

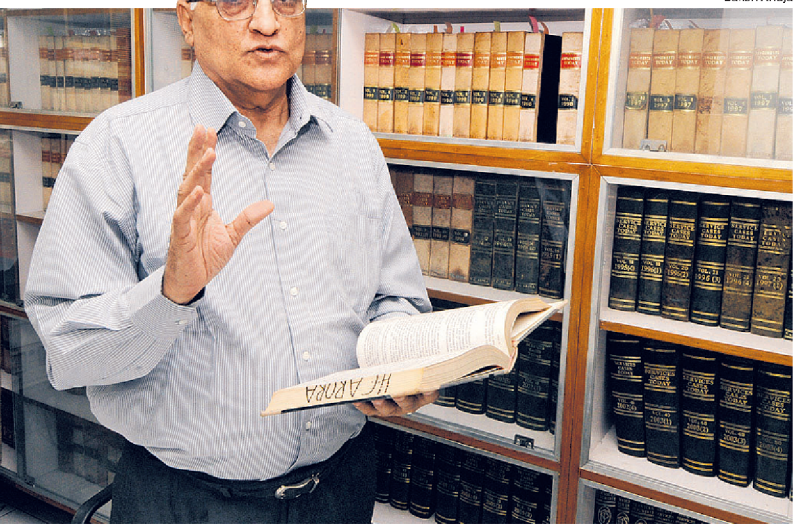
No PIL is bitter for him

From acid attack victims to children studying in unsafe government school buildings, H C Arora's 200 PILs have changed thousands of lives, reports Ajay Sura

The acid attack victims continued to face society's wrath, tainted cops continued to be in service, children were forced to study in unsafe buildings in government schools... With the system consistently failing to take timely action on issues related to women, education, law and order in the region, it was the public interest litigations (PILs) filed by Chandigarh-based lawyer H C Arora that offered some hope to people from Punjab and Haryana that not everything was lost.

Nearly 200 PILs filed by Arora on various social issues have led the two states of Haryana and Punjab and UT Chandigarh to change or formulate policies.

Taking up the issues raised by Arora, the judiciary—often anguished and angered over the sorry state of affairs in the

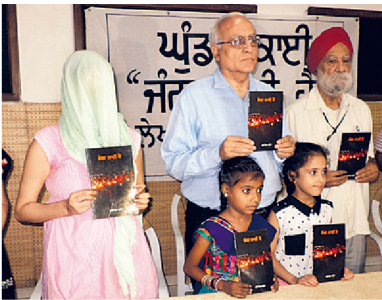


THE PIL MAN: Arora's activism hasn't just been limited to issues that received media attention. He has also been instrumental in throwing light on issues that no one gave a thought to

region—gave several important directions.

Talking to TOI, Arora says that even as the incidents of acid attack on girls were on a rise, a glaring lack of provisions to take care of them. His PIL forced the governments to wake up from their deep slumber and a policy was framed for their rehabilitation this year.

Similarly, when he saw the sentence



of a large number of convicts in crimes against women, including rape, being remitted by states, he filed a PIL before

THE CRUSADER POET

Arora recently penned 'Jang Jari Hai', a book containing poems on various issues concerning social evils such as dowry, rape, drug-addiction, liquor vends, pittance in the name of pension to blind persons, falling standards of primary education, scarcity of clean drinking water in schools, increasing menace of vulgar songs, cancer, politics in the name of homage to martyrs, and falling standards of politics. The book was released by Inderjeet Kaur, an acid attack victim from Morinda, who had lost vision in both her eyes after an acid attack. Kaur is now working with an Australia-based radio. "I had tried to commit suicide when two lawyers ditched me and joined hands with the opposite party. It was only advocate H C Arora who helped not just me get justice, but several others like me," says Inderjeet Kaur

the HC, which led the states to delete provisions for remission in the sentence of such convicts. He also succeeded in depriving the murder and rape convicts of the B-class facility in various jails in Punjab, Haryana and Chandigarh.

