



Kavitha Reddy

In Memory of my 9-year-old Lab Kamet who left us on 9th May 2019

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About the Book

Voices Matter, is a compilation of articles I have written over few years that were either published in News Papers or in other online Media.

This book is an earnest attempt to share my views, ideas, concerns on various issues. There are also satirical articles and critics on political issues, articles on policy and tourism too.

I have written on a very wide variety of topics that I either closely track or I am associated with. Objective of all my articles is to give an unbiased understanding of the issues and also give suggestion to make changes and improvements.

The views expressed in all these articles are personal in nature, based on personal understanding and experiences. Articles on Lakes, Garbage crisis, Women in Politics are based on the work I have been involved with.

I take this opportunity to thank all my well wisher who have encourage me to write and share my Ideas & Opinions giving strength to the causes I have taken up all these years.

Kavitha Reddy

Date: 9th May 2019

She the Law-Maker

Millions of Women Elected Representatives in Panchayat and Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) since 1993, yet we have fewer Women in Assemblies and Parliament, while many men who were Elected in Panchayat or ULBs have made it to the Assemblies and Parliament, the Women are left far behind, making it a fit case to analyze why the women reservation is actually not empowering women politically at the Panchayat and ULB level.

Women reservation at the Panchayat and ULBs was hailed as a revolutionary step, but little did we know how reservation would be misused for the benefit of the few powerful. Male Leaders fielding female relatives as proxy candidates to hold on to power is rampant, far fewer independent women get opportunities at the Panchayat level. In the ULBs where elections are fought on Party tickets the scenario is no different, women workers in the political parties are sidelined in favor of female relatives of the male leaders who keep the power within the family as and when the reservations rotate. If women reservation was implemented with the right intent and with the spirit to create a pipeline of women leaders, more Councilors and Corporators like their male counterparts would have aspired to become MLAs and MPs.

Yes, in reality the women reservation at Panchayat and ULBs has been misused, but does it make an argument not to pass the Women Reservation Bill, and stall the political empowerment of 50% of our population? Well, *drunk driving is no reason to ban cars*, and there is a need to find ways to end political power becoming family extension of male leaders in the name of women reservation.

Even though every major political party talks about making the Women Reservation Bill a reality, and have proudly put it in their manifesto, the Bill is still gathering dust, and discourse on political empowerment of women by the political parties is a mere lip service.

Deeper argument is also that political parties have few women in their decision-making bodies in the organization structure, so expecting them to give more tickets to women is a far cry. Why are political parties reluctant to field women candidates in Assembly and Parliament elections? And two common excuses are Winnability or (and) Lack of ticket seekers!

Winnability, rather non-winnability is the most common excuse given by every political party in every election, but actual data calls their bluff, on the scale of winnability women have done better than men. Also, when all men who get tickets don't win why is the responsibility of winning is so heavily pushed as a criterion on women? Assuming even if winnability is an issue than, it's all the more important to pass the Women Reservation Bill so that it's the women who are contesting against each other in the women reserved constituencies.

Lack of ticket seekers, when winnability claims gets questioned this becomes the next safe excuse, and certainly the most bogus argument. When political parties claim to have women wing in their organization, how can one accept the lack of ticket seekers as a legitimate claim? Debunking this claim is the huge increase in the number of independent women candidates over the last 20 years in the Assembly and Parliament elections, indicating how keen women are in fighting elections and being part of political process.

50% of the Indian population is not equally represented in the lawmaking process both in the State and in the Center, any argument to further delay the Bill is injustice and political exile for the women of this country. From Panchayat to Parliament women reservation has to be seamless, and unless we do not see 50% of the population represented in the Assemblies and Parliament our law-making process is not inclusive indeed.

Women Reservations does not mean women have to be judged differently on competency or performance nor it's an entitlement or one more avenue to push the female relatives of male leader. It is about providing a level playing ground for women to be part of the political spectrum and be counted as lawmakers.

Make no mistake, India needs inclusivity in its lawmaking process and today lawmaking is almost an exclusive men club in which views of 50% population of this nation are excluded.

Patriarchy has no place in new age politics, time has come to end the political exile of the women. Parties have to demonstrate political will and empower women of this nation politically; women are no political pariahs!

Publication: BPAC Blog, She the Law-Maker, 21st Dec 2018

Go Girl, Travel the World

Last few years has witnessed a significant increase in Indian travelers and particularly women. Travel is indeed a hobby/interest that women have taken to with great enthusiasm; financial independence, connectivity, accessibility and technology have opened up the world to women. Several destinations have even gone a step further to offer special travel/holiday packages for women travelers.

Sadly, an increase in brutal crimes against women across the country (both rural and urban) is going to have a huge impact on this new found travel freedom. One can debate and nuance the cause of increasing crime against women, but mobility and freedom to travel is indeed a key factor that determines the level of participation of women in the economy, politics and social structure. The fear is that the increase of violence against women will deter participation of women in all fields and will end up pushing us 15-20 years backwards.

One of the very important aspects of women empowerment is providing a safe environment for women who travel on work or leisure. As a traveler I am very concerned that incidents of violence against women will result in more social restriction and lesser focus on creating a safe environment and empowering women. It will be a sad day when the fear of crimes against women will stop many of us from going out exploring and traveling the world.

Yes, there is a lot that the governments have to do to create a safe environment for everyone irrespective of gender. Our society should take more responsibility in not just condemning the crimes against women but also grooming the boys in their homes to respects women and treat them as equals, and more importantly as humans.

But as women travelers we need to start taking control, unless we do not get confident about ourselves and be prepared at all times we will be curtailed with restrictions and fears. As a traveler and as a mountaineer I have been travelling for many years mostly alone. Be it the buses in UP or Rickshaws in Mumbai or the Jeeps in Uttarakhand I have travelled in some of the most remote areas across the country, three things that always makes me feel safe are Confidence, Awareness and Preparedness.

Confidence

- Be confident about yourself mentally and physically
- Learn basics of self-defense, which will make you more physically confident/aware
- Do not disclose information about your travel to unknown people
- Avoid any eye contact or talking with strangers, particularly men
- Do not let anyone get too friendly

Awareness

- Be aware of the surroundings, nothing happens all of a sudden
- Have complete information of the destination you are travelling
- Do not share food/cigarettes with any stranger during the journey
- Be aware of your luggage and do not stack all the money in a single place
- Try not to be alone in a bus/jeep/train
- Travel in public transport or in a recognized transport facility
- Avoid unscheduled night travel unless necessary
- Take upper berths or women compartment if you are travelling in a train
- Choose a reputed/recognized/authorized travel agency/tour guide, get references

Preparedness

- Inform friends and family where you are travelling
- Carry your ID card and emergency contact details
- Carry a whistle either around your neck or clip it where you can access it easily
- Have your phone at quick access with emergency/police control room numbers on speed dial
- Objective is travelling so dress for travel, watch what you are wearing, don't invite unwanted attention
- Wear skin tights or a swim suite underneath your dress
- Do not wear tight or revealing attire stick to full sleeve t-shirt, slightly loose jeans or khakis or salwar suit
- Travel light, ensure you have your backpack/trolley bag packed properly
- Do not wear expensive jewelry or display valuables like laptop/expensive phone/GPS/camera/cash etc
- Carry pepper spray if possible

We need to sometimes empower ourselves and be confident, be aware and be prepared, let's be practical there cannot be a police constable standing guard on every road every locality at all times. Government, Police, Society are responsible to provide a safe environment for every citizen irrespective of gender, but we cannot outsource our dreams and destiny either.

So, go travel the world do not wait for all the signals lights to go Green to embark on a journey!

Publication: Deccan Herald, Go girl! Travel the world, 5th Jan 2019

Shift Focus to Sustainable Tourism

Tourism brings cultures, cuisines and countries together, a recent newspaper clip caught the attention of many, when the locals of Shimla were pleading the Tourist not to visit Shimla!

Depleting resources, excess commercialization, increase in waste output, impact on environment are serious concerns in most of the Tourist spots across India. Tourism is not necessarily a fully organized industry in India, but for many states biggest source of revenue and job creating comes from Tourism, and foreign tourist influx brings in much needed foreign exchange, of course we forget the fact that local tourists are indeed greater volume when it comes to religious tourism, and hill stations that are high on honeymoon tourism. With accessibility and added economic power local tourists indeed outnumber the foreign tourists.

The lopsided tourism policies are focused on creating tourism infrastructure and seldom focus on developing the industry to make tourism more sustainable. These lopsided policies eventually are crumbling under their own weight, as tourist spots are becoming more and more crowded and in turn giving rise to serious environmental and sustainability issues. Be it untreated sewage let into the Ganga from the hotels in Gangotri or the garbage being thrown on the top of Khardung-La or the eateries cleaning meat at Balmuri falls or hours of traffic jams due to large number of visitors to Shivanasamudra, all tell the same story of bad policy decisions and even worst implementation.

Recently Karnataka Forest department took a decision to restrict the number of Trekkers, as the popular Trekking routes like Kudremukh, Skandagiri, Kumaraparvatha were reeling under heaps of trash and witnessed serious threat to the Flora and Fauna, but is that enough? The Forest department and Tourism department work in silos, thereby leading to more policy lapses and failure to create a holistic tourism policy.

Karnataka can offer 365 days tourism option and is blessed with a variety of options, Beaches, Wildlife, Cycling, Eco-Tourism, Safaris, Trekking, Rafting, Temples, Rock Climbing, Kayaking, Scuba Diving, Sky Diving, Forts, Monuments, Hill Stations, Waterfalls etc. With high connectivity and accessibility, the IT State lives up its tourism tagline '*One State Many Worlds*', Tourism department's enthusiasm to emulate states like Kerala or Goa or Rajasthan it is committing the same mistakes where the policies are devoid of sustainability. Today over 30-40 % of Karnataka tourist spots have reached the danger mark in the scale of impact on environment and sustainability.

Even though Karnataka was one of the 1st State to ban all kinds of single use plastic items fully, most tourist spots are an eyesore with plastic items littered around unmanaged, once in a while these spots are cleaned and the waste

along with plastic and disposables gets dumped into nearby drain or burnt. Waste water is let into the streams and rivers without any thought on the impact it has in the long term. With excess foot falls in some of the tourist spots, there is an alarming impact on environment and resources.

Does Karnataka Tourism policy talk about waste management or treating of waste water or low emission transport, does the state have a policy on making tourism more sustainable? Answer in NO! Any tourist spot that has an average of 100 tourists per day has to be considered at a high inflow spot where the infrastructure like hotels, toilets, eateries, souvenir stores, facilities needs to be regulated and made fully complaint under the '*Sustainable Tourism Guidelines*', and also create a community-based tourism where the beneficiaries are the local communities and not the Tourism department.

Tourism department has to play the role of a facilitator, incubator and regulator and not that of an operator, thereby making tourism more community based, this can create direct employment for local communities and increase accountability on Sustainable Tourism with checks and balances.

There is an argument that focus on Sustainable Tourism could lead to lesser inflow of tourists, which in reality invalid argument, as in the long-term there are more gains than loss, and also it is an opportunity to identify and develop more tourist spots. If the objective is to ensure that a foreigner should be able to spend one extra day in Karnataka, then it is a strong reason enough to offer more options rather than more days with fewer options.

So, what are the suggestions for Karnataka Tourism, here are some options, 1. Redraft tourism policy making it Sustainability centric 2. Shift from the role of an Operator to Facilitator, Incubator and Regulator 3. Promote Responsible Tourism via Community and Operators 4. Invest in resource development, low emission transport and not merely in infrastructure buildings 5. Focus on maintenance, cleanliness and branding of the tourist spots 6. Market tourist spots not facilities 7. Incubate operators and encourage operators to create circuits based on season 8. Prohibit tourist spots for at least 100 days in a year, to ensure re-cope and reduce exploitation 9. Stay committed to Environment friendly Sustainable Tourism.

Sustainable Tourism has to be the only way forward, foot falls cannot be the scale to measure success of tourism policy, scale of sustainability is far more important as we are constantly challenged by resource constraints and environmental impact.

Publication: Deccan Herald, Shift Focus to Sustainable Tourism, 3rd Sept 2018

Garbage In, Garbage Out

Whether Bengaluru is reeling under the depression in Bay of Bengal could be debated, but the city is undoubtedly reeling under severe Garbage crisis once again. BBMP and the relevant authorities have failed to address the Garbage situation in the city yet again; they have handed over the city and citizen health to Garbage mafia. Heaps of Garbage are quickly turning into mountains, out-break of an epidemic is inevitable if the apathy and mindlessness continues for few more days.

Throwing money at every problem seems to be the only idea BBMP comes up with; unfortunately, BBMP spending over Rs 400-500 crores on Solid waste Management (SWM) annually has not stopped the Garbage crisis that hits that city every 2 years. Bengaluru is probably the only city with such high spending on SWM and it seems like BBMP is busy 'applying lipstick on a pig'.

The villages around Bengaluru have chased out BBMP Garbage trucks, after BBMP converted the land near the villages into toxic dump yards and landfills, with absolutely no intention of processing, treatment or clearing the Garbage. Why only neighboring villages the Karnataka Compost Development Corporation (KCDC) that is located in Ward 190 has been opposed by the residents around due to faulty policy and complete contempt of court ordered Standard Operating Procedures.

Every time there was a Garbage crisis, hundreds of truckloads of Garbage was sent out to neighboring villages for dumping, but now with that option ruled out, the streets of Bengaluru are raising the stink.

So why is Garbage such a big issue for Bengaluru? In simple management terms it's 'Garbage In, Garbage Out', how can one expect better result from a toothless SWM policy and faulty Garbage tender?

A good look at the SWM policy and the Garbage tender will not only expose the lack of holistic approach, but lack of intent. When Garbage tender is not in sync with SWM policy the policy is designed to fail on all fronts.

The key guidelines of SWM policy that includes Source, Collection, Transport, Processing and Disposal should be implemented in totality, but today the policy is gathering dust with no connect to the Garbage tender what so ever.

Source

Segregation at source is the first and crucial step to addressing the Garbage crisis; even though currently less than 15% households segregating waste at source, it's more due to the waste collection method, lack of awareness and lack of sustained localized campaign in the communities.

Collection & Transport

Even though the tender has certain guidelines on collection, handling and transport, ambiguity in the clauses is completely exploited by the Service Provider, who have an incentive to transport un-segregated waste. Three critical aspects that need a revamp in the tender are:

- 1. Shift the policy from collection of segregated waste to collection of the Wet & Dry waste separately by two different Service Providers, thereby defining the roles and objectives for the two Service Providers.*
- 2. Mandatory use of leak proof containers by all primary collection vehicles, and sync the transfer timings between primary and secondary collection to avoid creating dumping at secondary collection points.*
- 3. Move from the term Treatment to Processing (Composting, Recycling, Reusing)*

Processing

The SWM policy has to change form Treatment to Processing, which will lead to reduction in creating newer landfill or dumping yards. Processing should include Composting in case of wet waste, Recycling in case of dry waste and Reusing to produce energy/bio-gas.

Disposal

Debris and waste that cannot be processed needs a clear destination, there is rampant illegal dumping of the debris on the Lake beds and into Storm Water Drains across the city. Construction debris is a reality and unless there is a specific destination identified the city Lakes will suffer at the cost of construction.

One does not have to read an encyclopedia to realize that Pourakarmikas (PKs), SHGs, Informal sector waste-pickers (ISWPs) play a critical role in a successful implementation of SWM policy. PKs, SHGs, ISWPs can be linked directly to various state & central livelihood programs by making them the stake holders in the SWM policy.

The SWM policy needs a highly decentralized approach, it should emphasize on multiple Service Providers and SWM Entrepreneurs to create not only competition but to push for continuous improvement on a yearly basis in infrastructure and technology.

State Government and BBMP are currently on a 'Frog Kissing' mode, they have announced yet another high cost experiment of Waste-2-Energy plant, but unless the SWM policy, Garbage tender are not in sync, Waste-2-Energy plant will be yet another white Elephant just like the Sewage Treatment Plants that are running 60-70% below capacity.

A good policy alone cannot guarantee better result, the skill is in implementation, hence there is a need to shift focus from spending on tenders to spending on manpower, resources, training, campaigns, awareness programs and incentive policy.

Garbage mafia has to end and to do that BBMP should start investing on setting objectives, targets and achieving results and stop throwing taxpayers' monies on Garbage trucks.

Publication: Citizen Matters, Garbage in, Garbage Out, 20th Nov 2015

My Rock Star Teachers

Guru Brahma Guru Vishnu | Guru Devo Maheshwara | Guru Sakshat Param Brahma | Tasmai Sree Gurave Namaha |

Whenever I meet my Teachers, there is always a big hug and they proudly introduce me to their current colleagues, speaking all the good things about me. No doubt that I was always the Teachers student, as a kid I remember getting into fights with my dad about math sum, and the fights always ended with me screaming '*My Teacher is right, I will not learn from you*', even after getting few tight slaps.

Noor Fatima, the Head Mistress how can I forget her, slim tall lady who always draped her sari beautifully and spoke with so much confidence. She was an inspiration, what was then not even an observation, today seems to be the very foundation of the way I see the world. A Muslim couple, running a school in Hindu matt premises, my class teacher being Anglo-India and my favorite teacher Fatima K singing om jai jagadish with a tilak on her forehead during the Friday Saraswati puja conducted by children. I learnt all my prayer songs not in a Hindu run school but a school run by Muslim couple, and Noor Fatima indeed laid the very foundation of my Secular thinking.

Fatima K, I can never forget even her signature, everything about her was perfect, she taught Math and Hindi and ensured that I was good in Math and learnt Hindi well. She was a good friend of my mom and her conversation with my mom with her broken Kannada and my mom's no English was indeed comical.

Oh boy, Pushpa, the very tough PT Teacher, even the tallest and well-built boy would never mess with her. She was the energy and never accepted anything less than complete discipline. I remember girls used to go her requesting for a day-off from PT class during their monthly periods, and she always sent them back saying '*it's going to be there for a long time, will you stop living your life 5 days of every month?*', maybe there were few exceptions once in a while. I liked the way she knotted her hair up, it was unique than and maybe even know, when I did have long hair that was the no mess hair-knot I sported.

Kausalya M R, the Head Mistress, dark skinned, big bindi and her sari collection was legendary. She taught History & Civics, always encouraged questions and her class on Indian Constitution was a treat. My best ever question to her was, '*if Hinduism was not a religion, how can you say that Buddhism & Jainism were the off-shoot religions of Hinduism*'. When accidentally my grandfather & my mom met her on a bus and my grandfather asked her about my progress, she said good things and ended saying '*she is Stubborn*'. Oh, that was the line for rest of my life, every time I opposed something at home '*even your Teacher says you are Stubborn*' became the

common gaali! Kausalya ma'am left a mark in my life, not just with the 'Stubborn' tag but the K in my signature draws some inspiration from her signature.

Vasudev Bhalla, what can I say about this scholar and Kannada Teacher, he knew Sanskrit, Tulu, Kannada, Hindi, English, Telgu, Tamil etc etc. The old man not only taught Kannada but lessons of life and in a way prepared me for life. He encouraged me to read books without prejudice and complete every book I rent or buy. He used to travel to my village and teach children on Sunday and he always had soft corner for me as he knew my family. He taught me the most important lesson in life, he always said '*Learning to drive a car is not enough, learn to change the punctured tyre also*' his suggestion was not limited to car for sure, '*Learn to fix the problem*' was the subtext.

Prabhakar Sir, the typical Hindi Teacher, even though my 3rd language was Hindi he always encouraged me to learn Hindi, me completing prathama & madhyama course in Hindi was undoubtedly his influence. Even though I can't write Hindi as well as I did once upon a time, it did help me to travel across many parts of North India without a language barrier. One day he gave me a full page picture of Valsamma the famous athlete torn from a sports magazine where she was handing over the baton to the next runner, and said '*when we handover the baton to the next generation we should have done a good job*', that picture was stuck in my cupboard for many years till it turned brown.

C N Mangala, the Principal, goddess and epitome of simplicity. Tiny lady who commanded the greatest respect, even though she never taught me in class she was someone whom I admired the most, and always felt when I grow really old, I will be like her. At a college day event, I was doing a karate demo with the group, after I finished a series of brick breaking and tiles smashing stunts the last was the chopping of watermelon. As I laid still with just a support at the head and foot, and watermelon on my stomach, the blind folded karate master with a huge sword was ready to slice the watermelon. I was told later that she stood-up completely worried and even covered her eyes as the sword went up. After the act, she called me, gave a pat on my back and said '*Brave Girl, Keep it up*'.

