



LIGHT

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President • Rtn. Abinash K Singh • Secretary • Rtn. Debasis Das • TREASURER • Rtn. Chiranjib Sha • Editor • PP Tanu Roy

The Forgotten 'Rani Ma' of Farmers Who Was Once Set to Represent India at Olympics

By Aarushi Agrawal

In her childhood, Ila Mitra was a recurring face in local Bengali dailies for her achievements as an athlete. Born to a well-to-do family, she was encouraged from a young age by her father to pursue her dream to be an acclaimed sportswoman in undivided India.

For a while, it seemed like that was indeed where her future would head, given that in 1940, she was qualified to compete in the Olympics.

Instead, fate would have it another way, and her life took a surprising pivot.

In the history of undivided Bengal, Ila is better recognised today as Rani Ma, or queen mother, of peasant farmers in the region, and for her monumental role in the Tebhaga Uprising. Hers is a story that's turbulent, heartbreaking, and inspiring at the same time. And above all, worthy of being told and heard.



Ila's promising athletic career

Born in 1925 in Calcutta (Kolkata), Ila was the eldest of six children. Her father, Nagendranath Sen, the Accountant General of Bengal, encouraged her to engage in basketball, swimming, and track. From 1937 onwards, she was a well-recognised name in the region for her sports abilities.

It is said that the proud father would take her for swimming practice and escort her to several track competitions all through the city, while managing his office schedule. He even kept a scrapbook of her achievements, filled with newspaper clippings that celebrated her.

In 1937 and 1938, she earned junior championship titles for girls in Bengal from the sports club Jatiya Juba Sangha. Counted among the best athletes of the Bengal presidency, she had collected over 47 trophies by this time.

Her big break was to come in 1940 when the world was preparing for the 12th Olympics. Ila was 15 and being considered for the contingent that would represent British India. However, this golden opportunity would never arrive — the games were cancelled owing to World War II.

Meanwhile, after completing her schooling from Bethune School, Ila went on to pursue a degree from Bethune School. Shortly thereafter, her marriage was arranged to Ramendranath Mitra, who belonged to a zamindar family and worked with the Communist Party of India.

"When I got admission in Bethune College, I joined the Girl Students Committee — there we began to discuss Marxism," Ila said in Kavita Panjabi's book *Unclaimed Harvest*. "We did this secretly. Gradually, through my relief work, I became a party member."

She joined the *Mahila Atma Raksha Samiti* (MARS), which was formed in 1942 to protect women from being trafficked to Allied Forces' soldiers. Their work slowly extended to issues like hunger, poverty, and gender-based violence.

Throughout the 1940s, there were also several reports of food shortage and rising prices for essentials. In 1942, a deadly cyclone hit Medinipur, making matters worse. Between 1943-44, the official death toll had reached three million.

All these events further influenced Ila, who was also ably supported by her husband, who, despite his background, understood well the plight of peasant workers under the firm grip of landlords.

A leader for all of Bengal

Meanwhile, in 1943, a devastating famine ravaged the Bengal region leaving millions dead due to starvation, poverty, malnutrition, and lack of healthcare.

As the population reeled from its effects, Ila and her husband worked closely with peasants and members of the santhal community, living among them to understand their conditions better. They mobilised them to pay only one-third (tebhaga) of the harvest to landlords instead of half, which was the norm. This went a long way in safeguarding against hunger and poverty.

This would form a larger part of the Tebhaga Movement, an integral uprising in undivided Bengal that saw the coming together of landless labourers, artisans, and members of the tribal community to secure two-thirds share of their crop and reduce the rent they paid to jotedars, or wealthy farmers.

In 1950, Ila organised a peasant and Santhal uprising in Nachole. Police were sent to thwart the protest, but things turned violent and four policemen were killed. Ila escaped with the other peasants, dressed as a Santhal herself. But at the Nachole railway station, an officer noticed the watch on her wrist and arrested her.

In lockup, she underwent brutal torture. In *A History of Bangladesh*, history Professor Willem van Schendel wrote, "[The] 24-year-old woman found herself being interrogated, tortured, and raped by police in the western district of Rajshahi [Bangladesh]."

