

+ FLASHBACK | SILVER JUBILEE | SPOOF

gobar times



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A DOWN TO EARTH SUPPLEMENT FOR THE YOUNG AND CURIOUS

*From green news and true,
From old times and new,
May good luck go with you,
And happiness too...*

HAPPY YEARS



A Blast from the Past

Dusting off our archives to showcase some of the best stuff we'd published so far.



Initially published in Down to Earth (DTE) in 1997 and republished as 'Fundung' in *Gobar Times* 1-31 December 2014

Game of The Games

The 2010 Commonwealth Games is being glorified as a grand coup d'état for India, especially for Delhi. The event has set numerous developmental projects on fire. The most ambitious of these projects is the 118-acre Games Village for the sportspersons visiting Delhi during the games. But, the story doesn't end here...

'Open Forum' published in *Gobar Times* 1-31 August 2006



Climate change in our backyard

A two degree rise in global temperature is predicted to cause many damages to the planet. We all know that. But did you know that the South Asian nations have some special challenges to tackle? Shifting rainfall patterns are likely to leave some parts too wet and others too dry. The Himalayan glaciers would melt and increase flooding. The floods and droughts would spread diseases and reduce agricultural output. And this is really just the tip of the iceberg. Scary scenario, right?...

'Centre Spread' published in *Gobar Times* 1-31 December 2013



Lights, camera, action!

A passionate movie buff and avid videographer narrates his journey through the reels on the importance of films in spreading environmental awareness.

'Cover Story' published in *Gobar Times* 1-30 April 2022



Midnight's children

It's been 68 years since that stroke of the midnight hour when India made a tryst with destiny - as Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru said - 'and woke up to freedom'. Thousands perished and suffered on the road to that freedom, and a very large proportion of those were the young. Students, children and youths from schools, colleges and neighbourhoods. What did they do? And how do today's children and youth identify with some of the 'environment-development' icons of the independence movement - things like khadi and salt? GT digs through old and new times and tomes for this Independence Day special...

'Cover Story' published in *Gobar Times* 1-31 August 2015



Since Gobar is the Culture of India!

Sharing fond memories from 25 years back—of ice creams, rookies, cow dung, and some cool environment stuff for kids.



Rustam Vania

In the summer of 1992, late at night in the basement of the then rented office space of the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), the editorial team of the *Down To Earth* (DTE) magazine had a very long hot and tiring day putting together their very first issue. Anil Agarwal, the founder editor, was busy scurrying around excitedly as he wanted to take the freshly printed copies with him to the famous Rio Earth Summit which was going to be held in June that year.

Barely a week into the first job of my life, the anxious 24-year-old in me was desperately coping with the anxiety of having been thrown into the deep-end of journalism. Anil poked his head into our editorial-design room and asked me rather nonchalantly, “Ice cream *khaaney chalogey* (Wanna come have an ice cream)?” Did this rookie have a choice? Off we went into the streets of East of Kailash in New Delhi looking for an ice cream vendor, driving in his dinky red and rusty old Maruti 800 car.

Bending his slight frame over the steering wheel he muttered, “You know, I have this idea of a Bollywood masala film script that tells the story of political ecology of our country...” I knew then that I was in for a very creative ride in this job.

On another occasion, while helping him sort out some slides (photographs!) he picked a picture he had taken in rural Rajasthan, held it up against the light, and exclaimed, “This is the culture of India!” It was a picture of

cow dung on the ground with a stone in the middle. “This means the cowpat is taken and now belongs to someone. Others cannot claim it. People respect that. Amazing, isn’t it?” he said, almost talking to himself. “The use of ‘Gobar’ (cow dung) in India encapsulates many

environmental principles.”

He then confessed that he actually wanted to call DTE as the ‘Gobar Times’. Obviously, none were amused by the thought back then!

A few years later, he and Sunita called me into their room and spelt out a task, “Can we create something for children on environment?” Gulp! “Err... like what do you have in mind?” They both looked up at me, “Something that provokes, entertains and educates! By when can you come back and show us what’s possible?”

And that is how *Gobar Times* came to be. A bunch of creative and passionate people wanting to communicate complex environmental questions using wit and humour. That adults began reading *Gobar Times* underscored the point that people are hungry for such information that addresses serious and wicked problems we face then and today.