I feel blessed that I have very good memories and so much to talk about all my Teachers, the list if these amazing Teachers are endless. Be it School, College or NCC I always had some of the best one to guide me; they encourage me to be Just Me.

We did not have 'Selfie with Teacher' in those days, hence I remember them more for who they are, and how they shaped me rather than how they looked.

Thank You Teachers.

Publication: Blog, 5th Sept 2015

Ward 174, Let's Hope

This BBMP election Ward 174 recorded less than 43% voting, leaving many of us who have been involved in the elections directly or indirectly not just surprised but annoyed too.

The story of low voting percentage was common across all BBMP Wards with very few exceptions; looks like relentless awareness campaigns about importance of voting had no impact on urban voters. It may be cynicism or simply not giving a damn about a Democratic process, whatever it may be by not voting and by not participating, voters are weakening the very foundation of our Democracy.

Anyways, as counting closed on 25th Aug, it was clear that voters (who ever voted) of Ward 174 had given BJP yet another chance. For several years with Corporator, MLA, MP all from BJP, both BBMP and State Govt Governed (rather misgoverned) by BJP, nothing good happened for Ward 174 rather only got worst.

There is no doubt that INC lost Ward 174 purely due to its internal fight and a last-minute patch-up of the warring factions did not help them, BJP just got away without being held accountable for its misrule or its bad governance both in Ward 174 and in BBMP.

But the mandate is out, so let's look at the enormity of the mess that newly elected Corporator of Ward 174 has on his hands.

Roads

With over 4238 potholes of various shapes/sizes/depth on 141 kms of road length, the basic road infrastructure is crumbling and needs major surgery. Except for repeated asphaltting of roads in the IAS Officers locality and 27thmain, roads across Ward 174 have not been asphalted for over 5-10 years.

Roads have been the largest source of corruption with multiple billing of the same stretch of asphalted road and illegal digging of roads to lay Optic Fiber Cables (OFCs), also leading to huge revenue loss.

Traffic & Parking

Rampant, unchecked and even illegal commercialization has led to a huge increase in the Traffic. All the key commercial roads that connect to different parts of Ward 174 have turned into bottle necks. Pedestrian are suffering due to random parking and pavement parking, leaving no space for their movement.

Safety

Basic audit will reveal that more than 50% of the 4737 streetlights are non-functional, thereby leading to serious safety issues for commuters, women and children. Deadly potholes and lack of streetlight is an open invitation to fatal accidents especially for people using two-wheeler.

Garbage & SWD

One can pass on the Garbage issue as a common problem across the City & Country, but so far there has been no effort what so ever to create awareness or to implement segregation at source. When large part of Ward 174 is a well-planned BDA layout its criminal indeed if even segregated Garbage is collected and dumped into the same pile.

Storm Water Drains (SWD) both the shoulder inlets and the main Raja Kaluves are to the brim with garbage and silt, with choking and clogging drains a few minutes of rains can flood houses in low lying areas.

Education & Health

A look at Anganwadi will tell you the plight of the children for the lesser privileged section of the society. Lack of even basic facilities will only suggest that previous Corporator gave no attention to the poorer section and left them to fend for themselves.

The Govt Schools are no better, with minimum facilities, with not much emphasis on quality and the high-profile schools not willing to implement RTE, parents who can't afford private schools have very little choice but to send their children to Govt Schools.

Garbage, choked SWDs, Pig menace, stink from KCDC, unkempt Public spaces, using of vacant sites as Public toilets all are leading to serious health issues cutting across all sections of the society.

Lakes & Parks

Both Agara Lake & Iblur Lake comes under Ward 174, but until the citizens started a movement to save Agara Lake 3 years ago all elected representatives had completely ignored the Lake. And once the elected representatives got involved, they made a big mess, pushing STP which is not even needed and which is a BIG waste of tax payer money, well status of Iblur Lake is less said the better.

Even though Ward 174 is blessed with 39 Parks, other than the one-time tap cutting its not been a priority for the previous Corporator and BBMP. Parks

lack basic facilities and cleaning, with some efforts of the RWAs some parks are still in usable condition.

Play Grounds

Ward 174 has been known for its Citizen/RWAs activism, just like snatching prey from a Tiger's mouth few eminent Citizens went to the court to save the Play Ground from becoming Judges Colony. But now like always elected representatives are pushing to set-up a 'concrete' stadium in place of an open Play Ground. Regularly the Play Ground is rented out (rather used) to some religious function, and they mostly leave back a mess.

With a population of 65000 fewer Play Grounds only mean lesser Public space and lesser opportunities for creating a sporting atmosphere.

To conclude, Encroachments, Illegal construction are on the rise; a complete control of this menace and implementation of law is the need of the hour.

These are just some of the key issues out of many, previous Corporator did not even bother about Ward meetings or about setting-up a strong, effective and functioning Ward Committee. There was not even a priority list or a Ward agenda, other than the BIG talk of 'Model Ward' with zero impact on ground. Previous Corporator's interactions were limited to her party workers and the select few in the Ward, there by ignore all the requirements in the Ward.

Is there Hope? Only time will tell, will the newly elected Corporator be another puppet in the hands of the MLA or will he show some spine and address the issues that Ward 174 and its Citizens are facing?

Publication: Blog, 3rd Sept 2015

BBMP Election: Sham called 'Women Reservation'

Dear Rahul Ji

You breezed in and out of Bengaluru warning the Chief Minister and City Ministers of serious action in case INC losses BBMP Elections, good to know that you are talking tough and telling the Ministers who are from Bengaluru City to win or get ready to be axed. There is no doubt whatsoever that if all the INC MLAs and Ministers who are from Bengaluru City work in the interest of the party, INC will get an absolute majority in BBMP Elections.

But at what cost remains the mother of all questions, with unnecessary and uncalled for delays in the BBMP Election process INC lost its initial advantage to a great extent, and with the method in which the candidates are selected raises very serious questions on the intent and motive.

Inspired by the growing anger among the people demanding better candidates from political parties, I decided to contest BBMP Election, as per the process I submitted my application and a detailed two-page profile to KPCC. A look at my application and profile will only suggest that there cannot be a better candidate than me to contest BBMP Election on an INC ticket.

Clean, Credible & Committed, with a good understanding of Civic Administration, vast experience in Sr Management roles and spirited Political & Environmental Activist, I was convinced that party will see greater merits in my application.

I was indeed very impressed when the observers came to meet all the aspirants individually, but that did not last long, the sham of selection stood thoroughly exposed. As observers started calling the names of the women aspirants, the men proudly walked and took the seat, left me wondering where the women were. So, women were just the proxy for the real candidates 'the men'.

This story is neither strange nor shocking, because this is how genuine women leaders are kept out of political process. You keep talking and giving big speeches about women empowerment and bringing women into the main stream politics, but reality is not a single woman is given ticket on her own credentials.

The selection process violated every single selection criterion, the women who were given tickets are neither party workers nor active members of the party. So, stop this farce called 'selection process' and directly ask the male leaders to nominate their female relative and give them tickets and get over it.

What can be more appalling, even with 50% reservation INC has not given tickets to independent women candidates/aspirants. INC leaders choose the female relatives of male leaders to fill the 50% seats, who will act as proxy for the male leaders and keeping civic administration within the family.

I agree that it's a common practice across parties, and if you want to follow the same practice then INC and you should not speak about 'Women Empowerment' anymore. And, if you really want to bring in change then promote women leaders recognize them for 'who they are' and not for 'who they are related to'.

By giving tickets to incompetent, unqualified proxies who are not even party members you are not only insulting women members of the party who dared to venture into the male bastion but also making a mockery of the Democratic process and disrespecting the voters who have little choice but to vote for a man behind a woman.

More than being disgruntle I am disgusted with the approach to 'fill' the 50% seats reserved for women with men. People like me relate to INC Ideology, but with repeated grave mistakes and unwillingness to make course correction, connect to Ideology will fade away sooner or later.

Publication: Citizen Matters, Rahul Gandhi, don't talk about 'Women's Empowerment' anymore, please! 15th Aug 2015

Quietly Forgotten - Pavagada Fort

Quietness at 700 meter tells stories of wars; the majestic 600-year-old Pavagada fort stands tall and forgotten in middle of a thickly populated Pavagada town. Built by Vijayanagar Chieftain, the fort is a multi-level structure with several enclosures, massive watch towers and bunkers.

The enclosures without doors indicate that it was used by the soldiers to keep their weapons to access them without delay in case of danger or enemy intrusions. The towers at different levels are surrounded by undulating stonewalls that captures one's imagination.

The gigantic boulders of various shapes look as if they have been placed to enhance the aesthetic. The large rock walls that hug the towers appear like a shield of stones protecting the towers and are indeed intimidating.

With seven levels of fortification a secret tunnel for the king to escape, it only contributes to the fact that the fort was fully war ready. The fort complex also houses a mosque, a pond, a massive bunker that gets sunlight and the architectural marvels are visible as you trek up to the top of the fort.

Tiny lanes next to the famous Shanimahatma temple will lead you to the foot hills of the Pavagada Fort. The stink of human waste, plies of plastic, destroyed interiors of the enclosures, broken fort walls will tell the sad story of how it's not only neglected but also destroyed by human activities. If one ignores all that, a 2-hour long trek will take you to the top that has two large towers. The trail goes through large entrances, stairs and rocky patches with enough resting places even on a hot day. Offerings at the Hanuman temple midway suggests that the locals visit the temple regularly to pray. Once at the top of the hill the cool breeze will only help you to explore around.

Piece of history, an architectural marvel that we need to be proud is left to ruin and to be destroyed by people who do not value it in any way. The apathy of the administration and inability of the tourism department to restore, preserve and promote it as a tourist attraction is indeed very disheartening.

Pavagada Fort is magnificent monument that is literally screaming to be preserved. It is a photographer's muse, an architect's inspiration, trekkers delight and a rock climbers Mecca.

A wake-up call to Karnataka tourism department, it's time to take note of, revive and promote this piece of history thereby doing justice to history and restoring its glory.

Publication: Deccan Herald, A forgotten fort in Pavagada, 9th June 2015

Being Farmer

Modi Sarkar was ushered into the Parliament with a landmark majority, and with a hope of #AccheDin. A hurried ordinance making major changes to the Land Bill that was passed with a thumping majority in 2013 by UPA-2, supported by BJP with equal vigour raised serious questions on Modi Sarkar's intent. Ordinance was projected as a major reform, and the #AccheDin Govt was least prepared for the backlash. Drunk with majority in LS and the corporate euphoria, little did it expect not just opposition in RS but a united and aggressive opposition taking the debate to the people's court.

Consent, Compensation, Social Impact Assessment, return of unused land are the hallmarks of the Land Bill 2013, and an attempt to make it crony capitalist friendly did not go down well with the very people who voted for #AccheDin. With no sight of #AccheDin even after 365 days, Modi Sarkar that came to power promising the Moonseems to have not done its homework and just came up with #Jumlas and U-Turns.

Land Bill that was passed in 2013 was long due; coming from farming community and having seen the suffering of the farmers post land acquisition the Land Bill 2013 was a great relief, a step in the right direction and felt better late than never.

Weaving my own story into this, as a kid I watched distressed farmers meeting my grandfather when Bommasandra Industrial Area was announced. My grandfather had told them that industry is also important; it will give employment to the youth and will improve living condition. Rich agriculture land was acquired with little and delayed compensation, farming community waited in vain for the much-promised jobs for themselves and their children. The Industries never really took off, with just few factories here and there and no real jobs for the locals or for the farmers who gave up their land. As years passed in distress trying to make ends meet, sooner or later Bommasandra Industrial Area was heading towards being declared sick Industrial Area.

The only advantage was that my native is much closer to the city of Bengaluru. After several years in agony and struggle to make ends meet it was the IT revolution that revived the fortunes of farmers and their children who already had crossed the prime age and were just about making a living. The stories of many other Industrial Areas are no different, land acquired in the name of industry and with a promise of jobs take several years and sometimes never happens.

MD of Biocon infamously referred to farmers as 'Squatters' in her enthused support to the proposed changes in the Land Bill. Little does she know that an assessment across the Industrial Areas will only show how land allotted several years ago for an industry that never came up is worth 20-50 times

more today, the real squatters are the industrialists who refuse to part with prime properties they got at a throw away price.

In an article by my Ex-Boss (for whom I have very high regards) argues how it's important to have fewer farmers and more production, but not stating the fact that every industry wants less employees and more productivity, leaving the question wide open on who will really benefit from the proposed changes to the Land Bill.

It is true that a farmer's child many not want to be a farmer, but it is also true that lack of strong agricultural policy has indeed driven many away from farming, if there is one business that has the maximum risk it is indeed agriculture. Farming and related activities employs most in India, and cannot be just measured on its GDP contribution.

Even as my parents moved to the city, we had the advantage of farm produce reaching home. Never remember buying Rice, Ragi, Dal, Chilli, Tamarind, Coconut, Curry leaves, Mustard, Ghee or Mangoes or at times even fresh vegetables from a shop. The quality of our life was better and my parents were able to afford good education for us and for many of my cousins/relatives because of the mutually beneficial arrangement back in the village. If we had to sell out all our land to some industry and move to the city, I would not have had the privileges and benefits I grew up with.

What really bothered many when the ordinance was shoved down the throat of Democracy was that many of us could connect to the farmers' issues directly; many of us have lost land in the name of development and got nothing substantial in return. The heart of India is still agriculture, even if you are an IAS officer when you go to your village you would not shy away from picking up the spade and diverting water into the fields. Argument of creating a stronger economy and 'trickling down effect' has always been a bad one. If 'trickling down effect' was true then with India opening up the economy in the 90' should be lifted every Indian out of poverty. The reality is millions fall back into poverty when there is a hospitalization or death or even a small unfortunate incident in their families. A bad crop can drag an entire farming community into poverty; booming economy without a strong social welfare schemes and pro-farmer schemes will not address poverty or the farmer issues in India.

Consent, Compensation, Social Impact Assessment and Return of unused land should be a rule. Like industry is important so is agriculture, one can't chase investments, promise jobs and take away livelihood of millions of farmers in the name of development. Food security is indeed the hallmark of a humane country and no development is relevant if it betrays its farmers who grow our food.

Publication: Blog, 25th May 2015

We the Women

'It is impossible to think about the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is impossible for a bird to fly on only one wing'
- Swami Vivekananda

Swami Vivekananda would not have imagined that even after a century we will still be talking and debating about gender inequality and women empowerment. It has taken centuries of struggle for women to break the glass ceiling, to be relevant and to be counted in different walks of life, but sad reality is that gender equality is still a far cry. It is a shocking fact that female infanticide is higher in urban India than rural India, defeating the argument that urbanization and education enables gender equality.

Challenge of gender inequality indeed arises due to a huge gap in participation of women in Social, Economic and Politics space, even though women to some extent have broken the glass ceiling in the Social & Economic space, India has seen a decline in participation of women in Political space.

With women reservation bill gathering dust, the percentages of women in Parliament and Assemblies across states are reducing and the gap is only getting wider. Some states might have made a 50% reservation for women in local bodies (Municipality/Corporation/Panchayat), but women are more co-opt by a male relative and is not necessarily a genuine attempt to provide opportunity for women to be part of the political discourse.

Excluding few well know women politicians like Indira Gandhi, Sonia Gandhi, Mayawati, Mamata Banerjee, Sushma Swaraj, Jayalalitha who have utilized the opportunity and have risen to be strong mass leaders, women in politics are selected or co-opted. Majority of women who have made it to the Parliament and Assemblies are either relatives of male politicians or achievers in their own fields who are parachuted by various political parties for electoral gains and mere representation.

Fewer women are joining political parties as primary members or taking to political activism, working their way up and surviving the heat and dust of Indian politics has less takers. What is even more worrying are the results of a study conducted by Centre for Social Research and UN Women which found that women in politics face high levels of violence, fear character assassination and emotional abuse, and adding to it, women who are young, poor and first-generation politicians found to be the worst affected.

Indian politics over the years has indeed become more of money, machismo and muscle, has this change kept women away from active politics? Whatever may be the reason, lesser participation of women in Politics and in Governance is not a good sign for our Democracy and the Nation at large.

Women are 49% of Indian voting population, but a meagre 11% of the Parliamentarians are women.

Bringing in women into politics is indeed a chicken-egg situation; will the political parties create a women friendly atmosphere to enable women to take to politics actively or will they encourage more and more women to take up party membership who will thereby bring the change in the political structure remains an eternal question.

Rahul Gandhi while addressing women party worker rally pointed out that the rally had more men than women and the same is reflected in his party offices too. PM Modi speaks about saving the daughters and empowering women, unfortunately percentage of women in his party also do not add up. Aam Admi Party that has galvanized the youth and re-energized interest in politics also lags behind when it comes to giving tickets to women candidates.

Every party recognizes that larger participation of woman in Politics and Governance is good for the Democracy. Sadly, cutting across party lines the one common factor that makes all of them look equal is that the percentage of women in the party and percentage of women who are given tickets to contest elections.

But it is also important that women break barrier and take to political activism, if one waits for the all signals lights to go green, it will never happen. More women participation in Politics and in Governance is a critical step towards closing the gap, the gap of gender inequality. Let's face it, any substantial change that impacts India happens only through our Parliament and Assemblies, and if women are not part of the lawmaking process it raises very serious questions. It is also true that without a large talent pool of women political activist just parachuting women into Parliament and Assemblies indeed makes the men who have worked their way up in the political system disgruntle.

Irrespective of the party or ideology one chooses, women need to become part of the political structure and political discourse of this country. As a third-generation political activist I do agree that politics is a tough place, but so is everything else. Women reservation bill even if it becomes law will not change much unless women step out of comfort zones and voluntarily identify themselves with a political structure and work towards becoming lawmakers. A change can happen for women only by women, and what India needs is a mass movement lead by women to become equal partners in political discourse, governance and law making.

As one more International Women's Day nears, let us not just restricted it to celebrate womanhood and pat our back on our achievement, but constructively work towards gender equality in Social, Economic and Political space.

As Hillary Clinton aptly said *'It is past time for women to take their rightful place, side by side with men, in the rooms where the fates of peoples, where their children's and grandchildren's fates, are decided.'*

Publication: Jagran City Plus, We the Women, 8th Feb 2015

Namaste Obama

Greetings and Welcome back!

Many things have changed since your last visit, and fortunately for you Americans are not expecting much, your media back home has already referred you as a lame duck President who is going to India to watch a Parade! Oh, additionally you may be signing few papers and pose for photos with PM Modi, may be even a Selfie, you can also learn how to take a Selfie from PM Modi.

This time around instead of Mahatma Gandhi you may have to speak about Godse, so please read about Godse and be prepared to call him a patriot, yes, your secret service staff can procure books on Godse from any RSS shakha, they will give it for free. If PM Modi is going with you to Raj Gath it's more for PR, and be assured his respect is only for Godse and not Mahatma.

PM Modi is all excited about your visit; America has always been his ultimate dream. Recently at Vibrant Gujarat PM Modi promised the world cheap Indian labour, and to prove it he paid Rs 300 per day each for 600 workers who cleaned all parts of Agra that you had planned to visit. Agra and Taj Mahal got a face lift just for you, and you decided to attend the Saudi King's funeral, yes, we understand, oil is indeed thicker!

Our media has changed too, last time they were all thrilled to talk about you for weeks, and this time around they will be finding ways to praise PM Modi from every word you utter. Last time around media was keen on what you wore and what you did not, this time around they will be raving about PM Modi designer wear and how he matches his attire to yours more than Michelle!

I am aware that you have a very high regards for our soft spoken, well-educated and statesman Ex PM Dr Singh with 5x3.5-inch Heart and 1.5 kg Brain, but as I said many things have changed, we now have a 56-inch chest PM Modi whom you have to deal with and nothing more.

Was told that you will be giving a sermon called 'Maan Ki Baat' along with PM Modi on Radio, Maan Ki Baat is about speaking your mind, so be careful of what you speak! If you really end up speaking your mind PM Modi Bhakts will troll and abuse you, they can trend hash tag of abuses on Twitter within minutes! Beware that the Indian-Americans will spoil the Democrats changes next elections, and will stop funding your party if you even remotely speak your mind!

You are the 1st US President to be part of the Republic Day Parade only because PM Modi is obsessed with '1sttime' even if it makes no sense to our

Nation. So, don't get carried away that you are the 1st American US at the Republic Day Parade, because it's not about you it's about PM Modi.

