

Mumbai Meri Jaan

Forward This To All - And All Forward - Together



This issue is dedicated to the memory of our dear Shyama Kulkarni

REMEMBRANCE



THE PUBLIC FACE OF AGNI

 **D. M. Sukthankar, AGNI Patron**

Shyama Kulkarni: the name, I recall, has always conjured up in my mind a tough yet compassionate lady who stood up steadfastly to uphold the right public causes, in general, and worked actively to promote good civic governance, in particular. She was a priceless woman, with sterling qualities of head and heart.

I came to know Shyama only after I joined the Board of Trustees of AGNI. She was then, if I recall correctly, the Coordinator for Bandra's H/West municipal Ward. She struck me as an upright and active ground level worker who was impatient about the lackadaisical functioning of the civic administration, particularly at the H/West municipal Ward level, and sincerely believed that sustained public vigilance and unfailing citizen participation could improve matters substantially. She had built up an active ALM which collaborated effectively in all her endeavours.

Shyama always practised what she advocated. Because of her absolute transparency and forthrightness, she could effectively forge a very constructive working relationship with every successive local Ward Officer and the entire team of subordinates under him. She could also earn the goodwill of the local public representatives -- the Corporator, the MLA and the MP too. This enabled her to achieve a lot and also helped in earning for AGNI an enviable reputation as an active and constructive NGO.

Whenever I was asked to nominate on behalf of AGNI someone as its representative to participate in a public debate on an electronic or any other medium, I had no hesitation in nominating the one and only Shyama! If AGNI wanted to organise a public function, the ubiquitous Shyama was always there to take the lead and shoulder the main responsibility at the ground level.

Shyama was an invaluable asset for AGNI. Her sudden and untimely departure has created a void which is virtually impossible to fill. She will always be missed very sorely.

Adieu our dear Shyama! May her soul rest in eternal peace! **MMJ**

THE SHYAMA I KNEW

 **Pamela Cheema, Asst. Editor Mumbai Meri Jaan & AGNI's S Ward Coordinator**

Shyama and I bonded almost two decades ago when I chose to sign up with AGNI—she was a mentor, adviser and someone I could discuss issues with openly whether they pertained to our NGO or to the city. She was frank and never hesitated to express her opinions plainly when the occasion required it, discarding any attempts at niceties or evasive arguments. I was hugely impressed by her boundless energy and dynamism, her passionate activism and her labyrinthine network of contacts which helped her to achieve so much. AGNI will sorely miss an irreplaceable stalwart.

MMJ

IRREPLACEABLE SHYAMA

 **Gerson da Cunha, AGNI Trustee & Convenor**

Irreplaceable is not an adjective to be bandied about, yet it is. With some departures, the term is apt. This is so in the case of Shyama Kulkarni. It has taken her passing to show how much Mumbai will miss her—and AGNI in a particular sense.

She was a spirit quickly and deeply moved by wrong-doing whether as corruption or as the stupidities in governance to which we have become so used. In her beloved Bandra, she attracted a group of people who felt as she did and zealously followed her lead in corrective action.

A look at the record of the Joint Area Action Group (JAAG) in H West Ward and its work on the condition of roads, proper water supply, response time of Municipality and Police to complaint will provide testimony. She was nominated unanimously by the Corporators of H West to its Ward Committee.

But Shyama Kulkarni will be remembered for her qualities as a human being: tough yet easily moved. Impatient with the least dishonesty. In a land riven by religion, caste, language and region, Shyama was an Indian, bold and true. A politician seeking re-election sought her help, "You will be invaluable for me among the Catholics of Bandra and Khar," he said. She replied, "But shouldn't you get a Catholic to do that for you?" "But aren't you a Catholic?" asked the politician. Shyama was catholic in the true dictionary meaning of the word: universal. **MMJ**

Shyama the GREAT!

 **Sharad Kumar, AGNI Trustee & Editor, Mumbai Meri Jaan**

Yes, you've got it right, she was indeed GREAT for many reasons. She never failed to respond if anyone requested her help. She was very punctual and was the first to be present whether at a Coordinators meeting, a Trustee meeting or any other AGNI event. She always did her homework before stepping out of her house for any social work. She literally walked the talk.

She was very systematic in her work. She immersed herself fully in the respective issues before she went out to help others. She was in the forefront in planning and organizing various AGNI events—AGNI's Annual Day programmes, Meet your Candidate events, Meet your Elected Representatives, Meet your Police Events etc.

