

Civil Society

MAHUA MAKES IT TO THE BAR

Can the tribal brew be a national drink?



Desmond Nazareth distills and bottles mahua under the brand name Desmondji

LIGHT TO FIGHT ANIMALS

Page 12

WHEN TRIBALS TALK

Pages 14-15

INDIA'S DOG FATHER

Page 16

INTERVIEW

'PALLIATIVE CARE HAS ARRIVED'

Dr GAYATRI PALAT ON OPENING 8 CENTRES IN TELANGANA DISTRICTS

Pages 6-8

MEALS JUST FOR YOU

Pages 24-25

WHO NEEDS A LIBRARY?

Page 26

THE MILLETS CAFÉ

Pages 29-30

Healthy India Happy India

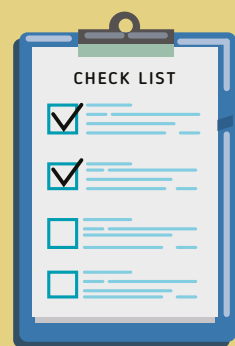


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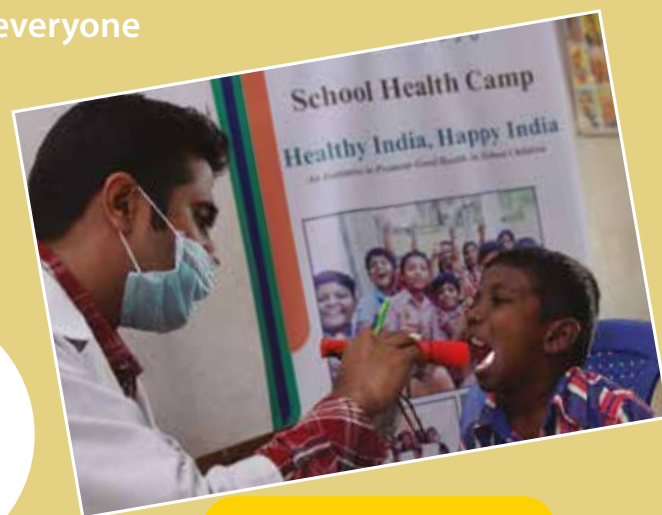
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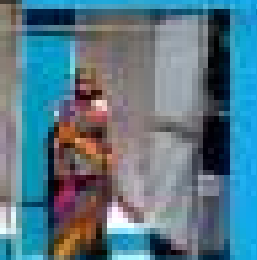
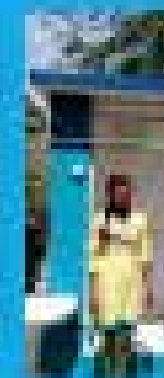
ORAL HYGIENE



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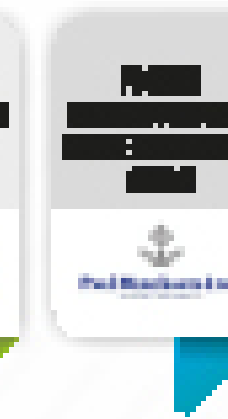
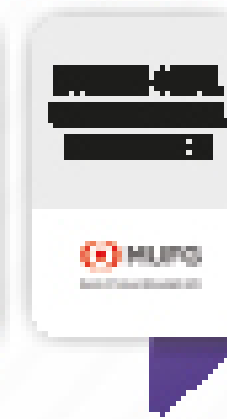
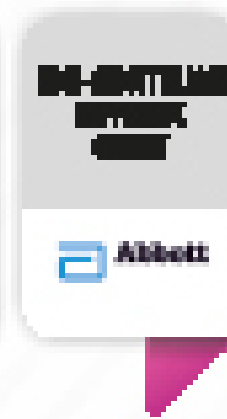
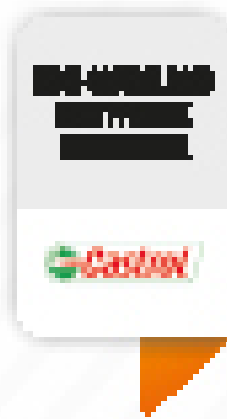
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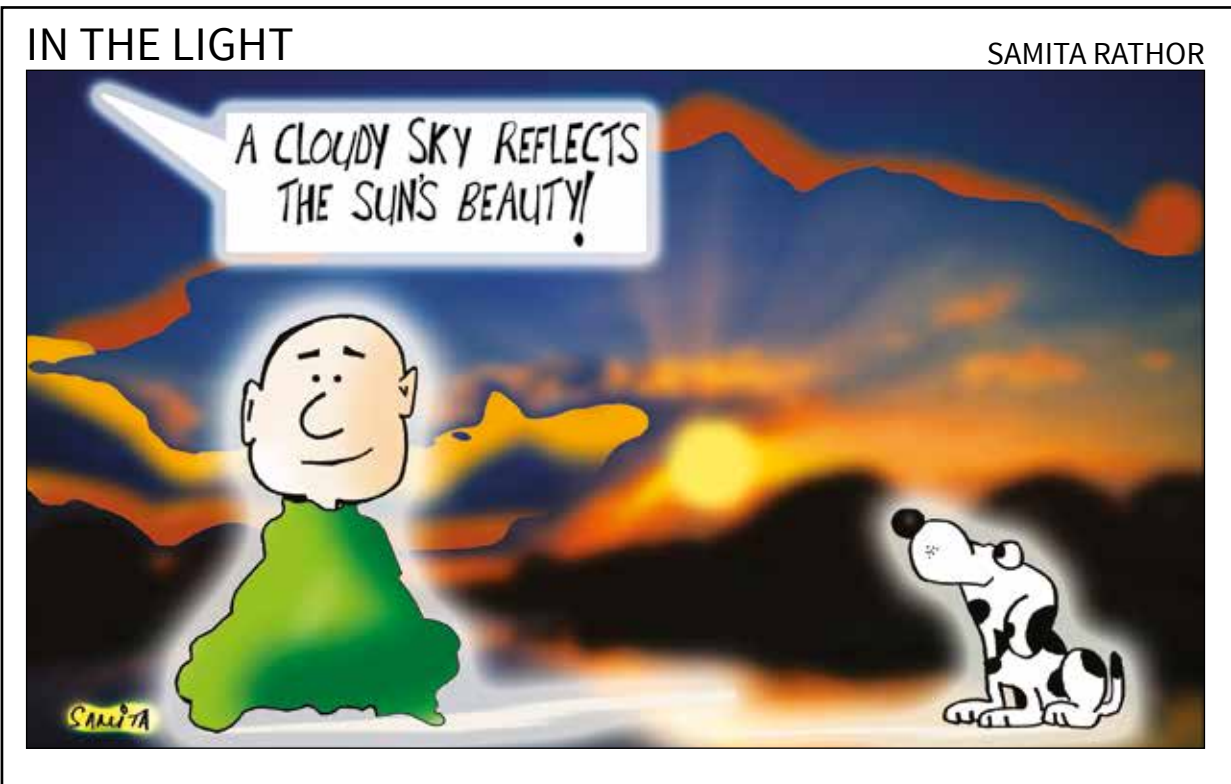


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LETTERS



Dying for the Ganga

Thanks for doing a cover story on Prof. G.D. Agarwal. Mainstream media ignored him. Prof. Agarwal was indeed 'an engineer, green guru and sanyasi' as you described him. But it is doubtful whether anyone will fight for the Ganga like he did. Besides, if G.D. with his proximity to the RSS, could not get his voice heard, then what hope is there that other activists will be able to influence the political class in power.

Sanya Malhotra

Fixing Gurugram

Thanks for the interview with V. Umashankar, 'Gurugram needs a unified vision.' He seems to have studied the city, which is probably the fastest growing in India, very closely. Drainage, as he points out, is one of the most difficult issues to fix in Gurugram, but it is also an

opportunity. Umashankar understood this and it is unfortunate that he has been transferred.

Dr B.N. Shenoy

Kobad in jail

I read the piece by Gautam Vohra on his experience of visiting Kobad Ghandy in jail in Hazaribagh. This is how laws that are drawn up to help citizens get wrongly used. There is no restraint on officials who handle prisoners and they misuse these laws as they please. This is due to lack of empathy or love which I trace to frustration, insecurity, lack of self-confidence and self-respect.

David Maude

Rebirth of Natarani

Thanks for the story 'Natarani is back after three years with old flair.' I have attended several programmes at Natarani. It is indeed a great place which will definitely draw connoisseurs and artistes from across the world. Mallika Sarabhai and Yadavan Chandran have managed to bring to life a great dream of theirs.

Sunil Kothari

Business and CSR

Your story, 'How inclusive are India's top 100 listed companies?' was pretty exhaustive. I happened to talk to a few companies to understand their perspective on making their company

inclusive. While many say they wish to, there is always a rejoinder — we are too busy to drive the activity or the business is complex. However, I can safely say that this trend is changing and companies are now realising their responsibilities.

Ankit Bansal

Seeds for farmers

I read Shree Padre's story, 'A wealth of rare seeds for farmers in Thrissur' with interest. It is really fantastic to see a government institute reaching out and sharing rare seeds with farmers so freely! Events like 'okra field day' should be widely publicised, and many more government institutes must be encouraged to follow this practice. Hats off to Dr John Joseph!

Vidhya

Going electric

I liked Chetan Maini's article, 'India can go electric by 2030.' Yours is an excellent magazine which introduces readers to people and entrepreneurs who undertake such humane initiatives. Please keep it up.

Bajrang Lal Sharma

Poshan champions

Congratulations to Arvind Singh and his team of Poshan champions for their wonderful work in taking nutrition to the doorsteps of households in slums. It is initiatives like these that have immediate impact. The AAP government will surely extend a helping hand and improve the *anganwadis*.

Amrita Bansal

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A mahua, please

Efforts at improving the condition of tribal communities almost invariably end up as some kind of dole. There is little serious attempt to understand their evolved cultural traditions, respect their habitats and hear their hopes and aspirations. The result is that though tribal people have the same democratic rights as anyone else, they go unheard and languish for want of access to the modern levers of the economy on their own terms.

Two stories in this issue of *Civil Society* address the problem. The first is the cover story on Desmond Nazareth, the somewhat unconventional entrepreneur who has taken the tribal brew, *mahua*, and distilled it to meet the formal standards of the alcohol business. Now that *mahua* is slickly packaged and branded, there are prospects of selling it widely. Since it is distilled from the flowers of the *mahua* tree, which tribal people collect, Nazareth believes he has opened the door for them to earn more.

Nazareth insists that his bottling of *mahua* is to give tribal people a better deal. It could be an exponentially big deal if *mahua* actually came to be seen as a national drink, which Nazareth, the eternal entrepreneur, believes it can. Whether that happens or not, the bottling of *mahua* in itself is a good example of how tribal people can be taken to market, of course with due protection against exploitation.

The challenge is not in "modernising" tribal communities, but in helping them realise the true value of their rich cultural traditions and knowledge systems. Giving tribal people a voice and platform is, therefore, the first step so that the rest of the country can at least begin to unravel what they are all about. Our second story which addresses the dilemma of tribal life comes from Jamsheedpur where Tata Steel held the fifth edition of Samvaad to which tribal communities from all the states of India come to celebrate their traditions and talk about their dilemmas and hopes. *Civil Society* was invited to all the previous editions of Samvaad but never went. This time we did. Because of our deadline, we offer a photo feature and a brief story. But it is an event unique in several ways — not the least one being that a steel manufacturer should give tribal identities so much genuine space. Going forward we will be tracking Samvaad in much more detail.

From Telangana we bring news of a fruitful collaboration between the state government and the voluntary sector which has taken palliative cancer care to eight districts. It is a huge achievement and an example of how public healthcare should proceed. While privatisation of healthcare should worry us, it is also true that we no longer have the luxury of the state sector doing enough on its own. Responsible partnerships that recognise the needs of a poor country are the way forward.

Finally, as toxic clouds of pollution engulf Delhi and the National Capital Region, we ask the question, what happened to electric vehicles? Is the lack of a policy with clear goals slowing us down when other countries like China are forging ahead at a frenetic pace and cleaning up their air?



COVER STORY

MAHUA MAKES IT TO THE BAR

Mahua, a traditional tribal brew, is now available in a bottle, distilled and packaged by Desmond Nazareth, an entrepreneur who believes its new status will benefit tribals.

18

COVER PHOTOGRAPH: SAGUN GAWADE

Govt teachers get tech-savvy..... 8-9

Drug policy tries to curb abuse..... 10

Whatever happened to EVs?..... 22-23

School official with no power..... 27

Desire and the rural woman..... 28

A *tharavad* and an endless lake..... 31-32

The value of a wet paddy field..... 32-33

Ayurveda: Relief from piles..... 34

Product: Bamboo toothbrushes..... 34

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'We have set up palliative care centres in 8 districts'

Dr Gayatri Palat on how the govt in Telangana has forged a creative partnership

Civil Society News
Hyderabad

TELANGANA has become a frontrunner in State-supported cancer treatment by opening palliative care centres in eight districts in partnership with the Pain Relief and Palliative Care Society since 2017.

Earlier, in 2007, the government-run MNJ Cancer Institute partnered Two Worlds Cancer Collaboration, a Canadian NGO, to set up a palliative care facility at the institute in Hyderabad.

Palliative care is generally neglected though it is an essential part of cancer treatment. Funds exist for palliative care under the National Health Programme, but go unutilised because of ignorance and lack of medical training.

Civil Society spoke to Dr Gayatri Palat, an anaesthetist and director of the Palliative Access Programme, about the centre at the MNJ Institute and the outreach in the eight districts.

Palliative care has not received the emphasis it should. How did your programme attract the interest of the state government?

My programme started in 2006 when I first moved to Hyderabad and we formally began working at the MNJ Institute of Oncology, which is run by the government and serves as the Regional Cancer Centre. In 2011 the Telangana government gave official recognition to this programme. It is now called the Department of Pain and Palliative Medicine and it has a proper faculty which is a big thing for us.

Are you here in a government capacity?

I work for an international NGO called Two Worlds Cancer Collaboration, which is based in Canada. We approached the management of the MNJ Institute and they were very open to the idea. We got into an MoU with the government and the palliative and cancer care programme was established here. I work in the government system, and this is due to the good vision of the management. But I also network with other NGOs. Working with the government is very helpful especially for advocacy and policy.

A lot of things have happened in five years. Slowly, the state government started recognising the importance of medications like morphine, a crucial component of palliative care, especially for patients



Dr Gayatri Palat: 'The state government is very receptive. They all feel for the cause'

of cancer. It isn't easy to get morphine in India because of stringent regulations. The government has been concerned that it will be misused, but rules have been so strict it hasn't been available for medical use and patients have suffered.

But that is now changing because we worked with the government of united Andhra Pradesh, amended the regulations and made morphine available for patients. We are now one of the few centres in India where medications like morphine are available and we undertake training, research and clinical work.

But you also do outreach through another NGO?

Yes, the Pain Relief and Palliative Care Society, which does outreach. I formed it in 2007 with like-minded people. We have a 24-bed hospice for palliative care in Hyderabad and we collaborate with the state government to run palliative care centres in eight districts.

While I was working with cancer patients in MNJ I realised that almost all of them over a period of time would become very sick and could not come to the hospital. They would suffer at home and die.

If I sit in this hospital then, yes, I am catering to some patients but I am not reaching the people in the community. That's why I formed the Pain Relief and Palliative Care Society, for outreach.

So now we have two NGOs and the government working together to provide palliative care within the hospital and reaching out to people in the community.

How many patients does your palliative care centre in MNJ handle?

