

## What Sanatan Means to Me? A Profound Journey into Eternal Wisdom (Part-2)

By Uday Kumar Varma

Author is a former Secretary, Information and Broadcasting, GOI

### A Code of Conduct

For a person of limited concentration and a sense of devotion wavering in intensity and sincerity, what then are the guiding lights for an appropriate conduct? The following lines from the Geeta might help: -

यस्मान्नोद्विजते लोको लोकान्नोद्विजते च यः । हर्षामर्षभयोद्वेगैर्मुक्तो यः स च मे प्रियः ॥

अनपेक्षः शुचिर्दक्ष उदासीनो गतव्यथः । सर्वारम्भपरित्यागी यो मद्भक्तः स मे प्रियः ॥

यो न हृष्यति न द्वेष्टि न शोचति न काङ्क्षति । शुभाशुभपरित्यागी भक्तिमान्यः स मे प्रियः ॥

समः शत्रौ च मित्रे च तथा मानापमानयोः । शीतोष्णसुखदुःखेषु समः सङ्गविवर्जितः ॥

तुल्यनिन्दास्तुतिर्मानी सन्तुष्टो येन केनचित् । अनिकेतः स्थिरमतिर्भक्तिमान्मे प्रियो नरः ॥

ये तु धर्म्यामृतमिदं यथोक्तं पर्युपासते । श्रद्धधाना मत्परमा भक्तास्तेऽतीव मे प्रियाः ॥

(Chapter 12; 15-20)

(In essence, it exhorts the believer to be friendly and compassionate, remain equanimous in both happiness and distress, remain indifferent to both pleasure and pain, be free from fear and anxiety, treat both friends and foes alike, and remain equanimous in the face of honour and dishonour, cold and heat, joy and sorrow, and to be free from malice toward all living beings. It requires to be forgiving and content, exhibit self-control and firm resolve, and renounce attachment to both good and evil things.

These are the attributes that Lord Krishna expects in one who is dear to Him. In other words, these constitute the ultimate conduct towards which one must aspire.)

Sanatan Dharma, then, is a profound, multifaceted tradition that encompasses timeless wisdom and invites spiritual seekers on a journey through lifetimes. Its adaptability, inclusivity, and rich philosophical foundation make it a remarkable source of hope and enlightenment in the ever-changing landscape of human existence.

### II "What Sanatan Means to Me?

#### Navigating Challenges and Embracing Opportunities"

That Sanatan Dharma, often referred to as Hinduism, stands as a monumental cultural, philosophical, and spiritual tradition has left an indelible mark on the world, is widely

acknowledged. Its contributions to art, science, philosophy, and culture are profound, with a history stretching back thousands of years. Yet, despite its rich legacy, Sanatan Dharma faces a series of contemporary challenges, as well as promising opportunities, which deserve our contemplation and action. How to navigate these challenges and how to embrace these opportunities? And what are these perceived challenges?

**Interpretational Diversity:** Sanatan Dharma is known for its inherent diversity, fostering various interpretations, practices, and beliefs. While diversity can be a strength, it also brings the risk of fragmentation and division. Balancing tradition with evolving worldviews is a challenge that Sanatan Dharma must address.

**Varna System:** The Varna system, often equated with caste, is a significant issue. It has been associated with discrimination and social inequalities, despite not being intrinsic to the faith. Addressing historical injustices while preserving the core teachings of Sanatan Dharma requires a nuanced approach.

**Ritualistic Rigidities:** Sanatan Dharma has seen the emergence of rigid rituals and beliefs, especially in the face of external pressures. It must adapt to changing times while preserving its core teachings, transcending ritualistic rigidity.

**Transformed World Order:** India's delayed entry into the world of science and new discoveries resulted in a gap between the privileged and underprivileged. Bridging this gap, harmonising tradition with modernity, and adapting to a rapidly changing world while preserving Sanatan Dharma's wisdom is a challenge.

**Political Manipulation:** Sanatan Dharma has been manipulated for political purposes, sowing tension, and division. Addressing historical misrepresentations and preventing ongoing exploitation for political gains is a pressing concern.

