

Civil Society



HALL OF FAME 2014

WORKING FOR INDIA

The Soya Project: Savitri, Prem and Manni of the Samridhi Mahila Crop Producers' Company in their warehouse in Bundi



'AYURVEDA CAN CONTRIBUTE TO MODERN MEDICINE'

Darshan Shankar on the need for ethical integrative healthcare in India

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11th Anniversary SPECIAL ISSUE

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VILLAGES GET WATER, TOILETS

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MILTON IN HANUMANGARH

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TACKLING CYBERCRIME

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LOW-FEE COLLEGE IN PUNJAB

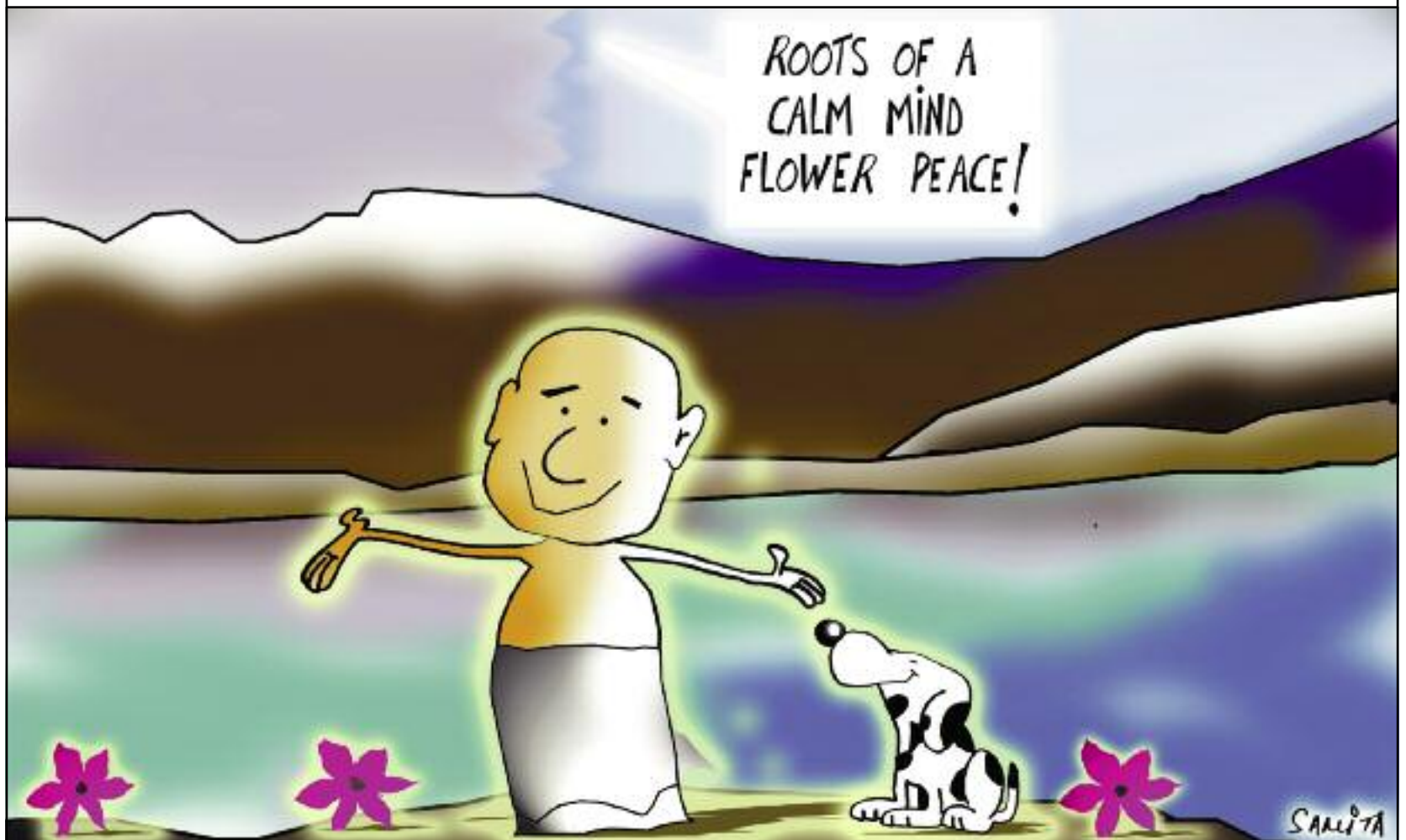
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PRODUCTS

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IN THE LIGHT

by SAMITA RATHOR



LETTERS



Five ministries

With reference to your cover story, 'What to do in 5 ministries,' my opinion is that absenteeism is common among government schoolteachers because they are routinely deployed on non-teaching duties. They are posted in remote areas where even

the most basic facilities are not available. For plum postings you need influence. Then, the state of school buildings is appalling and many are unsafe. Would you feel motivated?

Col. (retd) Arun Mamgain

New governments are always given a lot of advice by companies, the media and so on. But very few concentrate on the critical sectors that your magazine covers like health, education, environment, rural development and urban developments. Many experts have given wise and practical suggestions in your cover story and it was enlightening to read their views.

Shreedharan V.

Model teacher

I really enjoyed reading, 'The Model Teacher.' As an Uttarakhandi, I feel proud that a grassroots teacher, Jagdamba Prasad Dobhal, is going beyond the framework of prescribed teaching and is a catalyst for making children responsible citizens of tomorrow. His innovative math lab

will surely turn learning numbers into fun.

Suresh Thapaliyal

Medical tests

This is about your interview with Dr Balram Bhargava, 'Medical tests are being overdone.' The problem with 'too many medical tests' is that since the general public have lost trust in the medical community, the need for genuine tests is also being treated with scepticism leading to 'second opinions' which delay in diagnosis and treatment, apart from escalating costs.

Sudipto Roy

Today when you go to a doctor he will at once suggest a myriad tests. All the tests, apart from sounding new to your ears, will inflict losses to your pocket. Almost all the results of the tests will show no negativity. You will feel happy that you are alright. The doctor will then give you a pill or two – mere placebos – and you will go home in a cheery mood. My question

is: why can't doctors achieve a point of right diagnosis? Why do most of them make the patient undergo such tests? Why can't doctors diagnose the ailment by understanding the patient's symptoms and by physically examining him? After all if patients have to carry out a battery of tests to arrive at a diagnosis then what is the doctor for?

Shambu Goel

Excellent interview. The US has an over-diagnosed, over-treated, over-priced system – a racket in fact. It is hideous in its hypochondria. The nexus between the medical/medicating system – I won't call it healthcare – and the drug industry is deep and strong. Check out the biggest contributors to the US political system. Not for nothing did Lipitor become the bestselling drug of all time and the statin mantra gain such strong support.

But there is also a deeper underlying mortality-longevity issue. Americans want to live forever, tirelessly trying to roll back the years or

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COVER PHOTOGRAPH: LAKSHMAN ANAND

ANNUAL DOUBLE ISSUE

This September-October issue of *Civil Society* marks completion of 11 years of the magazine. The next issue will be in November.

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Civil Society

READ US. WE READ YOU.

11 very quick years

TIME flies and it seems to go especially fast in publications. In *Civil Society* we transit from month to month in a space that is never short of interesting people and trends. There is always something new to figure out, someone exciting to meet. We are blessed with work that keeps us in touch with people living in different Indias: rich and poor, weak and powerful, committed and casual, urban and rural. These are diverse worlds in a single system. It is great to be able to make this journey as only journalists can. It seems just yesterday that we were celebrating 10 years of our magazine. We have done 11 years now.

This has been a year defined by serious change. The Congress has been decimated for reasons that go beyond conventional politics. The Aam Aadmi Party rose rapidly and then came crashing down when it seemed to people that AAP leaders were no better than other politicians. The Bharatiya Janata Party rose to power on what we believe is a tide of hopes and aspirations in the country.

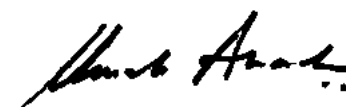
After 20 years of economic reforms, greater visible prosperity and access to empowering technologies like the Internet and mobile phone, the hopes and aspirations of people shouldn't come as a surprise. We should also recognise that India brims with positive energy. But people trying to get on with their lives are let down by dysfunctional institutions and a suffocating elitism in the country.

Governments that want to put India on the path of rapid growth will have to work at speedily reforming institutions and making access more equal. NGOs and other social sector players have an important role to play in achieving this. We have shown time and again through our stories that they are providers of last-mile solutions. They have done serious work in education, health and environment and governments would do well to give scale to their expertise by making them part of policy and outreach.

As always, we are proud to present the Civil Society Hall of Fame. This year's entrants to the Hall of Fame are all outstanding individuals and groups who deserve national attention. We present them as 'working for India' and it is our intention that India recognise their contributions.

The Civil Society Hall of Fame's success owes much to our partner, the Azim Premji Foundation and our sponsors. The sponsors are happy just to support a good idea and give us all the space to make it a citizens' initiative. We also have a debt of gratitude to our jury – Nasser Munjee, Aruna Roy, Darshan Shankar, Vir Chopra and Dr DPS Toor – who invest time and effort in choosing the final entrants from a much longer list.

Finally, a big thank you to our readers! Your subscriptions help us remain an independent magazine. It is thrilling that we reach faraway places in the country with our print edition. Of course the Internet's reach is much more. But the printing, packaging, posting and finally receiving of a magazine is quite something else.



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'Ayurveda can contribute to modern medicine'

INTERVIEW

DARSHAN SHANKAR

Civil Society News
New Delhi

DARSHAN Shankar has been at the forefront of efforts to mainstream traditional knowledge and create linkages with Western medicine. He is the founder of the Foundation for Revitalization of Local Health Traditions (FRLHT) in Bangalore where research has been conducted to arrive at meetings points for two different epistemologies. Laboratory tests have been used to validate the efficacy of Ayurvedic formulations in terms of Western science. Neglected folk-healers have been brought together for conferences in an effort to perpetuate their undocumented knowledge.

FRLHT also has a valuable herbarium, perhaps India's best, and has worked with communities to grow and conserve medicinal plants in situ.

In 2008, FRLHT set up a hospital and became the Institute of Ayurveda and Integrative Medicine (I-AIM). Recently, it was given the status of a university.

Shankar has played an important role in creating awareness and shaping public policy on how traditional knowledge systems should be nurtured and used for the benefit of society. He is a votary of both Indian and Western systems being employed in public health initiatives.

In this interview with *Civil Society* he argues that a huge opportunity presents itself to the new Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government and suggests ways in which it can quickly move forward.

The BJP government appears keen to encourage use of traditional medicine. What do you think the government's foremost agenda should be?

I believe that the most important agenda should be to revitalise traditional household and community health practices which can result in self-reliance of millions of citizens in primary healthcare.

Let me give you some examples. The traditional practice, which has now eroded, of drinking water stored overnight in copper vessels, or in any vessel (plastic, aluminum, steel) that has contact with copper, can eradicate waterborne diseases. The reason, as shown by rigorous scientific experiments, is that around 200 ppb of copper ions leach into the water and destroy all pathogenic bacteria.

Similarly, there is incredibly rich knowledge of yoga practices, healthy food recipes and of prevention and cure of common ailments with the help of around 6,500 species of medicinal plants that grow across various ecosystems of the country.

ICT technology can be used creatively to directly transmit and connect to millions of households on

low-cost traditional solutions for their health needs. This agenda is most important for the empowerment of civil society in the healthcare sector.

How can traditional medicine be inculcated into India's health system?

The government should establish a network of integrative clinical establishments for primary, secondary and tertiary healthcare both in the government and in the not-for-profit, non-government sectors. The National Health Mission has this strategy of integrative healthcare at the policy level but nothing effective on the ground. It is important for policy-makers to realise that integrative healthcare is the future for health services because no single system has the best solutions to all the health needs of the community.

'The most important agenda should be to revitalise traditional household and community health practices which can result in self-reliance of millions of citizens.'

Is there need for more scientific research based on Western systems into traditional systems of medicine?

Yes. I would recommend that the government encourage critical investments in high impact scientific research on Ayurvedic-biology in areas like Ayur-Genomics, pathogenesis, drug delivery, metabolic pathways and neurobiology. Such research has the potential for India to make original contributions to the world of medicine and even win Nobel prizes.

The government could also incentivise industry to manufacture ethical, safe and quality AYUSH products for consumption by both the domestic and international markets.

A very doable agenda is to design IT-enabled strategies for rapidly generating large-scale clinical evidence from ongoing, AYUSH clinical practice, in order to establish the effectiveness of Indian Systems of Medicine.

A critical futuristic agenda is to enable Medical Councils to pilot integrative modules into the health education system including ethical guidelines for integrative practice. Such modules on integrative healthcare have already been introduced in prestigious medical schools in the US and Europe.

Should doctors of Allopathy be permitted to prescribe Ayurvedic medicines? Currently they are



Darshan Shankar: 'It is essential to promote medical pluralism'

forbidden from doing so.

Despite the fact that the health seeking behaviour of the Indian public and, for that matter globally, shows that 40 to 80 per cent of the population do seek support from different medical systems for different needs, policy-makers seem oblivious to this popular behaviour.

Currently, cross-medical practice is illegal in India. In Western countries medical professionals are not discouraged from learning any medical therapy, for example acupuncture or even some aspect of Ayurveda, and integrating it into their practice. However, consumer laws in those countries are strong enough to prevent irresponsible practice.

In India such integration is illegal for any practitioner. While India has the world's largest number of legalised medical systems – Allopathy, Ayurveda, Siddha, Unani, Swa-rigpa and Homeopathy – it is ironic that licensed medical practitioners are legally barred from cross-medical practice.

In my view this situation needs to be changed. In India, given the fact that consumer laws are weak, I believe that Medical Councils need to be persuaded to introduce educational modules perhaps at the

post-graduate level for licensed practitioners from any stream of medicine who wish to learn specific aspects of another system of medicine.

State governments need to create a legal framework for medical practice that permits any licensed practitioner of any pathy to practice specific aspects of another system of medicine, only to the extent of their training. This is absolutely essential to promote medical pluralism and usher in a much needed system of ethical integrative healthcare, which is the crying need of our communities.

Do you have suggestions on how traditional knowledge can be promoted in schools?

This has to be done in very creative ways. It is a very serious programme. First, we need to create ecosystem specific herbal gardens in our schools. This is not enough. We need to design multimedia modules on medicinal plants and their properties using imaginative instructional and fun technologies to excite students to learn traditional knowledge.

Our own university, the Institute of Transdisciplinary Health Sciences and Technology (ITD-HST), would love to provide

content for such a programme but we will need creative ICT partners to help convert the content into interesting forms for young learners so that they are motivated to retain and utilise the content. Innovative universities like the Azim Premji University, which focuses on school education, should take the lead in developing this programme.