Arora's activism hasn't just been limited to issues that received media attention. Government schools, where children were being forced to study in unsafe buildings and girls were facing harassment every day for want of separate toi-

lets, moved him. His PIL in the former ordered demolition of all such schools in Punjab; in the latter, the state government was told to provide facility of separate toilets for girls in all of its schools.

However, according to Arora, also known as the PIL man in the region, the most important public interest litigation was dismissal of a large number of Punjab police cops, including four DSPs. They were removed from service on the basis of his PIL questioning their continuance of service despite conviction in cases. He had to undergo huge pressure during the course of the hearing of the PIL and the high court had ordered to provide security to Arora during his movement in the state of Punjab following this.

Another of his famous cases involves getting the ancestral house of martyr Sukhdev declared as a protected monument by the Punjab government.

Arora's foray into the PILs began in 2005 with the enactment of RTI Act. The Act turned out to be a potent tool for him and he secured crucial data needed for filing PILs. Arora says one PIL calls for a lot of research.

It includes procuring photographs, data and relevant matter to convince the judiciary about the issue. His first PIL was about pendency of criminal cases against government officials due to delay in granting of prosecution sanction by Punjab. It had forced the state to grant sanctions for prosecution in hundreds of cases.

And that was just a beginning.

FROM PIL TO POLICY

- 1 PIL** | Rehabilitation and compensation for acid attack victims
 - **Impact** | Free treatment to victims | Compensation up to Rs 3 lakh | Monthly financial assistance upto Rs 5000 | Preference in the allotment of fair price shops
- 2 PIL** | Remission of sentence to convicts of crime against women, including rapists
 - **Impact** | Both the states quashed the clause
- 3 PIL** | B-class facility for murder and rape convicts in jails in Punjab, Haryana and Chandigarh
 - **Impact** | Government withdraws all such facilities
- 4 PIL** | Unsafe school buildings in Punjab and no separate toilet for girl students
 - **Impact** | HC ordered to demolish all unsafe schools and to provide the facility of a separate toilet for the girls in each government school
- 5 PIL** | Condition of underground water level in Punjab
 - **Impact** | State government had to stop the use of underground water in construction work and it was directed that such construction shall only be done by using the water treated by sewerage treatment plants
- 6 PIL** | Seeking policy for protection of whistleblowers
 - **Impact** | Haryana and Punjab framed policies to protect whistleblowers
- 7 PIL** | Transparency in functioning of government
 - **Impact** | Punjab and Haryana directed to put all their enactments and rules on their official websites

25 years of the great Himalayan hoax

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Prof Viswa Jit Gupta disconnects the phone saying he is not available to talk on his research on Himalayan fossils. The celebrated discovery of Himalayan rock fossils, which was considered by many as one of the biggest scientific breakthrough, until, of course, it turned out to be the biggest scientific hoax in the history of Indian academics and was dubbed by world media as the second biggest fraud in the history of science since the 'Piltdown man hoax' of 1912. A fraud that went undetected for 25 years until an Australian scientist John A Talent exposed him in 1989 with a three-page commentary that appeared in top scientific journal, Nature; the very journal that published Gupta's breakthrough research in 1964.



HOAX STORY: Himalayas, where the fossil hoax perpetrated

After superannuating from Panjab University in 2002 from the position of professor, Gupta leads a life in oblivion in Panchkula. People close to him tell that he avoids public functions. Funerals are the only occasion where he is seen. Besides that, the only bridge between him and the old academic circle are a few books on environment published by not-so-known publication houses across the last few years.

Did the Gupta affair bring more professionalism into publishing of papers? Well, even as the Gupta case was a burning issue, Talent—who had eventually turned the tables on Gupta with his 1989 article called 'The case of the peripatetic fossils' published in Nature—says that a messy case perpetrated by some mathematicians from Varanasi came up. They had plagiarized the work of an Indian mathematician domiciled in the USA. In the recent times, cases of plagiarism have been reported at several major research institutes in Chandigarh.

