will comprise of three major developing and emerging economies. This provides a unique opportunity to India, supported by Indonesia and Brazil, to make a significant contribution to peace, security, stability and prosperity in the world. India looks forward to its Presidency of the G20 with determination and confidence.

[The writer is former Indian Ambassador to Kazakhstan, Sweden and Latvia.]

Mighty Millets - Super Grains of Power

Prof. Rajeev K Varshney

Super-grain, super-food and wonder-grain are some of the adjectives often used to describe millets, one of the oldest foods known to humans, and probably the first grain used for domestic purposes.

The unanimous adoption by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) of the resolution to declare 2023 as the International Year of Millets, a proposal sponsored by India and supported by over 70 nations, underlines the international community's support to recognise the importance and benefits of these grains for the global food system. Speaking on the subject during the adoption of the resolution India's former permanent representative to the UN, Ambassador TS Tirumurti, said, "There is an urgent need to promote the nutritional and ecological benefit of millets to consumers, producers and decision-makers to improve production efficiencies, research, and development, investments, and food sector linkages". He expressed gratitude to all the co-sponsors, especially Bangladesh, Kenya, Nepal, Nigeria, Russia, Senegal and all member states of the UN for their strong support.

Several ancient Indian scriptures make references to millets and the traces of millets have been found in the archaeological sites of Harappa and Mohenjo-daro. For many years, millets were a part of our daily diet. Today, there is a growing realisation among Indian farmers that cultivating millets requires fewer inputs and it is also an economically viable option, especially in harsh and dry environments. This is supported by the new-found knowledge on the health benefits of millets. Also, over the last few years, the Indian government has been making extensive efforts to encourage the cultivation of millets.

The Union Government of India, headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, had declared 2018 as the National Year of Millets to boost production of the nutrient-rich grains.

A smart food

Millets are an important staple cereal crop for millions of smallholder dry-land farmers across Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. They are also called nutri-cereals or dry-land cereals, and include sorghum (jowar), pearl millet (bajra), finger millet (ragi), foxtail millet (kangni), proso millet (chena), barnyard millet (samvat ke chawal) and kodo millet (kodon), and offer high nutritional benefits. Millets are also referred to as 'Smart Food', which are good for the consumers, the planet and the farmers. For instance, finger millet has three times the amount of calcium as in milk, and most millets have very high levels of iron and zinc, low glycemic index, good levels of protein and fibre, and are gluten-free.

Millets can also contribute to addressing some of the largest global issues in unison: poor diet (malnutrition to obesity); environmental issues (climate change, water scarcity and environmental degradation); and rural poverty. They have a low carbon footprint and have the ability to survive and grow in warm climate with very little water. They are climate-smart and hence constitute a good risk management strategy for farmers as compared to rice and wheat crops, which need higher quantities of water and fertiliser supplements.

Indian millets at the forefront

Efforts to bring Indian millets to the international forefront began in October 2017, during the Committee on Food Security event in Rome. A series of meetings involving the Government of India (GOI), the agricultural research body International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) and other stakeholders were organised at the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the UN to identify the process of promoting the idea with FAO departments and the Indian Embassy in Rome. Following this initial step, in November 2017, the Government of India's then Union Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh wrote to the UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, requesting the inclusion of the proposal in the UN General Assembly agenda for an International Year of Millets in 2018. Although this process can typically take five years, the GOI, ICRISAT, the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) of the Ministry of Agriculture

& Farmers' Welfare and its millets research institute, ICAR - Indian Institute of Millets Research (IIMR), along with others pursued the cause, which came to fruition in 2021.

It is encouraging to note that the world is talking about depleting natural resources like arable land and water, and the pressing need to produce more to meet the food and nutritional requirements of the growing population. Staple crops like rice and wheat are part of our traditional diets but are known to be water guzzlers, challenging our farmers, consumers and policy makers to explore ways to diversify our cropping system. Millets suit this requirement.

