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Dear Reader,

Never before in the history of mankind has such a catastrophe hit as the Covid-19 pandemic. We are grateful to have sailed through it, though after facing some violent storms along the way. The '2nd wave' has emerged crueller than the '1st wave' with tragedies striking too close to us. Another threat is of the impending '3rd wave'.

Helen Keller once said, "Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement. Nothing can be done without hope and confidence." We too, hope and pray that we can soon open our doors, to the public and the spaces of Nehru Centre will reverberate once again with the sound of music, artistic and scientific dialogue.

Till then, happy reading.

Chief Executive,
Nehru Centre

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Indian Armed Forces: In Service of the Country

India - China Conflict 1962

The genesis of India-China boundary dispute goes back to the time when British ruled over India. They wanted a clearly demarcated boundary between India and Tibet and between India and China. The McMahon Line was created to define the boundary between India and Tibet. The British claimed Aksai Chin and fixed India-China boundary beyond it. In 1914 a tripartite conference was held at Simla to confirm the above arrangement. While British India and Tibet ratified it, China did not.

After India's independence in 1947, both countries spent a decade of prolonged negotiations over Aksai Chin and Tibet. India stuck to the position that Aksai Chin was an intrinsic part of Ladakh and that the McMahon Line was inviolable which was not acceptable to China.

In October 1950, China occupied Tibet and also started building 'a strategic highway running through Aksai Chin linking Tibet with the south-western province of Sinkiang.' The highway was inaugurated in 1957 and for the first time India realized that there would be no negotiated settlement. China was on the path of aggression whereas India had made no military preparation, much less a strategic infrastructure to confront China.

In March 1959 the Dalai Lama left Tibet and took shelter in India much to the annoyance of China. There was also a revolt by Tibetan Khampas which was crushed. China believed it was engineered by India. Consequently China started intensive patrolling in Aksai Chin and along the McMahon Line. In August 1959 the first skirmish took place between Indian army and PLA (People's Liberation Army) when the latter asked an Indian post situated on the McMahon Line to be vacated. A more serious incident took place in October of the same year. It occurred in Central Ladakh where a CRP patrol was ambushed by the Chinese killing nine jawans and capturing eleven. India strongly protested and those taken prisoner were returned in November. Both incidents were like an ill omen forewarning of the disaster to come.

Faced with China's aggressive designs India adopted a poorly conceived policy known as the 'The Forward Policy'. Arjun Subramaniam describes it thus:

"It envisaged the creation of small static enclaves of troops positions of a maximum of a platoon strength in no-man's land very close to where Chinese were occupying similar positions, but in much larger strength." The policy was flawed because there were no means of communications connecting the posts which had to be air maintained. It also provoked China, which had numerical superiority, to use force. By 1962 the comparative strength of China and India in the North, North-West and the East was 3:1, the former being fully acclimatized to the weather, well organized and much better equipped.

Two incidents led to the military action. The first happened in July 1962 'when a platoon of Indian Army advanced down the Galwan Valley in Ladakh and outflanked the Chinese position at the head of the valley and isolated it from the important Chinese post of Samzungling'. The other spark was ignited in NEFA (now Arunachal) in Tawang sector. There was a platoon post of India's Assam Rifles on the south bank of Namka Chu river. That post was suddenly surrounded by a Chinese battalion in mid-September with the intention of evicting the Indian force. The post was below Thagla Ridge which had also been occupied by the Chinese. India considered Thagla Ridge as the defacto northern limit of the McMahon Line. When the ridge was taken over by the Chinese, the Indian Army was ordered to launch an operation to evict them from there. The hostilities began on 9 and 10 October 1962 in the east and on 20 October in Ladakh.

Indian troops forming a man-tow for artillery over rough mountain terrain

Much has been written about the India-China border conflict. There are detailed accounts of the course of the short war and India's humiliation – the Namka Chu debacle, collapse of Tawang, Sela and demolition of all forward posts followed by the fall of Bomdi La. There are also inspiring records of the heroic deeds of Indian soldiers and their strong resistance of the Chinese onslaught at Walong, Chushul and Rezangla. All that cannot be elaborated in this short piece.

