

December 6th at Chaityabhoomi

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Round Table India at Chaityabhoomi



Barely able to speak in Hindi or Marathi, Rakhuma, 18, and her husband Girish Madiga, 19, Friday jostled their way from Dadar station to Chaityabhoomi to pay homage to their icon Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar on his 57th death anniversary.



The newlywed had boarded a train from Gulbarga to come to Dadar a day earlier. It was Rakhuma's first ever train journey. "I had only been to the railway station as a child... Today traveled in it, too. It was a

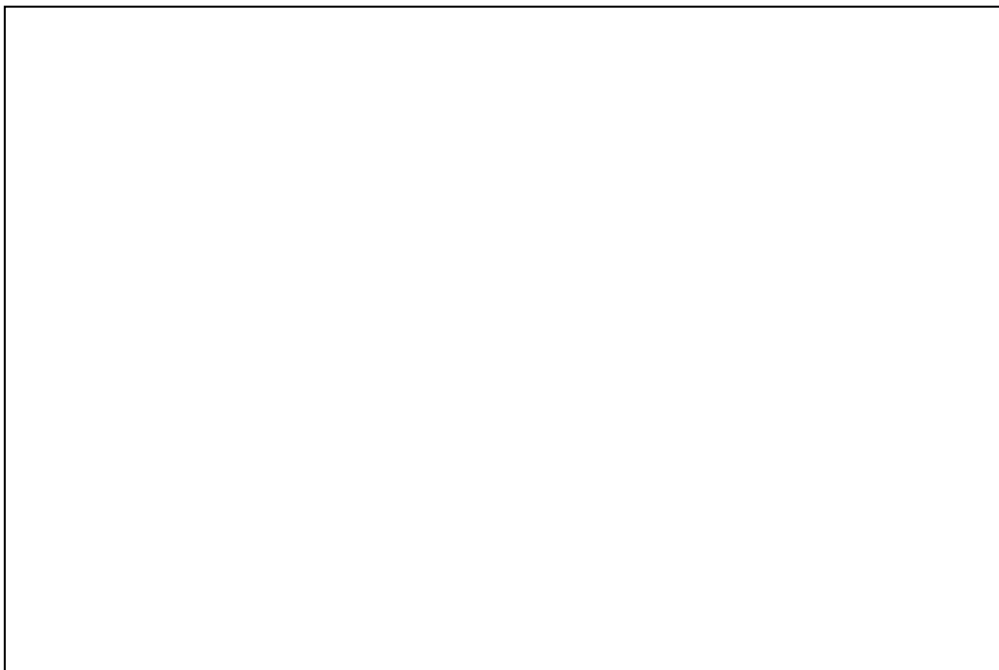
strange feeling," Rakhuma said, struggling to keep her excitement under check.



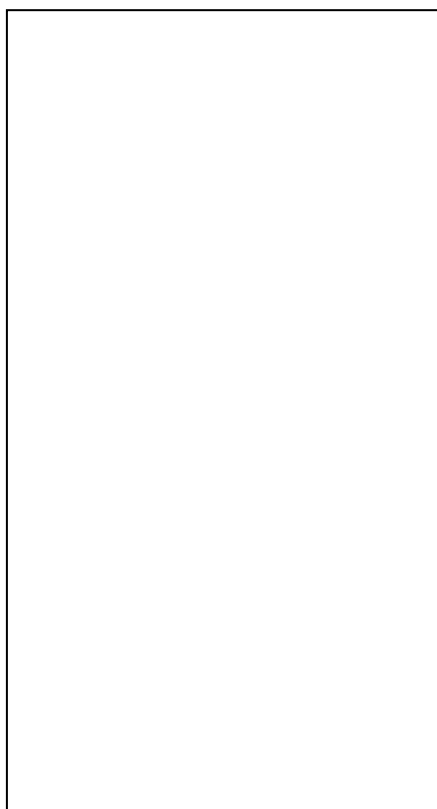
Married just a few months ago, the couple thought it was an apt day. "I had only heard lakhs throng to the city. I saw it, too," Girish said, a carpenter back in Kodagnur village at Gulbarga district.