I was very impressed with the way she did her work so when there was a vacancy on our Board of Trustees, I did not hesitate to propose her name to be a Trustee and there was unanimity in the meeting. She lived up to my expectations with her work.

She did very well the extremely difficult school campaign for the 2017 municipal elections where every student **Contd. on Page 4**

SHYAMA --- MY MENTOR

👉 **Zahida Banatwala, AGNI Trustee**

I met Shyama way back in 2008 when she invited me to join AGNI as the Coordinator of K-west ward, Andheri. Since then it's been a great journey working with her. Shyama led by example, she was my go-to person for guidance, help and support. On our journey to Wadala and back for AGNI's monthly meetings we shared our life stories and our thoughts on the betterment of Mumbai. These rides triggered great bonding.

At the meetings that we had with BMC officials or other departments she was direct and to the point conveying that she meant business. Because I had the pleasure of travelling with her often, I noticed that she would not hesitate to pull up a traffic cop even if we were stuck in some traffic snarl. She commanded great respect from officials, the public and of course, her beloved students.

No matter what I write here I would not do justice to this great lady. She led from the front and stood head and shoulders above the rest. There can be no other Shyama but we can do justice to her memory by trying to emulate her activism, with her honesty, sincerity and deep commitment.

MMJ

A SPECIAL PERSON

👉 **Rajkumar Sharma, AGNI Trustee**

"It takes a minute to find a special person, an hour to appreciate them, and a day to love them, but it takes an entire lifetime to forget them." Anonymous

And Shyama was more than special for all of us in AGNI so even a lifetime may be too short to forget her.

She was so motivating, that she just had to start something, be it the enrolment of college students in the voters list, awareness regarding waste management in schools, or anything related to good governance, people would join her and support her.

What made her special was that for her the cause was more important than any individual, department or authority. If she felt that the cause was genuine, she was not afraid to confront any politician, or bureaucrat. As a result of this selfless dedication, she earned the respect of all concerned.

"If the people we love are stolen from us, the way to have them live on is to never stop loving them." James O'Barr.

MMJ

AGNI's LOSS

👉 **Dinesh Ahir, AGNI Trustee**

Shyama's demise was unbelievably shocking and sad news. We had a long association and worked on many public campaigns together. Her passing away is a grievous loss to AGNI which will be hard to fill. Our prayers are with her family.

MMJ

DEDICATED SOCIAL WORKER

👉 **Anandani Thakoor, Managing Trustee Khar Residents Association**

Shyama to me was my idol from the word go. We worked together on many platforms and her dedication to social work was unbelievable. The ovation she received was overwhelming as she took up causes for the downtrodden. She was also involved in several development projects pertaining to public gardens, the Mithi river, pulling down political hoardings, and instituting peoples' movements for public causes. She kept up her links with politicians to take up cudgels against unauthorized constructions, reorganizing hawkers zones and creating parks. The scope of her work was unparalleled and huge.

MMJ

Celebrating Shyama

👉 **Lillian Pais, AGNI Coordinator, H/West Ward & JAAG team**

Shyama, you played and balanced the roles of wife, mother, grandma, teacher and a feisty activist to perfection. This is the awesome legacy we have from you.

You taught us loyalty and how to fight a good fight. A stronger, focused, selfless leader we have yet to find.

You were passionately outspoken and determined to make a change, whether it was for women, the environment or Bandra. The video links/ newspaper articles will remain testimony to your volume of work, together with the heart-warming messages from family and friends.

I, in particular, feel absolutely lucky to have worked side by side with you and experienced the 'Shyama' brand first-hand. Excitedly watching you keep every erring politician and bureaucrat in line. More often than not, you strictly reminding them of their duties and that we paid their salaries, then chuckling on the side you would say, "I cannot help that, it's the teacher in me".

But under that tough exterior you were such a softy at heart extending a helping hand to all no matter who asked. You're definitely an unparalleled person for us to emulate. Such a dynamic personality will always be missed and never be forgotten.

We will celebrate your life.

MMJ

Apostolic Shyama: The Teacher who created stories of transformation in lives and streets.

👉 **Austin Nazareth**

My memories of Shyama come in flashes. A respected teacher in Apostolic Carmel Convent on Hill Road, A crusading citizen activist for Bandra in particular, a Mumbaikar with an inclusive spirit and above all, a fearless voice for the idea of India.