For palliative care we see on average 70 to 80 patients per day. They come to our outpatient service. There is no other hospital offering this service. Our outreach provides home care. We have five vans going to different parts of the city with a team of doctors, nurses and counsellors trained in palliative care. They take care of patients in their homes. Most patients want to be at home and die at home, given the choice.

How many patients do you manage to reach in their homes?

Because of the traffic and distance we cater to four

'We have set up palliative care centres in 8 districts'

to five patients each day. We have five vans so that would work out to 20 to 25 patients per day, six days a week. It's not enough and there is a lot of scope to expand. Most of them are cancer patients.

We don't really cater to the population of non-cancer patients with end-stage diseases. A few approach us, mostly through word of mouth. The major chunk of non-cancer patients has neurological and geriatric problems. There are people afflicted with paralysis, stroke, dementia and old age-related issues. They all require palliative care at some point of time. We hope one day they will all have access to palliative care.

Your MoU with the government dates back to when?

In 2011, the central government set up a programme for palliative care for which they earmarked funds. In 2017, a National Programme for Palliative Care (NPPC) was started, a landmark move. It recognised palliative care as an important part of the health system. The centre encouraged states to utilise that fund to develop their own palliative care system.

It is a need-based fund. They are keen to fund district-based programmes, not big public hospitals. They are saying, decentralise and go to the districts and we will give you money. The funds are for infrastructure, human resource, and patients. It's a nicely planned programme.

The state government applied for the grant from the central government through the National Health Mission and it was lying unused. MNJ was approached. They involved us and the Tata Trust. So the government of Telangana, the Tata Trust, MNJ Hospital, and Pain Relief and Palliative Care Society came together and brainstormed on how we could use this grant.

In October 2017, our NGO signed an MoU with the state government to roll out a district-based programme in Ganga Reddy district. We established an in-patient facility and a home care programme.

In the first phase, from October 2017 to October 2018, we thought we would just set up eight centres across the state depending on the patient population. We did a need-based assessment before deciding on which districts to choose.

How does each centre work?

We have an in-patient facility with eight to 10 beds within the district or in the area hospital along with a home programme. If patients are critically ill they come to the in-patient facility where they get good end-of-life care. The state government has set aside really good funding for human resources so we have a dedicated staff of doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, ANMs and drivers. Each centre has a staff of 14.

MNJ Hospital provides intense training for six weeks to staff and sends them back to the districts. The NGO's role is to select the staff, oversee the programme and ensure quality. We connect with all eight centres to make sure they are functioning smoothly.

Where do trainers come from?

I have a local team of doctors and nurses who are trained. We have a very senior faculty. We also invite national faculty and they actually volunteer to go and stay in the district facility and spend time handholding the team. We also have international faculty coming here, looking at how to improve quality. Two Worlds supports the NGO with a grant for faculty.

How much does it cost to run each centre?

Each centre costs ₹3 lakh per month. We have 31 districts in Telangana. If you want a centre in each district it will cost just ₹11 to 12 crore a year. That's all. And we reach out to the people.

Our eight centres have 64 beds. Our home care team has done 500 visits every day. Palliative care is not a very high-cost specialty. The cost is mainly in human resources. Medicines are inexpensive, though they may be difficult to procure. The more human resources you have, the better the quality of care.

'Each centre costs ₹3 lakh per month. We have 31 districts in Telangana. A centre in each district will cost ₹11 to 12 crore a year. That's all. And we reach out to the people. Palliative care is not a high-cost specialty.'

And this money is available from the central government?

Any grant from the central government is in proportion — about 60:40. But the state government is saying, we will not limit your funds. If you are doing it in all districts we will give you the money. They are very receptive. They all feel for the cause. We are talking about suffering, about death and dying. It touches a chord.

Who pays the doctors?

We go by government standard norms. We are paying a little more than what regular doctors are paid. They are all working in the districts. We have a centre in Adilabad, one of the most remote districts in Telangana. We have a young enthusiastic doctor working there and five excellent nurses.

But doctors and nurses don't like to work in remote areas. How do you get quality people?

When we rolled out this programme, that was our biggest concern. Surprisingly, I am getting doctors. For one centre, four doctors came for the interview. We do give them an assured salary which is paid on time. In each centre we provide good quality furniture and a good ambience. These gaps are filled by the NGO.

How much would a doctor in your remote centre be paid? Are they young doctors?

A young doctor on average in a government facility

would be paid ₹40,000. We pay them ₹60,000 as a starting salary. We leave scope for a yearly increment. They should be happy otherwise we cannot retain them. In four centres the doctors are quite senior. In the other four we have younger doctors. They may pursue higher education and leave. I encourage that.

Do they have any specialisation in palliative care?

No, they have no clue. Most are MBBS doctors. I have postgraduate doctors because we do a lot of training. Initially, they don't come seeking to work in palliative care. They just come looking for a job but when we enrol them and they undergo training, they feel motivated. The doctors in our centres say that if they can do their postgraduation in palliative care they would like to continue with this specialty.

What about medications?

In almost all eight centres we have managed to procure opioid medications. For any good pain relief programme, especially a cancer programme, you have to have opioid medication.

In India this is a big issue. India is only one of two countries that legally cultivates opium and exports it to the rest of the world for pain relief. Yet, in our own country less than one percent of the population has access to pain relief through morphine and

related products because of stringent regulations.

Since we have morphine in all our eight centres, a patient in a distant place like Adilabad doesn't need to come to Hyderabad to procure it. He can get it at the Adilabad district hospital.

The other problem is lack of education and training. Training in palliative care is not part of our medical education. It is a big gap and patients suffer. In the absence of training, physicians fear administering morphine and other opioids because they are addictive.

So legally you can get it? But it is not used because of lack of training.

Yes. In 2015 the Government of India amended the NDPS Act. States cannot decide that they don't want to use opioids. The law is uniform across the country now. Clear instructions on how to procure medications like morphine and how to dispense them are laid out. You have to follow certain protocols. Yet, in most states we don't have access to such medication. You need to demand supply. No demand is due to ignorance.

But is that enough to formalise palliative care?

The government's National Health Plan 2017 clearly includes palliative care as part of their official health strategy. It says every health and wellness centre at primary health level should have palliative care, along with health promotion treatment and

Continued on page 8

'We have palliative care in 8 districts'

Continued from page 7

rehabilitation. It's official. We have arrived. It's just that we don't know how to implement it. It should be part of the mainstream health system. When you talk about medicine, surgery, cardiology you should also include palliative care.

So why isn't it like that?

Ignorance. Our doctors graduate without learning about palliative care. The Medical Council has not revised the curriculum.

So you managed to make morphine and its equivalents available in all eight centres?

Which, I think, is very significant and exciting in the palliative care world. The other thing which our health administration has done is to involve the local administration in this planning process. When I go to any district to set up a programme, I meet the collector. He decides the infrastructure the administration is going to provide.

Even if the central commissioner changes, the collector is involved. The local administrations have gone out of their way. I have a WhatsApp group of all the collectors and I message them on any issue and they interact with me directly. This is an amazing response. It's a lot of hard work.

When we think of cancer we think of chemotherapy, radiation and so on. Is palliative care a part of cancer treatment?

This is a very pertinent question. Why does a patient come to hospital in the first place, often before the first diagnosis? They have a symptom, a swelling and pain. So when they come to hospital and undergo investigation and get the devastating news that they have cancer, no support is given.

Throughout cancer treatment they get no support. Only when everything is over and you are referred to palliative care, you start getting good medicine for pain, good supportive care, good counselling, handholding.

That is not the internationally accepted model. They say every patient diagnosed with cancer from day one must be given the choice of seeking palliative care. Palliative care is not end-of-life care. Even after a cure survivors have fears and worries. Remission is a constant threat. We also talk about bereavement care. When you lose your loved ones you grieve and that process becomes very difficult. Our palliative care team extends bereavement support till they move on in their lives. So it's a big spectrum we talk about.

Are you doing this in MNJ?

When a patient is referred to us in our clinic we do a triage. We ask, do you want to continue to come to our OPD? Do you want to opt for home care or a hospice? Or do you want to go to the district facility? So now we can offer a choice to patients. With the kind of patient numbers we get, people do question the quality of care. We do worry about quality.

How many patients come to MNJ?

In a year we get 12,000 new patients. I agree this is not enough but at least we are doing something. ■

GOVERNMENT SCHOOL TEACHERS GET TECH-SAVVY



Teachers from remote government schools learning how to create audio-visual content for their students

Software firm, panchayat and NGO team up for training

Subir Roy
Kolkata

AT A picturesque resort amidst a tea garden in Alipurduar district of West Bengal, 20 schoolteachers from remote government schools listened intently to Debasish Mondal, a head teacher. He was explaining how audio-visu-als could be used to make teaching fun for students. Mondal, who is younger than some of his own students, is a veteran in holding forth on use of audio-visu-als in school teaching.

The teachers were attending a two-day workshop organised by Embee Software, an IT solutions company, the Kalchini Panchayat Samiti in Alipurduar district and AHEAD Initiatives, an NGO, to help government schoolteachers learn how to use audio-visual aids to enhance their teaching.

Four such intensive workshops in a year are planned along with monthly reviews with teachers through a dedicated Facilitation Centre, ending with a Lesson Plan competition.

AHEAD facilitated the partnership with Embee Software and the panchayat. It is rare for a company and a panchayat to come together to implement a CSR programme and is, probably, a great example

for other companies who find it difficult to partner even an NGO.

Abeer Chakravarty, chairman of AHEAD Initiatives, explained that the workshop was taking place against the backdrop of a high dropout rate in government schools. One way government schools could retain students was by making learning joyful through use of technology.

Most CSR budgets focus on activities around their establishments and not in far-flung, remote areas where the need for such funds is acute.

"We are excited to see how this project takes shape," said Utsav Kothari, director of Embee Software. "This CSR project helps trench Embee's belief and practice of going beyond hardware and software to provide solutions that help transformation, whether it be for their customers or for underprivileged teachers and students."

Two-thirds of the 20 teachers attending the workshop didn't know how to use computers. They had been selected by an empowered committee of the Panchayat Samiti.

Each teacher was first presented with a kit by Embee Software. The kit consisted of a laptop, a smartphone with a data card, mini-projector, sound pod and accessories such as a headphone. The idea was for every participant to become familiar with the gear, use it to do simple things which enable the use of audio-visu-als in teaching, and then take it back to his or her school for the other teachers to use and pick up similar skills.

One of those who attended the first workshop was Shyam Sharma, the 40-year-old head teacher of Bedvyas Nepali Primary School in North Bengal's Jalpaiguri district. He is no stranger to computers. He uses a laptop and his school has bought a TV and two computers to teach children how to use

them. One of the new projects he has in mind is to hold special classes after regular school hours for backward children in which audio-visual teaching aids will be used. This is because he has realised that audio-visual aids are a key enabler in situations where the normal way of teaching does not help.

Till now Sharma has made do with stills and handwritten material to prepare audio-visual aids for use in his school. Now he is excited about using the new techniques he has picked up for lessons focused, for example, on his school's environment and on the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan. The two meet in simple messages like "Don't drop garbage on the street."

Sharma, in a way, is not the typical government schoolteacher. He is obsessed by the private schools near his government school with which he has to compete. "We have an inferiority complex," he confesses. To change mindsets, he has made the tie a compulsory part of the school uniform. He is extremely proud that, be it in a football tournament or at the Independence Day parade, it is his children who are the winners. His enthusiasm has touched parents and when he calls a meeting they turn up in good number.

Kshama Roy, the 58-year-old head teacher of Netaji Prathamik Vidyalaya, does not use computers. But she is also special. At a workshop session when she made a presentation to go with a visual clip, enacting how she would teach her students, she was so obviously good that she earned a spontaneous round of applause.

"Children love to learn when it is fun. But not all are equally attentive. Children enjoy audio-visual stuff, particularly cartoons. Audio-visual aids can help everyone concentrate, absorb better, particularly slow learners. We can convey a lot through visuals instead of uttering so many words," she said.

The workshop was a new experience for her. "What I have picked up has gaps. I need a lot more training. So I will keep using my new skills till I have grasped them fully. If, with some effort, I can take to my school what I have picked up here, it will be very helpful. It was a dream of mine to be able to use audio-visual aids for teaching."

Roy feels she has been able to access something special because most teachers in government schools do not personally use computers.

"You need a creative spirit to use the audio-visual tool in education. The challenge is to make technology an aid for pedagogy that addresses the holistic development of the child," remarked Mondal, who along with a group of teachers addressed the teachers over two days at the workshop.

Audio-visu-als are a new aid to pedagogy to make learning joyful for the child, maybe in the same way as the old one of pure story-telling under a tree or in a verandah, that is, away from a standard classroom. The audio-visual tool has to be continuously adapted to the need to take forward a child's

learning activity and achievement. Mondal adds, "If technology can be used the right way then the teaching-learning experience will have embedded in it assessment tools." A child's response to technology makes up a learning assessment tool that tells you how the child is doing, so that you do not need to separately hold examinations!

LEARNING THE BASICS: The workshop began with a group of Class 4 schoolchildren rendering "We Shall Overcome" in English and Bengali, with an endearing North Bengal accent. Then they were shown an audio-visual depicting an unhappy family condemned to eat the same food every day and asked to draw a picture of an ideal family garden



Kshama Roy receiving her kit from Debasish Mondal

whose produce makes for a varied diet. This conveys a rationalisation of the practice adopted of creating kitchen gardens in schools which comes with the National Curriculum Framework.

Several films chosen by the faculty were loaded onto the laptops for the teachers to scour for clips to be used in their presentations. First came the story of Guppy, the fish, whose journey down the Ganga was used to depict the journey of the river. It was fun for Guppy initially but things changed, became troubled, as the Ganga travelled and became polluted. The story could be used to teach children how we pollute a river and threaten it, as also the life in it. The film could be used to devise activities for children so that they can imbibe the message and think up solutions. The final message could be: begin by thinking how you can clean up your village river. The film was a source of information for the children, presented in a digestible manner.

Another story on film was about one shoe in a pair. A boy travelling with his well-off family takes off one of his sports shoes at a railway station and then, in the hurry to get onto the train, leaves the shoe behind. A poor boy in torn *chappals* picks up the shoe and runs alongside the moving train to give the rich boy his shoe but fails. When the other boy sees this and looks at the poor boy on the platform, a fellow feeling develops and finally he throws the shoe still with him onto the platform so that the

poor boy now has a nice pair of shoes. The message to be conveyed to children in the presentation to be woven around the film is: when you give unconditionally, it comes back to you undiminished.

For the teachers, the overall message is: make a lesson plan incorporating an audio-visual which passes on a message without appearing to teach. And where to get the audio-visual? Maybe a clip taken from a film or something on YouTube which is relevant to your class. A practical lesson is woven in on how to make a clip from a film and then all the steps to be gone through in creating an audio-visual which is part of a lesson plan. In creating the audio-visual, a key focus has to be kept in mind: Who is the audio-visual for? A good way to make children relate to a lesson is to focus on the immediate environment, habitat and local knowledge so that it does not go over the child's head.

The idea is, content must enthuse the children. The lesson must engage them so that they can explore, explain and elaborate. By the time they have been through the process, the teacher will be able to evaluate what they have picked up.

One of the first simple skills taught was how to make a clipping out of a film or video shot with your smartphone, save it, edit it with open video editing software and then insert it into your audio-visual. Again, how to insert a bit of audio recording into the presentation by using your smartphone and headphone. All this was done to show how to prepare a PowerPoint presentation. The trick was to begin with a simple message and then insert text, audio and film

clips. The whole process had to be structured by a storyline or storyboard which would be used as the main teaching aid.