## Opportunities

And yet, it is perhaps the appropriate time to initiate and sustain efforts to bring out the profound wisdom and life's philosophy contained in its ever-evolving messages. These opportunities must engage urgent attention.

**Education and Awareness:** Promoting a deeper understanding of Sanatan Dharma's philosophical and spiritual aspects can dispel misconceptions and foster unity among its followers.

**Social Reform:** Addressing historical injustices and fostering social equality within the framework of Sanatan Dharma can lead to a more just society.

**Interfaith Dialogue:** Engaging in meaningful interfaith dialogues can bridge gaps, dispel stereotypes, and promote harmony in a diverse world.

**Modernization with Tradition:** Balancing tradition and modernity can showcase the adaptability and relevance of Sanatan Dharma.

Sanatan, in essence, has largely seen, analysed, and interpreted human quests in a far larger context, where there has been no place for discrimination.

Ishavashyopnishad says.

यस्तु सर्वाणि भूतानि आत्मन्येवानुपश्यति।

सर्वभूतेषु चात्मानं ततो न विजुगुप्सते॥

One who sees all living beings existing in the Supreme soul and the Supreme soul in all living beings, does not hate anyone.

Clearly, the emphasis of Vedant has never been on discrimination. It has always advocated that all living beings have the same consciousness and possess part of the same supreme energy. It talks of 'Samdarshan' - viewing all humans as equals, treating all humans as equals. The concept of discrimination is indeed, alien to Sanatan.

This finds further corroboration in Bhagavad-Geeta. It says,

विद्या विनय सम्पन्ने ब्राह्मणे गवि हस्तिनी ।

शुनि चैव श्वपाके च पण्डिताः समदर्शनः ॥

A Gyani sees complete equality amongst a humble and knowledgeable Brahmin, a cow, an elephant, a dog and a Chandal.

**To be continued in next issue ....**

---

## **Israeli Intelligence Failure – Or a Deep-Rooted Conspiracy? (Part -2)**

**By 'Sardar' Sanjay Matkar**

Author is an audacious adventurer, an avid student of history and global politics. He has authored 'Showdown at Dabiq – Islamic State Vs. Armies of Rome in the 21st century'.

All this came to an end when Yasser Arafat, the then PLO Chairman signed the Oslo Accords on 13 September 1993, with Israel Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, in the presence of the then President of USA, Bill Clinton. This prompted the Ayatollahs of Iran to begin their campaign to create new armed Islamist groups in Palestine and Lebanon, while increasing their support to existing ones. While Iran is estimated to be funding US\$ 100 million annually to Hamas, it has also publicly acknowledged that it is also supplying the rockets used by Hamas to target Israel. In 2012, Iran's military commanders disclosed that they had provided over 50 thousand rockets and over half a million anti-tank missiles to militants in Gaza; along with the technology to manufacture the Fajr-5 missiles in Gaza itself.

**It seems hard to believe that none of this was noted seriously by the five intelligence agencies of Israel.**

Now, let us look at the role played by Qatar in their support for Hamas. Throughout the last 60 odd years, Qatar has facilitated and funded radical Islamist ideologies and provided a safe haven to their leaders inside Qatar. The entire leadership of Hamas are permanent residents of Qatar, lavishly hosted and richly funded by Qatar's ruling al-Thani family. Beyond this, Qatar is funding an assertive Islamist social environment in the West through its investment in Islamic education and academic fields in the UK, funding of British schools, universities, community centres and Islamic centres; essentially funding Islamic extremism. Qatar is an unspoken enemy of Bharat [India] through its acts of liberally funding the Pakistani Army, which in turn funds terrorism in Kashmir. Other terrorists that Qatar has openly supported are the Taliban, the Muslim Brotherhood, certain al-Qaeda affiliates and the Houthi rebels in Yemen.