India's Republic Day Parade is mostly about showcasing our defence strength and 60+ years of sheer growth and prosperity; don't feel bad because most of it on display will be Russian! All our previous governments choose Russia over America, but don't worry PM Modi is a America fan, most of his election funding and support came from NRI's in America, so expect defence deals for America too.

PM Modi has launched 'Clean India' campaign and asking celebrities to send pictures holding a broom, many be you too should launch 'Clean America' to wipe and clean the bloodshed across the world you have spilled in the name of war and security for America!

Our Ex PM Dr Singh must have spoken to you about his policies and how it will help most of India's population, as I said many things have changed PM Modi policies are like Karan Johar movies made for Rich, Affluent and NRI audience with lot of Hoopla. PM Modi has already cut Medical, Healthcare, Land compensation, Rural Jobs, Food, Farmer budget, so do not talk about the common people with PM Modi he has left them to die a natural death or commit suicide as he has also proposed to de-criminalize suicide.

Many things have changed; PM Modi has changed all the name of the programs implemented by Dr Singh lead Government. PM Modi likes 'change' he mostly changes names and cloths way too often!

But you just chill and have a good time, this visit is not about you it's about PM Modi and even if you make few false promises or goofy statements it's ok, we are now used to the lies PM Modi has told us before elections.

Don't even try to feel at home, RSS-VHP will then perform Gharwapsi ceremony for you!

Publication: Blog, Jan 25th 2015

Open Letter to Elected Representatives

Dear Elected Representatives,

I know all your birth dates by now and I surely do not want to wish you on your birthday's ever! I also know that you wish your voters on every possible occasion even though it makes no real difference to their lives nor you have made any sincere effort to make a difference to their lives!

Yes, you and your party workers have successfully made Bengaluru Ugly with all those Banners, Hoardings and Posters, which to my guess are mostly unpaid and unauthorized.

Since you have set the trend, millions have followed you, with posters that offer PAN Cards, Passports, PG Accommodation, Cars, Cabs, Houses, Training, Sex, Cook, Food, Yoga, DL, Movies etc are posted on every single Wall, Flyover, Tree, Fence, Divider, Electric Poles, Gates and any other place that is still left!

What is more amusing is that most of the Bengaluru MLA's and Corporators are from BJP, PM Modi who heads the BJP Govt in the center passionately and eloquently speaks about Swacch Bharat, PM Modi has been asking people to clean the Roads, Locality, City, State, Country clean and all you do is make the city of Bengaluru Ugly, Dirty and Filthy every day!

Thanks to BBMP, the city is infamously christened as 'Garbage City' and you people are busy adding and other tag of 'Ugly City'. A rap on BBMP knuckles by Courts and Lokayukta has made no difference; BBMP has shown no will or spine and they continue to follow the diktats of you and your ever-aggressive party workers. The city not just getting uglier by the hour but is losing revenue, as none of you pay for erecting up those horrendous Banners, Hoardings and Posters.

Even at a small fee of Rs1 per Banners/Hoardings/Posters per day would mean cores of revenue that BBMP is losing, additionally BBMP ends up using tax payers money to remove/clean/dispose them. Those ridiculous flex banners you proudly display your photos on cannot be recycled; it ends up in the landfills creating few more Mandurs!

Spare a though, the city is already suffering from air pollution, water pollution, garbage, noise pollution, traffic jams, pot holes. Think about it, if I am stuck in a traffic jam and all I get to see are faces of you and your 30 odd party workers almost mocking at my fate, and follow me all through the lane till I turn to the next road, sadly only to see one more of your kind.

Recently, I spotted old lady who tearing one of your big poster from the frame, I asked her if she was angry with the politician, she smiled and replied

'no, the only good thing is that I can use these poster to cover my toilet which is in open', alas you have helped some one!

Stop making a mockery of the system, using your political forces you have wiped-off the revenues for BBMP and are using the tax payer's money to clean up your mess. Buckle up the city is struggling to survive; spare the city from your Posters, Banners, Hoardings and the Public Nuisance you are indulging in. Also save self from future public humiliation, because days are not far when people have to pee and poo on your banners and posters!

City of Bengaluru needs a break, needs a break from the 'Political Litter'!

Publication: Blog, 16th Jan 2015

Bengaluru: Water Matters

Quenching Bengalureans thirst and supplying tap water to the city is the most expensive affair, and is dipping into the BWSSB finances on a daily basis. A hike in water rates by BWSSB is always condemned, followed by a massive outrage in media, and then it ends in political fireworks and a price roll back.

Everyday 900-1000 Million Litres of water is processed and pumped from a distance of 100kms to Bengaluru which is at a higher altitude; it costs BWSSB not less than Rs80/KL of water that reaches Bengaluru, making it one of the most expensive water supply operations in the country. Even with such an expensive operation over 30-35% of Bengaluru do not get the water supplied by BWSSB or don't get enough even for basic needs. Households in several revenue pockets, apartment blocks, slums, parts of newer BBMP wards are deprived of BWSSB connections/supply and have to pay 2-4 times more for the same quantity of water that the households who have BWSSB connections utilize.

Households without BWSSB connections or less of it are drawing underground water from the tube wells in their premises or dependent on private water tanker supply system (the infamous water mafia). On one hand it is an environmental disaster in the making, as excess drawing of ground water and less than 30% of it getting recharged, the ground water will dry up sooner or later. On the other hand, is the huge disparity in the cost one pays to buy water.

A household in a slum pays Rs2-5 for a pot of water, a resident in an apartment block buys tanker supplied water (6000 litres) at Rs300-800 and a household with BWSSB connection pay Rs7/KL of metered water. The glaring disparity is not just unfair but undemocratic too, why should households of the same city have to pay different cost for water they consume?

On an average a person needs 80-120 litres of water per day to lead a hygienic and healthy life, and access to clean affordable water is indeed a right of every citizen. The lopsided supply of water does not address the minimum requirement of water to keep the citizens hygienic and healthy. It's common knowledge that water tanker mafia aid the local politicians to control their vote banks in smaller colonies, and to make windfall profits by supplying water to affluent apartment blocks. Hence there has been no urgency or political will to make rational changes to the system and to improve the water supply situation in Bengaluru.

Honorable CM Shri Siddaramaiah who is also the Minister in-charge of BWSSB has to review the water supply situation and fix the unfair disparities. With increasing influx of people into the city there will be an excess strain on

resources, it's practically impossible to keep drawing water from 100-200 kms from different rivers and also draining out ground water.

Suggestions to BWSSB, and tough measures:

1. BWSSB should use the BBMP GIS mapping and connect all the properties in Bengaluru to its network, making it mandatory for every household to have a BWSSB water connection. When a property is linked to BBMP Taxes and BESCO power supply there is no reason why the Sewage and Water connections are not made mandatory.
2. Supply 80-120 litres of water per person per day to every household, at an average of 5 people per household at a subsidized rate, and charge any additional usage at actual operating cost. Charging at actual operating cost above the basic necessity automatically forces reduction in usage; it promotes conservation and increases adoption of rainwater harvesting methods.
3. Ban drilling of tube wells for at least next 10 years, register and meter all the existing tube wells in the city and charge the water drawn from tube wells, but also reward recharge and harvesting methods.
4. Shut-down private water tanker operations, as the menace of controlling water for votes or gains should end. In a civilized society and a democratic set-up there should be no room for controlling of voices & votes via water.

Yes, many concerned citizens have taken to water conservation and rainwater harvesting in a big way, hats off to them, but their efforts alone will not solve the water problems of the city. There has to be changes at the Legislative level, and the current Karnataka Government has a great opportunity to bring in the much needed changes to the way water is supplied and priced in Bengaluru. However unpopular and politically challenging the changes are, it should be done as its good for the city and its citizens.

Water for all can become a reality if the Government uses a carrot & stick approach, by rewarding conservation and punishing excess usage.

Publication: Blog, 1st Jan 2015

IT Enabling Karnataka

'Governance at your Fingertips' much awaited initiative was launched by Government of Karnataka early this month, and the Chief Guest was none other than the Honorable President of India. Seldom has Karnataka missed an opportunity to be Innovative or to embrace technology 'Governance at your Fingertips' is yet another feather in its cap.

How can one forget BengaluruOne initiative that brought the payment of all utilities under one roof, with centers spread across the city operating from 8am to 8pm or the BWSSB and BESCOM automated bill payment machines?

BBMP launched the SAS, enabling assessment and payment of Property Tax online, thereby cutting the middle men, curbing corruption and saving the citizens from the hassle of standing in queues for hours.

KSRTC going online with its ticket booking was dubbed as the first of its kind in the country. BMTC online access to bus schedules or enabling the staff to apply for leaves via Kiosks, the state embraced technology seamlessly for all the right reasons.

Bengaluru police went a step further, made their presence felt in the social media and starting putting out information on Law & Order and Traffic on Facebook. With rising crime on children no less than the City Police Commissioner and his team took to twitter to interact with worried citizens, sharing information, making police truly accessible and people friendly. In which city in India will you find a Police Commissioner replying to your tweet and tagging the relevant officer?

After the arrest of an ISIS online supporter, the city went tizzy by the threats posted by some ISIS supporter calling for revenge. It was indeed very reassuring to see how the City police quickly addressed the citizens and put out a letter from Police Commissioner in social media and asking people to share it.

When a concerned citizen wrote this tweet to Police Commissioner "*@sai_2008: @BlrCityPolice @CPBlr how we can believe that this letter is really from police commissioner because electronically anything is possible*"

Police Commissioner quickly replied "*@CPBlr: @sai_2008 @BlrCityPolice believe me. It's from me!!*"

Government of Karnataka is using technology as an enabler and as a tool to reach out to its citizens across all medium/platforms, and why not, when a large part of our population is connected on mobile phone network already.

'Governance at your Fingertips' under the name 'MobileOne' is a user-friendly mobile application and 161 toll free number offering over 4000+ services ranging from Utility, Police, Telecom, Travel, Agriculture, Tax, Sakala, HRMS, Healthcare, Banking etc across the state. Citizens can download the application on their mobiles or dial 161 to access information, check service status, check nearest bus stop, raise complain or pay bill etc at their convenience.

Governance is about making the right policies and reaching it out to people, Government of Karnataka through its innovation and technology initiatives has shown the way to the entire country time and again.

To showcase the Karnataka technology initiative, Karnataka tableau at this Republic Day in Delhi should indeed be the MobileOne and various MGovernance initiatives of Government of Karnataka. It's time to say that Karnataka is inspired by its Capital city that provides IT & IT enabled services to the world.

Access to Services, Information and Processes will go a long way in taking Governance to people and 'Governance at your Fingertips' is indeed one big step in the right direction by Honorable Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and his Government.

Publication: Jagran City Plus, 27th Jan 2014

Right to Clean Drinking Water

Clean drinking water is still a great challenge in India; in 2008 96% of Urban Indian and 84% of Rural India had access to improved water, averaging to 88% which is a drastic improvement from 72% in 1990.

But unfortunately, 67% of Indian households do not treat their drinking water, even though it could be chemically or bacterially contaminated, thereby increasing the vulnerability to water borne diseases.

Clean drinking water is directly linked to health of the nation, lesser diseases would only mean a healthier and more productive human resource, and hence access to clean drinking water cannot be a privilege for the few but should a Right for all.

Many innovative approaches have been taken to improve the quality of drinking water in India, one such innovative step that has seen a large scale success is the Any Time Water (ATW) project initiated by Sri HK Patil in Gadag few years ago.

Taking cue from Gadag success Kanakapura MLA and current Energy Minister Sri DK Shiva Kumar undertook a large scale implementation of ATW's under the banner of DKS Charitable Institution Trust in every single Panchayat of Kanakapura Assembly constituency and later extended to several parts of Bengaluru Rural.

Over the last 7-8 months my visits to Bengaluru Rural on various projects gave me a first hand information of the working of the swanky ATWs in most remote Panchayats. The citizens are happy that at a drop of just Rs 1 into the vending machine they are getting 10 liters of clean drinking water. Many of them said that they are demanding more ATW's in Panchayats where there are a greater number of villages. It is indeed commendable that the access to clean drinking water has almost become a Right in this part of the country.

Success is indeed contagious; off late few Bengaluru Urban MLA's are making an earnest attempt to replicate the model in their constituencies, and why not with urban poor almost at an alarming 25-30% clean drinking water is the least one could provide to ensure that urban poor do not spend their earning on medical bill due to diseases arising for unsafe/contaminated water.

Every BBMP ward has its fair share of lesser privileged and poorer population and efforts should be made to provide clean drinking water accessible in these urban pockets/areas. In wake of hike in BWSSB supplied water and linking of usage and making it slab based, access to low cost rather no cost clean drinking water for the urban poor will be a logical and right step.

Elected representative should indeed push the drinking water project aggressively and effectively in their respective Assembly segments and Wards making clean drinking water accessible to urban poor in their locality.

A well-planned localized monitoring and distribution mechanism to avoid misuse will go a long way in truly democratizing of clean drinking water.

I also urge the citizen groups, RWA's, political activists and NGO's to take an active role and emphasize the need to provide clean drinking water for a better and healthier India.

Publication: Jagran City Plus, 15th Nov 2014

Recoding INC: Open Letter to Rahul Gandhi

Dear Rahul Gandhi,

HT headlines that read '*Rahul Gandhi gets ready for rediscovery of India*' indeed prompted me to write an open letter to you. After many such 'rediscovery of India' trips that you have undertaken it has been nothing more than a mockery of the legacy of 'Discovery of India'.

Social Media, Main Stream, Voters, Panelist on debates, Right-wingers, Political opponents all are feasting on INC Leadership and particularly you, and somehow you choose 'rediscovery of India' path!

INC its staring at the Leadership for direction and all you plan to do is an 'Incredible' India tourism campaign? Don't be fooled when some of the 'bright stars' in the party claim that if Indira could do it so can Rahul, even though I believe you have many qualities of Indira and she has been your inspiration, it's fair to say that you are NO Indira and 1970's India is not 2014 India.

I am not interested in giving my views on why INC ended up with 44 MP, just 6 less than the maximum WhatsApp group count, nor I am willing to blame UPA-2 for what it did or did not do. Because, no one drives a car just staring at the rear-view mirror, a rear-view mirror is only to learn from the past and be aware of what is behind you. It's time to look ahead, make a fresh start, but sadly there seems to be no concrete efforts made in that direction.

It's given that you will be under the worst scrutiny ever, both internally and externally and it's not going to get any better for you for a long time. The Leaders in INC are having a 'party' literally, pouncing, scratching and prowling at each other leaving the workers in a state of shock or worst running for cover.

Do not forget, over 10.7 crore people voted for INC, its time INC kept its commitment to these people who stood by the party even when it was staring at a brutal loss. Make a shift, ask these 10.7 crore people why they voted for INC, may be their conviction can help you steer INC in the right direction and help to 'Recode' INC.

Buzz is that there will more emphasis on PR, Communication, SM, Media interactions etc etc, yes all these can be achieved by bringing in professionals to manage it, ok good, but is that all one needs to do? No, INC has to bring back its sympathizers, believers, liberals, anti-right-wingers, traditional supporters, the disillusioned and more importantly women back into its fold.

Yes, democratization of IYC and NSUI is something you should be proud of, but are they heading in the right direction? May not be, IYC and NSUI that should have been an army of political activist, free thinkers, idealist, young

minds who feel the pulse of young India and who represent the ideology of INC, sadly they reflect the same shade of the larger organization which you are finding difficult to change.

INC biggest supporters were the women, for whom Indira Gandhi has been an inspiration, but the organization has failed them completely. Local leadership across states has systematically decimated the women leaders and workers. It's unimaginable how a party headed by an inspiring woman like Sonia Gandhi has no credible and strong line of women leaders, if this is not failure what else can it be?

I too come from a family of political activist and hardcore INC supporters, all my life I have seen elections, where working professionals used to take leave from work and campaign selflessly for INC in every election. Where did these professionals go? What made these professionals go away, many may not have changed their ideology but they have simply distanced themselves from the local leadership. In corporate world we say that people do not quit organization, they quit managers, and it is not different from what happened to these professionals who were the greatest supporters of INC.

I am emphasizing again and again on the local leadership and grassroots level, because whoever becomes the President of INC nothing will change unless the foundation is 'Recoded'. There is an urgency to move from mere tokenism to activism, money to mechanism and to bring back idealism into the organization. It can only happen if every member in INC is empowered to question and correct the leadership at all levels without being politically banished.

India has changed and INC can't keep on romancing history, but there are many things that are eternal, which INC stood for - free thinking, idealism, conviction, liberal view, social justice, equality and fearlessness, and Recoding INC will be incomplete without this.

My nasty comments on you are not an indication of disbelief in your capabilities, recently when someone asked if your sister is a better bet for INC, I firmly said with a bloody nose, battered and bruised image RG is more equipped to lead INC. I am indeed a supporter of your Leadership; I strongly believe you are Sincere, Honest and someone who has the Heart in the right place.

As they say it's the Generals who win the war through Strategy-Delegation-Deployment. Stop applying lipstick on pigs; bring in the Generals who can deliver, who are committed to the ideology of INC.

Don't wait for political opponents and parties to make mistakes, winning a 'For' vote is more reassuring than winning an 'Against' vote. A golden opportunity has presented itself, it's the 125-birth anniversary year of the

first Prime Minister of our Nation there cannot be a better day to start Recoding INC. Indeed, there can be no greater tribute to Pandit Nehru than restoring INC as a party of and for every Indian.

Quoting for an old advertisement that I think is apt for Recoding INC '*To change the way you Look; change the way you Cook*'.

Publication: Blog, 11th Nov 2014

Agara Lake: Struggle of Revival

Even as Lake Development Authority (LDA) drags on the Detailed Project Report (DPR) process without paying any attention to the basic maintenance of Agara Lake, the October rains have ensured the lake is back to life with water to the brim. The birds, fishes and the flora & fauna is back in the lake, the lush green trees feels more relaxing than ever, a lap around the lake gives the much needed fresh air this is missing in the concrete jungles of Bengaluru.

LDA has been neglecting the lake without de-weeding or removal of hyacinth which has been rapidly growing in the lake, nothing much to speak about on the cleaning of the lake surrounding, all in the excuse of DPR. There is urgency and a need to complete the DPR in a stipulated time and to take it to the implementation level and revive the lake to the fullest. The reasons known only to LDA, there is no sign of a timeline nor a sense of urgency even after 18 months since the citizens first started the Save Agara Lake drive.

Added to the apathy of LDA are BWSSB inability to ensure that the sewage water is not let into the SWD and most importantly BBMP unwillingness to keep the SWD garbage and silt free. Even an average rain floods the city of Bengaluru and it will not be an exaggeration to say that if BBMP keeps all the 800+kms of SWD clean the rain water will fill the lakes in Bengaluru and the case of Agara Lake is no different.

Even after repeated follow-up LDA has not shown any interest in getting a check-dam build in the main SWD to feed the lake nor has it asked the BBMP to clear the blockages in the smaller SWD that are in the Agara Lake catchment area. With Lake Activists form the Save Agara Lake forum running from pillar to post; it was indeed the support and guidance from Mr Ugrappa MLC that lead to some drastic action to finally get water into Agara Lake.

Agara Lake has a very good catchment area and is also part of the lake cluster that is interlinked, Bengaluru received good amount of rains between June-October, and this year also it was no different. Last year Agara Lake was full much earlier and the difference being this year there seem to be a consolidated effort from LDA, BBMP and BWSSB not to utilize the good rains to fill the lake. If not for the Lake Activist who got the active support and participation from Mr Ugrappa MLC the lake would have stayed dry.

The change in the attitude of these authorities only suggests that there is an aggressive push to waste Rs 35 crs of public money on an STP with would also have a yearly expenditure of Rs 1 cr, which actually may not be required if LDA, BBMP, BWSSB do the work they are supposed to be doing.

The nexus seems to be getting clear day by day, the intent is to ensure that the lake dries-up, and the agenda of STP is pushed. People who have been in

the lake vicinity and the residents of Agara village know very well that the lake is a rain water harvesting zone and the lake has always received good inflow of water even when the lake was under litigation and was completely abandoned for few years.

The fact of the matter is that the greed of money and builder nexus seems to be delaying the lake revival process, and its time LDA is held accountable and asked to be transparent about the DPR and the timelines for revival works to start.