May *Gobar Times* continue to provoke, entertain, and educate us—young and old alike.

The author was the Founder Editor of Gobar Times and associated with CSE from 1992–2004. Currently, he serves as the Academic Dean of Srishti Manipal Institute of Art, Design and Technology, Bengaluru.

Illustration: Yogendra Anand



Silver Jubilee

Silver Jubilee



In spite of all the brickbats

and rebukes, a tabloid

matures into a magazine

as it finds its 'beginners'

audience and speaks

through quirky cartoons.

No La-di-da for Beginners



Gobar Times (GT) already had a successful 10-year run before I got on-board. It was always resplendent in a spectacular tabloid avatar, grabbing eyeballs everywhere. But as if this was not intimidating enough, here we were staging the arrival of a new GT. It's looks? A standard news magazine format. Were we taking a risk? Well, even if we did, we were in good company. We had an emphatic affirmation from my partners of the CSE network. So far.

In fact, I had certain trepidations of my own. This was concerning the target group of GT. The 'Beginners'. Who were they? GT had been envisaged as a student's handbook. Primarily, for the schools. As it turned out, there were no defining lines. From students and teachers to bank executives, to a local milkman—everyone seemed to be set to 'begin'.

So, it was tightrope walking for us for in every issue. First, finding topics that were equally relevant to all sections of this widely divergent group, and then presenting these to our readers... in a way that appeals to them. I would be showered with brickbats by my friends and colleagues for dumbing down a serious issue in one edition and, in the next one, a teacher would send us a mild rebuke for being so la-di-da and boring. She could not turn any of our *Open Forum* columns into worksheets, she scolded once.

Fortunately, we had plenty to write on. That was a decade which saw a slew of uprisings against the local authorities for letting corporate entities force into territories which belonged to them.

These were complex issues and communicating these to a lay reader was difficult. So we created cartoon characters of whose dialogue would subtly reveal the nuances of human rights violations. We used infographics and illustrations to shore up

our articles. Our purpose? Creating a perfect package of authentic, scientific, and accessible information for the people of our country. To empower them to become relevant players in the debate on development and environment. For us Indians, there can be no trade-offs.

In fact, I have story of my own for the 'Beginners' here. I was only two months old in DTE when I was asked to prepare a comprehensive report on Global Environmental

Negotiations, the 'GEN'. Quite enamoured by the environmental extravaganza, I sat in the goldmine of information—the CSE Library—to do my research. And I was horrified. It was as if I was ambushed by words. Clumsily crafted obscure and unfamiliar. Most of the text unreadable. 'Sustainable development' definitely had a positive ring which would never reach the ears of the reader because it was surrounded by

the ugliest ones. And as I raised my hand to bang on the table in frustration, I noticed a book which looked distinctly different. It was. This is how the definition was presented: "The environment is not just pretty trees and tigers, threatened plants and ecosystems. It is literally the entity on which we all subsist, and on which entire agricultural and industrial development depends. Development can take place at the cost of the environment. Beyond that point, it will be like the foolish person who was trying to cut the very branch on which he sat."

I have used these words with unabashed frequency from innumerable platforms, addressing audiences that are about as diverse as it could get. And it has never failed to make an instant connect. You too go ahead and use them. Just make sure that the credit goes to the right man. It is Dr Anil Agarwal, founder of CSE. Much more about him later.

The author was a Reporter for Down To Earth (1999–2004) and a Supplement Editor of Gobar Times (2007–2014). Currently, she serves as an independent professional.



Sumita Dasgupta

Illustration: Yogendra Anand

About Yester Years and Ahead



Sorit Gupto

Narrating the tale and trajectory of *Gobar Times*—of how it evolved into a new avatar and gained new characters.

My association with the *Gobar Times* will be incomplete without Piu & Pom. We were once working on a comic strip for the magazine.

Piu is the name of my daughter so it was easy to decide the name of one of the characters. But for Pom, there's an interesting story. Those days there was an app on smartphones known as *Talking Tom*, which was about a cat who repeated whatever one speaks to it in a funny way. This cat was not only popular among kids but also among adults. Piu also had a soft toy of that cat which she used to carry with her all the time. So, it was more or less final that a cat would accompany her character.