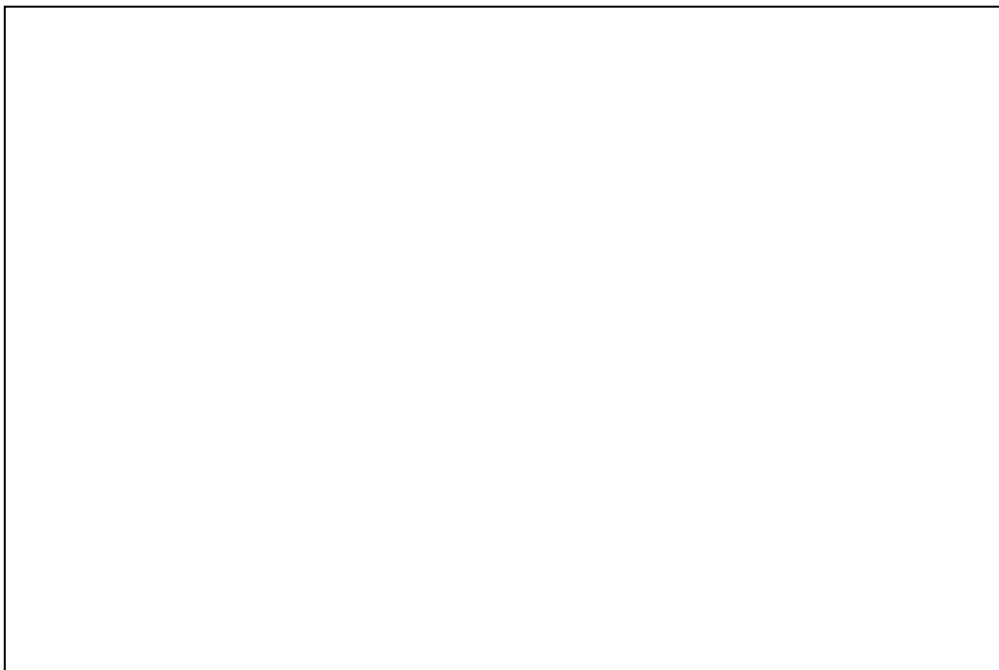
A political leader, father of the Indian constitution, a reformer, an economist. Ambedkar is everything for the Dalit community and the downtrodden.



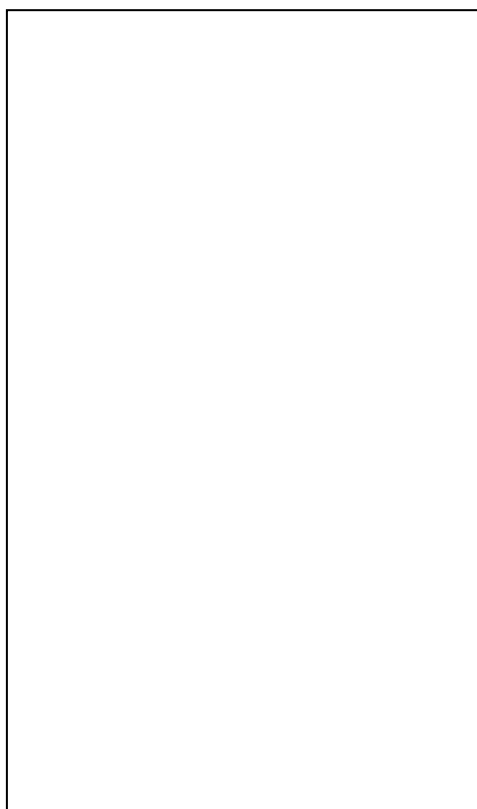
Ismail bhai, from the neighbouring district Nashik says restricting Ambedkar just to one community is a 'gross' mistake. "Only if our community (Muslims) had a great man like Babasaheb, it would have been a lot different."