Som Shah, who recently authored a book on the fossil hoax, says that in the long run, there was

The Man Who Unearthed The Hoax

In an email interview with TOI, John A Talent—now emeritus professor of Earth and Planetary Sciences, Macquarie University, Sydney says he was aware that Gupta's "research" was "appallingly shoddy" back in the 1960s, but viewed this as an Indian problem and felt that it should be addressed by Indian geologists. However, in July 1971, Talent stood with a flock of Australian and Indian geologists (including Prof Som Shah) on the site of possibly the most amazing of Gupta's discoveries concerning beautifully preserved small fossils with the appearance of tiny hacksaw blades, known as graptolites. He and his colleagues later identified them as having come from Burma. Talent, who has studied ancient life forms for more than five decades, said that some of the fossils that Gupta had quoted were so distinct that they could have never come from the Himalayas. In 1989, he published the paper on the research and all hell broke loose

Why The Biggest Fraud

Nature had, 25 years ago, said that Gupta's "findings" "will cast a longer shadow" than the Piltdown affair in Britain. In the Piltdown man case a single skull had been passed off as the fossilized remains of a previously unknown early human. That case, the journal noted, involved only one skull. But Gupta's case involved numerous scientific reports

a realization that Indian scientists had really been fooled because of the 'chalta hai' attitude. "The editorial policies which were somewhat lackadaisical and name based became more stringent. There was more accountability from scientists by the funding agencies. Moreover, there has been a clear understanding that fraud does not pay," says he.

Now, there is also an NGO named Society of Scientific Values (SSV) comprising senior scientists that aims to check frauds. "But it has no teeth. We need to strengthen it and similar agencies through legislation if possible. Fraud in science is a global phenomenon. In fact, the fraud in Indian Science is comparatively very small. Our only problem, unlike western countries, is that we have no organized mechanism of detecting frauds and expunging them," says Shah.

The 1947 Partition Archive held the first-ever screening of the footage of survivors' interviews, followed by witnesses sharing their stories with the audience in the United States on Thursday

Capturing a past fading fast

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Bapu Sindhne pachad kem padya cho? (Bapu, why are you after Sindh?), Radhika Kishin Chehnnani—who as a little girl asked this of Mahatma Gandhi when she heard that the region may be divided into two—passed away last month. Of the 14 million people displaced by the cutting up of the subcontinent when the British left hastily, Chehnnani was among the 1,500 survivors whose stories are now part of the 1947 Partition Archive. Many of these 1,500 people are no more with us, says Guneeta Singh Bhalla, the founder director of the Archive, a non-profit body.

On Thursday, 1947 Partition Archive held the first ever screening of the crowdsourced footage, followed by witnesses sharing their stories in the Berkeley Skydeck, Berkeley, California, US. The ticketed event was attended by less than 150, for want of space, and lasted much beyond the scheduled two hours as people stayed back talking about their own experiences.

Guneeta could not have been more satisfied with the outcome of her efforts that started four years back when she began recording video interviews with elder partition witnesses throughout the San Francisco Bay Area.

Haunted by the fact that she could not keep a record of her grandmother's memories of fleeing Pakistan during the partition, she did not hesitate long before giving up her career to focus on the project. Guneeta holds a doctorate degree in quantum physics and California University, where she was working, supported the initiative through its start-up accelerator programme.

"I told myself that puzzles of the universe have remained unsolved for billions of years, while life is passing away right now," she told TOI. "Also, the project was growing very fast."

The target, she says, is to collect 10,000 life stories by the 2017 and the sense of urgency reigns supreme. Simply because people who were children in 1947 are now in their seventies and eighties, constantly leaving their tales untold, except may be to couple of their relatives.



The challenges before Guneeta, though not daunting she says, are many. "We will not be able to make available full videos of the interviews with survivors for another two years. We need infrastructure to be able to upload and stream them. Most importantly, even though these are just life stories from all sides of the borders without any political or religious hue, we have to develop an ethical framework to be followed while making the footage accessible."