Easy to cultivate

Tolerant to drought and high temperature, and other climate change vagaries, millets are mostly cultivated on low-fertile land, mountainous, tribal and rain-fed areas of India like Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Telangana. As per the Food and Agriculture Organization' data, the global millet production stands at about 90 million tonnes, of which India's share is about 19 million tonnes.

However, as productivity for a majority of millets is very low, several Indian and international organisations have been working towards enhancing crop productivity by using multi-disciplinary approaches. For instance, the Pearl Millet Genome Sequencing Consortium, comprising 30 institutions, decoded the genome of pearl millet and identified genes for drought-and-heat-tolerance that may be useful not only for millets but also for other major cereals. These researches have contributed to developing several high-yielding hybrids and improved varieties of several millets that are grown by farmers in India.

Mission millet

At the national level, the Government of India has been promoting the cultivation of millets on a mission mode to achieve nutritional security,

following recommendations by a committee headed by NITI Aayog. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi dedicated 17 biofortified varieties of eight crops, which included two varieties of finger millets and one variety of little millet, on October 16, 2020, on the 75th anniversary of the FAO. As a part of the government's initiative under the National Food Security Act, state governments have been advised to procure millets at minimum support price and distribute them under the public distribution system (PDS). India's National Nutrition Mission, POSHAN Abhiyaan, has also advised state governments to include millets under large public system delivery channels such as Integrated Child Development Services, Mid-Day Meals etc.

While the government and research organisations work towards higher productivity of millets, nutritionists and chefs are contributing towards the promotion of millets by creating unique millet dishes. Promotions are being done on easy ways to cook millets, convenient tasty millet recipes, and word is being spread about their nutritional benefits and environment-friendly qualities among all stakeholders - both at the national and international level. The UN Food Systems Summit 2021 also offers additional opportunity to make the food systems sustainable and resilient. The declaration of 2023 as the 'International Year of Millets' will certainly support all these efforts and make millets a popular and healthy food choice for all.

[Prof. Rajeev K Varshney is a Research Program Director at the International Crops Research Institute for Semi- Arid Tropics (ICRISAT), Hyderabad, India and an Adjunct Professor with Food Futures Institute, Murdoch University, Australia.]

India

THE SPICE BOWL OF THE WORLD

Flavourful and aromatic with a host of health benefits - Indian spices are one of a kind. While some seasonings are popular, there are a few indigenous ones that are rarely used. Celebrity chef and Padma Shri awardee Sanjeev Kapoor explores a few of India's lesser-known spices



Of the many new-age recipes that incorporate the use of turmeric, vegan ice creams spiced with cinnamon are one of the most popular

India is popular for myriad aspects, including its traditions, rich heritage and diverse culinary styles. People from outside the country are extremely curious about the “secret” ingredients used in Indian dishes that make them so uniquely flavourful. But what they often tend to overlook is that it is the indigenous spices, which make Indian food so irresistible.

When we talk about spices, the one thing that is common in every Indian household is a *masala dabba* (spice box). A quintessential part of every *desi* Indian kitchen, *masala dabbas* are fascinating. And even though these spices are added in *chutkis* (pinches), they play a very big part in turning a dish from just palatable to simply delectable. Apart from the wonderful aroma and flavour, Indian spices also have medicinal and immunity-boosting properties.

For generations, Indians have traditionally used commonly-available kitchen ingredients to prepare healthy concoctions like *kadha* (a healing Ayurvedic drink made with herbs and spices) and *haldi doodh* (turmeric milk) to cure common cold.

Such popular spices as *jeera* (cumin), *saunf* (fennel), *sarson* (mustard) and *methi* (fenugreek)

Top: *Bhut jolokia*, one of the spiciest chillies in the world, is popularly pickled with oil, salt and vinegar

Bottom: According to an article published in news18.com, *bhut jolokia* is also known to improve mood by releasing endorphins



facebook.com/afooddiary

As per Ayurveda, *khus*, called the ‘wonder grass’, cools the body, especially during summer, and ensures good blood circulation





feature in *masala dabbas* across the country, and much has been said and written about their exceptional culinary properties. Therefore, here we explore some of the lesser-known indigenous spices from various parts of the nation, which will prove once again that India, truly is, the ultimate land of spices!