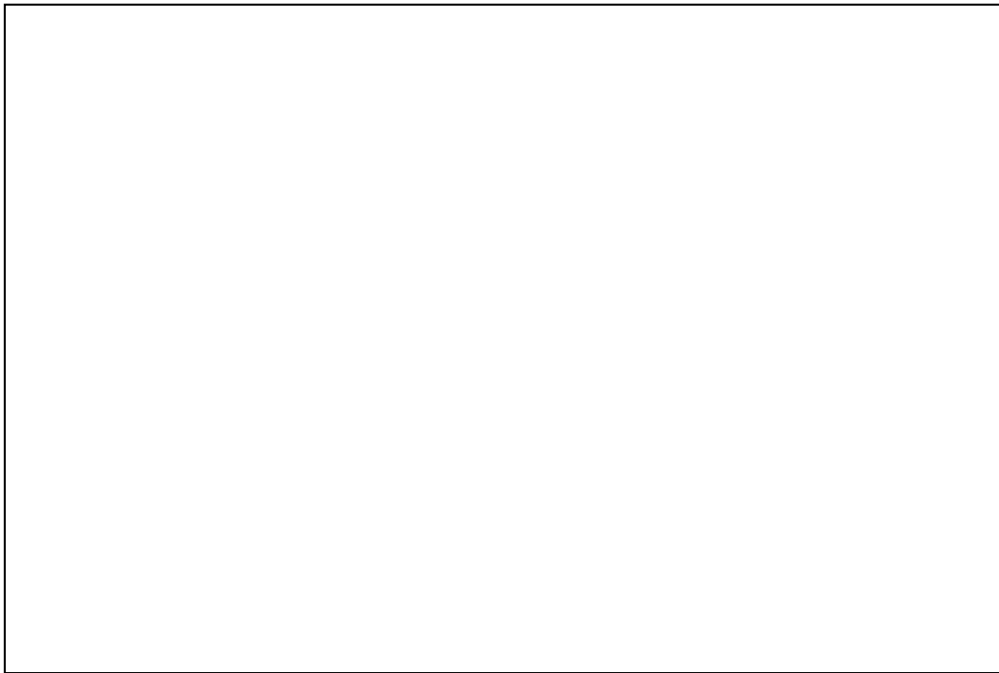
While, most Muslims observe December 6 as a 'black day' since the 1992 Babri Masjid demolition, Ismail and a dozen others prefer traveling to the city to pay homage to the prime architect of the Indian constitution. "He taught us how to struggle on the principles of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity." Ismail runs a small publishing house and has translated over 20 books into Urdu.



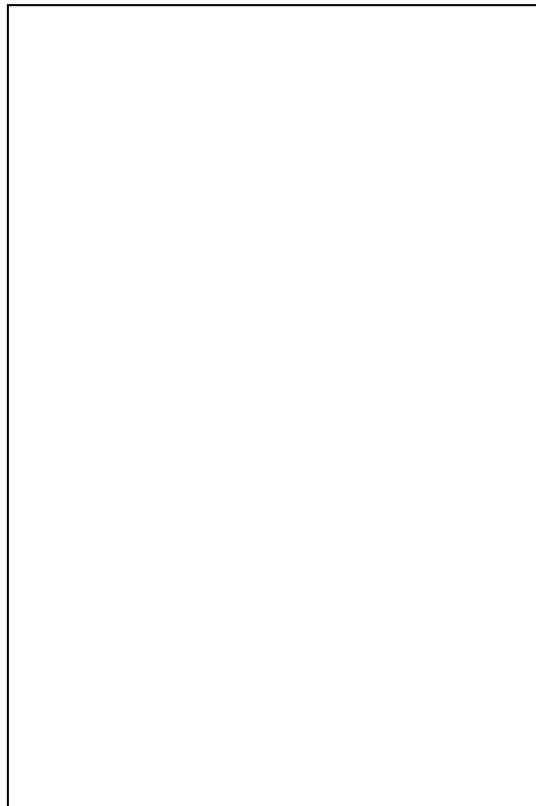
Driven by their hearts, with a hope for a better tomorrow, lakhs visit Mumbai every year. Even 57 years after his death. According to Mumbai police, over 20 lakhs visited Chaityabhoomi, this year. Nearly 4-5 lakh more than the previous year.