She was offered no food or water, and the policemen beat her with the butt of their rifles, smashing her legs with their lathis.



This level of torture continued for four days, until Ila was transferred to the Nawabganj jail. The jail warden there arranged for a doctor to see her, and she finally received medical treatment.

Her 1951 testimony of being raped was published in a pamphlet that inspired people from East Bengal to protest. Poets like Subhas Mukherjee and Ghulam Khuddus wrote poetry in her name.

Leaving behind a unique legacy

Suffering from ill health owing to her time in jail, Ila slowly began rebuilding her life once released. By 1962, she completed a Masters in Bangla literature and culture from the Calcutta University, and got a job as a teacher in the Sivanath Sastri College. She had also won an election from the Maniktala

constituency and became MLA, which she represented till 1977.

"She remained unfazed," recalls her son Ronendranath. "She went to the party office every afternoon after college, scolded the office bearers often, and held forth at home about everything the party was doing wrong. It was never about herself."

Meanwhile, her son Ritendranath Mitra recalled, "She believed she had survived the torture she faced because of her fitness."

Although her career as an athlete had ended years prior, sports always remained close to her heart, even days before her passing in 2002.

"Thakma (paternal grandmother in Bengali) would wake me really early, kaak bhorey — as we call that time of dawn when no one is awake except the crows — to go swimming with me at Anderson Club. Till a few days before she passed, this was her routine — she swam and exercised every morning," her grandson recalled.

"In the 90s, when I was growing up, thakma was not a prominent name. It was much later that I realised her legacy was unique," he added.

Today is our 2192nd

Members attended last RWM: 11

Birthday Greetings :

Sept 13th PP Ranjit K Basu
 Sept 14th Rtn. Gautam Purakayastha
 Sept 15th Spouse Ratna, Wife of Rtn. Debasis Das
 Sept 19th Rtn. Capt. Mritunjay Singh
 Sept 22nd Rtn. Debasis Das



Agenda – 2192nd RWM

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pre-Puja clothes distribution dates - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sept 24th at RCC Champa Mahila Society • Sept 25th at RCC Joypur • Sept 25th at RCC Badartala • Sept 30th at Madhya Kalyanpur Mahila Samity | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. November 1st, Bijoya Diwali Meet 3. November 8th, 2nd Club Assembly 4. November 22nd, BNROC - AG Visit 5. Dec 13th, DG's Official Club Visit 6. Dec 20th, Annual Meeting |
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Making literacy an achievable dream

Dr. Mahesh Kotbagi, RI Director, 2021-23

Education can help children realise their true potential and achieve their dreams. But when denied an education opportunity, their dreams are shattered. UNICEF reports that globally schoolchildren have lost an estimated 1.8 trillion hours of in-person classes, thanks to Covid. Thus India, already grappling with problems such as lack of infrastructure, gender disparity and access to internet, faces new challenges.



Rotary has a history of tackling the world's most challenging humanitarian issues and an example is the Rotary India Literacy Mission (RILM), which aims to achieve total literacy through quality education. In Jan 2021, RILM partnered with CRY to bring back to school dropouts, out-of-school and laggard children under the '**Asha Kiran**' programme. Rotary continues to support the GoI by providing e-learning modules broadcast through 12 national TV channels of NCERT for Classes 1-12, also available on GoI's mobile app Diksha.

We also want to improve teacher training, more important than ever to ensure collaborative learning, and adult literacy. To sharpen and upgrade teachers' skills to be digitally savvy, in a five-day workshop, RILM trained 70,000 teachers in Maharashtra and 5,000 in Delhi to use e-learning tools. We want to create a standardised teacher-training module that will create an inclusive and vibrant ecosystem.

RILM's success in improving literacy levels in Indian children notwithstanding, it'll be difficult to achieve total literacy without addressing its estimated 287 million illiterate

adults. Rotary works actively on adult literacy and RILM has developed tools to help adults get functional literacy, such as reading street signs, writing their names, etc.

RILM's Happy Schools programme provides infrastructural and co-scholastic facilities in state-funded schools to provide a positive environment to get better attendance, higher retention and improved concentration. Through Rotary clubs and districts, RILM has successfully transformed 3,112 government and government-aided schools across the country.