It's time the elected representatives take a good long walk around the lake and see the number of missed opportunities, the choked water inlets point at the story of how the authorities has systematically trying to cut the rain water inflow to the lake.

City of Bengaluru which was once known as a city of 1000 lakes now has about 150+ identified lakes and Lake Activists from every corner of the city are putting a brave fight to retain, revive and rejuvenate the lakes. Agara Lake has a history of more than 100 years, the hallmark of the lake is its wetland design which serves as an excellent bio-filter and is also a rainwater harvesting zone, most importantly it's the Pride of HSR Layout; it must be restored to its past glory in the right way and should not end up as one more scam in the making.

Publication: Jagran City Plus, 31st Oct 2014

Is Agara Lake a Mandur in the making?

Over the last year and a half, many of us who have been part of the Agara Lake forum have been interacting with the Lake Development Authority (LDA) for the revival and rejuvenation of Agara Lake. Post the Chief Minister's visit last September, the progress to revive and rejuvenate the lake was in a steady pace and the tender to prepare a Detailed Project Report (DPR) has been awarded to a qualified firm.

For the last few months BWSSB has been surveying Agara Lake to setup a Sewage Treatment Plant (STP), it has also been found that BWSSB has identified over 2+ acres of Agara Lake wet land for the STP. Agara Lake has already lost most part of its catchment area, latest to BDA that has in turn sold/leased lake land to an Educational Trust. Even as the dispute over the land encroached by BDA is going on, BWSSB plan to set up an STP which is indeed very alarming.

The primary objective of BWSSB is to ensure that the entire city sewage system is transported through underground pipes to designated pump-houses and STPs, which it has failed in totality. The Storm Water Drains (SWD) that has to carry only the rain water and the overflows for the upstream lakes is today nothing more than open sewage drains.

BBMP in the last 5-7 years has made no effort to clean the floating garbage or de-silt the SWD nor has it taken action against BWSSB for not fixing the sewage flow into the SWDs. No amount of pollution in the SWDs or water flowing into Bangalore lakes has woken-up Karnataka State Pollution Control Board (KSPCB).

BWSSB, BBMP, KSPBC have all consistently failed to do their duties, time and again. Now adding to the list of experiments is BWSSB's plan to setup an STP, promising 'crystal clear water' using membrane process from the loan given by a Japanese agency. The cost incurred to treat 1 liter of sewage water is about Rs 12, and the planned plant capacity is about 3 MLD. BWSSB is promising to let the treated water into Agara Lake and the excess would be sold to commercial/residential complexes.

Why STP in Agara Lake is not good and should be opposed?

1. STP in the wet land of Agara Lake would mean an end to inflow of natural rain water, eventually converting the lake into a mere tank.
2. Agara Lake has one of the best wet land designs and with the planned STP the lake will lose 2-3 acres of land along with the entire wet land area.
3. 1000 mm pipes that BWSSB is planning to lay in the Agara Lake would mean the diversion of most of the Bangalore sewage towards the STP. As the sewage flow increases over a period of time more additional STPs

would come up. This means taking over more lake area in the years to come.

4. Most of the STPs in Bangalore are either in the non-residential areas or non-working conditions, putting up a STP right in the middle of the residential area could affect the citizen's health and destroy the much-needed lung space.

If the intent of BWSSB is to treat sewage water and in turn provide potable water, fill lakes and re-charge the ground water tables it can simply revamp Madivala Lake STP which is the upstream for Agara Lake. All the excess treated water from Madivala Lake can reach Agara Lake through the SWD and further downstream lakes.

STPs are indeed a necessity, given the water crisis Bangalore city is going to face in the next 2-3 years, but serious questions arise in case of Agara Lake proposed STP:

- Is the STP planned to benefit the adjacent SEZ?
- Will the planned STP takeover more land as and when the inflow of sewage increases?
- Why should an STP come up in a wet land?
- BWSSB is only talking about 5-7 years maintenance that runs to 1-2 crores per year, what will happen after the initial contract period?
- Why STP in a downstream lake and why not in an upstream lake?

If BWSSB stops the sewage flowing into the SWD, if BBMP clears the floating garbage and silt in the SWD and if KSPCB does regular check on the quality of water flowing into the lakes a large part of water problem and contamination of ground water can be stopped.

Let's be very clear, no amount of technology or treatment helped to clean Hussain Sagar in Hyderabad. It will be good if BWSSB stops fooling people with 'crystal clear water' STP in Agara Lake and gets its fundamentals right. Ensuring 100% Underground Drainage System (UDS) should be the first priority of BWSSB and is indeed the first important step towards stopping contamination of ground water.

This piece of news may come as a rude shock for many Agara Lake enthusiasts and citizens who care about saving the lakes in Bangalore. It's time the citizens of HSR Layout, Agara Village, Jakkasandra and surrounding areas are aware what is being planned in their backyard so that they can ensure one of the pristine water body is not converted into an STP that treats most of Bangalore sewage. Any attempt to set up an STP in Agara Lake should be contested and opposed keeping in mind the need to save our lake and the lung space.

Our Chief Minister should take a long-term view on the planned STP and question BWSSB's intent on setting up STPs in downstream lake rather than upstream lakes. Since BWSSB comes under the Chief Minister, it's his responsibility and obligation to ensure that BWSSB does not take this wrong step that intends to benefit only a few powerful people with vested interests. I do hope Chief Minister will intervene, look into the merits of the argument I have put out and support the common citizens to retain both lung space and the lake.

Publication: Jagran City Plus, 20th June 2014

No Accidental Prime Minister

General Elections 2014, one the most bitterly fought elections in the history of independent India is finally coming to an end. In the next few days, faith of every candidate and party will be decided as voting ends and counting begins.

As the political drama unfolds one man is quietly getting ready to walk into the sunset. Renowned economist, father of economic reforms & liberalization in India and the man who lead UPA Government <http://www.upagovt.com/> for the last 10 years, Dr Manmohan Singh http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manmohan_Singh bids good bye to public life.

Dr Singh lead one of the most successful and progressive governments in the history of independent India, but equally marred with controversial scams, he was blamed for being non-communicative and was targeted unfairly as a puppet in the hands of Sonia Gandhi.

Dr Singh's last 2-3 years in office has been his toughest, an over critical media, obstructive opposition and anti-corruption movements across the country took a toll on communication. Dr Singh is not known for being aggressive; his dignified approach was mostly interpreted as his incapability to act tough. A soft-spoken Dr Singh was attacked constantly by a barrage of media and opposition sometimes with a pre-set agenda.

Today as Dr Singh gets ready to leave office, there is a sadness that surrounds, call it the era of sound-bites or a well-planned propaganda by the opposition, UPA Government and the Indian National Congress failed to aggressively put across the achievements of Dr Singh lead Government.

The biggest failure of Dr Singh lead government was simply lack of aggressive and relentless communication. As main stream media looks for stories from the social media, lack of proactive communication from UPA Governments only added to its list of trouble. One may argue that its fatigue, rarely any government has successfully completed its 2 terms in office.

As India stands at cross roads, and is fighting an ideological battle, facts got replaced with rhetoric and parliamentary elections is fought as presidential one from one end of the spectrum. A bitterly fought election has over shadowed the achievements of Dr Singh lead Government, and only time will tell how Dr Singh's Government will be viewed as the election dust settles.

No one knows what Dr Singh would do next but I firmly believe that history will judge Dr Singh kindly and will attribute the India Growth story to Policies he laid out during his tenure. Why shouldn't it, there cannot be a better person to lead India than Dr Singh, and even during the most tough economic times he put India ahead.

Dr Singh will always be #SinghIsKing for many INC supporters like me; I admired him for being dignified even during brutal, abusive and uncouth campaign against him, he held the dignity of the Office of the Prime Minister of India.

Whatever maybe the outcome of General Elections 2014 Dr Singh will indeed have the last laugh, and time will reconcile to the fact that he was '*No Accidental Prime Minister*'.

Publication: Blog, 9th May 2014

Agara Lake on the Edge

Heaps of debris dumped around, broken fence, reeking water, unkempt garden, tons of garbage, floating plastic are the striking first visuals of Agara Lake. Post the landmark judgment and cancellation of PPP lease in Feb 2012, lake was handed over to Lake Development Authority, very little rather nothing has been done since then.

An early morning walk around the lake is a painful experience, construction workers and laborers carrying water bottles looking for a spot or young boy jumping across the fence to attend nature call is a common scene. If one decides to ignore all that and walks towards the water treatment plant which is no more functional, one cannot miss noticing a new entrance for the tractors carrying debris from various construction sites. The excess debris dumping has blocked any possible flow of the drainage water into the treatment plant area, ensuring that all the money spent on the treatment plant went straight into the drain.

The lake that once attracted several birds and was a favorite walking/jogging area for many residents across HSR Layout, Jakkasandra, Iblur and Koramangala is completely abandoned. Who wants to start the day walking around piles of stinking garbage or watching people carrying water bottles or even worst - bare bums?

Many concerned Citizen and Eco groups worked relentlessly, gathering support, meeting authorities and demanding action but got nothing more than a list of excuses, with no plan-of-action or timeline to fix the deteriorating situation of the lake.

Ask about the plan for the lake, maze of administrative complexities is in full display, here is just a sample:

- Maintenance of storm water drains across the layouts is with one authority but ensuring underground sewage pipes are not leaked into storm water drainage that feeds the treatment plant of lake is with the other.
- Ensuring the garbage is not dumped around the lake is with one, cleaning the existing garbage around and inside the lake area is with the other.
- The technical responsibility of implementation the water treatment plant is with one authority but the responsibility of the lake and its financial requirements lies with the other.
- Tree plantation, gardening, introducing fishes into the lake, lighting, security is the responsibility of an altogether different multiple authorities.

Added to depressing saga of the lake are the anti-social elements, who have made the lake area their safe hideout or should I say trade joint. Chain

snatchers, gamblers, drinking gangs, prostitution rackets are all out in open with no fear of law or of any authorities what so ever. One can blame the open access due to broken fencing around the lake, but in reality, every authority and elected representative in the locality have chosen to ignore the lake, and ignorance is indeed bliss?

Today, as I write the faith of Agara Lake hangs in balance more than ever, the monsoon which is the major source of water for the lake is just around the corner, and I am not confident if the authorities will take advantage of a good monsoon (*as predicted by meteorological department*) this year and act upon to ensure maximum rain water is collected in the lake. When the hard reality of the depleting ground water tables is staring at us, it would be criminal not to make an effort to contain the situation by harvesting the water in the lake that would in turn recharge the ground water tables.

Apathy of the authorities and elected representatives has indeed led to the multi-fold problems of the lake. It's high time all administrative wings and elected representatives stop passing the buck; it's time they assess the gravity of the situation and take collective and affirmative action. Unless there is a synchronized action across authorities with responsibilities fixed, any action will be a futile exercise and a waste of tax payers money.

The apathy of the authorities and elected representatives makes me wonder if commercial pressures are acting upon to ensure that the lake is not revived and restored. It will not be far from truth to say any delay will only mean letting the lake die an unnatural death and become a hot real estate ready for sale.

Publication: ToI Times Neighborhood, 14th June 2013

Relieving Questions

Few months back when the Union Minister Jairam Ramesh made an observation that in India we have more temples than toilets, there was a general unqualified uproar among the political class who like always demanded an apology even on a genuine concern.

As a resident of a 'so called' well planned and affluent locality like HSR Layout my observation is no different than the Union Minister.

Construction workers waking up as early as 4 am to attend their nature calls in a close by empty site or darker areas away from sight of early morning walker is a regular ritual, the plight of women construction workers is indeed unimaginable.

If one decides to ignore the woes of construction workers or hawkers around as temporary, think about the people who visit the commercial areas of the Layout. Recently I was at a well know food joint on the 27th main, a older lady walked in requesting the person behind the counter if she could use the toilet, the man very reluctantly nodded.

Incidents like these are neither isolated nor unknown, somewhere the sense of building/planning for a basic facility like a public toilet is not a priority, and indeed it shows complete lack of civic sensibilities from the authorities. While generously doling out CA sites to institutions even in areas that may beat any planning sense the authorities have looked the other way when it comes to providing a basic facility to a human being, depriving them of human dignity.

What could be worse than the visuals of construction people walking with water bottles early in the morning, a lady begging to use a toilet at a food joint, a man relieving himself against a compound wall, I wonder when will the authorities wake up to reality?

The medieval mindset of class and gender bias has to change in our urban planning, it's the primary responsibility of the authorities to provide basic facilities to everyone and make urban planning more inclusive. India is a welfare state and in the midst of commercial focus the idea of India seems to be somewhere lost in the planning by the authorities.

Urbanization is a reality, unless the authorities are not contemporary and inclusive in their outlook and planning, we will be left with more and more 'toilets in public' with no public toilets across locality.

For the authorities it should be effortless to set-up few paid toilets and issue pre-paid passes to construction workers. Making it mandatory for owner of the property under construction to pay and avail passes for all its construction workers is definitely practical to implement.

Let's not forget the hard fact that one may or may not go to a temple but everyone has to use a toilet.

As a modern-day quote rightly says 'Failing to Plan is Planning to Fail', it's about time the authorities acknowledge the mistakes of mindless planning/development and fix the problems rather than leaving people to deal with their own plight.

Publication: *ToI Times Neighborhood*, 19th April 2013

Strike to Stink

Over 16000 BBMP staff (including the contract staff) went on strike leaving the 5000 tons of garbage per day care-of-footpath. Striking workers seemed very happy at plight of the city and its citizens, holding all to ransom and our BMP Commissioner, City Mayor and State Govt looked inspired by our PM.

Even after paralyzing the city administration for days, one of the strikers when asked by the media, why they are making the citizens suffer went to the extent of saying that they are doing this for the sake of the citizens, make me wonder....my my what the hell did I miss.

So, when the strikers were making merry, household who do not care to read/watch news left their garbage bags in a row on their compound walls or let it hang on the gates - some leaking, some getting wet in the rains, some falling off and some bursting out. In support of the striking staff the famous street dogs of Bangalore took to streets showing their solidarity, and letting everyone know what they can do if the demands of the striking staff were not met.

Packs of dogs pulled down the garbage bags on to the streets exposing which household has babies and what diaper brand they use, lady from which household is having her periods and man from which household uses condoms, not to forget which brand. Some walked on the streets trying to ignore it all, some made futile attempts to kick 'objectionable' items to the storm water drains.

Some smart citizens took things into their own hands, carried garbage bags and flung it into the empty plots close by or simply threw it on the sides of nearest main road where there are no houses. The plight continued for days, rains for some reason decided to help the striking staff by adding to the raising stink on the streets of Bangalore, not that Bangalore streets were any better it just made it worst.

Garbage, Birth Certificate, Death Certificate, Property Tax etc all came to halt rather piled up. 5000 tons of garbage per day and 3 crores of revenue collection per day seemed nobodies concern. Finally, after 3 stinking days they have called off the strike (it seems). Did they get back to their senses or did the City Mayor agreed to their demands is irrelevant, the stink will continue and the citizens will always be the only one to suffer.

This strike episode lacks any moral stand, also stinks of arrogance and disregard makes a Bangalore like me wonder why I should pay the additional garbage cess that was quietly slipped in to the property tax recently!

Publication: Blog, 11th Aug 2012

Living on the Edge

Every adventurer loves to live on the edge, as a mountaineer every time I am out in the mountain there is no guarantee that I will be back alive, but that never stops me from craving for more each time. When I heard the news of the missing rafters, all that crossed my mind was *'its adventure and it's a choice the adventurers made'*. As an adventurer, I feel if I am not living on the edge than I am occupying too much space, but leaving the survival to sheer luck is something that should never be done.

We do not know if the two rafters were clear about the risk they were taking or if they had a good understanding of the waters/terrain they ventured into, neither do we know if they were qualified or fully equipped to do what they did. But there is indeed a very thin line between being adventurous and being reckless, when perceived danger is higher than the actual danger then its termed as being too cautious but when perceived danger is lower than the actual danger then it has clear streaks of recklessness.

Yes, adventure activity comes with its own risks; the assessment of the possible risks by narrowing the gap of perceived danger and actual risk before taking up the activity is extremely important. Adventure related Risks can be classified as Nature Risk, Navigation Risk, Equipment Risk, Medical Risk and Operational Risk.

Nature Risk, this is perhaps one risk that is almost beyond human control, but studying the specifics of the locations/areas and evaluating the conditions is perhaps the best way to address it. We may never be able to predict Avalanches, Landslides, Floods, Water flow, Wild Animals, Weather and other Climatic changes accurately, but it is necessary is to be prepared to handle eventualities both technically and professionally.

Navigation Risk, with advanced gadgets like Walky-talkies, GPS and Google maps; today we are able to map the terrains more accurately. Information from these sources helps us in precise navigation and data recording. But what is unique about adventure is the impact of the nature-a change-of-course of a river, one extra rain pour, a de-route due to landslide, missing a cairn, a crevasse, an avalanche zone can take you miles away from the destination, and also posing new challenges that may not be part of the earlier plan or assessment.

Equipment Risk, quality of equipment's used for any adventure activity should be given paramount importance. Deploying certified equipment's that are well maintained and are in a highly usable condition is recommended; never try to save few bucks when it comes to equipment's. One risk that you can be in your control to a very large extent is the equipment risk. Ensuring that the personnel managing the activity comply with the highest standards on the equipment front is critical. Never forget that a rope snapping, a harness de-

buckling, a life jacket ripping, a raft deflating, a carabineer cracking or jamming can cost your life.

Medical Risk, disclosing the correct information about the medical condition and giving a personal declaration is mandatory for any adventure seeker. Even though severe medical conditions like heart attack may be instantaneous, it can be averted if one is able to communicate the state-of-mind and takes help whenever required. An easily administrable medical kit, listing out medication that may be allergic and getting a basic medical check-up done before going on an adventure is recommended. The other situations that may lead to severe are insect bites or snake bites, for which administering a medication can be difficult, trying to travel away from dangerous terrains is the only best option, but also ensuring that someone in the group/team knows the basics of snake bite administration should never be ruled out.

Operational Risk, is that of the attitude of personnel/individuals itself. It's extremely important to be aware of the terrain/waters one is venturing into. Added to the experience or qualification to take up an adventure activity it is critical to acquire information locally and inform the relevant authorities about the activity you are planning to undertake. If something is not legally permitted than one should never discredit the rule/law and for sheer thrills put one's life in danger.

We have heard about several adventure activities that has taken lives, the most recent being the deaths of mountaineers attempting to summit Mt Everest and closer to home the death of the two rafters on river Kaveri, neither of it will be the last. But let's not forget what a famous mountaineer said, "*Summit is optional, Basecamp is mandatory*", one should always put the safety and life ahead of all glories and thrills.

I strongly believe that a true adventurer is the one who lives only to do the next one.

*Publication: Deccan Chronical, Banning adventure activities in not the right solution,
12th May 2012*

Yeddi's Mask is off!

Dear Mr CM,

This morning I was hoping to begin this open letter with a reference to Mr Jaitley's comments/ bits on your behalf, but I was robbed of that when I took my bike for servicing this morning. A small-time mechanic whose daily bread comes from servicing bikes was forced to shut down his tiny garage by a gang of BJP goons!! They went around on the streets of my locality forcing all the shops and establishments to down the shutters.

Well Mr CM why should we be punished for your sins; governor has given orders to file a complaint against you based on hard evidence that was all out on media. You have a problem with the governor you sort that out with him don't make us party to your crimes and please don't shoot keeping the gun on our shoulders.

What is that you so proud of and sticking to the CM chair, what is that your government has done in the last 2 years?

Your pet Bhaghyalakshmi scheme is a nothing more than an eye wash. Paying Rs 19000 odd towards a LIC policy for a girl child who will get an amount of Rs 100000 odd after 18 years?? Whom are you trying to fool? Please calculate the NPV of Rs 100000 of that 18 years, what will Rs 100000 be worth 18 years from now? Buying and flying down to distribute saris cost the exchequer more than the scheme Mr CM. Over 37% on people in Karnataka are BPL what good is it to cover only 11 lac BPL families in the scheme?

You have put your pictures on the buses and took credit for JNURM projects; KSRTC and BMTC are not the products of your government so don't take credit without deserving it.

Over 200 MoU on investments have been signed but none seen any light. You have single handedly driven away Wipro and Infosys to Pune and Hyderabad. By giving KIADB land to your family members you have deprived the more eligible ones.