The idea of do-it-yourself was highlighted when the teachers were asked early on the second day to form into small groups, go out of the resort and down the road into the surrounding tea garden and shoot with the smartphone whatever seemed appropriate for being put into an audio-visual presentation. This was to work on the idea outlined earlier that content should be located near at hand, preferably to spell out a concept like caring for the environment or everybody's civic duty. This video and clips taken from films shown earlier and loaded onto the laptops went into making up the audio-visual, complete with headlines and text, which were used by every group to make a presentation that encompassed all the simple techniques picked over the two days.

Addressing the schoolteachers, Dibya Gopal Ghatak, deputy director, school education, said, "In the age of the internet when a child can access a thousand teachers, you, as a teacher, can network other teachers to meet the child's needs. Your gap is you have not asked the child to think. Your quest has to be how children can learn themselves." Pose issues to the children and use ICT as a tool so that they themselves come up with answers, he advised the teachers. ■

Drug policy tries to curb abuse

Jehangir Rashid
Srinagar

A new drug policy to check rising cases of addiction has been drafted in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) and made public so that people can read it and provide suggestions. The never ending conflict in the Valley has impacted the youth and most drug users are between 17 and 35 years of age.

The new drug policy's focus is on prevention. It aims to reduce behaviour in individuals that leads to substance abuse, by making early interventions and preventing complications in cases where substance use does occur. The policy also aims to tackle relapse of successfully treated cases and assist their rehabilitation in the community.

Known as the Draft Policy Document for Drug De-Addiction, the document has been drawn up by the Institute of Mental Health & Neurosciences (IMHANS), Government Medical College (GMC), Srinagar, in collaboration with the Department of Psychiatry, SKIMS Medical College, Srinagar, and the J&K State AIDS Control Society with inputs from the Department of Psychiatry, Government Medical College, Jammu, and psychiatrists from the Directorates of Health Services of Kashmir and Jammu, respectively.

Explaining the draft policy, Dr Arshad Hussain, reputed psychiatrist at GMC, says that it does not favour opening of de-addiction centres in a large-scale manner across the state. "We are not advocating opening of a multitude of de-addiction centres. Two existing centres are already doing a wonderful job at the Government Medical Colleges of Srinagar and Jammu. Since five medical colleges are coming up we propose to set up de-addiction centres at these colleges," said Dr Hussain.

"The drug policy aims to tackle drug addiction in integration with society and not in isolation. We want to involve the different stakeholders in society so that the results are excellent. It is necessary to tide over this crisis. Even the prime minister of the country talks about it," added Dr Hussain.

The three important aspects of the policy are prevention, integration and community participation. Dr Hussain says these aspects are closely related and cannot be treated in isolation while tackling the menace of drug addiction.

BILAL BAHADUR



Dr Arshad Hussain

Existing de-addiction centres in GMC, Srinagar, for instance, will be upgraded in terms of infrastructure and manpower to enhance care levels and provide links to the community.

District hospitals too will be improved. In all such hospitals a psychiatrist, a de-addiction centre, treatment services along with manpower for the psychiatrist will be provided. Community leaders like teachers, preachers and social activists need to be sensitised about substance abuse.

"Training of medical doctors, para-medical staff and other para-clinical staff in identification, intervention and referral of patients with substance use disorders should be done. Utilisation of mass media in spreading awareness across schools by making and broadcasting movies and internet-based informative videos are also needed," says the policy document.

The document says that para-social and para-

health workers like village-level workers, ASHAs, ANMs and para-legal field workers need to be sensitised about substance use and steps to curb it. It says that the Narcotics, Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act should be implemented in letter and spirit and, after discussions, more drugs should be brought under its purview.

"Reorientation of the literacy mission into an educational mission, focusing on the overall development of children with special focus on outdoor sports and playing activities along with moral education must be encouraged. This can contribute to building society. It is also important that content on the internet is regulated and curbs are imposed on glamourising smoking, alcohol, cannabis or other items used for substance abuse," states the document.

The new drug policy also recommends that medical insurance and medical leave benefits cover the de-addiction treatment period just like any other medical condition. Schools should conduct health check-up camps particularly for adolescents so that screening for substance abuse is done.

The policy says that there is a need for introduction of self-help communities on the lines of Narcotics Anonymous and Alcoholics Anonymous in the state. The controlling agencies need to reorient their *modus operandi* to counter-balance the availability of substances. Extension of after-care in the form of rehabilitative care within the community, and ensuring a life of dignity and purposefulness by empowering former users socially and economically, are also to be done.

"Once a child steps into the dangerous web of drug addiction it becomes difficult for him to return. It is important that prevention is given due importance. The drug policy proposes to reduce the demand for drugs but it is equally important to ensure that these drugs are not available in the open market," said Dr Hussain.

He said that doctors posted at primary level health institutes in the state should have knowledge of drug addiction so that they can counsel and guide an addict towards proper de-addiction centres. ■



Harvesting Rain for Profit

Name: Shri Muniraj,
Village: Muthur, Krishnagiri district, Tamil Nadu

Muniraj, a marginal farmer with seven acres of land from Muthur village of Krishnagiri district, had a greenhouse where he practiced floriculture. However, a falling water table meant that irrigation became a problem – especially during summer months even for drip irrigation.

To overcome the problem of insufficient water, Srinivasan Services Trust (SST) encouraged Muniraj to save every drop of rainwater falling on his green house. SST provided technical information and engineering support for creating a pond, next to the greenhouse, large enough to collect six lakh litres of rainwater. To prevent loss by seepage, the pond was lined with a polythene sheet and a shade net was used as cover to help arrest loss by evaporation. The pond gets filled up with 3 days of rain. The water saved in this pond is sufficient for the crop needs for one season.

IMPACT: Muniraj is now financially secure and earns more than ₹30,000 per month. He has built a pucca house and also bought a car. He has become an expert on rainwater harvesting and offers advice to several villages in the area.

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Samita's World

by SAMITA RATHOR



Light keeps animals at bay

Shree Padre
Kasaragod

As cropping season approaches in Kasaragod district of Kerala, farmers begin to get edgy. Wild animals from nearby forests start plundering their fields and, in a few hours, months of carefully nurtured crops are ruined.

This season, a gentle solution is available. Rajagopal Kaipangala, 49, has invented a simple device that keeps animals at bay. It is a flickering light placed at different levels which prevents nocturnal animals like wild boars, palm civets, bison, bats and even *sambar* and elephants from intruding into farms.

His gadget has an LED flashlight and a solar panel encased inside a round transparent case. The farmer has to simply switch on the gadget at the time of installation. Thereafter, it works automatically. Once night falls, the gadget lights automatically. When the sun rises, the light switches off and the solar panel begins to recharge on its own. Kaipangala has named his device KRAC LED light and it costs ₹1,500.

“What is important is the height at which you instal the light. This differs for different animals,” says Kaipangala. He has a diploma in electrical engineering and returned from the Gulf three years ago, after working there for 20 years so that his children could get a better education. Kaipangala began managing his family farm which

was situated close to the reserve forest. But his standing crops used to be damaged by wild animals.

So he started looking for a solution. Kaipangala had read that lights discourage nocturnal animals from coming close to fields. But he noticed that he could still see wild boars passing beneath street lights when he rode his motorcycle at night. That set him thinking. “Perhaps a flickering light at eye level would ensure that the animal sees it for sure,” he thought. He experimented with this idea for three years.

For wild boars, he assessed that the height of the light should be about 30 to 35 cm from the ground. Lo and behold, this started working and inspired him to research further. After some trial and error, he has now standardised the average height lights should be placed for different animals. A light at five feet keeps bison away. For the palm civet, a light about one foot high is enough. After discussion with forest officials, he estimated that for elephants the light should be placed eight feet from the ground.

Initially, Kaipangala would hang two inexpensive LED plates, back to back, to emit light at 360 degrees. In the next stage of improvisation, he lit these LEDs with a small chargeable UPS. The UPS had to be brought home and recharged at least once in two days and sometimes daily. Added to this,



KRAC LED is a flickering light with a solar panel



Rajagopal Kaipangala explaining how his invention works to Justice P. Sathasivam

wires had to be connected between LED plates strung in different places. This system worked well.

At first, Kaipangala used to advise interested farmers on how to build this system. “Get a guy with some electrical knowledge in your area. You can do it yourself with just a little money,” he used to tell his customers. But, as demand grew, he improvised the gadget to its present form.

Now, each unit has a solar panel. So no wires are needed and the system doesn't have to be taken home for recharging. “One should study the entry point of the wild animal and place the light strategically along its route. Undergrowth has to be cleared from that area,” says Kaipangala. He has installed just one light near his 70-cent coconut, breadfruit and banana garden. “For three years, it is working well. But if it isn't lit even on a single day, wild boars enter,” he says.

At the end of this October, Kaipangala installed one unit of his LED flashlight system near a 4.5-acre paddy field belonging to Mohana Shetty, a farmer in Mogral Puttur in Kasaragod district. This was one of six such units ordered by Krishi Bhavan of Mogral Puttur. “The lights were installed just a fortnight before the paddy harvest. But after that, raids by wild boars have stopped,” says Chavana Narasimhalu,

agriculture officer at Krishi Bhavan. They will instal five more units on various farms soon.

Kaipangala's advice is to instal lights at a maximum distance of 20 metres from one another for all-round protection. But what if a wild boar or some other animal senses danger and enters from another route close by? “That is a possibility. But, so far, this hasn't happened,” he says. “Rajagopal's device is effective,” says M. Rajeevan, divisional forest officer, Kasaragod. The forest department has installed three units in Kasaragod range to prevent elephants entering farmers' fields. “The gadget is mobile. We keep moving the lights from one location to the next, wherever we think elephants may intrude. We find they don't venture into areas where these lights are placed.”

Mahesh Puchchappady, a farmer and journalist from Sullia taluk of Karnataka, has starting using these lights to prevent *sambar* from entering rubber plantations. “At night, a herd of *sambar* comes in and eats the bark of rubber trees. Eventually, the trees die. They also eat the leaves of young plants,” he says. A fortnight after the LED light units were installed, he found *sambar* staying away but he would prefer to wait for a month before giving a final verdict on the efficacy of Kaipangala's invention.

The gadget was also installed at an open prison in Cheemeni in Kasaragod district. The prisoners grow tapioca and a variety of vegetables. These are eaten by wild animals. The lights kept the animals away.

“One research paper says that 35 to 45 percent of standing crops are destroyed by wild animals across the globe. Out of this, 50 percent of the damage is caused by wild boars,” says Kaipangala.

His new gadget runs with a 2.5-volt solar charging panel. It has 12 LED lights arranged in a circular shape on the circumference. One major advantage is that the gadget is waterproof. The 2200 Mhz batteries work for 72 hours after full charging. The light automatically switches on and off. So far he has sold about 50 such units.

During the recent Innovators Meet held at Central Plantation Crops Research Institute, Kasaragod, Justice P. Sathasivam, governor of Kerala, showed interest in Kaipangala's invention. He has written to the government, drawing its attention to the gadget.

Kaipangala has also met Dr D. Sajith Babu, district collector of Kasaragod, and explained his innovation. In response, Babu informed him that he has plans to convene an awareness class for farmers in villages affected by wildlife. ■

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When tribal people get talking

Civil Society News
Jamshedpur

OVER five days in November, tribal people from 24 states of India and 13 countries came together in this city known for its steelmaking to take part in a feisty celebration of their indigenous identities and aspirations.

Now in its fifth year, Samvaad is an effort to bridge social and cultural divides through free interaction and expression. It is a vibrant and colourful event, which seeks to promote diversity and inclusion.

On parade at Samvaad are different forms of local dress, music and food. Importantly, it is also curated to be an unrestricted platform where tribal people can speak their minds politically. Many of them have been victims of development who have experienced eviction from their homelands and loss of livelihoods due to destruction of natural habitats. They all come to Samvaad with their stories and are encouraged to tell them.

This year's Samvaad attracted some 1,700 participants who came from all corners of India as remote from each other as Nagaland is from Karnataka or Bengal is from Ladakh. Internationally, there were people from South Africa, the Camerons, Sri Lanka, New Zealand, Myanmar, Laos, Zambia, Mexico and several other countries.

Samvaad is different in several ways. It is hosted by Tata Steel as part of its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives, but the mood and tenor at the event are far removed from the structured formality of a company-sponsored event. It is easygoing and impromptu, even while following a schedule of events, making it simpler and less daunting for community groups to express themselves and interact.

In tribal fashion, circles and semi-circles prevail. At Gopal Maidan in the heart of Jamshedpur a large circular stage is the centre of all the action. At the inaugural, as darkness descends, a large tribal drum takes centre-stage. The loud rhythmic beating of tribal drums sets the tone for the evening of performances ahead. Soon the drummers have the audience on its feet — holding hands and linking waists and dancing as Santhal tribals do.

The mood at the inaugural imbued much that followed. Each day began with a different tribal prayer. But over and above the cultural and religious aspects there were workshops on tribal healing and marketing handicrafts and daily sessions at which developmental issues were addressed by community groups telling stories of their struggles and achievements in an attempt to learn from one another.

"We have tried to set up something which is unbiased, safe and honest to celebrate what is tribalism and discuss what the tribal view of development might be," says Sourav Roy, Tata Steel's head of CSR. "The one thing we have taken care of over the years is not to burden Samvaad beyond a point. There is a pace at which a platform like this needs to grow. We haven't found too many parallels of something like this from which we could learn."

What has helped is what Roy describes as "deep and meaningful" relations with tribal communities in and around Tata Steel's operations in Jharkhand and now Odisha. "We are known for a certain ethos and so there was a fair amount of trust with which we started off," explains Roy.

A genuine interest in the tribal way of life generally defined the approach to CSR under Biren Bhuta, who was Roy's predecessor and initiated Samvaad. Efforts were made to revive interest in tribal languages among the young and classes were held at the village level with local teachers from the community. There were also efforts to preserve tribal heritage and musical instruments and promote performers in the hope that they would inspire others.

By Tata Steel's very presence in Jharkhand, "Tata and tribals have their fates intertwined", says Bhuta. But banish the thought that Samvaad is anything more than a serendipitous happening. "We don't have mines in Nagaland and we aren't going to Ladakh to make steel," says Bhuta. ■



The Kharia tribe from West Bengal



Muria Gond tribals from Chhattisgarh leading morning prayers



A traditional healer from Manipur sets up his stall



There were Maoris from New Zealand



South African healers Gogo Zanele Sithole and Phepsile Maseko



The Bastar Band from Chhattisgarh



The Kudia tribe from Karnataka



A workshop on tribal crafts and small business practices



A home for orphaned dogs: Rakesh Shukla, founder of Voice of Stray Dogs, at his sanctuary on the outskirts of Bengaluru

INDIA'S DOGFATHER

Samita Rathor
Bengaluru

RAKESH Shukla is founder and CEO of The Writer's Block, a telecom content company with clients like Intel, IBM, Toyota, Siemens, Oracle and Microsoft.

An electronics engineer, Shukla writes and speaks on leadership, business and technology. He is also a Ted X speaker and inspires people to get over failure.

But what really distinguishes him is his selfless love for abandoned, injured and disabled stray dogs whom he rehabilitates and shelters, giving them a whole new lease of life. Shukla is the single largest rescuer of dogs in the world. He has rescued over 8,000 dogs and is called the Dog Father of India. He lives in a unique sanctuary on the outskirts of Bengaluru with 800 rescued dogs.

So how did a successful techie who has worked with the best companies in the world become an ardent animal lover?

In 2010, Shukla rescued a puppy from the streets of Bengaluru. The puppy was named Lucky. His first rescue opened his eyes to the plight of stray dogs in India and inspired him to spend his precious time rescuing dogs in Bengaluru using his own car. In two years he rescued 250 dogs.