Then there is question of resources. "We could not hold a screening earlier as we did not have resources and could not have handled the atten-

tion. Next two months will be spent raising funds," she adds. However, government funding is not an option that the Archive team is willing to consider.

Meanwhile, Guneeta is preparing for another 'Stories of Survival' event. This time at Habitat Centre in New Delhi on November 22. "We will see how Delhi audience reacts," she says, adding that she is not being nervous as this is something she intends to continue doing.

So, what's future hiding for the records of the past? "If Archive grows big, we can expand it to other influential events across the world," Guneeta says. For her too, the inspiration for the project came during a research trip to Japan, when she visited the Peace



"I told myself that puzzles of the universe have remained unsolved for billions of years, while life is passing away right now"
— Guneeta Singh Bhalla

Punjab diaspora rides on a new radio wave, the world wide web

Online internet radios catering to Punjabis abroad are being operated from across the state

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Punjab and Punjabis are going global once again, this time through World Web Radios. Here, a 26-year-old youth sitting in a Sangrur village conducts radio programmes for Punjabi listeners settled abroad and another conducts talk shows on issues of Punjabi diaspora from a rented accommodation in Ludhiana.

Moving beyond the craze of social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter, dozens of Punjabi youth have launched their internet radios from small towns and villages of Punjab, which cater to lakhs

of Punjabis listeners settled in North America, Europe and Australia.

Punjabi online internet radios, as they are known today, being operated from one-room accommodations located not only in towns like Sunam, Sangrur, Patiala, but even in villages like Puhla, Bhadaur and Mehal Kalan.

There are at least eight such online radios, some of whom were launched as recently as last month. Popularity of such radios can be gauged from the fact that listenership of some of these radios is as high as 30,000.

"Internet radio is a new paradigm in the field of journalism. Sit-



SAT SRI AKAL, PEOPLE: The online radios are being run from one-room studios

ting in Punjab, our anchors produce programmes and discussions based on issues of Punjabis settled across the globe. Such radios are growing

popular as most of the listeners residing abroad have smartphones and internet access. Moreover, these are different from conventional FM

PUNJABI ONLINE RADIOS

- Harman Radio | Patiala
- Rabta Radio | Sangrur
- Dhol Radio | Mehal Kalan (Sangrur)
- Lok Sanjh Radio | Bhadaur
- Dil Apna Punjabi | Samrala
- Voice of Khalsa | Chandigarh
- Chann Pardesi | Patiala/Bathinda
- Radio Punjab Today | Bathinda

radios. Anybody who has calibre and resources can launch his or her own radio sitting anywhere in the world," said Harpreet Singh Kahlon, creative director at Patiala-based Harman Radio, which is one of the most popular radios in Australia.

Those associated with such radios reveal that online radios are successors of phone radios and enable a programmer to connect with 3,000-4,000 phone users at one time.

"In these countries, telecom companies provide a facility where you can connect with around 4,000 listeners through your phone at one go. In the early years of the last decade, operators of famous radio, 'Dil Apna Punjabi', exploited this technique to launch radio through their own station. They took four-five such phones on rent and reached 10,000 listeners. Now, the advent of high-speed internet has paved the way for introduction of online radios," said Moga resident Tarandeep Deol, who was a member of the launch team of Sangrur-based Rabta Radio.

"Every such radio has its own apps and websites. Those using smartphones can listen to any such radios by using these applications," Deol added.

How to go about opening an online radio station

Shivinder Singh, who is working with three radio stations in United States said all you need is a voice-proof room, fast internet connection and a team of three-four youths to run radio programmes for 8-10 hours a day. "Such radios also require a website developer and a manager to manage and update radio websites and applications. Rest depends on how you make your radio popular among listeners abroad. Good advertisement skills, content and revenue generation are important aspects and require a lot of improvement when it comes to online Punjabi radios," he says.