

Civil Society



THE NEXT PANDEMIC?

The time to build a strong public health system is now, says Dr Ravikant Singh

Dr Ravikant Singh, founder of Doctors For You

AIRPORT VS TREES

Page 8

GLOBALIZED AGARBATTIS

Page 10

COFFEE FOR THE SOUL

Page 39

LOCKDOWN CHRONICLES

Page 42

INTERVIEW

'WORKERS LOSING PROTECTIONS'

RAJIV KHANDELWAL AND DIVYA VARMA ON THE NEW LABOUR CODES

Pages 6-7

SPECIAL SECTION

CENTREING THE STATES

SANJAYA BARU | VINAYAK CHATTERJEE
KIRAN KARNIK | VIMALA RAMACHANDRAN
VIJAY MAHAJAN | R. BALASUBRAMANIAM
P.D. RAI & SUSHIL RAMOLA

Pages 23-35



mawana[®]
SELECT

Har Pal Tyohaar




SULPHURLESS &
CHEMICAL FREE


PURE &
WHITEST


DISSOLVES
FASTER


UNTOUCHED
BY HAND



Use sugar in moderation and responsibly.

To enhance taste, it is advisable not to be dependent on artificial or chemical based sweeteners.

www.mawanafoods.com | Follow Us On:



IN THE LIGHT

SAMITA RATHOR



LETTERS



Talk rights

Thanks for the cover story by Osama Manzar, 'A phone is not enough'. It was a real eye-opener. It explained why accessing information is so very important for working class people. It is linked to their livelihood and is a lifeline for them. I hope the government provides free talk time to people with low incomes. Digital Empowerment Foundation (DEF) will have to lobby for it.

Anita Gulati

This is an extremely inspiring story. DEF is doing fundamental work responding to the emergent need of the time. We, at Jnana Prabhodini's Institute of Psychology (JPIP), will be happy to help in any way we can.

Anagha

Media matters

I read Dr Kiran Karnik's article, 'Media-mess age'. It was an excellent analysis of media functioning,

malpractices, fake news and commercialized paid news. Media has lost its credibility and respect. Honest journalists and editors find themselves isolated and misfits in current media houses. There is no effective regulator in sight.

M.L. Kashyap

Thanks for bringing out a special section, 'Media at the Crossroads'. You have rendered a signal service to your readers on a vital issue. There was huge space for a non-establishment publication. Above all for one that gives priority to development stories unfolding in the remote hinterlands. These changes are being led by a remarkable lot of local leaders entirely ignored by the mainstream media. *Civil Society* has drawn attention to the contribution

of these hitherto unsung heroes. And that is a major achievement of your magazine.

Gautam Vohra

Farm journalism

I liked Shree Padre's piece, 'Farm magazine for farmers'. *Adike Patrike* is unique. I have not seen or heard of such a farmer-friendly magazine. It has a variety of useful articles. The efforts made by team *Adike Patrike* are laudable. Our society should recognize such a service and nurture it. The magazine's uniqueness lies in its practicality and in bridging the gap between different stakeholders in the agricultural sector.

Prakash Bisht

I have known Shree Padre for 50 years. He is a photographer, cartoonist, water

conservationist, author and journalist. His contribution to agricultural journalism is immense. One special characteristic of Shree Padre is that he doesn't take the beaten track. He always chooses the offbeat. He took up causes like the ill-effects of pesticides with a local doctor, Mohan Kumar. He took the humble jackfruit and made it a hero. If Kerala has made it the fruit of the state, Shree gets the credit. I hope he gets the Padma Award this year. I have nominated him.

Dr K.G. Bhat

It is really difficult to bring out a magazine for so long without the patronage of moneyed people or politicians. I congratulate Shree Padre on *Adike Patrike's* 33rd anniversary. It will be difficult to translate and bring it out in English and Hindi. But important articles on subjects like water, jackfruit and so on could be brought out in book form to reach the non-Kannada readers.

Shyam Bhat Kolari

Hunger and help

Thanks for the story, 'Bridging Delhi's nutrition deficit in slums'. The splendid humanitarian work being carried out by Arvind Singh and his team gives us all hope and courage regarding the leadership of the young.

Devika Singh

Unusual cinema

I read Saibal Chatterjee's article, '10 Bengali films worth watching'. He brings out the fine details of each film and the rebirth of Bengali films. Huge thanks to him. I have promised myself I will watch each of these films sooner rather than later.

Sujit Chakraborty

Letters should be sent to response@civilsocietyonline.com



SUBSCRIBE NOW!
BECAUSE EVERYONE IS SOMEONE

One year Print + Digital

₹1400 Individual \$50 International

One year Digital

₹1000 India \$12 International

Name:.....
Address:.....
.....State:.....Pincode:.....
Phone:.....Mobile:.....Email:.....

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
Visit us at www.civilsocietyonline.com

CENTREING THE STATES

The politics of federalism
Sanjaya Baru 24-25

New revenue streams needed
Vinayak Chatterjee 26-27

The mountains deserve better
P.D. Rai & Sushil Ramola 28-29

States should work together
Kiran Karnik 30-31

For pre-school have a cadre
Vimala Ramachandran 32-33

Recognize cultural diversity
R. Balasubramaniam 34-35

More room for the states
Vijay Mahajan 36-37

INTERVIEW

'Worker protections taken away' 6-7

SPOTLIGHT

Agarbattis the world worships 10-11

COVER STORY

The next pandemic? 18-22

LIVING

..... 39-41

BOOKS & AUTHORS

..... 42-43

PRODUCTS

..... 44

VOLUNTEER & DONATE

..... 45

PLANT POWER

..... 46

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



Put healthcare above all else

A pandemic may not be the right time to judge healthcare systems. The best can collapse under the burden of unforeseen demand. The most poorly run may just rally round to deliver some kind of result. But for us in India, now seven months into dealing with the pandemic, this is the time to think about what the future holds if we can't fix public health facilities.