With only 350,000 nationals; but with constant access to enormous wealth through its natural gas reserves, Qatar seeks to exercise an international influence that is disproportionate to its geographical size, not only in the Middle East, but across the world. Qatar's protection from any global action is insured by its "investments" in the political parties and politicians in the UK, the USA and the EU. Governments of these countries, regardless of which political party is in power,

seek to maintain good relationships with Qatar in order to benefit from its huge energy reserves, to sell Defense equipment to it, and to attract Qatari investment into key infrastructure and energy projects. Bharat [India] and its ruling politicians are no exception. They allowed an investment of one billion US dollars by the Qatar Investment Authority into Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Retail Ventures. Beyond this, Qatar has made investments into media houses, real estate, infrastructure, financial institutions and investment funds. So, when thousands of Indian origin construction workers are killed in Qatar under inhuman working conditions or very soon, eight retired officers of our navy are hanged at the whim of Qatar's ruling family, do not be shocked. According to our Government and our bureaucracy, sacrificing a few Indian lives and our honour and price for the billions in investments; is just the price of doing business with Qatar.

Qatar's ruling family, the al-Thani's have perfected the art of being on all sides of a conflict and supporting everyone against each other. While funding the Hamas and allowing its leaders to enjoy residency in Qatar, it has positioned itself to be a key negotiator for the release of Israeli hostages, and at the same time preserved its close security and economic ties with the USA. Qatar hosts the forward HQs of the U.S. military's Central Command at the al-Udeid Air base in Doha. This gives Qatar the safety shield that it needs from any military attacks from its neighbours while being publicly praised by USA as its major non-NATO ally, critically important to U.S. foreign policy in the region. This support from USA comes at a cost of tens of millions of dollars that Qatar spends though its lobbyists in Washington DC, and influences the U.S. lawmakers through investments in law-makers constituencies, contributing to their election fund-raising, sponsored visits to Qatar (Minnesota Congress woman Ilhan Omar's visit to the soccer World cup was fully funded by Qatar) and has been accused of bribing this same Congress woman in exchange for sensitive intelligence information and to influence U.S. policy in its favour.

**When caught in illegal acts, Qatar falls back on their policy of threatening to restrict energy supplies to countries that accuse it of corrupt and unethical practices.**

The attack on Israel by Hamas has to be considered as a geo-political strategy by Iran and Qatar, working to destabilize the Middle East peace process for their own gains. The current conflict has successfully stalled and maybe destroyed the Israel-Saudi Arabi Normalization Agreement, allowed Iran to gain prominence in the region's politics, while putting those Arab states that have signed peace agreements with Israel into a difficult position whereby while trying to honour these agreements, they have to deal with the unrest on the ground by their Muslim citizens who are majorly anti-Israel. This works in the favour of Qatar who is opposed to the global influence of the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, who have accused Qatar of various crimes in the past. The Hamas offensive has encouraged smaller terrorist groups to attack U.S forces in the region, with rocket attacks on American military installations in Iraq and Syria.

If the current Hamas-Israel expands to become a U.S-Iran conflict, even through the use of proxies, it will affect global economy. Europe which is already under economic recessions due to the Ukraine-Russia war, will be adversely impacted as energy supplies from the Gulf would become scarce. The U.S. economy might also tip into severe recession and higher inflation, leading to a domino effect on other economies of the world that are tied to the U.S. economy. Scarcity of energy resources will mean higher logistics costs, increased production costs and reduced consumer spending.

The first question to be asked is this. At what point will USA, UK and the EU decide to abandon their support to Qatar to stop its funding of terrorists across the world, and try to normalize ties with Iran? Unless the influence of Qatar is removed from the geo-political equation, peace or even a restless peace will not materialize.

Therefore, the unspoken question has to be asked. Did Israel and its allies have complete knowledge of the impending Hamas attack on Israel, but decided to let it happen anyway for a greater geo-political strategy? The other line of thought is that, prior to this Hamas terrorist attack

of 7th October, the politics of Israel was deeply divided. Their current Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was on trial for corruption and was being tried in their Court of Law for fraud, breach of trust, and accepting bribes. Three of his former close confidants have turned State's evidence and are testifying against him. The current war is a welcome diversion from political problems, even if it has caused the killings of thousands on both sides. So, the moot question arises. Did some interested parties in Israel manipulate intelligence information for party political gains, not realizing that what they might have expected to be nothing more than 'containable violence', actually turned out to be a full-scale invasion?

