

Civil Society

THE CHIKOO IS RISING!

With parlours and a festival, farmers make it profitable



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Conservation of Biodiversity by Himalaya

We, at Himalaya, have planted more than 700,000 trees over the last 5 years as part of our Biodiversity Conservation initiative in the Western Ghats, Maharashtra. In association with SEBC (Society for Environment and Biodiversity Conservation), Pune, we also conduct Annual Awareness programs around International Biodiversity Day in Pune and Goa.

Himalaya has also partnered with WeForest in order to stop the loss of natural forestry and accelerate forest landscape restoration. Through this initiative, we are planting trees in the Khasi Hills region of Meghalaya this year.

Setting the pace for a sustainable ecosystem, our Tree Planting initiative has made a positive impact on the environment, where forests are managed sustainably for climate and humanity.



17th FICCI CSR AWARD WINNERS

India's first CSR award was instituted in 1999 by FICCI. The aim of the award is to identify and recognize the efforts of companies in integrating and internalizing Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). The selection process for the FICCI CSR Awards is extremely competitive.

Glimpses of the 9 companies that were awarded the prestigious 17th FICCI CSR Awards at the FICCI CSR Summit and Awards on February 21, 2019. An eminent jury selected the awardees from an exhaustive list of 120 companies after six months of rigorous assessment.



17th FICCI CSR Award for Women Empowerment
Nuvoco Vistas Corporation Limited



17th FICCI CSR Award for Women Empowerment
Jindal Steel & Power Limited



17th FICCI CSR Award for Education,
Skill Development and Livelihood
Ashok Leyland Limited



17th FICCI CSR Award for Environment Sustainability
Mahindra & Mahindra Ltd. (Auto, Farm and Agri Sector)



17th FICCI CSR Award for Environment Sustainability
Syngene International Limited



17th FICCI CSR Award for Health, Water and Sanitation
Vedanta Limited (Cairn Oil and Gas)



17th FICCI CSR Award for Skill
Development and Rehabilitation Project in Conflict Zone
Oil & Natural Gas Corporation Limited



17th FICCI CSR Award for
Nand Ghar-Modern Anganwadi Project
Vedanta Limited

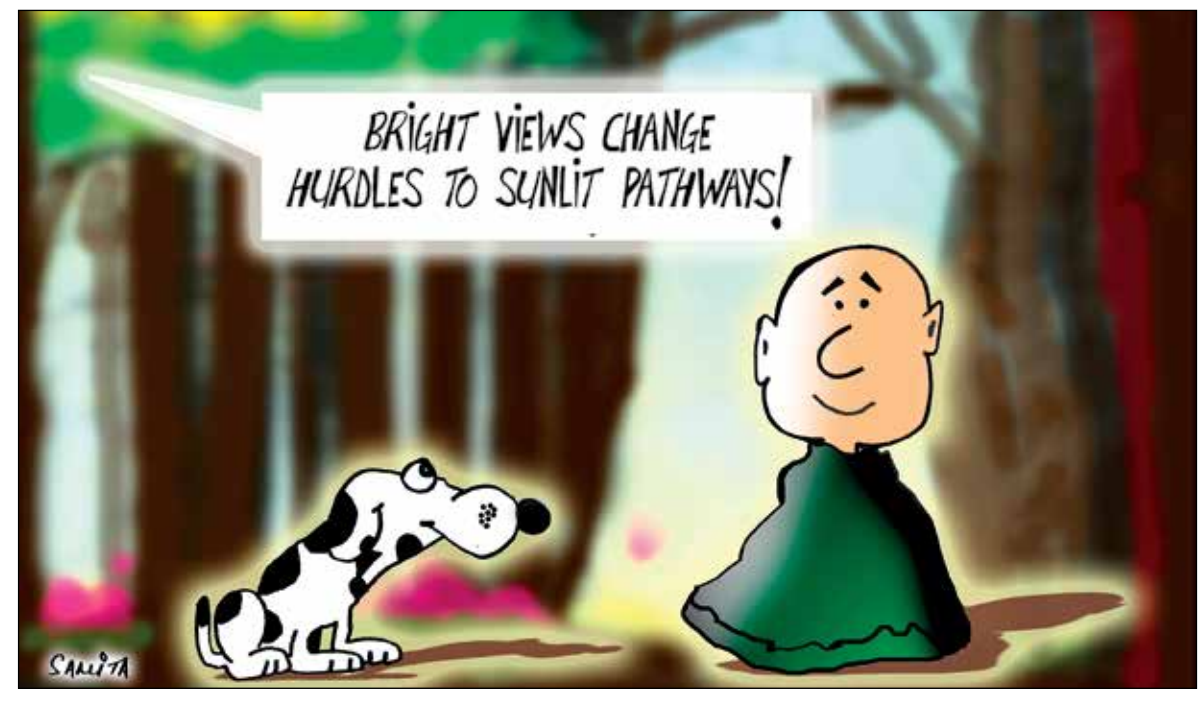


17th FICCI CSR Award for Grameen Mytrah Project
Mytrah Energy (India) Private Limited

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IN THE LIGHT

SAMITA RATHOR



LETTERS



work are important components. We have, in a small way, tried to contribute to society by running an informal school for tribal girls who have discontinued formal education. Some agriculture, like vegetable growing and animal rearing, is being taken up as an activity. This is, of course, a mini effort with about 60 to 80 girls who prepare for the Class 10 and 12 exams and, in the process, live together, work together and learn together. A form of *nai talim* by Gandhiji.

Sudarshan Iyengar

Women unions
Thanks for the lovely interview with

Devaki Jain, 'We must unionise workers, speak for them.'

Dunu Roy

Rural jobs

I am the President of the Young India Project (YIP) that has been working on rights-based struggles for the last four decades. We have read with interest Aruna Roy's article, 'MGNREGA is being sidelined by the government.'

I would like to express my appreciation to both Aruna Roy and *Civil Society* for publishing the article. It is comprehensive and covers many concerns regarding MGNREGA.

YIP has been working at the

grassroots for the past 35 years, supporting rights-based struggles of rural labour in Andhra Pradesh. We found the article to be much too government-centred and very little rural labour-centred.

In 2006, when the government of Andhra Pradesh asked YIP to do the very first social audit to evaluate the performance of MGNREGA in 40 talukas of Anantapur District, MKSS was asked to train our NGOs on how to conduct social audits.

We participated in the taluk meetings. We found that social audits were only focussed on fraud and did not make any attempt to monitor violations of rights of MGNREGA workers. Later, when Andhra Pradesh formed a social audit cell under Somya, an MKSS member, the cell took many of our best cadres to do audits. They would tell us that the social audit was not concerned with violations of workers' rights.

We were convinced that we had to make the state government create an independent system to inform, organise and enable MGNREGA wage seekers to demand and receive their rights and take up protests against violation of their rights.

In 2010, we got the state government to create APNA (Andhra Pradesh NGO Alliance), a government-NGO partnership to inform, organise and enable MGNREGA wage seekers to demand and receive their rights and take up grievances and resolve their concerns.

Narinder Bedi

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Cheque to: **Content Services and Publishing Pvt. Ltd.**
Mail to: The Publisher, Civil Society, A-16, (West Side), 1st Floor, South Extension - 2, New Delhi - 110049.
Phone: 011-46033825, 9811787772 E-mail to: response@civilsocietyonline.com
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Girl power

Thanks for the cover story, 'Girl power in Bihar.' It was well written and well researched. Apart from high rates of domestic violence, Bihar also has the highest rate of child marriage in India, according to the International Centre for Research on Women. The Aga Khan Foundation's strategy is absolutely correct. It is by educating and skilling adolescent girls that their exploitation can be stopped. The transformation the project is achieving is quite amazing.

Katherine Gomes

Farm college

I read Derek Almeida's story, 'A farm college in Goa finally gets the success it deserves.' Hearty congratulations to the person who runs it. We need to reintroduce our land-based culture and civilisation for a sustainable and harmonious society. Dignity and



THE CHIKOO IS RISING!

Chikoo farmers in Maharashtra have overcome the problem of low prices for their fruit by becoming entrepreneurs. They have opened Chikoo Parlours and made a range of products from chikoo.

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Contact Civil Society at:
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The magazine does not undertake to respond to unsolicited contributions sent to the editor for publication.

Publisher
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Layout & Design
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First Floor, Panchsheel Vihar,
Malviya Nagar, New Delhi - 110017.
Printed at Samrat Offset Pvt. Ltd.,
B-88, Okhla Phase II,
New Delhi - 110020

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South Extension Part 2,
New Delhi - 110049.
Ph: 011-46033825, 9811787772
Printed and published by Umesh Anand on behalf of Rita Anand, owner of the title, from A-53 D,

Postal Registration No.
DL(S)-17/3255/2018-20.
Registered to post without pre-payment
U(SE)-10/2018-20 at Lodi Road HPO
New Delhi - 110003 Registered with the
Registrar of Newspapers of India under
RNI No.: DELENG/2003/11607
Total no of pages: 36

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Shree Anand



Ravi Venkatesan: 'It is seen as a stigma to try something and not succeed whereas the right kind of failure should be celebrated'

'Young people should get excited about starting small businesses'

Ravi Venkatesan on mass entrepreneurship

Civil Society News
New Delhi

EVERYBODY has got the lowdown on the unemployment problem. Nobody seems to have figured out how to fix it in real time. There is a rising tide of young people who can't land jobs with the government or big corporations. Where should they look and how should they meet their aspirations in their most productive years?

Ravi Venkatesan believes the answer lies in the creation of a sea of small businesses, which will meet local needs and generate jobs on a scale not achieved before in India. Mass entrepreneurship of this kind would stimulate the economy and change the way people perceive income generation.

Venkatesan has been an insider to the corporate world. He was the chairman of Microsoft in India

and more recently helped turn around the Bank of Baroda. He is UNICEF's Special Representative for Young People and Innovation.

Venkatesan has founded the Global Alliance of Mass Entrepreneurship or GAME together with Madan Padaki and Mekin Maheshwari. A lean and energetic core team at GAME intends to build purposeful alliances, mostly with governments, to rapidly take the idea of mass entrepreneurship forward.

Civil Society met Venkatesan, Padaki and Maheshwari in Delhi for a wide-ranging conversation on GAME. Below is a formal interview with Venkatesan:

What exactly is mass entrepreneurship?

In any reasonably developed economy there is a good balance between small, medium and large

businesses. The main engines of job creation, whether in Japan, Europe or the United States, have been small and medium enterprises and not the large companies.

In India, that part of the economy is extremely underdeveloped relative to the size of its economy. The figure is just 18 percent, which is low compared even to Bangladesh. This is an opportunity. If we can get many more people to start small enterprises and begin to grow them, it can become a very significant engine for job creation.

When we talk of entrepreneurship today we talk about two ends: the technology-driven urban phenomena like an Ola or a Swiggy, a technology company, etc. Or we talk about a very, very large number of self-employed people whom we call entrepreneurs. But that is a misnomer. In fact, we are calling them 'necessity entrepreneurs' – they are

entrepreneurs not out of opportunity but out of necessity or compulsion.

What we are not talking about, when we talk of entrepreneurs, are the number of completely ordinary, mundane businesses that are serving local needs. It can be the beauty salon, the motorcycle repair shop, the solar panel installer, the small restaurant.... There is a significant opportunity here since these businesses are currently under-represented.

Today, what is aspirational for a young person is to go get a government job. For 368 peon jobs, 2.3 million people apply. Working in the IT sector was aspirational. But those jobs have become much scarcer.

What will it take to get millions of young people excited about starting small businesses instead of going and seeking a job? How do we make it cool and exciting? That's the core of this mass entrepreneurship movement.

Why is it that in India we don't have mass entrepreneurship?

I think the answer is that it's quite regional. There are some states that have a very strong entrepreneurial culture – Gujarat and Rajasthan, for instance, where you have the Marwari culture. And then you go to other parts of the country and it's pretty barren. India is obviously not a country, it's a continent and therefore it conceals very significant variations.

Secondly, I think risk aversion is very, very high across the board. It is seen as a stigma to try something and not succeed, whereas the right kind of failure should be celebrated.

Third, the challenges of starting and running a business are ferocious, notwithstanding the ease of doing business as measured by the World Bank, which is a significant improvement. But, on the ground, it still isn't easy to start a business, run a business, let alone close a business. And so that discourages many people, I think.

Are there certain parts of the country we need to focus on? Surely there could be cross-learning?

My intellectual guru is Ned Phelps who won the Nobel Prize in economics in 2006. Phelps examines why the Industrial Revolution happened in Britain and not in neighbouring Italy, France and Spain, which were more prosperous and advanced. The Industrial Revolution then shifted to the US. Why?

He says in 17th and 18th century Britain and in 18th and 19th century America, conditions were such that an ordinary person of no great means or education or even great ability could tinker and start sometimes great things.

Look at all the seminal inventions of the Industrial Revolution – the steam engine, the locomotive, the spinning wheel, the process for making wrought iron...or look at electricity, the light bulb, the sewing machine. Nine out of 10 of these were invented and great enterprises built by illiterate people of the most humble background like Thomas Edison, James Watt, Isaac Singer.

These countries created conditions that were favourable for ordinary people, not for the elite, to tinker, experiment and launch their businesses.

So what we talk about is a combination of seed, soil and climate. Seed is the capability of the person, then local soil or local conditions, and climate.

When you say another state can replicate it, of course it can, but what are the policies out there, what is the ease of doing business and is government a hindrance or help. I think there is great potential and ability.

What we are saying is, let's focus on young people. Our target group is 14 to 29 and 50 percent of the entrepreneurs should be women. One distinctive pillar of our strategy and focus is encouraging young women to get started on businesses.

Even after nearly 28 years of liberalisation why don't we have a more enabling environment for enterprise for young people? Why do so many people apply for government jobs?

China decided their export-driven model might not last forever. The aspirational thing for a young Chinese is to go to a city and get a job in a factory in Shenzhen or wherever. In a typical top-down way they said they had to change this. So, in 2014 Chinese Premier Li Keqiang decided China needed to implement Ned Phelps' idea. He said, listen, we need to get many more people starting businesses and stimulate domestic demand. They created a Ministry for Mass Entrepreneurship.

'The main engines of job creation, whether in Japan, Europe or the United States, have been small and medium enterprises and not the large companies. In India, that part of the economy is extremely underdeveloped.'

They have a website. It says since 2014 they have been creating 14,000 businesses per day. That number last year accelerated to 18,000 per day. This has resulted in the creation of millions of new jobs. Why am I saying this? I think China has shown you can do certain things top down. That may not be very effective or viable in India or Africa, which is the other place we are focused on.

So what can India do?

Job number one is to make mass entrepreneurship aspirational for young people. Take a look at the big shift that happened in the 1990s. IT became aspirational. Why? Because people saw role models. Not only self-made billionaires like Narayana Murthy or Azim Premji, but you also saw the person next to you go get a great job and vault their way into the upper middle class in a very short period of time.

So, they saw successes and they thought, I can also do it. Many more people, the security guard's son, the *chowkidar's* daughter, did an IT course. It became aspirational. That's because people could see success.

What we are trying to do is find role models, local heroes that young people can relate to. How can we create a massive campaign that can make this aspirational and exciting not only for young people, but also for their families. Parents discourage their children. So we have to transform the mindsets of young people, their families and the environment.

Job number two. And this is really important. Go into schools and right from Class 8 onwards get children to not only think of entrepreneurship, but

do it. Mekin's non-profit, Udhyam, for instance, goes into schools, teaches children about business and gets them a loan of ₹10,000 to, say, launch a lemonade stand in the summer months, run it and return the loan at the end of it – and it has a 90 percent success rate.

Mekin is now involved with Manish Sisodia and from July Delhi schools are going to make entrepreneurship mandatory. Now 700,000 kids a year are going to be taken through the entrepreneurship curriculum which is modelled on pedagogy that Mekin has developed. So that will begin to change things.

And we are also doing measurement and evaluation in this experiment. What changed and how many more children decided to try their hand at entrepreneurship? Were you able to take that percentage from 2 percent to 10 percent to 18 percent?

How do you evaluate and then inspire other states to embrace this in a big way? Are private schools keen to include this? We are looking at 100,000 people. This will not happen quickly. We have said this is going to take 10 to 11 years but what we have seen on a limited scale are significant signs of

success. And the scale-up to Delhi schools is the giant one so all credit to Manish and the bureaucracy. I think they are pathbreakers.

The third big thing is to create spaces where you can become part of a cohort of young people creating their own thing. That's been the biggest success of China's mass entrepreneurship initiative. They have created tens of thousands of hubs where business incubation is happening. Just being part of a cohort of similar-minded people on the same journey gives confidence.

In those places can we provide assistance particularly where interacting with the government is a source of friction? That's why we work with a retired IAS secretary who is top-notch. He has agreed to work with us on how we can streamline those interfaces.

The models are probably going to be very different between peri-urban and urban.

Part of what we are trying to do in the next 24 months is to understand which are the different types of models out there that have a reasonable probability of success. How do we tweak them and figure out a way of franchising those models.