What are your views on Public-Private-Partnership (PPP) to promote Indian systems of healthcare?

The operational concept of the PPP needs to be worked out by Indian planners. There can be many models. I am a votary of government support for not-for-profit, non-government institutions. I am strongly of the view that taxpayers money should not be spent only on government-managed knowledge generation and health service initiatives which are generally inefficient and wasteful. It is very important for this government to recognise that not-for-profit, non-government institutions, can make significant contributions to nation-building. I am sure that taxpayers would agree to the chan-

nelling of their money, particularly in the social sectors, to non-government institutions, who are selected transparently based on explicit public interest criteria related to their governance, competence and integrity.

It will be shocking for your readers to know that in government departments like the Department of Science and Technology, (DST), Department of Biotechnology, (DBT), Union Ministry of Health (MoH) and the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests, (MoEF), the government disallows payment of a salary or an honorarium or institutional overheads to Principal Investigators, (PIs) from non-government, not-for-profit research organisations or, universities for innovative programmes designed by them and screened and approved by DST, DBT, MoH, MoEF even if the PI spends 50-100 per cent time in the implementation of, the programme.

In 2012 you established one of India's first integrative healthcare facilities with the help of the Tata Trusts. What are your experiences from this experiment?

We have established a 100-bed healthcare centre which we call I-AIM (Institute of Ayurveda and Integrative Medicine). We took this initiative because health seeking behaviour studies clearly indicate that the general public believes in medical pluralism. They already seek relief from different systems of healthcare for different needs. Sometimes their decisions are well-informed and at other times not sufficiently informed. However, although people are demanding integrative healthcare, educational, research and health service institutions have not risen to the challenge.

The USP of the services in the I-AIM facility is our focus both on wellness as well as disease management. The knowledge of Ayurveda, yoga and allopathy in that order, inform the content of I-AIM's health services. We have definitely embarked on the path of integrative healthcare but we are evolving. We do have a long way to go before we mature into a well-balanced Indian model of integrative healthcare.

What has been I-AIM's experience in integrating Ayurveda, yoga and allopathy? How have patients reacted?

The number of patients is growing since 2011 when we started. This growth has happened only by word of mouth. I expect, from the trends, that numbers will continue to grow. I believe any serious integrative healthcare centre in the country will receive a similar response.

What are your future plans for I-AIM?

We visualise over the next 10 years I-AIM developing the capacity to undertake surgery and management of emergency and acute conditions managed by allopathy, chronic and common ailments, prevention and wellness, managed by Ayurveda and yoga. We visualise integrative teams of health professionals providing services in general medicine including specialised fields like wellness and prevention, cardiology, metabolic disorders, neurology, ophthalmology and orthopaedics. ■

From labour laws to land, campaigns speak up

Civil Society News
New Delhi

A public hearing was held at Delhi's Jantar Mantar on 4 August to coincide with the first session of the newly elected Parliament. It was attended by representatives of the Pension Parishad, the Right to Food Campaign, the Rashtriya Mazdoor Adhikar Morcha for MNREGA, the Jan Swasthya Abhiyan and the National Alliance for People's Movements (NAPM). The objective was to raise issues con-



Medha Patkar at the public hearing

cerning the marginalised.

Campaigners expressed concern over changes proposed in labour laws and in the new land acquisition and resettlement law. They opposed the introduction of genetically modified crops and wanted quicker implementation of the National Food Security Act (NFSA). They demanded a revamp of the Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MNREGs), strengthening of the public health system and an increase in pensions.

Dr Vandana Prasad of the Jan Swasthya Abhiyan said that health was a fundamental human right and that the government must provide health facilities with people's participation. The Jan Swasthya Abhiyan demanded that the public health system be strengthened and expanded with better infrastructure and more health workers at the grassroots. Their demands included free medicines, price controls on essential drugs, and a reliable urban healthcare system.

Kavita Srivastava of the Right to Food campaign urged the government to stop all field trials of genetically modified foods. "We demand the promotion of decentralised, local production across food schemes as enshrined in the NFSA," she said. She wanted immediate expansion and implementation of the NFSA.

"The government has arbitrarily extended the implementation deadline and given states three to six months to implement the public distribution system (PDS) entitlements without any mention of food security allowance as mandatory compensation provisioned in the law," said the activists.

The Right to Food campaigners welcomed the veto of the government against the WTO treaty. "We also demand that the government ensures no pressure from the WTO on right to food, full use of flexibilities of TRIPs and that it resists trade agreements related to intellectual property rights," they said.

Arundhati Dhuru, activist with the Rashtriya Mazdoor Adhikar Morcha, urged the government to allocate more funds to MNREGA because of inflation and a drought situation in parts of the country. "Rural workers across the country are facing a completely non-responsive employment guarantee regime," she said. Activists do not want any changes in the employment guarantee law. They want better implementation and they fear that the scheme will be handed over to contractors and big landlords.

The NAPM demanded that two key provisions of the new Right to Fair Compensation, Transparency in Land Acquisition, Resettlement and Rehabilitation Act, 2013, namely 'consent' and 'social impact assessment', must remain unchanged. They opposed any changes whatsoever to this law.

"We urge the government to urgently establish a National Resettlement and Rehabilitation Commission to deal with the grievances of 10 crore people who have sacrificed their land and livelihood in the process of development," said Medha Patkar, leader of the NAPM.

The Pension Parishad demanded that all citizens above 55 years of age should be made eligible for pension. Pension should be a universal entitlement of ₹2,000 per month and indexed to inflation. Pension must be paid on the first of every month and there should be a grievance redress mechanism. Social security benefits like healthcare facilities and rations must also be provided, stated a press release by the Pension Parishad.

"Governments come and go but we who represent campaigns and who are committed to securing the rights of the poor and vulnerable are here to stay till these rights and entitlements get realised in letter and spirit," said Nikhil Dey, an activist with the Pension Parishad and the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan. ■



Schoolgirls make notes on use of the RTI Act



A crowd around the RTI On Wheels van

Kashmiris flock to Gujarat RTI van

Jehangir Rashid
Srinagar

THE right to information (RTI) is being widely used in Jammu and Kashmir to get out information from the government and access services, according to the Mahiti Adhikar Gujarat Pahal (MAGP).

Activists of the MAGP, which is based in Gujarat, travelled across Jammu and Kashmir for two weeks as part of its RTI On Wheels campaign that was flagged by Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on 16 June.

Pankti Jog, secretary of MAGP, said RTI activists of Jammu and Kashmir should be saluted since they had to work under rather hostile conditions to implement the law and encourage its use.

"We went to different areas of the state and got feedback from the people. They told us in detail about the problems they face on a daily basis," she said.

"They said they were up against all odds, that the Army and forest smugglers caused problems every now and then. Still, they have not given up and carry on with their good work. There is a ray of hope in their hearts."

She also noted that the people of the state continue to be very concerned about human rights and development.

"In Doda district a person who had come all alone from Thathri village told us that he paid

₹5,000 to get information about the muster rolls of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) in his village. But, till date, he has been denied this information," Pankti recalled.

Despite such problems, the implementation of RTI in the state was impressive. In her view the state's RTI law was more effective than the Central law because the State Information Commission's functioning was transparent.

After MAGP's interaction with the commission people are getting the information they seek more readily.

"The J&K RTI movement has done great work in both Jammu and Kashmir regions. The movement is working tirelessly for improving the functioning of democratic institutions in the state," she said.

RTI is mainly being used to resolve issues concerning delivery of services in health and education.

"Through the RTI On Wheels we would like to assess the impact of the use of the RTI Act on the ground. We would also like to know how people are using this law. Is it being used positively to gain access to better facilities and services? Such an assessment would serve as an eye-opener and would help us to carry out our campaign more effectively," said Pankti.

Dr Sheikh Ghulam Rasool, chairman, Jammu & Kashmir Right to Information Movement (J&K RTIM) was all praise for MAGP's two-week cam-

'The people said they were up against all odds, that the Army and forest smugglers caused problems every now and then. Still, they have not given up and carry on with their good work.'

ampaign in the state.

"At Budgam, volunteers of the MAGP carried out a presentation on the use of RTI and interacted with ordinary citizens as well as RTI activists. But they couldn't do this in Srinagar due to a strike called on the scheduled date," said Dr Rasool.

The team visited far-off pockets in Pakharpora, Yusmarg, Branwar, Beerwah, Charar-i-Sharief, Chadoora, Kunzer, Tangmarg, Magam, Pulwama, Shopian, Mughal Road, Rajouri and Shahdhar Sharief.

According to Dr Rasool, awareness of RTI in rural areas is high as compared to urban areas. "A survey carried out in Budgam district showed that half its population is now aware of the RTI Act. The RTI movement's biggest success, however, is

the Save Tosa Maidan campaign. It was due to our sustained campaign that the Army is now ready to move out of this beautiful meadow in Central Kashmir," Dr Rasool said.

The MAGP is taking RTI On Wheels across the country to inform and educate people. Pankti said their observation was that more people in rural areas were using RTI than in urban areas. But despite this its benefits were not being derived by people in rural areas. "This is where we want to make a difference," she said.

The RTI On Wheels initiative began in 2008-09. But it had its teething problems, chief among them being a good enough vehicle to travel in. Now there is a full-fledged van in which it is easier to travel to remote areas.

The RTI On Wheels plans to travel across India for the next three years. "We have started from J&K but we will be visiting Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka and Kerala too. As our country is spread over a huge area, it won't be possible for us to complete the RTI On Wheels campaign in a year. It will take us at least three years," said Pankti.

"From Jammu we went to Doda and Kishtwar in Jammu division. From Kishtwar we went to Anantnag, Srinagar, Budgam, Pulwama, Kupwara, Tangdar, Tangmarg and Kunzer. On our way back we travelled on the Mughal Road and reached Rajouri district in Jammu division via the Shopian district in the Kashmir Valley," explained Pankti. ■

CONFLICT ZONE

Landmines leave deep wounds

Chetna Verma
Jammu

FIVE years ago, Saida Kosar had gone to a field near her house to play with two of her friends. The area where she was playing had been the site of an encounter between security forces and the militants. Oblivious of this fact, Saida picked up a shiny object – a landmine – and carried it in her right hand. In a split second, the landmine went off injuring her arm and killing one of her friends on the spot. Saida, who had dreamed of becoming a doctor, is now leading a dependent life. Her right arm was amputated.

With her father already handicapped, Saida, now 18 years old, has always led a difficult life. She hails from Bathidhar village near the Line of Control (LoC) in Mendhar district. This village, often in the news for cross firing at the border, is strewn with extensive antipersonnel mines, supposedly meant to check cross-border illegal activities. In reality, the landmines are causing deep mental and physical distress to villagers since several decades.

This village has its own share of unheard miseries. When you enter you are confronted by an agonising reality. You begin to notice the unusually large number of disabled people on the roadside walking with crutches or with a limb missing – a horrible sight to witness. Landmines do not discriminate between men and women. But the after effects of losing a limb due to a landmine has a deeper effect on women's mental and physical

health, trapped as they are in this cordoned village with very little freedom.

Nineteen-year-old Zahida Parveen shares Saida's grief. In 2009, she too stepped on a landmine while taking her cattle for grazing to a forest just a km from her house. She too lost her right leg in the incident. "I was in Class 9 and I had just started dreaming of becoming a teacher. But soon after this incident my father

passed away, leaving me as a burden on my mother, brother and sister," says Zahida who, fighting all odds, has enrolled in a private academy in Class 10.

"One cannot guess where the landmines have been positioned. They were strategically placed in dense areas to check infiltration from across the border but due to a decline in forest land and grazing land, the landmine areas have become more accessible," says social activist Nazam Din Mir, who comes from Keerni, another fenced village. He has been demanding compensation for landmine victims from the security forces or from the government since several years.

Decrease in the number of trees has led to soil erosion, which in turn, is responsible for frequent flash floods. Due to heavy rains, flash floods and snowfall, the landmines laid along the border get dislodged from their original position, making

them difficult to detect and deactivate. They slide into areas frequented by villagers, causing immense damage and loss of lives.

Women affected by landmine blasts are, in many cases, forced to sit at home to avoid the social stigma of disability. On the other hand, men can be seen hobbling through fields, doing menial jobs or passing their time with fellow villagers. If the victim is unmarried, her chances of marriage are very slim. She spends her entire life battling the bias of an unsympathetic society. And if the victim is married,

her role in the family, giving birth, raising children and other responsibilities remain the same.

Razia Kosar, a resident of Qasba village, located near the LoC in the Haveli tehsil of Poonch district, lost her left foot in a mine blast while she was cutting grass for her livestock in 2008. At that time, she had only one child but gave birth to another in 2011. Her husband, Mohammad Rashid, works as a labourer in Poonch town. Since they do not have any other source of income, Rashid cannot afford to stay back to help with the children, thus putting the entire

responsibility of the household on Razia. This is likely to cost Razia a great deal in terms of her health.

According to Irene Feika, Deputy Chairperson of Underrepresented Groups, Disabled People International, "Women with disabilities are deprived of political, social, economic and health opportunities. Their problems become very complex when combined with social stigma and poverty. They have been largely neglected when it comes to research, state policies, the disability and women's movements and rehabilitation programmes."

With no compensation from any quarter, the women landmine victims continue to suffer the prejudices of an unjust society. And in India religion, custom and tradition prevent women from speaking up for their rights. ■

(This article is part of the writer's work under a National Media Fellowship awarded by the National Foundation of India.)
Charkha Features



SAMITA'S WORLD

by SAMITA RATHOR



Villages get water, toilets

Rakesh Agrawal
Dehradun

FOR villagers in the hills of Uttarakhand, a clean toilet and piped water supply seemed, well, just a pipe dream. Fortunately, this dream is coming true and villagers are waking up to water and toilets in their homes. Naturally, they are thrilled.

“Hardly any home in our village had a latrine. We women were the worst sufferers since we had to trudge to the forest across the hill before sunrise,” says Guddi Devi of Silogi village in Tehri district. Now this village of 106 households has 37 toilets and more are being made, thanks to the Himmotthan Pariyojana’s Water and Sanitation Initiative (WATSAN).

The NGO, based in Dehradun, has put in place 180 drinking water schemes, 600 rainwater-harvesting tanks and 5,000 toilets in 126 villages, benefiting around 7,000 households. The project started in 2001 in three phases with the clear objective of ensuring a regular supply of water to villages and easy access to toilets.

Supported by the Sir Ratan Tata Trust in Mumbai, which extended technical and financial support, Himmotthan Pariyojana is also helped by the Himalayan Institute Hospital Trust in Dehradun which monitors the quality of construction and provides valuable inputs.