Shyama was loud and clear whether interacting with civic officials at H West ward office or at the local police station. She always took on politicians and their minions on issues which would affect the cosmopolitan culture of her beloved Bandra and Mumbai. She was a true Maharashtrian, combative, but always large-hearted.

Yet, there was much more to her than just being an activist. She quietly toiled in a municipal school run by Aseema to help underprivileged children transform themselves and their lives. She spoke with pride of her friend, Saba Patel, Principal of Anjuman-e-Islam Girls School at Bazargate, Bandra and the performance of the school children on Republic Day Parade despite the fact that many of the children come from slums. Her efforts at enrolling young collegians as voters will always be remembered.

Shyama Kulkarni was more Catholic than the average baptised Catholic. She visited the Vatican, a natural trip after living in Bandra with its suburban skyline etched by the spires of numerous churches and streets dotted with old style bungalows with a Cross in the front.

Shyama lived a truly apostolic life in the service of the community and strove for good governance, first as a Coordinator and later as an active Trustee of AGNI.

MMJ



In Memory of Shyama

👉 **Prabha Krishnan ex-AGNI Coordinator now in the US**

I worked closely with Shyama in 2014, when we all pitched in to expand and revise the electoral rolls.

Her energy was boundless and her enthusiasm infectious! She was very heavily networked and she pulled out all stops and called in all chips to make that project a roaring success.

We had very good personal vibes. When she found out that my husband was a marine engineer she bubbled over - oh, I am sure my husband knows him! Which batch was he? Her face fell when I told her that he had passed on.

Friendly, helpful, a bustling hostess. I loved her beautifully decorated Bandra apartment.

Sorry Shyama, we connected so briefly.

Stay laughing up in the stars.

MMJ

A FIREBRAND ACTIVIST

👉 **Shrikant Soman, AGNI Coordinator, R/North Ward**

Shyama was a firebrand activist consistently pursuing the mission of good governance. She was full of enthusiasm and always spoke with deep conviction. She was impartial towards all political parties while at the same time she came down heavily whenever there was any deviation from the right. Her presence at the scene of action always had a deep impact on everyone present. With her passing away I have lost a dear friend and guide while society has lost a warrior for good governance.

MMJ

THE TORCHBEARER

👉 **Anthony Dias, AGNI Coordinator, P/SOUTH ward**

Ms Shyama Kulkarni was a focused social activist. Courage, determination and the discipline of a teacher could be seen in her approach to attending to citizens problems and resolving them. As a Coordinator, I used to meet her only at AGNI's monthly meetings where she would discuss the issues affecting Bandra's residents and in particular, her coordination with H /west ward officials. She took problems to the highest officials to get a solution. A woman of substance with a desire to solve civic issues, clear in her thought processes and action plans. Her interaction with municipal schools and youths to get registered as voters was much appreciated. We need more torchbearers like Shyama Kulkarni to interact with the BMC to resolve civic issues.

MMJ

THE RESPECTED ACTIVIST

👉 **Willie Shirshat, AGNI Coordinator, R/North Ward**

Shyama Kulkarni's demise has been an immeasurable loss for AGNI and personally for me too. In the early years of the 2000s there were not too many activists or social workers in Bandra. It was in this era that Shyama emerged as a much respected activist of the suburb. She took on several projects of public interest and also groomed several budding activists herself. She was in the forefront of every project of AGNI and thus created a space for herself which will always be extremely difficult to fill.

MMJ

A TROUBLESHOOTER

👉 **Nutan Bhalla, AGNI Coordinator L ward**

Shyama and AGNI were so synonymous that it's hard to think of her not being amongst us today. Apart from the other facets of her powerful personality, she was in one word a troubleshooter. We worked together for the audit of BMC schools and Swachha Abhiyan in schools of the ward and the detailed discussions and the to-do list provided by her helped me tremendously in my ward.

We will miss you but rest assured you are in a better world.

MMJ

FIGHTER FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE

👉 **Kishor K Chudasama, AGNI Coordinator, N Ward**

Shyama Kulkarni was a dedicated fighter for good governance in Mumbai. She fought hard against gross negligence by the BMC, the police and the government. She was also deeply involved in waste management, a critical subject in Mumbai, the functioning of BMC schools and the environment. She was one of the green warriors who opposed the coastal road. Mumbai will deeply miss her dynamic activism.