For instance, in a town like Satara if somebody has figured out a fairly effective model for incubation of these businesses, what is it that truly makes it work? We put that in a box that can be taken to other similar-sized towns.

Your presentation mentions at one point that a majority of these businesses in China are in urban settings. There is a huge explosion of urbanisation

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here as well but there is also a huge rural and peri-urban crisis.

The real crisis is rural and less so peri-urban. Bill Gates made the same point. He said that agriculture is still huge and you need to figure out what are the agriculture-related businesses that can be started. Focus on that and figure out how you can franchise them.

For instance, there are businesses that are common to any rural area. Like equipment rental. Somebody buys a tiller and then rents it out. Another is vermiculture. One person produces compost and sells it to everybody else. Another would be seeds. Agro-processing. Tomatoes is one of the most cyclical vegetables. Prices vary hugely. The farmer can decide that instead of selling his tomatoes, he is going to make sundried tomatoes and he has figured out demand in Bangalore. His price realisation goes up. Simple things, like small cold storages.

So these are the kind of opportunities we tend not to look at?

Bill said you should characterise the hundreds of businesses that could be agri-related and then find models that are working and get those people to build franchises. He felt that franchising propelled the US.

In any US city today 80 percent of businesses are actually chains and only 20 percent are local. In India, 95 percent are local. The chain opportunity is lost and we don't mean global chains. So if somebody has figured out the mini cold storage business, how does he franchise it? I think we have to identify and crack these models.

A lot of this is human-related. We know so little about our young people, especially in rural areas. We have preconceived notions of their aspirations and where they want to be. Is this a challenge?

It's a huge challenge. Typically most of our interventions, not just in India, but around the world, have been top down and what is called 'spray and pray'.

Let a thousand flowers bloom and something will become a tree. Successful businesses start with understanding their customers. They start by segmenting a disparate population and saying, okay, we are going to focus on this affluent segment or this age group.

We haven't done the same thing to your point: who are these young people, what are their aspirations and how do we segment them? Not everybody is cut out to be an entrepreneur. In any population, less than 10 percent is actually capable of the tenacity, risk appetite, and all those qualities.

We have designed research projects to actually address these things. Through psychometric and behavioural testing you can quickly assess if a young person is even cut out for this. Because, if I am not spending a disproportionate amount of effort on this is not a good thing. However, everybody will benefit from an entrepreneurial mindset.

So a lot of our research efforts in the first year and a half are on understanding these foundational things. Otherwise we will be, just like everybody else, trying things and hoping something will work. And that is what has not allowed us to really address the issue. ■



Wendell Rodricks led the protest

A Goan village fights for its 6 mango trees

Derek Almeida
Colvale (Goa)

IN the village of Colvale, which has been sliced into two by NH-66, there is an uneasy calm. Despite an assurance from PWD Minister Sudin Dhavalikar that six mango trees would not be felled for expansion of NH-66, Wendell Rodricks, well-known fashion designer and Padma Shri awardee, who led the protest to save the trees, is not completely satisfied.

In fact, he is angry at the unplanned development that has turned his once idyllic village into a semi-urban entity sans proper infrastructure.

The protest in Colvale began in the last week of February when excavators started cutting up chunks of the old roads close to the six mango trees. "These trees are nearly 200 years old and are a natural canopy," said Rodricks. "Traditionally, trees of this nature were planted at the entrance or exits of villages and Assonora and Tivim also have them. The mango trees are a cultural landmark. They are embedded in our collective memory."

This is not the first time that village groups are protesting against the felling of trees for expansion of the highway. Earlier, activists had protested against plans to cut down over 100 coconut trees lining the highway at Guirim which is around seven kilometres from Panaji on the road to Mapusa in North Goa. The alignment was adjusted to ensure that the trees were lined up along the median and on one side.

According to local media reports, around 3,577 trees will be chopped down to make way for the

expansion of NH-66 in North Goa alone. The new highway, which comprises two major bridges across the Mandovi and Zuari rivers, underpasses and flyovers, will have four lanes with service roads on either side. This essentially means six lanes cutting through highly populated areas, in which green areas are being sacrificed in the name of development.

When asked why the banner of protest was raised so late in the day, Rodricks said that was not correct. "Earlier, buses en route to Mumbai used to pass through our village. Then, in 1995, when there was talk of building a highway, my father and I protested because it meant the six trees would have to be cut down. Eventually, the two-lane highway was aligned with both lanes going around the trees on either side. Then, when plans for expanding the highway were being discussed, we were told that a bypass would be constructed along the Konkan railway via Rivora and the trees would not be cut down."

The village accepted this assurance. But in the last week of February it was noticed that the road on either side of the trees was being excavated, leaving the roots dangerously exposed. This rang alarm bells in the village and the protest began.

"When I called the contractor, he told me that these 12-metre-tall trees would be cut down to four metres. How can these old trees survive such an onslaught?" asked Rodricks.

He also pointed out that detailed plans regarding land acquisition in Colvale and alignment of the highway were never made public and this is one reason why the villagers were taken by surprise when expansion work began. "They have raped us



The six mango trees on a road that's been dug up

and used us," he lamented.

In a letter dated March 7, addressed to the president of India, prime minister, chief minister, Union minister of road transport, the state PWD minister and others, Rodricks listed the quantum of land (24.3 lakh sq m) given by Colvale for an industrial zone, central jail, irrigation canal, housing board, power grid and highway expansion, and explained how all these development projects have turned Colvale into a semi-urban sprawl. "How much more land can we give?" he asked.

The battle to save the six trees is not the only one being waged by the internationally acclaimed fashion designer. The possible demolition of an over 100-year-old chapel located near the highway has incensed villagers. Rodricks' letter to President of India, Ram Nath Kovind, and others has an attachment to prove that the chapel is over 100 years old.

But what is more worrisome is the fact that, once constructed, the six-lane highway will make it more difficult for people to cross to the other side of the village. "Why can't they build an underpass for us?"



A 100-year-old chapel faces demolition

asked Rodricks. "People have to cross the existing highway to go to the church, the temple and the school. How are they going to do it once it is expanded to six lanes?"

Rodricks' solution to the problem is simple: construct a Y-shaped column flyover which would save the trees, the chapel and provide easy crossings for villagers. But there has been no assurance till

date on these demands.

Rodricks is also at pains to explain that he or the village is not against development. "I am not saying, don't build a highway. I am not stupid. If you are not going to keep in mind the impact of the highway on locals, then what kind of development is this?"

Speaking to the media soon after the protests broke out, Dhavalikar said, "The trees near Colvale will not be cut. Some of these trees predate our grandparents and we will not permit anyone to touch these trees, neither engineers, nor contractors, nor consultants."

"Chief Minister Manohar Parrikar, Union Minister Nitin Gadkari and I have saved trees on the Guirim stretch in the past so we will ensure that the trees here (Colvale) will be protected," Dhavalikar had assured.

This assurance by the minister will ensure that the six mango trees will not be touched for now, but a permanent solution, which Colvale is looking for, will come only when a minor realignment of the highway is notified. Until then, even Rodricks will have to wait with bated breath. ■

Samita's World

by SAMITA RATHOR



WOMEN WORKERS TELL THEIR STORIES

‘My life changed after I joined the SEWA union’

SHREY GUPTA



Marty Chen discussing a point with women workers

Kavita Charanji
New Delhi

A panel discussion on March 7 at the India Habitat Centre in Delhi gave women from the informal sector a space to share narratives of their lives and express solidarity. Organised by the Indian wing of the global network, Women in Informal Employment: Globalising and Organising (WIEGO), the women worked in diverse occupations: as home-based workers, street vendors, construction workers, domestic workers and waste-pickers.

Informal workers account for over 90 percent of the country's workforce and half its GDP. Yet their contributions are not valued nor do their daily struggles for survival cause enough concern. They are stigmatised and harassed by authorities, while laws meant for their protection often go unimplemented. It is unions of women and collectivisation that is helping women find a voice and fight for their rights.

Savita, a home-based worker, gave a graphic account of her battle for survival in Savda Ghevra, a desolate resettlement colony on the Delhi-Haryana border. The family was forcibly relocated overnight from Paharganj to Savda in 2006 in the run-up to the Commonwealth Games. "Savda was a dense jungle and you could hardly see a soul for miles. There were no amenities like water, electricity or toilets. My five children were very small and my youngest daughter was merely eight months old. With only a tarpaulin for cover, the fear of wild animals would keep us awake all night," she recalled. Later, with a ₹7,000 loan at a hefty 10-15 percent rate of interest, the family finally built a tiny *jhuggi*. "When the children should have had good food, they had no food at all," she recalled.

At Savda, she and her husband, an electrician,

toiled in the fields as agricultural labourers. Between them they earned ₹100 to ₹150 a day. She would go to the fields with her eight-month-old daughter and two-and-a-half years old son in tow. Water was scarce. When the water tanker would arrive, fights would break out in the community and the police had to intervene.

She and her children now supplement the family's small income by stringing bead necklaces. But that adds just a little to the family kitty as she manages to earn merely ₹100 a day. There are other worries. She has loans to repay. She has pawned her meagre jewellery and may never see it again.

It is unions of women and collectivisation that is helping women workers find a voice and fight for their rights.

Thankfully, the Mahila Housing Sewa Trust came to Savda in 2008. Savita's husband has become a construction worker. Her work in the fields gets her enough flour for the household. She has taken a loan from the trust for a water pump, built a toilet and has a *pucca* house. The trust has also created awareness among the residents of Savda so that they can put pressure on the municipal and government authorities for rights like sanitation, water and drainage. Savita is now a block representative of the Mahila Mandal and residents collectively approach municipal authorities to press for their demands. Her four daughters are being educated — one is doing a course in fashion design.

Her 14-year-old son goes to a government boarding school in Ishapur village near Najafgarh. But livelihood is still a worry. "Livelihood is very important, without a livelihood I have nothing," she says.

The need for collective strength is crucial, said the women at the event. However, policies meant for the informal sector are not implemented. "Women have fought for positive regulations for street vendors and waste-pickers. But they continue to fight for implementation of these laws. Funds meant for workers just sit there with the Welfare Boards and informal worker organisations need to press on," said Marty Chen, co-founder and senior adviser to WIEGO, who moderated the discussion.

Street vendor Ushaben is vocal about the urgency for collectivisation. She was one of the vendors driven out from the Red Fort vicinity during a beautification drive by the government. Her husband was unemployed. She had a visually impaired and mentally challenged child to bring up. Driven from pillar to post, life changed after she became a worker with the Delhi branch of the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA), a cooperative of poor, self-employed women workers.

That has given Usha new strength. Fifteen to 20 years ago street vendors would drop their wares as soon as they saw the police or municipal authorities approach, she says. With organisational backing and the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014, the result of years of advocacy by NGOs, SEWA members are unafraid to go to the police if they face harassment, she says. Along with her work at SEWA she now plies her trade on Sundays at SEWA's Mahila Bazaar near Minto Road.

"My life has changed since I joined SEWA. I have passed Class 10 and intend to finish Class 12. Now I am a board member of SEWA's trade union. I mobilise women workers, try to learn a little English and in 2018 I went to South Africa," she says with pride. But there is a long haul ahead as the Act for street vendors is not always implemented. "Vendors still have to struggle to make a decent livelihood. Their wares are confiscated and they sometimes have to pay bribes," she says.

Hirawati, a community worker from Jagori, Jagruti Devi, a waste segregator, Guruvari Bai, a construction worker, Geeta, a domestic worker, and Sitara, a home-based worker, related personal stories of struggle and empowerment. Though they are members of organisations, they were unanimous that the government needs to be far more responsive to poor workers. Jagruti is concerned that she has to make repeated rounds of government offices for her pension, while education, livelihood, and better implementation of laws meant for their welfare count a great deal for the others.

Meanwhile, there are major concerns. Chen expresses trepidation over the new Labour Codes. In late 2014, the Indian government started the process of merging around 40 old labour laws into four larger labour codes — wages, industrial relations, social security and welfare, and occupational safety, health and working conditions. While simplification of existing labour laws seems good on paper, Chen is unsure of the direction this rationalisation will take for the informal workers. "We don't know how much will be diluted and how much will be strengthened," she says. ■

Khushi improves child health

Swapna Majumdar
Chittorgarh (Rajasthan)

*Machli jal ki rani hai
Jeevan uska pani hai
Haath lagao to dar jayegi
Bahar nikalo to mar jayegi
Andar dalo to tar jayegi*

TWELVE children between three and six years old recite this popular Hindi nursery rhyme about a fish in a sing-song voice, using their hands to illustrate their words. Five-year-old Dharma leads the group, his tiny hands mimicking the movements of a fish and its fate if taken out of water. As he gesticulates how the fish begins to swim again after being put back into water, his voice suddenly becomes high-pitched and loud. Immediately, all heads turn towards him as the children break into peals of laughter.

The day has begun on a cheerful note at the Gathlia Kheda anganwadi centre in Bhilwara district of Rajasthan.

"When children are happy and keen to learn, it motivates us to do better. The children want to come to the centre. This is why we have almost full attendance and retention," said Snehlata Sharma, anganwadi worker (AWW) at Gathlia Kheda anganwadi centre (AWC).

But it wasn't always like this. Anganwadi centres in Rajasthan have been plagued by poor attendance of children and even poorer retention. This undermined the objectives of the government's Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) programme to provide non-formal pre-school education and reduce maternal and childhood malnutrition through a network of community-level anganwadi centres, critical in a state like Rajasthan where there are 4,300 children, from six-month-old infants to five-year-olds, with severe acute malnutrition. But in many of these AWCs, a majority of the names of children are only on paper and anganwadi workers are unable to reach out to the children who need their services the most.

This is now changing thanks to a new collaboration between the state department of Women and Child Development, Rajasthan, and CARE India, a non-profit working for the underprivileged. Called Khushi, this early childhood care and education programme, developed by the non-profit, is doing wonders to bring children from three to six years old to anganwadi centres and ensure they stay for the entire four hours, all six days a week. In doing so, the children are benefiting from nutritious meals and activities that develop their cognitive skills.

Launched in 2016 by CARE India, the initiative has reached out to 541 anganwadi centres in Bhilwara and Chittorgarh so far. The programme, funded by Hindustan Zinc under its corporate social responsibility initiative, focuses on enhancing the knowledge and skills of anganwadi workers to engage with children better and encourage them to come regularly. In Chittorgarh, enrolment has more than doubled, going up from 31 percent to 80

percent over the past year.

Much of it is due to the Khushi cluster coordinators who ensure that AWCs open and close on time. They keep an eye on the attendance, retention and health status of children with the help of a specially developed app to monitor each AWC. Based on the data sent through this app, the programme monitors the growth and development needs of the children.

"In fact, some children have returned to the AWCs a few weeks after being pulled out by their parents and enrolled in private schools. They forced their parents to bring them back. This is one of our happiest achievements," said Akhilesh Dubey, programme manager, Khushi.

One of the biggest outcomes of increased attendance and retention has been the improved health of the children. Sharma, who has been

newborn care, health camps and home visits are conducted to assess the health of children. Approximately 2,500 children have undergone health check-ups and kitchen gardens have been started at 154 AWCs and homes of children identified as malnourished during such camps.

Teaching anganwadi workers new recipes using the take-home rations given to children at the centres has also contributed to better nutritional status as they pass on these tips to the mothers. So far, 40 recipes have been shared. "Earlier, we fed the take-home rations to the cattle. But after learning new ways to cook it and by adding it to *halwa* or *dal*, we have seen how it has benefitted the health of our children," said Sumitra Garg. Her son has been coming regularly to the anganwadi centre in Ghatiyawali, Chittorgarh, for the past two years.



The Khushi programme is bringing children back to anganwadi centres by improving the quality of care

working as an anganwadi worker for the past 22 years at the Gathlia Kheda centre, has witnessed the change. "They get hot meals cooked by Self-Help Groups (SHGs) of women. Many of the members of the SHG are mothers of the children enrolled at the anganwadi. This way we don't have to worry about the quality of the food," she said.

With one in five children being underweight in Rajasthan, combating malnutrition and undernutrition is an important aim of the initiative. Malnutrition in both Bhilwara and Chittorgarh districts is high. The percentage of children under five who are underweight is 44.8 percent in Bhilwara and 43.1 in Chittorgarh. (National Family Health Survey — 4)

Besides holding meetings for expecting mothers and community members to sensitise them to the advantages of exclusive breastfeeding and about

Garg is so happy with his nutrition and learning developments that she has brought her three-year-old daughter for enrolment too.

For new mothers like Puja Salvi, home visits by cluster coordinators like Rakshita Sharma in Ghatiyawali have proven to be a life saver in more ways than one. "My newborn son almost choked to death when my mother-in-law fed him cow's milk. Had it not been for the timely intervention by Didi who came to check on us, he may not have survived. It was also because of Didi that my underweight baby was identified as malnourished and sent to hospital. He recovered because she ensured he stayed until he got well," said Salvi.