Rotary aims to create a student-centred, purpose-driven, inclusive and real education system in which teachers, curriculum, pedagogies, assessments and learners are made future-ready. Ahead of Teachers' Day and Rotary Literacy Month, I extend my greetings to the teaching fraternity for their selfless service in nurturing young minds. My gratitude to all *Rotary clubs and districts which have innovated and ensured the education journey of students even during the pandemic.*

Let us together create a system that makes children's lives better and turns them into leaders who will impact their communities, nation and the world.

A Legacy of Literacy paving the way for Modern Education in Southern India

By Akanksha Bishnoi

Education being a state subject, it's hard not to compare the existing models and the steps taken in policy-making by various state governments in its reform. Kerala, Lakshadweep, Mizoram and Goa have the highest literacy rates, out of which three of those fall under the southern territory. Such numbers represent years of effort and a long legacy of social reforms that notable personalities took to bring about change and revolution.

Let me enlighten you with the events/people/policies/reforms that were a part of the making of the educated south. It is wrong of me to club all southern states into an umbrella term such as the educated south. Still, I dare for the simple reason that a pre-independence account of social reforms and education falls under what was then known as the Madras Presidency and is an integral part of the narrative.



Literacy in pre-consolidated India

In an India that wasn't territorially bound and still divisive in kingdoms, before when imperialism was known just as a trade route, there was unity in education. There was the deliverance of indigenous knowledge in a socio-cultural context, ironically only limited to the feudal upper caste.

In colonial India, the western thought of teaching and

training was materialised, which aimed at an individual, a scientific and universal directive of education above the social and cultural. This rejection of the indigenous model created a gap between school-based knowledge and the actuality of the school children.

Amidst the rise of colonially structured education, rose mindsets that reformed education aligning with their ideologies; *Raja Ram Mohan Roy*, a pioneer of the modern Indian renaissance, co-founder of the Brahma Sabha and popularly known for his efforts in abolishing the Sati practise. He believed education to be an essential tool for social change and advocated for integrating western and Indian education.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy set a precedent for activists like *Jyotiba Phule* and *Savitribai Phule* (spouses) to seek to consolidate the critical rationality of modern science in organising education for Dalits and women after realizing that the policies of the colonial state favoured the Brahminical control of knowledge. Savitribai along with her husband founded the first women's school in India at Bhide Wada in Pune in 1848. She was also among India's first women teachers.

Erode Venkatappa Ramasamy, commonly known as **Periyar**, was an Indian social activist, and politician who started the Self-Respect Movement and is known as the 'Father of the Dravidian Movement. He has done exemplary work against Brahminical dominance, caste prevalence, and female oppression in Tamil Nadu.

Education in independent India

As India sat on the rollercoaster of Liberalising, Privatising, and globalising its economy, English became a significant part of education reforms, as universal education took to the stage, providing elementary education for all children in order to achieve the constitutional necessity of social justice.

The backdrop of the breakfast scheme lay in a 102-year-old history when Chennai Corporation Council approved a proposal for providing Tiffin to the students of a Corporation School at the cost of 1 Anna/student/day; which was later revived through the mid-day meal scheme followed by the implementation of Nutritious Meal Plan in 2020-21.

One of the pillars that a society's advancement stands on is the education of its population in its primitive years. The Budget FY23 has allocated Rs. 1, 04,278 Crore for the Education sector—an increase of 11.86% compared to the revised 2021-22 gross allocation of Rs 93,223 crore. Here's hoping that the new National Education Policy can mine the untapped industry of education with a focus on digital education



A child can play video games for 10-12 hours straight and improve hand-eye coordination, and good reflexes; imagine if learning was that simulating. The system of recitation and listening, dictating and noting hasn't changed much in contextualizing a teacher-student dynamic. After rent, education is the one sector where people spend the most money. This untapped industry holds a lot of scope for innovation in technique, exploring digitised scape, means of education and a long history of reforms and mistakes to learn from. paralytic polio."