There should be little doubt anymore that for a system to be effective it should be able to provide equal access and quality. The novel coronavirus has shown us that diseases don't recognize boundaries between rich and poor. It is no secret that the system we have is skewed. Ministers might duck into AIIMS to recover, but the rest of us don't enjoy such facilities quite so easily. The rich can pay for hospital rooms but no amount of money can buy protection from an infection. There are real limits to secession by the elite.

The emphasis on the private sector has had a deleterious effect on the entire system. It has turned healthcare and hospitals into a blood business of sorts driven by quarterly results. At the same time, it is unrealistic to think that the private sector should have no role when the unmet demand for healthcare is as high as it is in India. It is the government's primary job to invest in a dependable state-run system and also devise regulation that keeps players, both public and private, moving in a direction that serves the national interest.

The coronavirus also teaches us that all we want to achieve as an economy begins with healthcare and it should be given importance above all else in the goals that governments set for themselves. Countries that have invested in healthcare wisely have benefitted. Their examples are well-documented. In India, however, the national standard is laughable and there is barely a state capable of laying claim to exceeding it.

The cover story this month is an attempt to show what we should be thinking about and what we can do. Dr Ravikant Singh is a public-spirited physician who started Doctors For You to bring a sense of service back into medical practice. He is certainly not alone in this mission. *Civil Society* has covered many examples of doctors going the extra mile to make a difference. India has the doctors, technologies, paramedical staff and administrators too, but not the system that can help them perform. Dr Singh brings this out well in his piece as he and his many colleagues do through their outstanding work when disasters strike or a virus goes on the prowl.

Centre-state relations have been the subject of much discussion. We have a special section in this issue to capture some of the give and take. Much of the angst in the states is currently over money since GST hasn't delivered on promises and state governments are pretty broke. The federal question, of course, goes beyond money and has to do with aspirations and identities. A country as large as India has to see itself in its many parts.

Publisher
Umesh Anand

Editor
Rita Anand

News Network
Shree Padre, Saibal Chatterjee, Raj Machhan, Jehangir Rashid, Susheela Nair, Kavita Charanji

Desk & Reporting
Sidika Sehgal

Photography
Shrey Gupta

Layout & Design
Virender Chauhan

Cartoonist
Samita Rathor

Write to Civil Society at:
A-16 (West Side), 1st Floor, South Extension Part 2, New Delhi -110049.
Phone: 011-46033825, 9811787772

Printed and published by Umesh Anand on behalf of Rita Anand, owner of the title, from A-53 D, First Floor, Panchsheel Vihar, Malviya Nagar, New Delhi -110017.
Printed at Samrat Offset Pvt. Ltd., B-88, Okhla Phase II, New Delhi -110020

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
RNI No.: DELENG/2003/11607
Total no of pages: 48

Advisory Board

- ARUNA ROY
- NASSER MUNJEE
- ARUN MAIRA
- DARSHAN SHANKAR
- HARIVANSH
- JUG SURAIYA
- UPENDRA KAUL
- VIR CHOPRA

Get your copy of Civil Society

Have Civil Society delivered to you or your friends. Write to us for current and back issues at response@civilsocietyonline.com.

Also track us online, register and get newsletters

www.civilsocietyonline.com





Rajiv Khandelwal and Divya Varma

‘Basic worker protections taken away under new Labour Codes’

With the right ecosystem, India can be an example

Civil Society News
Gurugram

WHEN millions of workers literally burst on to the scene during the sudden lockdown in India, the entire country was shocked by how vulnerable they seemed. They didn't have housing, savings, healthcare and rights as employees. In their large numbers, they accounted for the majority of the workforce and yet there was no one to speak for them.

The lockdown was expected to be a watershed moment because of this unsettling experience. Going forward, it was hoped that labour laws would be rationalized so that they would be simpler for industry and also enhance the security of workers. Instead, the opposite seems to have happened with the emphasis being on hire and fire by industry and workers ending up more insecure.

Four Labour Codes have been passed: The Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, the Industrial Relations Code, the Code on Social Security and the Wage Code, which was passed last year.

We spoke to Rajiv Khandelwal, co-founder and director, and Divya Varma, programme manager, policy and partnerships, of Aajeevika Bureau based in Rajasthan. They have for many years worked closely with migrant workers to get them their rights and have a deep

understanding of their needs and expectations.

Do you think the new Labour Codes will improve employment as industry says it will?

R.K.: Categorically, no. What industry is happy about is that a significant part of its own constituency is being put out of the purview of regulation — by redefining what formalization means and by changing the potential for industrial action by making unions almost redundant.

‘In many industries the cost of labour is just seven to 10%. And imagine we are focussing on that alone as the segment which needs reform.’

It's really very paradoxical that the Codes have been passed just when this migrant crisis happened. At this time we needed pro-worker responses. What the Codes are doing is taking away very fundamental worker protection. Labour laws are not implemented very well, anyway. They don't

come in the way of industrial growth.

The Codes are an even sharper signal to industry to go ahead and continue to do what they do with labour, but maybe with more impunity.

Would you agree that there is a need to rationalize these laws because they come in the way of industry running their businesses?

D.V.: Yes, I would agree there is a need to look at labour laws afresh. I think what is happening is that informality has been legalized. The fragmentation of value chains that used to happen earlier was off the record. Now it's become officially mandated.

Regarding industry's narrative of labour laws stymying growth, we have studied practices in China, Vietnam and other countries witnessing higher growth than India. The experience there is that they are achieving higher growth in spite of labour protection and security.