Her baby is not the only one. Out of 379 severe acute malnourished children identified in the two districts in the past two years, Khushi has given 244 a new lease of life. ■

Shravasti takes OD head-on

Bharat Dogra
Lucknow

SHRAVASTI district is located in the eastern Terai belt of Uttar Pradesh, below the Nepal Himalayas. It has generally been known for very low human development indicators. But in recent years, officials with the support of voluntary organisations are overcoming this tag by achieving good results on sanitation.

Bairagijot is a village where initially there was a lot of resistance to toilets. Anju Chaturvedi, a member of the district-level resource centre for sanitation, says that she faced a lot of opposition from some villagers during her earlier visits. But they persisted and were able to spread some essential messages about the dire impacts of open defecation on human health, and the resistance began to recede. Today this village is mentioned as a place where the progress towards eliminating open defecation is satisfactory.

In Dindauli village, progress was relatively easier because of the support of the *pradhan*, Manoj Pandey. He says, and other villagers agree, that about 80 to 90 percent of households have been able to construct toilets while others will complete theirs soon. As villagers have shifted towards using toilets, Hamid Ali, a local resident, says the incidence of diarrhoea and vomiting has reduced. Krishna Kumari, an elderly lady who looks after an ICDS centre, says this has been a big blessing for women whose security and comfort levels have increased greatly.

Krishna Kumari adds proudly that she made an important contribution to the sanitation campaign with her songs and slogans. And she immediately breaks into song.

The same enthusiastic response towards improving sanitation can be seen in school. The headmaster of Dindauli school, Rakesh Tiwari, points out the many improvements being made in the school, which is an integrated campus that includes primary and middle school classes and an ICDS centre. A playground has been recently set up in a neglected area, classrooms are being painted brightly and now have learning materials, and adequate toilets have been provided. The panchayat has made funds available and takes a keen interest in improving the school, says Tiwari.

The upgradation in another school in Pandeypur village in Jharkusha block is even more impressive. The toilet block and water stations have been better built. A child-friendly toilet has been made separately for smaller children from Class I and Class II. The brightly painted walls not only help to create a cheerful environment but also have important educational content for children of various ages. Students here are well-informed about



Toilets and brightly painted walls



Residents and officials outside a newly renovated school



Drinking water has been provided

sanitation messages such as hand-washing. The head teacher, Anurag Pandey, is proud of his achievement and keen to listen to new ideas.

A key role in scaling up sanitation efforts in innovative ways has been played by the district coordinator of the Swachh Bharat Mission, Dr Rajkumar Tripathi. He is deeply committed to sanitation efforts, works hard and is keen to try out new ideas. Unlike some officials, he is willing to concede the shortcomings that exist, and enlist the support of those who can help resolve problems.

One problem is that contamination of water can occur in areas where the water table is very high, and so adequate care has to be taken, by using suitable technology and careful monitoring, to ensure that the rush to build toilets in these areas

does not lead to new problems.

Improving training can help too. The Aga Khan Foundation (AKF), supported by UNICEF, has played an important role in training panchayat *pradhans*, their secretaries and members of sanitation resource training centres on important issues related to sanitation, water and hygiene.

This training has been very useful in taking the sanitation campaign further at village level. Training related to Community-Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) especially has been very useful in overcoming the initial resistance in several villages.

Manoj Soni, a grassroots worker of the AKF, has been a part of the success story of villages like Dindauli. He says, "The CLTS helps us to make the sanitation effort a community effort. In addition, we monitor the situation carefully so that shortcomings can be identified and tackled at the right time."

Jairam Pathak is the overall coordinator of the AKF effort and has played an important role. He has used his IT skills to design a framework in which any shortcomings of rural toilets, village sanitation committees, and sanitation in schools, the ICDS and health centres can be identified using a set of indicators.

Grassroots workers like Soni can check these indicators on the basis of their observations. Then the data is analysed carefully by Pathak and shared with district authorities. Now new changes are being made so that activists like Soni can fill in the indicators on their smartphones, making the entire process easier.

District officials like Tripathi are appreciative of this help as it enables them to get a very realistic picture of the changes spread over a large number of villages on a continuing basis and this can be an important tool for making improvements.

The efforts in Shravasti are showing results precisely because there is room for learning from one another and pooling energy and resources for achieving good results. The success of villages like Dindauli owes a lot to the coordinated efforts of the administration, the panchayat, village committees and voluntary organisations.

At the same time, some serious problems remain. For example, government schools in villages do not have a sanitation employee. The panchayat sanitation employee or *safai karmi* is already overloaded with work and cannot attend to the additional responsibility of schools properly.

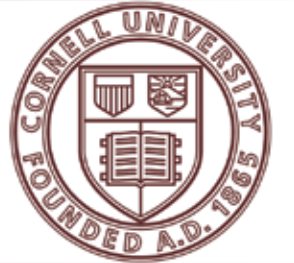
Another problem is that kitchens where mid-day meals are cooked do not meet the required norms of hygiene. The women cooks who have the onerous responsibility of feeding a large number of children are paid as little as ₹1,000 per month (₹33 per day). These problems need to be resolved soon. ■

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Women talk out domestic abuse



A Gender Sathi ties a rope across a woman to dramatically demonstrate how social norms restrict a woman's freedom

Sumita Kasana & Bharati Raghuvanshi
Narayanganj

RAJNI was in deep distress. Her husband and in-laws shunned her. Her father and brother had rebuked her. The villagers approved of the *jati* panchayat's decision to punish her because they agreed that she had brought shame to her family.

Rajni's fault was that she had dared to restrain her brother-in-law's hand when he was beating her. Her brother-in-law felt humiliated. He could not believe that a woman of his house would resist him. He had only been punishing her for her misconduct, he felt.

He took the matter to the *jati* panchayat which ordered Rajni to feed the entire village chicken and *roti*. She was made to publicly apologise to her brother-in-law. The *jati* panchayat's verdict was that a woman cannot hold her brother-in-law's hand, whatever the situation. Rajni had no choice but to succumb to their diktat. She took a loan from her brothers to arrange for the feast.

Three months later, a trained para-legal worker, Reena, came to the village, Udadna, to teach the women, mostly about issues of domestic violence. To support women in distress, Reena used to go to the block headquarters, the police station and other places. But her husband did not want her to go out for work, believing she had relationships with other men. He used to remain inebriated most of the time and, lately, had started beating and abusing her. When she resisted he called the *jati* panchayat.

Reena was fined ₹1,000 by the *jati* panchayat and told to respect her husband and follow his orders. She stopped going out for work. Her husband, however, didn't stop abusing her. In fact, he became more violent. And the leaders of the *jati* panchayat did not intervene on her behalf.

Such stories are fairly common at the grassroots. Reena is from Narayanganj block in Mandla district of Madhya Pradesh which lies in the vicinity of the Kanha National Park. Gonds and Baigas are the predominant tribes living there. Although it is believed that tribal women have more freedom, cases of violence against them are frequent and

community customs are primarily biased in favour of the men. The women themselves believe that there is nothing wrong with such norms. They succumb to atrocities without resistance, fearing repercussions if they were to resist.

To tackle domestic violence, PRADAN (Professional Assistance for Development Action) mobilised more than 10,000 women into Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in Narayanganj. The women further congregated in village-level clusters (VLCs) and block-level federations for mutual support and

Women did not want issues about their family and village to go to court. Some issues could be dealt with at village level.

solidarity. Women discuss and resolve issues related to their lives and livelihoods in such forums. An issue that often surfaced was violence against women. Many women had been victims of violence and abuse. The topic generated varying views from the women. Some waved it away, saying it was a common household problem and the women should think of their livelihoods instead. This is the fate of women, we should just bear it, was their response.

But other women said, domestic violence isn't only about our rights but also about equality and respect. If there is no equality, what is the point of such meetings? Finally, it was decided that domestic violence needed wider discussion with SHGs and at cluster meetings.

PRADAN trained selected women as Gender Sathis in Narayanganj. Topics such as gender and sex, gender and patriarchy, and gender and violence were discussed and debated. The Gender Sathis created awareness. Women who would earlier shy away from discussing these matters now found a

safe space in the SHGs and the VLCs to talk openly about such issues.

Gender Sathis reached out to women who were suffering silently. Among them was Reena. Encouraged, she started working as a para-legal worker again. She knew the law. She knew that whatever was happening with her was wrong. Finding support from other women, she filed an FIR under Section 498A of the IPC (Indian Penal Code), a non-bailable offence. Her husband was immediately jailed.

Due to pressure from her relatives and the villagers, Reena withdrew the case after a month. Overwhelmed by the experience, her husband mended his ways. He no longer interfered in Reena's work.

Reena's case was highlighted as a success story. If she could stop violence against her, why couldn't the others? Taking their case to the *jati* panchayat served no purpose. In fact, the panchayat's support of the men and penalisation of the women hiked the men's impunity. Taking up the matter legally, through the police and the courts, could be an alternative solution.

But whereas women like Reena, who were more exposed to the outside world, could take their case to the police, it wasn't easy for other women to do so. First, they would be dependent on others for support. Fighting legally involved the hassles of visiting the police station, going to court, bribing, and so on. Officials weren't always cooperative or sensitised to handle such cases. Moreover, such steps meant facing the ire of their family members. Women wanted to live peacefully with them. They did not want issues about their family and village to go to court. Also, all cases were not of violence. There were varied issues, which could be better dealt with at the community or village level.

Apart from the *jati* panchayat, there was also the Shaurya Dal at village level, comprising five women and five men. This group had been promoted by the Madhya Pradesh government. Members of the Shaurya Dal were selected by the gram sabha. Their role was to curb violence and atrocities against women and girls, with the philosophy that the solution to such problems lies within the community. But the women were unaware of the Shaurya Dal.

PRADAN, with the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) and Jagori, designed a rigorous training programme to sensitise Shaurya Dal members about gender and sex, patriarchy, violence, relevant laws, constitutional rights, provisions like the Domestic Incident Report.

Many cases were taken up, analysed and options decided on. Sensitising men, role reversals and constructive dialogue had a positive impact. The Shaurya Dal was exposed to the police station, the block and district headquarters, and the Women and Child Development department.

Eventually, revamping the Shaurya Dal seemed a better strategy. ■

(Names of the women have been changed.)
Sumita Kasana is executive, Research and Advocacy, at PRADAN.
Bharti Raghuvanshi is a PRADAN executive based in Narayanganj block.



Antu Pallippadan in his dense jackfruit orchard

Shree Padre
Angamali

ANTU Pallippadan's jackfruit farm is a sight to behold. It has 400 jackfruit plants standing in close proximity on just one acre. Typically, jackfruit plants begin to provide fruit only from the third or fourth year and yields stabilise from the fifth or sixth year. Pallippadan's wondrous plants are only two years old, yet they yield eight to 15 fruits each.

Pallippadan's plantation, Paduva Jackfruit Farm, is in Edakunnu, 40 km from Ernakulam in Kerala. A high-density jackfruit plantation like this one is unusual. The only place in India which has jackfruit plantations is probably Panruti in Cuddalore district of Tamil Nadu.

Fifty-year-old Pallippadan used to run a plant nursery. He says he has started earning a good income now from his plantation. He has been selling jackfruit since December. So far he has sold two tonnes but expects to sell five tonnes altogether this calendar year. He will earn, according to his calculations, ₹5 lakh from just one acre of jackfruit plants.

Pallippadan has opted for a jackfruit variety intriguingly called Thailand Pink. Its forte is that it bears fruit twice a year, if not more. So, during jackfruit's off-season last year, from September to February, when prices climb to ₹50 per kg, Pallippadan offloaded his jackfruits and earned

Antu's jackfruit hotspot

more. The price of jackfruit also increased because of its newly acquired status — the Kerala government declared it the state fruit last year.

An income of ₹5 lakh from an acre of jackfruit is unheard of. In fact, if Pallippadan trees don't catch



Bulbs of the Singapuri Wada variety of jackfruit

Antu has opted for a jackfruit variety called Thailand Pink. Its forte is that it bears fruit twice a year, if not more.

phytophthora fungal disease in the monsoon months, he could even earn ₹8 lakh, he says.

Thailand Pink, probably from Thailand, is the latest craze among jackfruit farmers in Kerala. Its nearest rival is Singapuri Wada, a local variety from Maharashtra; which is better is likely to become a topic of intense debate among farmers and scientists. A number of other varieties have also been floated by the University of Agricultural Sciences in Bengaluru.

HIGH-DENSITY FARM: Jackfruit plantations are actually a new phenomenon in the southern states. "Since around five years, in Karnataka's five to six drier districts, not less than 1,000 hectares of jackfruit plantations have come up," says Dr V.S. Hittalmani, a well-known retired horticultural scientist. But these plantations space their plants at least 8/8 metres from one another.

On Paduva Jackfruit Farm, plants are packed tightly together at only eight feet from one another. There is 10 to 12 feet of space between rows of trees. This kind of density would have required four acres if the accepted norm of spacing trees by 8/8 metres were followed.

"If there hadn't been floods last August, these trees would have grown to double their height," says Pallippadan. The plants were submerged for five days. "At that time I was getting my first crop. A few bunches of fruit were dangling from most of my

Continued on page 16

Continued from page 15

plants. We feared they would all die. Luckily, only 50 plants died." The other plants slowly recovered. It was the next crop that Pallippadan started selling last December.

Farmers prefer Thailand Pink for many reasons. First, if managed well, it starts fruiting the very next year. Second, it yields fruit at least twice a year. Claims that it bears fruit 365 days a year are a gross exaggeration but the variety does provide some fruit almost every month. Third, fruits are small, just four to eight kg, convenient for a small family.

Nobody knows the original name of Thailand Pink. It is said that the late Sundara Rama Raju, a nursery owner from Andhra Pradesh, first brought it from Thailand. It caught the attention of nurseries in Kolkata which started growing it and selling it for just ₹30 to ₹40 per graft.

Thailand Pink's popularity began to snowball. Nurseries in Kerala realised the variety would sell. To market Thailand Pink they thought of catchy names like Vietnam Early and Vietnam Super Early. The carpels of this variety are yellow.

In Kerala and Karnataka grafts of Thailand Pink sell for ₹100 to ₹200. A controversy recently erupted on social media when a farmer from South Kerala claimed that he had developed a new jackfruit variety which he had named Ayur Jack. He started selling grafts for ₹600 to ₹1,000 each. Those who saw them said it was just Thailand Pink by another name.

Pallippadan claims that his farm has one of the oldest Thailand Pink trees in Kerala. Eight years ago, he says, two French businessmen told him that Thailand Pink was available in Kolkata and that it was a dwarf variety which yielded fruit through the year. So Pallippadan procured 100 grafts of Thailand Pink from Kolkata. The venture failed. Even after three years, they didn't yield fruit.

But he tried again this time, buying more expensive grafts. He planted 400 grafts in December 2016 on a paddy field he had leased for three years. He planted the grafts very close together, he says, on the advice of the person he bought them from. "He told me these are dwarf plants and don't need much space," says Pallippadan.

His paddy field is in a marshy area with a perennial stream running alongside. A bund made for a banana plantation that existed earlier was already in place. The place is moist and no irrigation is required.

Pallippadan orchard and nursery now attract visitors who buy the fruit. Kochi airport is just a 30-minute drive away. A local exporter regularly buys jackfruit from Pallippadan to export to the Gulf. The plantation yields less fruit only in June and July, says Pallippadan. "Otherwise, we get fruit throughout the year." Impressed by Thailand Pink's performance, he has planted another 800 plants nearby, using buds from his older plants.

"When I started I didn't have much information on spacing and other farm operations. But, looking

back, I think I should have spaced the plants wider. At that time many people made fun of me for raising such a dense jackfruit orchard. Now they get dumbstruck, seeing the outcome," says Pallippadan.

SCIENTIFIC OPINION: Pallippadan might have erred in some agronomical aspects of planting but his achievement is that he proved that a dense jackfruit orchard can flourish and give decent returns from the third year itself. By the fifth year yields stabilise, according to horticulturists and academics.



Antu Pallippadan with his friends holding sliced jackfruits

Dr K.C. Shashidhar Kumber, head, Agriculture Engineering Department, University of Agriculture and Horticulture, Shimoga, says: "Of course, spacing will shrink as the plant grows. But he need not worry too much. Farming is not a forestry exercise. You can harvest your crop for the first few years and then, as spacing shrinks, you can cut alternate trees."

"Jackfruit requires well-drained soil. Yields could get affected once the roots of the tree go deep from the raised bunds," says Dr Shyamala Reddy, associate professor, University of Agriculture Sciences, Bengaluru, who is a jackfruit expert. "Since this is a dwarf variety it is suitable for high-density planting though spacing should be 20/20 feet."

Dr Reddy says Thailand Pink also needs thinning and pruning, or else fruits will become smaller and of poor quality. The plant, too, will become less productive over a period of time. Also, this variety requires more nutrition, especially potash.

Thailand Pink's main competitor, Singapuri Wada, originated from Prakash Sawant's farm in Wada, Maharashtra. Which one is better? "That's a difficult question," says Gururaj Balthillaya, a grafting expert from Athrady, near Manipal in Karnataka. "There is a very slight difference between them."