In 2012 he chanced upon Cookie, a paralysed St Bernard who had been thrown into a bush on a lonely stretch of Wind Tunnel Road, behind the HAL Military Airport. A kind woman called Sandhya picked up the dog but she didn't know where to take her since no vets or 'shelters' would accept a dog in that hopeless condition.

Finally Bengaluru's oldest dog shelter took the dog in, but declared that she could not recover, so she would be euthanised. Her spinal cord had been completely severed. Someone made a call to Shukla asking if he could do something.

Shukla immediately went to pick up the dog so she would not be put down. He named her Cookie. He had no place to keep her. No kennel or shelter

was ready to take her in for a night. With no other option, Rakesh took her to his office. Bengaluru's best vets declared Cookie, wrongly, out of danger, in no pain but paralysed.

No cart would really work for a 75-kg dog. Shukla decided to make a cart with wheels for her. On her fourth attempt Cookie started using the cart. But she had pyometra (uterus infection) since she had been lying in her urine and excreta before being rescued. There is no external sign of the disease. When she was finally diagnosed, it was discovered



Cookie, the St Bernard who was thrown into a bush

VOSD is the world's largest no-kill dog sanctuary and rescue centre where 8,000 dogs have been saved.

that septicemia had set in and, despite huge quantities of antibiotics and blood transfusion, Cookie passed away.

VOSD IS BORN: Distraught, Shukla decided to make a choice. He could either blame the 'system' or create one in which dogs lived their lives with the best medical care. Voice of Stray Dogs (VOSD) was

born with a staff of three and one van and it kept growing and growing.

That's how VOSD became the world's largest no-kill dog sanctuary and rescue centre. Apart from rescuing close to 8,000 dogs, VOSD has provided over 250,000 state-of-the-art free treatments to dogs and currently has 800 resident rescued dogs at its premises. No dogs are ever euthanised at VOSD because of lack of space, money or resources. No dogs are ever kept chained. VOSD has a lush 3.5-acre dog sanctuary with human grade medical care and human grade food for dogs!

VOSD is a last resort home for rescued dogs from across India. It has given shelter and treated dogs blinded with acid, run over, paralysed, sexually assaulted, slashed with knives, tied to train tracks. Dog rescues and dog rescuers arrive at VOSD not just from Bengaluru but from Pune, Mumbai, Delhi, Chandigarh, Chennai, Thiruvananthapuram, Indore, Coimbatore, Kolkata, Kochi and other cities.

The VOSD sanctuary is also home to retired service dogs of the Karnataka Police, Reserve Police, Railway Police, Kerala Police and army dogs and horses.

Recently, Shukla while trying to fix a wired fence for the dogs got electrocuted and nearly lost his toe in the accident. But that hasn't stopped him from his mission of caring for dogs.

BIGGER AND BETTER: VOSD Sanctuary dogs have 24/7 caretakers including para-vets who treat dogs, and nurture sick and recovering dogs over long recovery cycles including for renal, liver and other chronic conditions. These are dogs that no vet or owner would likely keep in India.

All the dogs get regular medical check-ups, weekly tick and flea treatments, quarterly de-worming, annual vaccinations and good nutrition. VOSD, on average, spends ₹2,000 per dog per month including nutrition and treatment, which is extremely low-cost.

VOSD at present has a medical facility built over 2,500 sq ft that has two outpatient departments, a basic surgery unit with surgical and suturing and anesthetic supplies, refrigerators and so on. This resident facility was built six years ago when there were only 10-20 dogs. It was made to create an aseptic environment. Now it houses 800 dogs, each with a medical history.

While all medicine and para-vets are locally available, specialised, critical treatment and diagnostics can only happen in Bengaluru which is a 150-km round trip with at least eight hours of driving and wait time. Says Shukla, "With a growing and aging population there is a critical need for faster response to the medical needs of dogs."

VOSD is upgrading its facilities. It plans to create a high quality aseptic surgery unit and three OPDs comparable to the best vet hospitals in Bengaluru and start a modern diagnostics clinic so that vets can prescribe treatment within minutes. Adult dogs will get an additional 30 kennels for post-operative care and recovery. There will be 10 climate controlled kennels for puppies. For aging dogs a water jet-powered hydrotherapy pool has been proposed.

And there is something for humans also. Living quarters will be upgraded so that the best Indian and international vets can come and stay and share their expertise. ■

Email: info@vossd.in; Twitter (@VOSD1), or contact yogarpanm@gmail.com



Harvesting water. Harnessing futures.

In a perfect world, children lead happy, carefree childhoods. They spend their days learning in school, while their free time is spent at play with friends. However, for the children of Nuh in Haryana, this is but a distant dream. The culprit - a severe shortage of potable water.

While most of us cannot even begin to imagine how crippling this can be; the residents of Nuh suffer the consequences every day. Over-salinated water and a lack of safe and assured water supply has created a trail of chronic issues that impact the health and well being of school children. This lack of potable water has affected the attendance rate at schools, with children going back home to refill their water bottles. More often than not, they never make it back to school.

DCB Bank stepped in to support an innovative plan using rooftop rainwater harvesting and bio-sand filters in three schools, which resulted in a number of positive changes. Access to drinking water has led to a decrease in absenteeism from schools. Mid-day meals are also cooked using this water, ensuring the children are healthier and happier.

With the capacity to harvest 3,00,000 litres of potable water a year, Nuh now looks to a hopeful future. One where children are free to learn and lead a normal, happy and healthy childhood.

DCB Bank Rooftop Rainwater Harvesting Project:

- Set up at 3 schools in Nuh, Haryana
- Four 25,000 litre tanks harvest 3,00,000 litres of rainwater a year
- Innovative, electricity-free bio-sand filter eliminates contaminants
- Nuh's children now have access to clean potable water, daily
- Over 1,000 futures positively impacted

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MAHUA MAKES IT TO THE BAR

Desmond Nazareth says with branding tribes will prosper

Derek Almeida
Panaji

IN a liquor market crowded with the world's best brands, an intrepid Goan entrepreneur has carved out shelf space for the humble *mahua*, the traditional drink of tribal people in 13 states across India.

The flower of the *mahua* tree (*Madhuca longifolia*) is collected and sold by forest dwellers. From time immemorial, they have also distilled a rough country liquor from the flowers for their own consumption.

The law allows tribal people to keep small quantities of the brew for themselves. But Desmond Nazareth, 50, while exploring heritage liquors, saw the potential of elevating *mahua* to the status of a national drink like tequila, bourbon, vodka or Scotch.

He has distilled *mahua* to international standards and put it out as a craft brew in prettily emblazoned bottles under the label of Desmondji. Walk into a departmental store in Goa and *mahua* now has its own corner among the big brands.

You can have a shot of *mahua* with tonic water, a twist of lime and some ice. Or you can buy it as a liqueur. Both versions were launched in June this year and so it is still early days. But Nazareth believes that as the citified take to *mahua*, the potential for tribal people to earn from *mahua* flowers will rise significantly.

Mahua wasn't Nazareth's first foray into liquor. He studied at IIT Chennai and went to the US as a software engineer. On his return in 2000, while looking for something interesting to take up, he chanced upon the agave plant growing in Andhra Pradesh. Tequila is made from agave in Mexico. Nazareth decided to make it here. So, the first craft brew he put out was Agave, which he couldn't call tequila because of the GI status that Mexico enjoys.

On a trip to Daman he came across *mahua* for the first time. The bottle he bought, with great difficulty, had an interesting flavour, he recalls, but its quality was poor. It crossed his mind that this tribal brew could be refined.

So two years after he produced his first batch of Agave liquor, Nazareth decided it was time to bring *mahua* from the tribal belt to cities.

"I have this vision of creating a heritage alcohol that has wide geographical footprint, is rooted in culture and the soil and I think *mahua* suits all these conditions," he says. "Most countries have a national drink. Mexico has tequila. The US has bourbon. I think in India, *mahua* qualifies for heritage status."

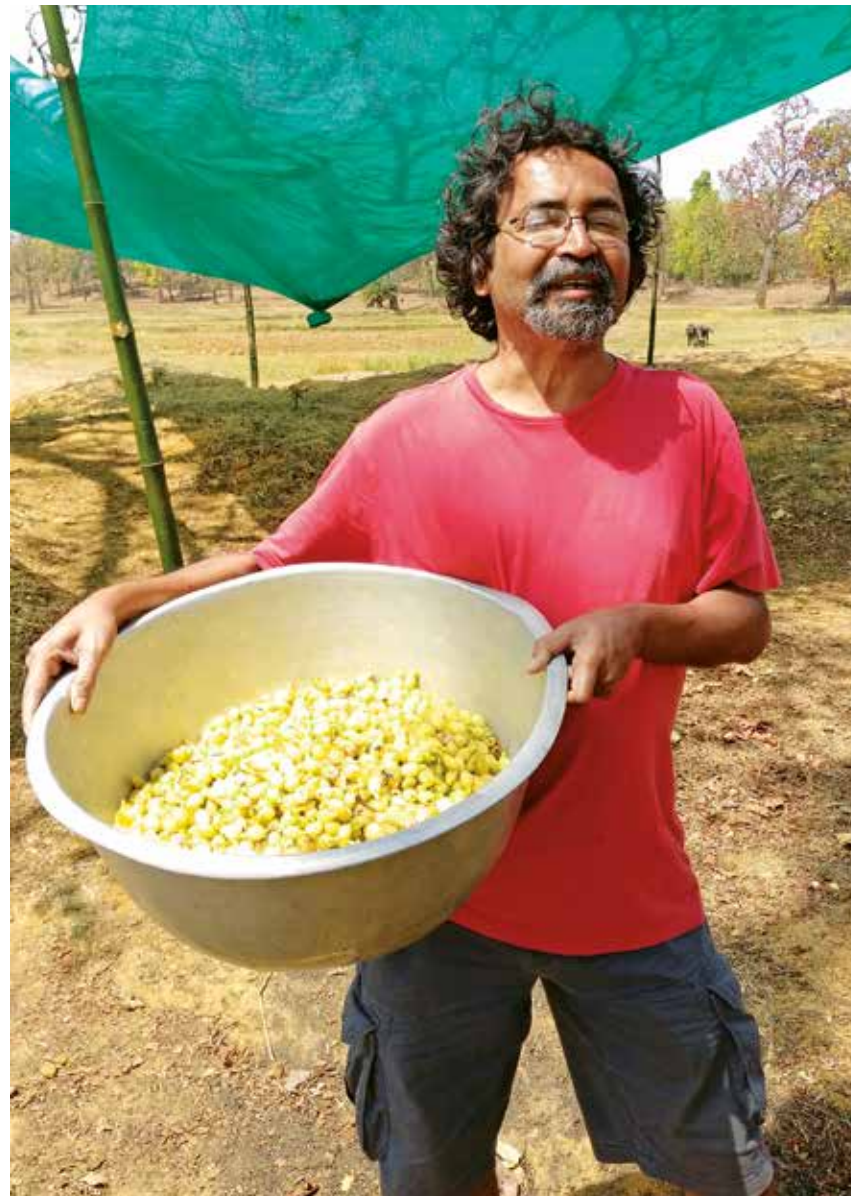
FROM FOREST TO FACTORY: The *mahua* tree is revered by tribal communities across northern Maharashtra, eastern Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, southern Bihar, northern Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal and Odisha. Tribal oral literature is replete with stories, songs and sacred verses about the *mahua* tree and its many blessings.

According to a 2008 study on minor forest produce by the Forest Governance Learning Group, India produces more than 85,000 tonnes of *mahua* flowers each year and an estimated 90 percent of this goes into making alcohol.

The manufacture of *mahua* is not regulated like *feni* in Goa. Since this drink is manufactured in small quantities, each tribal family is not allowed to store more than five litres. The total quantity of liquor produced is not known. But the scope of the operation can be gauged by the quantity of *mahua* flowers that are sold each year.

The *mahua* flower is among the top five minor forest produce items in the country and is the biggest non-timber forest produce revenue earner for Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh.

'I have this vision of creating a heritage alcohol that has wide geographical footprint, is rooted in culture and the soil. Mahua suits all these conditions.'



Desmond Nazareth with a large bowl of freshly harvested mahua

According to AGMARKET, a portal of the Directorate of Marketing and Inspection, an attached office of the Department of Agriculture, which receives data from more than 2,700 markets, about 90,000 tonnes of *mahua* flowers arrived at APMCs in 2012.

Nazareth sees enormous potential for *mahua* production. "It's not something casual. It is a huge operation. There are literally millions of trees spread over forests in central India," he explains.

When Nazareth began to chase his dream, he faced roadblocks. He was told that he couldn't be granted a licence as *mahua* was listed as a country spirit.

There are three categories of liquors in India — country spirits, imported spirits and Indian-made foreign liquor (IMFL).

"I had to convince the Andhra Pradesh government to remove *mahua* from the country spirit category and drop it into the IMFL bucket," he says. "I wanted to make a liquor of international standard because only then would I be able to get it into the right stores."

After much persuasion, Nazareth was finally granted permission to manufacture it as a non-country spirit.

The next step was to move it to Nazareth's



Nazareth works directly with tribal communities



Mahua and agave are sold under the brand name, Desmondji

home state, Goa, which had never heard of *mahua*. "I wanted it to be recognised as an IMFL in Goa because then I could go to other states and seek licences on the basis that Goa had accepted it." So, it was a long, circuitous route to raising *mahua's* status from a plebeian country liquor to an esteemed IMFL.

Once permissions were in place, Nazareth decided to work directly with Adivasis in central India to source top-quality flowers. "Flowers are the key to quality alcohol and one has to ensure that every process is of a very high standard, right from collection of fresh flowers, getting them sun-dried and transporting them," he explains.

The sun-dried flowers are rich in sugar and though flowering occurs for just a month, proper storage ensures that *mahua* can be produced throughout the year. "This year I worked with three groups of tribals and we gathered 11 tonnes of flowers which was the source for my first batch of *mahua* liquor," he says.

The flowers usually drop from the tree's huge canopy at night and have to be collected by morning. Every *mahua* tree has an owner, usually an Adivasi family. Ownership is recorded with the forest department and is passed from one generation to the next. A single tree can produce up to 200 kg of flowers a year and older trees are more fecund.

The purchase price of flowers varies during the year. "Flowers are sold for ₹20 a kg but we pay the tribals a premium over the highest rate. I would like the price to go up because it would help them, even though it would play havoc with my costing," he says. "An Adivasi once told me that with 10 trees he could look



Women collecting mahua

after a family of four."

Tribal communities lose out because of skewed taxation. Despite being a freely tradable item in Madhya Pradesh, a two percent Mandi Tax is imposed on *mahua*, though it is hardly sold in *mandis* which are far from villages. So collectors are forced to sell it to local grocery shops. Further, a 12 percent sales tax is imposed on *mahua* within MP, while it is three percent outside MP. In Odisha four percent VAT is charged on the flowers and 14 percent on the finished product. This gives neighbouring states like Bihar and Chhattisgarh an advantage over Odisha and MP, as taxes and duties on *mahua* in the former states are lower.

But it affects the livelihoods of the primary collectors badly and provides incentives for smuggling in border areas. These taxes have restricted community access to better markets within as well as outside the state.

REFINING MAHUA: Tribals generally use two methods to produce *mahua* liquor. One is to use just the flowers and the other is by adding jaggery to increase volume and boost alcohol content. The apparatus is rudimentary, comprising mud pots. The brew that emerges is cloudy and smoky. After a single distillation, the alcohol content is roughly 15 percent. Tribals almost never go in for a second distillation.