RAJA MIRCHA

Since we're talking about spices, let's begin with the ultra-spicy pepper

or *raja mircha*, quite popular in the Northeastern part of India. Also known as ghost pepper, Naga chilli and *bhut* (or *bhoot*) *jolokia*, it was recorded in the Guinness Book of Records as the hottest chilli in the world in 2007. It is best when freshly-plucked as it tends to lose its intensity with time. Another popular way of savouring this spice is by pickling it with oil, salt and vinegar. Nowadays, people are experimenting with it, which has led to the making of the *bhut jolokia* tea by a Guwahati-based tea company. When consumed in limited quantities, it is said to help in improving blood circulation and digestion, lowering blood pressure and boosting metabolism.

KALPASI

Also known as *daagar ka phool*, *patthar ka phool* or black stone flower, *kalpasi* is the Tamil word for lichen.

Top: *Kalpasi* is one of the spices in the mixture used in the preparation of the delicious Chettinad *meen kuzhambu* (fish curry)

Bottom: Lichens, called *kalpasi* in Tamil, are important indicators of atmospheric purity and will not grow when the air is polluted. They require a slight elevation above sea level, which is why Ooty and Kodaikanal in Tamil Nadu are important catchment areas for the spice
(Source: marryamhreshii.com/the-mystery-spice-kalpasi/)



This special yet rare spice, which aids digestion, reduces inflammation and acts as a pain reliever, is primarily used in Maharashtrian and Chettinad cuisine (of Tamil Nadu). The upper surface of this spice is dark green or black in colour. It has a strong earthy aroma and a dry texture, and is incorporated in the preparation of such popular indigenous spice mixes as Maharashtra's *kala masala* and *goda masala*, and Hyderabad's *potli masala*.

LAKADONG AND SALEM TURMERIC

Turmeric or *haldi* is probably the most common Indian spice. It enjoys a pride of place in every *desi* household and deserves more appreciation than otherwise given. It is rich in curcumin, which has antioxidant, anti-inflammatory and immunity-boosting

properties, and also imparts a beautiful yellow hue to every dish that it is added to! The two varieties of turmeric that are said to be the best in India are Lakadong from Meghalaya and Salem from Tamil Nadu. This humble superfood has travelled from traditional Indian kitchens to global food hotspots and has found a place in several international recipes like Morocco's



Top: Cinnamon turmeric ice tea is a refreshing and nutritious summer drink. Not only does it cool the body but also boosts immunity

Bottom: According to a study published by the Directorate of Horticulture, Department of Agriculture, Government of Meghalaya, titled *Mission Lakadong*, Lakadong turmeric promotes brain function and reduces inflammation





Top: *Radhuni*, a spice indigenous to West Bengal, has an aroma similar to parsley, tastes like celery and has a striking resemblance to carom seeds. It is used in the preparation of several dishes including *daal* (lentil soup)

Bottom: The brilliant red colour in north India's popular meat-based dish *rogan josh* is imparted by the root of the alkanet herb, also called *ratan jot*



pastilla (spiced meat and apricots wrapped in filo pastry), Sri Lanka's *kiri hodi* (dried Maldive fish cooked in coconut milk gravy) and the extremely popular turmeric latte.

RADHUNI

A spice that finds a special place in Bengali cuisine yet continues to remain obscure to the rest of the country, *radhuni* is often confused with *ajwain* (carom seeds) because of their similar appearance. *Radhuni*, seeds of wild celery, forms an integral part of the quintessential Bengali *paanch phoron* - a traditional five-spice mix comprising *kalo jeere* (nigella), *rai* (mustard), *mouri* (fennel), *methi* and *radhuni*. This indigenous spice aids digestion, and helps reduce pain and inflammation.

RATAN JOT

Alkanet root or *ratán jot* is a unique spice from north India, especially Jammu & Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh. It is a herb that comes from the borage plant family and its roots produce a unique red colour, which has made this spice so popular. The flavour is more earthy than spicy. *Rogan josh*, the classic Kashmiri meat dish, gets its rich red colour from this spice! It has also been used as a medicine since ancient times for treating infections, skin wounds, rashes, burns and several other health problems. Perhaps, it is a precious '*ratán*' or jewel after all!