The point is that nobody has raised a high-density plantation with Singapuri Wada. It also hasn't caught the attention of graft experts in Andhra or Kolkata the way Thailand Pink did.

But both are vulnerable to fungal disease especially in heavy rainfall areas like the Karnataka coast, warns Balthillaya who recommends a fungicide spray to keep the disease at bay. The downside is that farmers aren't mentally prepared to spray medicine on jackfruit. They see it as a zero attention crop.

"In my opinion, Thailand Pink makes a better vegetable. When it comes to fruit, Singapuri Wada scores higher. It is sweeter. Its carpels range from light yellow to saffron. Both have less latex. Singapuri Wada, however, has fewer carpels," says Balthillaya.

Jacob Chalissery, a fruit farmer from Bengaluru, has a jackfruit plantation near Belthangady. "The Thailand Pink variety is good for domestic consumption but not for commercial purposes. Its carpels are thin and soft. Peeling the bulb is not easy. When better varieties come up, it won't be able to compete."

SHREE PADRE

Gabriel S. Veigas, a retired forest officer, is a pioneer in jackfruit plantations. His 10-acre farm in Dakshin Kannada district has just started yielding fruit. "Antu Pallippadan's experiment is worth following. It illustrates that jackfruit farming can be a serious profession," he says.

LOCALS ARE TOUGHER: The downside of varieties like Thailand Pink or Singapuri Wada is that they are more vulnerable to disease.

"In coastal areas, varieties from low rainfall regions like Bengaluru UAS' Swarna, Lalbagh Madhura, Singapuri Wada and Thailand Pink are affected by *phytophthora* fungal disease. In contrast, local varieties like Prashanthi and Ananya remain unaffected. Farmers with jackfruit plantations should not forget this," says Veigas.

Dr Ganeshan Karunakaran, head, ICAR-IIHR's Central Horticultural Experiment Station (CHES) in Hirehally, praises the Thailand Pink variety. "Undoubtedly, Thailand Pink has superior genetic character. It has proved its mettle in different climatic zones by retaining its attributes. When local varieties begin flowering, Thailand Pink is ready with fruits."

His own trial plot in CHES, Hirehally, has varieties like Mankale Red, Lalbagh Madhura, Swarna and Thailand Pink. But only Thailand Pink yielded fruit in the second year itself.

Dr Karunakaran says Thailand Pink is suitable for high-density plantations but his choice for spacing would be 20/20 feet between plants. To ensure adequate sunshine, he recommends regular pruning.

"Jackfruit is mainly a stem bearer and not a terminal bearer like avocado or mango or guava. The growth of its canopy should not be restricted. Regular pruning will give the plants much required rest. If trees are planted too closely you will get a cloudy micro climate which will encourage pests like the fruit moth and fruit borer," he says.

He advises training of branches when plants are young. The branches should be trained so that they spread out in three directions. A rope and a wooden stick can be used. The lowest branches should be one and a half feet above the ground and the second rung of branches should be another one and a half feet from the first rung. At CHES he has limited the height of jackfruit trees to just six feet, which, he says, is the right height. ■

Contact: Antu Pallippadan - 096335 15131



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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Chikoo Parlours are dotting highways along the North Konkan coast in Maharashtra

THE CHIKOO IS RISING!

Farmers make it profitable with parlours, products

Shree Padre
Bordi

THE chikoo is rising and how! 'Chikoo Parlours' offering milkshakes, ice-cream, sweets, pickles, chips and more made from the fruit are slowly dotting highways along the North Konkan coast in Maharashtra.

The coastal villages of Bordi and Gholvad in Dahanu taluk of Palghar district in Maharashtra are the epicentre of chikoo cultivation in India. Chikoos from here are unique and the Gholvad chikoo was awarded a Geographical Indicator (GI) tag two years ago.

For the longest time, growers have been reconciled to getting whatever they are given when their chikoos are sold at the Vashi wholesale market in Navi Mumbai. Middlemen have called the shots. But with value addition and the setting up of the parlours, growers hope to reorder an unfair arrangement and make chikoo cultivation more profitable.

The first Chikoo Parlour, with the tagline, *Sabh Kuch Chikoo*, came up in Bordi in September 2016. The second one in Haloli is on NH-8 which connects Ahmedabad and Mumbai. The third and fourth are at a two-km distance from each other on the Mumbai-Nashik highway, in Vasind and Asangaon, respectively. None of the Chikoo Parlours is in crowded city markets, but along

thinly populated highways. They attract people driving past.

"We aren't into mass production. We produce for the masses," says Mahesh Parshram Churi, 65, who has invested in the Chikoo Parlour idea and grown it as a business. "We wanted to show farmers a new way of augmenting their income."

There are about 800 chikoo families of growers in Bordi and Gholvad who own an average of five acres of chikoo orchards. Churi has five acres of his own. Siddharth Patel, a farmer and entrepreneur in Bordi, says at least 15 to 20 tonnes of chikoo travel to Vashi market in Navi Mumbai for about half the year. Since the fruit has a very short shelf life — about two or three days — farmers are compelled to offload it quickly. They get paid between ₹8 and ₹20 per kg though in Mumbai chikoo sells for around ₹40 per kg.

Churi is an electrical engineer. He shifted to Mumbai but because of his love for his village, he set up Sumo Instruments, an electronics manufacturing industry which makes measuring instruments, in Bordi. Although he earned well from his business, he wanted chikoo cultivation to prosper because it was the mainstay of people in Bordi.

"We want to make Bordi an icon for chikoo products," says Churi.

The chikoo-growing villages have shown determination to free themselves from the clutches of middlemen. Churi's and a few parallel ventures are sure to

take the chikoo's fortunes to new heights.

For many years farmer families in Bordi and Gholvad made chikoo chips, powder and pickle, and sold them to tourists. They are now being encouraged to improve quality and move up the value chain.

Siddharth Patil, 32, has 23 acres of chikoo and a seven-acre mango orchard. He has invested ₹1 crore and set up an agro-industry called Aryas Foods.

And Hillzill which makes a range of fruit wines also manufactures a chikoo wine, the only one of its kind in the world.

THE CHIKOO TRAIL: The chikoo tree is native to Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean islands. In English, it is called mud apple, nose berry and sapodilla (*Manilkara zapota*). Its other Indian name is sapota. Chikoo is a major commercial crop in India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia and Malaysia. The tree is fast-growing and resistant to drought or strong winds. It flourishes well even in dry, arid regions.

It was Sir Dinshaw Maneckji Petit, a Parsi textile magnate, who first imported chikoo plants into India and planted them in his garden in Mumbai. In 1901, his estate manager, Ardeshir Irani, took some seedlings to Bordi, 130 km from Mumbai, and sowed them in his one-acre plot in the village. The chikoo plants thrived and became the main crop of the entire Dahanu taluk.

According to the horticulture department's figures, the total productive area under chikoo cultivation in Dahanu taluk is 3,850 hectares and the annual yield is 120,312 tonnes.

Traditionally, farmer families have been turning chikoo into chips, powder and pickle. But they would use considerable sugar for the powder, had poor production standards and there was no proper packaging to speak of.

Churi thought converting chikoo into powder of high quality without added sugar would increase its marketability. This would attract the health-conscious customer.

"We did all the experimentation with chikoo, using the profits from our electronic products company in Bordi," recalls Mohak Churi, Mahesh's eldest son. They took samples of the powder to Mumbai and Pune, hoping it would be well-received. The response was lukewarm and they ended up with a loss of ₹1 lakh to ₹2 lakh.

But Churi didn't give up. He reckoned that the dehydrated powder was a new product that people didn't know of. So why would they buy it? Instead of trying to sell chikoo powder, if they could create finished products with it they would attract consumers and local people would see the possibilities of value addition.

It was then that the idea of the Chikoo Parlour came to Churi. Two of his relatives, Deepak Save and Sandeep Save, were in the catering business. They advised him to invent a range of chikoo sweets. Churi brought in a sweet-making expert, Hari, from Mathura.

After much experimentation, about a dozen chikoo delicacies were developed: chikoo roll, chikoo *katri*, chikoo roll cut, chikoo *peda*, chikoo double decker, chikoo *kandi peda*, chikoo *mahim halwa*, and so on. Samples were distributed among relatives who appreciated them.

A chikoo factory was set up near Sumo Instruments in Bordi. Mahesh's younger son, Subak Churi, 28, and nephew, Pranit Raut, 38, look after raw material procurement and production. Subak has a management degree and Raut is an automobile engineer who has been working at Sumo Instruments for the past 15 years.

The chikoo powder, the base material for all chikoo products, has no added sugar, artificial flavours or preservatives. The sweets, which have a shelf life of six to 45 days, have added sugar, but no artificial flavours or preservatives. The *halwas* can be kept for one and a half months. Prices range from ₹80 to ₹1,200 per kg.

"To serve sweets as fresh as possible, we make them every two days and supply

them to all our outlets," says Subak.

Chikoo is available almost throughout the year at Bordi. But there are two important seasons. The first is from December to March and the second from May to July. Chikoo Parlour products are made from ripened fruits which fall to the ground. Schoolchildren collect the fruits and bring them to the company's processing unit. "We pay a consistent rate of ₹13 to 15 per kg while in the local market the price fluctuates from ₹5 to ₹20," says Churi.

Chikoo powder is made during the fruit's best season which is from December to March. The factory processes 300 kg of ripe fruit every day. Twenty to 30 tribal women are engaged in the pre-processing process of cutting and drying the fruit.

Chikoo is manually cut into slices and then dried in small solar driers. The fruit is not peeled. "Peeling is a laborious process. Besides, the skin has many nutrients," says Mohak. The company has made its own chikoo powdering machines. Dehydrated slices have to be ground two to three times to get dry powder.



Women workers at the Chikoo Parlour factory in Bordi



Mahesh Churi



Mohak Churi



Subak Churi

The two chikoo-growing villages of Bordi and Gholvad have shown determination to free themselves from the clutches of middlemen. A range of business ventures aim to take the chikoo to new heights.

The women are paid ₹10 per kg for slicing. They work from 9 am to 12 noon or 2 pm, depending on the workload. Each woman slices on average about 20 kg of chikoo. Manual slicing is preferred because the slices are evenly cut, says Mohak. About 100 kg of fresh fruit produces 20 kg of powder in five days.

The finished chikoo powder (they call this granulated powder chikoo rawa) is sold for ₹1,000 per kg and has a shelf life of six months. If packed properly, it can last more than a year, but six months is safer.

The chikoo *kaju* roll, which sells about 100 kg a month, is the most popular product. The second is the double decker *burfi* made with buffalo milk. Chikoo powder, chikoo milkshake powder and chikoo pickle (*chunda*) are also popular. *Chunda* is most popular in Gujarat. Churi's Chikoo Parlour's chikoo *chunda* is available in both sweet and spicy forms. All these products can be kept for six months.

A FAMILY AFFAIR: The Chikoo Parlour business is a family business. Mahesh and Mohak look after marketing from their head office at Borivil in Mumbai.



The Chikoo Parlour at Bordi's annual Chikoo Festival which is growing in popularity

Subak and Raut manage production at the Bordi factory. Mahesh's wife, Ratnamala, helps in managing their stall at chikoo fests. Mohak's wife, Pranjal, takes care of digital publicity, including their Facebook page.

"The *mithai* business, like the milk business, needs constant attention to detail," says Mohak. Mahesh monitors distribution but a heart problem he developed at the young age of 49 means he cannot exert too much.

The enterprise doesn't have many unsold products. "We always produce as per requirement. We have software which gives us complete data of sales and stocks so we take decisions accordingly," says Mohak. "Every parlour has a staff of two or three people and is fitted with CCTVs. From our Mumbai office, we can monitor every detail and track a batch of products if there is a complaint."

Most customers opt for the chikoo milkshake and then try some of the sweets. The Chikoo Parlour on the highway between Ahmedabad and Mumbai attracts Gujaratis who are known to be fond of sweets. In fact, 70 percent of customers buy the takeaway pack, says Mohak.

"We haven't spent a single rupee on media or advertisement so far," says Mahesh. "We don't mind slow growth. Instead of spending on advertisements, we have tried to strengthen our products, their quality and packing. This way, by word of mouth, we are sure we will enlarge our business."

CHIKOO FESTIVAL: Since 2013, Bordi has been holding an annual two-day Chikoo Festival in the last week of January or in early February. This year, the festival had 250 stalls. The stall fee is between ₹10,000 and ₹14,000. "Yet, all stalls were booked within a few hours," says Prabhakar Save, 70, founder and former president of the Konkan Bhumi Agri-Tourism Cooperative Society which organises the festival with the Department of Tourism. This year the festival attracted 140,000 visitors from Mumbai, Pune, Nashik and towns in Gujarat, and earned revenue of ₹1.7 crore over two days.

The Chikoo Parlour stall at the festival notched up sales of ₹7 lakh. The festival has helped the parlour establish its identity and



A range of sweets made from chikoo



A young visitor enjoys a glass of chikoo milkshake



promote its products.

The Churis have also been trying to promote their products globally and across India. NRIs in the US, for instance, buy the chikoo powder and take it back. The Chikoo Parlour gets orders from Mumbai, Hyderabad, Delhi and other cities. The products are packed and sent through courier.

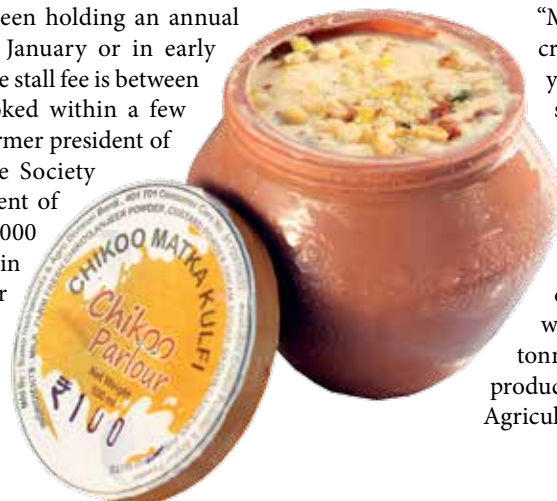
Chikoo fruit is available in Mumbai through the year. Generally chikoo milkshake is made with fresh chikoo. There is a slight difference in taste between milkshake made with fresh fruit and milkshake made with chikoo powder.

"Milkshake made with fresh fruit is watery. To thicken it, ice-cream parlours add custard powder. But with chikoo powder, you get thick milkshake that is more authentic in taste," says Mohak.

"We had developed some 40 chikoo products. Eventually we selected only 25 because some would have had a very short shelf life and others would be expensive to make," says Raut.

The company has been steadily increasing production of chikoo *rawa* over the years. In 2016-17, one tonne of *rawa* was produced. The very next year production rose to five tonnes. During this chikoo season as much as 10 tonnes was produced and the company's turnover touched ₹1 crore.

Agricultural scientists are upbeat about Churi's enterprise and see



From chips to wine

FOR several years Bordi and Gholvad villages in Dahanu *taluk* of Palgarh district cultivated chikoo and made a few chikoo products, selling to tourists who came to admire the scenic stretch of coastline in Maharashtra.

Now a sea change is taking place. The two villages are attracting enterprises keen to process chikoo and other fruit. The only chikoo wine in the world is being manufactured here. Small producers are being encouraged to make quality products that can be branded and sold to bigger markets.

Sharada Gajanan Patil from Bordi, now in her mid-seventies, pioneered the shift to value-added products made from chikoo. She was the first to invent chikoo powder. She wrote a book in Marathi detailing how 100 chikoo products could be made. The Patil family trained thousands of housewives to make chikoo products. They now sell these under the brand name of Amrut Madhuri.

Anjali Sachin Patil, 45, another small producer, has been making chikoo chips, pickle, *burfi*, *wadi*, powder and chocolate for 10 years under the brand name of Ruchira. There are at least 70 such farmer families doing value addition.

Prabhakar Save, founder and former president of the Konkan Bhumi Agri-Tourism Cooperative Society, says they are encouraging small producers to obtain the FSSAI licence and move up the value chain.

"We need small driers to prevent wastage since from May 15 it starts raining," says Save. The total quantity of value-added products by village households is about 150 to 200 tonnes. A chikoo farm of one acre produces six tonnes of fruit.

With a background in marketing in Gujarat, Siddharth Patil has set up Aryas Foods which produces the Chipzee brand of dehydrated fruit products. Chikoo chips and powder are packed in aluminium foil with nitrogen packing, a first for any local product here. Equipped with a 500-kg capacity solar drier, he also manufactures dehydrated mango, pineapple, garlic powder, dehydrated carambola, dehydrated coriander leaves, *kasuri*



Hillzill Wines makes the only chikoo wine in the world

methi, and so on. Currently, he is testing the market.

Another notable achievement is the production of fruit wines in Dahanu *taluk* by a local farmer's company, Hillzill Wines, under the brand name of Fruzzante. Six fruit wines are made — chikoo, carambola, mango, pineapple, honey dessert, and spices. Shrikanth Patil, 66, and daughter Priyanka have developed these wines. Their premium product, chikoo wine, is priced at ₹255 for 330 ml.