BJP roared when the JMM case happened few years ago, how different is 'Operation Kamala'? Luring MLAs Corporators, ZP members after them getting elected on other party seats is NOTHING but horse trading and day light bribery!! Just to favor yourself you are force spending public money on re-elections of these defected representatives on your party ticket. You promised a minister berth to even people like Jaggesh and made him the Vice-Chairman of KSRTC!! What credentials does he have for this post?

The sex tainted ministers like Renukacharya and Halappa thrived in your cabinet; you do not have the moral responsibility to question them because

of your own un-explainable relationship with one of your ministers, so you keep mum. Katta Naidu and Reddy brothers looted and are still looting Karnataka, there is enough proof (not evidence) on their Land and Mining scams respectively, you were/are mum, because it was all 'you scratch my back I will scratch yours' type. When the Reddy brother's drama was going on, I truly believed that they were being unfair to you but reality is that you are hand in glove with them. You need them to fill the BJP party funds at the national level and they need you to keep the Lingayat in Karnataka happy (even Lingayat's are disgusted with you).

Your temple visits are astonishing!! Who pays for all your personal glory visits? It's the public of this state; you are burning public money to keep the gods in your favor!! You donate elephants to Temples in Kerala, you go flying to AP, TN temples seeking blessings, you hop in and out of all temples in Karnataka!!

When the RTI application exposed your nepotism, you confessed on camera and promised never to do it again, will you spare a murdered or a criminal if he/she confesses and says he/she will never repeat it? Your sons said that they will return the land, is all this NOT proof to file a case against you?

The BJP at the center commented on the PM that Creasers wife cannot choose the forum to be above suspicion?? You have chosen a retired judge to look into your land scams? Why is the same rule not applicable in your case? Why is that you are not handing over the case to Lokayukta? Why is that you took away the right of the Lokayukta to question elected representative and passed a resolution in the Assembly for the same?

Yesterday Mr Jaitely defended you by opening his statement "some people have asked to file a case on the CM.....ok Mr CM please tell Mr Jaitely that that "some people" whom he very casually referred are the one who voted for you and you are the CM because of that "some people". Ms Nirmala Sitharaman on the TimesNow show asked "what the hurry is and why is that Governor did not wait for the report to come"? What was BJP's hurry in asking Mr Chavan to resign? Even in his case the report was not there, it was enquiry pending!!

Pot cannot call a kettle black; you please resign and prove your innocence if any in the courts of this land. Don't insult the chair of the CM by sitting on it anymore...have some SHAME and let the law take its course.

As I end my open letter your goons have destroyed public and private property of the citizens!! We had enough of you and your drama; you will get the place in history as the WORST CM of this state without any contest at all.

Publication: Blog, 22nd Jan 2011

Weed out Corruption

With country waking up to scams after scams on a daily basis, 11th Dec was marked as the anti-corruption day, a day to come together as citizens and as civil society and condemn corruption in this country. But there is a need to ask ourselves how much are we responsible?

I would like to narrate my story, being the child of the 70's I grew up with idealistic values. The India I grew up in was just out of the wars, civil society was more patriotic, at schools and colleges we grew up hearing the stories of people who died for the country putting India first.

The media revolution began with print and electronic become stronger than ever post- emergency. With the new right to vote @ 18 it unleashed more power and participation. It made me believe that we can make everyone in office that Indian voted for more accountable.

My 1st encounter with bribe was when I went for the vehicle driving test, it was a norm to go through an agent and anyone who applied directly was failed in the 1st attempt. Many who failed decided to opt for an agent just to avoid failing the test again. My 1st refusal to pay bribe stared there, I told the offer who was conducting the test that even if he fails me 10 times I will not pay him bribe through the agent and I took up the test again and the same officer had no choice but to ok my DL.

When I bought a site and decided to construct a house, everyone who knew me warned about the corruption. They told me to close my eyes and hear nothing and let someone else manage the pay-out to various authorities. We build a house in exactly 12 months; I have record of every single penny we spent on the house, neither the BDA or the BWSSB or the KEB or the BBMP asked me for extra money to pass my file.

The only person who was scaring us out was either the Electrician or the Plumber who tried to make us believe that we need to pay. I walked into every government office myself ever determined not to pay, the last in the house riddle was the Khata. With the application and relevant documents, I walked-out of the revenue office at HSR BDA complex without paying a single penny. I had to follow-up 3-4 time for the same but never was asked a bribe, I followed the process and gave every letter every piece of paper I was asked. My brother said it was a fluke, getting a Khata without paying a bribe is impossible, and I got the Khata for his house which was long pending again without paying. I had to go to their office more than 4 times, but when I was asked to call the officer, he promptly told me that he was help up in election duty and it will be done. I got the Khata for my brother's house also without paying a bribe in fact the staff there offered me breakfast and coffee.

I have learnt five things:

1. If you make yourself aware of the basic process no one will take ask you for a bribe
2. Right approach and follow the process
3. Government work takes time, have patience if you are on the right side of the law
4. It's we who want short-cuts most of the time
5. If you are determined not to pay bribe you don't have to

Being in adventure travel, I get to meet government officials from forest department and sometimes police but, I never pay money for permission to trek in the forest other than what is stipulated as fee by the government.

It does not mean that I was not asked to pay a bribe; I wanted to register my company under the SSI, after submitting the application I was ask to pay some Rs 3000 as expenses. When I asked if I would get a receipt or details of the expenses in writing the relevant officer said no. I refused to pay, I am yet to get the registration certificate but I would no way pay to get it.

I am no big crusader, I always believed in walking the talk, and never deterred from standing up to what my conscious says.

I believe that taking bribe is a crime but paying bribe is a SIN. Without getting carried away by bigger scams, if we are able to say NO even for that Rs 100 bribe it will go a long way in cleaning up the system.

Publication: Jagran City Plus, Say NO to Bribe, 24th Dec 2010

Welcome Letter to Obama

Welcome to India Mr Obama, we simply love you like the way we loved Mr Bush, Mr Clinton....Mr Nixon and rest of them. Even though you will leave in the next 2-3 days Prannoy, Barkha, Arnab, Rajeev, Sagarika and Vikram will ensure that you will stay in our living rooms for the next 10 days. We will get the breaking news of what you said, what you did not, what you ate, what you did not, what you are wearing and what you are not...etc etc.

Bad entry, you spoil the Diwali for the Mumbaikars...but both MNS and the Shiv Sena decided to forgive you this time as they are glad that your team rubbed the CM & Dy CM on the wrong side even before you landed....it saved you from the trouble of making your speech in Marathi. I am sure the 'Old Tiger' will be glad to share his bathroom with you like he did with MJ for pronouncing Dharavi properly and referring Mumbai as 'Incredible Mumbai', because he has been trying to tell the Ministry of Tourism that it's not Incredible India its Incredible Mumbai as for him Mumbai is India.

If you are feeling home sick and missing the great bashing by the stronger Republicans back home don't worry right after your Taj emotional athyachar speech BJP has ensured that you don't miss home. As you rightly said both US & India are the largest democracies in the world and we have a lot in common including the opposition and unexpected election results. I humbly request you not to take offence of Mr Rudy's direct remarks on you, BJP was just trying to put its best man forward, you can check with your TV monitoring staff, he never dresses in a suit for a press conference and he is the only young- and good-looking BJP leader.

You must also realize that Sena was happy that you called Mumbai incredible, you won over the Congress by referring to Nehru, you spoke about the brave cops and many other, but you did not say a word that touched BJP in your speech, trust me if you had just said hey Ram that would have been enough, next time please tell your speech writer from Bangalore not to miss out on anyone, representation is very important.

But I must thank you for visiting the Mani Bhavan where Mahatma spent some quality time and even inspired Martin Luther, its good once in a while to remind us about our Mahatma, also Gandhi story really sells. Did you watch the super hit Munna Bhai? Maybe you should give up beating up countries and start giving them Jadhvi ki japi or even start sending flowers to Taliban till the time they vacate Afghanistan.

Many of us are upset that you did not mention Pak-is-tan in your ma(i)de(i)n speech, maybe in India we did not realize that you-are-tan..oops was that a racist comment sorry!! We see things differently in the Asia for eg Afpak in India means you get only 10 cigarettes to smoke, Pak in Pakistan means

Pakistan, America and Kashmir, Arunachal Pradesh means Tibet in China, you see we are all part of very old rather 5000-year-old civilization after all.

I particularly like the fact that you are here to fill vacancies in the great US, I thought you were anti-outsourcing, but if you want us to hire people for you, we will be glad to do that too. But just wondering if you are putting all your eggs in Indian basket? We already run your banks, software, websites, school tuitions, hospitals, shops, politics etc etc..eh it's just we do not want to be called a monopoly on a later date.

Our Harvard, Wharton, Silicon Valley returned and Desi business leaders seem to be very impressed by your long well-rehearsed, flawless sales pitch, must say that they have not been used to it at all, they have generally been told what to do and what not to do by the politician in this part of the world. It looked like a welcome change; they seem to be soaking it up before you land in Delhi with a different agenda or a changed tone given that you are also a politician and your party has just got crushed in the mid-term polls.

You have brought in many business leaders from US to sell their products in India and to attract Indian investment in US, dangling a carrot of opening up imports and high-end technology to India. Sure, we will export fresh fruits, vegetables, grains to the aging Americans whom you are struggling to keep alive and in return you can shove the Coke, Pepsi, McDonald, KFC etc etc down the throats of our young kids who are really the future of the great American economy. About Indians investing in US don't you worry, the accumulation of the gold owned by middle class Indian exceed the gold reserve of US treasury, so we have a lot of 'faltu' money in our lockers, but don't complain on a later date that we are controlling your economy like we already do in UK, buggers are now realizing how it feel to be colonized.

There are many who are very critical of your sales pitch, they tell me that you are playing for the galleries in US, and that your speech was for the Americans and not us, it's ok we get to experience the same all the time out here, we never understand whom our politicians are talking to or talking about all the time. You signed 20 deals worth \$10 billion that will create 50000 jobs in America, but you did not mention how many years will it take to create those 50000 jobs? Good you did not, it's just two more years for the election dude don't screw up your chance of being re-elected, knowing our and your bureaucracy these 50000 jobs could take 50 years and the American people are not in a state to hear that, no way. Simple call it the Diwali gift for the Americans as Diwali keeps comes every year.

Is it right that your visit is costing the US tax payer \$ 900 million, and people back in US are asking if this visit was needed when the unemployment rate is at 10%, and your rating is at the lowest? Hmmm if you get SRK and Mrs Obama to dance to Bollywood songs I assure you that 100% of the Indian-Americans will be with you and that can swing the rating in your favor. Also

try to influence your market research organizations to run popularity ratings survey online, we will ensure that Catherine, Liz, Anna, John, Ben from Bangalore vote for you, they too are trying to save their jobs you see and would not mind voting in your favor.

If nothing works on the job front may be its time you implement MGNREGA, you can still keep the same name and just remove rural since you consider Mahatma Gandhi as your Hero. You can get all the information from our MGNREGA champion Mr Rahul Gandhi, I am sure you will be meeting him since you are meeting his mother, kids stay with their parents out here in India. It's important to meet the BJP president Mr Gadkari too, in case it's missed out of your itinerary, don't be overwhelmed by his enormity, he has been our undisputed 'Biggest Loser India' ever since. Its politics and you never know when the BJP will be back in power, maybe will be good to meet them before Mr Gadkari takes them back to the good old size 6 or may be 4.

Are you wondering why I have not mentioned anything about our great PM, you know him very well, you have already met him six times, he really looks up to you for support and kind words? He does not mind being looked down at, he is used to it, everyone in the opposition always looks down upon him, but we the citizens don't care, we are happy that our PM is one of the most educated and brilliant minds, he is the inspirations to all our young people he is too keen to handover the PM's job to the next baba. Hmm I know what you are thinking....we can't outsource our PM's job to US it will be too costly we have cheap options.

On the lighter note, heard that some people were not happy that Mrs Obama visiting the red-light area, simply ignore it, even our cricket team captain MSD did, since she danced for our Bollywood music, we will not tell anyone not even Mr Clinton.

Kindly note, Indian press is giving you a lot of air time and space does not really mean that you can take them for granted; they understand politics and politicians very well, so watch what you speak or say, they can be very nasty like your channels back home. If Arnab calls you on his show don't say no, just say Time(i)s now to go, NDTV thinks you are the President of India, now that you have mentioned your daughter would like to know more about the save Tiger campaign Vikram must have already taken a flight to meet her. Be assured that Sagarika has not put on that extra make-up and draped in a jazzy sari just for you, she always dresses like that. If Rajdeep is interviewing you please mention that cricket is a great game and that IBN is really the number one news channel in India. Don't ever accept an invite to be interviewed by Karan Thapar, you will be impeached even before you go back home.

Lastly, Bangalore visit was removed from your itinerary; I totally understand dude, the city is already hearing enough from the Americans on a daily basis

and they may recognize your voice. But I should not forget to mention that you really missed the guided temple tour by our CM, tips on the best way to perform black magic, how to get god's blessing for America and the great opportunity to learn how to convert Republican senators to Democrats back home.

Aatithi devo bhava, once again welcome to India, enjoy your stay in India, after a long time we get to see a tall dark and handsome politician.

Publication: Blog, 7th Nov 2010

The Roaring Mountain

Roaring winds from Mt Nanda Devi East was crashing the tent at Camp-1 (5200 meters); one lift would take the tent down 300 meters onto the other side of the ridge. Ice axes, 3-feet snow stakes and walking sticks that were used in anchoring the tent loosened out in no time. I used all that was in the tent to hold the 3 corners and stood firmly at the 4th, I knew I was losing ground and had to get out to safety abandoning the tent, my backpack and other essentials were ready to be dragged out, it was just a matter of time that I would be forced to exit. After one bigger round of pounding, I heard Bharath and Takpa, they rushed in kicking down the anchors into the snow and we were holding on to the tent for the next 45 minutes till Nanda Devi calmed down.

Locals believe that Nanda Devi range is one of the most powerful and dangerous range in the Himalayas, they offer prayers to Nanda Devi to ensure that her fury does not bring doom. For a mountaineer peaks in Pindari Glacier have always been the most challenging quests, given its inhospitable terrain and highly unpredictable weather conditions. But Pindari Glacier is also one of the most beautiful regions, and our quest to climb Mt Nanda Khat (6611 Meters) started for Loherkhet.

Trek from Loherkhet to Pindari Glacier (the glacier has receded in the last two decades) is a pure scenic beauty of 50 Kms, the trail is a traverse all through the huge rocky hills on one side, river Pindari gushing right below and rocky & lush green hills on the other side with several waterfalls that join river Pindari at the base. The rich forest cover on both sides of the river houses an amazing assortment of flora and fauna, birds like Eurasian Jays, Rose Finches, Snow Partridges, Snow Doves, Fly Catchers etc are found in abundance and Dr Lalit captured over 45 species of birds through his lens.

Even though the Rhododendron flowering season was over, there were still some pink patches here and there in contrast with lush green surroundings. The clear water in the river splashing the huge rocks, sound of the waterfalls all around and the wind was soothing. Dakuri our first camping site gave us a 180-degree trailer of the snow-covered peaks like Maiktoli, Cream Roll, Sunderhunga Col, Panwali Dwar, Bhanoti, Nanda Devi and its outer sanctuary ridge.

As we hiked up and down the hills crossing Khati, the chirping of the birds and the sound of the pleasant breeze was replaced by the roaring river; with water gushing down rapidly slamming the huge rocks in its way making its presence felt. Tiny brown dippers did entertain us for a while but the sound of the river was too loud to be ignored. As we reached a place called Dwali where the water flowing from Kafni & Pindari Glaciers meet, it was a different world all together; the enormity of the water was so much that the hills on both sides are literally invisible.

As we moved to higher altitude the trees and shrubs were replaced by grass and the trail opened into the meadows covered with the bright yellow Butter cups and over 4-5 colors of Potentilla. With clear blue sky, and ice-covered peaks far ahead, it looked like a carpet of flowers just laid out to shoot a scene in Yash Chopra movie.

One of the threats that was very eminent was excessive grazing, each of the flocks were not less than 2-3 hundred sheep and the total sheep would not be less than 4000. Added to grazing, shepherds set off fire on the dried grass and in they do not even spare the Juniper shrubs. Birds were screaming out of the fire abandoning the nest and the little ones and the eggs. It was heart breaking to see the destruction caused; the grass that holds on to the top soils erodes within no time causing landslides.

As we approached basecamp, the view of the magnificent peaks, constant noises of the avalanches and rock falls welcomed us. Given the logistical difficulties for a 12-member team to manage itself for 20-30 days we decided to set up our advance basecamp closer to the peak we would be attempting. As we got closer, we could sense that the furies of the nature got stronger, calmer nights were replaced by thunder, snowfall and the day with gushing avalanches. At advance basecamp it was indeed a 360-degree effect, as we were completely surrounded by the peaks, Lamcher, 1, 2, 3, Nanda Kot, Changuch, Trails Pass, Nanda Khat, Panwali Dwar, Baljuri.

Our movement to higher camps got slower than planned, and sometimes we stayed in the tents for 24-48 hours. Route to Camp-1 was about 4-hours with two rock faces of 150-200 meters each, an ice wall and an altitude of 900 meters. Occupying Camp-1 with all that we needed took us 8 days, and the approach to summit camp from there on was a snowfield filled with crevasses, snow bridges and a climb 3-4 hours. The hidden crevasses are always dangerous, many may not be dangerous but in bad weather anything can get worst. Reeba fell into a crevasse and could not pull herself out, we luckily had Wallambok who got down into the crevasse and release her climbing boots that was stuck. Smaller incidents more than being dangerous take away a lot of energy and time, thereby slowing the progress in the mountains or getting held up in bad weather. However well trained or experienced mountaineer one could be, there is no possibility of competing with the bad weather or taking an unsafe route trying to challenge nature at its worst.

After days of waiting for the weather to get better we finally got a clear window, summit attempt started with splitting the team into two. As it was an alpine style climbing, we could do better with two teams and also the risk factor would be much lesser in smaller teams. As one team conserved their energy at Camp-1 the lead team successfully attempted the summit, it took over 20 hours, weather got worst at the end of 11 hours, but reaching the lower camp safely was a priority. The next day second team did not get lucky,

they were to start the summit ascend by 10 pm and weather never cleared, with heavy snowfall, complete whiteout and strong winds they had to move down to safety with heavy hearts.

Every expedition, every summit attempt may not be always successful, what drives a mountaineer to these mountains again and again seeking new highest and new challenges is the sheer love to be midst of the magnificent peaks. Mountains do really bring out the best in you; one would look at them and wonder how tiny and insignificant human beings really are.

For a true mountaineer surviving the cold, facing the challenges, climbing the mountains is not a sport but it's an 'Attitude' they love to live.

Publications: Deccan Herald, Conquering Nature's Fury, 13th Sept 2010

Caste (A)way

End of 2011 India would have collected the data of the castes of its citizens; hot debate on caste-based census was almost like a storm in a cup. Many of you who are reading this may not agree with the view but it's time to call 'spade a spade'. Sitting in the comforts of our living rooms and calling ourselves global citizens or being idealistic does not change the fact that the poverty in this country is linked to caste. If drunken driving is no reason to ban cars then the argument on caste census becoming a tool for minority or caste politics etc etc is trivial.

For sake of argument which country in the world does not ask your caste, which political party in this world does not address the vote bank? In the recent UK elections, a person from Indian origin was given a ticket to contest from a constituency that had Asian majority. US can intellectually call it ethnic groups etc etc, it all leads to one single thing, 'who were you born as'. Let's cut the bullshit of religion, caste, ethnic groups etc etc being irrelevant in the economic surge or political process.

If we accept that there is a problem then it's easier to find a solution, hence let's get the fact right, there is a pattern to poverty in India and that has to do with caste. 25 years of well-run literacy program has still left us with 37% poverty (even though I disagree on the 37%, as the urban poor are different from rural poor). The ideological view of 'literacy for all' rhetoric has not changed the fact that the female feticide is the highest among the educated urban class, so leave alone it being 'the plan' for poverty reduction.

People from certain castes and certain religion have been left behind in the India growth story. If we have to address the 37% poverty and 35% illiteracy, then there is a genuine need to understand the social fabric of hungry India. The fear of politicians manipulating the vote bank or data leading to more reservation etc are petty issues compared to the larger need of creating a non-intimidating atmosphere, empowering every section of the society, inclusiveness in our growth process and finally not just creating opportunities but creating options to every single Indian.