KUDAM PULI

Kudam puli or Malabar tamarind is a popular souring agent in South India and is often used as a substitute for the regular *imli* or tamarind. Its appearance



One of the main ingredients of the Malayali fish curry is the *kudam puli* or Malabar tamarind

is similar to *kokum* but it has a strong smoky flavour and is added to a variety of fish curries, which is why it's also called 'fish tamarind'. This spice is known to not only aid weight loss but also promote cardiovascular health and boost energy.

KHUS

Another indigenous gem from Indian spices is *khus* or vetiver, which is also considered a must in Indian homes during summer. *Khus sharbat* (drink) is very popular during summer for its refreshing quality. In several households, this *sharbat* is a must-serve during Holi! As per Ayurveda, *khus*, called the 'wonder grass', cools the body and ensures good blood circulation. *Khus* also boosts

immunity, helps control thyroid-related issues and can also be used to keep diabetes in check.

Indian spices pack in more than just flavour and aroma. They are treasure chests of wellness too. And although they vary in taste, pungency and usage from one part of the country to another, it is certain that no Indian cuisine is complete without them.



Sanjeev Kapoor is a celebrity chef, author and TV show host. In 2018, he had the honour to prepare meals for Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the latter's visit to the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The chef was invited by His Highness Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces.



SPICE UP YOUR immunity

Since time immemorial, traditional spices and herbs have played a vital role as immuno-boosters in Indian cuisine. Here's a look at how these ingredients make our everyday food not just tasty, but also wholesome

BY GITA HARI

The addition of the bouquet of spices in traditional Indian meals is what makes them one of the healthiest dietary solutions in the world

According to ancient Indian texts, *ushadham ucchyathe sarvam*, which means food is the absolute cure and healer. Traditionally, in Indian cuisine, vegetables and spices are used in a dish according to their nutritional benefits and their ability to strengthen our immune system, which in turn, can protect us from ailments and infections. A reason why it is advised to include a balanced mix of spices and herbs in our daily meal plan to provide a regular boost to our immune system.

Spices like turmeric, saffron, cloves, cinnamon, carom seeds, ginger and garlic are known to have a plethora of beneficial properties. Herbs like mint, *tulsi* (Holy Basil), and leaves of *neem* and moringa trees are said to have several health benefits. In India, with diverse preparations being made from more or less the same ingredients, spices play a significant role in culinary preparations.

For instance, turmeric - the commonest of all Indian spices - is added in almost all dishes. It not only lends the dish a golden hue but is known for its antiseptic properties and in reducing existing metabolic syndromes. We have often had our mothers urge us to drink warm milk mixed with turmeric to treat dry cough, sore throat and purify the blood of toxins, thereby upping the immunity quotient. Today, this drink



In India there are many examples of beneficial herbs and spices being added to dishes to lend a distinct flavour and also to make them healthier



Top: Jaggery is a staple in traditional Indian kitchens. It is rich in anti-oxidants, aids digestion and is known to cleanse the liver; **Bottom:** A *thepla* (flatbread) made with fenugreek leaves, known to absorb sugar and reduce bad cholesterol



Top: A tea made from fenugreek leaves is known to provide relief from anemia, loss of taste, fever and even dandruff; **Bottom:** A Sattvik meal of cottage cheese fritters deep-fried with a layer of buckwheat flour (*kuttu ka aata*)



Sattvik cuisine

- Depending on its character and effect, food can create a balance or imbalance in one's state of living.
- Sattvik cuisine, in essence, embraces the nutrients that cultivate a positive outlook in a healthy body to enhance spiritual and physical progress.
- It is intrinsically good and in total accord with nature. It comprises of pure foods such as vegetables, grains, fruits and dairy products like milk, curd, white butter and *ghee* (clarified butter).
- This type of cuisine is free from artificial ingredients and desists from spreading disease. It maintains and focuses on stamina, serenity and mental clarity.

is available at many upscale cafes as turmeric latte. Ginger too has similar health benefits.