"We are the only producers of chikoo wine in the whole world. We have sold 45,000 bottles in about 120 retail outlets in Mumbai, Pune and Nagpur in the past three years," says Nagesh Pai, Priyanka's husband.

They found it tough to sell chikoo wine initially. Nobody wanted to try it. "We conducted a series of tasting sessions and winery events to introduce our product. Once people tasted it, many of them liked it. We now have regular customers," says Nagesh. But taxes are very high. As much as ₹87 out of ₹255 for a bottle goes in taxes. Hillzill Wines plans to introduce strawberry and apple wine shortly.

Apart from tourists, small producers can sell through Maharashtra's *grahak* panchayat which buys directly from farmers and sells to local

customers. Siddharth Patil hopes to tap this market and export his products as well.

Chikoo activity has also boosted tourism. Bordi and Gholvad have orchards of chikoo, coconut, mango and litchi. This makes a lovely man-made forest. About 50 families have built tiny cottages for tourists and offer farm tours along with fresh 1-kg packs of chikoo to carry home.

A 20-member committee from these chikoo villages is now trying to get a common facility centre for chikoo. A National Research Centre (NRC) for chikoo is to be set up at Palghar to provide scientific and standardised solutions for chikoo cultivation. The Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) had put forth a proposal to the government to set up a centre here but it seems to have been put in cold storage.

For Chikoo Festival contact: prabhakar@savefarm.in

this as an example of how farmer incomes can be increased.

"We farmers must realise that selling fresh fruit gives us a limited income. The market for seasonal fruits is erratic and drops during a bumper crop. A large part of the crop must be converted into value-added products. These could be promoted also as health foods and nutraceuticals," remarks Ajit Shirodkar, chairman, Western Ghats Kokum Foundation.

"The Western Ghats coastal region could pioneer value addition in chikoo, mango, coconut, jackfruit, kokum, cashew apple and karonda," says Shirodkar and adds that his foundation would be happy to offer incentives to such enterprises.

Dr K.P. Vishwanatha, vice-chancellor, Dr Balasaheb Sawant Konkan Krishi Vidyapeeth, Dapoli, has offered all technical help to the Churis for processing and value addition for chikoo and other fruits.

"Mahesh Churi's enterprise offers new hope for farmers — fruits get value addition, local employment is created and a new agro-business comes up," says Dr Vishwanatha. "The addition of tourism and events like the Chikoo Festival has to be applauded."

The Churi family has plans to diversify into more fruits. They are experimenting with guava and *sitaphal* (custard apple), making new products with the two fruits and giving them to relatives to taste. Their dream is to make the village of Bordi a tourist destination known for chikoo products. ■

Chikoo Parlour — +91 92245 92529; chikooparlour@gmail.com; Website: <http://chikooparlour.com>



The Gholvad chikoo has been recognised with a Geographical Indicator

‘There has been CSR learning and course correction by companies’

Civil Society News
New Delhi

IN an unequal world, it has become increasingly important for companies to do their bit by society. Some of them have a long tradition of making social investments. Others have been swept along with the fairly recent tide of corporate social responsibility (CSR). Figuring out what to do and how to do it well can be confusing since it often means going beyond core business concerns. Learning from the experience to become more caring and connected is yet another kind of challenge.

Awards for CSR projects have become a useful way of showcasing good work. They help ferret out outliers who might otherwise have gone unnoticed. They also put the spotlight on the achievements of long-time performers. They promote shared learning and collaborations. In the standards they set, awards also help define what is aspirational.

The FICC Awards this year covered a range of interesting initiatives. From the long list of companies that applied, the winners were Jindal Steel and Power, Ashok Leyland, Mahindra and Mahindra, Nuvoco Vistas, Vedanta, ONGC, Mytrah Energy and Syngene International.

Civil Society spoke to Uma S. Seth, director, CSR FICCI, and Nomenita Chetia, joint director, CSR FICCI, on the process by which the companies were chosen and what the awards reveal about trends in industry.

It's interesting how many awards there are for CSR these days. But yours must be among the very earliest?

Uma Seth: Yes. I don't know of any other award that was set up way back in 1999. So I don't think there was any CSR award in the country at the time when we started out. It's still going strong and even now, very coveted companies want to be acknowledged. Obviously because we're a national chamber. Our process, of course, is very transparent and rigorous.

The way the awards are given must have changed over the years?

US: Yes, it has. After the 2014 Companies Act came



Uma Seth and Nomenita Chetia

‘We had nine winners for projects ranging from women's empowerment to lake renewal, education, nutrition and livelihoods. Biocon adopted a lake in Bengaluru and cleaned it up.’

about and CSR became mandatory, we aligned ourselves with the Schedule 7 categories of the Act. So more people can now apply.

What do you mean, more people can apply?

US: As in there are more categories because Schedule 7 has something like 11 or 13 categories.

Nomenita Chetia: Earlier, it was on a triple bottom-line approach. It focused on the internal processes, human resources and inclusion as well. We assessed companies for transparency also.

As an industry organisation, what have you come to understand about companies and their social commitments from these awards?

US: The trend is definitely positive and progressive.

With the changes under the Companies Act, many more companies are doing CSR now than earlier. But, of course, there is a mix. There are those companies that have been doing CSR for a long time. They already have their processes together, they've evolved, they've learnt over the years.

For example?

US: There is ITC, Mahindra, the Aditya Birla Group — they've been doing this for a long time. So they've got their act together in the sense that there has been learning on the ground, resulting in course correction and extended projects.

Some other companies go year by year and sector by sector. But the more evolved companies stay vested. They could pick up one village and be vested there. And though there is an exit strategy



The Jubilant team receives its award from Union Minister Suresh Prabhu



Shallu Jindal receiving the award for Jindal Steel & Power

it's not as if at the end of the year they have to make an exit whether the community is ready or not.

We have a good mix of companies this year. We have Amazon at one end and Biocon (Syngene International) at the other.

NC: Yes, Indian companies are there.

US: You have Biocon, Aditya Birla Group, Renew Power, Mytrah, Jubilant.

What kind of projects won awards this time and why?

US: We had nine winners for projects ranging from women's empowerment to lake renewal, education, nutrition and livelihoods. They were varied and very interesting. Biocon adopted a lake in Bengaluru and cleaned it up.

NC: Amazon had a project on community care. So they had a holistic programme right from education to women's empowerment and livelihoods. And then they connected the beneficiaries to their own vendors to sell the products online. It is a 360-degree solution that they have provided to the community.

US: Ashok Leyland's project was very good. It provided remedial teaching to bring children on a par with the curriculum in government schools.

Like bridge schools?

US: It's not really a bridge school. It's within school hours. They've identified these children and there are one or two periods during which they work to integrate them. But that is not so much the fascinating part. What is interesting is the tracking mechanism to see if the children actually reintegrate. And if they do not they are taught again.

The programme as of now is till Class 8. But the children are tracked till the 10th board exams — how many opted for them and how they fared. This is an example of learning on the go or course correction. They have realised that they can't just let go of the children after Class 8. A programme on skilling has been added so that the children are tracked into early adulthood and employment or entrepreneurship.

And in nutrition? You mentioned nutrition.

NC: It's in Jhabua, Madhya Pradesh. MA

Knowledge, which is Moody's, is working with a tribal group to address the problems of malnutrition and maternal health.

US: There are companies which go to remote areas where access is difficult. For instance, ONGC runs a skilling programme for children affected by militancy in Baramulla in Jammu and Kashmir. Such companies are not just looking at areas around their plants where they may be comfortable. ONGC won an award.

Each year, how many awards do you give?

US: Roughly 120 companies apply to us every year. After the first desktop screening is done, we have a shortlist for which an on-site assessment is done. We have our assessment partners with us. We also assess some of the companies ourselves.

This year, from 100-odd companies, how many did it come down to?

US: There were nine winners and 32 companies were on the shortlist.

How do you decide the ones to shortlist? What are the indicators?

US: We have very strict parameters. The indicators are sustainability, annual spend and impact assessment. Is it too much money going into a small cause? Or is it a small amount of money making a big impact? Have you got a third party assessment done? Sometimes the application forms don't meet the basic criteria. That's the first level.

It is when you go into the field that you get the real picture. Sometimes, it exceeds what is written in the application and sometimes it doesn't match in the sense that it is less than our expectations. It happens both ways, which is why the field assessment is very important.

One also gets to assess employee involvement during a field visit. Sometimes, from the CEO to the president to the CSR manager and employees in general, everyone is involved. Then again, there are companies that sign a cheque and get an NGO to do the work. It is perfectly legal, but does such a company really deserve an award?

Suppose you have a company that has a really good project, a really impactful project, but the CEO does not have a clue. Yet you have a CSR

head doing a good job.

NC: It's not that the CEO has to be involved, but it is good if the CEO is involved.

US: They are not rejected on the basis that the CEO isn't involved or doesn't know.

What you're trying to see here is how closely integrated the project is with the whole management culture.

NC: CSR is nothing but the ethos of the company. How humane you are, how concerned you are about the issue. It matters a lot when we decide on taking that company to the second or third stage of the awards process.

US: In some companies the ethos is there throughout the company. These companies are very organic. It is a part of their culture.

NC: From small events that you get to see in the field, you get a sense of how involved the company is and how it is addressing the issue and collaborating with the community. These things matter a lot.

US: Many a time you'll see that an NGO is implementing the project but the CSR manager or maybe someone from HR or the team in general will make field trips every week even if it means long road journeys.

So it hasn't just been outsourced?

US: They want to sit with the NGO and know what the project is. It is not that the NGO will send reports and pictures and everyone will know that the money has been well spent. Biocon's publicly listed subsidiary, Syngene International, for example, cleaned the lake and the trash surrounding it. Then they wanted to put out floating rubber tubes, which had plants growing, both for beautification and for cleaning the water. The idea was from Japan, but to import the contraption from there would have been too expensive. So, the engineers at Biocon put their heads together and came up with a low-cost solution.

At which level were these activities being led?

US: The Biocon Foundation's head, Kiran
Continued on page 24

Continued from page 23

Mazumdar-Shaw is very involved in terms of community projects. She knows where she wants to work, what she wants to do. The involvement is from the top down. These are very interesting examples, because not everyone needs to be a CSR manager or social worker. There is managerial and technical expertise, as in the Biocon engineers stepping in, which can be tapped for a project.

Is the involvement of companies with government projects something you look at?

US: Yes, definitely. In areas like health and education you can't do isolated projects. You have to fit into the National Health Mission or the education programme of the government. You can't have a parallel set-up running. Companies that work to strengthen primary health centres have to collaborate with state governments.

NC: It is one of the most important indicators.

US: Even if you have a standalone project you finally have to integrate it with the government's programme. The education project I was talking about basically comes under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan.

'If there is a govt facility or scheme available, you might as well utilise it. There have been many success stories.'

You don't want to reinvent the wheel. If you have a PHC available but it's not running up to the mark, you use your CSR money to upgrade the infrastructure, invest in training and get the community involved. There is no point in having a private set-up when there is a government facility available.

The same goes for education and for so many other things. If there is a government facility or scheme available, you might as well utilise it. There have been many success stories.

I'll give you an example from Swachh Bharat. The government gives you ₹10,000 per toilet. Some companies are apprehensive about the fact that you need to retrieve that ₹10,000 and there is paperwork to be done. But a couple of years back, one of the projects we saw used its CSR money as a corpus and built the first set of toilets and then filled out forms to claim the money, which came after a year and was put back in the corpus. So there are examples like that where companies are very smartly working around with what the government has to offer.

Do you go back and see what happens with your awardees?

US: Definitely. It is a network. It's not just the awards. Through the year, there is a lot of interaction. After three years, they are eligible to apply again. In a separate category they can apply the next year. ■



Salma Gul and saris with Afghan embroidery

Refugee enterprise is Afghan by design

Rwit Ghosh
New Delhi

SALMA Gul, 32, lives in a small *barsati* in an inconspicuous lane in Delhi. An Afghan refugee, she fled her country in 2013, fearing for her safety. A fashion show put up by an NGO she worked for, Young Women for Change, was criticised by a conservative faction. Back home, she was a women's rights activist teaching embroidery to other women. As a child growing up under the Taliban regime, Salma learnt to weave carpets and embroider instead of going to school.

After five years in Delhi, Salma is finally finding her feet. She is part of a women's group called Atiqa that does intricate Afghani embroidery on a range of garments and has just concluded a successful exhibition-cum-sale at Dastkar's Basant Mela in February.

Atiqa in Persian means antique. Afghanistan is home to some of the oldest and finest embroidery techniques in the world, each with its unique history, style, design and colours. The craft, practised by women, has survived war and turmoil.

Sitting in her *barsati*, Salma describes the painstaking effort that goes into doing Afghani embroidery. She disappears briefly into a room and emerges with a bag of scarves. Fishing excitedly through them, she pulls out a bright red embroidered one. "This scarf is my favourite," she exclaims. "But no one has bought it, I don't know

why." There is a flicker of disappointment on her face which is instantly replaced with a smile. The work on display is a sight to behold and laborious to make.

When Salma came to Delhi she would call home frequently to find out if it was safe for her to return. "The answer was always the same," she says. Slowly, she realised that going back home wasn't an option. She approached the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and explained her situation. "It was hard for me in the beginning," confesses Salma.

One of the biggest problems that refugees like her face is earning a living in a new country. Salma, too, didn't know where to begin.

"I remember showing my embroidery work to my landlord," says Salma. "He told me that it was too expensive, and no one would buy it. People preferred cheap things to wear every day."

In 2017, while helping an Afghan friend, Salma came across the Ara Trust's Migration and Asylum Project (MAP), India's only refugee law centre, run wholly by women. MAP legally represents refugees, helping them through the UNHCR's asylum process and linking them to support services.

That day Salma's friend was wearing a dress with Afghani embroidery on it. It caught the eye of the lawyers who asked if she knew embroidery work. The friend pointed to Salma and said she was better at embroidery than her.

That was when the idea of Atiqa began to take

root. MAP's lawyers understood the livelihood issues refugees faced. "Atiqa started off as a passion project. It wasn't something that we actively sought out or raised funding for," says Pallavi Saxena, a senior legal consultant at MAP.

Atiqa is now a collective of eight Afghan women who have bonded and found a semblance of home in India. Some of the women are survivors of domestic and sexual abuse and Atiqa serves as a safe haven for them.

Members of MAP raised the initial investment to source materials, get samples ready and give the women a small stipend. The pieces that the women made were then compiled into a photo book that



Embroidered stoles and scarves in stylish colours



SHREY GUPTA



Salma Gul holds up her favourite red scarf



Afghan embroidery is intricate and time consuming

Atiqa is now a collective of eight Afghan women who have bonded and found a semblance of home in India. MAP helped to fund it.

MAP used to raise funds for the Atiqa project. Eventually, VGIF, an American foundation that helps in women's livelihood and empowerment, gave them a grant of \$7,500 (₹5,22,000).

The original designs were very intricate, driving up prices. However, MAP linked the women to Dastkar, a non-profit that supports traditional artisans, and eight workshops were organised to enable the women to make their designs more affordable for consumers.

The effort that goes into the embroidery, though, isn't less. The embroidery on scarves, stoles and saris is amazingly detailed. The time taken varies. There are four types of embroidery: Gulatlaz,

Kasheda Dozi, Bati Dozi and, lastly, Khammam, which is usually reserved for heirloom pieces like bridal wear.

Scarves and stoles take around four to five days to complete, whereas saris can take up to a month. The women have children to take care of so embroidery work is done during their free time. Salma spends all her available time on sewing and embroidery and coming up with new designs that can be replicated on garments. The women drop by to pick up the new designs.

Not all types of cloth are conducive to Afghan embroidery. As of now, the women work on linen, *khadi* cotton and *matka* silk. Since the work is time

women. "We had just four left," says Salma. A second exhibition is being planned later this year. Part of the profits made at the exhibition were split evenly among the eight Afghan women. The rest was tucked away to buy raw material for future exhibitions.

Given that the initial investment on sourcing raw material and setting up for the exhibition was between \$1,500 and \$1,600, their return on investment was close to \$3,000, a very decent margin of profit.

"Giving them wages acts as an incentive as they were willing to commit six to seven months without getting anything in return. The only payments they received were at the end, after the exhibition was over," says Saxena.

MAP's initial plan was to use Atiqa to create a Self-Help Group (SHG). The business is in a nascent stage. The women started work in August 2018 when they received funding and training via the workshops. "Ideally, we'd like to see Atiqa become a self-sustaining enterprise where we can do things like e-commerce. Unfortunately, that is not possible because the group isn't a legally registered entity and doesn't have any scope of becoming one as well," says Saxena.

The only option left for the Afghan women is to deal in cash transactions through their exhibitions or stalls at different fairs, thereby limiting their growth, says Saxena. However, a more pressing concern that Saxena voiced was one of exploitation, "At the exhibition, they were approached by boutique owners saying, you do this embroidery and we'll pay you. But we don't know the amount that they will pay." Since refugee women have no legal papers, it is difficult for them to take recourse to legal means if the boutique owners don't pay them.