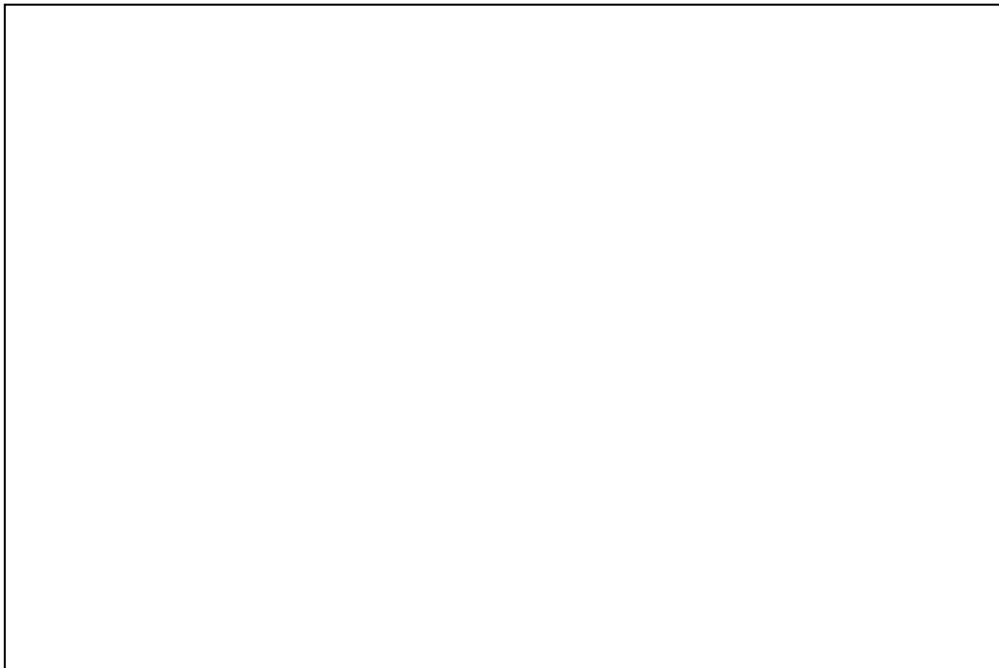
"His name is enough to mobilize people. We do not need political parties to mobilize us. People do not care about food or sleep. They board any train or bus that will bring them to the city (Mumbai). It is one day that every Ambedkarite wants to have a glimpse of the place where this great man now rests," says Baburao Sangle.



He is visiting Chaityabhoomi for the 19th consecutive year. Sangle and a few friends hire potable water tanks for the crowd.



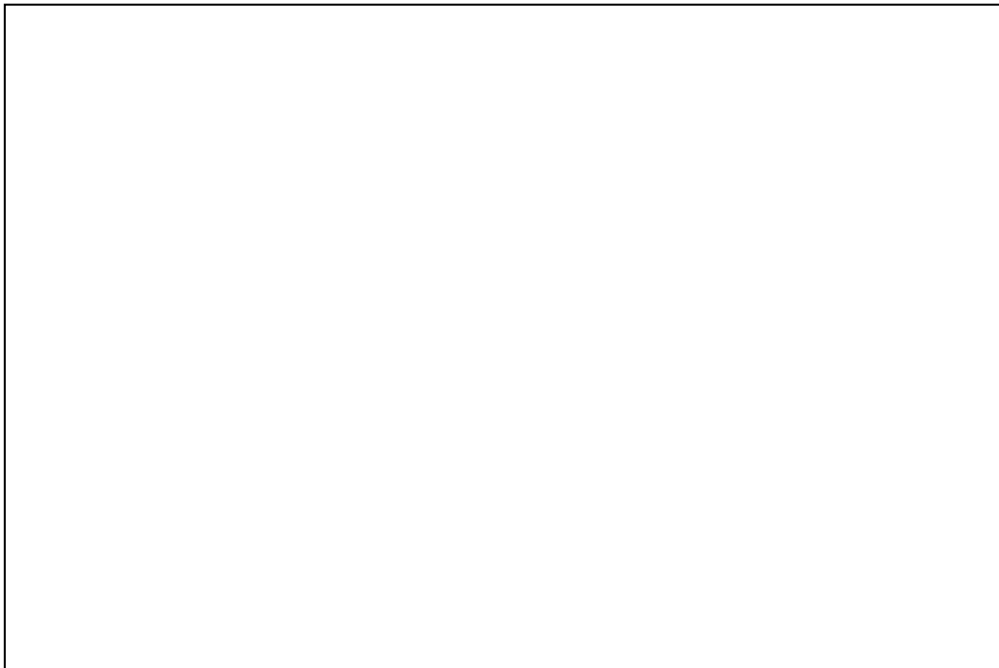
For many December 6th is also a window to the maximum city. Making an optimum use of the government facilities, including free travel through public transport, many stay back for a few days. "When do we get this chance. I had last come to Mumbai with my son. He had to shell out Rs. 2,000 for our travel and stay in the city. So we ensure after paying homage, we stay for a couple of days and then return home," said Shanti bai, from Mehsana district in Gujarat. Her son is a clerk at the municipal corporation there. "This year he has promised to take me and his wife to Worli sea face," Shanti bai said.



