

COVER  
STORY

# *Nationalism vs. Patriotism*

## EDUCATING GENERATION NEXT

**At a time when *ahimsa* has given way to *himsa* and hyper-nationalism dominates the national discourse, can the idea of India — a nation united by diverse faiths, languages and beliefs — survive? In this Independence Day special cover story, we examine ways and means to educate and sensitise children and youth to the libertarian and secular ideals on which India was founded by freedom fighters led by Mahatma Gandhi**

**RADHIKA MEGANATHAN**

*“Nationalism is a great menace. It is the particular thing which for years has been at the bottom of India’s troubles”* — Nobel laureate **Rabindranath Tagore** in an essay *Nationalism in India* (1917)

**N**obel laureate Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), poet, playwright and philosopher, wrote these lines a century ago. Yet, his words are prescient today in an India where *gau rakshaks* (cow vigilantes) lynch beef-eaters and cattle traders of the minority community in the cause of nationalism and cultural protectionism. With the BJP government at the Centre failing to come out strongly against the wave of mob lynchings and rabble-rousing, nationalism has transformed into majoritarianism with any dissenting voice labeled anti-national. On the eve of India’s 70th Independence Day celebrations this month, it’s important to examine the impact of hyper-nationalism that breeds intolerance, anger and violence, on generation next. Independence Day also offers an opportunity to educate and sensitise children and youth to the libertarian and secular ideals on which India was founded by freedom

fighters led by Mahatma Gandhi.

*Ahimsa* (non-violence) rather than intimidation or violence was the foundation on which India’s freedom from oppressive British rule was won. Under the inspired leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, people of widely diverse religions, languages and cultural traditions united to win India’s independence from foreign rule and later to heal and build a new nation recovering from the pain of Partition.

“Unfortunately in latter day India, nationalism has become an ugly word, smacking of xenophobia and intolerance of religions and other minorities. Patriotism, on the other hand, requires pride in your country and its best values — in India’s case, diversity, acceptance and the right to dissent. But today, the line between nationalism and patriotism is blurring, with dangerous consequences for all Indians. Diversity and secularism go hand-in-hand, and a true love for the country will never support intolerance in the name of culture. Patriotism means respecting values like tolerance, secularism and cooperation endowed upon us by the founding fathers of the Constitution. Our



Maya Menon

children need to be educated about the secular and liberal ideals on which this nation was founded,” says **Maya Menon**, founder-director of The Teacher Foundation, Bengaluru.

As the national discourse becomes increasingly dominated by spokespersons of majoritarianism masquerading as nationalism, educationists

believe the young generation — absorbed in computers, mobiles, and social media — needs to be exposed and educated about the high moral and ethical values and ideals on which independent India was founded, which is a sharp contrast to divisive rhetoric of the RSS and *sangh parivar*.

*ParentsWorld* spoke to people who witnessed Independence Day 70 years ago including Dr. Sita Bimbrahw, who taught greats including Jawaharlal Nehru, Morarji Desai and A.B. Vajpayee *charkha* spinning, as well as others who run peace and heritage education classes for children and youth. Their insights on how to reignite the spirit of patriotism and reassert values of tolerance, respect for diversity and love of nation-building in generation next, are presented herewith.

#### **T.V. GOPALAKRISHNAN: Move from individual to common goals**

Padma Bhushan awardee and renowned vocalist, violin and *mridangam* artist, Chennai-based T.V. Gopalakrishnan was a teenager in the mid-1940s. He finds the difference between now and then stark.

“Those days, we smiled a lot at each other. Nowadays, nobody smiles. Why? We are so immersed in living a “me”-centric life. Even in schools, competition is encouraged, never camaraderie or community effort. Value education classes have been junked. If we don’t bother to take interest in being involved in lives besides our own, we won’t be interested in the affairs of the nation either,” he says.

According to Gopalakrishnan, such individualistic worldview, which is encouraged by parents and schools, is creating and fermenting divisions within society. “During the freedom movement, we were all united irrespective of our different religions and socio-economic backgrounds in nation-building. That is how we won independence from foreign rule. But today, there are no common, only individual goals. This needs to change if we are to take this nation forward,” he says.