"They do not use yeast. Instead they use rice cakes in which some bacteria are trapped. In fact, there are specialists who make these starter cakes in the tribal



Desmond Nazareth paying tribute to an agave plant

areas,” explains Nazareth. But his plant in Andhra Pradesh uses industry-standard vessels and yeast.

“I cannot risk using rice cakes because I am producing a batch of 2,000 litres at a time and should something go wrong, the loss would be huge.” His *mahua* doesn’t taste like the original brew because he uses copper vessels instead of clay and all impurities are removed.

The rigorous process comes at a price. A bottle of *mahua* in a tribal area is for around ₹200. The liquor sold under the Desmondji brand costs ₹1,000. Nazareth also has to pay all sorts of export and import duties and the cost of transporting *mahua* flowers over 1,500 km. Then there are distributors and retailer commissions to contend with. “All this makes up 60 percent of the cost and I am left with 40 percent to cover production, overheads and marketing. The only thing that drives me is to make a world-class liquor and a national drink,” he says.

The first batch of 11 tonnes of *mahua* flowers yielded 2,000 cases of *mahua* liquor which is at present being sold in Goa and exported to Europe and the US. The dream of a national drink might still be a long way off, but Nazareth has taken the first step. “We could be the game changer, and 20 or 30 years from now *mahua* could be as big as cachaca is to Brazil,” he says.

It was Nazareth’s success with agave, the plant used to make tequila, that led him to discover *mahua*.

THE AGAVE HUNT: When Nazareth moved to the US, he started a computer company. “We were the first to detect the Y2K problem in 1986 and created the tools to resolve it.” He says it as if it was as easy as sipping *mahua* on a Saturday night.

Nazareth acquired a reputation in his circle of friends for mixing heady cocktails, margaritas in particular. When he returned to Mumbai, where he was born and bred, he found himself repeatedly coaxed into blending drinks.

“To make my range of cocktails, I had to stock my bar, but I couldn’t find most of the right ingredients like good tequila or orange liqueur. What I found were cheap overpriced varieties,” he explains.

The first batch of 11 tonnes of *mahua* flowers yielded 2,000 cases of *mahua* liquor which is at present being sold in Goa and exported to Europe and the US.

His search for the right ingredients led him to establish a microbrewery in Andhra Pradesh under Agave India Industries Limited. And with it *desi* tequila was born. “I grew up in India and that’s where the agave story begins,” he says. “My father used to work with AIR and we travelled a lot!” It was during these travels that he came across many species of plants, including agave, and it remained at the back of his mind.

He also wondered why tequila, which is safeguarded with a GI, is made in Mexico alone. There are historical reasons for this protection. Here is the story: The Columbian Exchange was an important event in history. The phrase was coined in 1972 by historian Alfred Crosby to describe the exchange of crops and livestock from the New World and the Old World. The New World received staples like citrus, apples, banana, onions, coffee, wheat and rice while the Old World got maize, tomato, vanilla and potato.

While looking for information on agave, Nazareth read *Agaves of Continental North America* by Howard Gentry who wrote that the agave plant had travelled all over the world and it was a matter of time before other countries started producing agave spirit, best known as tequila and mezcal.

This led him down the path of research which would keep him engrossed for nearly four years. “I took a map of the world and traced the latitudes passing through the areas where the agave plant is grown in Mexico,” said Nazareth. He made a surprising discovery. The lines passed through the Deccan Plateau. It was then that he remembered seeing the agave plant during his travels as a

youngster with his family.

“When I moved to Goa I realised this was a place where I could start experimenting,” he said. While doing a documentary called *Souls and Spices* on 450 years of colonial rule in Goa he got to meet many people, among them Miguel Braganza, a respected botanist, and Johnny D’Silva.

Within six months the three found themselves travelling into the Deccan Plateau in a mini-truck. It was meant to be a week-long expedition to find the agave plant. Fortuitously, they had hardly travelled 200 km into Karnataka when they came across a farmer who was using it for fencing. In the Deccan the plant is also used for soil conservation because its roots spread laterally. The farmer agreed to sell them a few plants and the trio had to tell the guards they were giant pineapples to get them across the border.

“After four years of experimentation I started getting a good response and people began choosing my drink over established international brands. That’s when I thought of starting a company,” recalls Nazareth.

Why did he choose to set up a distillery in erstwhile Andhra Pradesh? “My original plan was to lease around 8,000 acres of dry land to grow the agave plants,” explains Nazareth. Since the plants take around 10 years to mature, they have to be planted in batches separated by a year. The plant flourishes in areas where the annual rainfall is between 600 and 800 mm. “It won’t grow in Goa as the rainfall is too heavy,” he says.

While looking for land, Nazareth was alongside doing a project in a tribal area for ITC under their corporate social responsibility plan. This was when he met an employee who suggested that he visit Andhra Pradesh. “I was surprised to see thousands of agave plants,” he says, “somebody was obviously planting them for other reasons.”

Being a tri-state area comprising Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, he had to choose one state to register the company. “At that time I chose AP because Tamil Nadu wouldn’t allow anyone to register and Karnataka had corruption issues.”

He began setting up his factory in 2007 and in 2011, after raising two million dollars, the first batch — 1,500 cases of the Desmondji brand of agave spirit — was ready for sale. Since then sales have increased and today, Agave India produces around 10,000 cases a year.

Today, after nearly 20 years of hard work, Agave India Industries Limited is producing 10 spirits — 100 percent Agave which is a premium spirit, 51 percent Agave, Oak Finish Agave, Pure Cane which is close to Brazil’s cachaca, orange liqueur, Blue Curacao, two Margarita blends and two *mahua* spirits.

Last year, before the *mahua* spirits were launched, Agave India produced 15,000 cases and this year Nazareth has ambitious plans to double production. About seven percent is exported through Goa, where the liquor is bottled.

“The products are doing well and we have captured 30 to 40 percent of markets we have entered,” says Nazareth. All products, barring the *mahua* spirits, are currently marketed in Goa, Bengaluru, Mumbai and Pune and there are plans to enter Delhi.

“We export to the US where we have a co-branding agreement with Perfedio and to Europe through Belgium,” says Nazareth. Recently, a Danish distillery bought 9,000 bottles.

NAME WITH A TWIST: Speaking about the rise of his brand, Nazareth proudly says that he always depended on locals in Goa to take his plans forward. For instance, the microbrewery was designed by architect Hyacinth Pinto and the bottles were crafted by Raboni Saha.

But selecting a brand name did not come easy. At the outset Nazareth was advised by marketing gurus that since the drinking population is aspirational, a Mexican sounding name would appeal to them.

Nazareth held his ground. “I wanted an Indian sounding name,” he says. “We thought of various names but most were taken because the problem in India is

that people can squat on names.”

A golden rule in marketing is that a brand name should be original and have recall value. At a brainstorming session, Cajetan Vaz, who was handling marketing, came up with the name ‘Desji’. Nazareth did not like the name and fate played its part in blocking it. The registrar rejected it because it sounded like ‘desi’. Finally, Vaz came up with ‘Desmondji’, which was not registered because, as Nazareth puts it, “who would think of a name like that?”

As sales improved and the media took interest, news eventually reached Mexico and a year later a team from the Tequila Regulatory Council arrived in Chennai to check out if Nazareth was violating GI rules.

Nazareth did not meet them but explained that he never claimed to make the



The mahua tree



The microbrewery is modern and well-designed

world-famous tequila. Instead, he argued that he was making agave spirit. This satisfied them, but to boost sales he had to make the association with tequila. There are 250 species of agave and 15 are used to make liquor. Nazareth’s sales pitch is that he is making a spirit which, like tequila and mezcal, also belongs to the agave family.

The result was an article in a Mexican newspaper called *Negocios* on September 18, 2012. And it quoted Ramon Gonzalez Figueroa, director of the Tequila Regulatory Council, as saying that, so far, Desmondji is the only brand similar to tequila that they detected in India.

This certainly was a feather in Nazareth’s cap and proved that all his research, hard work and dedication had finally yielded recognition, even from the Mexicans.

Agave India, which has around 70 investors from India, Goa and abroad, is now firmly established. Nazareth has successfully converted *mahua* into an aspirational Made in India drink. What remains is the heritage tag. ■



The government bought 10,000 electric cars from Mahindra and Mahindra and Tata Motors to prime pump the market

Whatever happened to EVs?

Little progress minus a clear policy

Civil Society News
New Delhi

AS air pollution levels soared in November, making it difficult to breathe in New Delhi and the surrounding National Capital Region (NCR), alarm bells for public health were ringing once again. Another year had passed without a solution in sight and the emergency measures being trotted out were the old ones — odd and even number plates, only CNG vehicles, a construction ban, no generators and an end to random burning of leaves and waste.

But what about electric vehicles? It is almost a year since the Union government set a target of going majorly electric by 2030 in personal and public transportation. Yet, not one electric bus has been put on the capital's streets and two-wheelers and cars that run on battery are as good as non-existent.

So, what is holding up electric vehicles even as

cities across the world aggressively introduce them to deal with air pollution and promote cleaner living? Are India's big automobile manufacturers pushing back because a switch to electric vehicles disturbs their business plans? Is it the lack of infrastructure such as charging stations? Or is the absence of a policy and direction from government coming in the way of investments and a rapid transformation?

When the target of having 30 percent of vehicles in India as electric by 2030 was declared, there was reason to cheer. A goal had been set. It was expected that a policy would follow. But soon it was made known that since a target existed, a policy wasn't needed. The country would find its way to the target, it was said.

At NITI Aayog, planners told *Civil Society* that a sudden transition was impractical. It was important to first prime-pump the electric vehicles market and create demand so that existing automobile companies could sustainably make the switch. If

cities bought buses and the government placed bulk orders for cars, capacity would increase and consumer interest would be created.

Since then, the government has bought 10,000 cars from Tata Motors and Mahindra and Mahindra. Bus orders by cities are somewhere in the works. But it is clearly not enough to bring in the mega investments that can transform transportation in India. The only noticeable increase has been in battery-run three-wheelers: more than a million exist but their introduction has been higgledy-piggledy, they don't meet safety norms and they run on shoddy battery technology.

On the other hand, a clear policy, if formulated, would spell out intent and create confidence. It would help lay the foundations of an organised electric vehicles industry and attract investments. It would provide more jobs, new technologies and, most importantly, cleaner air in cities where automobile emissions account for a large part of air pollution. A policy would also kick off the complex

task of creating infrastructure for the use of electric vehicles, embolden banks to lend and help consumers choose an unfamiliar technology.

"I think that setting that goal for 2030 was very important because it made people open up and think what a larger vision could be. But what has happened post that is the ecosystem does not exist. The auto industry has been saying it will take a lot longer. Things are not ready and so there has been a push-back on this front," says Chetan Maini, creator of the iconic Reva car and currently Co-founder and Vice-Chairman of SunMobility, an electric infrastructure company.

"This whole thing came up because India would produce a lot of renewable energy. In fact, by 2030, India's target is to produce 300 GW of renewable energy and if all vehicles go electric by 2030 we need less energy than that," explains Maini. "I think 2030 was misconstrued. What was said was that we have enough energy and so we could go electric. This was translated into a target. But even if 40 percent of that target is achieved by 2030 that would move the country in the right direction."

Comparisons are often drawn between India and China, but do the two countries compare at all? China has progressed by leaps and bounds in the past five to seven years to become the world's largest producer of electric vehicles. It is the largest producer of electric two-wheelers and accounts for 99 percent of all electric buses made in the world. In a city like Shenzhen all 15,000 buses are electric.

"In China the transformation wasn't that they would do two percent or three percent. The transformation was that in some cities in three to five years they would go 100 percent. Delhi has 4,500 to 5,000 buses. Can you imagine what a difference it would make if in the next two to three years they made every bus electric in Delhi," says Maini.

"Something like 80 percent of two-wheelers in China are electric. We have maybe one per cent. The push has been so fast in China because of policies and a lot of it has been to counter pollution."

"There needs to be an overall framework. When something is so new and transformational, it needs a push from the government at the beginning. After that the market takes over. Now, in some areas where everything makes business sense from day one, everything will happen automatically. Take the example of e-rickshaws in India. We have 1.5 million e-rickshaws on our roads. It just happened because of demand. But in larger areas such as in the procurement of a bus, which will require tenders and infrastructure, a lot of stakeholders have to come together," says Maini.

"I think you need a very strong regime to say if it is not 100 percent electric by 2030 where would we like to be by 2025. Let's put some top-level thought process on these areas and let's not judge those numbers on the basis of what some western countries are doing. But what the best in the world are doing and how we can be doing it even faster," says Maini.

Benchmarking India with countries which have done well in relevant segments is important. What did Norway do in personal transportation to make 50 percent of its cars electric? What has China done in public transportation, two-wheelers, three-wheelers, taxis and so on?

"Are we going to follow the same policies? They



E-rickshaws have flourished on their own but are they good enough?



Chetan Maini

may not be relevant in India and we have to think of what is relevant here. We don't have the same subsidies and budgets. But in terms of the triggers that created the pulls, we can think of the equivalent here," says Maini.

India does not have the luxury of making incremental increases. If the automobile industry is growing at 10 percent, electric vehicles have to do better than that. So what should be done?

"I would first set a vision and target to say that this is the percentage of vehicles we would like to see electric in three years, five years, seven years and 10 years. It helps line up the industry," says Maini. "Then we should do what is required to achieve this in terms of vehicles, infrastructure and the supply chain level. And based on these what are the fiscal and non-fiscal policy changes that are required?"

"You want investors in automobiles and infrastructure and so on to see it as a 200 billion dollar opportunity and invest in it. Transformational businesses like these need a lot of investment and money in place. And for people to put that in they should see a direction."

A comparison can be drawn with the solar power

industry. A policy stated the country's objectives and investment followed. Now there is an International Solar Alliance and India plays a lead role.

The opportunity is much the same with electric vehicles. A national strategy with clear goals and the involvement of the states would change the scale on which the opportunity is seen.

For instance, in Delhi, with so much pollution there is no reason why there shouldn't be a three-year plan for autorickshaws to go electric, which would be a stage cleaner than CNG.

In public transport, the government has a crucial role to play. Bigger targets are needed for making public transport electric. With coordination and a larger sense of purpose much can be achieved. For instance, if every city had a target of making 10 percent of new buses electric next year, followed by 15 percent and then 20 percent, in five years perhaps all new buses purchased could be electric.

Public transport also plays a role in deciding preferences in personal transport. For example, if a commuter took an electric bus and then the Metro and used an electric three-wheeler for the last mile of a journey, he or she would be most likely sold on a technology which is more comfortable, quieter and not harmful to health. When buying a car or a two-wheeler the chances are that such a commuter would readily choose an electric one.

If the government were to set the pace with large numbers, much would follow. Electric mobility would go from being an alternative to a mainstream reality with all the attendant opportunities and support systems.

"Investment goes in the direction in which the country is going to go. Look at going from a two-stroke to a four-stroke to CNG — all of this has been driven by the demand that has been created," explains Maini.

"Even those in the automobile industry who are well entrenched would be ready to go electric if they were sure of the opportunity. They are being asked to invest in a Euro 6 vehicle, but why will they put all their money there if they know everything is going to go electric." ■



Gopikrishna Lingala, co-founder of LeanSpoon, which serves up meals on which nutritionists and chefs work together

Meals meant just for you

LeanSpoon knows to customise diet

Civil Society News
Hyderabad

ORDERING in is bigger than ever before. Everyone's buying food that comes home and is ready to eat. But what if you have health issues and just about any kind of meal will not do? Or if you are plain worried about your weight? Or if you like to eat well but not heavy and at the same time low-calorie is not good enough?