There are many such examples of beneficial herbs and spices being added to dishes to lend a distinct flavour and also to make them healthier. For example, moringa leaves and fruits (drumsticks) are used in curries across north India to help fight bacterial afflictions. *Neem* too is used in meals and brewed into a thick concoction called *kadha*. A special *neem* leaves chutney is prepared in Maharashtra during the festival of Gudi Padwa. *Neem* has proven remedy to cure loss of appetite, fever and also boost cardiac strength. Curry leaves, the staple garnish in Indian cooking across states, is a popular natural anti-oxidant. "Almost all parts of a *Azadirachta indica* or *neem* tree have beneficial properties – the leaves had raw or cooked, purify blood and aid digestion; the bark extract has been found to cure stomach and intestinal ulcers and *neem* oil reduces skin blemishes. The oil is also a cure to breathing problems," says nutritionist Kavita Devgan.

According to Dr Pooja Thacker, Head of Department Dietetics at Bhatia Hospital, Mumbai, "The clinical trials of *tulsi* on humans have shown it to be a unique combination of anti-viral, anti-microbial, anti-fungal, anti-malarial. It can reduce hypertension, arthritic pain and depression. It acts as anti-epileptic, anti-inflammatory, hepato protective, anti-ulcer, and anti-asthmatic."



Traditional South Indian meals, served on banana leaves are known to be rich in spices that prevent several ailments. Most Indian kitchens apply the concept of minimal wastage along with many eco-friendly practices

Asafoetida relieves bloating, flatulence and irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) while fenugreek is known to control long standing ailments like diabetes. Cumin and bishop's weed, the culinary equivalents of modern indigestion drugs, help digestion and check food-borne disorders. Pepper improves absorption of essential nutrients and promotes gut health. A pepper drink is often the go-to cure in many Indian homes to fight a flu.

Asafoetida, fenugreek, black pepper, coriander and cumin seeds

have anti-inflammatory properties, and are extensively used in Indian cuisine. Quintessential South Indian dishes like *sambhar* (*lentil curry with vegetables*), *rasam* (a clear sour soup) and even curries are flavoured with these spices. *Bisibele Bhath* of Karnataka is another classic rice and lentil preparation using various spices and nutritious vegetables to avert deficiencies.

If dishes like *pongal* from the South uses crushed pepper and cumin, Gujarat finds its comfort food in *khichdi* – wholesome rice and lentil dish prepared with minimal spices like cumin and ginger. While restoring digestive enzymes, this one-dish meal builds up energy and resistance levels in the body to fight infections.

The habit of eating freshly-cooked meals must be formed to derive more nutrients, energy and to maintain a healthy body

Khichdi is often the remedy to dietary distress and is used to reset the digestive system with its simple albeit healthy ingredients. Various dried and powdered spices and herbs in traditional Marwari preparations from Rajasthan like *ker sangri* and *pitod ka saag* ensure physical strength. These dishes, often heavy in the use of garlic and onion, ensure that the body is prepared against the heat in most parts of the desert state. Maharashtra has its share of wholesome meal in *usal/misal*, consisting of multiple sprouts in a spice-rich gravy that has loads of ginger and garlic and ensures essential nutrients like proteins. The liberal use of lemons and citrus fruits, which do not allow for thick gravy preparation, ensure the adequate dosage of Vitamin C and a strong defense against the hot and humid environs around Maharashtra.

Punjabi cuisine is hugely popular for the intoxicating aromas of spices and herbs used generously in its

recipes. Just as the fragranced waft of *garam masala* (a rich mix of spices like cardamom, clove, star anise and cinnamon) from North Indian kitchens are simply irresistible they also burst with vigour. Cinnamon and cloves can be counted as immunity-warriors for their anti-fungal and anti-bacterial properties. These dishes often include or end with a generous portion of fennel, ensuring that there is no acidity.