While many will assume these questions to be in the area of an 'unbelievable conspiracy', the relationships of the past between the various players in the middle east, the current relationships between Islamic nations and their fundamentalists, the issues faced by Israeli politicians in their own country, and their singular relationships with the USA; all of these will determine the outcome of the present Hamas-Israel conflict.

---

## Cyber Threats and Terrorism

**By Amla Kanvinde**

Author Has previously worked with Siemens. She is a management graduate from Glasgow UK, studied psychology and certified in Cyber Law. She is a German language expert. Currently works in the area of people centric Cybersecurity.

We all live in Cyberspace now. And this cyberspace is like our universe, it is infinite and ever expanding. There is no beginning and no end and there is no count of the number of players in this cyberspace.

Our modern way of living is greatly dependent on the internet and connected systems. This cyberspace is also the basis of all our future plans. We plan industrial automation for our manufacturing sector, smart transportation and logistics systems, driverless cars, e-learning platforms, efficient healthcare systems, innovations for the agricultural sector, smart cities. All this will happen with complex, connected and interdependent systems of the future and security concerns will only increase. We will be entering even deeper into cyberspace in the future.

Our Critical Information Infrastructure are energy grids, water and wastewater systems, Government facilities, transportation and logistics systems, banking and finance systems, Defense systems, healthcare facilities, telecommunication.

These are the systems that are critical for individuals, businesses and for the nation. Disruptions to these systems have a huge economic, social and political impact.

The main types of threats that these systems face are data threats and operational threats. Data threat is where data security and integrity is compromised. Customer names and credit card numbers are breached from a bank, patient data is compromised from a healthcare facility, reservation data is lost from a luxury hotel chain. Operational threats are when the regular operations are disturbed and the system does not function as desired. Connectivity problems in cell phone network, problems in smooth supply of electricity through the power grids, disruption to the water supply systems.

The costs attached to cyber-attacks are many. There are financial losses. There is loss of productivity and opportunity. There is loss of reputation. There are forensic costs involved, cost to retrieve the data, free the systems from viruses, set up new protection mechanisms. These costs can be a huge burden. A cyber attack can set a business back by several years.

In some cases, it can lead to complete closure of business.

It is absolutely necessary that cyber security and awareness is given the importance it deserves.

The systems are attacked either by exploiting the technical vulnerabilities or through Social Engineering. There are some technical flaws in the systems set up by cyber defenders and this gives the attackers an entry into the system. Social engineering attacks aim at people and not the system at all. They depend on humans to be the weak link. They exploit the natural human biases and emotions like fear, sympathy and temptation,

### **Cybercrimes and Cyber terrorism**

Every crime is not an act of terrorism. Cybercrimes are against individuals and businesses. When they are against governments or nations, they become acts of terrorism. The motive behind cybercrimes is mainly monetary gains. Sometimes it is thrill or ego. In case of cyber terrorism, they want to hold the system hostage, to promote their cause, to put pressure on the government and create fear among the public, to prove a point or its just vengeance. Cyber criminals are after money. They don't care which system they attack as long as they get the money. But cyber terrorists will attack those systems that will cause maximum damage, affect maximum people and for the longest possible period. Cyber criminals don't want their acts to be noticed at all. Cyber terrorists on the other hand, want publicity for their actions.

### **Cyber incidents from around the world**

Petya and NotPetya are malware. They affected thousands of computers worldwide in 2016 and 2017. Petya was a standard piece of ransomware that aimed to make a few bitcoins from the victims. NotPetya was a Russia sponsored attack targeting Ukraine, but it quickly spread to Europe and the US. It affected the Danish logistics company Maersk. This company has a terminal at our very own JNPT Port. The terminal went down too. Since our ports operate multiple terminals, the situation could be controlled. This NotPetya affected the Russian oil company Rosneft as well.

The opening ceremony of the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics in 2018 was disrupted by a cyberattack. The official website had to be taken down. Initially North Korea was blamed for the attack. But US intelligence later found the attack carried out by Russian Military agency GRU. There was a ban on Russian team from participating in the winter games due to doping allegations. So this attack was in retaliation to the ban. The attackers had routed the attack IPs to North Korea to make it appear like their handiwork.