Well-balanced meals you can rely on from one day to the next are hard to find. Invariably, you have to get into your kitchen to put together something that works for you. Not so in Hyderabad, where LeanSpoon, a small food business, has been sending to homes, offices and hospitals meals that meet specific needs.

So, if you have diabetes, hypertension or are dogged by obesity, LeanSpoon designs a diet which puts in what you need and leaves out what you don't. You won't have to run your kitchen if you don't have the time or the inclination. Breakfast, lunch and dinner will turn up exactly as it should be made for you.

LeanSpoon offers 'parameterised nutrition'. What this means is that the meals it puts out are not just healthy in a generalised way, but balanced in terms of specifics: carbohydrates, proteins, fats, sugar, salt and micronutrients like magnesium and potassium. It recognises that each customer is different. Some may have serious health conditions and others may be merely contending with everyday lifestyle problems.

You could, of course, just order the food you like without seeking specialised advice. But LeanSpoon's unique proposition is the opportunity to speak with a nutritionist about what could be just right for you. The nutritionist then works with the chefs. It is a dynamic relationship in which a nutritionist is always available and often proactively in touch with the customer to see if a meal plan is working or if changes are required.

Is this too clinical and similar to what you would get in a hospital? Not really. LeanSpoon tries hard not to be boring or severe. From the branding to the options on its menu to an emphasis on flavourful cooking, the effort is to meld goodness with appeal and have customers placing orders because they like

what they get and not just because their bodies need it.

"With a diet, it is the execution that takes the most amount of time. You have to understand calories, you have to understand nutrition, you have to know how to cook," says Gopikrishna Lingala, who founded LeanSpoon along with his wife, Saneesha, roughly three years ago.

"Most people lack these skills and we felt we would be able to fill the gap. At the end of the day, 80 percent of any health programme is related to diet and can be addressed through it along with exercise, sleep and stress management," says Lingala.

With urban stress levels growing, it is a ready market and Lingala sums it up by rattling off the ailments with the ease of a practised salesman — "hypertensive or pre-hypertensive, diabetic or pre-diabetic, overweight, stress at work, don't sleep well. The combination is fairly typical for everybody."

"But the reason why it happens may be different. It may be lifestyle, working at night, a bad diet. Improving one's lifestyle can't just be the solution. It has to be specific. So that is the nutrition advice we provide," Lingala explains.



Each meal is attractively and hygienically packed



Chefs at work



The LeanSpoon team

"Elevated thyroid levels, PCOD, vitamin deficiency, magnesium deficiency. We try to figure out what has to be pushed up or down, depending on the specific condition. And that dietary allowance gets converted into meals," he says.

"We look at the past, present and future dietary allowance for the individual. The dietary allowance is broken down into macronutrients and micronutrients. Macro is about fibre, fat, carbohydrates and proteins. What blend and at what time of day. Micronutrients is where it gets really interesting. The challenge is to provide a healthy dose of micronutrients in the course of the week," he says.

LeanSpoon supplies 600 to 800 meals a day, which includes individual customers, hospitals and offices. There are two meal plans: 'Pro' and 'Healthy'. Most customers are for Pro, which comes with professional advice on nutrition. The nutritionist provides a 'Health and Risk Report' and a 'Goals Report' for what you want to achieve over the next 15 days or in months to come. Under the Healthy package you just choose for yourself.

Both packages involve taking a subscription in

advance for a fixed number of meals. A Pro customer pays ₹15,000 for 50 meals and ₹25,000 for 100 meals. A Healthy subscription is ₹3,500 to ₹4,000 for 20 meals.

On average, a meal works out to ₹250. The meals have to be ordered within a time period, but LeanSpoon is generous with waivers and holds on to its customers, who do drift but come back. Some of them have been consistent, like the third one they got when the business started, who is still with them. There are working couples who order breakfast, lunch and dinner from LeanSpoon, spending up to ₹3,000 a day.

LeanSpoon employs four nutritionists and 10 chefs. As founders, Lingala and wife Saneesha are very hands-on. But then it is a business that came out of their own need as a young couple to have meals that truly suited them.

Back from an overseas job in Colombia where they lived in Bogota, Lingala found himself spending 14 hours in the office in Mumbai. Meals were the first casualty in his hectic schedule. Saneesha was pregnant and her thyroid levels had gone somewhat out of whack.

LeanSpoon follows a subscription model and supplies 600 to 800 meals a day, which includes individuals, hospitals and offices. A meal costs about ₹250.

As the pressure built up, they knew they had to do something about their diet. "We tried to stick to home meals and cooked ourselves. We do cook well, but it wasn't what we needed. Next, it was, hire a cook, fire a cook and we found we were getting nowhere," says Lingala.

From their own experience came the idea of starting LeanSpoon and relocating in 2015 to Hyderabad where they had the support of both their families. With capital of about ₹2 crore and space on two floors of a building owned by Lingala's family, they began experimenting with their idea.

The first six months went in trial and error as they served up meals for free and made their mistakes. Then the business began to take shape. Now LeanSpoon employs about 80 people, including delivery boys.

With a monthly turnover of around ₹20 lakh, they are beginning to break even but significant profitability is still a long way off. Typically, customers bring in customers and in this way LeanSpoon's base has continued to grow. An institutional customer like Fernandez Hospitals has outsourced all its meal requirements to LeanSpoon and seems to have no regrets.

Right now the personal touch matters a lot. A customer who calls in might just get Lingala himself on the line. Sometimes, when a customer does not order the number of meals in a subscription within the stipulated period and comes back months later to renew, Lingala just extends the old subscription. Going forward, how such bonding will build loyalty and, finally, scale remains to be seen. For now, LeanSpoon is a healthy idea doing nicely in ways that matter. ■

PICTURES BY P. ANIL KUMAR

Who needs a library?



**DELHI
DARBAR**

SANJAYA BARU

DRIVING down one of Beijing's broad boulevards one evening, I chanced upon a tall building with dozens of students seated on the steps outside. Was it a *dharna*? Were they protesting about something? My taxi driver laughed. They are waiting to enter the library, he told me. It was around 5 pm and so I asked him if the library opened only in the evening. He laughed again. The library is open till late night from early morning, the students outside the building are waiting for chairs to be vacated by those inside so that they can go in, he said. The library was fully occupied! It could permit new readers to come in only when those inside left. The hunger for learning is palpable in China and libraries are around in plenty and fully used.

It reminded me of my student days at the Jawaharlal Nehru University when, in the weeks before examinations, the library would be filled and one had to await one's turn to get a place inside so as to access a book that was kept in reserve and not issued. But this spectacle of a crowded public library in the middle of a city is not a familiar one in India.

It was a recognition of the need to spread the public library movement across the country that prompted the Manmohan Singh government to launch the National Mission on Libraries (NML) in 2012. The idea was originally proposed to the prime minister by his joint secretary, the late R. Gopalakrishnan, a Madhya Pradesh-cadre IAS officer. While the original proposal was made in 2008 and an order issued in 2009, the NML was constituted only in 2012 and launched in February 2014 by President Pranab Mukherjee.

Visiting NML's website (nmlindia.nic.in), one is immediately disappointed to see that it was perhaps last updated in 2016. The website does not come across as a live centre of latest information on the achievements and activities of the mission. The only useful data available is the state-wise list of

Registered Libraries. A total of 5,352 libraries have registered themselves on this website, providing information on their names, location and number of books and publications available. Maharashtra tops the list with 919 public libraries registered with the NML. Madhya Pradesh is at the bottom with five. West Bengal comes second with 833 libraries followed by Gujarat with 527 and Kerala with 523. From Uttar Pradesh only 46 have registered.

The NML has funds for restoration of one public library in each state capital and in one district centre in each state and Union Territory. It has no provision to assist with setting up public libraries in other towns and rural areas. However, the Raja Rammohan Roy Library Foundation in Kolkata provides matching grants to state and UT governments interested in setting up public



A futuristic library in Tianjin, China

A public library is a symbol of a knowledge-based society. The habit of using libraries must be inculcated in children from primary school.

libraries. In 2015-16 the RRRLF provided ₹53 crore for 22,772 libraries.

Apart from government-funded public libraries, there are many privately funded and publicly funded libraries in several states, especially Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Gujarat and Maharashtra. The Sundarayya Vijnana Kendra in Hyderabad, dedicated to the memory of CPI(M) leader P. Sundarayya, is an excellent example of such a public library. Situated in the heart of the city, it is widely used and has a good collection of books. Chennai and Mumbai also have such public libraries. Delhi was a pioneer in this effort when the Delhi Public Library was set up in 1951, but the nation's capital has few such libraries today. Most good libraries are

attached to teaching and research institutions and are not easily accessed by the lay public.

All this sounds good, but is clearly not good enough. Rarely does one come across the Beijing street scene wherein young people are waiting patiently to enter a library. China has built both grand public libraries, like the libraries in London and Washington, DC, and small neighbourhood libraries across the country. India not only needs more libraries but also a library-using culture.

I recall the passion with which the late Gopalakrishnan pushed the proposal for a national library mission, hoping the mission would not just find financial resources for improving and creating libraries but would also promote a mass culture of accessing libraries. A public library is a symbol of a knowledge-based society. The habit of using

libraries must be inculcated in children from primary school onward. The discipline of handling books, of sitting quietly along with many others in a large room and reading a book are important pedagogic tools. They help shape a nation's character.

The foundational pillar of a good library is a good librarian. I recall how in the early 1970s the JNU chief librarian, Girija Kumar, would walk around the reading rooms of the library, seeing what students were reading and engaging them in conversations about these books. He would suggest other options and tell you where you could access them. Sometimes he would go down to the stacks and bring up a book that one might want to read. At the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, its then director, Professor Ravinder Kumar, a historian, also engaged library users. Noticing that I was working

on the imperial sugar policy in the 1930s, as part of my doctoral work, he sent me an invitation for a conference at the Indian Institute of Advanced Studies in Shimla. For a young researcher this was a truly thrilling reward.

I am sure there are many Girija Kumars and Ravinder Kumars around the country who walk the aisles of the libraries they manage, helping users and encouraging them to explore new avenues of knowledge. As a nation we need to reward such librarians. We need to build more libraries, stock them with good books in the language of a library's users and make libraries more accessible and enjoyable. ■

Sanjaya Baru is a writer based in New Delhi

School official with no power



**BACK TO
SCHOOL**

DILEEP RANJEKAR

I was excited to visit this Model Senior Secondary Government School in one of the blocks in Rajasthan because a colleague from the Azim Premji Foundation was holding a discussion with a group of teachers on a subject that combined several issues in science and social science. This is typical of our work in the capacity enhancement of teachers in public schools. Instead of merely focussing on the content of various subjects, we make an effort to build teachers' perspective on the role and essence of education as enunciated in the National Policy of Education as well as in the National Curriculum Framework.

Today's session was no exception. We picked up the topic of adulteration in food items in the market that covered issues of chemistry, physics, biology, integrity, equity, economics, law and governance related to such adulteration. The responses of the teachers were incisive and indicated they were understanding the integrated approach that was being presented to them. In turn, we were seeing the prospect of teachers changing their teaching-learning practices in schools and classrooms.

The Panchayat Elementary Education Officer (PEEO) who made it a point to be present for the session appeared pretty pleased with what was happening with the teachers. While he belonged to another Adarsh (Model) School, he had travelled 10 kilometres to be present for this interaction and to meet my colleague and me.

Sometime in 2009 or so, in a major structural change on the ground (that was to have long-term implications on education), the state government of Rajasthan abolished the position of Cluster Resource Persons (CRPs), Cluster Resource Coordinators (CRCs) and the like, and sent them back to schools as teachers. The position of Block and Cluster Resource Person was created vide the National Policy for Education, 1986, to provide academic support to schools within a cluster. However, in most states, it failed to provide quality academic support for multiple reasons such as not having developed the necessary competence among the CRPs, loading them with a plethora of administrative jobs in addition to not enabling them to travel to various schools that they were to support, and so on.

The creation of the position of a PEEO in Rajasthan about a year ago, therefore, came as a

blessing both structurally and academically. This has the potential to ensure effective decentralisation of school education by providing both academic and administrative authority to the PEEO to ensure quality among schools within a panchayat. More important, PEEOs are persons who are closely connected with ground realities since they are also the principals of an Adarsh School in the panchayat. The PEEOs will be responsible for the learning outcomes and results of the schools and have the authority to visit (inspect) schools, take decisions on leave and salary-related issues of teachers, and so on. Given the scale and size of our geography, it was impossible for a Block Education Officer to be responsible for all the schools in the block (around 175 to 200 schools). The PEEO's span of control is thus far more manageable with 10-16 schools in the panchayat.



AJIT KRISHNA

and the transfer of existing teachers to higher secondary schools, he was left with only seven.

As a result, his workload has increased so much that he ends up sleeping just about four to five hours every night and his 80-year-old mother has told him to quit the job which, of course, he cannot do because of his commitment. So what are the critical issues? One, he gets no time to contribute to his core area of competence and preference of work in the academic domain. His reading up on new stuff has almost stopped. Two, he is burdened with all kinds of administrative responsibilities (like maintenance of schools, administrative matters including record-keeping) with no help from the system at all. Consequently, he ends up taking work home and burns the midnight oil to cope with his daily responsibilities. Three, shortage of teachers has led to making all kinds of unhealthy adjustments

in schools, classrooms, and so on, leading to an adverse influence on the results of the school. He lamented that after more than 70 years of Independence, we have failed to provide one classroom per grade and one teacher per classroom.

He narrated how senior officers hold meetings in the state capital and blame the juniors working on the ground for the lack of quality in education. He was surprised to observe the behaviour of "no resistance" by the juniors at such meetings. Later, he realised that the juniors have consciously adopted the strategy of simply listening to such blame without offering any contrary view. They know that the seniors have no understanding of the ground situation. The seniors neither appreciate the difficulties of the system nor are they interested in solving the

issues permanently. These officers behave like children in the doctor's clinic. Their approach is "yes, it is going to cause pain but get it over with as painlessly and as quickly as possible".

In one such meeting, the PEEO told the seniormost person that quality in education would not be achieved since the top management was not serious about quality. He pointed out that, for the leadership, the mid-day meal programme is of far higher priority as compared to children not learning or the school not having a sufficient number of teachers. Not only was the senior officer not sympathetic, his own colleagues blamed him for having raised the issue and wasted their time.

This is a great example of how, after having taken the right step by creating the PEEO role, the state is not reaping the best benefits of its action by not empowering the post. Our nation, for the past seven decades, has seen several well-intentioned and great programmes failing due to either inappropriate execution of those programmes or not resourcing them well to make them truly effective. It is just a string of "missed opportunities" after having created such opportunities. ■

Dileep Ranjekar is CEO of the Azim Premji Foundation

Desire and the rural woman



GENDER REPORT

ARCHANA DWIVEDI

AN eye-opening incident occurred in 2002 when we were visiting villages in Mehrauni block of Lalitpur district, Uttar Pradesh, to talk to women during their afternoon break from their backbreaking work as agricultural labour.

The women sat around in groups in someone's *barandah* or outside someone's house. We joined them to chitchat and our talk invariably veered around to answering their queries. Were we married, they asked, did we have children?

They laughed uproariously at some of their own questions. Like, how did our husbands allow us to travel so far to their village? What they implied was: whom will your husband now have sex with since you are not around? And how did we do it? We couldn't understand this question. We were young girls and we blushed coyly.

They explained. We all wear saris, so it's very easy. We just lift our saris and do it quickly. But you wear salwars which need to be untied and that might be cumbersome if you want to have quick sex. Then they laughed uninhibitedly and joyously at the fun they were having at our expense.