Top: Drumsticks in a bowl of *sambhar* for added health benefits

Bottom: *Azadirachta indica* or *neem* leaves have unbelievable and numerous health benefits. It can be enjoyed as a juice, a spicy chutney with chillies or as a roughly ground powder



Right: A bowl of *rabri*, a dessert, enjoyed all across the country, is often garnished with strands of saffron.
Bottom: A traditional fish curry in mustard sauce. Mustard seeds are rich in a nutrient called selenium, known for its high anti-inflammatory effects



Valley's contribution to India's spice treasure is the Kashmiri red chilli, full of minerals besides black cumin (*shah jeera*), black cardamom and white pepper. The signature lamb dish, *rogan josh* with curd and a variety of spices is a robust low-cholesterol delicacy. Embracing mindfulness while eating and fresh, home-cooked meals can help you kick off stress, discomfort, and depression. Experts say that ingestion of food within four to five hours of cooking is the best.

It's interesting that even today, the ancient concept of a balanced Sattvik meal, cooked fresh with a bouquet of spices, is considered one of the healthiest in the world.

Plenty of star anise, bay leaves and saffron can be found in the dishes from Kashmir. Dr Thacker throws light on saffron's benefits, "It helps in curbing asthma by reducing inflammation. Tests have proven that having saffron regularly can reduce Immunoglobulin M and Immunoglobulin G, which directly reduce asthma." The star among the



Gita Hari curates healthy Sattvik 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.



A craftman showcases an intricate pashmina shawl from Kashmir

MAGIC OF THE loom

From the ancient ikat to the royal patola, from jamdani to Banarasi brocade to the ornate gyaser, and the Kashmiri pashmina, here are some of India's most famous handwoven and handspun weaves that celebrate rare artisanal flair to create the most unique and opulent fabrics

BY PRIYA KUMARI RANA

Handloom fabric is the pulse of India, and has been a tradition in our land since millennia. India is one of the few countries where handloom and hand-spinning are still thriving. In his recent 'Mann ki Baat' address to the nation, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke about National Handloom Day (celebrated on August 7) and encouraged citizens to support handloom artisans, which, in turn, would add to the vision of "Vocal for Local".

From khadi, which has its roots in our movement for Independence,

when Mahatma Gandhi encouraged Indians to start spinning yarn with a *charkha* (spinning wheel) at home, to clusters of weavers spread all over India who spin and weave indigenous cloth – whether it's ikat, bandhni, patola, Banarasi brocades, zari, Apatani, or pashmina – cloth made on the hand-operated loom is woven within the fabric of our nation. Handloom fabrics like khadi were omnipresent right until the advent of the power loom in the West in the 18th century, which ensured that our markets were flooded with machine-made cloth, and led to a decline in our own industry. But thanks to

A weaver weaves a traditional saree using a wooden handloom in Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu





(Right and bottom)
A collection of khadi fabric and sarees created for Gandhi Jayanti by the brand Taneira. The traditional wooden charkha is also visible in the image on right



A group of weavers make Sambalpuri ikat fabric in Bargarh, Odisha. Odisha's rich weaving tradition includes the tribal Bomkai and the striped or chequered Santhali sarees, but the weft-resist Sambalpuri, woven in silk or cotton, is its most recognisable product



government initiatives like World Handloom Day and many others, we are now aware of the significance of various types of handlooms available in India, as designers and customers pay homage to the artisanal work in each outfit, saree, or cloth purchased.

KHADI

Khadi, the most humble yet potent symbol of India's freedom struggle, needs to be certified by the Khadi Village Industries Commission (KVIC), for it to be able to carry the name – and the cloth must be hand-spun and handwoven. The fabric is mostly woven in KVIC-recognised and supported institutions where the government provides employment to rural weavers. These institutions are scattered all over India, in Bengal,

in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh – and the cloth can be bought from Khadi Gram Udyog outlets all over India. Nowadays designers are experimenting with khadi – from stalwarts like Rajesh Pratap Singh, who has been creating clothes from khadi for over a decade, to younger labels like Anavila that experiment with bright hues and jewel tones by procuring khadi woven in Bengal, and dyed with natural dyes like turmeric and indigo.