Stuxnet is a computer worm that targeted Iran's nuclear facilities. It attacked the programmable logic controllers (PLCs) used to automate the Processes. It caused severe damage to the nuclear facilities. The worm was introduced in the target environment through an infected USB. Infected USBs were scattered around the premises such that they would be found. An employee tried to open it on the workplace PC and the worm entered the system.

This highlights the importance of designing the systems with care, having a robust security mechanism and a response plan in place.

These are the pillars of India's cyber security architecture.

The **National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre**, under the National Technical Research Organization, helps design secure information systems and also protects the existing ones.

The **Indian Computer Emergency Response team** is under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, analyses and shares cyber intelligence and takes emergency measures for handling security incidents. Cert IN aims to promote effective IT securities practices throughout the country. It offers prestigious certifications in the area of vulnerability assessment and penetration testing. The empaneled auditors are authorized to evaluate information security risks and controls of the companies to be audited.

We have **The Information Technology Act 2000**, to handle the legal matters in cyberspace. It defines cybercrimes, prescribes punishments and provides remedies. It has given a big boost to e-commerce and e-governance in the country by giving validity to e- contracts and digital signatures.

Under the Ministry of Home Affairs we have **The Indian Cyber Crime Co-ordination Centre**. It operates the National Cyber Crime reporting Portal. It also has a Crime Research and Innovation Centre.

Along with this it is also necessary to focus on the human element in the Cybersecurity matrix. Having vague ideas about the cyber risks doesn't suffice. We have to be empowered to identify threats quicker, prevent threats wherever possible and respond to them better. This is possible when we function in the cyber world with more awareness about how it affects us, how humans interact with technology and how it affects our thought patterns, expectations and ultimately our behaviour.

---

## **Stitched in Silence: Stories of Bangladesh's Factory Laborers**

**By Dr.Santhosh Mathew**

Author is Associate Professor at Centre for South Asian Studies, School of International Studies & Social Sciences, Pondicherry Central University, India.

"Stitched in Silence: Stories of Bangladesh's Factory Laborers", is an evocative exploration of the often- overlooked lives of garment factory workers in Bangladesh. This collection of narratives sheds light on the untold stories of those who play a pivotal role in the global fashion industry yet remain hidden behind the seams. It delves into the challenges and resilience of these individuals, unveiling their dreams, struggles and aspirations. This article invites us to recognise the individuals who have long remained invisible in the supply chain, emphasising the importance of acknowledging and valuing their contributions.

In the bustling metropolises and rural towns of Bangladesh, millions of skilled hands toil in obscurity, weaving the fabric of the global fashion industry. These individuals, working silently in the heart of garment factories, bear the immense responsibility of producing the clothes that drape our bodies, all while their own stories remain largely unheard. "Stitched in Silence: Stories of Bangladesh's Factory Laborers" is a poignant exploration of this hidden world, a world where the human cost behind our clothing choices is woven with threads of hope, hardship and resilience. Fashion is a global phenomenon, with the latest trends and styles effortlessly traversing borders. Yet, the human faces behind the garments we purchase often remain invisible. This article sets out to unveil the profound and often heart- rending narratives of the garment factory workers of Bangladesh, individuals who form the backbone of an industry that touches every corner of the world.

As consumers, we seldom pause to consider the journeys undertaken by the garments we buy. This article offers a unique opportunity to delve into the lives of these unsung heroes, providing a voice to those who have been relegated to the shadows of an industry that generates billions of dollars every year. And it also reflects on the ethics of fast fashion and advocates for fair labour practices.

The Ready- Made Garment (RMG) industry in Bangladesh has seen significant growth since the 1980s. The Ready- Made Garment (RGM) industry also contributes remarkably to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). This industry also provides opportunities for income, exports and jobs for the people of Bangladesh and has thus become the lifeline of Bangladesh's economy. This industry alone provides jobs to approximately four million people in the country, majority being women workers- as per the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association or the BGMEA.