MMJ

She was unique, amazing, beautiful, dignified, sincere and caring, a wonderful human being

-Mini G Rao, Lawyer

MMJ

A COMRADE

👉 **Hansel D'Souza, President, Juhu Citizens Welfare Group**

Shyama was a comrade who would wait to fight with me over some issue or the other! Once while driving back from a protest in town, she pilloried me about my support to the Shiv Sena in the MCGM. I struggled in my defence but to no avail. Imagine a Maharashtrian mulgi, daughter of the late Sadanand Varde, crucifying a Catholic for supporting the Sena !!!!!

MMJ

IT'S THE TRUTH

👉 **Arch. Savio Lobo**

Yes. All that has been said here is the truth.

I knew her so well and we kept meeting very often until she shifted to a new house a few years ago. She was always ready to help anyone as long as it was a good cause.

MMJ

An appeal for donations

AGNI is a movement managed and run by volunteers. Being a voluntary movement, AGNI needs the support and contribution of every citizen to continue its work. Citizens are invited to contribute their indispensable ideas, time, effort and financial support. Send Cheque / DD in favour of "AGNI" to any of our Ward Coordinators as listed on Page 4 or to AGNI Office: Chadha Bldg, 1st Floor, Plot no. 95,

Wadala (West), Mumbai 400 031
Bank Details for donations transferred electronically:

Account Name: AGNI,
SB A/c No.: 000710210000005
Bank of India, Breach Candy
Branch, Mumbai 400 026.

NEFT / IFSC: BKID0000007

AGNI is a Charitable Trust. Donations are eligible for exemption under 80G of the Income Tax Act

MMJ

A VERY BIG THANK YOU
for Donations received

in the month of August 2021:

Francis Corla-Souza Rs.5000/=

FEARLESS AND PASSIONATE

Jennifer Shetty, AGNI's A ward Coordinator

Shyama was a person who was fearless, passionate, inspiring with deep convictions who always strove to build a better society. She spoke her mind.

Her relationship with people around her, including with bureaucrats and politicians is something to learn from. She sustained these relationships even if there was dissent. That's a noteworthy quality. There are three distinct experiences I had with Shyama where she supported me WITH FAIRNESS although there was disagreement among the rest. I truly appreciated her for standing up for what is right

The tireless social work that she did was immeasurable. As a tribute to her, AGNI must carry forward her legacy, the work that she has left behind to sustain a better city, a better environment and a better future for our young Indians.

MMJ



Shyama addressing the 5th National Conference of Residence Welfare Associations on her award winning project "Solid Waste Management through children", said "Children are the best sources to make parents and societies aware of how waste can be managed at the local level,"

In Memory of Shyama

Sandra Alex, AGNI Coordinator, K/West Ward

I so looked forward to meeting Shyama having been inducted into AGNI as coordinator K West. A force to reckon with on myriad fronts her name loomed large and stood for all that was just and right God had other plans and Shyama will forever be our guiding light as the tenets she lived by are indelible and firmly ensconced in the hearts of the Agni family and the many whose lives she touched

Rest in Eternal Peace and light Shyama...Shine on.

MMJ



Shyama the GREAT!

Contd. from Page 1 impressed on their parents on the need to go out and vote. Over 300 schools took part in this campaign. The result was there for all to see— the voting percentage went from 45% to 55% thanks to her detailed planning and helping Coordinators in implementing the campaign.

When the Election Commission of India wanted to have a pilot project for registration of youths in college for their Voter Registration drive, ECI turned to AGNI for the pilot project and AGNI in turn turned to Shyama to lead the team. It was the same in the Swachha Mumbai Abhiyan campaign. Whenever she was asked to participate or lead the team, she did an exemplary job.

Thus with her passing away, we have lost a leading light of AGNI. Will we ever get a replacement like her again? The best way to remember her is to emulate her example in letter and spirit.

Shyama is survived by her loving husband, Charu and two children, son Arjun and daughter Anjali in the USA, daughter in law Smita, son in law Sachin Jamdar, grandchildren, Maya and Reyva Jamdar and Mohan Kulkarni, and sister Padma Varde. (Her endeavour to bring awareness of citizen's responsibilities has filtered down even to her teenage granddaughter Reyva in the USA, who volunteered in the recent elections there).

May God give enough strength to the family to bear this irreparable loss.

MMJ

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