IKAT

Ikat is a truly mysterious weave, with an Egyptian mummy discovered with a piece of Odisha ikat – a proof of the trade routes between the two ancient civilisations. References to ikat have been found in the murals of the

Ajanta caves from 200 BC. Ikat, unlike other forms of tie-and-dye, is unique because here it's the yarn that is first dyed (by mashing together bundles of yarn tied tightly together, dyed in the pattern of your choice), and then the weaver takes the yarn, and lines it up on the loom to create a pattern on it – a very laborious and intricate process. There is warp ikat, weft ikat, and double ikat, which is very intricate, and it's manufactured in Odisha, Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh.

Veteran designers like Madhu Jain, have made ikat their métier by creating museum-worthy pieces in bamboo silk in the ikat styles of Indonesia, Uzbekistan, and India. Jain has been vocal in her support of sustainable fabrics and living, and this new textile does not eat into the

One of the richest ikat weaves in India – that was once worn by royals and aristocrats – comes from the state of Gujarat – the Patola

earth’s resources, and can provide livelihood to bamboo growers, besides being biodegradable.

Inspired from the land of Babur, Uzbekistan, where it was a royal textile – master artisans like Asif Shaikh (founder of the CDS Art Foundation), awestruck by its large, bold pattern (the ikat in India has smaller motifs), has superimposed his version of ikat with miniaturised motifs that have been hand embroidered on the fabric.

A loom with a Patola saree being woven in Patan, Gujarat



One of the richest ikat weaves in India – that was once worn by royals and aristocrats – comes from the state of Gujarat – the Patola.

Known for its vivid colours, and geometric designs interspersed with folk motifs, it’s said that a Patola sari can survive for 300 years and still retain its original colour! A Paan Patola is a double ikat weave from the northern Gujarat region of Patan, and is a priceless heirloom that are passed down from one generation to the next. Each piece of coloured (dyed) yarn is carefully aligned so as to form the desired pattern while weaving, and both the warp and weft are dyed whilst making this kind of

Patola. Natural dye like madder roots, indigo, and turmeric are used to colour the thread, and patterns look identical on both sides. Delhi-based fashion label Asha Gautam recently created a phenomenal Patola sari for actor Urvashi Rautela, which took six months to make – with more than 70 days to colour the threads, and 25 days to weave, and with 600 gm of silk.

BANARASI BROCADE

The Piliokothi area of Varanasi is the centre of the world-famous Banarasi brocade, which involves intricate motifs in zari handwoven onto silk cloth, producing some of the finest sarees, typically worn by a bride on her wedding day. Kolkata-based designers and textile revivalists Swati and Sunaina are known for their delicately woven tissue saris with one side silk, and the other side pure zari, with borders in Hashiya miniature paintings in brocade. Each saree takes around eight months to weave and costs around INR 2 lakh. The ornate Gyaser weave (traditionally made for the heavy robes of Buddhist monks in monasteries in Tibet and Lhasa) was brought to Varanasi from China by traders. This Oriental influence can also be seen in today’s Banarasi sarees.



A contemporary Banarasi weave

Photo credit: Shanti Banaras

Promotion of the ‘India Handloom Brand’, cultural diplomatic engagements and the support of indigenous artworks are some of the important steps being taken toward promoting the handloom industry



Photo: Swati and Sumaina

no jacquard, the weaver takes a motif and weaves on it like a drawing – a technique known as *uchyant*, where each motif is woven separately.” Some of their most intricate sarees are woven with jamdani (a technique that uses the lightest yarn or zari to weave motifs separately onto the silk). Another forte of theirs is the *jangla jaal*, which is a Banarasi brocade pattern of delicate vines woven with zari into a pure silk saree. A saree like this needs around four to eight weavers and can take from two to four months to be ready.

APATANI WEAVE

This weave is prevalent in every home of the Apatani community in Arunachal Pradesh (and parts of Nagaland) even today, although unfortunately, the number of families practising it has been declining.