After Bomdi La fell, the Chinese were poised to enter the plains of Assam. They did not do that. Instead, China announced a unilateral ceasefire on 22 November. India was outnumbered and outgunned in the border conflict with China for want of military preparations.

The psychological impact of the defeat was severe on India. Its prestige in the comity of nations plummeted. India faced ignominy because its political leadership, diplomats and intelligence agencies failed to recognize the reality that China was an aggressive expansionist, the 'Panchsheel Treaty' notwithstanding.

India's politico-diplomatic and intelligence structures would do well to remember what Field Marshal Lord Roberts, who served in India for forty-one years, said over a century ago: "The art of war teaches us to rely not on the likelihood of the enemy not coming, but on our own readiness to receive him; not on the chance of his not attacking, but rather on the fact that we have made our position unassailable."

Reference:
India's Wars: A military history, 1947-1971 *by* Arjun Subramaniam

What Nehru said....

It is almost worse to live in a world which is always in a sense on the threshold of disaster, which because of that is full of fear, full of apprehension and as a result of fear, I regret to say, full of hatred, of dislike. Fear is about the worst companion that an individual or a nation can have.

Speech at a banquet hosted by the Prime Minister of Denmark

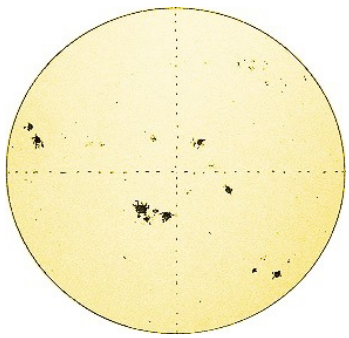
Sunspots

In last month's Newsletter (The Sun Explained) we mentioned that there are dark areas seen on the photosphere, the topmost regions of the sun. These areas are called sunspots which appear for a short period of time and are usually darker than the surrounding areas. They also occur in pairs most of the time.

The earliest recorded sighting of sunspots was by Chinese astronomers in 28 BC. Later in 1128, the English monk John of Worcester made a drawing of the sun showing the sunspots. These observations were made at sunrise/sunset or when the sun was visible through fog. As we all know, the sun is so bright that looking at it without appropriate filters can cause severe damage to the eyes.

The advent of astronomical telescopes in 1609 and the later possibility of projecting the image of the sun on a screen made it possible for astronomers to study sunspots in greater detail. They found that the sunspots are of irregular shape and varying sizes.

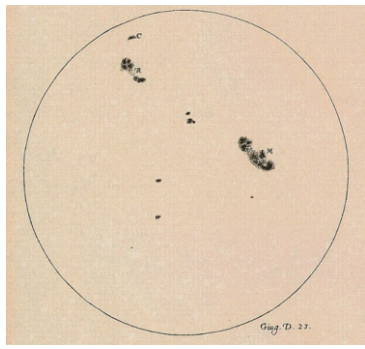
An English astronomer Thomas Harriot (1560 – 1621) and Italian astronomer Galileo Galilei (1564 -1642) were the first to sketch the sun and sunspots. But no further work was done by them.



Sunspots
Credit: Thomas Harriot

In March 1611 German astronomer Christoph Scheiner (1573-1650) published '*Appelles Letters*' or 'Three letters on Sunspots' in which he suggested that the sunspots are satellites of the sun. Some other astronomers supported the 'cloud theory' which suggested that the sunspots are, in fact, simply clouds passing over the sun.

Scheiner's letters prompted Galileo to resume his observations of the sunspots in April 1612. He carefully observed the sun and kept a systematic record of his observations. His drawings showed two distinct features of the sunspots. They were the dark central region called the umbra and the surrounding less darker region called penumbra. Galileo observed that the position of sunspots changed with time. The spots move continuously from east to west on the solar disk. This was observed by other astronomers also but Galileo went a step further.