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“Nationalism is not to be confused with patriotism. By patriotism I mean devotion to a particular place and a particular way of life, which one believes to be the best in the world but has no wish to force on other people. Patriotism is of its nature defensive, both militarily and culturally. Nationalism, on the other hand, is inseparable from the desire for power. The abiding purpose of every nationalist is to secure more power and more prestige, not for himself but for the nation or other unit in which he has chosen to sink his own individuality.” — **George Orwell** (1903-1950) in an essay *Notes on Nationalism*

“The patriot says, ‘I love my country,’ works for its good, and defends it if necessary — against enemies within and without. He strives and prays not primarily that God will

bless his country, but that his country will bless God. The nationalist, meanwhile, says, ‘My country is better than yours.’ ‘My country is the greatest there has ever been.’ ‘The greatest nation on God’s green earth.’ ‘They hate my country because it is so good.’” — **John Dwyer**, US-based historian

“(Nationalism) is the particular thing which for years has been at the bottom of India’s troubles. It is my conviction that my countrymen will truly gain their India by fighting against the education which teaches them that a country is greater than the ideals of humanity.” — **Rabindranath Tagore** (1861-1941), Nobel laureate, poet and philosopher

“The difference between patriotism and nationalism is that the patriot is proud of his country for what it does, and the nationalist is proud of his country no matter what it does. The first attitude creates a feeling of responsibility while the second a feeling of blind arrogance that leads to war.”

**Sydney J. Harris** (1917-1986), American journalist



**DR. V.R. DEVIKA: Gandhi for our times**

While 21st century India grapples with issues of identity and intolerance, Dr. V.R. Devika, Chennai-based founder and managing trustee of the Aseema Trust, is doing her best to keep the legacy and ideals of Mahatma Gandhi alive. She believes “it is more essential than ever for

children to truly understand his life and ideals in these troubled times; we need to reclaim him for the present generation”.

To this end, the Aseema Trust conducts regular workshops on peace education for school students and teachers. According to Devika, true patriots must acknowledge and accept India’s diversity and plural society. “I tell children in my workshops to look around them. Do they see just one type of plant or animal? No, the world is made up of innumerable varieties and types of flora and fauna. Nature has made this happen because diversity is the key to survival. Likewise accepting and respecting human diversity is critical to national and world peace. Secularism and tolerance are the bedrock of India’s democracy. Reckless denial or dilution of the equal rights of minorities will lead to disunity and civil unrest,” she warns.



**DR. SITA BIMBRAHW: A charkha for change**

Meanwhile in New Delhi, 81-year-old Dr. Sita Bimbrahw, a retired Hindi professor of Delhi University (DU), spins on her *charkha* every Wednesday, from 3-5 p.m., at DU’s Gandhi Bhavan, where she teaches children and adults how to use the age-old traditional spinning wheel to make yarn. Among her first students, recalls Dr. Bimbrahw, were former prime ministers Jawaharlal Nehru, Morarji Desai, V.P. Singh, and Atal Behari Vajpayee. “Now, my students include CEOs and army officers. Parents also come with their children, and I am happy to see them bonding over charkha spinning,” she says.

For Bimbrahw, the charkha is a symbol of *swadeshi* or self-sufficiency, synonymous with the dignity of labour, equality, and unity. “Today’s children are disconnected from their past. They are cocooned and seem to be living

## HERITAGE AND CULTURAL EDUCATION PROVIDERS

To practice patriotism instead of shallow nationalism and jingoism, it's important to learn about India's ancient and syncretic culture. Given below are some NGOs which provide children insights and education about India's ancient and diverse culture.

● **Young INTACH** is a subsidiary of the Delhi-based Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH). It offers activity sheets, quizzes, photographs, lesson plans and other resources on its website to make heritage education interesting for children. [www.youngintach.org](http://www.youngintach.org)

● **Flow India, Delhi** organises educational/heritage field trips to museums and historical monuments for school children. Among their recent programmes were Paradise on Earth: Humayun's Tomb (middle school, three days) and Lungs of a City: The Delhi Ridge (senior school, three days). For further details, visit [www.flowindia.com](http://www.flowindia.com)

● **Sanskriti Foundation, Delhi** focuses on preservation and promotion of India's artistic and cultural heritage and traditional crafts through its Museum of Everyday Arts of India, Museum of Indian Terracotta and Museum of Indian Textiles. The foundation periodically organises children's workshops under its Yatra

programme. [www.sanskritifoundation.org](http://www.sanskritifoundation.org)

● **Heritage India** is a history, culture and heritage magazine published from Pune as a quarterly and available nationally. It also conducts events, workshops and heritage walks for all ages countrywide and their most recent workshop in Pune was titled 'Back to Roots Sketching Workshop for Kids'. [www.heritage-india.com](http://www.heritage-india.com)

