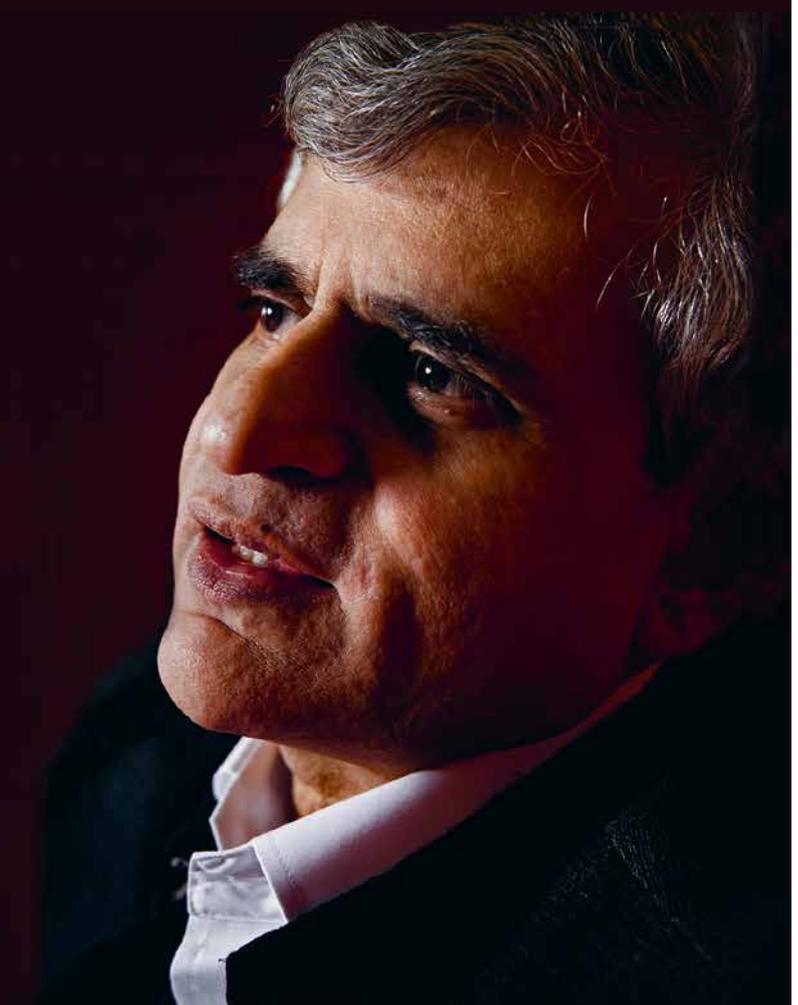


And finally...

P Sainath

The veteran journalist and writer has, since 2011, been working on a new project: the People's Archive of Rural India (PARI). He talks to CHARUKESI RAMADURAI about recording the stories of everyday people and his hopes for his country's future.



In the 20 years since your book *Everybody loves a good drought* was published, how has India changed?

Those 20 years have seen India move rapidly along what the stories in *A Good Drought* recorded: deepening inequality. The elite and upper strata of Indian society, including a few sections of the middle classes, have done better than they ever dreamed of. Millions of others have faced deprivation they never imagined possible.

One per cent of Indians own 58.5 per cent of wealth in India. The corresponding figure for the US is 42.1 per cent. And for China, it is 43.8 per cent.

What one change would you wish to see in India?

The collapse of neoliberalism and market fundamentalism, and the enforcement of the Directive Principles of State Policy of the Indian Constitution: the enacting of the main principles of the right to work, health and nutrition, and the philosophy of 'a social order in which justice – social, economic and political – shall inform all the institutions of national life'.

What are the biggest challenges facing contemporary India?

Growing inequality, hunger, unemployment; new and sophisticated

forms of exclusion and discrimination that give new life to an old caste system; a gigantic agrarian crisis; the growing impact of climate issues; the rise of various fundamentalisms.

The Indian state is today ruled by an alliance of socio-religious fundamentalists and economic market fundamentalists. The two need each other greatly in the building of a corporate-led state. Any solutions we devise for this have to come from mass movements, mass mobilization – for ending social and economic exploitation and inequality, and for social reform.

Who inspires you in your work and ideology?

For 15 to 20 years, I have been recording the stories of the last living freedom fighters of India. These are mostly unknown or forgotten rural people who led great battles against British imperialism. This is the generation that inspires me.

You will find several stories on them in the People's Archive of Rural India (PARI – ruralindiaonline.org) in the category 'Footsoldiers of Freedom'. I draw a great deal of inspiration from that generation and my core values from those of the radical streams of the Indian freedom struggle.

PARI is an archive of the immediate past, a journal of the living present and

a constantly updating textbook of the future. Rural India has 833 million people, speaking 780 languages, practising an unrivalled diversity of occupations, cultures and more, many of which have ceased to exist in most other parts of the world.

PARI exists to tell stories of the everyday lives of everyday people, and to have those people tell their stories themselves.

We are trying not just to draw together the best journalists, but also to take journalism back to the communities.

How do you hope to attract readers to the website?

We're already publishing stories in up to 12 languages. Teachers in several colleges and universities, from Princeton in the US to Santiniketan in India, are using PARI stories and material to teach their courses. And students in various university and college departments are making films for us, writing stories, interning and doing research.

We are building a kind of legacy, a treasure that is open, free access, with no corporate or government links. Something that belongs to the people. ■

Charukesi Ramadurai is a freelance journalist from India. Twitter @charukesi