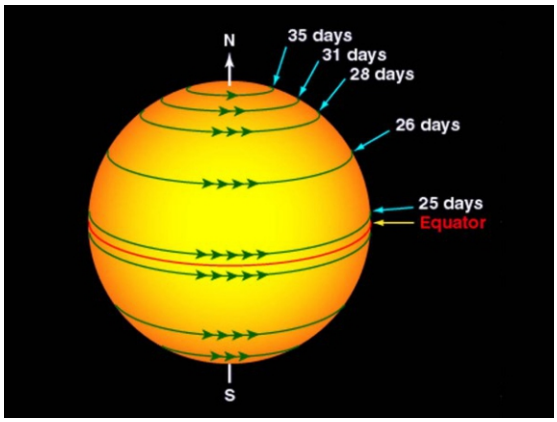


Sketch of the sun and sunspots
Credit: The Galileo Project/M. Kornmesser

By carefully measuring the daily shift in the position of sunspots, he conclusively proved that the sun rotates on its own axis. He calculated one rotation period of the Sun to be about 27 days.

Galileo also observed that the sunspots appear dark because they are in relatively cooler regions of the sun. If the region surrounding the sunspots is blocked and only the umbra or penumbra are seen, then they appear red or orange respectively.

In 1859, English amateur astronomer Richard Carrington (1826 – 1875) observed that the sunspots close to the equator move faster than those close to the polar region. Sunspots near the equator complete one rotation in 25 days whereas those near the poles take as many as 35 days to go once round the sun. This rotation is called differential rotation of the sun. Based on these observations, he demonstrated that the sun is not a rigid body but a fluid one.



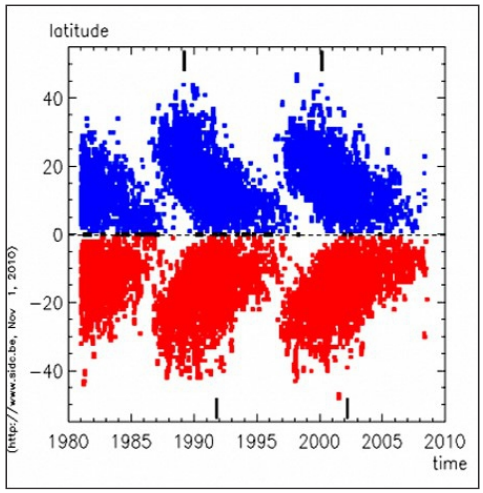
Solar rotation varies by latitude
Credit: NASA

Another amateur astronomer, Heinrich Schwabe (1789 – 1875) from Germany who is remembered for his work on sunspots observed the sun from 1826 to 1843. From this and other historical observations, he published an article titled 'Solar Observations during 1843' in which he suggested that the sunspots increased and decreased every eleven years.

The regular record-keeping of sunspot cycles started in 1755 and that first cycle was appropriately called #1.

The year in which has the maximum number of sunspots occur is called the sunspot or solar maxima. The solar maxima is followed by the solar minima after about five and half years. During the solar minima period, one may not be able to observe a single spot on the sun for many weeks.

Edward Walter Maunder (1851 – 1928) was an English astronomer who worked at the famous Royal Observatory at Greenwich in London. His job also involved photographing and measuring sunspots. He observed that after the solar minima, the first sunspots are seen close to the equator. After this, the spots are seen at much higher latitudes of the Sun. The study (shown below) of days versus the occurrence of sunspots on the latitude of the Sun is called the Maunder Butterfly diagram named after Edward and Annie Maunder.



The Maunder Butterfly Diagram
Credit: Royal Observatory of Belgium

The solar cycle #24 ended in December 2019. The 25th cycle is expected to peak in 2025.