The experience was to stay with me forever. As an urbane, educated girl it blew my mind. I found myself questioning my own timidity towards notions of sex and sexuality. As a child I had seen women in my village having fun and teasing each other with explicit words and gestures I have never seen or experienced in urban spaces.

Sixteen years ago my colleague and I were speechless at the response of the women. We giggled not so much with amusement but with embarrassment since we didn't know how else to react. Today, when I look back, I am not sure whether the women were having fun and laughing to paper over the extractive and violent nature of sexual relationships that they might have been experiencing in their lives.

There is much more openness and space for conversations on sex and sexuality today. And a lot of us feminists have moved beyond violence and sexual harassment to pleasure and the politics of sexuality. But, there is still a wide gap between rural and urban expressions and conversations around sex and sexuality.

Nirantar, a resource centre for gender and education, has played an important role in forging these conversations where positive and political approaches to sexuality are taken from academic and urban circles to rural women and girls.

Our experience of working with rural women has given us a vocabulary and well-accepted metaphors, enabling us to talk about sex in an accessible language. It has also helped us to understand the

everydayness of sex and sexuality in a rural context.

While working in rural areas, I came across an expression of sex as '*shareer ki bhookh*'. But, as an upper caste girl from a rural area, I had never heard this expression within my own community. The virtues of being asexual and the ability to control desire were given so much importance, it couldn't be questioned. Upper caste women waited for specific occasions. Like the night when all the men from the boy's side go to the girl's home for the marriage ceremony. The women are left behind with no men around to place any restrictions on



them. They then enact the most explicit sexual drama called *Naktaura* and indulge in a lot of feminine fun. The women from the girl's side get a chance to sing *gaalis* with explicit sexual content, aimed at the men from the boy's side.

These forms of expression and articulation, I feel, cannot be undermined. They need more exploration to understand sex and sexuality in the context of rural culture. This is not to say that there are no taboos, but that within those boundaries a lot is explored and practised.

Both men and women of various ages have their own peer group with whom they explore and talk about sex and desire. The peer group isn't under strict vigilance all the time. These peer groups exist exclusively within the same caste, clan and gender. Relationships, whether sexual or otherwise for girls, are diligently monitored. Sex or desire based on relationships that transgress the boundaries of caste and religion are violently punished especially if the girl belongs to an upper caste community or to the majority religion and the boy belongs to a Dalit or minority community.

There is an acceptance of sex as an integral part of human life, but at the same time there is also a fixed notion of what is good sex and with whom it can be sought or practised. In addition to deep divides of caste, class and gender, there is a rigid notion of what is sex and pleasure and a limited scope of alternatives.

This we gauged during Nirantar's workshop with rural women when they shared with us their disgust for anal or oral sex and some of them interpreted certain sex acts as violence. This could also be true for women living in urban areas.

However, this is the paradoxical reality of rural women. On the one hand there is a culture of humour and fun through songs and dramas with sexual overtones. On the other hand, there is no space for open conversations, awareness and knowledge sharing. Nevertheless, there is an overt and rich vocabulary that exists among rural

communities especially among women to talk about sex and sexuality without feeling awkward.

But the rural is no more as rural as it was 20 years ago. Urban morality has seeped into rural culture and lots of practices are actually dying or have died out because of certain urban notions of civilised language and behaviour around sexuality. The *gaalis* that women sang during marriages or the *Naktaura* they did are traditions that are hardly practised now by young women. Talking about sex and enjoying sexual conversation is no more a common practice among women, especially among young women.

While the sexuality of upper caste and middle class rural women and, to some extent Dalit and tribal women, has always been strictly guarded and controlled, there were still ways in which rural culture celebrated and created space for sexual conversations and expressions of desires.

We can reclaim those spaces and cultural practices and bring them to our urban sensibilities to break the binary between rural and urban. Let's acknowledge and learn the language that exists in every local context and take our evolving understanding to them to challenge some of their notions around sex, sexuality and pleasure. In doing so, we can create new vocabularies that can bridge the gap between rural and urban. ■

Archana Dwivedi is Director of Nirantar, Centre for Gender and Education, New Delhi

LIVING

BOOKS | ECO-TOURISM | FILM | THEATRE | AYURVEDA

The millets café Eat and learn about nutrition

PICTURES BY KVK HULAKOTI

Shree Padre
Hulakoti

AN Ethnic Food Café on National Highway 67 which links Ankola to Bellary is attracting locals and travellers with its unusual menu. All the items are made of millets. Not only is the café the first of its kind in Karnataka, it is probably the first to be set up and run by an agricultural extension centre — the K.H. Patil Krishi Vijnana Kendra (KVK) Hulakoti in Gadag district of Karnataka.

"Customers enjoy the food and make repeat visits. Many of them are not aware of the nutritive value of millets. Their first reaction is, do millets really have so many health benefits?" says Dr Lakshman Hiregoudar, coordinator of the KVK.

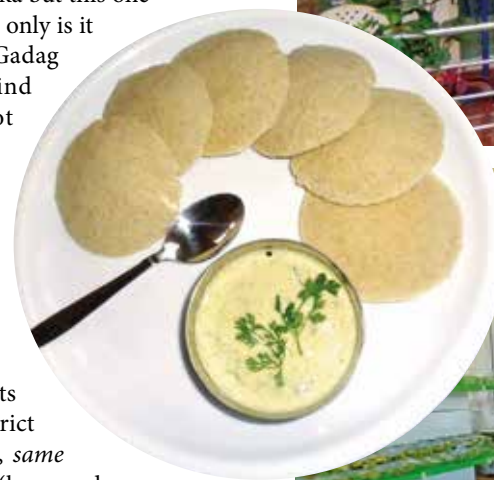
The Ethnic Food Café was started on the KVK campus just four months ago, on Independence Day. Similar attempts have been made to start millet cafes elsewhere in Karnataka but this one retains its uniqueness. Not only is it the first of its kind in Gadag district, the idea behind setting it up is not commercial but idealistic — to induce millet farmers to actually eat the millets they grow!

"Since our main objective is to inspire local millet farmers to eat it too, we have restricted our menu to three millets that are grown in the district — *navane* (foxtail millet), *same* (little millet) and *korle* (barnyard millet)," says Sudha Mankani, home science specialist at the KVK.

Breakfast, lunch and desserts are on offer. *Paddu*, a local specialty breakfast preparation, is popular and served throughout the day and so are millet *idlis*. Other fast-moving items are *roti*, *dosa* and *puris* made from foxtail millet. A millet *thali* is also on offer. It consists of foxtail millet *puri* or *roti*, *pongal* made of foxtail millet or little millet, and *holige* (*puranpoli*) made from little millet, sesame and groundnut.

The café is spread across 1,500 square feet, including a kitchen and a store. The KVK has recruited a staff of six — three cooks, two suppliers and a manager — all of whom are locals. They were trained in cooking and management.

"The café is doing well. It is popular with travellers and locals. Foreigners on their way to Goa are our special customers. They like our foxtail



The Ethnic Food Cafe is the first to be run by an agricultural extension centre

millet *puri*," remarks Dr Hiregoudar. "A considerable part of our sales consists of takeaways. Mostly people ask for *dosas*, *paddu*, *bajji* and *mirchi* to be packed."

To add variety, the café cooks *dosa*, *pongal*, *idli*, *paddu* and *chakkuli* with little millet on one day and

with foxtail millet the next day. Barnyard millet, which has debuted in the district, is also used. From 6 pm to 7 pm it is '*bajji*' time in Gadag district. So, in deference to local food habits, the café offers evening snacks — little millet onion *bajji* similar to

Continued on page 30

Continued from page 29

kanda bajji, little millet *palak bajji* and *mirchi*, another deep-fried snack made with a particular variety of chilli. The *bajjis* are served with a puffed rice dish called *girmit*.

The Ethnic Food Café's larger purpose is to create awareness about the health benefits of eating millets. It does this by detailing the nutritive values of all the millets being used on its menu card and comparing it with the nutritive value of rice, wheat and *jowar*. "Local customers, mostly from the farming community, read the menu and express surprise about the high nutritive value of millet," says Mankini.



A range of tasty dishes, made from millets, is served

Dosa, roti and idli made of millets are all new inventions for local millet farmers. 'They are getting interested and slowly introducing these as part of their diet at home,' says Mankini.

In fact, the Ethnic Food Café draws inspiration from Café Ethnic, the first millet restaurant set up in India by the Deccan Development Society in Zaheerabad in Medak district of Telangana. A team from KVK visited Café Ethnic about 15 years ago.

"We realised the best way to impress people or change mindsets about a particular food is not just by organising awareness classes, but by getting them to eat it. We were very impressed by Café Ethnic and we wanted to replicate the idea ever since," recalls Dr Hiregoudar. "But due to one reason or another our project kept getting postponed."

Naturally, customers who taste the millet dishes have a torrent of questions. The café staff has been trained to answer such queries. If women in the group are curious to know more, they are taken to the kitchen where they can see for themselves how the dishes are being made. For those who would like to try their hand at cooking millets, a variety of packaged millets are available in a corner of the café.

The most grown millet in the district is foxtail. Till about four decades ago, it used to be boiled and consumed as '*anna*'. But after rice and wheat were introduced, the millet lost favour since it wasn't considered as tasty as rice and wheat.

Therefore, *dosa*, *roti* and *idli* made of millets are all new inventions for local millet farmers. "They are getting interested, learning from the café and slowly introducing these as part of their diet at home," says Mankini.

Any invention requires experiments and so it was with millets. Making *roti* from foxtail millet proved intractable in the beginning. The flour was grainy and wouldn't bend to *roti* making. Dr

Hiregoudar is diabetic and his wife, Kamalakshi, made many attempts but failed.

Three years ago she sent some foxtail millet to a commercial flour mill. The mill ground it to a talcum powder consistency. And it made excellent *rotis*! The secret of making *rotis* with foxtail millet is now shared with interested customers.

To popularise millets the KVK has conducted innumerable workshops, demos and cookery classes in millets. Some members of a self-help group have started making a few millet preparations like *holige* and selling it through a few outlets and at weekly bazaars.

"Millets are the best drought-resistant crops we have. Not only are they life savers for farmers, they also have a good market. Even with a meagre rainfall of 150 mm we can grow them.

Our sustained mission to popularise millets has created new interest at a time when millet cultivation had fallen to 500-600 acres in the district. Now we have an estimated 10,000 acres under millet cultivation," says Dr Hiregoudar proudly.

Yet, the Ethnic Food Café is mainly attracting a middle class health-conscious clientele. People of low income aren't interested at all. "That's mainly because millets are expensive whereas rice and wheat are cheaper," says Mankini. "The best solution is to introduce millets in the public distribution system, through ration shops, as they have done in Andhra Pradesh," points out Dr Hiregoudar.

The café's average turnover is ₹3,000 per day. Dr Hiregoudar explains, "Since there is no pressure on us to make profits, it runs on a no-loss and no-profit basis. But we are happy. The café is spreading a strong message." ■

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A tharavad and an endless lake in Kerala



An elegant traditional cottage

Susheela Nair
Thiruvananthapuram

FROM the private jetty the boat chugged across the Vembanad lake, the largest wetland ecosystem in Kerala. Serene hamlets nestled amidst swaying groves of coconut palms and green stretches of paddy fields set the tone of our relaxed holiday. There was a sense of tranquility for the moment we entered this charming idyll. The site is criss-crossed with canals which are an extension of the topography of the backwaters. Small bridges got us across the separated land masses.

Set in Kumarakom, in the midst of the backwaters and the never ending Vembanad lake, Coconut Lagoon is a tile and timber mansion — a typical traditional Kerala *tharavad* painstakingly transplanted and restored. The most striking feature of the resort is its architectural elegance, the structures having been built from old houses that were abandoned or destined to be razed. These have been carefully dismantled and relocated to this property from surrounding villages and then reassembled, beam by beam, by descendants of the master craftsmen who originally built them. By using local building materials, the use of cement, tiles and steel was drastically reduced.

We stepped out of the boat into the reception area, housed in a traditional *naalukettu*. There are heritage mansions, bungalows and pool villas, surrounded by the captivating sight of the Kumarakom backwaters and vistas of natural expanses — a haven for birdlife. We were ushered into our guest cottages with the rustic flavour of classic Kerala styling laced with modern comforts. The centrally located restaurant is said to be the oldest structure in the resort. It is housed in

an *ettukettu* — a structure with two atriums, similar to courtyards, under a roof supported by pillars.

The resort was built without disturbing any of its original topography. All the old trees including mangroves were preserved. More saplings were planted, adding to local biodiversity. The canals, thanks to a profusion of fish, do not breed mosquitoes. And, unlike mosquitoes that breed in stagnant water, there are dragonflies here which perch and thrive in fresh water. The dragonfly is an indicator of the health of an ecosystem.

Coconut Lagoon is quite a birdwatcher's paradise with more than 60 different species. There are esteemed visitors like the southern birdwing, the largest Indian butterfly. The organic paddy fields and adjoining fallow lands have seen an increase of bird population, enough to merit a couple of birdwatching perches. The fact that we could see about 30 different species of birds in an hour is quite impressive by birdwatching standards.

RESPONSIBLE TOURISM: Coconut Lagoon is part of the CGH Earth Group's chain of hotels. "Responsible tourism is an integral part of our DNA. CGH Earth has pursued eco preservation with a passion — worm farms, solar panels, recycling and rainwater harvesting are mandatory features at almost all our properties. The results have been rewarding. One clear cause and effect situation is the butterfly garden, where our efforts have been rewarded with beauty or in the dragonfly population, which can thrive only in a clean aquatic environment where they can lay eggs," says Jose Dominic, managing director of CGH Earth Hotels.

A CGH holiday offers a beautiful, relaxing destination with an unspoiled feel of the local environment. "We are uncompromising about



The picturesque Vembanad lake



Enjoy a sunset cruise on the Vembanad lake

promoting responsible tourism and there are no two ways about it. We are not about luxury holidays. We want to provide engaging experiences that benefit not only the traveller but also the local community, with minimal disturbance to the local environment," explains Dominic.

"In the 1990s, CGH Earth introduced a model of innovation, creating products which were small and local. It became successful in a very short time. The business was built on our core philosophies of including the local community, minimising the impact on the environment, giving local experiences and creating value proposition for the customer," added Dominic.

GREEN INITIATIVES: The resort does not discharge any waste from its boats into the lake and they work with local governing bodies to educate and spread the message of good environmental practices. We observed that great emphasis is laid on material and waste reduction. Suppliers are encouraged to deliver their products in recycled containers instead of plastic packaging. Packaged water in plastic bottles has become a grave environmental issue for the hospitality industry. To reduce the burden of waste,

CGH Earth bottles and serves purified rainwater in glass bottles that can be reused. Some of the dry waste is used in truly creative ways.

Rainwater harvesting and waste management is built into their management systems. Food and animal waste processed at the biogas plant fuels the staff kitchens. Water from baths and the Ayurveda centre is processed for human consumption. Wet waste is turned into biogas and vermicompost which are used as cooking fuel and manure, respectively.

There is never a dull moment at the resort. We tried the freshly brewed tea from the floating tea stall gliding in the canal. It tries to capture the romance of the period with tea served out of old-style copper samovars. We set out on a nature trail and enjoyed the birds and butterflies that thrive by the Vembanad lake. We explored life in the backwaters; visited the bird sanctuary and farms, and learnt to cook with spices. Relaxing in our verandah, we were transported to a world of peace and contentment. We watched the endangered *vechoor* cows graze and 'mow' the endless lawns. The refreshing greenery, the bird calls, the omnipresent butterflies all indicate a clean, green and healthy atmosphere and you know all is well with the world. ■

FACT FILE

Getting there: Coconut Lagoon is a 10-minute boat ride from the jetty, which is 10 km from Kottayam.