● **The FUN Science Club, Mumbai** organises discussions on "interesting facts and topics" for children. Its most recent workshops included Indian political system, houses of Parliament, elections, political parties in India. Details at [www.facebook.com/FunScienceClub/](https://www.facebook.com/FunScienceClub/)

● **The Heritage Lab** is an online portal listing heritage-related events and workshops. Check out [www.theheritagelab.in](http://www.theheritagelab.in)

● **Kolam, Chennai** is a new initiative of the Sharma Centre for Heritage in collaboration with the Children's Garden School Society, and has evolved from the Sharma Children's Museum. With indoor and outdoor displays, an ecological park, an auditorium and children's library, Kolam is currently under construction and scheduled to open soon. [www.kolammuseum.com](http://www.kolammuseum.com)

in pursuit of an ideal, trouble-free and sugar-filled future. It is important for parents to ensure their children don't lose touch with their history and culture. Exposing them to Gandhiji's life and ideals will help them understand that our nation is built on diversity and mutual cooperation and respect. This means acknowledging the equal rights of all citizens," says Dr. Bimbrahw.

### JAYALAKSHMI VAIDYANATHAN: Advantages of being Indian

Even as sensitisation to the Gandhian values of tolerance and compassion are being propagated by the older generation, a new breed of idealistic entrepreneurs such as Jayalakshmi Vaidyanathan, founder of Satori Life Skills, a Bengaluru-based company which conducts life skills programmes for school/college students, is incorporating nation-building values into her students. "No country is perfect, and India is far from an ideal country. But when times were hard, say for instance in the US, people didn't migrate to other countries. They stayed put and fixed their problems. Likewise in India, children and young people who have received subsidised education need to be taught that it's their responsibility to fix our problems. I recently participated in a British Council programme where we got Indian children to connect with children from several other

countries. This activity helped them appreciate the life and freedoms we have in India. Learning to appreciate what our country offers followed by a desire to improve things is the first step towards inculcating patriotism in children," she says.

The Constitution of India, according to which the nation is governed, is a brilliant charter which was debated for almost three years before it was promulgated on January 26, 1950. Teachers and parents need to discuss its wide-ranging provisions and particularly the fundamental rights — the freedoms of speech, peaceful assembly, religion, to form associations and unions, and freedom to move freely within India and reside and settle in any part of the country and to practice any profession, occupation, trade or business.

These fundamental rights (Article 19) are conferred on all citizens regardless of their gender, race, religion, caste etc and are buttressed by the right to equality (Article 14) which prohibits the state from discriminating between citizens on the basis of gender, caste, race, religion etc. Over the past 70 years, a whole body of case law has been built up in which high courts and the Supreme Court have reasserted the fundamental rights of all citizens. True patriots are citizens who respect Articles 19 and 14 of the Constitution. That's the litmus test of patriotism.

# EARLY CHILDHOOD



DR. CHAITALI LADDAD

## Iron Deficiency ANAEMIA

**IDA is most common in children aged one-three years and could adversely affect their cognitive, language and motor development**

**I**s your infant pale and always fatigued? Then, it's likely she is suffering from Iron Deficiency Anaemia (IDA), which can seriously impair a child's growth and development.

### WHAT IS IDA?

A child/adult is anaemic when the body has a decreased level of haemoglobin in the red blood cells (RBCs). Haemoglobin is the protein in RBCs that carries oxygen to body tissues.

IDA is the most common type of anaemia, and occurs when the body doesn't have enough of iron minerals. The body needs iron to make haemoglobin. When there isn't enough iron in the blood stream, the body can't get the amount of oxygen it needs. Moreover, this micronutrient plays an important role in muscle function, energy supply, and brain development.

According to the US-based Mayo Clinic, "babies are born with iron stored in their bodies, but a steady amount of additional iron is needed to fuel a child's rapid growth and development." IDA can cause behavioural and neurodevelopment disorders, some of which may not be reversible.

IDA is most common in children aged one-three years and is often the result of a child's diet not being sufficiently

replenished with iron-rich foods. Toddlers, being fussy eaters, are more susceptible to developing iron insufficiency. Also IDA is mostly found in breastfed babies, because the iron content is less in breast milk. Hence, it's recommended that lactating mothers take iron supplements. When the baby begins to eat semi-solids, iron-rich foods can be introduced.

It is estimated that 70 percent of children in India below 5 years are iron deficient i.e, a whopping 89 million children. Amongst adolescent girls, it's around 40 percent.