Lack of water and sanitation is very prominent in the hill regions of Uttarakhand. The 2011 census reported that 45.9 per cent of rural areas in Uttarakhand are without such essential facilities.

Although water for most of northern India originates from the Himalayas, the people of this hill state face an acute shortage of potable water. The state’s green cover is shrinking and traditional water harvesting structures, like streams and waterfalls, are drying up especially in summer. Many mountain rivers like the Kosi near Almora and the Gaula near Haldwani have severely reduced water flows during the lean season.

“While we support the project by providing resources and know-how, it is implemented by village-level groups,” explains Malavika Chauhan, Executive Director of Himmotthan Pariyojana. The NGO partners local organisations that help village-based groups to implement the programme.

In Gawana village in Tehri district, people no longer have to face water scarcity, “After our river stream dried up, there was no water source in our village,” says Prabhu Lal, a resident. In the beginning of 2014, the village began getting piped water supply. They are very happy. “I can now take care of my teenage daughter as I don’t have to walk miles to fetch water,” says Sushila Devi, 46, a resident.

Piped water supply has greatly reduced women’s burden. “The time women spend fetching water has reduced from six hours to less than half an hour per day,” says Vinod Kothari, Coordinator, Monitoring

& Evaluation, Himmotthan.

A regular supply of water has yielded health benefits too. Bhag Singh of Kalavan Tegna village in Tehri district confirms that everyone washes their hands with soap before meals, after meals, and after using the toilet. “Ninety five per cent of people use latrines for defecation and now no one suffers from diarrhoea,” he says.

In villages where water sources like springs and rivulets don’t exist or flow much below the village, Himmotthan has constructed rainwater-harvesting

RICHA AGRAWAL



‘The time women spend fetching water has reduced from six hours to less than half an hour per day.’

structures. Villagers are very happy to use this reserve of water. “Our women don’t have to walk long distance anymore as God gives us all the water we need. We store water in the tank not just during the monsoon, but even afterwards,” says Rajendra Singh Negi of Khuret village in Tehri district. In his village, 94 households are collecting rainwater since 2005.

The water and sanitation committees in each village plan, design, implement and manage their own schemes. This ensures that health improves with access to clean drinking water and safe sanitation. A community-based participatory approach is the hallmark of WATSAN projects. The villagers con-

tribute around 10 per cent of the capital cost, giving them a sense of ownership, says Chauhan.

“Since a toilet costs about ₹30,000 and we get ₹3,000 as incentive, we feel it belongs to us and we use it,” says Sushila Devi of Khedtalla village. The incentive for constructing toilets for Dalit and Adivasi households is a little higher at ₹3,300.

The community takes care of the operation and maintenance of the scheme after its construction. It appoints a village maintenance worker, whose duties include minor repair works, collecting a water tariff and ensuring water supply is regular.

People are satisfied with the services of the maintenance worker, “We no longer worry about not getting water as the mechanic is just a call away,” says Darshani Devi, 34, a farmer from Silogi village in Tehri.

Himmotthan has also underlined the importance of groundwater management. “For a sustained supply on a perennial basis maintaining a good forest cover in the catchment areas of water sources is imperative. Therefore, conservation and management of the spring’s catchment area forms an integral component of the project,” says Chauhan.

To help revive flows in 2009 the Advanced Centre for Water Resources Development and Management in Pune, an institution that works on geo-hydrology and groundwater management was brought in to study springs in specific project areas. To ensure the sustainability of water from springs, soil and water conservation works have been carried out in catchment areas.

Villagers who instinctively understand the connection between water and forests are thrilled. “These *banj*, *moru* and *khirasu* trees will live for ages, so our local stream will always have water,” says Darshani Devi of Dangala village.

Similarly, in Khedtalla, a small, scattered village in Tehri district, people never believed that they would ever get clean, potable water at their doorstep. They now get piped water.

“I am finally free of my cumbersome backache as I don’t have to walk a long way to fetch water,” says Maya Devi, an octogenarian. “And I can help my daughter to get ready for school,” says Kamini Devi, another villager.

Himmotthan has also involved government departments such as the Jal Nigam, the Department of Rural Development and the Forest Department to ensure their full support since providing water and sanitation is primarily the government’s responsibility. A District Level Coordination Committee has been formed in every district to coordinate with government departments.

The Government of India awarded the Nirmal Gram Puraskar to 10 out of 126 villages where Himmotthan has implemented its water and sanitation project. Four more villages have been nominated for the award. And Himmotthan’s success story has been replicated in 10 villages in Sirmour district of Himachal Pradesh. ■

Milton in Hanumangarh



TUSHAR DHARA

Vasundhara Raje, Chief Minister of Rajasthan, inaugurating the Milton Library with Purna Chandra Kishan

Tushar Dhara
Hanumangarh

THE community library project in Hanumangarh district of Rajasthan is a network of nine libraries that promote reading among children from economically deprived communities and widen their cultural and social horizons. The libraries provide access to art, music, literature, poetry and even sports.

The project is the brainchild of Purna Chandra Kishan, the Collector of Hanumangarh district, who wanted to provide children access to art, music and literature. He also wanted his 'non-library' library to be located in working-class *bastis*.

"These kids are as bright as any other children but they don't have the opportunities or the access that middle-class children have. The libraries help them bridge that gap," says Kishan.

The John Milton Library was the first library and it was set up in Hanumangarh Junction in January this year. Happy, energetic children scramble around, reading and playing. One of them does a Michael Jackson dance, a combination of break-dance interspersed with *bhangra*.

Prints procured from the National Gallery of Modern Art hang on the walls. There is Amrita Shergil's self-portrait, paintings by Abanindranath Tagore, MAR Chughtai, Jamini Roy and Raja Ravi Varma's oleographs of Indian mythology.

The library stocks literature and children's books. There are books to ace competitive exams for older children. The books in the literature section have been selected by Kishan. The courtyard outside has busts of poets like Qazi Nazrul Islam as well as writers like Premchand and Rajasthani folklorist Vijaydan Detha. Inside, the children read or play

The John Milton Library became such a success that seven other libraries were opened in quick succession in Hanumangarh.

chess and carrom.

The John Milton Library became such a success that seven other libraries opened in quick succession in Hanumangarh and in the nearby towns of Pilibanga and Sangria. The residents of Parlika village set up one. A youth group from a nearby village also got one.

These libraries have been named after Western scientists: Michael Faraday, Isaac Newton, Galileo, Euclid and Albert Einstein. The nod to scientists probably points to Kishan's science background: he graduated from the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT).

Hanumangarh is an agriculturally prosperous district in north Rajasthan. An extensive network of irrigation canals provide water to fertile farmland. Migrant labourers have settled in the district. Bihari Basti is one of the poorest parts of Hanumangarh town and home to rickshaw-pullers, brick-layers, domestic workers and so on.

The Galileo Library and Reading Room was started here in March. It is located next to a pond clogged with hyacinth and the town's sewage. The library has become Bihari Basti's cultural centre. Children here have now become bookworms and chess champions.

A pan-library chess tournament was held in May. The Galileo kids emerged victorious. Sonu Rai, 13, who is in Class 7, won the tournament. His rival

was runner-up Utkarsh, a confident boy who is happy that he is second-best at chess.

"Before the library was set up there was nothing to do around here. I would go to school and come back," says the diminutive Sonu. "Now I want to spend all my free time here and even my parents are happy." His favourite reading material is the Panchatantra and general knowledge books. Sonu's father migrated from Bihar 35 years ago and is a rickshaw-puller while his mother is a domestic worker.

The library has developed a sense of pride among the children and their families. One of the stated aims of the library project is to "prevent children from idly falling into vices like drinking, gambling and addiction".

The Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) team played chess against the library boys at multiple locations and lost each and every match. One nail-biting match at John Milton stretched over two hours but the end was a foregone conclusion. The boys won.

Kishan has faced some criticism over the libraries. The grouse was that he seemed to be spending too much time in the libraries. In response, he roped in Sandeep Dadhich who worked for the Hanumangarh municipality, to look after the day-to-day functioning of the libraries.

Dadhich explains how the libraries run: "We don't charge money for the books and the kids can take them home whenever they want." The open-access system has worked well and he says that none of the libraries have lost books.

The books have been procured from the National Book Trust and the Children's Book Trust. Dadhich says that everyone contributed 'whatever they could' towards funding. But what will happen to the libraries when Kishan gets posted elsewhere? Dadhich is confident that the libraries have gained traction with the communities and will continue.

Meanwhile, the libraries are bringing communities together, or at least their kids. The Michael Faraday Library is in Nai Khunja Basti in Hanumangarh town. One side has Muslim hutments while the other side is 'Hindu only'. Ironically, the library, a community hall in an earlier avatar, is located in the middle. Kids from both communities read and play together.

And girls outnumber boys. Many girls belong to the Muslim community, according to Dadhich. The MKSS team tried its luck at chess here and lost, once again. The team turned instead to admiring the art on the walls and the books on the shelves.

At the end of our two-day visit to the libraries, we went to John Milton for dinner. Two boys played raga Darbari on the violin and sarangi as we ate. Darbari is a brooding night raga which creates an introspective mood. The raga is probably the best metaphor for what a library should be. ■

(Tushar Dhara is a former economics and business journalist who now works with the School for Democracy and the MKSS in Rajasthan)

Awards for four NGOs

Shayak Majumdar
New Delhi

RESOURCE Alliance, in collaboration with the Rockefeller Foundation and EdelGive Foundation, felicitated the four winners of the India NGO Awards 2013-2014 in New Delhi on 26 July. The four were chosen from a longer list of 12 voluntary organisations whose exceptional standards and practices qualified them for the finals from 400 applicants.

The NGOs were classified into three categories: small, medium and large, depending on their size, scale and reach. An award was also given to one upcoming NGO. Kirron Kher, actor and MP, presented the awards. "With so many NGOs operating in the country, there is a lot of scepticism among people about their genuineness. The selection process of the India NGO Awards makes it possible to reward deserving NGOs on the basis of accountability, transparency and effective use of funds," said Kher.

Save Life Foundation (SLF) won the best NGO award in the small category. Based in New Delhi, SLF works to reduce the high number of road accidents that take place in India.

In the medium category, the winner was Sense International (India). Established in 1997, it is the first national NGO to develop sustainable comprehensive services for deaf and blind people. It works with 48 partners in 21 states, providing services to almost 57,000 persons. Sense India provides education, vocational training and livelihood support to adults. It trains families and teachers to work with the deaf and blind. Sense India advocates for their rights with communities and the government.

SOS Children's Villages of India won the award in the large category. SOS works for children who have lost their families and those who are at risk of abandonment and social neglect. It provides long-term family care to such children. SOS' well-known Family Based Care (FBC) model, where a loving home and family are recreated for the child, is implemented in all its villages.

The Rising Star NGO award was given to Rural Health Care Foundation (RHCF). Formed in 2007, RHCF works to address the paucity of medical facilities. RHCF has five healthcare centres in the rural interiors of West Bengal and two centres next to slums in Kolkata. OPD services are provided through four departments in each of its centres - general medicine, ophthalmology, dental care and homoeopathy. Since its inception, RHCF has treated over 920,000 patients.

General Surat Sandhu, Chairman, Resource Alliance India, said, "We are confident that these awards will inspire more people and organisations to promote accountability and transparency in the non-profit sector."

Gurgaon Police train students to tackle cybercrime

Shayak Majumdar
Gurgaon

It's rare for a state police force to take in young interns and acquaint them with tackling digital crime and understanding cyber law. The Cyber Crime Cell of the Gurgaon Police has done just that. Under its Second Annual Summer Internship Programme, 35 college students from all over the country were selected for a training session of around one month on how to curb the growing menace of cybercrime.

Alongside, the Gurgaon Police is also reaching out to students, parents and the faculty of educational institutions through their extensive Cyber Safe campaign that was launched in April. The Gurgaon Police has sent experts from its Cyber Crime Cell to more than 25 schools and colleges to spread awareness on social media crime, Internet fraud and cyber ethics.

"Both the internship programme and the awareness campaign are aimed at spreading cyber awareness among citizens," says Alok Mittal, Commissioner of the Gurgaon Police. "However, it also gives us a chance to interact directly with people and let them see how the police works and how it tackles cybercrime."

The 45-day internship programme that started on 3 June, trained interns on cyber offences like banking fraud, email crime, hacking and cyber laws. Rakshit Tandon, Advisor, Cyber Crime Cell, Gurgaon Police and Agra Police, says, "The students were selected on the basis of their background in computer science and the course they are studying, which should be engineering or cyber law."

Interns came from IIT Allahabad, Amity Law College, SMVDU Jammu, Police University of Jodhpur, Aligarh Muslim University and various IITs. "We received a total of 150 applications this year. After a round of interviews on phone, we picked 35 students," says Tandon.

At the Cyber Cell of the Gurgaon Police interns worked on various projects and surveys. Daily interactive classes were arranged with cyber experts, ethical hackers, banking professionals and eminent lawyers. "We invited Supreme Court lawyer, Pavan Duggal, to conduct a session. The Commissioner of Police himself had an extensive session with the students," says Tandon. "We also invited experts from PayU.com, HDFC and ICICI bank, who trained the students on digital financial crime."

The interns were taken to visit the police control room, the women's helpline centre and a police station. "We are probably the first state police force in North India who has started such a unique internship program. The students generally do their internships with companies, so we thought why don't they come intern with us and see how we function and learn about cyber law in the process," says Mittal.



Rakshit Tandon speaks to schoolchildren

As part of their project, the interns prepared an online cyber safety quiz module, which comprises over 1,000 questions on cyber safety. "We are using this module in our cyber safety awareness campaign in schools and colleges," says Tandon.

The cyber safety campaign has already covered over 25 Gurgaon schools like Ryan International, Blue Bells, Scottish High, Suncity World School and more. It has also reached out to several colleges. "We visit the institutions and speak to the students, making them aware of the perils of cyber usage," says Tandon. "We conduct group interactions and a quiz, based on the module prepared by the interns."

"Many young cyber users, especially children, unknowingly post pornographic content on the Internet. They don't know what is ethical. Girls share personal photos on Whatsapp with friends which eventually gets published on social websites," says Mittal.

Other than sexting, there are cases of cyber bullying on Facebook pages and cyber stalking. All this, affects the safety and mental health of the students. "We get messages from students who say that they can't concentrate on their studies because they are being bullied on social media or their personal photos are published and ridiculed on the web," says Tandon.

He explained that cybercrime has become a growing menace in India, especially for school and college students. "Out of the total number of arrests made on account of cybercrime between 2012 and

a big increase in hacking, fraud and publishing of objectionable content on the Internet.