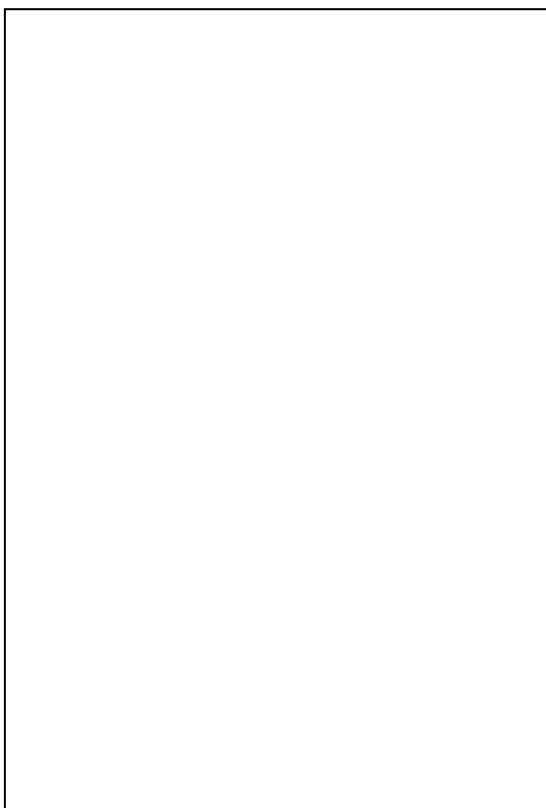
Until the time this crowd disperses, it is a "nightmare" for the residents of Shivaji Park. Chaityabhoomi is located in the heart of what epitomizes an 'elite Hindu habitat'. Many 'flee' to their relatives, go on a long vacation; locking their homes, just to dodge the crowd. Same neighbourhood, however, was seen showering flower at Bal Thackeray's funeral procession, last year.

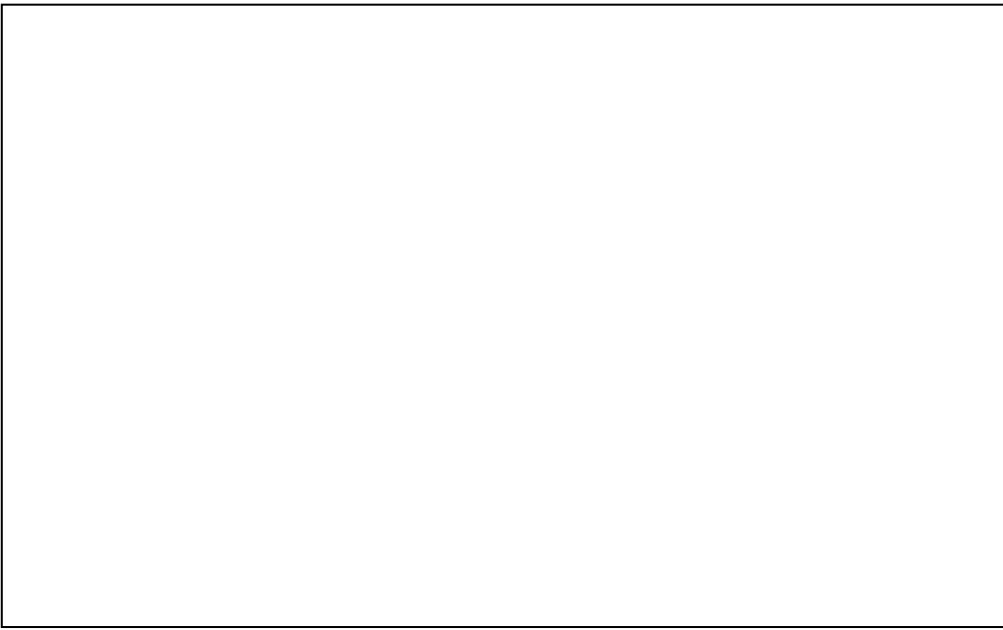


Sangle, who lives at BDD chawl nearby says that he passes by Shivaji Park regularly. "I have seen this arrogance for years. Newspapers cover their story and call it their 'plight'. But, such an arrogance for a man, who was a prime architect of the Constitution. Who is not just a "Dalit Leader" but a global one, I say it is their loss."



"Which other living or dead leader manages to pull such a crowd", asks Sridhar Kamble, a student at the Mumbai University, who is studying law. "No untoward incident has ever been reported. People come in batches, maintain utmost discipline and leave the city. Unlike religious activities, here no case of stampede or crimes get registered," Kamble adds.

