

---

*AustralAsian Centre for Human Rights and Health Inc*

[www.achrh.org](http://www.achrh.org)

---



# ACHRH

Empowering Communities

August 2021  
Newsletter



*I thank the University of New South Wales for the honour of conferring the title of Adjunct Professor. ACHRH is central to the achievement. I sincerely thank the entire family of ACHRH, together we have achieved remarkable goals. Next year we will celebrate 10-year anniversary.*

**In this issue I wish to acknowledge the role of Indian women in bringing about India's independence. Please read the article below and be inspired by brave women.**

Dr Manjula O'Connor, Adjunct Professor

Executive Director ACHRH



## Happy 75<sup>th</sup> Independence day anniversary to India !! and all persons of Indian heritage

The role of Indian feminists in achieving Independence is hardly ever spoken about. Yet, women of India played a crucial role in bringing down the British Empire.

The Rajput warrior queen the Rani of Jhansi led her army against the British in the 1850s. Her husband, Maharajah Gangadhar Rao Newalkar of Jhansi, had died and there was no male heir. The British or the East India Company, which had made a self-serving rule called the Doctrine of Lapse that gave them the power to take over any kingdom in India if it did not have a male heir, seized the state jewels of Jhansi, and granted her an annual pension of Rs. 60,000 and asked her to leave the fort forever. The Rani was trained in warfare by her widowed father who had brought her up in unconventional ways. She is said to have been outspoken and confident. A sword-fighter. She assembled an army of rebels, including women, and fought the British Army valiantly for two weeks, with her four-year-old adopted son Damodar Rao tied to her back. She died on 17 June 1857. “The dauntless bravery of the Rani was a subject of great conversation, in the soldiers’ camp , reminisced a British army surgeon”

From the beginning of the 1900s, women of India began organising themselves into an anti-British force to be reckoned with. This could not have happened had they been an entirely enslaved or oppressed lot in pre-British India. Or perhaps they drew on their cultural history. After all, India is the land of powerful goddesses - Laxmi, the goddess of wealth, Sarasvati, the goddess of education, Durga, the goddess of power, and Parvati, the goddess who stood next to her powerful husband Lord

Shiva and was ardhangini अर्धांगिनी meaning 'half his body' - these women were part of the psyche of Indian women since time immemorial.

In 1943, in Singapore, the nationalist Subhas Chandra Bose created the Rani Jhansi Regiment (RJR), an all-women corps of soldiers, approximately 5000 in number, drawn from the Indian diaspora in Burma, Malaya and Singapore, where racism and patriarchal and imperial attitudes were rife. The women were seen to be lower in social status than men, and many who joined from the rubber estates in Malaya 'lived and worked under conditions that approached slavery. Sexual abuse by the mainly white estate managers was a common occurrence. The Rani of Jhansi Regiment offered an environment where the young women found themselves respected and free of the social stigma of "coolie" status. Now with their heads held high, they experienced a level of egalitarianism in the company of their Rani comrades that they had not known before.'

The women recognised that their "coolie" status was patriarchy re-enforced by colonialism that oppressed them and joined the men to oust the British Empire, fighting under the Indian National Army in the Second World War and allied with Japan.

Both Sarojini Naidu, poet and activist, and Kamla Nehru, freedom fighter and wife of the future Prime Minister, along with many other women, participated in Gandhi's Satyagraha. Fighting with peace, they went to jail and fasted like their male counterparts. As Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru wrote: *'Most of us menfolk were in prison. And then a remarkable thing happened. Our women came to the front and took charge of the struggle. Women had always been there of course but now there was an avalanche of them, which took not only the British government but their own menfolk by surprise.'*

Indian women played a decisive role in the 1947 downfall of the British Raj. Their actions smashed the stereotypes of Indian women - they showed themselves to be complex and resilient not simply the subjugated creatures the British had supposed.

The entry of women into politics and the Indian National Congress was an act of diplomacy and political savvy. They cast their centuries-old subordination by men as arising out of India's history of wars, invasions and imperialism. Thus they defused male opposition and won support for their cause by linking freedom for women with freedom for India. The women also recognised that the patriarchal family structure was oppression itself and made demands to improve family life for women through 'the Hindu Code'.<sup>34</sup> The Code advocated monogamy, inter-caste and inter-religion marriage, divorce, widow remarriage and equal inheritance. The Hindu Code laid a framework for gender equality in India. It would usher in the modern era.