As a country we are growing younger, which only mean we will have more 'young and restless', and large part of the younger population demographically are in this 37% population that is under poverty. If we do not identify and engage them rightly, as a nation we will be left with a lot on our plate to deal with. Today the only caste difference we want to recognize is the rich and the poor or the urban and rural, in this lopsided view we are missing the disease and are only treating its symptoms.

Our shining examples of people from the backward caste making it in life comes with the reality that they have worked harder than their counterparts from forward caste, and for some reason we seem to be very ok with them

working harder. Did it ever occur to us that why should a person from a backward caste work harder than the one from the forward caste to be what he/she wants to be? We have type casted them as backdoor entries or reservation class for decades, laterally tearing into their self-esteem and the disregarding the right to opportunity.

Here are some facts to ponder, and if we still believe hungry India can be addressed without understanding the make of its population then we must be living in eternal denial.

- 50% of the 28% urban population lives in smaller towns
- 72% of India lives in rural areas
- Less than 32% of rural population are from forward castes
- 16% of the population is SC (50+ sub-castes listed under this)
- 7% of the population is ST
- 52% of the population is OBC (3000+ sub-castes listed under this)

Recently during a discussion on caste census at an alumnus meet, I was appalled to hear a remark that 'caste census will create more Mayawaties', what I am not able to understand is not just the attitude of the remark but selective targeting of a caste and equalizing quality with caste. A bad politician has no caste; UP was not better during the time of N D Tiwari or Kalyan Singh or Rajnath Singh or R P Gupta or Mulayam Singh Yadhav, each of them have played to the galleries but we still believe in linking quality to caste, which in a way only makes it clear that the caste is in our heads really.

The growth of a country is in its inclusiveness, in its ability to bring all sections of the society to the discussion table and to the drawing board, if reservation is the only means to address it so be it. It's time we realized that a group of think tanks or economic big wigs cannot decide on what is good for every Indian; let's give an opportunity to people across board to speak for themselves. Economic participation is directly linked to Social and Political empowerment & inclusion, and caste census is the only way to assess the position we are in and strategize how we can make India inclusive.

I to believe in a casteless system and my only caste is 'being an Indian', but one cannot ignore the ground reality or feel intellectual by harping of no caste system. The fact of the matter is that there is no equality without equality in Political, Economical and Social process, inclusive India needs a better understanding of its make.

Publication: Blog, 10th Sept 2010

Adventure a toll for Learning

Mankind as we see is today is a result of Explorers and Adventurers who have dared to discover new things and new places, there by filling the gaps in connecting the world we are in.

Adventure is perceived as risky, dangerous but equally exciting experience. The word Adventure largely refers to activities with some potential physical danger, such as Skydiving, Skiing, Mountaineering, Scuba Diving, Bungee Jumping and other Extreme sports. However, if viewed from a wider prospective it can refer to any venture /organization /enterprise /individual as they also take a market risk, a financially risk, a psychological risk, a consumer risk etc to be successful in their chosen area.

Primarily the most successful venture /organization /enterprise /individual have been the one who took greater risks, the one who dared and the one who were able to explore newer markets /customer /options each time when they faced the odds or opportunities.

Humans & Adventures, Humans lived predominantly outdoors and in close contact with nature, and involved in myriad adventurous exploits, thus, it will not be incorrect to say that we are adventures by instinct and a penchant for adventure may be hard-wired into the human psyche and culture.

Why Adventure? What is the need, wouldn't it be better to play safe and stay home?, For many, adventure is a pursuit of self, as it teaches you to deal with life, to adapt to circumstances, to make the best use of resources, learning by doing & by experiencing, opportunity to open up to new ways of looking at things, appreciating differences, finding a common ground and all this cumulates to what we call it as experiential learning.

Adventure could be a first step towards being able to deal or overcome difficulties and a need to acknowledge that yes its hard, but what now? It's all about pushing yourself, taking yourself to the next level and in the process realizing your inner self and your inner strength.

Deep within, we all by nature thrive on sense of adventure, adrenaline rush and experience on living-on-the- edge in one form or other, it also psychologically unlocks the fear, makes one more resilient and gives a sense of fulfillment.

Groups/Teams respond to Risk/Adventure, Groups generally encourage individuals to be adventurous, when people are in groups; they make decision about risk differently from when they are alone. In a group, they are likely to make riskier decisions, as the shared risk makes the individual risk less. The team spirit of not wanting to let down the team enables them to look at risk differently, and this shift in risk perception is termed as choice shift.

Physiological impact of Adventure, Experiences of an adventure activity more than often leaves a highly positive impact, more importantly in the way in which people see, feel and understand themselves. Learning, experimenting, change in personality perception, better manage stress and more importantly value resources could be some of the long-term impacts of adventure.

Adventure as Stress Buster, Studies have made evident that participation in adventure activities has a positive effect; adventure motivates, boosts self-confidence and enhances self-awareness. Outdoor activities like Cycling, Fishing, and Games make you feel fresh and relaxed, but the excitement and thrill that accompanies adventure takes to the next level of fulfillment, and makes you feel challenged and encouraged thus, exhibiting your skills and building self-confidence.

Adventure as a process identifies with the underlying philosophy that is also referred as experiential learning. Research shows a positive outcome and reports that it effectively improves self-esteem, better personal behavior, increase mutual trust, better social behavior.

Adventure & Outdoor based training is one of the most preferred training options among the HR fraternity and the corporate as it's an effective employee engagement model. It enables participants to learn and experience the challenges in an unfamiliar ground. It helps to enhance behavioral skills and qualities of an individual, bringing out latent facets of one's personality.

Publication: Deccan Herald, Adventure a tool for Learning, 26th May 2010

Risk & Danger never on Vacation

As the news of Carlton Towers fire spread, local channels aired heart-rending visuals of people jumping off the tower in most desperate attempt to save themselves from being charred; it was clearly an extreme measure of survival. It angered many and raised several questions, but accidents like Carlton Towers are not the first or the last, as risk and danger are never on vacation.

Whatever course law takes or enforcements happen on the Carlton Towers accident, for many who lost their loved ones it's too little too late, and for rest of us it just wisdom at hindsight.

As organizations and as individuals we do very little to assess and understand safety without realizing that fire drills, fire extinguishers, first aid kits etc are not enough to ensure safety, given that all can fail and failed at Carlton Towers.

Rescue comes ahead of safety indeed; it is an opportunity to be safe/survive when all safety measures fail. If safety measures are an assurance of being safe, rescue operations are about doing the right thing when assurance fails. Safety assessments as a process generally ignore rescue plans, and the assessment checklist mostly will just include fire extinguishers installed in the corridors, the red colored exit doors and approvals given by the authorities. Routine check-up and an alert drill ensure's the safety measures are working but falls short of putting an alternate plan in place when things fail to work when it is really needed.

Being a mountaineer, key lesson I learnt was what best one can do when pounded under an avalanche or when slipped into a crevasse. Two most important distinctions are managing situations that are in our control and the other managing the one that are not in our control.

As a mountaineer what is under my control is to use the best of the equipment and have the technical skills to use them, but what I need to be prepared for is to handle the one which is not in my control. Safety rules are the same where ever you are, if few basic principles of rescue are all it takes to minimize risk and casualties.

In a case like Carlton Towers, where it houses several small independent offices, 'safety' one really looks at is the neighbor next door who occupied the office earlier than you did. We live by the phrase "all izz well" if there are so many others in the same building. Not to sound rhetoric but the fact of the matter is that there are several such buildings across the city, we will see a lot of re-inspection, re-assessment that will happen across buildings and eventually will ignore all that and wait for the next Carlton Towers to happen.

The people occupying these building should at least start insisting on basic self-rescue facilities and points along with the safety measures.

- Self-lowering Anchor points / Bolted points
 - *Enabling ropes to be used to lower people easily*
- Large Airbags, inflatable on release
 - *Ensuring people who may jump out to fall to safety*
- Emergency Ladders
 - *Which can be easily installed in the balconies to let people climb down to safety*
- Rail / String across 2 buildings
 - *Where people can be easily moved from one building to other with very basic equipments*
- Basic Rescue Kit – Ropes, Harness, Descends, Mittens, Karabiners
 - *A must have, can be used to get people down faster*

I do not know what could be justice for the people who died in Carlton Towers fire, because they are no more, we are not yet sure who is to blame and how long it would take to bring the real culprit to book. But Safety & Rescue are not just hygiene factor, they are to be assessed and re-assessed even when you don't have to.

We have an instinct to survive, but should never be left just to instincts alone, there is a need to invest in securing the lives of people by looking beyond building approvals and safety protocols.

Publication: Bangalore Mirror, Risk & Danger never take Vacation, 5th April 2010

De-risking Living-on the Edge

We were 17100 Ft, just few meters away from Camp-2, "Avalanche, watch-out" came the call!! We moved quickly towards the end of the avalanche fall-line and switched-on the Avalanche Victim Detector (AVD) to transmission mode, within seconds we were covered by flakes of snow. We were very lucky to be able to move out of the fall-line, else we would be been pounded by heaps of ice blocks and snow with sure casualties.

Every adventurer loves to live-on the edge, but leaving it to luck is something that should never be done in Adventure. An adventure activity comes with its own risks; the assessment of possible risks before taking up the activity enables to de-risk them to a large extent.

Adventure related Risks can be classified as Nature Risk, Navigation Risk, Equipment Risk, Medical Risk and Operational Risk.

Nature Risk, this is perhaps one risk that is almost beyond human control, but studying the specifics of the locations/areas and evaluating the conditions is perhaps the best way to address it. We may never be able to predict Avalanches, Landslides, Floods, Wild Animals, Weather and other Climatic changes accurately, but it is necessary is to be prepared to handle eventualities both technically and professionally.

While returning from Mt Jaonli expedition, right before the junction where Lodgad River merges into River Bhagirathi, the water level had increased substantially. The only crossing option was the log bridge that was swept away by the gushing waters of Lodgad. With no other option left, we risked our lives and crossed over to safety, with the help of a fallen tree.

Navigation Risk, with advanced gadgets like Walky-talkies, GPS and Google maps; today we are able to map the terrains more accurately. Information from these sources helps us in precise navigation and data recording. But what is unique about adventure is the impact of the nature - a change-of-course of a river, a de-route due to landslide, missing a cairn, a crevasse, an avalanche zone can take you miles away from the destination, and also posing new challenges that may not be part of the earlier plan or assessment.

Equipment Risk, quality of equipments used for any adventure activity should be given paramount importance. Deploying UIAA certified equipments that are well maintained and are in a highly usable condition is recommended; never try to save few bucks when it comes to equipments. One risk that you can be in your control to a very large extent is the equipment risk. Ensuring that the personnel managing the activity comply's with the highest standards on the equipment front is critical. Never forget that a rope snapping, a harness de-buckling, a raft deflating, a carabineer cracking or jamming can cost your life.

Medical Risk, disclosing the correct information about the medical condition and giving a personal declaration is mandatory for any adventure seeker. If you are in a group or part of an organized event informing and updating about your state of health without any hesitation is the only way to address an eventuality.

Even though severe medical conditions like heart attack may be instantaneous, it can be averted if one is able to communicate the state-of-mind and takes help whenever required. Communication without hesitation or ego hassles is the best way for a great adventure trip. You know your body better than anyone else and pushing yourself extensively is not advisable.

On a longer adventure activity, one may have a doctor to accompany, but it is not practical or economically viable for shorter events. An easily administrable medical kit, listing out medication that may be allergic and getting a basic medical check-up done before going on an adventure is recommended. If you are going to high altitude areas, having HAP's (High Altitude Porter), oxygen cylinders, GAMO bag, stretchers, splints, doctor on ground and helicopter rescue option (if possible) is mandatory.

The other situations that may lead to severe are insect bites or snake bites, for which administering a medication can be difficult, trying to travel away from dangerous terrains is the only best option, but also ensuring that someone in the group knows the basics of snake bite administration should never be ruled out.

Operation Risk, primary operational risk is that of the personnel (Guides, Organizers, etc), it's extremely important to check on the experience, qualification in adventure and certifications of the people whom you are hiring for adventure activity. Even the basic guidelines given by Indian Tourism Ministry is, to go with operators who are certified with state governments or with someone who is certified by recognized Mountaineering institutes in India.

The secondary operational risk is that, even though India has a fairly large number of adventure tourist both local and global there are no specific or structured insurance or rescue options in place, and whatever is available is either too expensive or inadequate or highly unrealistic.

The one time we needed a helicopter was when we were on an all women expedition to Mt White Sail in the Himachal area. Given that, it was a personal expedition; we did not have INR 2 lac advance deposit towards any possible rescue operation. We are summit camp at approx 18000 ft, our HAP who was helping us in the expedition developed HAPE (High Altitude Pulmonary Edema), a life-threatening altitude sickness condition. We were left to our will to get him down on a stretcher, even with a thin staff we managed to bring

him down safely and later took him to the hospital. Expect for our presence of mind, preparedness both in terms of equipments and personnel, we had everything racing against us.

India is the only place in the world with Snow-Mountains, Rocky hills, Forests, Beaches, Rivers and Desert making it more exciting for an adventure seeker globally. Given this amazing geographic spread India can offer adventure activities all 365-days through the year.

Indian tourism over the last few years with its 'Incredible India' campaign has seen a tremendous increase both in revenue and foreign exchange, adventure tourism alone accounts to approx 450 crores. Adventure tourism generates employment particularly in the Himalayan range. Majority of the population in these terrains are dependent on adventure tourism for their livelihood, for many it is probably the only means to make a living and hence, it is both economically and socially important for a country like ours to promote and develop adventure tourism.

We have heard about several adventure activities that has taken lives, the most recent being the death during a bungee jumping activity in Bangalore. But '*Drunken driving is no reason to ban cars or to remove pedestrian crossings*', banning or putting restrictions (which are, generally the first reaction) on adventure activities or its operators for any mishaps or accidents are no real solution.

At a policy level, a National & State-wise comprehensive policy that follows global conventional guidelines and mechanism to assess the safety protocols followed by its operators should be put in place to make Adventure Tourism safe and safer on a consistent basis.

Most importantly, at an individual level ensuring that there is no compromise on the quality of equipment's or quality of the personnel who are handling it is indeed the first step to towards a safer Adventure Holiday.

A famous mountaineer once said, '*Summit is optional, Basecamp is mandatory*', one should always put the safety of self and the group ahead of glories.

Publication: Deccan Herald, De-risking living-on the edge, 1st Nov 2009

Making Adventure Your Career in Incredible India

If you believed climbing walls, scaling mountains, trekking across the forests, gliding in the skies or rafting down the rivers are for fun and just hobbies, you could be wrong; it can be a serious career option too.

Today adventure tourism in India offers many challenging career options. With increased number of global and Indian travelers seeking adventure in the harsh terrains of Himalayas or the rough rock faces of Hampi or the cool beaches of Goa; the demand for qualified adventure professionals has only increased. Infrastructure and accessibility over the last decade have enabled the adventure travel industry, which has been largely unorganized to move into professional and organized set-ups. Global competition and the need to have a competitive edge, has brought in well-trained professionals, making it interesting, fun and less risky.

India Market

India's biggest opportunity is its demography. It would not be wrong to say that India is the only place in the world with Mountains, Rocks, Forests, Beaches, Desert and Rivers making it more exciting for an adventure seeker. India can offer adventure activities all 365 days a year given the geographic spread.

Indian tourism over the last few years with its 'Incredible India' campaign has seen a tremendous increase both in revenue and foreign exchange. The Adventure travel industry accounts to around 500 crores with a 20% increase in the last 2 years.

Foreign travelers mainly back-packers and mountaineering enthusiasts contribute largely to the revenue and foreign exchange, given the longer duration of their stay. Majority of Indian travelers are pilgrims and holiday'ers, but there has been a 25% increase in adventure travelers. With the country growing younger and a much strong Indian economy the adventure space will stand to gain over the next 3-5 years.

Career options

Adventure space offers a wide range of career options, like any other profession, even in adventure space there are entry-level and specialist options based on the level of education and experience.

Some of the career options are:

Trekking & Mountain Guide – A well trained guide has an earning potential of Rs. 12000 to 70000 per month. Basic degree, guide course/advance mountaineering course from any of the mountaineering institutes is what it

takes to become a guide. If one has the understanding of the terrain, has a wilderness medicine course or has done a search and rescue course, understands GPS tracking and map reading, then it will be an added advantage.

Outbound Training Facilitators & Trainers – Outbound training is one of the most preferred training options among the HR fraternity, it is also an effective employee engagement model. There has been a substantial demand for highly trained and qualified adventure professional to facilitate outbound training programs. One can take the journey of being a facilitator to a trainer based on the skills and additional qualifications acquired, and would be able to earn Rs. 15000 to 1.2 lac a month.

Water & Aero sports specialists – Rafting & Paragliding are the most challenging adventure activities and one has to be a highly trained rafter or glider before venturing into the waters or the skies. A sizable coastline and several rivers across the country, enables water ski and scuba diving career option, if one can go through the rigorous training to be qualified.

Gear Designer – If you love adventure but want a career as a designer, then there is no looking back. Many Indian brands that are competing with global brands are always on a look-out for the best talent. Designing adventure gear and accessories can be fun and equally lucrative.

Naturalist – A life science degree, knowledge of flora on fauna and love for adventure can get you a job as Naturalist. The role could involve survey, documentation of eco-tourism opportunities and also facilitate travelers to understand and enjoy the natural surrounding better.

Where to start?

Like any other career, aspiring adventure professionals too can get trained and certified by National and International institutes. Mountaineering institutes like Nehru Institute of Mountaineering (NIM), Himalaya Mountaineering Institute (HMI), DAMAS and NOLS an international outdoor school, offers training programs for adventure enthusiasts and adventure career aspirants.

Maj Vishal Thapa, Vice Principal & Training Head of NIM says “*We are rated as the best training institute in Asia; we train over 900 people both Indian and Foreign Nationals every year. In the last few years, we have seen a drastic change in the objectives of the trainees, today majority of them join our courses to hone themselves professionally. We have enhanced our training program and re-designed our methodology, making it more contemporary to address the current demand. Our aim is to provide superior training enabling an inflow of better qualified professionals into the adventure space*”.

Some of the successful stories

Ashok, unlike others choose the 'un-trodden path'. A career in adventure 20-years ago would have sent shivers down the spine, but he braved it out to set-up Ozone. Ozone has evolved and an excellent brand in Adventure gear market and today has the most popular multi-brand outlets called 'Adventure One'. As Ashok says *"It's a lifestyle choice, it's that simple"*.

'Creating a brand', lack of quality and affordable adventure gear in India till the late 80's posed a challenge to many adventure enthusiasts including Dinesh. He stood-up to the challenge to create India's most popular adventure gear brand 'Wildcraft'. With over 15 stores and 300 employees the brand is synonymous with adventure gear in India.

'Changing course', *"as an adventure enthusiast, I was keen in an 'adventure' career; I saw a huge potential in this space and the possibility of creating a successful company. I gave-up my corporate role to start BASECAMP Adventures; today we manage Outbound Training and Adventure programs for over 2600 corporate clients and adventure travelers"*.

Anita connected to the blue skies, 'flying high' was just what she wanted to do, she did that by creating the coolest brand 'Temple Pilots' in the Adventure and Tourism industry in the country.

'Camping glory', Balaji (Bala) runs a campsite called 'Shristi' that focuses on experiential learning, facilitating learning, creative thinking and self-development through nature, he says *"It was initially very hard, but love for adventure and determination to make it a success kept me going, today there is a sense of achievement"*.

Opportunities are immense for those who travel the newer terrains. A board at NIM reads 'Success lies in Courage'; a career in Adventure space is definitely challenging, if one has the courage and is adventurous enough then success is sure to follow.

Publication: Deccan Herald, Making Adventure Your Career in Incredible India, 13th Aug 2009

In Blue & Green

"Need a Break" my heart cried, I called my friends and we decided to go on a trek. We gathered at Delhi, traveled to Rishikesh, on reaching we took an auto to check-in to a hotel, refresh and leave to Uttarkashi late in the evening. Just a few minutes ahead, the auto driver stopped in front of a TempoTrax and suggested that we should go Uttarkashi right away, plans changed and we loaded our Rucksack.

Rishikesh is at an altitude of 356 Mts, it's the base for most of the trekking activities in the beautiful Garhwal Himalayas. The city is surrounded by hills on three sides and the holy river Ganga flowing through. Rishikesh also offers the best of Rafting, with some excellent rapids; we planned to splash some water on return.