This is also the reason why MAP is reluctant to hand Atiqa to someone else. This is the first and only project that the legal foundation has committed itself to. The status of refugees in India is very vague. But Saxena hopes that given enough time, these Afghan women will figure out how the market in India functions and make their way around it. This would also ease handing over Atiqa to somebody else.

However, MAP currently has no interest in expanding the scope of Atiqa because the kind of embroidery that the women do is what most of them have grown up doing, stuck at home during their country's time under the Taliban regime. Trying to teach someone Afghan embroidery from scratch would be a challenge. According to Saxena, expanding the size of the group would only make sense if new members were Afghans, especially since Atiqa also works as a support group for all its members.

India is not party to the UNHCR's Refugee Convention of 1951, a multilateral treaty that defines who a refugee is, what their rights are, and what the responsibilities of the nations that grant asylum are. This is also the reason why the legal status of refugees across India remains so tenuous.

Despite this, India has managed to be a good host to people from the Afghan community. Women like Salma and her Afghan compatriots continue to weave their intricate embroidery, hoping that someday it will be safe for them to go home. ■

Who will police the police?



OVER the next several weeks the festival of democracy will keep Indians busy and entertained. The jingle on my radio issued by the Election Commission says, “*Watan dabayega button!*” It’s a call to arms. With the singular exception of Indira Gandhi’s Emergency era (1975-77) general elections to the Lok Sabha have been held on time since 1952 and Indians have ensured a smooth transition from one elected government to another.

Much can be said in praise of the election process and improvements made to the organisation of elections. Several officials involved in conducting elections have written important books that testify to the magnitude of the Indian achievement. If there is still one complaint that one can legitimately have, it is to do with the duration of the Lok Sabha elections. This year it will be conducted over a period of six weeks and through seven phases, beginning on April 11 and ending on May 19, with results being declared on May 23. The Indian electoral process is the world’s most long-drawn one.

What accounts for this inordinately long duration? The Chief Election Commissioner was asked this question at the press conference on March 10. His reply was astounding and revealing. There is a shortage of security personnel, said the CEC, because all political parties have always demanded that the security of both candidates and election booths has to be provided only by the central police forces and not by the state police.

The limited number of central police forces have to be moved around the country by train, given time to acclimatise to the local conditions before they can be deployed, and so on and so forth. The CEC explained that the only reason the electorate in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal would vote over seven phases while Andhra Pradesh and Telangana would vote on just one day has to do with logistics pertaining to the movement of the central forces. This does sound odd. In any case, in no state do political parties have any faith and trust in the impartiality and efficiency of the state police. State

police are, it would seem, viewed as partisan instruments in the hands of the ruling party of the day.

This is an astounding revelation, coming as it does from a responsible government functionary like the Chief Election Commissioner! It testifies to the complete politicisation of the state-level law and order machinery. If state police cannot be trusted to be impartial in providing security to all during the elections, what kind of a police force do we have?

The CEC’s reply would not come as a surprise to anyone familiar with the deterioration in the leadership and quality of personnel of state police and their politicisation across the country. In a shocking revelation made three decades ago by the



also stated that there has been a rapid spread and growth of criminal gangs, armed senas, drug mafias, smuggling gangs, drug peddlers and economic lobbies in the country which have, over the years, developed an extensive network of contacts with the bureaucrats /government functionaries at the local levels, politicians, mediapersons and strategically located individuals in the non-State sector. Some of these syndicates also have international linkages, including the foreign intelligence agencies.”

Since 1993 the rot may well have gone deeper. Even at that time Vohra noted in his report, “In the course of the discussions, I perceived that some of the members appeared to have some hesitation in openly expressing their views and also seemed unconvinced that government actually intended to pursue such matters.”

Ever since this report was submitted, Indians have been familiar with the phrase “the nexus between politicians, criminals and police”. Thanks to successive Election Commissions, we now know the names of all criminals contesting elections and the criminal records of elected politicians. What many citizens may not know is the intimate link between politicians in power and the local police. It is this nexus that politicians themselves worry about at the time of elections. Hence the demand that local police be kept away from guarding election booths. There has been any number of instances over the years when local police have been involved in organising what has been dubbed “booth-capturing” by one or the other candidate.

Apart from the cost of transporting central forces and providing other related logistics support, there is the additional cost of a prolonged election campaign and ensuring safety of ballot boxes over an extended period of time. This is further complicated by the fact that election campaign restrictions prevent the government in office from functioning like one until elections are completed. The lockdown on policymaking can also be debilitating.

The era of booth-capturing and ballot box stuffing has mercifully come to an end with the introduction of electronic voting machines and the provisioning of adequate central security forces. Going forward, the Election Commission and all political parties should try and see how the duration of elections can be reduced, at least to a month if not a fortnight. ■

Sanjaya Baru is a writer based in New Delhi

Secular practices for schools



A few days ago, someone circulated a message titled ‘Calendar of Indian Festivals in 2019’ on WhatsApp. Out of sheer curiosity I took a closer look only to realise that it essentially listed just Hindu festivals and only one national holiday — Republic Day. The sender was a long-time friend and a socially aware person who teaches in a premier management school. It could be that he simply forwarded the message without applying his mind or there was a deepset tendency to treat India as Hindu!

After reading one of my recent columns, “Non-secular Education in a Secular Nation”, some readers urged me to write on how education can become more secular in our schools. This column is an attempt to make some specific suggestions.

Some realities: Census data reveals that around 20 percent of the population in India consists of non-Hindus. Given the current population, around 1,360 million, the population of non-Hindus stands at 272 million. Only two other nations — China and the US — have a population higher than that of the minorities in India. Therefore, given the sheer numbers of non-Hindus and the constitutional mandate of being a secular nation, we have to not only constantly recognise the existence of minority religions but do everything to establish our secular nature.

Our educational institutions are the best places to begin this agenda.

MANDATE: The National Policy on Education, while describing the “Essence and Role of Education” has clearly enunciated “furthering the goals of socialism, secularism and democracy enshrined in our Constitution” as one of the crucial roles of education. Given the historical background of our nation, its extensive diversity, its deep-rooted belief systems and the realities on the ground, implementing the secular agenda is easier said than done.

It would need a combination of concerted effort, political will and definite strategies deployed at every stage of education. These strategies will have to be implemented in an orchestrated way by policymakers, administrators, curriculum developers, textbook writers, school leaders, social media, political masses and, above all, by parents. Messages have to be consistently reinforced by all constituents of society.

MESSAGING: The political leadership has to make it a point to deliver an unswerving, powerful message to the masses at every possible opportunity. It could

be the prime minister speaking from the Red Fort on Independence Day or the president of India in his Republic Day message or the chief minister / education minister or the minister for culture of each state at an appropriate place. Besides, political leaders at all levels must be role models for this message and practise what they preach. Messaging to bureaucrats and administrators must also be equally clear. They, in turn, must ensure secular practices across their organisations.

ADMINISTRATORS: They must carefully identify practices in their departments, schools and classrooms that can promote secularism in its true sense. There are many schools inside religious places, like temples and mosques, and therefore surrounded by a religious atmosphere of a kind. There is nothing wrong with this.

However, school leaders and teachers in such institutions must be extra sensitive not to force one particular faith on the others and allow festivals of other religions to be celebrated. Holidays declared by institutions must factor in the presence of all religions though the quantum could be determined according to the proportion of the population.

It is common practice in thousands of schools to have a statue of Saraswati, the mythological goddess of knowledge and wisdom among Hindus. Prayers or poems are recited every morning. Administrators must communicate to students that the emphasis is not on the religious and ritualistic recital of such prayers but on understanding the symbolic and philosophical significance of the presence of such a statue. The administration can also provide guidelines on how assemblies, sports events and other co-curricular activities in school could be effectively used to promote sensitivity, collaboration, inclusivity and empathy.

TEACHER EDUCATION: There is very little or no emphasis today on how teachers can promote constitutional values in their teaching-learning practices and processes. The teacher education curriculum must include elaborate guidelines on such specific practices. The curriculum must include how to develop enormous sensitivity among teachers about the Indian Constitution and its mandate for our nation. The curriculum for teacher education must enlighten teachers and teacher educators about the fundamental role of education and how that could be achieved through multiple strategies.

CURRICULUM AND TEXTBOOKS: Given the education mandate to develop children as independent thinkers with necessary cognitive and affective abilities as well as to enhance understanding of constitutional values, even the teaching of subjects must be aimed at developing these abilities and not merely at rote memorisation of content. Textbooks should stop resorting to stereotyped symbolism like showing religious integration through a few pictures of children with tilaks on their foreheads, a few wearing skull-caps and a few wearing a cross.

Instead, we have to focus on innovative and effective ways of having a meaningful discourse on religion as a philosophy or a way of thinking. Efforts must be made to develop understanding among students on how humanity goes beyond all religions and that the essence of all religions is similar when interpreted constructively. Applying NCERT textbooks across all states is a good idea since they are generally superior to the textbooks developed by the states and convey similar messages across the nation. Creating national cohesion and national integration is anyway a major agenda of education.

SCHOOL CULTURE: Illustratively, the morning assembly must be innovatively utilised to promote thoughts, discussions and exchanges, and develop the ability to communicate, listen and understand instead of merely memorising and singing prayers together. I am not at all against prayers, but what is important is understanding the message, its context, its lyricism and so on.

Why not add local folksongs with their meaning? Children will look forward to these prayers if we include fun activities during the assembly. Even the slogans written on the wall matter. I have seen the same slogans for years written in an illegible manner on the walls of schools. Why can’t we have dynamic slogans? Why not ask children to make and write slogans that keep changing each day, each week or each month? Schools must definitely detach the religious-ritualistic aspect from activities like singing of prayers, practising yoga, and so on. The scientific, rational and philosophical aspect of each activity must be explained to students.

National festivals such as Independence Day, Republic Day, Gandhi Jayanti et al must be celebrated with activities or competitions that promote better understanding of why these days are celebrated, their genesis, the societal conditions that prevailed during historical times, and so on. Other local festivals must also be brought into the school. I have witnessed how some schools in Uttarakhand’s Pauri Garhwal district used a festival like Phooldehi to educate children about the changes in nature during specific seasons and the geographical, botanical, scientific and cultural aspects of such changes.

I see a lot of pictures, posters and anecdotes of only one kind of people on school walls. Can we bring in stories and pictures of modern-day heroes who would inspire children in the current context?

MINORITY SCHOOLS: There are many minority schools. Owing to their minority institution status, they have certain rights. However, that does not give them any right to enforce the practices of only a particular religion in the school. No school can have rights beyond the constitutional obligations of developing a just, equitable, humane and secular society. The Education administrators must coach, educate and, if required, enforce constitutional values in all schools, including minority institutions.

Constitutional values are supreme and everything else is subordinate. ■

Dileep Ranjekar is CEO of the Azim Premji Foundation

A new path for tribal women



VILLAGE VOICES

R. BALASUBRAMANIAM

YOU do not usually expect the presence of 14 women dressed in all their finery at a busy shopping mall to make headlines. One can agree that this is not breaking news. What makes the appearance of the women special is that they were all in their early thirties and were indigenous forest-dwelling tribal women from more than 100 km away. The women were in the mall in Mysore to launch their *ragi*-based food products made in a factory that they owned and operated far away on the fringes of the Bandipur National Park.

The achievement of these shy and timid indigenous women sounds insignificant when one compares them with successful women entrepreneurs running large corporations employing thousands and generating crores of rupees in turnover. But those who know and understand the path that indigenous tribal communities have travelled over the past 70 years will be able to appreciate the enormity of what these women have attained.

The indigenous tribal communities constitute just a little more than 8 percent of India's population and live in about 15 percent of the country's area in various ecological and geo-climatic conditions. There are 705 ethnic groups notified as Scheduled Tribes (ST) and they live across 30 states and Union Territories. Tribal groups are at different stages of social, economic and educational development. While some have adopted a mainstream way of life, there are 75 Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) who are characterised by a pre-agriculture level of technology, a stagnant or declining population, extremely low literacy and a subsistence economy.

Data from across the country clearly indicates that the benefits of affirmative action or of special development schemes have made minimal or no impact on their social, economic or political mobility. These are the communities which have been repeatedly displaced and dispossessed by large irrigation projects and extractive industries. It is unfortunate that despite having a Forest Rights Act, indigenous communities enjoy very little control over local natural resources that their habitats are endowed with. Centuries of operating in a traditional hunter-gatherer economy with little or no appreciation of the demands of the 'market' have placed tribal communities at a tremendous disadvantage.

Before the onslaught of 'development projects', large dams and forest conservation laws, tribal

communities lived an existence that was sustainable and minimalistic. Their skillsets were more than adequate to ensure that they had a place to live in and food to eat. Being suddenly uprooted from their traditional habitats and relocated outside their comfort zone of a forest, tribal communities are today at a crossroads they never faced before. They can neither go back to the forests nor do they have the skillsets to cope and thrive in the modern world. It is against this backdrop that the achievement of these tribal women is worthy of celebration.

These women come from families that have been uprooted twice in their parents' lifetime — by construction of large reservoirs and by the formation of national parks. On both occasions, the state never truly compensated them nor provided any sustainable rehabilitation. An insensitive



Tribal women in the Araku Valley, Andhra Pradesh

government machinery with no formal policy for rehabilitation and resettlement left their families to survive on their own. This has not changed much in many parts of the country even today. Despite newer laws, tribals are still silent and helpless victims of a 'system' that has neither the intent nor the patience to understand their concerns and needs, and formulate programmes and schemes that will truly empower them and help them survive in a world that hardly acknowledges their existence.

The present plethora of government schemes is designed by bureaucrats sitting in state capitals and in Delhi with little or no understanding of the anthropology, culture, traditions or current status of these indigenous tribal groups. What is needed is not 'top down' programmes of the State or humanitarian NGOs but 'bottom up' creation of opportunities that can fulfil the current aspirations of tribal communities.

These aspirations are slowly finding expression

around the slogan '*Jal, Jangal, Jameen*' (water, forests, land). Development planners must not just acknowledge tribal voices but engage actively to seek them out and get them to articulate their true needs. They need to understand that unless one builds on the human and social capital of these communities, economic mobility will only remain a far-fetched dream.

What the tribal communities want are not doles from a patronising State or NGO but the skillsets, knowledge and space to participate as equals in a system that has consistently been denying that to them. They do need the social safety nets of affirmative action and special development assistance for the initial take-off. But beyond that are other social needs — good healthcare, contextually relevant and culturally appropriate education, livelihood opportunities, political voice, financial and social inclusion, and, more important, recognition of being equal partners in their progress.

They need to be recognised as the custodians of local natural resources and made partners in any development projects that are undertaken in their traditional habitats. Beyond the romanticising, they also need the knowledge and skills to integrate and compete in today's market-driven economy. They need to learn to survive not on the doles of a welfare state, but to live with the dignity and self-esteem that they have been traditionally known for.

What these women have done is to begin this journey for themselves. They are a beacon for other tribals and are demonstrating what can be done if they make up their minds to create a balanced reality for themselves. A position that enabled them to accept their landlessness, not with resigned helplessness but to look for other possible avenues. Along with this growing empowerment came their decision to source their raw materials only from local farmers, to provide nutritional supplements

free to malnourished children in their communities and to differentially price their products so that other tribal and rural women could afford them.

What is needed now is to create a new generation of such leaders from amongst the indigenous tribal communities who can understand the current reality and the challenges that exist, and are prepared to traverse the road ahead. The time has come for them to articulate their own problems and seek solutions based on their strengths rather than on external resources made available to them. A new development paradigm will be fashioned when they develop the ability to negotiate the complexities of development and alongside retain their time-tested values, structures and traditional wisdom. This may be the path to sustainable development not just for indigenous communities, but for the whole world. ■

Dr R Balasubramaniam, the founder of the Swami Vivekananda Youth Movement, has lived and worked with indigenous tribal communities for over 25 years in Mysuru district of Karnataka. He can be reached at email@rbalu.com

LIVING

BOOKS | ECO-TOURISM | FILM | THEATRE | AYURVEDA

Films of quiet courage

Praveen Morchhale is awarded for his cinema

Saibal Chatterjee
New Delhi

IT isn't unusual for sections of the Mumbai movie industry to claim that they revel in telling stories that simply have to be told. But mainstream Hindi cinema, notwithstanding the changes that have swept over it in recent years, rarely spotlights what is important. Taking the line of least resistance, it peddles what sells.

Praveen Morchhale, a self-taught 50-year-old filmmaker who lives and works in Mumbai, stands well apart from the crowd. He walks the talk. Using his own resources, he makes films about ordinary people going about their ordinary lives but making extraordinary leaps of faith in seeking to achieve their ends.

The Institute of Rural Management Anand (IRMA) alumnus has himself made several leaps of faith in the process of finding his calling as a filmmaker with his own unique niche. The three independent narrative features that Morchhale has made thus far, principally with non-actors and in an austere, contemplative narrative style that is far removed from the ways of conventional Mumbai cinema, have predominantly steered clear of the hustle and bustle of urban life and focused on the deeply personal struggles of people who exist on the margins of the vastness that is India.