PM releases wild Cheetahs - which had become extinct from India - in Kuno National Park

The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi today released wild Cheetahs - which had become extinct from India - in Kuno National Park. Cheetahs - brought from Namibia - are being introduced in India under Project Cheetah, which is world's first inter-continental large wild carnivore translocation project. Out of the eight Cheetahs there are five female and three male Cheetahs.

The Prime Minister released Cheetahs at two release points in Kuno National Park. The Prime Minister also interacted with ***Cheetah Mitras, Cheetah Rehabilitation Management Group and students*** at the venue. The Prime Minister addressed the Nation on this historic occasion.



The release of wild Cheetahs by the Prime Minister in Kuno National Park is part of his efforts to revitalise and diversify India's wildlife and its habitat. The cheetah was declared extinct from India in 1952. The Cheetahs that would be released are from Namibia and have been brought under a MoU signed earlier this year. The introduction of Cheetah in India is being done under Project Cheetah, the world's first inter-continental large wild carnivore translocation project.

Cheetahs will help restore open forest and grassland ecosystems in India. This will help conserve biodiversity and enhance the ecosystem services like water security, carbon sequestration and soil moisture conservation, benefiting society at large. This effort, in line with the Prime Minister's commitment to environmental protection and wildlife conservation, will also lead to enhanced livelihood opportunities for the local community through eco-development and ecotourism activities.

The historic reintroduction of Cheetahs in India is part of a long series of measures for ensuring sustainability and environment protection in the last eight years which has resulted in significant achievements in the area of environment protection and sustainability. The coverage of Protected Areas which was 4.90% of the country's

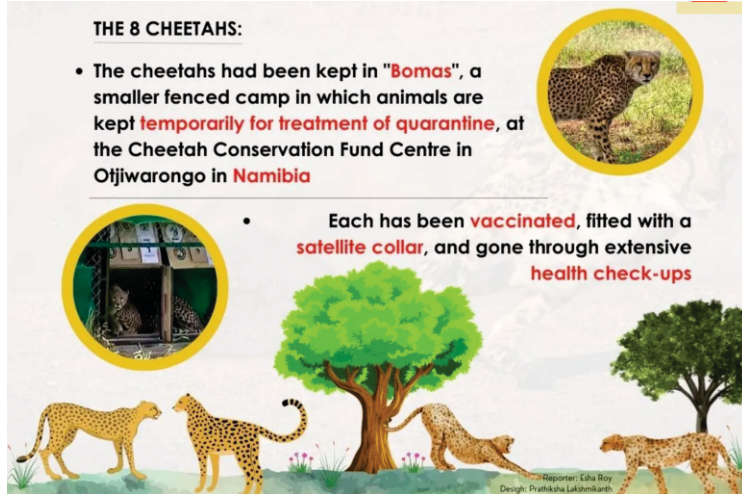
geographical area in 2014 has now increased to 5.03%. This includes an increase in Protected Areas in the country from 740 with an area of 1, 61,081.62 sq/kms in 2014 to present 981 with an area of 1,71,921 sq/kms.

Forest and tree cover has increased by 16,000 square kms in the last four years. India is among few countries in the world where forest cover is consistently increasing.

There has also been an increase in the number of community reserves. From just 43 in 2014

THE 8 CHEETAHS:

- The cheetahs had been kept in "Bomas", a smaller fenced camp in which animals are kept temporarily for treatment of quarantine, at the Cheetah Conservation Fund Centre in Otjiwarongo in Namibia
- Each has been vaccinated, fitted with a satellite collar, and gone through extensive health check-ups



Reporter: Esha Roy
Design: Pratiksha Lakshminath

their numbers are more than 100 in 2019. India is home to 52 Tiger Reserves covering approximately 75,000 sq/km area in 18 States with approximately 75% population of the wild tiger at global level. India achieved the goal of doubling the tiger numbers in 2018 itself, four years in advance from the targeted year 2022. The Tiger Population in India has increased from 2,226 in 2014 to 2,967 in 2018. The budgetary allocation for tiger conservation has increased from Rs. 185 crore in 2014 to Rs. 300 crore in 2022.

The population of Asiatic Lions has shown a steady increase with a population of 674 individuals with an increase rate of 28.87 per cent (one of the highest growth rates so far) from the 523 lions in 2015. India now (2020) has 12,852 leopards as compared to the previous estimate of 7910 conducted in 2014. More than 60% increase in population has been recorded.