The Ready- Made Garment (RGM) industry also grew as an important contributor to the economic development of Bangladesh. This industry is also the highest foreign exchange earner. But this is not the complete picture of the industry. It has many issues and problems, due to which time and again the garment workers in the country have protested against the government of Bangladesh.

In the garment industries of Bangladesh, it is often the young women who get employed and they have to face long working hours, low wages, face cramped spaces, and precarious safety conditions. Garment factories in Bangladesh are often overcrowded, with workers sitting shoulder to shoulder, hunched over sewing machines for long hours. It's a grueling routine, with shifts that can extend far beyond the standard eight hours. The concept of weekends and holidays is often foreign to these workers as they labour to meet production quotas set by factory owners, who in turn cater to international fashion brands.

Wages are a contentious issue. While the Bangladesh government periodically revises the minimum wage, it often falls short of meeting the basic needs of workers and their families. As a result, many labourers are forced to live in substantial conditions, struggling to make ends meet. Safety concerns loom large. Even the years after the Rana Plaza disaster, which triggered an international outcry and promises of reform, the garment industry still grapples with a lack of adequate safety measures. Workers are often employed in buildings that are structurally unsound, and fire hazards are a constant worry. Inadequate safety training, coupled with the drive to meet production deadlines, places lives in jeopardy. The world became acutely aware of these issues in 2013, when the Rana Plaza disaster happened. This event claimed the lives of more than a thousand people and permanently disabled a few more people. This tragedy exposed the dire working conditions in the industry. In the aftermath of the disaster, a wave of protests and calls for reform emerged.

After China, Bangladesh is the second largest importer of apparel in the world, with over 3500 garment factories. Well - known brands like H & M, TESCO, IKEA, Zara and more source their products from Bangladesh. The garment workers across Bangladesh took to public protest that led to factory vandalism and clashes with security forces. The garment workers are protesting against the harsh working environment and the low wages being paid to them. One of the glaring issues is the low wages that garment workers in Bangladesh earn. Many of them toil for long hours, often without overtime pay, while earning a meagre wage that barely covers their basic needs. These low wages contribute to a cycle of poverty that is difficult to break free from. As a result, thousands of workers in these garment factories took to the streets of the capital city of Dhaka and in Gazipur in demand of better wages.

In addition to low wages, the safety and health of these workers are consistently at risk.

Poorly maintained factories lack essential safety measures, leaving workers vulnerable to accidents and even disasters like the Rana Plaza collapse in 2013, which claimed the lives of over a thousand workers. It highlighted the grave lack of safety standards and regulations in the industry. The demanding working hours, often exceeding 60 hours a week, take a toll on the physical and mental well- being of these workers. They endure crowded and unsanitary living conditions, as well as inadequate access to clean water and healthcare. This firm reality fosters a culture of exploitation and oppression.

Child labour is another pressing concern in Bangladesh's garment industry. Many children are forced into labour due to their families' dire financial circumstances, robbing them of their right to education and a proper childhood. To combat these issues, there is a pressing need for multinational companies to take responsibility and ensure safe working conditions and fair wages for their supply chain workers. The government of Bangladesh should also strengthen labour laws, and international organisations should continue to advocate for change and support workers' rights. The harsh working conditions faced by garment workers in Bangladesh demand immediate attention and action. It is our moral duty to stand up for these workers and work towards a future where they can lead dignified lives free from exploitation and suffering.



The Rana Plaza disaster prompted a global outcry, leading to increased scrutiny of the practices of international fashion brands that source their products from Bangladesh. Many brands pledged to improve the safety of their supply chains and invest in factory inspections and renovations. The Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh was an important step in this direction. This legally binding agreement between international brands, Bangladeshi factories, and labor unions aimed to ensure the safety of workers in the garment industry. However, not all brands have embraced these initiatives. Some continue to prioritize cost-efficiency over worker safety, leading to ongoing concerns about the industry's commitment to reform.

Lidl, the German supermarket chain, said that it took the accusations placed by the garment workers and it took the responsibility towards the garment workers in Bangladesh and other countries, wherever they source their products.