Many women in this time of movement against the British Raj went on to become leaders in free India and globally, inspiring younger generations of Indian women. Sarojini Naidu and Kamaladevi Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit to name but a couple.

The Women of India continued the feminist movement. ACHRH is proud to be connected to some of the remarkable women - Dr Ranajana Kumari, Dr Shalu Nigam, Professor Rajni Palriwala and Professor Indu Agnihotra to name a few. In 1970s their activism brought attention to the new brides who were being burnt by bursting stoves on a regular basis. It was no accident. The women were being murdered by in-laws and the husband for not bringing sufficient dowry, despite 1961 laws banning dowry taking and giving. More powerful laws gave prominence to dowry murders and deaths. In 2005 domestic violence laws were introduced. A lot of work still needs to be done. More than 7000 women were killed as a result of “insufficient dowry” according to Indian National Crime Recording Bureau Report 2016. We see similar pattern imported to Australia. The Indian community of Australia is working with ACHRH, and supporting projects around prevention of family violence, and dowry abuse. That is priceless. It keeps us working harder every day.

Recently ACHRH was granted funds to perform our second community theater. We have chosen to call it **SNEH THEATRE**. Sneh is affection in Sanskrit, and the theatre’s goal is to inspire everyone to be affectionate within the family. That prevents violence but also mental health. Tread below more about it. **JOIN IN AND PARTICIPATE**



*Above: Red Fort, Delhi, India. The seat of many royal kingdoms and the place where Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru declared independence in 1947. Below: Parade to mark 15 August*



PRIME MINISTER

## MESSAGE FROM THE PRIME MINISTER

### INDIA INDEPENDENCE DAY 2021

I send my warmest greetings to the people of India, and their friends and family in Australia, on the occasion of the 74<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Indian independence.

In 1947, Jawaharlal Nehru described India's independence as the continuation of an '*unending quest*' — for the peace and prosperity of the people of India.

The decades since have born countless achievements. India's growth and development has helped to realise the economic aspirations of millions of its citizens. Today, India is a proud democracy.

Australians have been heartbroken to see the severe impact of COVID-19 in India. The intense pain of separation has been felt by Australians of Indian descent.

We look forward with hope and confidence to our people coming together once more. When that day arrives, Australians will extend welcome and *maitri* as more of our Indian friends, family, students and residents return to our shore.

Our *maitri* endures because we have so much in common. As proud democracies, we are bound by a commitment to respect, responsibility and the rule of law. We believe that the dignity of our people lies at the heart of who we are.

Ours is an Indo-Pacific partnership, committed to openness, freedom and prosperity. We aspire to advancing the common good of our region.

I pay tribute to India's efforts in providing critical COVID-19 vaccinations across the Indo-Pacific — a project Australia has joined with a shared sense of urgency and responsibility.

This year, Independence Day celebrations will be subdued as we continue to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

We look forward to the 2022 celebrations — India's 75<sup>th</sup> year of independence — which I hope will be a time when we can joyfully join one another in celebration.

On this anniversary we are grateful for our Indian friends and extend our best wishes for a safe, optimistic and hopeful Independence Day.



The Hon Scott Morrison MP  
Prime Minister of Australia

August 2021

---

## COVID, FAMILY LIFE AND MENTAL HEALTH

No country in the world has been spared by COVID 19. Covid the invisible enemy has taken millions from us-how many more will be lost to us we worry and wonder. I lost my brother-in-law Commodore Arun Sachdev and three classmates from my medical school in Delhi. There is no family who has not been touched by COVID related death. In Melbourne I have seen dozens of patents with anxiety, panic attacks and depressions. They have lost family, or are fearful that they will lose their parents, aunts, uncles, friends.

Think of the doctors and nurses at the front line of this war. They are dealing with hundreds each day suffering from mental health trauma as they work with lack of supplies, oxygen, beds, equipment, medicines. Many have lost their own lives family and friends to covid

The news of death changes you forever. The news arrives, and time stops.

Whatever we believe is to come after death, the loss of so many of the people that we value is painful, and since our own death gives grief to others it is natural that we feel sad on their behalf.

The relinquishment of life is easier when there is preparatory time, allowing for anticipatory grief, for example through illness, such as cancer. The ravages of cancer damages our appetite for living,

And for loved ones the grief passes roughly through 5 stages in “normal” circumstances of loss -denial or shock, anger, bargaining with god, sadness, and acceptance.

But this is not an ordinary time. COVID 19 has hit the world like a gigantic tsunami a huge wave of gigantic proportions that is swallowing up our loved ones unexpectedly. It is threatening, frightening and our brain is not coping with the threat.

