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Shine On, You Crazy Diamonds



I remember back in the 1970s, when a new India was just over a quarter of a century old, Geoffrey Moorhouse, in his foreword to his “Calcutta” wrote: “The imperial residue of Calcutta, a generation after Empire ended, is both a monstrous and a marvellous city. Journalism and television have given us a rough idea of the monstrosities but none at all of the marvels. I can only hope to define the first more clearly and to persuade anyone interested that the second is to be found there too.”

Kolkata has of course endured and it is even learning to live with Mamata’s blue period after more than three decades of Marxian red. If you scrape away the grime and raise the louvres there are multiple shafts of bright sunlight that make the gloom glisten.

And there are marvels aplenty if we care to look for them. We have been beset by an avalanche of negativism and often it seems that we have an especial talent for extracting defeat from victory, misery from happiness, and calamity from good news.

The Japanese possess a very fine aesthetic, and their poets transformed what they observed into written pointillism in the form known as haiku – a 17-syllable composition in three lines. Read this haiku by Bashō (1644-1694):

*Seen in plain daylight
the firefly’s nothing but
an insect*

So true. It is only against the ink-black night that light flares out brightest, and it is only against the backdrop of the rancour and vitriol that we respond positively, and eagerly, to good news and tidings of the better side of human nature. We have much to look forward to, and there

really is a lot that is going right. When every “news-hour” on prime-time television is actually a showcase for a shouting, berating, finger-wagging “anchor” – heaven knows what they are anchoring when they are ricocheting so much – you are hard put to really get near the real news. If you read the vernacular press you get information couched like agendas; you rarely get dispassionate reportage. So where do you

turn for positive news on what is happening across the vast United States of India? Where are all the hundreds of thousands of little smithies where our innovators and entrepreneurs toil long and hard to hammer out a better and more exciting future? They flash past like the tiny points of light that flare up in the black countryside as your train hurtles past and then grow dim and distant again.

You will find one repository of good stories at www.goodnewsindia.com. Its progenitor D.V. Sridharan writes that he stopped the website in 2006 to concentrate on a land-restoration project. The website has been revived in 2012 and you will find several good stories. With a note of resignation, Sridharan writes: “I no longer retain my early confidence that a sustained economic boom will be like the tide that raises all the boats.”

It is easy to nearly drown in the excreta of despair, like that young lad in *Slumdog Millionaire*. But we do have a responsibility to ourselves to chronicle the tides rolling in. It is not easy finding these inspiring tales. Our antennae need to become super-sensitive to pick up those feeble radio signals. Sometimes we do tune in to them, and the sounds we hear are music to our ears. Hence the theme of this year’s anniversary issue. ♦