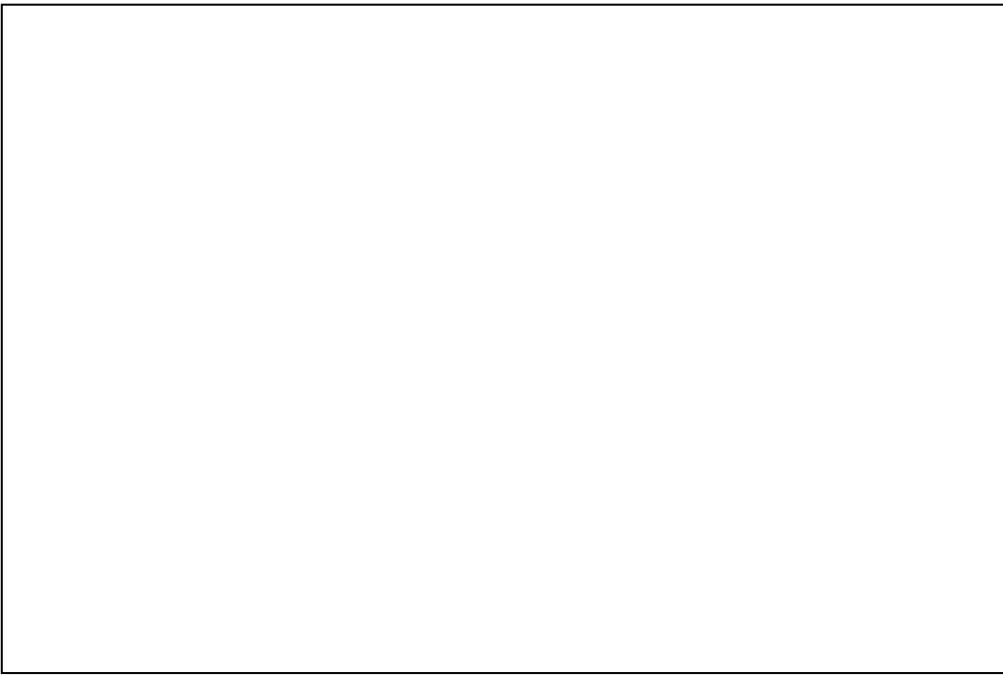




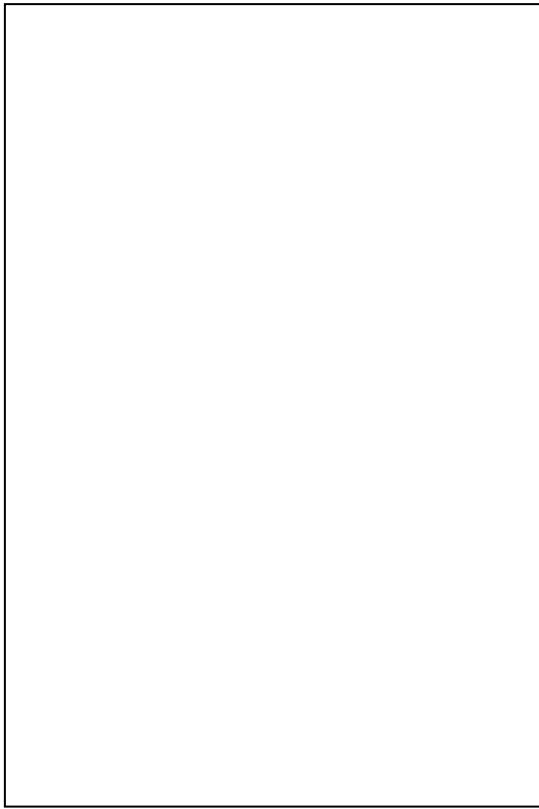
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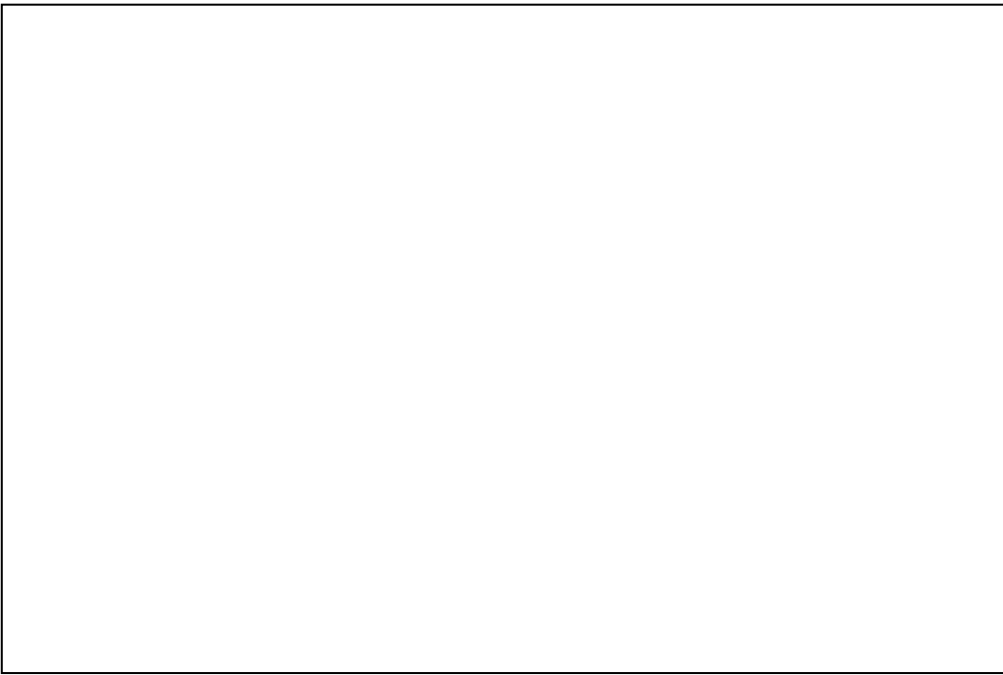
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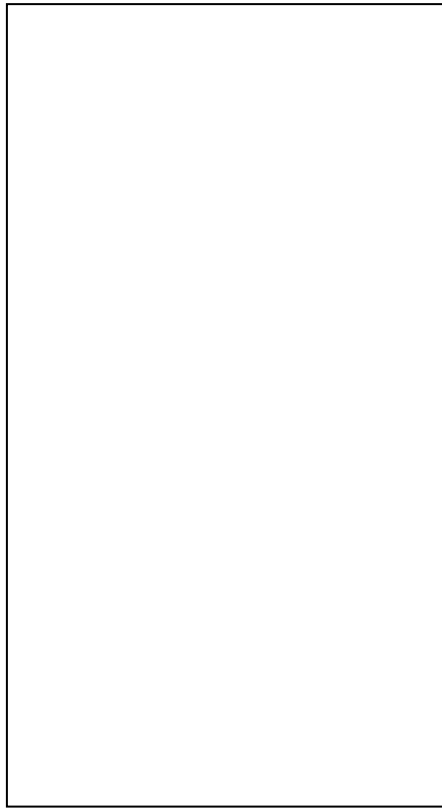