That's because decisions guiding investments are based on variables like robustness of power supply, infrastructure, the road network, predictability of industrial policy, stability, law and order, and so on. Many other parameters are more important than labour welfare in deciding where investments should be made.

So the problem isn't labour at all?

R.K.: In many industries, processes and production scenarios, the cost of labour is just seven to 10

percent. And, imagine, we are focusing on that alone as the major segment that needs to be reworked for industrial growth to take place.

Of course the multiplicity of labour laws should have been rationalized. There are contradictory provisions in those laws that could have been streamlined. But the idea that labour laws are in the way of prosperity is a very, very mistaken one.

We need action on development, infrastructure, health, education, as a booster to the economy, not labour laws.

I mean, take any country in the world with a robust economy — China, Germany. They have very well-developed and strong labour laws. Labour is really looked after. If that is a marker of growth, then you need more labour protection, not less.

So when industry and government say that they have to compete with other emerging economies, you don't buy that?

R.K.: We talk of being competitive because of our wage advantage, our cheap labour that makes the cost of our goods and services low. But take into account that many of these other countries are able to invest in other aspects of worker welfare. In China, for instance, even if wages are low, food, health and housing are taken care of. And that is what workers spend a large part of their income on. In our country, low wages coupled with no housing, subsidized food or public healthcare makes us a very extractive economy. It doesn't create any competitive advantage but hollows out our workforce.

And who are we competing with? Cambodia, Vietnam, Bangladesh. Look at their size and scale of problems. We can get away with low wages if public provisioning is existent. Provide this, then okay, pay people low wages.

We see a rise in contract workers today. Do the Codes give contract workers any advantage in terms of wages?

R.K.: The laws now apply to factories that employ more than 50 contract workers. That means if a factory has even 49 contract workers, they will be outside the purview of labour laws. An overwhelming number of factories and units employ less than 50 workers. They have created protection but they have also increased the threshold so a large number of factories are now not covered by legislation. I think contract workers stand to be harmed rather than benefitted.

D.V.: I think employment security will be affected by the new provision for fixed-term employment. It has been introduced to account for fluctuations in demand and supply of workers that industries face. So I get the business logic. But what it creates for workers is a vast sense of job insecurity. There is no provision to compensate them for periods when they don't have any job.

The government is also keen to encourage small units to become large units. Will the Codes help this process?

R.K.: Industry prefers to work with a vast number of small units in its supply chain rather than with a large firm. Small units retain very thin margins. They are run by small-time employers who thrive in the supply chains of industry. In the manufacturing

sector, industry prefers to work with smaller suppliers and vendors because larger suppliers will demand larger margins. So what is preventing smaller units from becoming larger are not labour laws but the structure of the market.

D.V.: There are no incentives for smaller firms. It's not like if they register themselves they get access to more credit or logistic support. Why should they register? Right now they operate outside the scope of legality.

Is there anything in the Labour Codes which would help migrant workers?

D.V.: The Interstate Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act, 1979, has now been subsumed by the Occupational Security and Health Code. It does mandate registration of migrant workers. The earlier law mandated registration of only those workers who moved with contractors. We know people migrate through their own social networks and with family. An important provision is that the Code stipulates that anyone who declares himself or herself a migrant worker can register under whatever machinery is set up for the purpose.

Although the PDS is not a matter of labour policy but of social policy, the Code still talks about portability of the PDS and that state governments

‘Providing for intra-state migrants was important. That is missing. We would have preferred separate legislation for migrants. Also, who is responsible for registration?’

should enable it. It's also being conceptualized differently under the 'one nation, one ration card' scheme.

Also, the Code provides for a national toll-free helpline for migrant workers, that states have to set up. These are good developments under the Code.

Some things which are missing are that the Code talks only about inter-state migrants. But the maximum migration happens intra-state. People moving within state boundaries also face the same vulnerabilities and hardships as inter-state migrants. So I think that providing for intra-state migrants was important. We would have preferred separate legislation for migrants. That has not happened.

Importantly, who is responsible for the machinery of registration has not been spelt out. The responsibility of principal employers and contractors and the different roles of source state and destination state are not delineated. Perhaps that will be come out in the rules.

We have seen how the Unorganized Workers' Social Security Act, 2008, remained on paper. That too called for registration of unorganized sector workers but nothing happened. None of the labour departments has a framework for its implementation.

The same thing can happen here if proper guidelines, role, clarity, division, accountability mechanisms are not clearly spelt out, though these provisions are good.

You already have the Building and Other Construction Workers' Act (BOCW) but very

few construction workers have been registered. What are the linkages with the Labour Codes?

D.V.: The BOCW Act has also been subsumed under the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code. Registration has been made portable which is a good thing. The BOCW Act was landmark legislation. We will need to see how that plays out.

R.K.: The big risk is that the boards that have been set up under the BOCW Act can get subsumed. That money is meant for construction workers. It's true the state boards are sitting on crores of rupees and there are problems about registering the right kind of people. But even before this issue could be sorted out at state level, the law is taking it away and incorporating it in larger legislation.

We are resisting this merger because this is a powerful security offering to construction workers, the largest segment of the workforce in the country. The states may be able to retain the boards but at central level that mandate has been taken away.

What would you have liked the Labour Codes to have focussed on?

R.K.: The Codes are very complex. Imagine bringing 40 laws as four. Since we work with migrant workers, we are most concerned about

what the Codes offer to highly migration-sensitive industries. By raising the threshold to 50 workers for the applicability of several regulations we have done away with all kinds of protection and regulation for migrants. Most migrants are employed in smaller units. We would like that provision to be revisited. The only way to challenge it is to question its constitutionality since it is already a law.