It threatens to shatter our trust and faith in life.

Now we are left feeling powerless and desperate, in shock, and acute sadness, we dissociate from the loss and yet we shed copious tears at another time

We prefer to believe that our loved ones are safe from harm. We assume that accidents and illnesses will bypass them. So, when tragedy strikes suddenly, we go into acute grief

A sudden death shakes you to the core. You can't turn away from it; you can't reason with it. You know that life will never be the same.

We will not let ourselves forget how many doctors have died, after caring and deeply concerned over god only knows how many deathbeds.

How many warriors, philosophers, engineers, mothers, fathers, daughters, sons have gone right in front of our eyes too soon.

The significant part in among all of that is that grief brings isolation

We are in the grips of grief's loneliness.

COVID has brought us isolation and loneliness and that affects mental health. Many families have suffered abuse and domestic violence.

### **What to do to protect your mental health and your family.**

*Turn your feelings of powerlessness into positive action*

Allow yourself to feel the emotions-anxiety, fear, panic, sadness. Deep breathe 5-7 times. It will pass

It is essential to maintain routine –schoolwork, office work, all in a routine from morning till night. It makes your brain feel safe and less anxious.

The bedtime routine is really important for young children - those 12 years old and younger. Read a story, avoid using mobile phone and other screens at bedtime.

Exercise every day. It releases feel good chemicals.

Eat good food. Avoid alcohol.

If you feel trapped at home go out for a walk, or do something creative like write, or paint or build something. Avoid taking frustration out on a family member.

Stay Connected. ACHRH partnered with a number of key leaders to hold a vigil to remember the doctors and nurses of India

Recognize the pleasure and strength you get by having family and friends. Hug your family members and feel the joy of their touch.

ACHRH acted in this torrid time. We could not go to India, but we could honour their efforts. On 15 May 2021 ACHRH partnered with several leaders to remember the fallen people and sacrifices of doctors and nurses of India.



Doctors gathered in Melbourne to pay Respect by holding a vigil at Federation Square on 15 May 2021



**INDIA SOLIDARITY VIGIL**

Melbourne-based medicos and ‘Vigil Aunties’ Dr Ranjana Srivastava, Dr Nisha Khat, Dr Bindiya Sethi and Dr Manjula O’Connor organised a solidarity vigil for India’s medical personnel at Federation Square, who despite limited resources and terrifying odds, continue to fight at the frontlines of the pandemic.



Bubbles were sent off to heavens -each bubble remembering a life



## Sneh Theatre Project 2021-2024

We are excited to announce that ACHRH has been successful in winning a Victorian Government grant. Over the next three years we will use theatre as means of identifying community leaders who would like to represent stories of successfully helping the community in seeking help very early for family issues and related mental health issues



ACHRH is building on its previous work with the community using theatre *NATAK VIHAR* (see [www.achrh.org](http://www.achrh.org))

In this community participatory theatre (CPT) community volunteer actors will act out scenarios to concretize the images of what are nebulous and abstract concepts. Theatre will explore our community's understanding of what does help seeking involve, where to go for help, how to navigate the system, why early help seeking is better than delaying it. Théâtre will explore how we can maximize family relations, how family can impact mental health and enhance resilience.

Theatre will also help to recognize laws around family violence and dowry abuse. The aim will be to enhance community understanding of family violence and culturally acceptable ideas that promote and disseminate positive solutions to early intervention and prevention of family violence.

Additionally, Sneh is community participatory theatre, meaning the audiences are not mere passive observers of skits being played on the Stage. They actively participate by commenting via a mediator, critically analysing the presentation and the underlying driving forces of various situations in a culturally safe and positive manner. Active learning accelerates learning.

Theatre is fun, it is an innovative approach, and it helps to move hearts and minds of participants.

Theatre is fantasy, it is imagination, yet it is real!