"In order to address cyber offences better, we are setting up a Cyber Congress in various schools," says Mittal. A School Cyber Congress is constituted by a group of students from the same school who are well acquainted with online technology. Schoolchildren being harassed online can complain to the congress about any cyber offence.

"The members of the Cyber Congress, who are trained by us, try to solve the problem by taking immediate action. If the problem becomes too much for them and the school authorities, the

campaign, we carry out a 'Train the Trainer' programme, where we train them on cybercrime and cyber law."

"The campaign and the internship programme isn't a one-way process. We have received inputs and suggestions which will help strengthen the enforcement of cyber laws," says Tandon. "The studies that the interns have conducted provides us with excellent data which would help us in the coming years."

"We always make a conscious effort to connect with people. We have a Facebook page and a Twitter handle where we continuously get complaints and feedback from citizens. The cyber campaign acts on

'The students generally do their internships with companies, so we thought why don't they come intern with us and see how we function and learn about cyber law in the process.'

police will then intervene," says Mittal. The Cyber Congress not only ensures a fast solution to offences, but also helps train students who may grow up to be cyber officers in the police force.

The campaign also reaches out to parents and teachers. "Often the parents don't know whom their children are interacting with on the Internet. It is necessary for them to have a thorough understanding of digital crimes so that they can protect their children," says Tandon.


Workshops for parents informing them about email frauds, forgery, online bank frauds, ATM frauds and several other crimes are being carried out by the Gurgaon Police's Cyber Crime Cell.

According to Tandon, teachers in most institutions lack knowledge of cybercrime. "They have extensive knowledge on the subjects they are teaching. But, when it comes to cyber safety and hacking, they are not aware," he says. "As part of our cam-

the same line and helps spread a positive, friendly image of the police among the people," says Mittal.

"Sadly, there has been a negative image of the police. People always think of the police as this angry, baton-brandishing force that only arrives when there is a crime," says Tandon. "The cyber campaign has helped changed this attitude. Students of the schools and colleges where we have interacted now feel free to visit the police station and talk about their problems. They are not scared of the police anymore."

At the end of the internship programme, many students seemed keen to join the police force as cyber officers. Says Mittal, "A number of students came up to us and said that they never knew how the police functioned. But now, they are looking forward to joining the police force. We need more bright, young officers as the rate of digital crime will increase in the coming years." ■



CHILD SURVIVAL MEDIA AWARDS 2014

For Print and Photo Journalists

The National Foundation for India (NFI) in partnership with Save the Children has launched the "Child Survival Media Awards" for the mid-career journalists to research and publish articles and photo essays on the broad theme of child health and survival. The overarching areas to be highlighted include:

1. Maternal and Child nutrition
2. Adolescent, Reproductive and Maternal Health
3. Newborn and Child Health
4. Maternal and Child Mortality

Journalists will be supported to write exclusively in the states of Delhi, Bihar, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Orissa and West Bengal.

The fellowship is for ₹1, 25,000/- each. Women journalists are encouraged to apply. Applications in regional languages will also be accepted.

The last date for receipt of applications is September 10th, 2014

For more information & application guidelines write in to:

National Media Fellowships
National Foundation for India
 Core 4A, UG Floor, India Habitat Centre, Lodi Road, New Delhi 110 003
Phones: 91-11-24641864/65, 91-11-24648490-92, Fax: 91-11-24641867
Email: mini@nfi.org.in, info@nfi.org.in, **Website:** www.nfi.org.in

PS: Application for the Annual NFI Media Awards will be available on www.nfi.org.in by August 30th 2014

Students teach students at low-fee college

Civil Society News
Gurdaspur

IT is spread over 15 rambling acres at Tughawala in the Gurdaspur district of Punjab, but the Baba Aya Singh Riarki College really occupies much more space in the minds and hearts of nearby rural families.

It is here that some 3,000 children, predominantly girls, study through school and then college. Around 1,000 of them are boarders and the rest come and go as day scholars, but for everyone entry is supposed to mean the beginning of a way of life based on self-help, honesty, discipline and respect for all religions.

The girls manage the campus through a committee. They run the kitchen and cook their own food. They grow crops of grains and vegetables and work in the school's dairy. When a new building has to go up or an old one has to be renovated, the girls serve as construction hands.

The brighter students are given the responsibility of teaching the weaker ones. Classes take place in the open, under trees, in sheds and in rooms too. Girls in their uniform of white salwar, kurta and dupatta sit cross-legged in regimented rows, heads bowed and covered, eyes transfixed on their books.

Sardar Swaran Singh Virk, 68, is the towering patriarch of the institution. He is a tall, burly man with a robust manner and a booming voice. A shout from him and girls break out of a class to run around one of the fields. Another shout and *kho kho* teams take position while the rest of the girls sit down to watch. A third shout and they are free to play as they please – chase each other or hold hands and go round and round with abandon.

"What is education?" asks Virk. "It is discipline, values, honesty. It is taking pride in all that you do. I didn't ask that girl to bring a chair for you, but she brought it. That is education. Education means learning about your history and religion and other religions too. It is remembering the heroes of our society and drawing inspiration from their lives."

"More than 90 per cent of our students do well in



Classes are held, like this one, out in the open, often with students teaching students

their exams. No one cheats here though cheating in exams is a big problem across Punjab. This is one exam centre where there are no invigilators. They are not needed," says Virk.

"We teach our students to be honest. To be able to speak the truth is very important," Virk goes on. He shouts out to a large class of girls: "How many of you didn't cheat in your board exams?" A certain number of girls stand up. He then asks, "How many of you cheated in your exams?" Another bunch of girls get up.

The girls who admit to having cheated have come here after passing their board exams from another school. They have been taught to first of all be honest with themselves.

Virk founded the Baba Aya Singh Riarki College in 1976. It was his tribute to Baba Aya Singh who way back in 1925 started a small school for girls and then grew it into a secondary school for both boys and girls, finally getting the government to take it over. Virk was a student of the school.

It was also Baba Aya Singh's dream to set up a college for girls and Virk did that in 1976 in Baba Aya Singh's memory. Now the campus has the college, the original school, and four other schools.

There is a separate school and hostel for boys. On the day we spend at Tughawala it is raining and we

don't get to go to the boys' side.

Virk does not believe in boys and girls studying together. "There is no question of it," he says with a dismissive wave of his hand. "Co-education only leads to distractions." He rules out intermingling till the age of 25. "After that they can do what they want," he says.

The schools are recognised by the government, but Virk has never sought affiliation for the college though it has received high praise from the Guru Nanak Dev University. By not taking affiliation the college is free to follow its unique system of education. The students take their university examinations as private candidates.

There was a time when 5,000 students would be taken in. Now 3,500 are taken in because it had become difficult to manage.

The fees are unbelievably low. Families with money pay only ₹6,600 a year which includes the cost of living in the hostel, uniforms and tuition. Day scholars pay ₹1,000. A child from a proven poor family pays nothing.

Virk is proud that he doesn't regard education as a business and yet has enough money to run his institutions. It is partly possible because of the Spartan living conditions for the students, himself and his family consisting of wife, son Gagandeep,

PICTURES BY LAKSHMAN ANAND



It is a verdant campus. Here the girls are playing kho kho



Girls walk about on the campus during their free time



Sardar Swaran Singh Virk

who has been appointed principal, and two daughters who are teachers.

Another reason why it is possible to get by on low fees is that the students do all the work on the campus and the better ones also take classes. This, no doubt, reduces overheads.

"We have more than enough money from the fees we charge and take nothing from the government or anyone else," explains Virk. "In fact we give ₹2.5 lakhs as our contribution to the original school. This land comes to us from that school."

So, how do the lives of the girls who study here change? Do they go on to find employment or do they sink back into patriarchal families and get married off?

Virk says there are former students who are in government jobs now. There are others who have studied further. But by and large the girls go back into traditional home life. "Their families are conservative. By the time they are 25 they are married off. You can't expect too much change in this generation. Perhaps in the next."

But change even if slow is happening. Prabjyot Kaur is 26 and has come back to be a teacher of political science. She did her schooling and college here. She belongs to a local rural family and is the only woman in her family to get an education and work. She has a B.Ed. and a Masters degree. She is a self-assured and articulate young woman.

"It was unthinkable," she says, "but my father allowed me to work and I earn ₹6,000 a month which I can do what I want with." There is no pressure on her to get married.

Prabjyot used to be one of the student teachers and explains how the arrangement works. "It is easier for weak students to learn from shining students. They begin to see the student teacher as a role model. Also since there is bonding as students it is easier for the weak student to discuss her problems."

Located as it is two hours from Amritsar, deep in the countryside close to the border, the Baba Aya Singh Riarki College makes a difference in its own way by giving girls an education and taking them out of their homes. It was Baba Aya Singh's vision in 1925. The question is whether it is good enough for today. ■

Four steps to road safety

Shayak Majumder
New Delhi

INDIA suffers the highest number of road deaths in the world and experts say the four main causes are bad road behaviour, weak enforcement of traffic laws, flawed road design and lack of rapid trauma care.

The Save Life Foundation (SLF), based in Delhi, has been pushing for new regulation that would be more effective in addressing these issues than the Motor Vehicles Act of 1988.

In September 2009, the government formed an expert group chaired by S. Sunder, former Union Transport Secretary, which recommended an overhaul of the Motor Vehicles Act and presented a draft law in 2011. It is yet to be introduced in Parliament.

Around 10 per cent of global road deaths occur in India annually. According to the National Crime Records Bureau reports, almost 140,000 people were killed and close to 500,000 were seriously injured or permanently disabled in 2012. Delhi has the highest number of road deaths in India – around 1,600 in 2013.

SLF, founded by Piyush Tewari, 34, after he lost a relative in a road accident in 2008, came up with a bystander care model, which trained bystanders to try to save an injured person's life.

"An effectively trained bystander can offer immediate care to the injured until an ambulance arrives, often saving his life in the process," says Tewari. The model earned recognition from WHO, the World Bank and won the Rolex Award for Enterprise in 2010.

But the burden on post-accident care will keep increasing unless the number of accidents is reduced. A modern national road safety law is needed to deal with four major issues.

The first relates to why Indian drivers drive so recklessly. In Indian driving schools, a student is only taught how to drive a vehicle. "The minimum curriculum set by Central Motor Vehicles rules doesn't address accident-related issues," says Tewari. "Most of the time, you don't even have to go through a driving test to get your licence. Driver training is not mandatory under the law."

"In the US or Singapore, there is a graded licensing system. To drive any type of vehicle you need to have a licence of the required grade," he points out.

"In India, if you have a Light Motor Vehicle licence, you can drive a Maruti 800 or a more powerful sports car. The complexity of driving a sports car is so different from driving a Maruti, but it is completely overlooked, which inevitably leads to a car crash," says Tewari.

He also points out that the traffic law enforcement system is human-dependent. A police officer is manually stationed at important traffic zones to enforce the law. "Being human-dependent, law enforcement is corruptible," says Tewari. "At Delhi's ITO intersection, 140 million traffic violations take

place annually. However, only 5,600 challans were made out last year. It is not humanly possible to catch 140 million offences."

Tewari calls for a more technology-oriented traffic enforcement system, with a severe penalty system attached to it.

"Another reason behind faulty enforcement of traffic laws is the lack of proper crash investigation. In a crash, we tend to blame the bigger vehicle all the time. But it's not necessary that the bigger vehicle will be at fault always," says Tewari. A crash

covered that around 9,000 people die every year, ramming into trucks which carry protruding rods. "We were shocked to learn that the Central Motor Vehicles Act allowed one metre of protrusion behind the trucks," says Tewari. "This let the state governments allow longer protrusion. Goa allows two metres of protrusion."

SLF approached the Supreme Court, which issued a notice to the government. The Section was deleted from the Act on March 5 this year.

"Almost 99 per cent of Indians do not know about

ROLEX AWARDS/JESS HOFFMAN



Piyush Tewari: 'The Motor Vehicles Act is ineffective'

'Tamil Nadu is the only state which can provide exhaustive data on the cause of accidents there. Its model should be replicated throughout India.'

investigation can yield results, data and records which can help proper enforcement of laws.

Tewari feels Tamil Nadu has the best crash investigation discipline. The investigating officer carries a PDA when he visits a crime scene. The PDA helps take photos of the crash, record witness testimony on the spot and also carries a 41-point questionnaire that the officer must fill in at the crash site. The questions range from the presence of skid marks to road conditions around the site.

Recorded data are directly uploaded to a server so officers can evaluate the cause of the crash. Tewari says, "Tamil Nadu is the only state which can provide exhaustive data on the cause of accidents there. Its model should be replicated throughout the country."

SLF carried out an RTI-based study which dis-

this. Also, if a truck is still caught carrying protruding rods, the penalty is a mere ₹100. It is a non-compoundable offence," says Tewari. SLF has approached the Supreme Court again to ensure that, in such cases, the vehicle owner as well as the consigner should be criminally charged. "It is the owners and consigners who are in charge of what gets loaded on the truck," says Tewari.

Flawed road design is another factor. On Indian roads, drivers fight for road space. "If you look at the left side of any road, you will see that the space is shared by public buses and cycles," says Tewari. "The heaviest vehicle on the road comes in a road space conflict with the lightest vehicle."

"Our roads are constructed without any legislatively mandated design or construction guidelines. The Indian Road Congress issues guidelines which are very archaic and not legislatively mandated," says Tewari.

Lastly, there's the lack of rapid trauma care. According to a report of the Law Commission, the number of deaths can be halved with timely treatment.

SLF's bystander care model helps treat the injured until emergency medical service (EMS) arrives, but Tewari believes it is not enough. "Most of the time, the deaths occur while they are being taken to hospital. It is mandatory to have properly trained EMS personnel who can perform emergency CPR and treat the patient while travelling." ■

11th
Anniversary
SPECIAL ISSUE

CIVIL SOCIETY HALL OF FAME

IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE AZIM PREMJI FOUNDATION

— The Soya Project —
BUNDI, RAJASTHAN

— Praveen Kumar —
HYDERABAD, ANDHRA PRADESH

— Shankar Singh —
AJMER, RAJASTHAN

— Kyrsoibor Pyrtuh, Zambolis
Sawkmie & Moody Lyngkhoi —
SHILLONG, MEGHALAYA

— Doctors For You —
MUMBAI, MAHARASHTRA

LEAD SPONSOR



HALL OF FAME

THE HERO IN EACH OF US

RITA & UMESH ANAND

INDIA is full of positive energy. We can tell you because we go out in search of it every month as we produce *Civil Society*. When we look around, we find people doing incredibly useful things. We report their stories because we see in these efforts valuable ways of moving forward.

But with the Civil Society Hall of Fame we go beyond our publishing responsibilities. Here we promote a device for citizens to felicitate citizens. It is a celebration of ideas and common values – a way of saying thank you for doing something that helps us all live a little better.