Second, in the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code standards of work that provide safety to workers have not been spelt out. Imagine a whole Code on safety with no universal standards of what safe work should be. We want that to be spelt out very, very clearly.

Third, there should be working hours, safety from injuries and toxic chemicals. Such parameters should be legislated. These have been excluded.

Fourth, a revival of the participatory process. The process of consultation in drafting the rules must include unions, labour organizations, people's representatives. The tripartite process has not been invoked. The Indian Labour Congress whose recommendations are generally taken have been neglected.

D.V.: I would add, enabling portability of social security benefits for intra-state migrants as well as inter-state migrants along with mechanisms for implementation. Also, a definition of migrants. At Aajeevika we define them as people who move out of their districts and their social safety net so it includes inter-state and intra-state migrants. ■

AIRPORT VERSUS TREES IN DOON

Rakesh Agarwal
Dehradun

ABOUT 25 km from Dehradun is a village called Thano with a small bazaar and a few houses. Adjacent to it, about six km away, is the Jolly Grant Airport. Nothing ever happened here till the Uttarakhand government decided to expand the airport into an international one. About 243 acres of forest land were to be acquired and handed over to the Airports Authority of India. So the government approached the National Wildlife Board for its approval.

This news sparked angry protests from young people in Dehradun who didn't think the trees should be felled and that the airport could be easily built at another location where less environmental damage would be caused. They rallied under Make a Difference by Being the Difference or MAD, a credible and energetic local youth outfit run by Abhijay Negi, a young lawyer.

The protests have found wide support from young people, senior citizens and other NGOs. Sleepy Thano now finds itself in the middle of a dispute that continues to simmer despite the Union Environment Ministry favouring a change in location. The state government hasn't, till the time of writing, acted on the Centre's directive.

The forest land at Thano falls into the Shivalik Elephant Reserve and is contiguous to the Rajaji National Park. The Thano range has lots of trees, birds and animals. Around 10,000 trees were slated to be axed.

It was on October 18 that the first protest took place, Chipko-style. Young people marched to Thano village holding placards, shouting slogans, singing songs to protest against the felling of 10,000 trees. *Rakhis* were tied around trees, expressing the need to protect them.

The agitators have welcomed the MoEF's directive but they aren't calling off their agitation till a more suitable location is chosen for the airport. "Sure, we welcome the central government's nudge to the Uttarakhand government asking them to explore other land for Jolly Grant. It's a victory for us. But why have an airport here near this forest? Why not shift it to Pantnagar in Kumaon? The place already has an airport and plenty of empty land," said Karan Kapoor, an active member of MAD.

Earlier, Negi had clarified that they weren't opposed to the expansion of any airport. They had suggested Doiwala, a town about eight km from Thano on the way to Rishikesh and Haridwar.



Students led the protest marching with banners to Thano village, the proposed project site

Protesters want the airport to be shifted to another location. The forest being acquired falls in an eco-sensitive zone.

Doiwala is not an eco-sensitive zone like Thano.

What has angered the youth and fuelled the agitation are the obfuscations by the state government and its agencies. All these were uncovered by MAD. The Forest Research Institute and the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) are based in Dehradun and their students are well-versed in matters ecological.

Take the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) report by the project consultant, Green Sea Indian Consulting, based in Ghaziabad. "The EIA falsely reported that no protected animals, birds or species listed under Schedule-1 of the Wildlife Protection Act exists in the Thano forest. In reality, this forest is contiguous to the Rajaji National Park and part of the Shivalik Elephant Reserve. It is an important elephant corridor that stretches all the way to the Tanakpur border with Nepal," said Kapoor. Thano forest is home to 104 bird species, and leopards, deer, and wild boar, say the student activists, who have done their homework. A tree count revealed Thano has 9,745 trees, including *khair*, *sheesham*, *sagon*, *sal* and another 25 species. "They claim that the forest isn't dense. But, we just made a visit to the project-affected area and it has a very dense *sal* forest, with canopy cover exceeding 80 percent," said 22-year-old Harsh Nautiyal, a student.

"As many earmarked trees are around ponds and lakes, the land will become flat and dry, forcing wild animals, including elephants, to transgress into nearby villages and towns like Thano itself, Ranipokhari, Doiwala, Lachchiwla and, eventually,

Dehradun city. This will aggravate the people-wildlife conflict which is already quite severe up in the hills," said Vishal Uprerti, 27, a wildlife expert from the WII. MAD also took their concerns to the forest department. "We registered a strong protest with the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, Jai Raj, and handed over a representation to him. We rallied sister organizations to stop anything that fatally impacts the environmental balance of our already disturbed Doon Valley," said Negi.

The state government simply retorted that the hoary trees would all be grown back. "The importance of Dehradun Airport is not only for tourists. It has national importance. If trees are being cut, then plantation will also be done in return," said Chief Minister Trivendra Singh Rawat.

He promised three trees would be planted for every tree cut. Not to be outdone, the forest department said they would plant 17 trees for every tree axed. The party spokesperson outbid all by declaring he'd plant 22 trees for every fallen tree.

The protesters were not impressed. They wondered where these trees would be planted and what their survival rate would be. "Even if they survive, saplings need at least 25 years to become full-fledged trees and, by then, we will all be history," said Isha Rawat, who had joined the protest. According to MAD, only 20 percent of the saplings planted by the forest department actually survive.

"We're planning to involve the Uttarakhand Biodiversity Board on the observations made in the EIA by the project consultant so as to get all agencies to work together and resolve this issue," said Negi.

Although hundreds of students and environmentalists have joined the protests, most locals have not. "Locals aren't against it. Many have become contractors for the project. Others are keen that tourism is given a fillip. Besides, land prices have zoomed around here," remarked Bhopal Singh, a farmer in Thano village.