The intricate Banarasi Gyaser weave, inspired by ancient fabrics from China is being used by designers today to introduce variations in this traditional fabric

Shanti Banares, based in Varanasi, is a third-generation textile brand specialising in Banarasi weaves, and is led by Amrit and Priyanka Shah. In one of their recent collections, they have used Persian weaves to create bird motifs – unusual in Banarasi saris, using antique-finish zari. “To make a loom, the weaver normally makes a jacquard (a pattern that is woven in a certain ratio of under and over threads) that comes on the loom,” says Amrit Shah. “But when there is

With its colourful geometric, zig-zag patterns, normally using the colours black, red, white, and yellow, the minimalist patterns are used to create aesthetic shawls and other fabrics on a bamboo tube set. With many youngsters turning away from the loom, it’s time to bring back their interest by creating a market for these wonderful textiles, in the forms of shawls, throws, and even jackets.

PASHMINA

Next we travel to the picturesque, wintry setting of Kashmir, which produces the warm and comforting pashmina weave. A 100 per cent pashmina must be made from 100 per cent cashmere to be considered premium, and only gets



Above: A woman from Nagaland working on a traditional handloom during a tribal festival in New Delhi
Bottom: A woman of the Apatani tribe weaving on a handloom

THINKS TO KNOW

- In 2015, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared August 7 as National Handloom Day
- The 'Handloom Mark' is a symbol of the rich legacy and tradition of Indian handloom textiles. The Mark is aimed to promote the brand of handlooms and develop a niche market for the handloom textiles with a distinct identity
- India's textiles industry employs around 35.22 lakh handloom workers. More than 80% looms are in rural areas. India is the second largest exporter of handloom products in the world, with exports valued at US\$ 353.9 in 2017-18



Handloom Mark

Weavers working on handlooms to make kani shawls at a home workshop on the outskirts of Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir



the GI (Geographical Indication) certification if it's handspun and handwoven using pure pashmina wool from Ladakh. "The wool for the pashmina we make is from goats from the Chand Khand region of Ladakh," says Tariq Ahmad Dar, a former model who runs his own luxury pashmina brand, Pashmkaar. The hand-spinning of the yarn is done by women artisans from Srinagar (it takes one woman one week to make thread from 10 gm of wool), and once it's woven into a shawl or a stole, it's dyed or embroidered (a 2-m shawl takes 15 days to embroider). Dar employs 250 artisans (including 40 women just

to spin the yarn), and is using fresh, bright colours to make pashmina stoles for men as a fashion accessory using his international travels and inspirations to make fashionable pieces for modern men. Some of the pieces for women in his Shah Bano line have taken around three years to embroider, and prices can go up from INR 12,500 all the way to INR 1 lakh. When you design and weave a beautiful pattern directly onto the pashmina, this is known as *kani* – woven with small, eyeless wooden sticks – which is the most prized pashmina of all, and gets its own GI, and features stunning Mughal motifs (mostly flowers) in a very labour-



A craftsman uses a handloom to make rugs in Jodhpur, Rajasthan and (inset) colourful traditional fabrics from Rajasthan

intensive, almost spiritual process (only 3-4 cm can be made in a day). "The pashmina was the first economic revolution in Kashmir, especially for women," says Dar, adding, "My grandmother would spin yarn on a *charkha*, and even today the yarn cannot be made without women."

The above are just a few of the handloom textile traditions practised in India. But there are many more that are flourishing in different parts of the country. With support from the government, designers and textile revivalists are working towards popularising these fabrics again. Promotion of the 'India Handloom Brand', cultural diplomatic engagements and the support of indigenous artworks are some of the important steps being taken toward promoting this industry.

Also effective are implementation of government schemes such as the "Make in India" and "Vocal for Local" to promote handlooms and crafts; the Mudra scheme to support women entrepreneurs, the National Rural Livelihoods Mission, and mobilising SHGs are other bottom-up approaches. But what is most important, is the support people can offer in the revival of these weaves by buying and wearing them.



Priya Rana is a leading fashion writer who has helmed major publications in India. Rana is currently a contributing editor with The Man magazine