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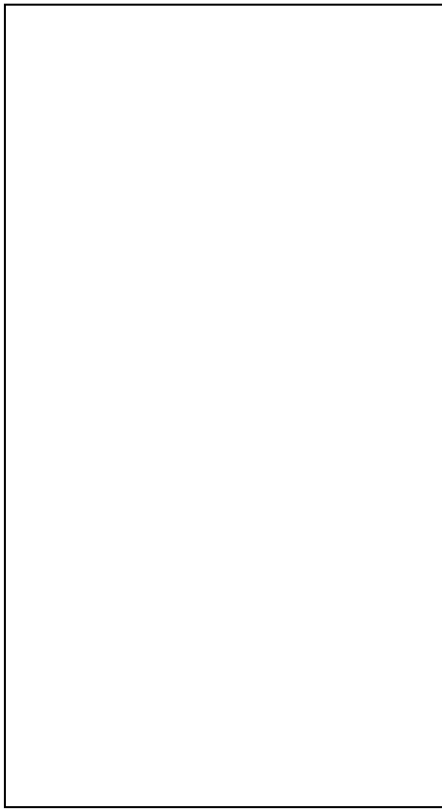
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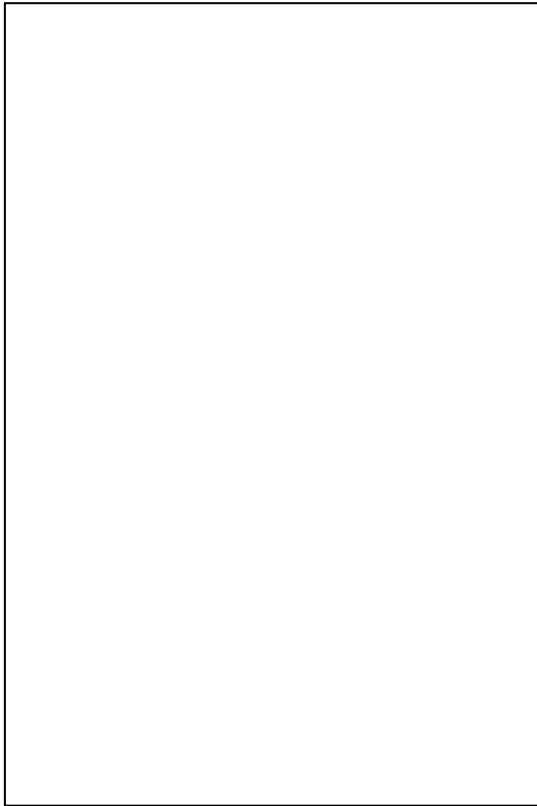