MAD spread word through social media. "We'll keep protesting till the establishment abandons the airport project at Thano," said 21-year-old Saumya Prasad, a student based in Dehradun. ■

BIMTECH IS DRIVEN BY INDIA'S LEADING BUSINESS HOUSE – B.K. BIRLA GROUP



REIMAGINING THE FUTURE

EXPOSURE TO GLOBAL FACULTY

Educational experts from CXO positions in industry having IIT/IIM background

RANKED 6th AMONG TOP PRIVATE B-SCHOOLS IN INDIA

(NHRDN-Shine (HT Media) Management Institute Ranking 2019)

CATEGORY 1 Graded Autonomy Status by AICTE

Only 2 Institutions have achieved this recognition in the country

66+ INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCES

SCHOLARSHIPS

For meritorious and ESCS category candidates

GLOBAL RECOGNITION

First Indian B-School to get BSIS Label from EFMD, Brussels (Business School Impact System)

CLASS DIVERSITY

Students from 25 states

INDUSTRY 4.0

Aligned courses

PROGRAMMES OFFERED

(MBA Equivalent, Approved by AICTE, Ministry of HRD, Govt. of India)



PGDM



PGDM Insurance Business Management



PGDM International Business



PGDM Retail Management

Eligibility: A recognized Bachelor's degree in any discipline with minimum 50% marks in aggregate along with Valid MAT 2020-21 score for PGDM (Insurance Business Management) & PGDM (Retail Management) programmes. Candidates appearing in final year Graduation Examination (1st attempt) in summer 2021 can also apply.

Selection: For different programmes, there are specific eligibility criteria. For complete details on final selection, please visit our website www.bimtech.ac.in/admissions/

Payment of Rs. 2000/- for online application can be made through Credit/ Debit card

APPLICATION DEADLINE: 31st January, 2021

Apply Online: <https://online.admissions.bimtech.ac.in/>



BIRLA INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT TECHNOLOGY, Greater Noida (NCR), Uttar Pradesh, India
Tel: +0120 6843000-10, Mob: +91 9718444466, Email: admission@bimtech.ac.in, Toll Free: 1800 5723 999, Website: www.bimtech.ac.in

India makes incense the world worships

Homegrown industry globalizes

Civil Society News
New Delhi

INDIA'S agarbatti industry does more than spread fragrance. It employs a huge number of people, mainly women in rural areas. It is ecofriendly, the agarbatti or incense stick being made from natural materials and biodegradable. It is also importantly a foreign exchange earner since Indian agarbattis are well regarded internationally and command a good price.

The lockdown brought production to a standstill, but stocks continued to sell. In times of trouble people turn to prayer. Sales are particularly brisk during the festive season and usually go up by 50 percent. This year, because manufacturing units were closed and began production late, the industry managed to meet 30 percent of the increase in demand for agarbattis. It even introduced two new fragrances — Woody Amber and Fruity Floral.

The agarbatti business is steeped in its own traditions. But it has also undergone modernization — in its manufacturing processes, management practices and orientation to overseas markets.

In every which way the agarbatti industry is indigenous and perhaps a good example of *atmanirbharta* or self-reliance, especially so for being Indian and global at the same time. From being a disaggregated cottage industry, it has successfully made the transition to the formal economy. There are 800 companies that make up the All-India Agarbatti Manufacturers Association (AIAMA), which has its head office in Bengaluru.

Arjun Ranga is the president of AIAMA. Progressive and well-qualified, he is a graduate in polymer science and has an MBA from the US. He is now the CEO of his family enterprise, N. Ranga Rao & Sons, manufacturers of Cycle Pure Agarbattis.

Ranga spoke to *Civil Society* on the trajectory of the industry and why it is a significant sector.

The agarbatti industry provides employment to a huge number of people. Can you explain how?

The industry has various parts to it. You have the raw material procurement part — minor forest produce like bamboo, *jigat* powder and charcoal which provides some level of employment. Then, you have the raw agarbatti stick which is unscented. After that, the creation of fragrances, the art and science of making agarbatti and the application of fragrances on the agarbatti sticks. Once the agarbattis are ready, you have packaging which employs a large number since it's completely manual and, finally, sales, marketing and distribution of agarbattis.

This entire chain employs 450,000 people in

India. It's a big employment generator. Because of the nature of the industry mostly women, rural women, are employed. The agarbatti sticks are delicate and nuanced. So you need dexterity. That's why women are predominantly employed.

If you go back 30 to 40 years, women used to prepare agarbatti sticks at home. They weren't willing to step out. Over the past 15 years factories have evolved and a certain level of technology has been brought in. Women are now willing to travel to work in factories where the lighting is better, it's more comfortable and you have proper restrooms. Technology has enabled women to increase their efficiency, productivity and earn more wages.

How much do the women earn?

It would be 20 to 25 percent more than the minimum wage prevalent in different states because companies have to follow the minimum wages law.

'Over the past 15 years factories have evolved and a certain level of technology has been brought in. Women are now willing to travel to work in factories.'

And in your company in Karnataka?

My company is across the country. The lowest part of the value chain are the ladies who make the raw sticks. Before technology came in, a lady could make about three to four kg of sticks per day by hand. About 10 years ago she would earn ₹10 to 12 per kg. But once mechanization came in, she started making 30 kg of sticks per day and earning ₹250 to 300 per day. It actually became a financially viable option for her.

The industry also started to see huge growth. Today 100 percent of the agarbattis made in India are made on semi-automatic machines. And women at entry level who were earning the least have improved their incomes because of technology.

So has the agarbatti industry successfully returned to pre-COVID levels?