Mere 5-hour drive in the mountains, anything in your tummy would come out, we decided not to eat till we reach Uttarkashi. However physically uncomfortable the drive was, beauty of the mountains kept me occupied. My camera was little excited looking at the River, Clouds and the Mountains literally in that order and by noon we were at Uttarkashi.

First stop was the prestigious Nehru Institute of Mountaineering (NIM), an institute that has trained several mountaineers; it was very emotional as was trained at NIM. The training team includes Everest'ers, army deputes and technically superior mountaineers, it is definitely one of the best mountaineering institutes in the world. One would simply fall in love with the well-maintained campus, greenery all over, surrounded by mountains all the four sides, the sound of the Baghirathi River, several species of birds, specially the Paradise Flycatchers.

Next morning, we arrived at Bhukki by road, a dusty terrain with several landslides, construction of roads, NTPC plan to build a power station, there was action all over. It was a long Trek, which would mean a steep walk and gaining height more quickly.

Our first camp, Tela gave the first sight of snow-covered mountains on one side and a green terrain on the other 3 sides. As our cooks were getting the dinner ready, we started to pitch tents. We had our first Chai on the mountains and went up for a walk, it's important to gain height and come back and sleep at a lower altitude. We were introduced to various kinds of trees and plants species, trees like Silver Oak, Pine, Maple and the wild Orchids were in abundance. It was one of the relaxed nights, after a long Trek we had nothing else but just to have dinner and go to bed.

We follow "No Trace" policy and are highly environmental coconscious. We ensure the entire place been left intact and free from any human trace of overnight camping. We had a nutritious breakfast and carried packed lunch.

The Trek to Jungle Camp was tough, downhill and uphill with rucksacks, we could feel the pain all over the body. We reached Jungle Camp just in time, happy to beat the rain god. The stay at Jungle Camp was a bit scary, I tried to get as much sleep as I could and waited for morning to break.

The next day was more relaxed, I guess we got used to the Terrain. The day was bright and as we gained more height the tall trees were replaced by the shrubs and later the carpet of flowers, it felt as if it was laid out just for us, Marsh Merry Gold, Lilies, Orchids, Rhododendron, many more, the Lichens hanging from the trees, the clear vast blue sky, the snow covered mountains around, "Is this Heaven"!!! I wish we could preserve this for generations to come, for our kids to enjoy the nature as much as we do.

I was captivated by the beauty of the land, pride of been born in the land of Himalayas. I had read only in books and now it was in front of my eyes and I could see, feel and experience it all by myself for the next few glorious days.

Gujjar Hut is a tiny settlement of local tribes, mostly shepherds. We walked to sacred Kheratal (Serpent Lake) that has water all year round and never dries, locals. Night was very pleasant, and we slept with the excitement of reaching Base camp next day.

We were at Base camp by late noon, a flat land on top of a hill, drop zone with water gushing down the valley on one side and peak Mechha Dhar, Jaonli, Draupadi-Ka-Danda and the Dokrani Bamak surrounding the other sides.

Amidst the enchanting surrounding, weather was getting colder, less sleep, frozen hands, running noses but all seemed fun. We started from Base camp towards Dokrani Bamak, trekking across the moraine, we had an opportunity to gain more height and experience some good snowfall. Dokrani Bamak is also the training area for NIM. The following day we started early to Mechha Dhar, even though it was not technical, it was an opportunity to be on top of a 5000 Mts peak. Rocky walk, plain land, green grass, carpet of flowers and the snow, that's how the landscape changed as we climbed up. There was enthusiasm, we reached the top of the peak, felt a sense of achievement. We congratulated each other; it was time to capture every moment on the top.

Hearts filled with joy, we descended safely. A long trek back skipping one of the interim camping points, we were in Tela for the second time, this time to say good-bye. Tela to Bhukki was a cakewalk, and we are back in Uttarkashi.

Next day it was time to say good-bye; we left Uttarkashi promising to be back soon.

Publication: Deccan Herald, In Blue & Green, 26th April 2009

Hillock of the Goddess

Place not known or less frequented by Bangalore trekkers are very few, one such hideout is Bananthimari Betta, just 3 kms from Kanakapura on the Kanakapura to Ramanagaram road.

Situated between Konanadoddi and Kuthnahalli it offers a unique trekking option, surrounding the 2 hillocks are the vast fields, between the hillocks is a lush green valley and a stream flowing down. "Bananthi" means mother who is nursing a newborn, and "mari" means the violent goddesses. I am not sure on the origin of the name, but the base of the hill has a temple of Bananthimari that can be reached from the village of Kuthnahalli.

Many devotees visit this temple, sacrifice lamb or chicken, cook near the temple and serve all the visitors. The highlight of this place is that the priest goes into a séance and talks to the devotees about their problems, and giving solutions and blessings.

There are 3 trek routes:

Route 1: Reach the temple by vehicle, and trek to the top of the hill through the narrow treks path and the boulders.

Route 2: Reach the base of the hill from Konanadoddi side crossing the granite factory, the fields. Trek through the valley, the vegetation is very rich and the wall like rock face on both sides offers a great view, the sound of the flowing stream and the quietness keeps you going all through the route. This is also the track accessed by the local shepherds, it finally leads to the temple and from thereon have to take Route 1

Route 3: This is 'freak's route' basically no route, keep climbing and trekking till you feel you are reaching somewhere.

All wanted one long break; so, on the morning we drove down from the city. Once reaching Kanakapura we asked for directions, and at one place two villagers got into a verbal fight on who was giving the right direction, so we decided to take the advice of the older of the two and reached the base of the hillock.

After parking the car at Soundrya Granites, we realized that none of us had a water bottle; I did not carry it as every trek and lose a good water bottle and en-route we forgot to buy some bottled water. Subbu went to a near-by hut and borrowed a small ½ liter empty bottle promising to return it.

So, we walked around the fields that were all slushy due to rains in the last few days, still deciding which route to take and finally 'freak's route' was the best option. We had no clue what will be ahead, but started walking up the

rocky face of the smaller hill, we could see a red flag on Bananthimari Betta and we had only objective – ‘to reach there taking the difficult route’.

The rocks seem to be much older than the Madhugiri or Ramanagaram, it looked more worn out, quite rough and did not feel slipper even on a steep stretch. Even though we only get to see the fields on all the 3 sides of the hill, the view of the other hillocks from there is really awesome.

Ramadevara Betta, Kabbaldurga, glimpses of Savanadurga and many more of those unnamed elevations give some breather for our cameras, we took pictures of as many views along with all our other regular crazy shots.

Bouldering is also a good option; many faces also offer some rappelling routes. It is quite a long climb to the flat pitch on the top of the smaller hillock. Mid way there is a spot that has a huge rock in the middle, one side of the rock is a traverse that is dangerous, and the other side is a drop zone with some two feet space to walk and is slipper due to the flowing water, once you decide to brave it and cross over, you then have a 6-foot climb up with a 75 degree elevation and a slip to your right would mean going down the drop zone.

Other than few of the dicey spots, the climb is quite nice and mainly tests endurance levels. Once on the top of the smaller hill, the route down and up to the main hill was clearer. We met a boy named Raju who was keeping an eye on his cattle that was grazing in the valley below; we got talking and asked more about the routes and the local area as such.

One of the interesting things about trekking is that we get to meet the local people, talking to them sharing their knowledge about the place etc ect. Most of the time they wonder why we are doing crazy thing of coming to a forest instead of enjoying city life on a holiday, little do they know what we really feel about our city life....“ Murphy’s law” I guess.

As we trekked down to the lake, we saw a small temple and the devotees asked us to stay for lunch, given the fact that we were hungry, that was the best offer we had, we immediately said yes. We lazed around for an hour, decided not to trek up the actual Bananthimari Betta, sensing that it’s going to rain we trekked back using Route 2, to reach the granite factory by 4 pm.

We fell asleep on the back seat, Jeetu had no option but to drive and we reached the city.

Publication: Bangalore Mirror, Hillock of the Goddess, 5th March 2009

Flirting with Mt Everest

Trek route: Lukla – Monjo – Namche – Deboche – Dingboche – Lobuche – Gorakshep – Everest Basecamp (EBC) – Gorakshep – Kala Pattar – Pheriche – Namche – Lukla

Six people one mission “to see Mt Everest form the closest distance”. 3-days at Katmandu domestic airport waiting to fly to Lukla in THE best the season says only one thing; “mountains have not made up their mind yet”.

In the most desperate attempt on day-4, we landed up at the airport at 6am for a 9am flight. Looking at our sad faces but sheer determination, airlines staff boarded us on a charter flight, we made it to Lukla in 24-minutes.

With the enthusiasm and the thrill that we made it, day-1 trek to Monjo seemed easy, even though we climbed up and down few hills, crossed over from one hill to another on the swinging bridges across Koshi, it was all picture time.

The beauty of Himalayas is that, till the tree-line ends the entire landscape is lush green and covered with beds of flowers, this trail was no different. Dudh Koshi that causes havoc in Bihar was gushing between the valleys, looked like it was in a hurry to hit Bihar once again. Like the name the water is white due to the speed at which it travels, maneuvering all the turns and twists between the hill range and the rocks. All through the trek one thing that was running parallel with us was Koshi River and its tributaries.

Namche was a big trek, we gained an altitude of 3440 mts, had an extra day stop over. Namche is like a super market in the middle of the hills, it also gives the 1st view of Mt Everest & Lhotse tempting you to go ahead.

At Namche we heard that one of the flights crash-landed at Lukla, all the 18-people onboard died. Lukla airstrip is scary, its just 150 mts long, elevates 15-20 degrees on landing, if the pilot does not land with great precisions, it’s a nosedive. We were lucky to be alive and breathing even in thin air.

As we trekked to Deboche the visibility of Mt Everest was getting clearer, night in a tent, which Subbu and I opted for woke me up to Mt Everest. As I stretched out from the tent, I saw the fascinating hump of Mt Everest, tears trickled, could not have asked for more, it was truly “dream” come true.

The weather was getting colder, it had dropped to 2-5 degrees; wind got colder, stronger and wilder making it difficult to breath. The terrain was rapidly changing, the stupas, which had Buddha eyes all through the trails so far were getting replaced with memorials for people who died or just never found. It was an indication of what is it going to be next. The landscape was darker and less green; the trail was heaps of rocks and pebbles making the

trek slower. We turned into the range that had Touche to our left, Amadablam to right and Mt Everest & Lhotse ahead, which eventually crossed over to Pumori, Mt Everest and Nuptse in the front.

We crossed over to Lobuche, as we trekked to Gorakshep on ridges along the Khumbu Glacier, the moraine became visible. We entered the EBC route, and could see the pinnacles and the deadly Khumbu icefall jettied out, one could only wonder how the climbers would cross over to open route to Mt Everest peak.

Moraine is an unforgiving terrain; ice below topped with debris can slide you down if you are careless. It's exhausting; with wind blowing at a high speed and the temperature dropping, trekking after 2pm in this terrain is a task. Many, rather most of them were returning from the ridge, but I was determined to make it to EBC by 2pm, so was Subbu, but the rest were still not visible at that point.

Ah! Reaching EBC (5364 mts) was a reassurance that I still have a lot more left in me. The rest of group arrived, it was a perfect picture moment, I was very happy that all of us made it to EBC and we could scream loudly here after "been there done that".

After EBC the next mission was climbing Kala Patthar, it's just a trek up, but at 5545 mts and the steepness it's quite a climb, finally only Subbu and me decided to go. It took exactly 2-hours, loads of energy, not to let it go spirit to reach the top. Kala Patthar gives the best view of Mt Everest, and that all we wanted.

On return we made it to Pheriche in 4-hours flat, next day the entire team was back in Namche and the following day at Lukla. After a relaxed night, morning it was all over, we reached Katmandu.

Published: Deccan Herald, Flirting with Mt Everest, 22nd Feb 2009

Hey Ram!

Karnataka government response to the horrendous Mangalore incident days after the National outrage headed the recent Bramos test fire way, "just off the target".

- It's a shame that the CM has blamed the "Pub culture" for the incident instead of asking the police and the judicial system to imprison the so-called "Ram Sena men" for life, so that no one ever dares to try it again.
- It's a shame that the NCW when to Mangalore and were questioning the "Pub license", "security at the pub" and looking into visitor register rather than meeting those traumatized women, taking a firsthand information and assuring them that justice will be done.
- It's a shame that that politicians want to ban pubs to ensure security for women, what if there is a rape in a school or college will they ban education too?

On every other news channel, the only thing the bloody politicians like Mr BP Sengal said was that we should ban "Pub culture", and also went to the extent of justifying that the hooligans did harmless protest all these years and since nothing happened, they did what they did. Let's justify our case to Mr BP Sengal, every citizen in this country have been protesting against the misdeeds of our corrupt, power hungry, useless politicians and we see nothing happening, so now let's get violent and butcher them once for all, what say?

These justifications are not only stupid but also irresponsible; there can be NO justification for violence of any kind whatever maybe the reason. The people of our country need one thing, "able to live without fear" irrespective of "WHO" we are.

The young girls were beaten, traumatized, abused and chased by 40 odd goons who claim to be the guardians of Indian culture!!

- Who are they to define Indian culture?
- Who are they to tell women (who are as equal as any man in this country) what they should do and what they should not do?
- Who gave them the approval or permission to do what they did?
- What do they know about "Indian culture" or "Hindu culture" which they seem to be representing?

Beating women is not Indian culture, Violence is not Indian culture, taking law into your own hands is not Indian culture, abusing unarmed people is not Indian culture, destroying others hard earned property/assets is not Indian culture, and the hooligans violated all that is part of any "human culture"!!

They do not belong to human society, if people who attacked Mumbai are terrorist then people who attacked women in the Mangalore pub are also terrorist and there is NO difference what so ever.

All these idiotic outfits with idiotic ideologies should be banned, why are they getting registered in the first place? If they think they are capable of doing anything good for the country then,

- Let them, Join the forces and fight the real enemies
- Let them, Fight against bribery, corruption, injustice
- Let them, Get the politicians to do their jobs
- Let them, Get every kid in this country to go to school
- Let them, Ensure that every village in this country gets basic facilities
- Let them, Fight to ensure that dreams of every kid in this country comes true
- Let them, Fight to ensure that no one dies out of hungry in this country

There are more than a one million things that one can fight for in this country to make it a better place. Real courage is in fighting for those one million things and not in committing crime in the name of "GOD".

The tragedy is that, all the hooligans who were arrested after a prolonged outburst after nearly 72 hours post the incident, walked free. They walked out with no remorse what so ever celebrating their "achievement", thumping their chests and announcing that they will do it all over again and it's their victory. NCW defended their inability by bringing is legalities, asking the women to come forward and register a case, completely ignoring the fact that it was all visible on camera!! And what would be the need for someone to register a case? If camera is NO evidence to the act then what is?

I feared that they will trivialize the issue, the real incident will be covered up with unwanted details and at the end of it and that's exactly what happened. The vociferous Ms Renuka Choudary should hang herself in shame, it's easy to talk on a TV channel and condemn the incident and also say its Talibanisation!! And finally do nothing about it. Again, relating this back to Mumbai attack we are all angry on Pakistan as they have ignored the evidence, and what have we done in case of Mangalore? If letting go the goons of Managlore incident is right then what Pakistan has done is also right.

It's sad that we as a society glorified and have given muscle to this brutal act, forgetting that fact that we are a free country and everyone in this country is equal irrespective of religion, gender, caste or creed and we the people have the right to choose our lives as permitted by the constitution of this country.

Publication: Blog, 1st Feb 2009

Battle Ground Mumbai

Great city of Mumbai lived through the night of terror; all of us know that Mumbai will be back to normal even before the news channels find other BREAKING NEWS. But why should we always expect the city to bounce back terror after terror?

Over 120 killed, 330 injured, assets worth crores damaged, crores of revenue lost, terror stuck citizens, this is what Mumbai has been for the last 25 hours, bring the city to a standstill.

14 Policemen 2 Army jawans laid down their lives fighting militants, the city came to a stand till with the most prominent landmarks under siege. The ATS chief who has been blamed by the BJP & Co for the last few weeks over the Malegaon investigations, lead his team from the front and took 3 bullets straight on his chest. Do the BJP still want to question his integrity? It's sad that people like him who wanted to make a difference had to lay down their lives fighting for the rest of 1 billion people.

It's disgusting that not even a single politician made an effort to visit the place of horror. I wish these places had the kin of a politician, just getting killed by terrorists, then they would have reacted, I guess. Innocent people are being targeted; I wish it was not the common people, not the brave forces but the politicians who were targeted for once. They would then know what is the result of their disgusting politics over religion and power. Our politicians are so thick skinned and petty minded that they would ONLY know what it is to live in terror if they are held hostage.

The police force moved-in with no proper ammunition and ill-equipped to fight highly armed terrorist, the Prime Minister of the country says on TV, that the police should be equipped better and it's time for police reforms, is that not common sense Mr PM? It's been due for the last 20 years Mr PM?? Or is it that you woke-up now?

The Army marched in, and the people of Mumbai stood up to cheer them, it was an assurance for the terror stuck citizens that they will be safe now. But what have we done for the Armed forces? The 6th pay commission is still to be finalized? There has been no betterment for lives or conditions for soldiers braving it out in the most difficult terrains in the name of DUTY.

Maj Gen Hooda came in with his men, they did not march thinking about their pay scale or their lives; they came on duty to serve the country, they came to kill the terrorists, and prepared to lay down their lives if required. They did not go on a strike like PSU employees or State government employees or Bank employees or Teachers, they did not refuse to work if they did not get the much needed and long-overdue pay hike. We should be ashamed as a country that we treat our brave hearts with absolutely NO dignity.

It's time we woke up, see what the brave hearts of this country are going through. It's easy to blame them when things go wrong, but how much of freedom do these brave hearts have to implement, to act and to achieve results. How many more officers will we lose in this petty politics? Its time leaders LEAD from the front and that is what LEAD means, in case our politicians do not know the meaning of the word "LEAD".

My heart goes out to those brave men; they fought for all of us. Nothing at all can replace the loss to their families or the police force, but I know that they would fight once again with the same determination if they were alive.

Taj Hotel is not just any other landmark or just a 5-star hotel, it's a monument that was built by Jamshedji N Tata when he was refused an entry in a Hotel during the British rule. It's a symbol of determination, protest against discrimination and voice against the British rule.

May be its time to refuse to vote and register a protest vote, making it loud and clear that we will not elect anyone till they clean up their act. It's time to confront the so-called leaders of this country on our terms and refuse to accept them as leaders any more. We have a choice to speak out and make our voice heard and our blogs read. The media should black-out all politicians on both print and electronic media, running a protest campaign like the Indian Express running blank papers during emergency, and bring the politicians down on their knees.

We are a nation of great tolerance; we have tolerated our politicians for too long. It's time we declare our independence from the politicians, the atrocities and the polarization they have put us through, with no sight of any reforms or constructive action.

In this emotional moment, I received an SMS saying, "Forgiving a terrorist should be left to GOD, but fixing their appointment with GOD is OUR responsibility – INDIAN ARMY". The armed forces and the police know their responsibility, let us help execute their responsibility to the fullest.

Publication: Blog, 27th Nov 2008

Ramanagaram Rocks

'Naach Basanti Naach' the famous line from the all-time super hit movie 'Sholay' echoes as one reaches Ramanagaram, just wondering where Gabbar-ka-adda was. Who would have ever imagined Sholay that was shot in Ramanagaram would be such a big hit and that the movie would rock even after 3 decades, I guess such is the might of Ramanagaram Rocks.

Ramanagaram is passionately called the 'Rock Climbers Mecca', at 1000+ MSL it is spread over 4-5 kms in radius encompassing 7 major hills, many hillocks and large boulders. A week-end or a holiday would mean that you get to see the Rock Climbers of Bangalore doing what they do the best, climbing those magnificent rock faces and enjoying the aura of the place.

The boulders of all kinds and shapes en-route give enough challenges to a learner and an experienced climber, making the trek up to the hill more and more exciting. The texture of the rock can rip off the skin in case you are not careful enough, but what the heck there is nothing bad in having few bruises here and there when you want to do some good bouldering.

As you explore the landscape you will find few good rappelling faces, you could just fix ropes and start rappelling or could use the bolted routes to go up the rock face and then rappel down. The rock face near the pond on the hill have some 8+ bolted routes and if you are confident enough, know the basics of rock climbing and have climbing gear & equipments i.e harness, carabineers, belay device, ropes, quick draws, climbing shoes and a good partner to belay, you could do some real rock climbing all day long.