One day, while scribbling the character of Piu, I asked her what name she wanted to give her cat in a comic strip. She replied, "Pom". Later, she told me that she wanted to name it, "Pom-Pom." But by that time, it was too late.

It was around the May issue of 2015 when *Piu & Pom* appeared for the first time in *Gobar Times*. Its title was 'Be a good guest'. Soon, the comics and the characters of *Piu* and *Pom* became one of the most important elements in the magazine. Both these characters started appearing on the cover page, cartoon column, games, stories, and even in a selfie corner during an event of the Green Schools Programme.

In the last 5–6 years, the magazine has gone through a lot of changes and experiments by introducing the concept of the cover story, new

columns, crosswords, posters, and short stories on the environment to name a few. But the most important change, or rather the biggest challenge we faced at the time of the pandemic, was when *Gobar Times* became an online magazine from a print product.

Globally, the print media is at crossroads and so is our magazine. It's a choice between costly hardcopies or the technology-based online versions. Needless to say, we are not very clear about which one to subscribe to. Probably,

there is a middle way. We did a series of special issues in the online format during the pandemic days.

An online magazine for kids was itself an experiment (well, we were forced to go for the experiment) and it has its own positives. And negatives. Being a person of the old school, I prefer to read a hardcopy in the printed format. But our target audience, the kids, are getting more and more habituated with reading on-screen.

One thing is for sure: magazines in general and the kid's magazines, to be precise, are not going to be same anymore. Their biggest challenge is coming from Artificial Intelligence (AI).

We often wonder what will be the scenario of print media in the age of AI. What we forget to ask is something more important: that is, what will be the scene of a kid's magazine in the age of AI?

A mature reader has some sense of discretion—to differentiate between right and wrong. True and false. Fact and fallacy. At least, he/she has the ability to crosscheck the details. But what about kids who have blind faith in the things they read in a magazine or which are told by adults? The AI is going to destroy each and every grammar of the yester years.

It may sound scary but it's the truth.

I wonder if we are prepared to deal with our Pius & Poms in the near future...

The author was the Supplement Editor of Gobar Times (2017–2022), and currently serves as the Chief Cartoonist of the Down To Earth magazine.