TRF enables impactful projects

Dr. Bharat Pandya, TRF Trustee, 2022–26

One of my favourite books, A Short History of Nearly Everything by Bill Bryson, muses on the creation of the universe and how a tiny speck of it we call Earth went from being a fiery ball with seas of molten rock to the lush green-and-blue home we know today. Bryson's argument is that it is a miracle that we — our planet and our species — have survived. "We enjoy not only the privilege of existence," Bryson writes, "but also the singular ability to appreciate it and even, in a multitude of ways, to make it better."

We are fortunate to be able to read his words or any others. And we are fortunate to be part of an organisation that is making our world a better place by helping those who can't read them. There are an estimated 773 million illiterate adults — most of them women — who can't read these words or write their own name. They are at a clear disadvantage in life, with limited opportunities to work. And this situation isn't their fault.



Rotary has not forgotten them. In September, let's celebrate Basic Education and Literacy month by looking at the long-term impact Rotary and The Rotary Foundation are making and how we are finding ways to lend a hand in the effort.

Last year alone, TRF approved 104 global grants totalling \$6.3 million for basic education and literacy projects, according to preliminary figures. This is on top of decades of work in our clubs and districts. As an Australian, I'm especially proud of the work of Dick Walker, a past district governor from Queensland, who used a Foundation matching grant to develop the concentrated language encounter method

that has been adopted by educational leaders around the world.

At the community level, our clubs are well-known for book drives that have changed the lives of so many children. But when we gather many clubs and districts together and work on large-scale Rotary Foundation projects, we have the potential to impact entire communities for generations.

The opportunities for Rotary to make a difference in literacy are boundless. Once basic reading and writing is achieved, it opens a path to other types of literacy, such as numerical literacy, digital literacy and financial literacy.

Let's not squander our opportunity to improve our corner of the universe. I encourage you to think big about literacy and education and change the world — this month and beyond.

Naan-sense & Pun-eer

Shashi Tharoor shared some light-hearted food humour while commenting on a Twitter thread.

He reposted a witty conversation between former Managing Director of Twitter Parminder Singh and two others.

In the hilarious exchange, Singh had said, "If two guys fight over a tandoori naan, is that violence or naan-violence."

Ram Vaidyanathan, a Twitter user, replied, "Naan violence is part of our kulcha."

Another user added, "Lassi who wins."

Coming up with a hilarious food pun while taking forward a conversation in the same vein, Shashi said, "as a Southie I would rice to the occasion, provided some-bar wasn't there."

The exchange of puns continued after Tharoor's tweet.

The Delhi University alumnus turned nostalgic about the fun they used to have on campus.

"Thanks for tweeting this Shashi. Repartees like this were a DU rasam, commented Parminder Singh. "It's never too lait... but for now yeh coffee hain," replied Tharoor.

"It's butter not to fight over this naan sense," said another.

"A daily "dosa" of humour was a staple diet at College!

I'm not going to "mince" my words- jokes at the Cafe prevented too much "roti" learning from "scrambling" your mind," added Vikram Chandra.

I think we knead a change." - Another tweeter!

PASWA to educate State's 50 lakh Youth

PNS | Ranchi

Private Schools and Children Welfare Association (PASWA) has decided, on Monday, to educate 50 lakh youths of Jharkhand under the National Literacy Mission. Through the programme PASWA will educate 5 crore youths of the Country under the aegis *Rotary India Literacy Mission*.

To ensure the success of the literacy programme a workshop will be held on September, 24 & 25 at Kolkata.

Addressing a press meet the State PASWA Chief, Alok Kumar Dubey said that the scheme for educating illiterate adults across the Country will be led by PASWA National Chief, Syed Shamail Ahmed and President of Rotary World, Shekhar Mehta in which students from class VI to above studying in private schools affiliated to more than five lakh associations across the Country. "Within 3 months, the girl students will work to teach their families and uneducated adults around them. Certificates will also

be given by PASWA to teach those students which will be useful in their future and those who will take adult education, they will also be educated,” he added.