For two or three months there was no production so we had zero income. But the market saw no contraction because people were lighting agarbattis at home though temples were closed. In fact, with



Arjun Ranga: 'Technology has enabled women to increase their efficiency, productivity and earn more wages'

production at a standstill and household consumption continuing there was a huge shortage.

We employ a huge number of daily labour because women who make the agarbattis earn on that basis. The industry was able to take care of its direct employees for two months. We couldn't immediately support our indirect employees. Those two months were really tough for all of us.

Typically in April, May and June the industry builds up its inventory for the festive season which is from August to September to October. From Ganesh Chaturthi to Diwali, consumption increases by 50 percent. We can't produce 50 percent now because the women go back to their villages for the monsoon, for harvesting and festivals. We hope to increase production to 30 percent.

Since there was no demand contraction, unlike many other industries, we were hit only from March 23 to May 9. Once transport got streamlined by July, supplies started to come in. All companies put COVID safety protocols in place to ensure employees would be safe.

Due to mechanization we have been able to structure the shop floor a lot better. Social distancing already existed. The nature of our workplace is such that you can't have a lot of people sitting close together and working because the machine requires space.

What are the challenges you are facing?

The supply chain is still a problem as well as availability of raw material and its quality. Earlier we could travel to check out the quality of raw material, whether wood powder or charcoal. But now we are finding it difficult to validate raw material at source.

'The Indian agarbatti is more about fragrance. We spend a lot of time on fragrance creativity. We use good ingredients, the sticks are small and the smoke emitted incomparable.'

Is India still importing bamboo sticks? Has this issue been resolved?

Yes. The Government of India (GoI) and the National Bamboo Mission are localizing bamboo to specific species suited to the agarbatti-making machine. Not all bamboo sticks are feasible. We have started large-scale plantations. We also now locally source raw materials. Imports of agarbatti stopped a year ago completely. A hundred percent of agarbattis are made in India. Some raw materials are imported.

What is your standard increase in demand every five years?

It's directly proportional to population growth. The agarbatti industry has a high penetration of 82 percent. So 85 percent of Indian households use agarbattis. It is among the highest penetrated consumer product categories in the country. The quantity used is less, about two sticks a day, maybe four in some households. This is unlike countries in Southeast Asia like Thailand, where 50 to 100 sticks are lit together.

Has agarbatti manufacture spread across the country? Have new manufacturing clusters come up?

Traditionally, the industry was based in Tanjore and

shortage of raw material. We faced challenges for three months with shipping and ports being closed. But the demand is there.

Has the trend of natural fragrances picked up?

Agarbatti sticks intrinsically use almost 99 percent of natural materials. We follow international fragrance guidelines. In perfumery creation you will have natural ingredients majorly. Bamboo, *jigat* powder, oils, incenses and some manmade ingredients for fragrance creation are used.

How much is domestic demand and how much is exported?

Exports are 10 percent. Just to give you a ballpark figure, since there are so many unorganized players, AC Nielsen puts the retail value of the branded industry at ₹7,000 crore. The export figure, based on the customs database, is ₹900 crore, which is the wholesale value. Our distributors could probably retail it at three times more. So the domestic market is way bigger than the export market.

Who are your buyers globally?

The moment you go out of India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal, it's not Indians who are the biggest consumers, it is the locals. The US is the biggest market for Indian agarbattis followed by South America, countries like Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Chile.

Do the countries you export to have any particular demand?

Fragrances are unique and exotic for different markets, close to flowers available locally. We create new fragrances. The challenges are in packaging. Different countries have their own statutory requirements. So packaging has to be customized. Some markets like Africa would want stronger fragrances. For countries like France you would need more subtle fragrances. So fragrances are customized to the market. Quality standards are the same for the domestic and export markets.

Since agarbatti manufacture is now so specialized, do you require technologists?

As manufacturers we are at the cutting edge. The AIAMA represents 800 companies. We are putting in place common R&D facilities so that everyone can develop. We are constantly conducting seminars on perfumery and creativity.

We do workshops on packaging and we work with the Export Promotion Council, which sends us NID graduates to help in design. They are very progressive.

The SME ministry is trying to support us. For GST we conducted workshops since we have many small manufacturers who didn't know. For COVID too we held virtual seminars to explain the protocols to be followed. We have exhibitions too for manufacturers across the country to upgrade their skills.

We make agarbattis that no other country can make. The agarbattis made in China and Vietnam are longer and made of wood powder. They have no fragrance and more smoke. The Indian agarbatti is more about fragrance. We spend a lot of time on fragrance creativity. We use good ingredients, the sticks are small and the smoke emitted incomparable. ■



ACCELERATING INDIA'S PROGRESS

To know more, log on to www.tataprojects.com | [tata-projects](#) | [OfficialTPLCommunity](#)

ACCELERATING INDIA'S PROGRESS

Tata Projects Limited is one of India's fastest growing and most admired infrastructure companies. Leveraging latest technology and advanced construction methods, Tata Projects has successfully undertaken several infrastructure & EPC projects of national importance.



Executing Trisonic Wind Tunnel & Cryogenic Integrated Engine Testing Facility for ISRO



An IT Park of 1.0 Mn Sq. Ft. BUA, spread across 100 acres constructed in Indore



Constructing 7.8 kms long bridge section of Mumbai Trans Harbour Sea-link Project



Successfully completed LOT 102 and 103 of Dedicated Freight Corridor Project



Completed 41.42-km Transmission Line Project of 500kV in Thailand



218 Projects Under Execution



Devices for the disabled

Kavita Charanji
New Delhi

THE world's first self-standing crutches are called Flexmo. TurnPlus is a swivel chair that can be fitted to a car seat so that a disabled person can travel comfortably. NaadSadhana is an app which uses artificial intelligence to create musical experiences for people with disabilities.