Sun and sunspots as observed in Mumbai on 27 April 2021
Photo credit: Amateur astronomer Pooja Tolia

Folk Dances of India - Bihar

Folk dances are one of the most interesting aspects of Bihar's culture. Most of the dances reflect common life, people's sorrows, joys and problems. On important social gatherings, these dances are performed in groups to the accompaniment of musical instruments like tabla, dholak and harmonium and accompanying singers.

Some popular folk dances of Bihar are:

Bidesia Dance: Bidesia is a form of dance-drama which holds a unique place amongst folk dances from Bihar. It is believed to be created by Bhikhari Thakur, a Bhojpuri poet, playwright, folk singer and dancer widely regarded as the greatest writer in the Bhojpuri language. Bidesia deals with social issues and conflicts between the traditional and modern, the rich and the poor and socio-economic issues of the region. The musical instruments used are *dhol* (drum), *pipahi* (a shehnai-like instrument), *manjira, jhanj, mridang* etc. Group dances for men are performed to the accompaniment of songs and musical instruments. The footwork is carefully kept in tune with the *swar* and *taal* of music. In the case of group dances for women, such care is not taken. The women dance in the courtyards of their houses, forming a circle with their hands tucked into each other's waists.

Jat Jatin Dance: Jat Jatin is usually performed by folk dancers from Kosi and Mithila. It is performed by couples who depict a story of natural calamities like floods and droughts. The dancers sometimes wear a mask. The husband-wife relationship is often portrayed beautifully through this dance form. The steps are lively and vigorous with delicate bodily movements, four steps forward and an equal number back. The dance usually begins with an invocation to rain gods.

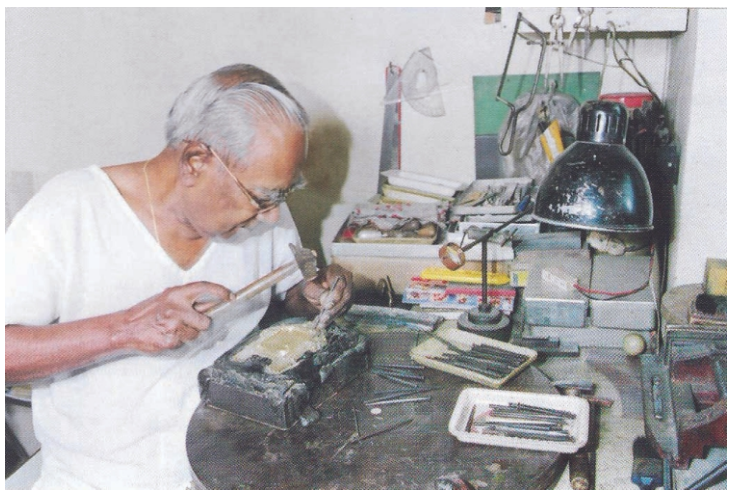
Jhumri Dance: Jhumri dance of Mithilanchal region of Bihar is similar to the Garba in Gujarat. It is performed by rural women. It signifies a good omen and is usually performed after the month of Ashvin coming in September-October. The women dance in gay abandon and invite the men to join in, who usually provide the musical accompaniment. It signifies celebration during changing seasons with dancing, singing and music.

Shri Nagesh B Sabannavar was born in a family of hereditary metalcraftsmen. He showed his talent and sincerity in drawing early in his school-days and his teacher Mr. Pawar encouraged him in all possible ways. Nagesh appeared for the Intermediate Grade examination and got highest marks in all the six papers. However, at the same time he was also attracted to India's freedom movement. His teacher skillfully deviated his mind by recommending his name for a scholarship in Sir J. J. School of Art, Bombay for students from families of craftsmen. He also used his own influence to get from the collector of Belgaum, a certificate that Nagesh was not involved in the freedom movement. The family was glad that he was getting an opportunity for higher education in art. Thus, Nagesh came to Bombay to join the Lord Reay Art Workshop of Sir J. J. School of Art. In addition to training in art school, he attended morning art classes at Nutan Kala Mandir of Dandavatimath.