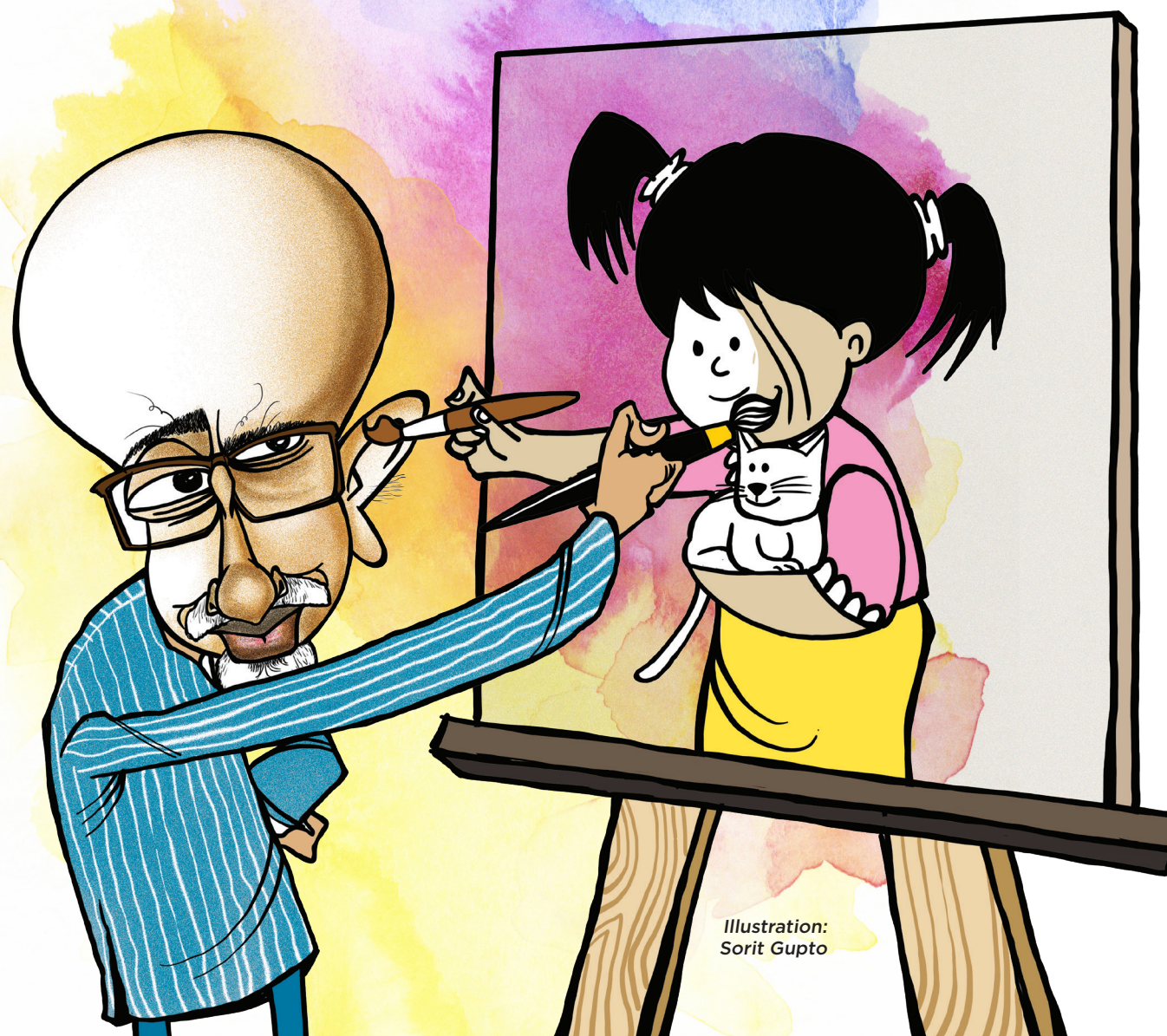


Illustration:
Sorit Gupto

Bolstering their Voice

A thoughtful reflection on the value of Gobar Times with an understanding of what is it about, why so, how... and a little bit more.



Souparno Banerjee

My association with *Gobar Times* (GT) has been in two stints. The first of these was some years ago, when we decided to give it a makeover. Rustam Vania (read more on pg. 4-5), one of the original creators, stepped in to guide us, and a new look of the magazine was born. The second stint is the one ongoing, in which the magazine has found a place as a slim e-publication on a colourful new website for the young, the *Young Environmentalist*. As a mentor for these two avatars, I must say it has been a deeply satisfying experience.

I believe what GT offers its team is quite invaluable: an opportunity to reimagine somewhat complex subjects so that they can ignite young minds to think and reflect. Often, some of these subjects are not exactly unfamiliar territory that a child traverses – GT merely holds them up in a new light. It is a challenging task, of course, this constant and consistent effort to create, recreate, and visualise content that would make sense to a curious and as I have found very often – questioning – young mind. I do believe that this challenge has been met successfully and with equal perseverance by our extremely talented team here.

We are living in tough times. Times in which the Earth and its well-being is under serious threat from climate change, growing pollution and contamination, and a surge of unknown and little-known diseases. There is also increasing poverty, resource crunch, and the world's inability to collectively, jointly address most of these concerns. In such times, the children and the youth perhaps hold the key to a resolution. We have seen that they do have a powerful voice, one that has popular appeal, one that is heard and noticed globally. This voice needs to be kept alive and thriving; it needs to be nurtured, made stronger so that it can reach the parliaments of our nations, the boardrooms of our corporates, and parents and families. My fervent hope and wish is that GT will – as it is doing now – continue to help in this process of bolstering.

The author is the Supplement Editor of Gobar Times (2015-2017 and 2021-present), and also serves as the Senior Director for Outreach, Publications and Environment Education in the Centre for Science and Environment, New Delhi.

Oh My dog

தமிழ் | తెలుగు



Ritika Bohra/GT

Many of us love pets, especially dogs. But do you know that over the last five years, they have killed more than 300 people, mostly poor and rural children? Over 20,000 rabies deaths have been caused by homeless dogs and more than 30 endangered species have been hunted by them in the wild. The human-animal conflict between people and stray dogs in India has reached an alarming level. So, the next time you venture outdoors, please take care of yourself!