Our work in the magazine requires us to be at an arm's length from our stories. It is important for the credibility of what is put out. It won't work if we are emotionally swayed. We can't be activists and journalists at the same time.

But the Civil Society Hall of Fame is a somewhat different space. We do exercise objectivity by visiting the entrants and assessing them against definite parameters. Yet we have to admit that the process, which culminates in an event, makes us a part of the stories. You could say the Civil Society Hall of Fame and all that it involves is close to our hearts.

The rules for the Civil Society Hall of Fame 2014 are the same as they have been in previous years. You can't apply and you can't want to be famous. Mostly, we end up zeroing in on people who say they are surprised anyone should be honouring them. It is that response – 'How did you find out about me?' – which we find most charming and is to us the best qualification for being an entrant.

Innovators tend to work within their chosen bandwidths. The Civil Society Hall of Fame's importance is in being a non-official antenna that can pick up signals which otherwise get missed. It isn't a perfect mechanism and is not meant to be. There are many remarkable people, we realise, we miss out on. But the idea here is to recognise what one sees – sometimes next door. In a country as large as India it makes sense to encourage people to bring change where it is needed and how it is needed. Multiple solutions are the answer. One size does not fit all. On the other hand, shared learning is also immensely valuable.

People who make it to the Civil Society Hall of Fame are those whose contributions are inspirational and more so because they are grounded in reality. We can see their efforts working and hope to emulate them in our own contexts. We find it easy to want to be like them.

In an age of big brands and sweeping technologies, we need to go a bit in the opposite direction and find simpler and more human ways of connecting with each other. The Civil Society Hall of Fame seeks to promote such connectivity – sometimes bringing together vastly different people over crazily long distances. At our event many languages are spoken, but everyone is understood. Different styles of clothes are worn and no one feels out of place. It is this kind of inclusion that we are thrilled to sponsor.

There is much that governments need to do to give small initiatives that are delivering results continuity and scale. The innovators who have entered the Civil Society Hall of Fame in the past six years have all made contributions that governments should have been eager to promote. But governments don't know to reach out and in this disconnect real opportunities are lost.

This year's Hall of Fame entrants are examples of the difference that focussed leadership makes. They have worked selflessly for their goals. They are passionate, but also pragmatic in negotiating positions and defining their strategies. They are visionary and encourage people to dream. As true entrepreneurs they are driven by ideas – not money or position.

In the picture on our cover this year are three women from villages in Bundi district in Rajasthan. They run a producer company, but not long ago they used to be only small farmers eking out a living in a rain-deficient region.

The credit for their empowerment goes to Padam Jain and Himanshu Bains, who while working on a dairy project for SRIJAN, or Self-Reliant Initiatives for Joint Action, saw the potential of boosting the soya bean crop in Bundi district.

Padam and Himanshu consulted agricultural scientists and worked with the farmers to improve soya bean yields. In the process the yields of other crops like wheat and mus-

tard also went up. They began with 50 farmers and now have more than 10,000 using better farming techniques.

The setting up of self-help groups (SHGs) and finally the producer company has resulted in the financial empowerment of women farmers of the district. It has linked them to the market in ways in which they could never imagine.

Himanshu and Padam have shown that dealing with rural poverty means working at field level to improve agricultural practices and help farmers get better prices.

From the erstwhile Andhra Pradesh, we have Praveen Kumar, who, as Secretary, has injected great enthusiasm and a sense of purpose into the students and teachers of the Social Welfare Residential Schools run by the government.

Praveen Kumar is a decorated IPS officer, but he came from a very poor home. He is an example of how our system does deliver. He chose to be Secretary of the schools to do something for children who come from poor homes like he once did.

In Meghalaya, three pastors – Kyrsoibor Pyrtuh, Zambolis Sawkmie and Moody Lyngkhoi – have, using the right to information, taken on a private university and its alliance with the Presbyterian Church. They have also exposed the lack of regulation of private education in the state. The pastors want the Church to show

greater openness and contribute to society at large.

Dr Ravikant Singh and Doctors For You are trying to improve the public health system. They set out to help state governments respond to calamities. But now they are imparting training to staff in government hospitals so that everyday standards are raised. We watched them work in Bihar, but they are elsewhere in the country as well.

Finally, we have Shankar Singh of the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) who has been an outstanding campaigner against corruption in the rural areas of Rajasthan. He is an activist who has used his talent as a performer to take messages of accountability and transparency to simple rural folk.

With this *Civil Society* completes another happy year. Thank you for reading us. ■



PICTURES BY LAKSHMAN ANAND



Padam Jain and Himanshu Bains in the warehouse that farmers now use to stock their crops and wait for a better price

THE SOYA PROJECT

Farm evangelists

IN 2008, two earnest young men set out to boost soya bean yields in the semi-arid region of Bundi in Rajasthan. Rainfall there is meagre and the soil lacks nutrients. But there are ready buyers for soya bean and the farmers were already growing it in small quantities among their other crops. Bumping up production held out the prospect of soya bean being the driver of better incomes in the villages of Bundi district infamous for bonded labour and poverty.

Neither Padam Jain, 38, nor Himanshu Bains, 32, had extensive knowledge of scientific agricultural practices. Well-informed opinion was also against their mission. But they plunged in and six years later they are heroes to thousands of farmers who have experienced a social and economic transformation.

Soya bean yields have galloped thanks to 14 agricultural best practices put together by Himanshu and Padam. Women farmers have set up a producer company of which they are the only shareholders. The company has a licence to buy grains directly from farmers and sell them further. It runs a store and provides seeds and inputs at fair prices. A warehouse makes arbitrage possible – when prices are down grains can be stocked and sold later. There is also access to bank finance.

Padam and Himanshu work for SRIJAN or Self-Reliant Initiatives

through Joint Action, which is based in New Delhi. The changes they have brought about have upturned old equations in Bundi district. The unfair terms on which farmers were compelled to sell their produce to the APMC (Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee) traders at the Bundi wholesale market have also ended.

Much of the credit for the initiative's success belongs to the women farmers. They seized the opportunity to empower themselves. They now have a greater say in their families and cut into the leadership role traditionally played by the men. Savitri Gaur is the chairperson of the Samridhhi Mahila Crop Producers' Co. Ltd. She is at ease in her company's warehouse surrounded by gunny bags of grain, some of them with labels saying they are pledged to ICICI Bank.

"We were selling on adverse terms and buying things from the market at a premium. So we thought to ourselves why not set up our own company and save on the margins that traders and shopkeepers make," she says.

But this is Savitri talking now, with her cell phone clutched in her hand. She didn't have any of this confidence some years ago.

"We didn't know what a Self-Help Group (SHG) was let alone a company. Our lives have changed in so many ways. We didn't know to express ourselves. We used to cover our faces and wouldn't dream

of talking to a stranger the way we are talking to you now."

The company has 2,482 women as shareholders who have each put in ₹1,000 as investment. The governing board has 10 members – among them are Prem Bai and Manni Bai who are with Savitri as she talks to us.

It has all been part of a process that began with talking to the women. The conversations would be about better farming methods, benefits from government schemes and setting up of SHGs.

"These people would come to us and tell us to create SHGs and save our money. We were wary because so many finance companies take our money on false promises. But these people said we could manage our own money. That is how we learnt to save and lend to each other", recalls Savitri.

The SHGs multiplied (there are now 457) and came together in the Samridhhi Mahila Mandal Trust where two women represent each SHG. The producer company was the next step.

The women have played a crucial role in convincing the men to adopt the farming practices propagated by Padam and Himanshu. The increase in yields has, of course, been most important. Production has gone up from 1.5 quintal a bigha, (half an acre) to three and even four quintals. Interestingly this increase has been not just for soya bean, but wheat and mustard as well.

Padam and Himanshu worked to a strategy. They used 50 plots, which they call 'commander' plots, to demonstrate that improvements were possible. The farmers who benefited went on to become evangelists for the new farming techniques.

Parmanand of Loharpura village was one of the earliest converts. "Before they came to me in 2009, I used to farm without any real method. But they showed me how to space out the seeds, put nutrients in the soil, water the plants at the correct time even if it meant buying water from a farmer with a tubewell. They also taught me when and how to use pesticides."

"When my harvest increased, I had no hesitation in telling other farmers about the techniques I had been taught," says Parmanand.

He remembers that it all began with the SRIJAN team meeting the



The producer company runs a fair price store



Some of the early bird farmers



Everyone gets together at Pinky Pankaj's house



From fields to the market: Savitri, left, and Prem, on the right, run the Samridhi Mahila Crop Producers' Company

women and talking to them about what could be achieved. The women would return home with accounts of what happened at the meetings, he remembers.

Another farmer, Ram Rattan Meena, has taken all of five years to switch. His wife, too, would go to the meetings and became a member of an SHG. But he wasn't convinced. Having adopted the new methods, the yields on his land have gone up. He used the warehouse to store his wheat to get a better price for it. In the interim he took a loan from the bank against the stock.

The successes in the field have been crowned by empowering the farmers to go to market on their own terms. Pinky Pankaj, at whose home we meet a large number of women and have a traditional Rajasthani meal on the floor, says at the Bundi Mandi or wholesale market, farmers used to be forced to sell at prices arbitrarily decided by traders and the *arhityas* or commission agents. Decisions on quality too would be arbitrary.

Now the producer company buys the grain at local centres and decisions on quality are based on objective criteria. The price is correct. Prices of produce in the *mandi* and at collection centres, set up by SRIJAN, are pasted on village walls.

"Earlier we had to sell once we reached the Bundi Mandi," points out Pinky. "And at whatever price the traders had decided on among themselves. Now we have a fairer, more transparent system and also the option of keeping the grain in the warehouse."

Padam is from Bundi. He has a Masters in irrigation and he worked with the Sadguru Foundation, an NGO well-known for its work in water and soil conservation. He moved on to ASA (Action for Social Advancement) to work in the tribal part of Jhabua district and then joined BAIF, another NGO, respected for its work in agriculture. "I finally joined SRIJAN in 2003. I really like it here," he says.

Himanshu is from the Chhindwara district of Madhya Pradesh. He studied at the Xavier Institute of Development Action and Studies in Jabalpur, got a job with CAPART and worked in Barmer with SURE (Society to Uplift Rural Poverty). He got an internship with the Ministry of Rural Development but got bored writing project propos-

als so he quit and joined SRIJAN in 2003.

At that time SRIJAN was doing a smallish dairy project in the Tonk district of Rajasthan. Himanshu and Padam were sent there to scale it up. But they noticed the opportunity in soya bean in the neighbouring Bundi district. The crop had ready buyers. There were three soya-crushing mills. An American multinational, Bunge India Pvt. Ltd. was interested. Rainfall was a paltry 450 mm but enough for soya bean to survive. Also, soya is a good crop because it generates nitrogen and improves soil health.

The two men approached Dr PS Bhatnagar, a retired scientist from the National Soya Bean Research Centre for help. But he was sceptical since neither Padam nor Himanshu are agricultural scientists. Finally, they approached PRADAN (Professional Assistance for Development Action), a well-known NGO that works on rural livelihoods and agriculture. They attended workshops and came up with 14 best practices for soya bean cultivation.

Previously farmers would broadcast soya bean seeds on their fields. "But since rainfall is scarce it is important to retain moisture in the soil: that means levelling the land, deep ploughing and furrowing fields at appropriate stages. So we trained tractor owners as well," says Padam.

"At the time of ploughing and pod filling, irrigation is very essential. We undertook soil and water conservation. We enabled farmers who did not have any water source to buy water from farmers who had wells." They put burrows and seed grills, promoted by the agricultural department, to good use. Application of gypsum helped improve the soil.

Padam and Himanshu have also brought down the price of seeds. They got women farmers to learn how to produce seeds scientifically from foundation seeds. The seeds are certified so the women can sell them in markets.

SRIJAN has, in fact, exceeded its target of reaching 10,000 farmers. They now work with 15,000 farmers mostly women organised into SHGs. The SHGs have been linked to the Development Cooperative Bank and so far have taken credit amounting to ₹3 crore. ■

PRAVEEN KUMAR

Officer on a dream mission

IT is as though a beam of sunlight has penetrated the darkened assembly hall when RS Praveen Kumar, 46, walks in. The 500 girls waiting for him to address them clap rhythmically to welcome a man who has become their inspiration, their hero. Punctuating his long strides, he stops at almost every row to shake hands with the girls. He radiates energy and hope. The atmosphere is electric.

The school in Hyderabad's Mahendra Hills at which we witness this amazing scene is one of the government-run Social Welfare Residential Schools in Telengana. It could have been just another government institution – dull, drab and directionless. But in the three years that Praveen Kumar has been Secretary of 138 Social Welfare Residential Schools, he has turbocharged the lives of the students and teachers. Everyone calls him 'Secretary Sir', but the goals he sets require going much beyond the formality of his position. It is his passion that invites affection and awe.

Tens of thousands of children from poor families in marginalised communities get accommodation and an education in these schools, which were started as part of a social transformation initiative conceived of by PV Narasimha Rao in 1972. NT Rama Rao took it forward.

Praveen's own beginnings were very humble. He came from a poor family in a backward caste. His mother was a coolie who was rescued and given an education. She went on to become a teacher. His father too was a teacher. Education changed things for the family.

Praveen learnt the value of education early in life from his parents. He studied veterinary science before being inspired to take the civil services examination and join the Indian Police Service (IPS) in 1995.

He was a decorated IPS officer and he had done a Masters in public administration under the Mason Programme at the Kennedy School in Harvard University when he opted to be Secretary of the schools.

Praveen believes exposure, opportunity and attitude take people out of poverty. He ensures there is a surfeit of all three in the schools he leads – reaching out incessantly to the children with his own story.

The first step is to come out of the mindset of victimhood. "They should not connect to the traumatic past. They don't want to go back to the painful past. So we say in our schools here that we have disabled the reverse gear!"

The idea is to empower children to imagine what they can do. "Give wings to dreams. They have dreams, let us not kill those dreams," he says.



Praveen Kumar with his students after the Mount Everest victory

P. ANIL KUMAR



Anand and Poorna who scaled Mount Everest with Praveen Kumar



Meeting students and motivating them is key to the strategy for making them feel anything is possible



It is to this end that the children are exposed to dozens and dozens of people who have come from difficult circumstances and have not just escaped the trap of poverty but have gained recognition and affluence.

These interactions show the children what is possible. "There is a lot of hunger for information, to get the right information at the right time, about the right things and the right persons can make all the difference," he explains.

Interestingly, every student of the social welfare hostels will always suffix his or her name with a Swaereo. Asked what it means, a student explains: "SW is for social welfare and aereos means someone who can fly in the air and touch the skies."

Praveen says the schools want to give the children a sense of community and a new identity that they can be proud of.