Nearest airport: Kochi (74 km). The nearest railhead is Kottayam.

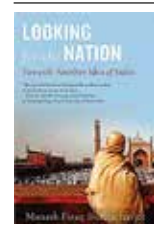
Address: Kumarakom, Kottayam District, Kerala - 686 563

Tel: 91 481 2528200 / 0484 426171

Email: contact@cghearth.com; coconutlagoon@cghearth.com

RANDOM SHELF HELP

A quick selection from the many books that turn up for review



Looking for the Nation
Manash Firaq Bhattacharjee
Speaking Tiger
₹350

The idea of India is spelt out in the Constitution which speaks of noble principles like justice, liberty, equality and fraternity and describes the nation as secular and democratic. But in recent years, it is nationalism that has superseded all other principles in the Constitution. The author, Manash Firaq Bhattacharjee, retraces the origins of Indian nationalist thought to the leaders of the freedom struggle — Nehru, Gandhi, Tagore and Ambedkar.

He analyses the fate of India's minorities, Muslims, Dalits and refugees, and posits it against the majority community's constant fear of losing territory and power. The status of Indian Muslims continues to shrink due to strident nationalism and the long shadow of Partition which disrupted traditional friendly ties between Hindus and Muslims. Also included are Dalit marginalisation and assertion, Aadhaar and State violence against minorities as well as a chapter on resisting strident nationalism by a more compelling counter narrative. ■



Strike a Blow to Change the World
Eknath Awad
Translated by Jerry Pinto
Speaking Tiger
₹399

Jerry Pinto has done a remarkable job in translating Eknath Awad's original autobiography which was published in Marathi and titled *Jag Badal Ghalumi Ghaav*. Awad, also known as Jija, was a Dalit from the Mang community who spent his life fighting for the rights of Dalits and Adivasis in the Marathwada region of Maharashtra. In his autobiography, Awad described the grinding poverty he grew up in, his struggle to get an education

and the humiliation the Mangs faced every day at the hands of the upper castes. Awad joined the Dalit Panther movement. He was at the forefront of the land rights movement and the campaign to rename Marathwada University as Ambedkar University. Awad studied law and instead of settling into a comfortable practice in cosmopolitan Mumbai, returned to Marathwada to continue his fight for Dalits and Adivasis. He set up Maanav Haq Abhiyan and a Rural Development Centre, freeing Adivasis from bonded labour. Awad courageously battled not just upper castes and political forces but even members of his own community. He admitted frankly that aggression came in handy at times. ■

This is an engrossing autobiography of Visier Meyasetsu Sanyu, an elder of the Meyasetsu clan of the Angami tribe in Khonoma village of Nagaland. His story begins in 1956 when Nagas were fighting for independence from India and his village was attacked by the Army. Sanyu was just five years old and along with others from his village, Khonoma, fled into the jungles of Nagaland. His description of the two years they spent in the jungle and how they survived are surprisingly vivid. They eventually emerged from the jungle and settled down. His

father began running a small store. Sanyu joined Sainik School and left after a horrific incident—rumours were spread about the Naga students. They were attacked and had to flee. The police took the hapless Naga students into custody. Sanyu went on to graduate from St Joseph's College in Darjeeling, became a lecturer in the University of Nagaland and finally found refuge in Australia. He returned home in 2015 and began a Healing Garden in his village. Sanyu's life story from a barefoot child to a professor is fascinating. His experience of the strife in Nagaland shadows him throughout his life. And yet his kindness, intelligence and compassion shine through. ■



The Night of Broken Glass
Feroz Rather
HarperCollins
₹399

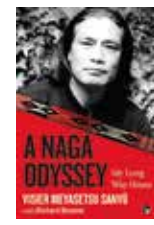
This is a captivating book, wonderfully written and haunting. It consists of a series of short stories about Kashmir. But each story isn't a standalone one. It is connected with the other stories with the same characters drifting in and out. The stories are about life in a conflict zone, the kind of difficult and horrific situations ordinary people find themselves in and how they react. The author, Feroz Rather, explores the

psychological impact of Kashmir's unending conflict. But it isn't only State oppression that Kashmiris contend with. There is also caste and gender. In "The Old Man and the Cottage", the protagonist is asked to look after a sick old man, abandoned by his son in a cottage. The old man is Inspector Masoodi who had brutally beaten up the protagonist, tied him to a rock and thrown him into a river. In "Rosy", an upper caste girl falls in love with a lower caste militant. "The Stone Thrower" depicts how random deaths of innocent civilians fuel stone throwing. ■

Cerebral palsy has afflicted mankind for thousands of years. What is it like for the parents of those affected by it? What kind of help is available? The reality of being a caregiver for people with cerebral palsy is grim, yet you have families that power through. Upali Chakravarti's book, *Disability and Care Work: State, Society and Invisible Lives*, looks at the stark reality of the nature and depth of care involved in caring for people with cerebral palsy and, to a lesser extent, autism. From coping with their child's disability to finding health initiatives, the book is a critical examination of the gaps that exist in the systems designed to care for the disabled while delving into the gendered roles of caregiving, social stigma and government policy. ■



Disability and Care Work
Upali Chakravarti
SAGE
₹795



A Naga Odyssey
Visier Meyasetsu Sanyu with Richard Broome
Speaking Tiger
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The infinite value of a wet paddy field

In her remarkable book, *The Flavours of Nationalism*, Nandita Haksar recalls the important role food played in her life's journey as a human rights activist and lawyer. Food mitigates hunger but it is also deeply entrenched into political, social, cultural and economic norms. Haksar deftly links all these threads into a compelling book. Below is an extract.

THE Nagas live in fertile areas and most have not suffered famines or droughts in the past. In their society, the richest man is one who has the most grains and cattle. But he does not get the respect of society till he has given it all away.

In the past, the man (yes, not a woman) who was given the highest respect in Naga society was one who gave away his entire wealth in a series of feasts to the village. It could be up to thirty feasts. After that, he and his wife were given the honour of erecting a special kind of pole, or the right to wear certain kinds of ornaments or a special shawl.

One of my most prized possessions is a plain white shawl given to me by the villagers of Oinam in the Senapati district of Manipur. I remember that when the village elders gave it to me, I was truly overwhelmed. They gave me the Feast of Merit shawl in 1991 at the end of my four-year-long court battle against the Indian armed forces for committing human rights violations during a counter-insurgency operation codenamed Operation Bluebird.

Despite the fact that the final hearing was over in 1992, the High Court has not given its judgment in the case. I have decided I will wear the shawl the day the judgment is delivered. I have not yet worn the shawl.

NAGAS say they eat everything that flies, except airplanes; and everything that walks except human beings. The Naga diet consisted of a large number of green leaves and many different kinds of vegetables, roots and herbs; and they had access to a large variety of non-vegetarian food such as snails, frogs, insects, fish, pork, beef, chicken and everyone's favourite is, of course, pork.

I saw first-hand how the diet of the Nagas has been depleted over the years. In part, this is because of the negative impact on the biodiversity by the kind of developmental projects being undertaken. I understood how development could have adverse effects on the diet of tribal people when I took up the case of Hundung villagers living in the Ukhrul district of Manipur.

In the 1970s, the Centre set up the North-East Council, a statutory authority charged with the duty to ensure balanced development of the region. One of its first projects was to set up a cement factory in Hundung village.

On 6 January 1981, the Government of Manipur brought out a notification announcing that the compensation would be 0.04 paise per square foot



A paddy farmer in Nagaland

for second-grade land and 0.06 paise per square foot for first-grade land. The villagers challenged this notification, but they lost the case at the lower level because, they said, they could not afford to pay a bribe to the judge.

The case went up to the High Court but nothing came of it. In 1988, I was in Manipur in connection with the Oinam case. At that time friends from Hundung asked me to take up their case. The villagers had formed themselves into a group called the Victims of Development.

I filed a public interest litigation case in 1990. One of the aspects of the case was the loss of their paddy fields, kitchen gardens and forest-land — all of which affected the diet of the villagers. The land taken away for the cement factory and the mini hydro-electricity project included their prized wet paddy fields. In fact, their paddy fields were the best in the entire district. Since the construction of the Nungshangkong Mini Hydro Electricity project, the water had been diverted to the cement factory, thus converting the wet paddy fields into dry fields.

In the wet paddy field, the cultivators have fish ponds and its fertility allows for intercropping of maize, beans, soya bean, etc. Thus the yield of the wet paddy field is 80 percent higher than a dry paddy field. A wet paddy field not only yields more paddy than a dry field, but is also a source of fish, frogs and a variety of insects that are eaten and are a source of protein. I sat with the villagers and made an elaborate chart of the number of fish, insects and snails available in a wet paddy field, and their value in calories, and translated that into monetary terms. The person who helped me to understand the ecology of the wet paddy field was Dr Ngachan Francis, an agricultural scientist who was working in the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR); he was from Hundung.



Paddy fields provide a variety of food

The villagers had been hesitant to talk about the things that they ate because they knew that in the eyes of the non-tribals, their food was not civilized and they felt embarrassed to say they ate snails, frogs and insects. Only when we calculated the loss did they realize how much they had lost.

I submitted this chart in court as evidence of the extent of loss and demanded compensation on the basis of this loss.

Luckily, two Naga judges, Justice Sema and Justice Shishak (the only ones at the time), heard the case

and accepted our contention, and the villagers won their case, including compensation for the loss in their diet.

The case came up in the Supreme Court where the judges commented on the unusual way of calculation for compensation but accepted it. If you read the Order in State of Manipur and Another vs Hundung Victims of Development given on 6 December 1994 (equivalent citations: AIR 1995 SC 1875), it only states 'Compensation for loss of pisciculture and also loss of yield of paddy,' and has no reference to our elaborate chart.

The two Naga judges were not put on a Bench together again.

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WHILE I was working on the case I spent a night at Hundung village. That night, there was a great deal of excitement because the villagers were going to smoke out the wasps and get the hive. This was the first time I saw such a massive three or four-storied hive that had formed underground and stuck to a rock.

When the wasp hive was brought to the kitchen of the owner of the hive, children gathered around. I



**AYURVEDA
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Dr SRIKANTH

Relief from piles

PILES are dilated blood vessels in the rectal mucosa which form a mass in the anal canal that might obstruct the normal function of defecation, may bleed occasionally or produce discharge. These dilated blood vessels are medically known as haemorrhoids.

Piles are common in both men and women. People with improper dietary habits and a sedentary lifestyle have a greater incidence of piles. Pregnant women are also sometimes prone to piles. In India, it is estimated that approximately 80 percent of sufferers are between 21 and 50 years of age.

CAUSES: It is often said that piles are a natural consequence of adoption of erect posture by mankind. Chronic constipation, obesity, sedentary lifestyle, improper dietary habits and liver disease are some contributory factors for piles.

Other factors such as family history, temperament, climate, age, sex, pregnancy and suppression of haemorrhage in other areas have also been held responsible.

Yet other factors include irritation of the anal canal, lack of normal tone in the anal sphincters and continuous use of suppositories.

Suppressing nature's call, excessive physical strain, inordinate consumption of non-vegetarian food, uncooked or spicy foods, sleeping during the day, and excessive two-wheeler riding have been listed in Ayurvedic texts as common causes of piles.

SYMPTOMS: The main symptoms of piles are swelling and irritation in or around the rectum. Pain, itching and bleeding may also be associated

with piles, especially while defecating.

Bleeding from the anus is a common symptom in severe piles. Some patients may complain of rectal fullness, mucus discharge and prolapse of pile mass.

PREVENTION: Piles usually can be prevented by adopting a healthier lifestyle:

Avoid using a western closet — an Indian-style lavatory is always better. Avoid straining.

Avoid prolonged sitting or standing positions as it puts pressure on the anorectal region.

Wear loose-fitting clothing and undergarments made from natural materials such as cotton.

Reduce your weight if you are obese. Regular exercise and a modified diet are helpful.

Establish regular bowel habits and avoid constipation.

Consuming high-fibre foods and adequate water will help to prevent constipation. High-fibre foods include green leafy vegetables, fresh fruits and whole grain cereals like wheat, barley, oats, corn, rice, etc.

Drink at least 8-10 glasses of water every day.

Avoid intake of spicy food, alcohol, coffee and tea — these tend to irritate and aggravate piles.

TREATMENT: A Sitz bath is helpful for reducing pain caused by piles. Sit in a shallow tub of warm water for 15 minutes, twice daily.

Also, an ice pack for local application, twice daily, may be used to reduce the swelling.

HOME REMEDIES: For piles with complaints of pain, itching and mucous discharge, consuming 150-200 ml of fresh buttermilk twice daily after meals provides relief from such symptoms.

- Regular consumption of vegetables like elephant yam (sooran/jamikand), radish (mooli) and greens (palak, methi) is helpful.

- Having amalaki (amla), haritaki (harad), draksha (munakka, raisins) helps to relieve constipation — one of the main causes of piles.

- You can take: 1 teaspoon of amla murabba/1-2 fresh gooseberries daily.

- Half or one teaspoon of haritaki churna (fine powder of harad) — with a glass of buttermilk or

equal quantity of jaggery — twice daily, before meals.

- Eight to 10 raisins soaked overnight in water/milk — to be consumed in the morning along with the water/milk.

AYURVEDIC MEDICINES: Grade-1 & 2 (relatively minor piles) can be medically treated. The following medicaments along with adopting some of the preventive measures mentioned above may be helpful:

- 20 ml of Abhayarishta / Duralabharishta (Vaidyaratnam) with equal water, twice daily, after meals, or one teaspoon of Avipattikara churna (any reputed pharmacy) twice daily with water/coconut water/ghee, before meals or Herbolax / Triphala tablets (Himalaya) 2-0-2 tablets, before meals.

- Pilex tablets (Himalaya), Pirrhoids (Baidyanath), Pilonid (Nagarjuna) — 2 tablets, Pilocid (Kottakkal) — 2 tablets thrice daily for 1-3 months.

Topical application on the affected area — this helps to relieve pain and swelling, control bleeding and shrink the pile mass:

- Pilex ointment (Himalaya) or Pilon (IPCA) or Shatadhauta ghrita (Kottakkal) — for local application twice / thrice daily.

In severe cases when piles cannot be medically managed, various surgical options are available — like sclerotherapy, cryotherapy, rubber band ligation and surgical removal of the pile mass. All surgical remedies may have one or the other disadvantages, including recurrence over a certain period. A suitable option can be selected after consulting with the surgeon.

Some renowned Ayurveda specialists suggest a popular and effective para-surgical method — kshara sutra. This reportedly reduces chances of recurrence in comparison with the other available surgical remedies and doesn't require hospitalisation. ■

Dr Srikanth is a postgraduate in Ayurveda and has been a consulting physician for the past 17 years. He is currently National Manager, Scientific Services, at The Himalaya Drug Company

Almitra hopes to take down such environment culprits one at a time.

The company offers options: toothbrushes made of bamboo and charcoal in different colours, combs of sheesham wood, reusable straws of bamboo, copper, wood and paper and areca leaf cutlery. You can also throw out your plastic scrubbers and replace them with Almitra's

scrubbers made of coconut fibre and coir that can clean bottles, pots and pans, and vegetables.

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Their stall, at the wonderful Women's Organic Festival held at the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, attracted considerable interest. Anamika says the response has been phenomenal. ■

Contact: 9769133231, email: anamika.s@almitra-sustainables.com
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ANAMIKA Sengupta is an eco-warrior keen to win the battle against plastic. She founded Almitra Sustainables on June 5, World Environment Day, this year with her husband, Biplab. Her designation is Green Ambassador.

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