Dubey said that he will also participate in this Literacy Mission launch program and workshop and will deliver his lectures on the plan to educate more than 5 crore illiterate adults. “After the launch of the program at the State PASWA will discuss the plan to educate about 50 lakh illiterate adults of the State in the first week of October, he added.

“The State PASWA will organize a teacher's honour ceremony in Ranchi on October 16 and will honour more than one thousand teachers who are dedicated to the duty of the State” said Dubey.

“For the first time in the history of Ranchi University, NSS Volunteer and PASWA's hardworking colleague Falak Fatima has been congratulated for being selected with the President's Award. After being honoured by the President on September 24, a grand ceremony will be organized to felicitate Fatima, the pride of Jharkhand and Ranchi University, so that other children can also follow and move forward after being impressed by their works,” said Dubey.

The State President said that within a week, PASWA would launch its membership and would work to connect private schools with the association and would appoint district presidents within 15 days.

Living With Polio, He Became Entrepreneur at 16 & Now Takes Education to Small Cities

By Krystelle D'Souza

Ajay Gupta was diagnosed with polio when he was only nine months old. However, being disabled himself, he spent his life working for the cause and starting ventures for the betterment of others.

Gupta used his knowledge of shares and had an entrepreneurial spirit very early on in life. This led him to a string of successful ventures by the time he was just 24. But there was one thing that propelled him to focus on pre-primary education, among other causes.

Having his legs and left hand paralysed when he was still an infant, Gupta couldn't attend school until the age of six. This was due to a lack of accessibility in the education space. Throughout his studying years, he noticed this issue was prevalent in India.

Thus, when he had the chance to make a difference, he did. In 2004, he started Bachpan Play School in Delhi with only Rs. 30,000.

A proper curriculum and strategy were the pillars on which the playschool rested with the aim being to provide quality education to young minds in



Tier II and Tier III cities of India. As the venture gained traction, it was loved by many and spread from Delhi to Bareilly, Muzaffarpur, Dehradun and more such cities that total up to 1,100 franchises in India.

Today, there are almost 1 lakh students who benefit from this venture.

Along with this venture, Gupta also set up an NGO - '*Hum Honge Kamyab*', for equal accessibility for disabled students in the education space.

MINUTES OF THE 2191ST RWM HELD ON SEPTEMBER 6TH, 2022 AT BNR OFFICERS' CLUB, GARDEN REACH

1. President Abinash called the RWM to order and requested to rise for the National Anthem.
2. Members were briefed about the JRWM held at Eastern Metropolitan Club with Rotary Cal Millennium, Ballygunge & Cal Nabodiganta. President, Secretary, PPs Tanu, Mousumi and Naresh, along with PP Debasis attended. Guest Speaker Dr Rupashree Dasgupta spoke on Ovarian Cancer.
3. On September 4th, a Health Check up & Cancer Awareness camp was held for Senior Citizens residing at Parnasree Green. 43 patients were checked. Rtn. Dr. BN Jha, PP Dr. JK Singh, and technicians from Ekbalpore Nursing Home assisted the project. Rtn. Dr. Amitabh Ray (Oncologist) spoke on Cancer Awareness. IWC of Garden Reach participated, and was represented by - PPs Dr. Sharada Ray, Kiran Singh, President Tumpa Dutta, and Secretary Dr. Minu Kumari.
4. President informed that PP Ranjit Basu has consented to sponsor 40 sarees for Madhya Kalyanpur Mahila Samity.
5. Rtn. Shweta Barua has contributed Rs. 10,000 towards the clothes for children at Nayantara Memorial Charitable Trust, Daranda.
6. It was discussed that 50 sarees will be given to severely underprivileged elderly women at RCC Joypur; 70 sarees & 20 each of lungi and vest will be given to underprivileged & brick kiln labours of RCC Badartala.
7. President announced the forthcoming important dates for projects & events of the Club.
8. 3rd Board Meeting will be held on September 11th, 2022 from 6.30pm, at Haldiram's Banquets, Ballygunge, followed by celebration of 45th Charter day.
9. Club Secretary, Rtn. Debasis conducted Club business.
10. Minutes of the last RWM were confirmed. President terminated the meeting.