"We have banned the word Dalit in these schools. We don't want children to get that tag and walk into the world. Instead we chose Swaereo - meaning someone who will fly out into the sky and aim high."

Just how high? Two of their students have recently scaled Mount Everest. At 6 am, on 25 May, Poorna, a tribal girl, all of 13 years and 10 months, became the youngest girl to scale Mount Everest. Along with her was Anand, an 18-year-old Dalit boy. Both have gone from the depths of deprivation to the heights of achievement and glory.

"How many of you want to do mountaineering? How many want to climb Mount Everest," Praveen asks the girls assembled in the auditorium of the Hyderabad school. Almost all the girls raise their hands and shout.

"All of them will be Poorna and Anand," he says smiling. "Opportunity is the difference between success and failure. We are trying to create that opportunity, creating an ecosystem, exposing them to role models, so they know what road they can take."

Praveen likes to call it a "constellation of factors and an enabling environment that will conspire to make it happen".

While everyone may not be equipped to climb Everest, the children are encouraged to take up mountaineering, rowing, swimming, rifle-shooting and so on. It gives them the confidence they need for engag-

ing with society. Of course it also keeps them physically fit.

Girls are encouraged to shed inhibitions - sing, dance and feel emancipated. So, while education is important, self-discovery comes from multiple journeys.

Children in these schools speak in English confidently because they have been told it is okay to make mistakes. The first step is to overcome fear and shyness. The concept of E-Clubs introduced last year has proved very useful and has brought about almost a dramatic change in English language skills.

Every evening after school, children have a session where they speak about a topic, freely with no inhibitions. If they make grammatical errors, they aren't corrected in the E-Club session but in the classroom the next day.

One of the first initiatives was to involve parents. In rural areas, the parents are either small farmers or farm labour, often not even literate. In the urban areas, the mother is usually a domestic help and the father an autorickshaw driver, painter, security guard or a watchman. Teachers were asked to visit the families in their homes, so they could understand the circumstances and environment from where the children come. "We were asked what dreams we had for our children. We were told about the progress our children are making. The teachers talk to us, treat us with respect. That is a big thing," says Yadaiah. He was quite overwhelmed that Praveen shook hands with him.

The conquest of Everest came as a bonus atop all these efforts.

It was a big risk to take and Praveen says he was more than conscious of it. Poorna and Anand were both very young and inexperienced, having started mountaineering hardly eight months earlier. Even for the fittest and most experienced climbers, the conditions and turn of events on the peaks is unpredictable.

A month before they reached the top, 16 people had died in the worst-ever avalanche tragedy in the Himalayas. That closed the Nepal route and they made their attempt from the north, via China, a route

that was even more difficult.

But the risk and the effort were worth it. The conquest of Everest as a singular event has fired the enthusiasm of hundreds of thousands of youngsters and adults who have now come to believe that anything is possible.

"We have reached the top of the world. We can no longer be called Dalit!" an enthusiastic parent announced at a felicitation ceremony for the two young achievers.

Praveen knew the spinoffs a success like this would have, not just for Poorna and Anand but an entire community. "The risk was there but we took a lot of precautions. We trained and tested their endurance at various temperatures and altitudes. I won't say we have gone to that extent to push them to go to Everest. But it has to be seen in the context of the aspirations of these children. They have some innate desire to express themselves, to show they are not inferior, not just in mountaineering. Our effort was to try and support that dream to whatever extent possible. The world record was a sheer coincidence."

As a police officer, Praveen's career has been full of exciting challenges. He has held sensitive positions. But perhaps his biggest achievement has once again been social by getting 100 Naxalites to surrender when he was District Superintendent of Police for Karimnagar. The surrender resulted in the liberation of 3,000 to 4,000 people caught between the extremists and the security forces.

Praveen is a firm believer in negotiation and constructive engagement. "Poverty is not an impediment in achieving any goal. Once opportunity is provided any goal is achievable. In our schools we are trying to give as much opportunity as possible. We are engaging the children in summer holidays. We are trying to increase hours of engagement with books and different activities. We are exposing them to people from different cultures and countries and trying to empower them to hold their own in a rapidly changing world." ■



The girls are told to live out their dreams and be emancipated



Shankar plays the neta at the Pension Parishad

SHANKAR SINGH

Rockstar at the grassroots

WHEN the Ghotala Rath Yatra (Chariot of Scams) rolled out at the 53-day *dharna* demanding the right to information in Jaipur in 1997, it was a masterstroke in communication. Shankar Singh was the moving force behind this unique messaging. Dressed as a *neta* he stood on the chariot and irreverently acted the part of a mindless politician. What he said was funny but it was also tragically true. So was the song, '*Ghotalaraj ki jai jai bolo*'. Its lyrics underlined the irony of representative politics, divorced from people and their realities.

Not far from the arc lights of the RTI (Right to Information) movement, Shankar has played a key role in communicating complex ideas at the grassroots. Seldom heard as a spokesperson and always seen as part of a group, Shankar is a rare talent. He is one of the most valued members of the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan's (MKSS) core group.

Shankar was born in Lotiyana village in Ajmer district of Rajasthan. He is the only son of a *patwari*. His father died when he was around 10 years old. His mother toiled on public works as a daily wage labourer to pay off the debts her alcoholic husband had left behind as an unwelcome legacy. Her 1.5 bighas, barely yielded two months of grain. Shankar is a Rawat. The Rawats are an economical-

ly and socially backward community, but with strong egalitarian principles. Both Shankar and his mother have an innate sense of equality.

Noji Ya, as she is affectionately called now, really laid the foundation of Shankar's life. She decided to send him to school, at any cost. Shankar completed high school but employment became a serious concern.

Shankar changed 17 jobs. He worked on a poultry farm, sold tea, *pakor*as, vended kerosene, became a *babu*, a mate on public works a labourer in a *namkeen* factory and more.

He discovered to his surprise and chagrin that too much literacy was a disqualification.

Shankar recalls that when he went to a poultry farm for a job, the owner asked him what his educational qualifications were. Shankar proudly replied that he had passed high school. The owner retorted that he was too literate and sent him away. As he was leaving, he overheard the owner hire an illiterate man.

So the next poultry farm he went to, he told the owner he was illiterate and he was hired! Since he didn't want to rouse any suspicion, Shankar drew lines on the wall with a piece of coal to count the egg-

trays. The owner admonished him for marking the walls and gave him a pencil and notebook to draw lines.

Meanwhile Shankar secretly studied for his graduation. He worked for three years at the poultry farm. When he went to the owner with sweets to celebrate his academic success, the owner was shocked to realise that Shankar was very literate!

With a Bachelor of Arts degree to his credentials, he got a job with the Adult Literacy programme in Ajmer. It was there that he discovered his extraordinary skills as a communicator. He made friends with people working with the Social Work and Research Centre (SWRC) or Barefoot College, Tilonia. Fascinated with his ability to connect, they persuaded him to join their team. Shankar's ready wit, his sharp satire with malice towards none and his compassion turned him into a grassroots star.

Shankar set up SWRC's communication section attracting talent from everywhere – Ramlal and Chauthuji from the Nat community of traditional performers and Bhanwar Gopal amongst others from non-traditional performing groups. Shankar left with the group for a workshop in Saharanpur with Alarippu, a creative theatre group based in Delhi, organised by Lakshmi Krishnamurthi and Tripurari Sharma. Tripurari who teaches at the National School of Drama, continues to be an inspiration and comrade in Shankar's theatrical journey.

The group returned and orchestrated a decade of exciting growth. Every day new ideas and concepts were discussed, experimented and performed. This group of traditional and non-traditional performers energised an entire generation of activists in Rajasthan and across the Hindi heartland. A *gharana* of activist communication was born.

All through this period, Shankar struggled with his family. They wanted him to get a government job, not be a performer. Performers are economically and socially at the bottom of society. At the SWRC, Shankar found a friend and admirer in activist Aruna Roy who was determined to have him remain in theatre and activism. Arguments and persuasive logic finally prevailed and Shankar turned down the government schoolteacher job he had landed. Instead, he decided to combine his communication skills with his political concerns and work for his people.

Nikhil Dey came into their lives in the early 1980s. The three of them – Aruna Roy, 41, Shankar Singh, 33, and Nikhil Dey, 24 – decided to begin work in Devdungri. They lived in Shankar's sister's mud and stone hut, then in Udaipur district in 1987. They worked to shape a non-party, people's organisation with the political ideology of people's empowerment. In the first three years, significant struggles on land and wages gave birth to a desire to form a Sangathan. On 1st May 1990, the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) was formed by a group of over 1,000 people at Bhim, Rajasthan, and the rest is history.

Like all great performers, Shankar brings an infectious vivacity on to stage. He could be performing at a street corner, a makeshift arena or even on a handcart! His dexterity of mind and his immense compassion lend quality and depth to all his performances. But when it came to choosing between acting and activism his human and political concerns dominated. The famous theatre director, BB Karanth, once tried to persuade Shankar to remain with theatre. But Shankar's concerns were for the poor.

Shankar's infectious warmth is universal. There is no malice or ill-will even when he quarrels. He makes friends with those he critiques. He fights injustice, corruption and oppression, but never a person.



Campaigning in the villages with his trademark puppet

His artistic expression rises above petty pique, or personal rivalry. His performance is memorable and leaves behind ideas that resonate long after he has left.

Activists respect Shankar for his great skills as a communicator, a speaker, an actor and puppeteer. But what is special is his ability to link political thought with activism. He articulates the language of the people and the thoughts that flow through their minds. He has the knack of subsuming his persona with the people. He is one of them. He is the audience and he is the actor. He is Chaplinesque, combining pathos with sharp political comment.

Shankar's contributions to theatrical performances are innumerable. Take the song, *Mein Nahin Manga*, or the street play, *Khazana* which ingeniously defined the worker-peasant and the ordinary citizens point of view on the RTI. His contribution has always strengthened the collective and encouraged individual creativity.

Shankar with Bhurji and many others converted an ordinary handcart into a rath replete with stuffed horses and the Ghotala Rath Yatra was born. A group from Baran composed the songs. The *ek-abhinay*

Continued on page 39



Rev. Kyrsoibor Pyrtuh, Rev. Zambolis Sawkmie and Rev. Moody Lyngkhoi walk down a street in Shillong

KYRSOIBOR PYRTUH, ZAMBOLIS SAWKMIE & MOODY LYNGKHOI

The people's pastors

THREE pastors have set the Presbyterian Church in Meghalaya thinking about greater transparency in its decision-making and the importance of addressing the social concerns of the people.

Using the right to information (RTI) law, the pastors have had their Church annul an agreement with a private university and they have simultaneously put a spotlight on the unregulated higher education sector in Meghalaya.

Reverend Kyrsoibor Pyrtuh, 41, Reverend Zambolis Sawkmie, 41, and Reverend Moody Lyngkhoi, 42, are now actively involved in campaigning for accountability, transparency and people's rights in the northeast.

"The traditional conservative definition of a pastor is somebody who is confined to the four walls of the Church and to spiritual matters. But things have changed. I am professionally committed to the Church. But I can move beyond that and confront injustices in society. The Church needs to connect with larger society and subject itself to the same laws of accountability and transparency," says Rev. Pyrtuh.

Rev. Pyrtuh was ordained in 2005. A Bachelor of Divinity from Bishop's College, Kolkata, he is pastor of the Mawkhar Presbyterian Church, Shillong.

He is part of the Campaign for an Independent Lokayukta in the state. A founder-member of Thma U Rangli Juki (People's Upsurge), he has been at the forefront of protests against the grabbing of *raij* or common land and the displacement of traditional farmers to build a New Shillong Township.

Rev. Sawkmie is a Master of Theology in Biblical Studies. He began his career as a pastor in Lapmala in the Jaintia Hills. Later, he joined the John Roberts Theological Seminary as a teacher of the New Testament. He now works as a Translations Adviser at the Translations Centre of the Bible Society of India in Shillong.

Rev. Lyngkhoi is the artist in the group. He is a painter, a musician, a singer and a songwriter. A Master of Theology in communications, he works as a teacher at the John Roberts Theological Seminary.

Their story begins in April 2005. At that time the Khasi Jaintia Presbyterian Assembly (KJPA), the administrative body of the Presbyterian Church in Meghalaya, entered into an agreement with the National Lutheran Health & Medical Board to start a private university named the Martin Luther Christian University (MLCU) in Shillong. Later that year, the state government formally notified the university.

The MLCU was, at first, warmly welcomed. The university promised much. The Presbyterians, including its elders and clergy, were

initially optimistic. It would improve standards of higher education in Meghalaya and carry out high quality research, it was believed. It was the general opinion that such a university was surely needed.

However, as time passed, a feeling of unease developed about the university. "We felt it was not running as per our mission and vision," says Rev. Pyrtuh. "So we began questioning them about the way they were functioning". But the university stonewalled all such questions.

So, Rev. Pyrtuh, Rev. Sawkmie and Rev. Lyngkhoi, joined by four more pastors, began scouting around for answers. Then they made a startling discovery.

The MLCU had claimed that it had representation with the United Evangelical Lutheran Churches in India, based in Chennai. Thinking that the MLCU was thereby linked to a sister Church, the Presbyterian Church had gone ahead and signed the MoU (Memorandum of Understanding) with them in good faith. This gave the MLCU a huge advantage. It now had the blessings of the Church, its name and goodwill. As a result the new university's credibility among the people got boosted.

But the pastors found out, through their queries and interactions, that the United Evangelical Lutheran Churches in India had no knowledge of the agreement with their Church which they had supposedly been a party to. In a straightforward reply, the United Evangelical Lutheran Churches in India stated that they had "no correspondence or meeting to establish the university" and were "not aware of the MoU which was executed in April 2005," and that the whole business had "become a private affair".

Shocked at this revelation, the pastors probed further. "We did not stop there. We began inquiring from every public authority linked with the university. We approached the governor, various state departments and the university itself."

The MLCU remained tightlipped, refusing to part with information or delaying matters. The pastors made many visits to the State Information Commission. A cabal of powerful people within the Church and in society tried to dispel any concerns.

At the KJPA's biennial Dorbar held in April 2011, the pastors decided to make their findings public. They published a pamphlet and distributed it to the delegates. It caused an uproar. Many of the people at the Dorbar, just could not accept the findings. The pastors were attacked for using the RTI. It was seen by some as a profane thing to do. But the Church took it seriously and formed a commission to inquire into what the pastors had revealed.

"Initially it was tough," admits Rev. Pyrtuh. "We even got letters condemning us. But the people soon began to understand what we were trying to do. We got support from the Church too."

Almost immediately after the Dorbar and the press coverage surrounding it, MLCU lawyers served legal notices to the pastors for defamation, asking for a sum of Rs 10 crore in damages.