### IDA AND RECURRENT INFECTIONS

Iron deficiency makes children vulnerable to recurrent infections, constant fatigue and impairment of brain functions. Recurring infections, particularly throat-related contagions are a result of IDA.

Further, as the Mayo Clinic points out: it leads to "unusual cravings for non-nutritive substances, such as ice, dirt, paint or starch".

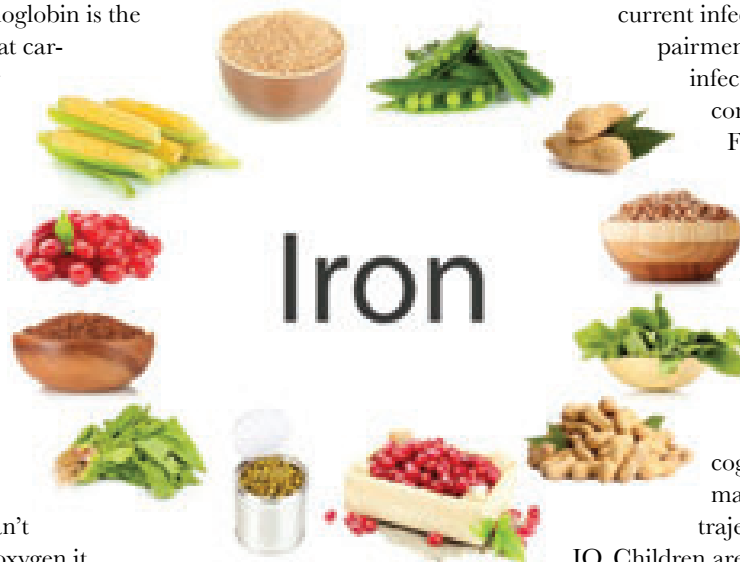
### IDA AFFECTS COGNITIVE AND BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

Studies have shown that IDA in infants affects cognitive, language and motor domains, altering the development trajectory and resulting in lower

**IQ.** Children are likely to have poor concentration and memory retention skills, and are unable to process information. IDA also causes fatigue and lethargy and impacts the immune system and increases chances of infections and inflammatory diseases.

### WHO ARE AT RISK?

- ★ Infants who are primarily milk drinkers
- ★ Babies suffering from ailments such as contagions and food allergies, can easily contract IDA
- ★ Iron deficiency is also very common in teenage girls who have begun to menstruate



- ★ Children suffering worm infestations — prevalence is as high as 28-50 percent in toddlers and school-going children
- ★ There is a possibility of white worms entering a child's body through bare feet. This is known to cause loss of intestinal blood and IDA.

#### WHERE ARE PARENTS GOING WRONG?

- ★ Infants below one year should not be given cow's or goat's milk. This is because animal milk won't assimilate into the child's body, resulting in intestinal bleeding and iron loss. Partial breastfeeding is far more nutritive for infants than cow's milk
- ★ Babies should be given foods rich in iron after six months of age
- ★ Too much milk in a child's diet prevents administration of a balanced diet. Milk is a poor source of iron and when consumed as the major energy source, it constrains the absorption of iron in the intestines.

#### IDA DIAGNOSIS

IDA can be diagnosed through clinical evaluation — blood tests such as Hbconcentration, RBC indices and a complete blood count (CBC). Once a child is diagnosed with IDA, the paediatrician is likely to suggest advanced tests such as reticulocyte concentration and total iron-binding capacity

to decide course of treatment.

#### PREVENTING IDA

- ★ For infants in the age group of 0-6 months, it's advisable that nursing mothers continue taking iron supplements
- ★ For premature babies, your paediatrician may prescribe an iron supplement, as such babies are often deficient in iron
- ★ Children between six months-one year should be given semi-solids rich in iron such as leafy vegetables in pureed form, baby cereal and porridge. Older children can have iron-rich fish, chicken, beans, legumes, dry fruits and egg yolk
- ★ If your child is a fussy eater, try adding green, leafy vegetables like spinach, soup, fortified cereals, pulses, dry fruits, mince cutlets, eggs, steamed fish and red meat to her diet
- ★ Vitamin C helps in absorption of dietary iron. Infuse your child's diet with foods rich in Vitamin C like dark green vegetables, citrus fruits (orange, sweet lime), strawberries, tomatoes and *amla*
- ★ Cook in cast iron pans as it increases the iron content of many foods.

(Dr. Chaitali Laddad is founder and director of The Paediatric Network, Mumbai)



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