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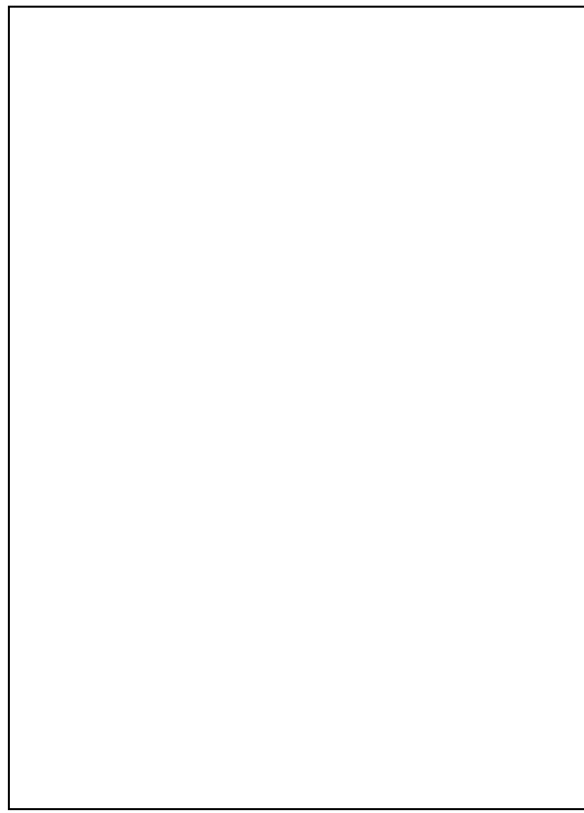
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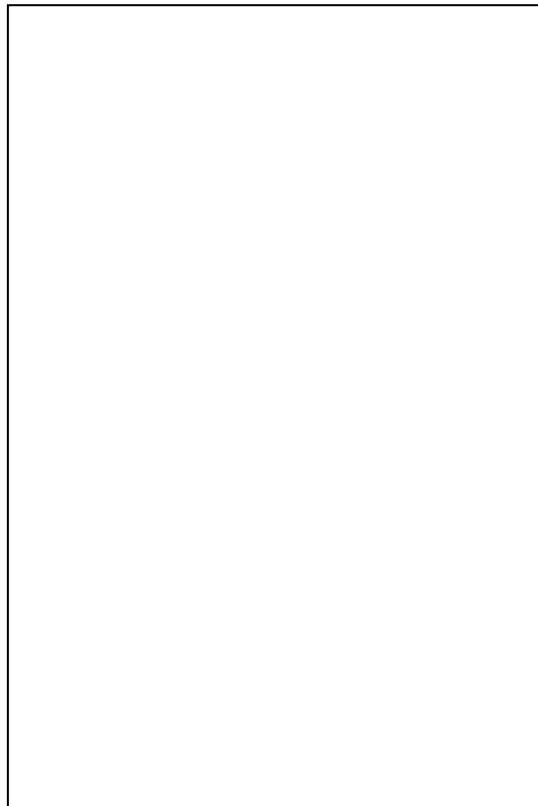
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*Pictures courtesy: **Nilesh Kumar.***