Following through with the decision to build a career around telling stories set in indigenous cultures couldn't have been easy. But he kept chipping away, working with limited budgets and in places that have no filmmaking infrastructure. "For survival, I make documentaries for NGOs and government ministries. I plough the money that I save from these projects into fiction films on themes that I feel are important," says Morchhale.

His second and third feature films, *Walking with the Wind* (2017) and *Widow of Silence* (2018), have pitchforked the director into the limelight. They fetched him a pair of international awards in a span of two weeks in November last year.

Widow of Silence, about a Kashmiri half widow who struggles to get a death certificate for her missing husband so that she and her 10-year-old daughter can move on, won the prize for the Best Indian Film at the Kolkata International Film Festival (KIFF) before it travelled to the prestigious festivals in Busan and Rotterdam.

About 10 days after the KIFF win for *Widow of Silence*, Morchhale's previous venture, *Walking with the Wind*, which had premiered at the MAMI Mumbai Film Festival a little over a year earlier, bagged the UNESCO-ICFT Prize of the 49th International Film Festival of India in Goa,



'Widow of Silence' is about a Kashmiri half widow struggling to get a death certificate for her missing husband



'Walking with the Wind' tells the story of a boy who struggles to get a chair repaired in a tough terrain

confirming his growing status as a writer-director who uses the medium to give voice to the voiceless.

Walking with the Wind, which Morchhale dedicated to the late Iranian master, Abbas Kiarostami, is a Ladakhi-language film that tells the story of a schoolboy who goes out of his way in more senses than one when he inadvertently breaks his classmate's chair. His home is in a remote village that is seven kilometres away and he has to carry the chair across the tough Himalayan terrain in search of a carpenter. For the boy, it is a struggle of epic proportions.

In Morchhale's cinema, the little things of life are endowed with great significance. The overwhelming beauty of nature stands in sharp contrast to the bleakness of the lives that he portrays. But what stands out above everything else is a quiet celebration of the tenacity of the human spirit. In his films, plotting is sparse. The images convey the struggle of his protagonists.

The idea is clearly to allow the audience to enter the world in which the characters live and breathe without letting the camera movements preempt the

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responses. “Silences speak a lot. Pauses between dialogues allow the audience to think and absorb. This creates space for various interpretations,” the filmmaker explains.

In *Walking with the Wind* and *Widow of Silence*, both of which were filmed on location in 17 days, Morchhale employs wide angles, long takes and steady shots. “I do not like too many close-ups,” he says. This style, with its deliberate pacing and muted drama, suggests that life goes on at its own pace even amid social, political or cultural turmoil, he adds.

“Living in paradise and in hell at the same time is very difficult,” says one character in *Widow of Silence*, in which the lead is played by theatre actress Shilpi Marwaha, the only professional in the cast. The cinematic canvas that Morchhale creates perfectly reflects this state of uncertainty. The name of the film’s protagonist, Aasia Jeelani, is a tribute to the real-life Aasia Jeelani, a 30-year-old journalist and human rights activist who took the lead in highlighting the plight of brutalised Kashmiri women. She was killed in a landmine blast in 2004.

Incidentally, *Walking with the Wind* and *Widow of Silence* were lensed by the same cinematographer, Iran’s Mohammad Reza Jahanpanah. He brought a distinctive feel and texture to the two films by luminously capturing the vistas of Ladakh and Kashmir, favouring a colour palette to go with the ruggedness of the setting. “Landscapes are very important to me,” says Morchhale. “I love travelling and exploring. I stay in a place for long stretches and try and understand local elements and nuances before I start working on a screenplay.”

How much do awards matter to him? “Awards,” says Morchhale, “do not necessarily prove that one film is better than another, but they are definitely welcome recognition for one’s work. It is encouraging to be told that you are doing the right thing as a filmmaker.” The ‘right thing’ for this unassuming writer-director is obviously not to follow the crowd.

“I insist on telling my stories in my own way,” adds Morchhale. Inevitably, he ends up not only writing and directing a film but also producing it. “It gives me the freedom to do exactly what I want. I believe in capturing life in its purest, rawest form. Cinema is an art form that is best used to reflect the social realities of places that are outside our immediate environs.”

Morchhale’s debut feature, *Barefoot to Goa* (2015), was somewhat at a remove from his subsequent two films. It was a shot in the dark. When he failed to find a producer to fund this film about an 80-year-

old woman, he decided to go ahead regardless. He assembled a small crew of first-time technicians. “I settled for people with no experience because I knew they wouldn’t ask any questions during the shoot. If they did, I wouldn’t have an answer. If nothing else, I was confident that the film would at least be a learning experience.”

Barefoot to Goa is about a girl and her elder brother who, on stumbling upon unread letters written by their granny to their parents, decide to make a trip from Mumbai to Goa to meet the ailing octogenarian who has been at the receiving end of neglect from her son and daughter-in-law. The journey that the siblings make turns into an adventure that exposes the two children to life outside the big city as strangers lend them a helping hand along the way.



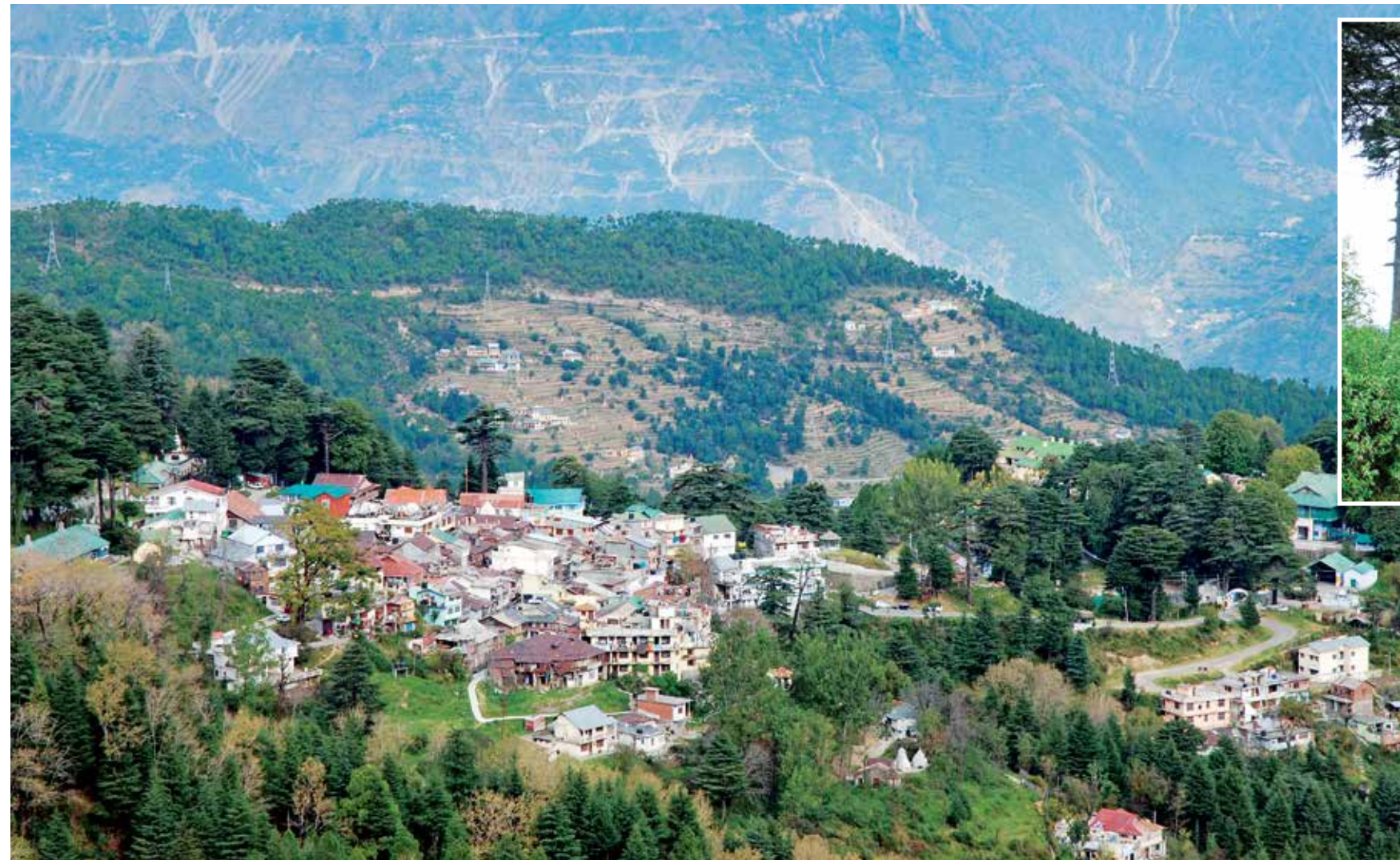
'Barefoot to Goa' is a moving film on relationships



Praveen Morchhale (right) on a film shoot, directing his actors

“I did not impose my visual plan on *Barefoot to Goa*,” he says. The film made its way to the multiplexes thanks to a crowd-funding campaign that brought in support from 200-odd people in 18-19 countries. *Barefoot to Goa* was on the screen across 18 Indian cities — a major feat for a small, starless independent film made for a lark. The positive response that it received strengthened Morchhale’s resolve to carry on.

His next film is also likely to be located in Kashmir. “It will look at the conflict in the Valley through the eyes of a grave-digger,” Morchhale reveals. “I will cast a real grave-digger in the lead role.” The first recce, he adds, has been done. “One of the grave-diggers that I met during my stay in Kashmir told me that he gave dignity to the dead. That has set me thinking,” he says. ■



A bird's eye view of Dalhousie town

Dalhousie is serene, laidback as ever

Susheela Nair
Dalhousie

What makes Dalhousie a charming hill station in Himachal Pradesh is its lazy serenity and lingering ambience of the erstwhile British Raj. Its colonial-style buildings and homes evoke memories of a bygone era. The town’s unhurried, laidback aura induces a feeling of timelessness in the quiet of the night and on silent walks through stately groves of deodar and oak.

Rambling over five little wooded hills of pine and oak — Kathlog, Potreys, Tehra, Bakrota and Baluni — at the southwestern edge of the Dhauladhar range, the hill station of Dalhousie is named after the 19th century British Governor-General, Lord

Dalhousie. Acquired from the Raja of Chamba by the British, it was a hill station for people from Lahore during the British era.

The snowy peaks of the majestic Dhauladhar range are a scenic backdrop. It is the perfect spot for a serene, relaxed holiday and there are some lovely walks around the town. Dalhousie resembles Shimla in many ways. Amongst its places of interest are Panjpulla, Subash Baoli and Jandri Ghat. The Round, a promenade which circles the town, is ideal for viewing the diverse scenery of the surrounding mountains.

Dalhousie’s dense forest trails overlook vistas of wooded hills, waterfalls, springs and rivulets. There are also breathtaking views of the Chamba Valley and the mighty Dhauladhar range with its snow-covered peaks. The town’s varying altitude colours the place with a variety of vegetation that includes tall groves of pine, deodar and oak, and flowering rhododendron. Rich in colonial architecture, the town has conserved some beautiful churches.

We found it a delight to saunter around its three Mall roads and wooded loops such as Potreyn Road, Bakrota and Moti Tibba hills. We passed by quaint cottages, residential schools, five stately churches, British-era hotels in a state of decline, a cemetery spread over nine terraces, and wayside rocks decorated with bright Buddhist paintings of celestial beings. We stopped by St John’s Church, harking back to 1863, to gaze at the 19th century stained glass painting of Jesus flanked by St John and St Peter.

Then there is Panjpulla, named after five wooden bridges that existed in the past, where a memorial to

freedom fighter Ajit Singh has been built over a mountain stream. There are other small destinations like Satdhara on the way to Panchpulla, where small springs emerge from the face of the mountain.

Dalhousie is also home to a sizeable Tibetan refugee community. A veneer of Tibetan culture has added a touch of the exotic to this serene resort and along roadsides are huge rocks carved in low relief and painted in the Tibetan style. One can pick up souvenirs from the tiny Tibetan market at Gandhi Chowk itself.

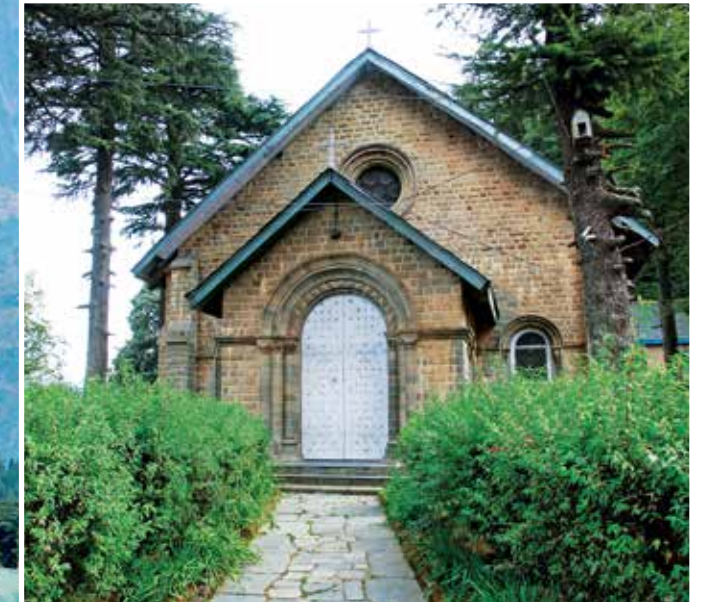
Day trippers have a variety of excursions to choose from. Khajjiar, located midway between Chamba and Dalhousie, makes for an interesting excursion from either town. Located at a height of 6,430 feet, this grassy bowl is ringed by conifers, a dense deodar forest, a forest rest house, a place for horse riding and a little temple with a golden spire dedicated to Khajinag, after which the place is named.

It is a destination in its own right. One can marvel at the 12th-century temple with its fine wood carving and some crude carvings of the Pandavas installed here by the Raja of Chamba in the 16th century. The place was originally developed as a golf course by the British. If you want to be photographed in traditional attire, professional photographers will woo you with truckloads of garments. For the adventurous, there is a two-day trek from here to Dharamsala.

On the way to Khajjiar, 8.5 km from Dalhousie, we explored a deep forest that not many tourists stop by. Kala Tope Sanctuary is home to a variety of high-altitude Himalayan wildlife like antelopes,

SUSHEELA NAIR

SUSHEELA NAIR



St. John's Church

deer, small carnivores, wild canines, and birds. Though the animal sighting was poor, we enjoyed the sheer mystery of a primeval Himalayan forest. We tarried by the forest rest house here, perched precariously on a ridge, and had a superb view of the northern snows.

Two excursions from Dalhousie offer stunning views. Dainkund with its thick forests, otherwise known as the singing hill, is close to the town. This tall peak outside town affords a bird’s eye view on a clear day of the hills and verdant valleys and the Beas, Ravi and Chenab threading their silvery way down to the plains. The twists and turns of the Ravi are a treat to watch from many vantage points.

Chamba was the next place on our itinerary. It’s an off-beat destination which exuded a medieval charm. Perched on a ledge above the Ravi river, Chamba is a temple town where almost every street corner is dotted with an old temple. It features temples built mostly in *shikhara* style with exteriors exquisitely carved in stone. Of these the best preserved are a group of six temples like the Lakshmi Narayan temple, devoted to Shiva and Vishnu, and the Hari Rai temple. The shrines of Bajreshwari and Chamunda Devi are equally impressive. The views below from the Chamundi temple are spectacular, with tiny houses clinging to steep valley slopes.

One cannot afford to miss the Chaugan, a grassy promenade which is the venue for cricket matches, evening promenades and festivals. The Bhuri Singh Museum where traces of the town’s long past are preserved, is worth a peek for its excellent collection of Bahsoli and Kangra miniatures, together with salvaged murals and artefacts. We culminated our trip with exploring the colourful market in Chamba. The spirit of Chamba was discernible in the small shops peddling local Chamba sandals worked in gold thread, the *rumaals*, embroidered unisex scarfs, Chamba embroidery, Tibetan handicrafts, cane baskets and other artefacts. ■

FACT FILE

Nearest airports: Pathankot and Chandigarh

Nearest railhead: Pathankot

By road: Connected by inter-state buses to different cities.

For details: tourism.hp@nic.in

Understanding the IAS

Civil Society Reviews

THROUGH the rough and tumble of democracy, natural disasters, internal strife, political squabbles and more, it is the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) that continues to govern India with a steady hand and reassuring predictability.

In the broad sweep of things it is the IAS that delivers development and keeps a diverse country on course. The Election Commission has served as the fulcrum of the democratic process thanks to those who have preserved its independence and neutrality — and when these values have seemed to be under threat officers have come out of the comfort of retirement to express concern.

It is important to study the evolution of the IAS for the country to have a sense of perspective on where it has succeeded and the occasions on which it has been seen to succumb. Deepak Gupta's *The Steel Frame: A History of the IAS* is therefore a welcome volume. Written by a lifelong insider, it is also well researched and not merely anecdotal as former bureaucrats tend to be. An added bonus is some valuable insights on how the service needs to reinvent itself.