These were some of the inventions that won the 11th NCPEDP-Mphasis Universal Design Awards 2020. People were also honoured for their contribution in improving the lives of people with disability.

"Without accessibility all our fundamental rights remain inaccessible. As the pandemic has shown, access to information for everyone with or without disability is particularly important," said Arman Ali, executive director of the National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People (NCPEDP).

Mphasis, an applied technology company, has been associated with the awards over the years. Explained Srikanth Karra, chief human resources officer: "We extend our support to inclusion and innovation. The most important thing for us is the structural change brought about by policy-level advocacy."

Shakuntala Doley Gamlin, secretary, Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, was the chief guest. She said it wasn't easy to implement universal access in the built environment, information technology and public transport. "But without accessibility, inclusivity cannot become a reality."

The winners of the NCPEDP-Mphasis Universal Design Awards are a great example of inclusivity. Here is the list of winners:

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Ravinder Rambhan Singh, who has a locomotor disability, is the founder of MyUDAAN. His organization has developed V Go, a wheelchair that converts a manual wheelchair into an inexpensive, easy-to-use motorized wheelchair.

Raghavendra Satish Peri, who is visually impaired, is a digital accessibility buff. He is the founder of Hello A11y, a community of accessibility professionals, developers and enthusiasts building an eco-system for people with disabilities on the internet.

Dr Vikrant Sirohi, paralyzed in the right leg due to polio, is senior medical health officer at the Roorkee Municipal Corporation (RMC) and medical superintendent, Community Health Centre (CHC), Bhagwanpur, Roorkee. He ensured the CHC fulfilled all National Health Mission objectives. Proactive during the pandemic, he set up a separate isolation ward at his CHC even before the COVID lockdown. He was honoured as a Corona Yoddha (warrior) by the RMC.

SPECIAL RECOGNITION BY JURY

Ketan Kapoor B. is a Disability & Inclusion (HR)

Consultant at Siemens India and an activist. He is categorized as a person with 100 percent disability with a medical condition from birth known as Osteogenesis Imperfecta (OI) type III. Last year in the Pimpri Chinchwad Municipal Corporation area, Kapoor did pro bono career counselling with the Skill Council for Persons with Disabilities (SCPwD) for underprivileged disabled people seeking jobs at a jobs camp.

Pratishtha Deveshwar hasn't lost her spirit despite an accident that left her paralyzed chest down nine years ago. A graduate from LSR College in Delhi, she is doing a master's in public policy from Oxford University. As president of the Equal Opportunity Cell of LSR, she conducted access audits, got ramps built, provided accessible reading material to visually impaired students, organized mobility workshops and events designed to be accessible to all students.

WORKING PROFESSIONALS

Sandeep D. Ranade is the founder of NaadSadhana, an iOS app that uses artificial intelligence to create melodies with many instruments. People with disability can use it to practise, perform and publish amazing music.

Anupam Kumar Garg, a software engineer from IIT Kanpur, left his job to promote maths and science learning among the visually impaired. He has developed a patented GEOMKIT that helps them construct 'embossed' geometrical patterns.

Adarsh Hasija, a computer engineer, has developed an app, Suno-Be My Ears, for iPhones for the hearing impaired. In 2020 he released a new version of Suno that aids people with visual disabilities.

Naveen Kumar M. is the creator of the first light-weight multi-purpose wheelchair with sitting, standing, sleeping and stair-climbing features. He has also developed a spring-assisted crutch that is easier to use than a conventional crutch.

SPECIAL JURY AWARD

Dr Srinivas Puppala works for the government of Telangana as deputy transport commissioner. He has trained 40 people with hearing disabilities to clear theory and practical driving tests. He also taught them to overcome hearing loss during driving. This remarkable initiative is being replicated across the country.

SPECIAL RECOGNITION BY JURY

Aakanksha Sharma and **Bharath Surendra** are students at the National Institute of Design (NID) in Ahmedabad. They have developed Typo, a literacy tool for children with cerebral palsy. Typo enables young ones to learn and write English and improves their sensory-motor skills.

Astha Ashesh Avinash is a student at NID. She has designed Loopers, a toy for partially visually impaired children with additional disabilities like cerebral palsy, autism and low cognitive abilities.

COMPANIES/ORGANIZATIONS

Flexmotiv Technologies has created the world's first self-standing crutches, brand-named Flexmo,

which improves mobility. The crutch is slip-resistant and pain-free. It has ergonomically-designed grips which provide a natural wrist angle and distribute load across the palm. The crutch can help a person navigate wet surfaces, snow, rocks and mud.

Kidaura Innovation's Screenplay is a digital game-based screening tool that helps identify children with mild autism who are misdiagnosed or not identified. Screenplay reduces the identification assessment process. Schools usually take one year.

Tactopus Learning Solutions promotes a diverse, inclusive learning culture and social integration. It has a range of multi-sensory learning products for children aged three onwards, especially designed to include children with disabilities.

TurnPlus Consulting Services has invented an award-winning, cross-disability swivel seat mechanism for car passenger seats. The easy to instal swivel seat can be used for people with osteoarthritis, paralytic stroke, pregnant women, the aged and wheelchair users.

JAVED ABIDI PUBLIC POLICY AWARDS

Karpagam M. is the first visually challenged woman lawyer-activist in Tamil Nadu. She has filed PILs and fought for the right of the disabled to access 38,000 temples in Tamil Nadu. She is the CEO of VVIP (Voice for Voiceless Indian People Foundation), that has helped 10 hearing and speech impaired people find jobs or start their own enterprise. She has filed over 400 RTI applications for assessments and audits on the rights of persons with disability. During the pandemic, she got a government order to rescue intellectually disabled people stranded on pavements. Two hundred such persons were rescued and relocated to government homes by the State Disability Commissioner.