Instead of becoming defensive, the pastors responded by filing more RTIs and seeking even more information about the MLCU. Many revelations came to light.

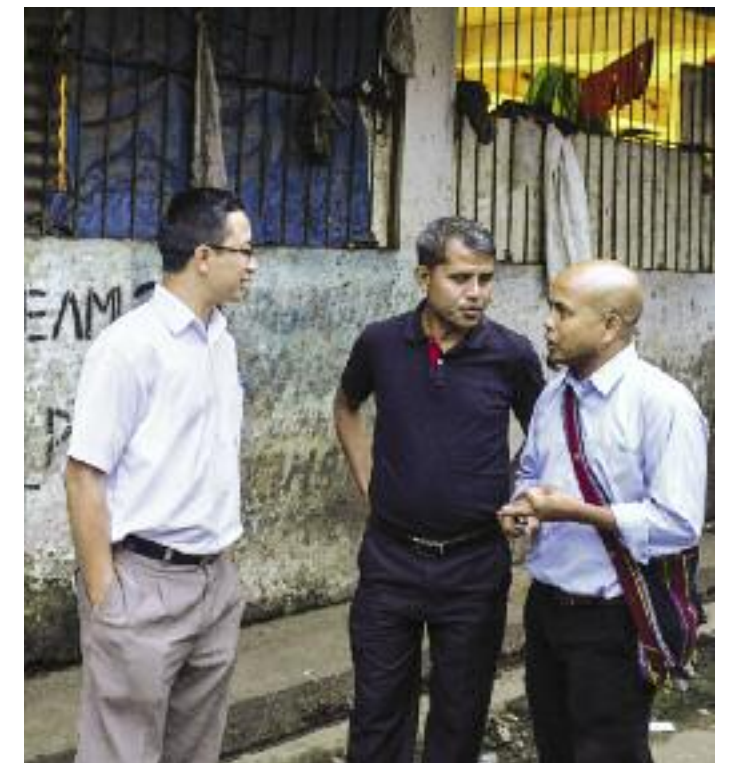
RTI applications revealed that the MLCU had falsely claimed properties that legally belonged to the KJPA.

Even before consolidation of their permanent campus, the MLCU had broken UGC rules by opening off-campus centres. In complete violation of norms, the MLCU had started granting affiliation to colleges and institutes within and outside the state.

The MLCU was given money to set up a North East Career Institute that would coach aspirants for the civil service exams. People were happy thinking that their children wouldn't have to travel to Delhi for coaching. But nothing happened and now there is a CBI inquiry against the university.

A university is expected to maintain high standards of education and research. But an RTI filed by the pastors revealed that the MLCU doesn't even have proper guides for PhD scholars. "A university is meant to advance knowledge," says Rev. Pyrtuh. "But their standards of education are very questionable."

'Initially it was tough. We even got letters condemning us. But people soon began to understand what we were trying to do.'



The UGC has repeatedly issued directives to MLCU, the last on 7 June 2012, to comply with its rules and regulations. "But they don't want to follow any regulations, not even state regulations," says Rev. Pyrtuh.

Again through RTI, the pastors found out that the university administration had filed a writ petition in the Guwahati High Court's Shillong Bench seeking exemption from UGC norms. The university claims to be self-financed. Hearing about this the pastors, fearing for the future of higher education within the state, were allowed to implead themselves in the case in the Shillong High Court. They are today providing vital information to the court.

They are also co-petitioners in an ongoing litigation in the Meghalaya High Court about the regulation of private universities in the state.

Their efforts have met with success. The KJPA has now disassociated itself from the MLCU. The MLCU Act 2005 was also amended so as to enable the Church to withdraw from this partnership in the last session of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly in June 2014.

The pastors have been united in their vision of "building a just society" and have consistently called for transparency and accountability, both inside the Church and outside it. These pastors are also committed to reinterpreting the Bible in accordance with this day and age, using it to challenge oppression and everyday tyrannies. For them the greatest sin is to dehumanise someone.

"The power of the people will bring down the impenetrable walls dividing the rulers from the ruled, the rich from the poor and the denial of access to basic needs," said Rev. Pyrtuh at a national convention on RTI held last year in Shillong.

The actions of the pastors have won them support from the laity of the Church and the people. But because they continue to ruffle feathers in the religious establishment and the secular establishment, they have become targets of vested interests. Unfazed, the pastors remain firmly committed to setting new standards for the Church and society. ■

PICTURES BY LAKSHMAN ANAND



Dr Ravikant Singh: 'We have to take baby steps, make small improvements so that the system becomes stronger'

DOCTORS FOR YOU

Calamity specialists

IT was 2007 and Mumbai was reeling under an outbreak of malaria, dengue and leptospirosis. The blood bank at the KEM Hospital was in urgent need of blood and platelets. Dr Ravikant Singh, in the first year of a post-graduate course in public health administration, was leaving the canteen after breakfast when he saw a notice for donors. He was a regular donor himself but it struck him that the problem could be solved more effectively with a bigger campaign.

Dr Ravikant, as he likes to be known, spoke to a few other young doctors like himself and soon they had two banners with which they launched a platelet awareness and donation drive. Their effort instantly attracted attention. A report in a Mumbai newspaper helped. The number of platelet donors doubled and the KEM Hospital blood bank no longer had a shortage.

"Through that drive we literally saved the lives of 30 to 40 patients," says Dr Ravikant. "I had just completed my MBBS and taken admission in the post-graduate course. We didn't have an organisation at that time nor any plans to launch one. It was just an instinctive response to an emergency."

As word spread that the KEM Hospital blood bank had platelets,

calls began coming to the Dean asking him to help other medical facilities in the city. The Dean summoned Dr Ravikant and asked him whether the campaign was being run by a registered organisation. Anxious not to be caught on the wrong side of the rules, he instantly made up a name – Doctors For You. He said the campaign was being run by Doctors For You and, yes, it was registered.

It is seven years since that landmark day. Doctors For You is now an expanding initiative to train government doctors, improve public health facilities and promote efficient medical responses during calamities. It is as spunky and innovative as the original effort to get platelets for the KEM Hospital blood bank.

"There was a time when doctors were 'only for you'. They were public spirited like Dr Kotnis or Dr Antia. India produces 40,000 MBBS doctors every year these days. But not even one per cent of them are interested in public health or doing something for society," says Dr Ravikant, now 32, and based in Patna.

"Very often many doctors who want to serve society do not find an ecosystem in which they can do so," Dr Ravikant goes on to explain. In its own small way, Doctors For You provides that opportunity.

There are 15 doctors working full-time for Doctors For You. There

are others who provide their services for a certain number of months at a time. An MBBS doctor in Mumbai is paid between ₹40,000 and ₹45,000 a month. In Guwahati it is slightly higher at ₹60,000. A gynaecologist asked to work in Bihar gets ₹1.25 lakhs a month.

These salaries are at par with government scales, but nowhere near what doctors aspire to earn through private practice. However, the opportunity to make a difference and uphold the true spirit of the medical profession is invaluable.

We got an idea of some of the challenges that a Doctors For You team takes on at the Danapur Sub-Divisional Hospital a few kilometres outside Patna. The hospital is the only major government gynaecological facility in the entire Patna sub-division, but it is in a shambles. Women with newly born babies lie around on steel beds with dirty sheets. The walls are stained. The bathrooms would make anyone sick.

The operation theatre (OT) is defined by an aluminium partition. The man in charge is what is called 'dresser'. The OT lights don't work and so it is under a 200 watt bulb that surgical procedures are performed. Instead of OT tables, there are steel trolleys. It is common for a catheter to be washed under a tap and used again and again.

A disused water filter, donated by the State Bank of India, lies near the entrance to the OT. Images of Kali and Durga adorn the entry point. There is no changing room for surgeons to get into their gowns.

There are supposed to be 26 doctors at this hospital. Six are supposed to be gynaecologists, but only two are actually qualified. The rest are MBBS degree holders with a diploma in gynaecology. There is only one anaesthetist and for most procedures where the patient has to be knocked out, ether is still used.

The wards are all uniformly lacking in facilities. They are also dirty, poorly lit and lacking in ventilation. Women and their babies, some just a few days old, lie around unattended. Relatives sit on the floor.

No medical standards are maintained, but there are drawings of Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck on the deeply stained walls. There is a chart of recommended lower back exercises. A notice tells patients not to tip nurses.



Anxious women at the Danapur Sub-Divisional Hospital. Below: One of the chaotic and poorly maintained wards



Dr Ravikant, Dr Narendra Khalpada and Dr Supriya Kumari at the aluminium door of the Danapur hospital's operation theatre



Dr Narendra Khalpada coaches nurses from nearby colleges



Women and children sit on the floor and wait



Ether is still used to knock out patients

It is in these conditions that the Doctors For You is trying to make a difference by training the government doctors while working alongside them. Funds for the hospital's improvement have come from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation through CARE, which in turn has brought in Doctors For You.

The Doctors For You team consists of Dr Narendra Khalpada, a senior Gynaecologist from Nepalganj Medical College in Nepal, Dr, Supriya Kumari, who recently got her degree as a gynaecologist from Maulana Azad Medical College in Delhi and Dr Ravikant himself.

Dr Khalpada is going to be at the hospital for three weeks. Earlier, he spent a week each in government hospitals at Gopalganj, Bettiah and Khagaria.

In all that they do they seek to raise the bar for the rest of the hospital. Dr Khalpada is in a well-pressed shirt and wears a black necktie. It is their job to set an example through superior surgical procedures and interventions and better standards of hygiene.

To us the situation seems hopeless. What expectation can Dr Ravikant possibly have?

"We have to take baby steps. Make small improvements so that the system becomes stronger. We are trying to get a changing room for the surgeons and a professional OT table. Our job is to lead by example. Our way of training doctors is to work alongside them and do a procedure in a better way. When they see that, they pick it up," says Dr Ravikant.

What impact have they had so far? "It is difficult to say because this hospital keeps no data. But, suppose in the past, 60 babies were lost and now half that number are lost, it is an improvement though still not a good record."

If the situation in Danapur is dismal, it is much worse in Bettiah and Motihari and other district hospitals.

In Bihar, Doctors For You finds it difficult to get doctors with good training because the teaching hospitals have collapsed. Worse still, like everyone in the state, the doctors trained here have come to accept Bihar's appalling standards.

"Doctors in Bihar go into the OT wearing chappals, perform surgeries without knowing the patient's name. There are no records.

That is why we prefer doctors trained outside Bihar or at least those who have post-graduate degrees from elsewhere," explains Dr Ravikant.

Doctors For You looks for doctors by word of mouth, through its Facebook page and occasionally through advertisements.

Ravikant himself comes from Bihar and is from a lower middle class background. He was fortunate to study at good institutions in Mumbai. It transformed the way he looked at the world.

Doctors For You has succeeded in accessing multiple sources of funding. It takes up projects such as a health centre in Mumbai which is supported by the Mumbai Rail Vikas Corporation as a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiative. The space for the centre is provided by the Maharashtra government and Doctors For You manages the facility.

It also receives funding of the kind it has got from CARE for the Danapur Sub-Divisional Hospital where it is working to improve infrastructure and train the staff.

Finally, it has been training doctors in government hospitals in Uttarakhand, Assam and Delhi in dealing with calamities.

Calamity response was the really first big exposure that Doctors For You had in 2008 when Ravikant brought some 50 young doctors to Bihar during very severe floods in the state.

The mission ended abruptly in tragedy when Dr Chandrakant Patil was struck by lightning and died while working in one of the relief camps. He was a very young doctor who had just completed his MMBS and was junior to Dr Ravikant at KEM Hospital.

His death shook up Dr Ravikant and the other doctors badly. Chandrakant came from a very poor family and many hopes rested on him. After taking Chandrakant's body back to Maharashtra, Dr Ravikant returned to Bihar with six doctors from Mumbai and worked at relief camps for several months.

Preparing the healthcare system to deal with calamities remains at the core of the organisation's mission. But that also means strengthening the government's everyday healthcare machinery.

"It is a process of handholding, of leading by example. Even small

'Our job is to lead by example. Our way of training doctors is to work alongside them and do a procedure in a better way. When they see that, they pick it up,' says Dr Ravikant.



The half-built emergency wing at the Danapur hospital

improvements give us a lot of satisfaction. Much more than a fat cheque," says Dr Ravikant.

Asked how long he can see himself continuing with this seemingly impossible mission, he replies: "Well, I never thought when I started. So, I suppose I will continue." ■

Grassroots rockstar

Continued from page 33

of the *meta* was Shankar. As the Ghotala Rath rolled from village to city, it captured the imagination of the people and drew them into the discourse on politics, leadership and democracy with irresistible humour and political satire.

Corruption is endemic in village development. Officials, contractors and the sarpanch get together to siphon public funds meant for roads, irrigation, drinking water and other public works. MKSS demanded that government accounts be made public. People would then know where money was being misspent and whether the claims of expenditure made by officials were correct.

Shankar managed at that time to access some official records. He copied them laboriously by hand. The MKSS had, meanwhile, crafted the mode of the *Jan Sunwai* (public hearing) to creatively place such information in the public domain.

These processes electrified the people. From the very first *Jan Sunwai* held in Kotkirana in December 1994, Shankar effortlessly linked this information to human stories, to the lives of the people with the pathos of drama. He imbued the information with life and helped contour a dramatic depiction of corruption. This empowered people. It gave them the courage to fearlessly testify, despite threats.

The *Jan Sunwai* campaign of 1994-95 led to the evolution of a platform of the RTI and the yen for a more participatory democracy. It was a precursor to what has now become the discipline of the social audit.

Shankar has been a guru to many young people helping them

understand the process of the social audit. Sowmya Kidambi, the current Director of Social Audit in Seemandhara and Telangana is one of his students! He has the ability to spot errors in accounting and counter check accounts with implacable logic. Though never publicly acknowledged for this talent, he remains an important part of the collective that contributed to a very important tool of governance.

Whether he is addressing protestors at the Narmada Valley or officials at the UN headquarters in New York, Shankar always makes a very powerful statement. It is his empathy with the people, his uncanny ability to gauge the audience, and reach out with compassion, that helps him connect. For him, the truth must be unfolded and conveyed engagingly. As Tripurari once said, "he thinks with his heart and feels with his mind!"

At protest sites when tensions rise, Shankar often breaks into song leaving the frontlines of the police amused, bemused and disarmed by the truth of his lyrics. In New York, Shankar took Ban Ki Moon, Secretary-General of the UN, by utter surprise when his puppet unexpectedly popped up and asked him an unscheduled question - "Will the UN meet basic transparency norms on its expenses across the world?"

An innate sense of equality and dignity has become for him and his comrades the realisation of the MKSS slogan: "We will create a world of justice and dignity for all."