The IAS came out of the Indian Civil Service (ICS) which served the British Empire with great efficiency and the question which has always the dogged Indian bureaucracy post-Independence has been whether it has been able to sublimate inherited notions of privilege.

The first chapter is devoted to the early beginnings of the ICS in Bengal under the East India Company. The administrators were called writers and they worked their way up but they weren't selected on merit and they doubled as traders leading to much corruption. It was after the Crown took over, post 1857, that the ICS really took shape and right from the start selection was through an open exam held in Britain. The system was biased against Indians and this issue was taken up repeatedly by our freedom fighters.

The ICS concentrated on furthering the economic

agenda of the Empire and maintaining law and order. So welfare was sidelined and free India inherited abysmal human development indicators especially in primary education, health and livelihoods.

Post-Independence, it was the foresight of Sardar Patel that prevented the ICS from being dissolved. He impressed upon Nehru the need to have an administration that was 'efficient, impartial, free from local or communal bias, party allegiance or political influence.' Stability in those tumultuous days was the need of the hour.

There is a chapter on the role of the district collector, the most important post under the British, and who, even today, is the 'lynchpin of the system.' The work profile of the district collector has changed. Development and welfare programmes are now given priority and the district collector works in a more cooperative style with panchayats, people's representatives, rural development agencies and so on.

Numerous agitations provide their own challenges to administrators at the grassroots. The nature of law and order has changed and so has the relationship of the collector with the superintendent of police. Under the British the SP reported to the district collector. In recent decades the SP, due to political reasons, has risen in power and authority and the relationship between the two is less collaborative.

The author traces the erosion of the IAS to competitive politics beginning from 1967 when non-Congress governments began to form in some states. The Emergency, he writes, was a turning point and things began to slide downhill. Officers who were partisan and fulfilled the agenda

of the ruling party were favoured. Loyalty to the political party and not to the nation was rewarded. There was a loss of self-esteem as administrators contended with judicial activism and a media which has been derisive. "The steel frame as envisaged by Sardar Patel has cracked," writes Gupta.

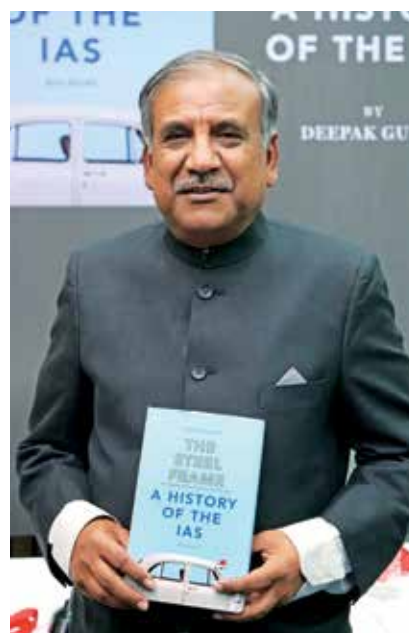
The author provides suggestions on what can be done. The first is to improve standards within the IAS and promote a uniform culture and value system. Gupta, an IAS officer himself, was head of the UPSC from November 2014 to September 2016. He says common exams for a whole bunch of services aren't a good idea. Different skills-sets are needed for different services. Also, a common language for a national service is important and Hindi is not acceptable to the south.

It is essential for trainees to understand hunger, malnutrition, agrarian distress and the political economy. As many as 37 percent of engineers and 8 percent of medical graduates join the IAS and the need for a wider social orientation and a humanities approach is felt. Rather than

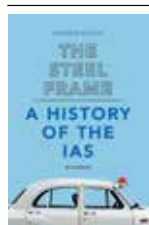
lower entry barriers it is more important to improve education standards and ensure that the IAS gets people who are dedicated and capable.

The author also takes up issues like lateral entry into the IAS and suggests the UPSC could be a neutral body to pick candidates. There is good analysis on policies and why IAS officers are invaluable because of their experience in dealing with the grassroots and handling implementation.

But the message of Gupta's book is that the political culture must change. The IAS and the political establishment have a symbiotic relationship. It is the administration that implements the policies and schemes of the government. If the policy is clear and targets realistic, officers implement policies very successfully — the midday meal plan in Tamil Nadu being one of umpteen examples. If politicians could respect the IAS's boundaries, much could be achieved. ■



Deepak Gupta at the book launch



The Steel Frame: A History of the IAS
Deepak Gupta
Roli Books
₹695

An Adivasi's search for love

By Anita Anand

IN 2017, Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar found himself at the centre of a storm when his book, *The Adivasi Will Not Dance*, was published. His own Santhal community demanded that the book be banned because of its depiction of Adivasi women.

The short story in question, "November is the Month of Migrations", described an impoverished Santhal family travelling from Jharkhand to West Bengal as part of its seasonal migration for work. While waiting for the train, one of the daughters has sex with a non-Santhal policeman, drawn in by the bread *pakodas* in his hand.

Shekhar was accused of portraying Adivasi in a poor light and denigrating Santhal women. The protesters, many of them Santhal academics and writers, harassed him online and in offline forums. His effigy and copies of his book were burnt.

Shekhar, a medical doctor working for the Jharkhand government, found himself out of work. His book was banned in Jharkhand and he was suspended from service.

The ban had the effect all bans have — it accelerated sales and made him somewhat a hero. There were signature campaigns protesting against the ban. Soon, Shekhar was doing the rounds of lit fests and being nominated for book awards and citations, though accolades were not new to him. Prior to *The Adivasi Will Not Dance*, Shekhar had already been heralded as a bold young voice in emerging Indian literature.

The Jharkhand government lifted the ban on the book after four months. A year later Shekhar was reinstated and back at work.

His recent book, *My Father's Garden*, has a beautiful cover depicting flora and fauna. The 192 pages move fast, assisted by a large font size and generously spaced rows. The book is divided into three short stories.

In the first story, titled "Lover", the narrator describes graphically his sexual experiences with gay lovers as a college student. In some ways, this was his first experience with class, caste and, often,

unrequited love. Shekhar's writing about sexuality is unlike any other Indian author. He writes boldly and frankly about sexuality and, more specifically, gay sex.

"I try to create characters that my readers might keep in their minds even after they have finished reading that story or novel. Sexuality — gay or whatever — is also a part of creating a character," says Shekhar.

An only child, Shekhar's parents — unlike many Santhals — are educated professionals. His parents worked in a copper mining company in which his father was a chemist and his mother a doctor. His father's ambition was that Shekhar should become a doctor and so he did.

The second story, "Friend", is the narrator's experience of being posted as



My Father's Garden; Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar; Speaking Tigers
₹499



Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar

a doctor in Pakur in Jharkhand. Not knowing anyone, he is befriended by a man who helps him settle into life in Pakur but turns out to be of questionable character. They become friends but, as the story moves on, there is betrayal and disillusionment about the nature of their friendship, and everything that surrounds them.

In the third one, "My Father's Garden", the author

writes about his father who found pleasure and solace in his garden whenever he felt life had let him down or he felt defeated. His son, a witness to these developments, searches for ways and means to tell his father about his sexuality. But he just cannot. So much is left unsaid. Shekhar's delicacy in dealing with complex and multiple emotions is supreme in this story.

In all three stories, there is love, longing, desire, sadness, loss, joy, exclusion. No emotion is missing. Underlying each story is the constant reminder the author feels of being the other, a Santhal and an Adivasi outside the Indian mainstream.

The Adivasis comprise several groups of indigenous tribal communities. According to the 2011 Census, about 8.6 percent or about 140 million of India's population are Adivasi.

Their history is a saga of oppression and exploitation, first under the British and then in free and democratic India. The British took over their forests to extract timber, forcing them to live on the outskirts of their jungles. Then, post-Independence, tribal communities continued to be dispossessed of their remaining lands so that dams and other infrastructure could be built.

Shekhar's writing is political, but he doesn't wear his politics on his sleeve. It is cleverly disguised in the crevices of his sentences. His short, direct sentences make an impact. He doesn't spend time creating atmosphere.

On how his fiction is informed by his personal life, he says, "I think personal could be defined more accurately if the genre is non-fiction. The things I write — or mostly write — are fiction. I take cues from the things I see around me and fictionalise them accordingly. In terms of holding back, I just try to create work that I would be happy with."

Reinstated in his job as a doctor, Shekhar is now in Chandil, Jharkhand, where, in his free time, he reads and writes and is unable to make the time for lit fests.

How has the ban on *The Adivasi Will Not Dance* and his suspension from his job affected him? What has he learnt from it? "I have learnt to move on and focus on my work," he says.

For the time being, 36-year-old Shekhar's greatest satisfaction is that his writing is accepted, read, appreciated, discussed and recommended. What more, indeed, could an author want? ■

(Anita Anand is a development and communications consultant and writer.)

Innocent Syaahi finds a teacher in the rain tree

By Sudhirendar Sharma

SYAAHI's Green Summer is about appreciating simple pleasures and easing up in a society that encourages materialism and competitiveness. The author, Kunjana Parashar, creates a child's imagery of nature that is fresh, insightful and persuasive in her debut book.

Syaahi, which means ink, is a restless nine-year-old girl chided as a slowpoke in class who, like most

children, sticks out her tongue at her uninteresting school building as she heads home for the vacation. She finds solace in nature, amidst the trees and creepers in her garden as she talks to mute trees about all that she is unable to share with her grandma and classteacher. In her little mind, trees are great listeners and respond with a rustle of leaves or an occasional falling inflorescence. Much to her surprise, the old rain tree, under whose feet she has spent countless hours feeling the texture of

its roots and bark, seeks to whisper sounds that only she can hear and comprehend.

The rain tree finds a discerning pupil in Syaahi, and exposes to her the strengths that her grandma and schoolteacher have not been able to discover. Erasing her self-doubt, the rooted giant instils a sense of self-belief in the child. Reminding her to nurture good seeds of patience and care, the rain tree boosts her with irresistible energy to embark on a secret journey to make her vacation 'green.'

Parashar, an English literature graduate, has let her imagination take wing as Syaahi begins to sway on the long aerial roots of the friendly banyan tree from one part of the city to the next. Her worldly encounters on sowing good seeds are short, but detailed and accurate. Such innocent indulging in the narrative that one finds being flung up high with

the child, only to be reminded of the follies that have been collectively committed on the ground.

At a time when people are being pulled in separate directions or are often directionless, Syaahi fuels life into the ecosystem with her innocent charm. She showers compassion on birds and beasts. In response they chirp, sing and squeak back as if the garden is a colourful Indian wedding. The notion of co-existence, of interdependence, is reflected as all creatures join the tiny girl in her affable greening initiative. There are hardly any dramatics, just plain narration that catalogues every moment in detail.

The author creates a character in tiny Syaahi who is observant of every little thing around her. No



Syaahi's Green Summer
Kunjana Parashar
APK Publishers
₹150

wonder the garden is her secret, her private den and sanctuary. It is here that she composes a lullaby of musical sounds and musical whistles with no words. She believes that if you use words in a lullaby, you will wake up the one you are trying to put to sleep. Parashar conveys a profound message with effortless ease. Nature, like a mother, only generates a musical lullaby. We mortals miss the lullaby for the words. We love noise, but are deaf to the embedded signal.

This is a book about reconciliation, first with oneself and then with one's surroundings. This could well be the most rudimentary takeaway from *Syaahi's Green Summer*, but the central preoccupation in the book is of possibilities, and the conviction of turning simple dreams into

transformative realities. This tiny gem of a book doesn't preach but leaves a message that can inspire every discerning mind into creating his/her own set of actions. Without employing an expansive definition of ecological prudence, Parashar nonetheless offers a simple but doable body of conscientious choice with humane values.

Despite it being written from a child's perspective, the book is thoughtful. *Syaahi's Green Summer* is more for teachers than for children, a must-read for evoking interest in understanding what we seemingly consider as given. Ignoring the disappearance of a tiny sparrow from our daily lives, for instance, carries an ominous sign about our own existence. The author invites her readers to connect with her with cheeky comments and snarky witticisms. She deserves accolades. ■



**AYURVEDA
ADVISORY**
Dr SRIKANTH

That runny tummy

DIARRHOEA is characterised by abnormally loose or watery stools. It is a very common digestive complaint, afflicting adults at least once a year and children twice or thrice. It is caused by infections and sometimes by the use of medications. Lactose intolerance, too, can result in loose stools, particularly in the elderly.

A lot of the time, diarrhoea can be controlled through dietary changes and by giving the digestive system a rest. But in very severe cases it is important to consult your doctor to decide on an appropriate line of treatment.

DIET & LIFESTYLE: Since diarrhoea results in dehydration because of the loss of fluids caused by multiple motions, the first thing to do is to drink a lot of water. It should be boiled and cooled.

Squeezing half a lime into a glass of water with a pinch of salt, a teaspoon of sugar and some cardamom powder helps restore the body's balance.

Taking small sips of fluid throughout the day is one of the best ways to keep hydrated during episodes of diarrhoea. Milk should be avoided. Buttermilk may be helpful.

In a severe case, ORS or oral rehydration salts

may be needed to restore the micronutrients that the body has lost. ORS packs are available over the counter at pharmacies.

Light, easy to digest food articles such as gruel and porridge are recommended. Soups made from lentils are also good during diarrhoea. Fruits like sweet lime, oranges, apples and melons are usually well tolerated. Heavy to digest, spicy, deep-fried food should be avoided.

HOME REMEDIES: Fennel: Mix ½ teaspoonful of fennel (saunf) powder with ½ teaspoon of ginger powder. Chew this mixture two to three times a day.

Gooseberry: Mix 1 teaspoonful of gooseberry (amla) powder in 1 cup fresh curd or buttermilk. Have this mixture two or three times a day.

Fenugreek: Take 1 teaspoonful of fenugreek (methi) seed powder (roasted or unroasted) with hot water or buttermilk two or three times a day.

Ginger & jaggery: Add 1 teaspoonful of ginger to 200 ml of water and boil until the water reduces to half. Add a little jaggery and drink the mixture when it is lukewarm twice or thrice a day.

Pomegranate: Soak fresh pomegranate peel in half a litre of water for about an hour and then boil until reduced to half. Take a couple of tablespoons of this several times a day.

Alternatively, about ¼ to ½ teaspoonful of pomegranate dried rind powder with ½ to 1 cup of fresh buttermilk will also provide similar benefits.

Ginger, cumin, honey: Mix 1 teaspoonful each of ginger and cumin powder with honey to make a paste. Take 1 teaspoonful three times a day. Roast 2/3 teaspoonfuls of cumin seeds and

powder them. Add a pinch each of ginger powder, cinnamon powder and black pepper powder. Mix in 1 cup of yogurt. Eat twice a day.

AYURVEDIC REMEDIES: Try any of the following Ayurvedic remedies:

✓ Mustarishta + Kutajarishta (any reputed pharmacy) — 2 teaspoonfuls each mixed with 4 teaspoonfuls of water after food thrice daily.

✓ Dadimashtaka churna (Kottakkal/Vaidyaratnam) — 1 teaspoonful with warm water / fresh buttermilk twice or thrice daily.

✓ Diarex tablets + Bael tablets (Himalaya) — 2 tablets each, thrice daily.

✓ Diarex syrup (Himalaya) / Mebarid syrup (SG Phytopharma) — 2 teaspoonfuls 3 to 4 times daily for children below 10 years.

✓ Kutaja ghana vati (any reputed pharmacy) — 2 tablets 3 to 4 times daily.

Either with the suggested home remedies or the medications mentioned above, diarrhoea can usually be managed effectively. However, if the diarrhoea is unusual in its intensity or duration, or if it is occurring more than occasionally, it is important to consult a doctor.

When can diarrhoea be considered serious?

- Passing of watery stools 10 or more times within a 24-hour period.
- Presence of signs of dehydration (e.g. dark, scanty urine or inability to urinate; dry, sticky mouth; extreme thirst; loss of skin elasticity—skin doesn't rebound when it is pinched into a fold).
- Blood or mucus in the stool.
- Dizziness, headache and fever. ■

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

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PRODUCTS

Paper baskets

SONA Kapoor began making a range of baskets from wastepaper as a hobby some years ago. That little fun activity mutated into a micro-enterprise called Sona's Creation which she runs with her husband, Vikas. Old newspapers and other wastepaper are rolled tightly into ropes and then handwoven into products. Sona runs her enterprise from her home and has hired two women to work with her. "It takes one and a half days to make a basket. The work is

labour intensive," says Vikas.

Sona and Vikas displayed their products at a stall in Dastkar's Basant Bazaar held in Kisan Haat in Delhi. There were wastepaper baskets, laundry baskets, fruit baskets, handbags, organisers, pen stands and coasters. Another item they are currently experimenting with are lampshades. All of Sona's products are neatly woven, durable and painted in vibrant colours. Sona began by selling on Facebook and then on Amazon. The couple now gets export enquiries from the US and Europe. ■

Contact: vikaskapoor@sonascreation.com
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