Nagesh completed a course in metalwork in two years and returned to Belgaum in 1945. Gerrard, the then principal of Sir J. J. School of Art who had already admired his work since his student days invited him to teach metalwork. Later, Gerrard was also impressed by his sincerity and devotion to his work and teaching. Nagesh completed his Diploma in Painting in 1948 with good marks. After his work at the Reay Art Workshop was over for the day, he used to return to his small flat in Dadar where students inspired by his skills would come to learn techniques in metal embossing. His house, in those days, was a gurukul for art students. His favourite technique in metalwork was repoussé, a technique in which metal is shaped by hammering or pressing on the reverse side. He loved reading and had deep knowledge about the technical aspects of the other three art subjects too viz, textile design, interior decoration and ceramics and pottery. In his career as a teacher in the Lord Reay Art Workshop, he submitted many art-pieces and was honoured with prestigious awards. He executed many commissioned works of designing various trophies for different associations, institutions and organisations.

The Art Gallery had exhibited the works of Nagesh Sabannavar as a part of the Indian Masters' Retrospective in 2004. Unfortunately, the great master craftsman passed away the following year on 22 August.

Repoussé works by Sabannavar



Sabannavar at work

UNESCO World Heritage Sites in India

21. Agra Fort

Near the gardens of Taj Mahal stands the important 16th-century Mughal monument known as the Red Fort of Agra. This powerful fortress of red sandstone encompasses within its 2.5 km long enclosure walls, the imperial city of the Mughal rulers. It has a number of exquisite buildings like Moti Masjid - a white marble mosque akin to a perfect pearl, Khaas Mahal, Sheesh Mahal, Diwan-e-Khaas, Diwan-e-Aam and many more.

The construction of the Agra fort was started around 1565, when the initial structures were built by the Mughal Emperor Akbar, and subsequently taken over by his grandson Shah Jahan, who added most of the marble creations to the fort. The fort is crescent shaped, flattened on the east with a long, nearly straight wall facing the river. It is ringed by double castellated ramparts of red sandstone, punctuated at regular intervals by bastions. A 9m wide and 10m deep moat surrounds the outer wall. The imposing 22m high inner wall imparts a feeling of invincible defensive construction. The layout of the fort was determined by the course of the river, which in those days flowed alongside. The main axis is parallel to the river and the walls bridge out towards the city.

Agra Fort - Entrance

Built by Shah Jahan, the Khaas Mahal demonstrates distinctive Islamic-Persian features. These are well blended with a striking range of Hindu features such as chhatris. It is considered to be the emperor's sleeping room or 'Aramgah'. Khaas Mahal is embellished with some exquisite painting on white marble. On the left of the Khaas Mahal is the Musamman Burj, built by Shah Jahan. It is a beautiful octagonal tower with an open pavilion. This is where Shah Jahan lay on his deathbed, gazing at the Taj.

Sheesh Mahal or the Glass Palace is the finest example of decorative water engineering in the hammams. It is believed to have been the harem or the dressing room, and its walls are inlaid with tiny mirrors which are the best specimens of the glass-mosaic decoration in India. To the right of Sheesh Mahal is Diwan-e-Khaas, the hall of Private Audience. The marble pillars are inlaid with semi-precious stones in delightful floral patterns.

Sheesh Mahal

Diwan-e-Aam

The Diwan-e-Aam or Hall of Audience is a room where emperor Shah Jahan and his successors received members of the general public and heard their grievances. The proportions of the columns of this hall and the engraved arches show high aesthetics and fine craftsmanship. With an impressive façade of nine engraved arch openings, the hall was ornamented with gilded and white shell lime plaster work. Its ceiling and columns were painted with gold.

UNESCO declared the Agra Fort as a world heritage site in 1983.

Further reading at Nehru Centre Library:

- Agra Fort *by* Muhammad A. Husain; Department of Archaeology, New Delhi, 1952.
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