At 60, Shankar has incredible energy. He works with determination and hope completely committed to the rights of the deprived. He also works tirelessly. He will sing, walk miles in searing heat and dust, ride on trucks and listen to the people, to their problems and grievances. He will put up tents for a *dharna*. All with equal ease and sincerity. ■

Watch a video of the song Mein Nahin Manga at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gRVFR2IF6Tw>

Pictures tell us who we are. They capture moments that are hard to describe. Lakshman Anand has been witness to a decade of campaigns, events and changing trends. A selection from his eclectic portfolio.



Reaching for the sky: Euphoric workers of the Aam Aadmi Party in the early days



Working for pensions: Baba Achav, the famous unionist from Pune, at a Pension Parishad rally in Delhi



Girl power: Protests over rape reached a new high



Gay outpouring: The happiness over the Delhi High Court's liberating order was shortlived



Doom or boom? Construction workers at a site in Gurgaon



One big family: Hope rules at this home for the children of leprosy patients at Kothavalasa in Andhra Pradesh



Front row seats! Bawana is where slum dwellers evicted for the Commonwealth Games were relocated



Counting in girls: Pardada Pardadi sets a fine example in Bulandshahr district of Uttar Pradesh



The day's news: Girls at the Baba Aya Singh Riarki College in the Gurdaspur district of Punjab



Play by ear: A hectic moment during a football match played by the blind



Big bite: Close-up of venom extraction by the Irula snakecatchers



Exploited donkey: Donkeys are made to work hard at construction sites in Gurgaon



Changing equations: A panchayat building at Muzaffarpur in Bihar with MNREGA muster rolls inscribed on its walls

Individual crafts people and producer groups make products that often don't get the attention they deserve. Here are saris, pottery, foodstuff, linen, home decor items, toys, kites and perfumes. Just try.

PRICELESS SARI



MOHAMMED Nasim Warsi is a traditional weaver from Benares who spins the very special Jangla sari. A lot of nimble hands go into making it. The purest silk is used. Intricate zari work is woven with real gold and silver threads. The Jangla sari takes two or three months to produce and costs not less than ₹80,000. Warsi has received a National Award for this heirloom sari.

"I make it only on order," says Warsi sitting behind stacks of cloth in his stall at Dilli Haat in New Delhi. He gets a few orders for the Jangla sari during the marriage season. Before getting down to work he holds in depth discussions with his client on colour and design.

To earn more money, Warsi now spins scarves, salwar kameez sets, saris and fabric in a range of prices. There is no compromise on quality. "We are earning more," he says. "Exports have picked up and the Union government has helped us." ■

Contact: Naseem Warsi: 07503676351, 09891050789, 08303074015
Address: Anas Silk Saris, H. No S-30/127, Muslim Basti, Shivpur, Varanasi, UP.



HEALTHY HONEY

BRBEE's Honeylite products are creating a buzz. Its hardworking bees produce natural honey that isn't laden with antibiotics, heavy metals and preservatives. You can buy honey in many flavours: acacia, thyme, blackberry, lychee, orange, wildflower and fresh herbs. BrBee produces monofloral honey.

That means the bees travel in their bee boxes to different fields of flowers in the high mountain ranges of the Himalaya. They go to Lahaul in Himachal Pradesh, to Jammu in Kashmir, to Dehradun in Uttarakhand and to Haryana when the mustard is in full bloom. Bee travels depend on the season.

They also flit around in dense forests and come back with nectar that has a subtle taste of clove, eucalyptus and basil. This honey is called Wild Forest. Try it.

Each honey has a distinct taste and colour. Acacia is light and subtle. Blackberry is darker and intense. While acacia is good for coughs, thyme is a blood purifier and a digestive. Blackberry lowers blood pressure and diabetes. Honey is, after all, the elixir of good health. ■

Contact: BrBee Products Pvt Ltd, VPO Bandrol District, Kullu Tehsil, Himachal Pradesh
Phone: 1902-08510070085, 011-43001861/62
Abhishek Saha: 09711181446
Email: asaha@brbee.co.in

HOME STUFF



THE Anupshahr tehsil of Bulandshahr district in Uttar Pradesh is emerging as a centre of girl power. This backward region is being transformed by the efforts of the Pardada Pardadi Education Society (PPES). Founded in 2000 by Virender (Sam) Singh, after he retired from Du Pont, PPES has expanded from one school and 45 village girls to four educational institutions and around 1,200 enthusiastic students.

PPES not only provides a quality education, paying girls to complete school, it helps them to become economically

independent by teaching them valuable skills. After Class 10 students can opt for textile production. They learn to do delicate embroidery, appliqué work and block printing on cloth. This is then used to create tablecloths, duvets, sheets, curtains, picture frames, trays, diaries and coasters. There are also attractive wine covers, gift bags and calendars on offer. The products are sold through PPES' online boutique, From the Village to the World. Gift a friend a lovely PPES product this Diwali and light up a little girl's life. ■

Contact: Pardada Pardadi Educational Society, 114/B Khirki Village, Malviya Nagar, New Delhi- 110017 Phone: 011-29542966, Mukesh: 09540969674, Indu: 09268563312.
Website: www.education4change.org



ANDRETTA BLUES

ANDRETTA is a historic village in Himachal Pradesh's Kangra Valley. In the 1930s, Norah Richards, an Irish theatre activist and playwright, started an intense revival of Punjabi theatre and culture here. Richards wanted to convert Andretta into India's first artists village.

She invited famous potter Gurcharan Singh and portrait painter late Sobha Singh, to Andretta. The village soon became a hub of the arts. Amrita Pritam spent time here. It was also a stepping stone for Prithviraj Kapoor's acting career.

Norah Richards' dream was not realised but pottery lives on in Andretta. Gurcharan's son, Mansimran Singh and his wife, Mary, run the Andretta Pottery and Craft Society that still makes delicate blue pottery. The society has a studio and a terracotta museum. Residential courses in art

pottery are offered for three months and students acquire skills to set up their own pottery unit. ■

Contact: Sardar Mansimran Singh, The Andretta Pottery & Craft Society, VPO Andretta, District Kangra -176103, Himachal Pradesh Email: minimary_99@yahoo.co.uk Phone: 01894-253090, 254243 Or contact: Jugal Kishore: 09816314481



BENARES WEAVERS

BADRUODUJA Ansari is an expert at weaving the elegant Baluchari sari. A traditional weaver from Benares, he says his Baluchari saris are distinct since he weaves Bengali patterns delicately, infusing them with the Benaresi touch. In 2008, he received a national award from the Government of India for his version of the Baluchari sari.

Ansari is an innovator. He has been experimenting with fabrics from all over India. He shows us a red sari with gold motifs. The fabric is muga silk from Assam, he explains, and the motifs are distinctly Benaresi.

Ansari, like other weavers, is using all kinds of fabrics to make several products at cheaper prices. You can buy a woven silk scarf for just ₹650. There are saris and salwar suits in cotton-silk, and fabric. But there is no compromise on the quality of his weaves.

His partner, Ashfaq, says that the Union government's economic package for weavers has greatly helped them. "We are grateful to the government. We would like it to keep helping us, like getting us this space in Dilli Haat to sell our products," he says. ■

Contact: B. Ansari: 09616171872, Ashfaq: 09235180696



KETTLE & CUP

SIX years ago Tenzin Dolkar decided to start a small business in tea things – cups, mugs and kettles. She named her business Snow Lion. A Tibetan settled in Dharamsala, a town in Himachal Pradesh, Tenzin invested her own modest funds and began a pottery unit. "It is run by my mom, my sister and me. Actually, only me," she says with a smile.

Tenzin has a shop in Dharamsala's main market. She says Indian tourists love to buy her products. This is her first trip to Delhi, thanks to the Dastkari Haat Samiti, and she is happy that the response at Dilli Haat, a crafts bazaar, has been good. The kettles and mugs are neat with pretty Tibetan designs etched on them. There are dragons and flowers in a riot of colours, from bright yellow to sombre blue.

But it isn't only tea products that Tenzin propagates. Her stall spouts Buddhist philosophy. There are posters with quotes from the Dalai Lama that gently urge people to curb negative emotions like greed and enhance positive ones like compassion. Tea is, after all, associated with serenity and peace. ■

Contact: Tenzin Dolkar, Snow Lion Handicraft Shop, Surya Complex, Shop No 6, Temple Road, McLeod Ganj, Dharamsala, District Kangra – 176219 Himachal Pradesh Phone: 08679693222



GARDEN TOYS



GIRILAL Prasad's colourful stall looks like an animal farm made of terracotta. He makes a variety of flower pots and fountains for home gardens. There are dinky pots shaped into cute cows, fountains with

a crocodile's mouth, gawky camel and giraffe flower pots and so on. Naturally, his stall attracts mostly little children who poke their fingers into his fountains and pat the animal pots. Prasad is a well-known potter who says with pride that he has taken part in the Republic Day celebrations sitting atop the Delhi installation and turning the potter's wheel. "Terracotta is not very easy to get right," he says. "It is a mix of different types of clay. I buy mine from Haryana and meld it myself." As for designs, Prasad says he relies on his customers. They approach him with a design from some magazine and he copies it perfectly. You can order one piece or 100, Prasad is happy to make it for you. ■

Contact: Girilal Prasad, RZ 29, Uttam Nagar, Prajapati Colony, Delhi-100059 Phone: 9810594197, 9871370017

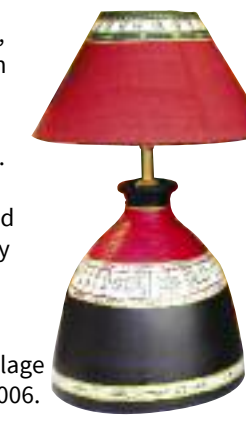


ARTY TERRACOTTA



HARYANA isn't famous for art so Brajendra Singh Prajapati's small stall at Dilli Haat is a surprise. His family is from a village in Palwal district of Haryana and they make a range of eye-catching terracotta home products. His father, Budhi Ram Prajapati, is a famous potter who received a national award from the Union government in 1996 and was bestowed the title of Shilp Guru in 2010. Prajapati sells lampshades, lamps, vases, lanterns and pots in attractive colours and designs. The lanterns light up with a bulb. "We have chosen the best folk art in India. From Bihar we have borrowed Madhubani, from Maharashtra, Warli and from Haryana our own version of Rangoli. These are all hand-painted on our products," says Prajapati. He says pottery is his hereditary profession. They don't own land. His family of nine members depends on the income earned from pottery. "People who love craft buy our products," he says. ■

Contact: Brajendra Singh Prajapati, Village Banchari, District Palwal, Haryana-121006. Phone: 9991369794, 941613844



WOOD CRAFT

TARKASHI is a method of artistically embossing strips of brass on wood. This craft originated from Mainpuri in Uttar Pradesh but Pilkhuwa too is catching up. Sardar Hussain is famous here for being a master craftsman of Tarkashi. His Sajawat Handicrafts produces an amazing jumble of trays, glass boxes, planters, lamps, frames, mirrors and candle stands with Tarkashi work. All his products are made from sheesham, beech or mango wood. The designs are surprisingly neat and modern. Eye-catching colours like bright pink and turquoise blue have been liberally used.

The wood is smooth to touch. "We use wax polish to heighten the beauty of the wood," says Faraz Aqeel, a partner in the business. "Its all hand made and very time consuming to produce." Prices are reasonable. ■

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SKILFUL INDHA



INDHA Craft is a social enterprise and training programme started in 2005 by Literacy India, an NGO, in Daulatabad village of Haryana. Indha actually means a cloth that Haryanvi women wear on their heads when

they carry water or firewood. It eases the burden.

Indha Craft is doing that too by empowering them. "Our first thought was to help women step out of a restrictive and conservative mindset and give them a skill to sustain themselves. Initially, Indha started with just 30 women," says Satya Prakash of Literacy India.

In nine years, Indha Craft has trained around 10,000 women from Haryana, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, West Bengal, Jharkhand and Telangana. The social enterprise has also received an award from the Indian Institute of Craft and Design. Indha turns recyclable material like discarded paper, plastic, wood and jute into pretty products.



Each woman is given the responsibility of making one finished product and not just part of a product. This gives the women the skill, experience and confidence to start their own enterprise if they wish to.

Indha Craft produces attractive bags, photo frames, stationery, masks and diaries.

Well known designer Tarun Tahiliani and students from design institutes have helped Indha.

Today, Indha has many corporate clients. They get orders ranging from 50 pieces to 5,000 pieces.

Indha products are also available on flipkart.com and novica.com. ■

Lakshman Anand

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THREADS OF LOVE

DEVOTION is a tranquil shop on a busy street in Delhi that sells pretty hand embroidered garments and furnishing. Devotion has a special soft spot for babies. It offers a range of cute frocks, towels and smooth sheets with pillow covers. There are also hand towels that look like puppets. For your bedroom you can buy bedsheets sets, both double and single, in pastel colours, embroidered by hand. Take a look too at tablemat sets, tablecloths, nightwear and towels in



many sizes for adults. Devotion is run by Arpana, a non-profit that provides health, education and livelihood services to 248 disadvantaged villages in Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and in the slum resettlement colonies of Molar Bund in New Delhi.

Devotion's products are made by Self-Help Groups (SHGs) of women. Arpana has linked the women to banks. The non-profit provides training and markets SHG products. The women now stand for elections and take part in village development. Arpana's priority is to work with the poorest. The guiding spirit behind Arpana is Param Pujya Ma. ■

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NATURALLY FRAGRANT

THE natural aroma of rose, lemon, lavender or rosemary is gently heady and therapeutic. But buying wondrous green products isn't easy on the pocket. Everybody enjoys using natural soaps and oils. To make such products available to people, Saklain Kawoos, a young social entrepreneur, has started a store in Srinagar's Polo View area.

Named Saklain's Coterie, the shop sells the entire range of pure essential oils and handmade natural soaps. You can take your pick. There is lavender oil, rosemary oil, almond oil, apricot oil, olive oil, walnut oil, tea-tree oil, juniper oil.

Various forms of handmade natural soaps dot his shelves. These soaps are very different from the ones sold in the market. They contain just glycerine and saffron. There isn't even a trace of chemical, unlike soaps available in the general market.

Oils are extracted from the flowers of aromatic plants grown in Saklain's farm in Yaarsuthoo village of Budgam district. He gets the soaps made after supplying the requisite quantity of saffron and glycerine to the manufacturer. He also deals in dry fruits and pure saffron.

Saklain's Coterie is already acquiring fame. His store was mentioned in the BBC's *Good Food* magazine and has been covered by the local and national media. With sales picking up, Saklain is naturally thinking of exporting his products. ■ *Jehangir Rashid*

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