Steps of the theater are

- Focus groups -2021
- Theater workshop -train to become an actor -early 2022
- 8 Theater performances for the South Asian community across Greater Melbourne 2022-2024

**Recruitment will begin around November 2021. If you are interested to join this exciting fun innovative project , please write to [org.achrh@gmail.com](mailto:org.achrh@gmail.com)**



# Mental Health, Family Violence &

# the 'other pandemic'

## INTERACTIVE WEBINAR

- case study  
discussions

-expert  
presentations

Sunday August 29,  
2021

4-6pm

RSVP FOR ZOOM LINK:

[info@saclg.org.au](mailto:info@saclg.org.au)



Dr Manjula O'Connor  
0419 354 482

Dr Raju Adhikari  
0412 853 603



Australian Government  
Department of Social Services



**SACLG**

South Asian Community  
Link Group - Australasia

*linking the communities together*



**AustralAsian Centre**

FOR HUMAN RIGHTS & HEALTH

# Someday Sun would change the Earth for Moon's sake

By: Shweta Mishra "shawryaa"

Someday there will be a new sun in the dawns

That will spread the light of equality

and the light of sense

Such that anyone who would have a ray

of the largest sphere

fall on the forehead

Shall never look down upon

Shall never be contemptuous about

Someday this sun with each morning escalation

and with a greater passion

Will turn a greater number of us

into better human beings

When there will be inseparable hearts

in families

And impartial survivals

in societies

Someday there won't be fences

On the lands of this planet

No lines on the babbling water tributaries

When sun would burn all differences

And turn all boundaries to ash

That day all violence

Would come to a halt

And Moon shall come down for a ride to earth

# Travel restriction exemption for travellers to and from Australia

## *Change to outward travel restriction exemptions*

On 1 August 2021, The Minister for Health and Aged Care amended the Biosecurity Determination 2020. From 11 August 2021, Australian citizens and permanent residents ordinarily resident in a country outside Australia will not be automatically exempt from Australia's outward travel restrictions. From this date, they must apply for a travel exemption through the Travel Exemption Portal. See the Home Affairs website for the types of supporting evidence that will be considered.

## **Travel to India and Papua New Guinea (PNG)**

Based on current health advice, travel restrictions for travel to India and PNG will return to global settings. Individuals seeking an exemption to travel from Australia to India or PNG can apply for a travel exemption through the travel exemptions portal.

## **Donations to ACHRH are now tax deductible!**

Thank you for considering a gift to ACHRH, which will support our work to create happy and healthier communities; did you know that donations to ACHRH over \$2 can now be claimed as a tax deduction?

Since 2012, ACHRH has delivered a range of programs which tackle issues affecting migrant communities in Australia. If you would like to be a part of making tangible impacts for at risk communities, please contact Kate Grimme on 0400 032 821 or email [info@achrh.org](mailto:info@achrh.org) We will be pleased to provide you with more information on how you can make a financial contribution and to share details on the programs and projects we run.



**Consulate General of India  
Melbourne**

**Global Pravasi Rishta Portal**

1. The Government of India has launched several initiatives till date to ensure efficient, timely, reliable and accessible delivery of public services to the members of Indian diaspora.
2. To further facilitate effective communication between the High Commissions/Embassies/Consulates and the members of Indian diaspora, the Ministry of External Affairs recently launched **Global Pravasi Rishta Portal (Rishta Portal)**.
3. The portal would enable the diaspora to reach consular office/services in a timely manner. Through the portal, registered members of the Indian diaspora would receive emergency alerts, advisories, updates on activities of the Consulate and information on the existing and new government schemes on a real time basis.
4. Members of the Indian diaspora residing in Victoria and Tasmania are invited to register on the portal at <https://pravasirishta.gov.in>

30 June 2021

\*\*\*\*



## WHERE TO GO FOR HELP

- **POLICE IN EMERGENCY -- 000**
- **YOUR GP -- they will refer you to the right place.**
- **NATIONAL DOMESTIC AND FAMILY VIOLENCE COUNSELLING SERVICE  
1800 RESPECT**
- **INTOUCH MULTICULTURAL CENTER AGAINST FAMILY VIOLENCE –  
1800 755 988**
- **Safe Steps Family Violence Response Centre, phone  
24 Hour statewide line 1800 015 188**
- **MEN'S 24-HOUR REFERRAL SERVICE  
1800 065 973 (FREE CALL VICTORIA ONLY)**
- **WOMEN'S INFORMATION & REFERRAL AGENCY (WIRE)  
03 9348 9416  
inforequests@wire.org.au**

### WHY GET HELP?

- ❖ Domestic Violence damages our culture
- ❖ Domestic violence breaks our homes
- ❖ Domestic Violence causes:
  - Anxiety,
  - Depression,
  - Suicide,
  - Homicide in women, men and children

### WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- ❖ Support those who may be victims
- ❖ Encourage victims to seek help and become survivors
- ❖ Encourage perpetrators to seek help
- ❖ **DO NOT BE SILENT ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

*Say No to Family Domestic  
Violence*