Whatever the case may be any activity in adventure sports has to be a calculated risk and it's important to take the calculated risk more seriously. The rocks are always there to climb only if return safe.

The splendid landscape surrounding the hill are picture perfect and gives enough scenery to a lens man/woman to click around. Every shot and every frame can redefine the way one feel about the rocks.

Every place has a history so does Ramanagaram rather a vibrant one also not to miss silky present, it's the largest cocoon marketing center. The name Ramanagaram was officially christened in 1949, originates from the village Ramagiri on the foot hill of Ramadevarabetta (hill of lord Ram).

Ramanagaram is around 50 Kms from Bangalore on the Bangalore-Mysore highway and is the taluk center for Bangalore Rural district. Situated on the banks of the river Arkavati, mention of Ramanagaram is recorded as early as 268 AD during the rule of Mauryas to Gangas, Cholas, Chalukyas, Hoysalas, Vijayanagar rulers, Kempagowda, Mysore kings, Hyder Ali, Tipu Sultan and the British.

The hill has a Sri Ram temple that is built in the Dravidian style; to many rulers this place was of great strategic significance. It is also believed that saint Sri Ramanujacharya had visited this hill. There is a mention of Ramagiri in Ramayan, 16th century works of Renukaradhya and in Sarvajna vachanas.

As a traveler who would like to just visit or as adventure sport enthusiast wanting to scale the rock faces, Ramanagaram simply 'Rocks'. All you need to do is have a Rocking time and keep the place litter free.

*Publication: Deccan Herald, Its Rocking, 19th Oct 2008
Bangalore Mirror, Ramanagaram Rocks, 9th June 2009*

Kalavara Betta

Weekend traveling is limit less when you are in a city like Bangalore. An hour and half drive in any direction to the outskirts can take you to the most beautiful hillocks where tranquility can be described the best. Just to lie on a big boulder, stare at the sky and think about nothing. What more to ask for? One such hideout is Kalavara Betta in the Skandagiri range.

Driving on Bangalore- Hyderabad NH, deviation to Chikkabalapur and the road there on takes you to a small village called Kalavara that comes under Muddenahalli panchayat. Little will one believe that Sir M Vishveshwaraiah the architect of the KR dam, Dewan of Mysore, the greatest engineer India had ever known was born in this vicinity. So much we call as development that it takes away everything from these villages and not even the basic necessities are addressed. Once you decide to ignore all the hard-hitting facts you reach the base of a large mass of rocks.

The route to the top of the hill depends on what you have on your mind, you could take a difficult 4 km route where you get to do some decent bouldering, feel the rocks, beat the sun and sweat it all out or take a 7 km trail from 'Papagni' temple that has forest cover, shade and you could get to see the levels of the fort to the top. Either ways, the landscape around mesmerizes you. The smaller hills covered with all shades of green, big odd rocks jutting out and bearing the weather at all times and hoping that they will still be untouched by the human greed for years to come. The left side of the climb gives a spectacular view of the famous Nandi hills, you can see the rock face of the hills more peaceful and wilder than the drive-up.

While you're climbing up, never let an opportunity to look around, as that makes you feel less and less tired. The air gets fresher, the grass cover becomes thicker and you will come across the ruins of the fort that surrendered to the British during the Anglo-Mysore war. The piece of history, the story of life gone by that makes you wonder how such a multi-layered fort was constructed way up the hill yet preserving all the natural surroundings or is just merged with nature.

A good 2.5 hour of climb, feasting your eyes all along; will take you to the top of the hill, greeted by a stone carving of the 'Basava' (bull) and a tiny temple and you know it's time to take a breather. The peace that surrounds you hearing the chirping of the birds, watching those colorful butterflies is more than one could ask for. Away from the noises of the honking vehicles the endless concrete buildings and the desperate search for fresh air.

If you opt to watch the sunset then choose a full moon day, camp overnight and you will get to see the sunrise too. But be prepared to carry basic camping gear, food and lots of water. Sitting on one of those huge boulders watching the endless sky, the green carpet below, the big glowing orange sun setting

only to rise the next day defines the life in total. A camera along can do the trick of capturing every moment that you do not want to let go.

Anything that is this breathtaking has to be preserved for long. Be a responsible traveler and ensure that you do not litter and 'leave no-trace' of your visit as you return from serenity only to go back soon.

Publication: Deccan Herald, Kalavara Betta, 24th Aug 2008

Let the games begin!

Li Ning lit the Olympics flame in a breath-taking trapeze act, the images of the torch journey across the world revealed on screen with ever leap Li took across the rim of the stadium, covering a distance of 350 meters. When everyone wondered how the torch would be lit, he extended the flame that blazed to the top of the big torch on a trail smeared with gunpowder.

Protests against China, disruptions during the flame journey, charges of human right violation, free Tibet campaigns, world leaders refusal to attend the opening ceremony, nothing in the last few months was in favor of China, except for their determination to make Beijing Olympics '**BIG**'.

If ever there was one most powerful place on the earth, it was the **Bird's Nest** on 8th Aug 08. World leaders including all those who threatened to boycott the opening ceremony sat through the grand start of the world's greatest sporting event, making the motto of this Olympics "**One World One Dream**" a reality at least for that moment.

Watching the presentation of the journey of a 5000-year-old civilization, depiction of the spirit of China through its people and art forms, usage of technology in the best creative way, was the most humbling experience. The sound of 'Fou' (an ancient instrument) thundered and roared with great percussion welcoming the world to China, the fireworks blazed across creating the 29-foot prints indicating the 29th Olympics.

Children from the 56 ethnic groups in China gathered around their national flag, and as the flag moved in, a chorus of 56 artists representing the 56 ethnic groups sang the national anthem in one voice, simply saying they all represent one great nation.

2008 drummers synchronizing movements & sound and the light effects thereafter, was a visual treat. It was paradise on earth, when the women dressed in white did the dove dance expressing peace, freedom and love with music playing in the background, the spectators imitating the hand movements of the dancers and cheering loud. Well co-ordinated firework lit the dark sky in colors, as the laser displays mesmerized the 91000 odd spectators in the stadium and billions across the globe watching it on television.

As estimated \$40 million has been spent on the event, but the preparations to be the perfect host started the day China won the games bid. They left no stone unturned, be it making their people learn English, stopping the climbers at Everest camp 4 to ensure the Olympic torch reached the Everest summit without any disruption, diverting traffic to reduce pollution levels in their cities, ordering the restaurants in China not to serve dog meat, encouraging

their people to prepare their businesses for the visitors etc the list can go on.

If the US flag bearer was Lopez Lomong, a refugee rescued by the US army from Sudan, who is also a 1500-meter medal hope for his adopted country, China had its 'tallest' Basketball star Yao Ming carrying the flag, with a tiny little child who survived the devastating earthquake in China marching along. It was an expression of reassurance to its people that the country is with them during their difficult times, and also telling the world that nothing can deter the spirit of this 5000 year old civilization.

It's a shame that, India with almost the same population, civilization as old as Chinese and technology better than the best in the world has a mere 56-members contingent as against the 639-members Chinese contingent. Discipline, Hard work, Determination, which I call the '**Chinese way of life**', is something we lack as a country. Amaranth land row, name boards in Marathi, Tamil protests against Kannada's classic language status etc etc, is all we care about, wish we grew beyond these trivial things, and look at bigger challenges that are only getting bigger each day.

8 is considered the most auspicious number for the Chinese, the day was **08-08-08**, time **08** pm, **8** runners in the flame relay, 8 flag bearers, and many of their themes revolved around number **8**. It's definitely an **8-on-8** for this Olympics games host.

If a four-hour long Beijing Olympics opening ceremony was one thing, it was the display of Dragon power.

For China, it just not Olympics, it's also about telling the world that they have arrived and arrived with a big bang. They achieved what they set to, revealing all the mysteries behind that "**Great Wall**".

I do wish China tops the medal tally, making them not just the sporting giants of Asia but the world too, which I believe they truly deserve.

Publication: Blog, 10th Aug 2008

Adventure Calling, Dandeli

Summer was just around the corner; itch for one last adventure weekend for the season prompted us to pack off to Dandeli. Holidays are more exciting when there is a certain amount of travel comfort so mode of transport is a very critical part to any holiday plan.

Given that Dandeli is nearly 482 kms from Bangalore and since our weekend was going to be filled with Adventure and a lot of Physical exertion, we opted for a train journey, in Kollapur bound Rani Chennamma Express that stops at Alnawar, which is around 40 kms from our destination.

So, we set off to Dandeli from the Bangalore railway station at around 8 pm on a Friday evening, to reach Alnawar Station at around 6.30 am the next morning. Post which, we hired a Tempo Trax. Enroute to Kulgi Nature camp, our campsite, we spotted Peacocks, Deer and quite a variety of birds; it was indeed a treat to see them all in the wild.

Kulgi Nature camp is managed by the Karnataka Forest department and offers a comfortable tented accommodation with common toilets, bath and hot water facility too. The camp has an in-house kitchen that serves tasty authentic North Karnataka cuisine. As the Camp is in the forest area, we could spot Languor all around, Malabar giant squirrels and Birds like Minivets, Dorangos, Blue Jays, Bee Eaters, Kingfishers and other common ones.

After freshening up, a good heavy break-fast and packed lunch, with rest of the necessary stuff in our backpacks; we set off on a day long trek, accompanied by a guide provided by the forest department. The route we choose was to end Ambikanagar via Nagazari bridge approximately about 15 kms. We trekked through the amazing forest range, along the banks of a stream, up the hills and the water falls, we could not get enough of it. We took a quick lunch break; with all the exertion the lunch had never tasted better. As the minutes passed by it was getting darker and colder but our enthusiasm and the spirit of adventure pushed us every step. We reached the end of the day long trek, and in less than an hour from there we were back in the camp, a long shower and a good dinner put us to bed within no time.

Early morning is the right time to spot wildlife, so we hopped into the jeeps for a safari at around 6 am. One needs to be patient and lucky enough to spot animals in the wild; it did not deter our enthusiasm to give it a try. Though spotting an elephant or a wild cat would have been an ultimate thrill, we were happy to see few Deer a Bison and several species of birds. The Jeep track took us deeper into the jungle, where the forest cover got thicker and darker. We went ahead, hoping to spot that one wild cat that could make our day.

After that desperate attempt to see more wildlife we got back to the camp to grab some breakfast and ready to splash some water in River Kali. We reached Jungle Lodges and from there were driven in jeeps with the rafting guide team to Ganeshgudi, the starting point for our activity. Rafting in Kali is a real pleasure as the name suggests the water appears to be black due to the coloration of the rock under. No comparison to rafting in Rishikesh, in terms of distance or the grades of the rapids but never the less Kali has its own charm, thrills and is a lot fun.

The activity started with a talk on safety, wearing the life jackets and other gear. Once on the raft we were taught how to paddle and when to paddle followed by a dip in Kali. The 9 km route has 7-9 rapids between 1-3 grades. The rapids depend on the release of the water from the dam. Kali being a perennial river has water throughout the year, but the best time to raft is between October and February. The route has forest cover on both sides, which gives it a calm and serene look. You could also get to swim, but should never miss the Horn Bills and the Kingfishers along the route.

After all the splashing and screaming in the river we were on our way to explore Dandeli town and binge on some food - a sumptuous lunch in one of the local restaurants. We just had a little time to walk around the town and reach the camp and pack-up. As we drove to the railway station to head back to Bangalore, promised ourselves that we would come back soon.

Places to see if you have time or an extra day are Kavala Caves and Cyntheri Rocks a 300 Ft rock face.

*Publication: Deccan Herald, Adventure Calling, 20th July 2008
Bangalore Mirror, Delightful Dandeli, 10th Aug 2009*

Singh is KING

3rd July would be celebrated in India as "Nuclear Independence Day", the day Dr Manmohan Singh stood tall and strong against all his detractors and announced that he will go ahead with the "Nuclear deal".

It is going down in history as a day India put its national interest ahead of any political agendas, a day when the soft spoken Prime minister who was always taunted as the puppet in the hands of Mrs Sonia Gandhi made it loud and clear that he will go ahead with the deal, and nothing can stop his commitment to the deal.

Many of Dr Singh's party colleagues were not in favor of the deal, as any uncertainty on the stability of the government would mean early elections, and no party is ready to face the people yet again. The PM's determination, greater vision and the belief that the time has come to do the right thing for India not just won him the praises from the media, backing of the scientists and the economists but even parties like SP announced its willingness to stand by the government if the Left party pulls out its support from the coalition.

So, what's the deal on the N-deal?

The Nuclear deal is seen and accepted as the only long-term solution to our growing energy crisis. India is a country that is growing younger, which would mean that there is a high economic growth, an alternate energy source will fuel the economic growth that India is going to see in the next 10-30 years. One must also not ignore the fact that for a growing economy a cleaner energy would mean a lesser strain on the already warming earth.

The IAEA document is finally out in public, analyst agree that the agreement is in favor of India and it does not deter India's weapon program in anyway. India had already declared 14 of its 22 reactor as "civilian".

With the nuclear deal India will have access not just to the technology but also the supplier market through the NSG. Clean energy requirement to India is critical, and any inhibition that deal may curtail India's weapons program is just an imagination.

Some of the political parties pulled a fast one, stating that N-deal is anti-Muslim, where did this come from? If it's good for India, it is good for anyone who is an Indian.

As a superpower in the making India has to join hands with larger powers, it's time we start thinking and believing that we are going to be a superpower. With the projected economic growth, the world may love us or hate us but they really cannot ignore us.

Dr Singh did a Nehru; going back to history Nehru's vision of a modern India has been perfectly crafted. Two countries India & Pakistan which are of similar cultural and social background got their independence the same day or should we say, Pakistan decided to call midnight as end of the day and India called it the beginning of a new day. Today India is spoken in the same breath as China or America and Pakistan is either compared with an Afghanistan or Bangladesh. I guess such is the power of great visionary, and Dr Singh will be remembered along with Nehru for years to come, truly christening him "Singh is King".

India is looking at 22nd July 2008 as the day when we strengthen our belief as a country to go that extra mile to do what is GOOD for INDIA.

Publication: Blog, 11th July 2008

Water Matters

India makes up to 2.5% of the global land mass; we not only have a good 4% of the global freshwater resource but also are endowed with an average annual rainfall of 925 mm from the Southwest and Northeast monsoons. But we are under a huge demographic stress as we have over 16% of the global population in the 2.5% land mass.

Increase in population density is leading to a shortage of freshwater; we are drawing up the underground water to meet this demand. Urbanization may not be as rapid compared to global standards but the population density is exploiting the underground water causing long-term damages to the water tables. Water tables are depleting, and excess drilling is leading to contamination of underground water.

The hydrological imbalance needs some immediate attention and a sound water management process to be put in place. Few years ago, one would have argued that expanding capacity of reservoirs and creating surface water bodies would help to store fresh water, but that argument is not strong enough in the current scenario. Surface water is easily contaminated by pesticides, industrial waste and human waste making it less usable.

With an annual rainfall of 925 mm, rainwater becomes the primary source and the single largest source of fresh water, and a proper harvesting plan both at a macro level and micro levels is critical. Macro may be more as government undertaking the activity but at a micro level, we in our own communities can implement it to address the ever-growing demand for fresh water.

Rainwater harvesting in simple terms mean conservation and efficient utilization of rainwater. Harvesting can be done either as collection to storage for immediate use or to recharge back into the groundwater aquifers.

A basic calculation on a house of 100 sq. mts, built in a place with 600 mm of annual rainfall, assuming that only 60% of it is getting harvested it would add up to approx. 36000 liters of water per annum.

A community-based approach to make harvesting part of housing plan and larger constructions like apartments, schools, commercial complexes and office buildings will help in better utilization of the rainwater, which otherwise would flow into the drainages or dry up from the surface water storages.

Rainwater harvesting is definitely not new to India, it is recorded as early as the Indus valley civilization. In many cities responsible citizens have implemented harvesting, even though much needed legislation on making it mandatory for all types of constructions does not really exists.

As a step forward in conservation of our natural resources, at our community level we should make rainwater harvesting a revolution. We need to actively put forward the agenda to the policy makers both at local and state level to make rainwater harvesting a mandatory requirement in all construction and penalize defaulters.

Be a responsible citizen, little effort from your end will go a long way to conserve freshwater for all.

Publication: Blog, 20th Dec 2007

City under Siege

Lush green parks, peaceful city, garden city, pensioners paradise, hill station of south if all these phrases remind you of a city called 'Bangalore' aka 'Bengaluru' then you really 'romancing' history. The 740 sq km of the IT capital of India is crumbling under its own weight.

Rated as one of the fastest growing cities in Asia, as it surged to be back office for the world, very popularly christened as "Bangalored", did not realize the constraints of growth. Any company setting up its base in India 5 years ago would have had Bangalore on the top of their list, but today it is not a surprise if city does not feature in that list at all. The development of the city did not keep its date with the pace of growth. It could be true to cities like Delhi & Mumbai who have grappled with growth, but Bangalore was well positioned to learn from others mistakes and skip the learning curve.

The woes of the city are two folds - one the infrastructure (only roads are focused) and the other environmental. The city has over 28 lac vehicles on its roads, which is thrice the capacity it can take; it adds 1150 new vehicle on its roads every day accumulating to the chaos. 2-wheelers make up to 73% of Bangalore traffic and 4-wheelers/cars are 15%.

BMTC, the state managed city public transport system ply's over 4000 buses every day covering appx 4600 kms. BMTC carries less than 50% of the commuters, making public transport unreliable at all times. Added to the size of the traffic comes the condition of Bangalore roads; narrow lanes, bad quality of the roads, pot holes all over and encroachment has reduced the average speed of the moving traffic from 20 kmph to 13-15 kmph. Today it's really acceptable to go late to office or an appointment and say "got stuck in a traffic jam" anyone will empathize with you.

Managing the pace of the city is one, but a political will to implement the much-needed option is another. It has taken the city to come close to its metro dream almost 23 years. Metro was first proposed in 1984 and no real effort was made to push it through. Unstable to visionless to no government, at the end metro project has seen it all. If one assumes that the metro will somehow change the transport system and ease the city roads then here is a shocker - the metro will only cover 37 kms of distance carrying less than 2 lac commuters in the first phase.

Once you take a long breather visualizing what is installed for you on Bangalore roads in years to come, you would feel choked with the air you are breathing. Bangalore vehicles consume over 5 lac metric tons of petrol, 7 lac metric tons of diesel every year and a large amount of adulterated fuel and kerosene. According to a report 'the air pollution levels in the city are no better than an industrial age steel works town'. The RPM (respirable particulate matter) is three times more than the acceptable level.

Over 47,000 auto-rickshaws and an increasing number of cars are running on LPG. This shift in the type of fuel could bring in some relief to the air pollution levels in the city. But this is certainly not good in the long term as it contributes to the green-house gases leading to global warming.

The misery does not end here:

1. City generates 2200 tons of garbage per day with no disposable mechanism
2. Outdated building laws that does not address the current concern
3. Construction industry taking advantage of outdated building laws
4. Shortage of electricity and water
5. Underground water tables drying up
6. Water contamination due to poor drainage system
7. Lesser green space with no check on the encroachments
8. Lack of will to make hard decisions by any government

Bangalore is at a stage where all the issues are at an 'important & urgent' state; any action taken has to be a holistic approach with a long-term solution. Cribbing about the problems is not good enough. We need to make it heard loud and clear and bring in suggestion and contribute to make things better for the city.

Some of the immediate actionable can be:

1. Reward & penalization program for the road contractors who take up the road projects
2. Stop commercialization of lakes and encroachment of forest and parks
3. Relook at the allotment of land for trusts, societies and commercial buildings in the residential areas
4. Revisit construction laws making it more environmentally friendly like compulsory rain water harvesting and use of solar energy for all building plans both residential & commercial
5. Stringent implementation of environmental laws for all large-scale constructions
6. Deployment of small size buses to increase road coverage of public transport system
7. Change over to CNG and fix a deadline for a 100% implementation

As the citizens of Bangalore let's voice our opinion and do whatever it takes to make this city better.

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She Co-founded Basecamp Adventures a company that focuses on Adventure Travel & Outbound Learning, is also the Trustee of Kaagaz Foundation an NGO that focuses on Environmental Campaigns, Women Empowerment and Education.

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In Memory of **Kamet**