The struggles of Bangladesh's garment workers continue to be marked by resilience and hope, as they fight for better working conditions and fair treatment. The Rana Plaza tragedy and the subsequent protests brought international attention to their plight, but the battle is far from over. While there have been positive steps towards improved safety and labor conditions, there are still significant challenges to overcome.

The world must remain vigilant, holding both brands and governments accountable for their commitments to ensure that the garment industry in Bangladesh, and beyond, becomes a place where the hardworking individuals who stitch our clothes can do so in safety, dignity, and fairness. The stories of Bangladesh's factory laborers, stitched in the backdrop of adversity, continue to inspire and drive the quest for a more just and equitable industry.

**Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors. They do not purport to reflect the opinions or views of the FINS or its members.**

## India is Proud of: Matilda Kullu

**Odisha ASHA worker on Forbes list who battled Covid, superstition & casteism.**



Wearing a neatly pinned blue sari, Kullu checks the bicycle's wheels and puts required medicines, Covid kits and record-keeping material (notebooks, charts, pens) in her bag which she carries around 250 houses she is in charge of.

Kullu, who has been an ASHA worker for the past 15 years, featured in the 'Forbes India W-Power 2021' list along with Amazon head Aparna Purohit and banker Arundhati Bhattacharya. This was the first time that an ASHA worker has been featured in the list.

Her journey, however, has not been easy, she said while talking to the media "The Print", recalls how she had to battle casteism, superstition, and there were days when she barely got any food to eat.

“Sometimes people thought I was the reason they fell ill because I went to their house. Such was the extent of their superstitions,” said Kullu, who belongs to the Kharia tribe.

She now recalls her struggles with a toothy grin and is focused on imparting knowledge. She beams with pride when she says that the entire area, she oversees is almost completely vaccinated against Covid.

Kullu’s day begins anywhere between 5:30-7 am. She returns home anytime between 4-11 pm, at times even later.

Her work ranges from checking on pregnant and new mothers, testing for malaria, advising women on hygiene and contraception, holding meetings with anganwadi workers, and so on.

The youngest of five children, she admits that she received a lot of love from her parents but is also quick to point out the hardships they had to go through.

“There have been days when they had no food to eat. The situation was much better by the time I was born,” she says.

Kullu did face difficulties when she began working as an ASHA worker. During her field visits, she says, people at times would offer her water in a glass that they would refuse to touch later.

During a field visit, a woman shouted at Kullu saying: “What do people from your caste think of themselves”. Kullu, however, says she kept returning to the lady’s house, who was suffering from malaria, as it was her duty to provide care. Years later, when her daughter-in-law had a baby, the woman told Kullu – “If you weren’t there, we would not have been able to manage.”

“Now when I go, they sit and eat with me and have chai as well”, she says smilingly.

### **Dealing with the pandemic**

For Kullu, dealing with the pandemic was challenging to say the least, as many villagers initially thought Covid was a “hoax” and feared they would die if they get vaccinated. However, through patience and guidance, Kullu was able to convince people in her village to get tested, isolate (if Covid positive), and get vaccinated.

### **‘Happy to get recognition’**

On being featured on the Forbes list, Kullu says she is happy that ASHA workers are being recognised, adding that she feels validated after all her years of struggles.

“I like helping people. Seeing them healthy and happy makes me satisfied. I don’t want anyone to ever feel sad when they see me, even if it means burying my own hurt”, she said.

Constantly on the go, Kullu says she wants to share her knowledge and information with people and is happiest while assisting deliveries or saving someone.

“I am so lucky to be able to witness that feeling of mothers holding their children. And saving someone gives me happiness and satisfaction which no amount of money can ever give.”

She also has advice for other ASHAs just starting out — do your work diligently and success will automatically follow. “Not everyone is lucky to be an ASHA worker. You are lucky to have this opportunity. So work from the heart.”

---

Write to us at:

**[bulletin@finsindia.org](mailto:bulletin@finsindia.org)**

**OFFICE :4, Belle View, Lakhamsi Nappu  
Road, Dadar (East), MUMBAI – 400014  
Phone 022 24127274**

**EDITORIAL BOARD**

**Shri. Milind Bondale  
Col Ravindra Tripathi**