Arun Kumar Singh, who has a locomotor disability, is president of the Jharkhand Viklang Manch. He has filed numerous PILs and got judgments in favour of persons with disabilities for accessible elections, employment and public spaces. He has also helped persons with disabilities find government jobs.

JAVED ABIDI PUBLIC POLICY JURY AWARD

Kausar Jamil Hilaly worked as State Commissioner for Persons with Disabilities (SCPD) in Assam till July 2020. During his tenure he implemented the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, in Assam making a crucial contribution to government efforts.

In the 2019 Assembly elections, he advocated an accessible election for persons with disabilities. He also swung into action during the pandemic by ensuring prompt distribution of rations and medicines for vulnerable persons with disabilities. It was because of his efforts that the Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA), the National Health Mission and DIPR produced accessible government advisories and other publicity material on COVID-19 for visually and hearing impaired people. ■



TREE PLANTATION DRIVE

According to the **Global Risks Report 2020** by the World Economic Forum, the repercussions of climate change are striking harder and more rapidly than expected. Environmental risks now top the risks agenda.

Himalaya has always worked towards preventing the loss of biodiversity and has been committed to preserving nature. We have rolled out many initiatives in this direction, and our tree plantation drives are the most crucial part of this endeavor. Till date, we have planted **7,90,000** saplings across the **Western Ghats, Eastern Ghats, and Khasi Hills**.

We work at the grassroots level by collaborating with partner organizations like **Society for Environment and Biodiversity Conservation (SEBC)**, **SYNJUK**, and the local communities and other stakeholders to help us understand the terrain better to plant indigenous species and ensure the survival of **75%** of the saplings.

Forest reforestation is vital to mitigate the current threat of rising greenhouse gases, climate change, and the loss of biodiversity. Through these efforts, **Himalaya** is focusing on creating a sustainable future.

Saving topsoil with terraces

Parijat Ghosh, Dibyendu Chaudhuri & Jostine A. Chataniha (MP)

DURING our transect walk through Chataniha, a village in Singrauli district of Madhya Pradesh, Ramkali and Munni explained how their lands were losing topsoil due to ploughing and subsequent rain. The same issue was raised by many other villagers such as Budhni, Sugmanthy and Bitty Panika in the meeting held after the walk.

We saw rocky, barren land everywhere as we walked through the village. When we asked villagers at the meeting, “*Khet ki mitti kahan gayi?*” (Where did the topsoil go?), Munni, with her usual sense of humour, replied, “*Meri khet ki mitti toh Shanti didi ke paas hai*” (Soil from my land went to Shanti’s land). Munni’s land is on the upper side of the hillock. Every year her family members plough the land to grow food crops, but with rain all the loose topsoil gets washed away and deposited in the valley, where Shanti has her land.

Several such discussions on soil erosion, enhancing soil fertility and intensifying crop production took place in Chataniha when villagers joined the Adaptive Skilling through Action Research (ASAR) programme, a joint research initiative of Professional Assistance for Development Action (PRADAN), the Azim Premji University (APU) and the village community from three villages in Central India.

Eventually, the entire research team came up with an innovative solution to address the issues of soil erosion faced by the villagers of Chataniha.

Several interactions with the villagers revealed that they were fully aware of the adverse effects of ploughing on land on a high slope. However, they had no option but to plough those lands to grow crops as it was the only cultivable land they had.

ROCK AND SOIL: Back in the PRADAN office, we searched for all possible sources of information to find suitable measures to check soil erosion in similar topography in the Central Indian Plateau (CIP). We could find options such as plantations or pastures. One of us came up with the option of terrace farming which is practised in other hilly parts of the country.

We started calculating the feasibility of terracing on Chataniha’s rocky landscape. From calculations we found that the cost of construction would be too high compared to possible returns. We were thinking of creating narrow strips less than half a metre in height for each step of the terrace. The terrace might collapse during intense rain if constructed with a wider strip and more height between strips.

However, that would make it impossible to use a bullock-drawn plough. The bullock wouldn’t be able to move onto narrow strips. If we made wider strips, the height between the strips would be more and bullocks would not be able to climb to reach the strips. So, we almost discarded the option as being inappropriate for Chataniha’s small and marginal farmers.



District officials visit Chataniha village to see the terraced fields

THE SARRAH SOLUTION: However, a colleague from Deosar told us that a farmer from Himachal Pradesh, who was the father of one of our colleagues in PRADAN, had come and taught farm-terracing to a few villagers in Sarrah, another village in Deosar. We rushed to this village to see the work there. We were amazed to find that three farmers of Sarrah had made farm-terraces on their land which had similar slopes as Chataniha under the guidance of the farmer from Himachal Pradesh. The vertical portion of the terrace was pitched with grass. That was the fourth year after construction and the entire patch was stable.

Ramswarupji, one of the farmers in Sarrah, said that crop output had increased manifold after he started agriculture on terraces. The soil quality had gotten better. We saw a ray of hope and arranged an exposure visit for the villagers of Chataniha to Sarrah.

ADAPT AND REPLICATE: The villagers of Chataniha discussed the possibility of experimenting with farm-terracing on a few patches of land in subsequent meetings. They also discussed the specific issues which needed to be looked at in their context. Some of them were:

- The terrace strips cannot be very thin. They should be wide enough to allow cattle to move around for ploughing.
- The height of the steps should enable the cattle to get in for ploughing.
- The topsoil layer in each step of the terrace should not be wasted.
- The terrace should be stable.

In the absence of any financial assistance from the government, labour sharing would be the norm.

The first two concerns were difficult to resolve as broader strips would have meant more height between strips. But higher steps are difficult for cattle to climb and are also more costly. After a lot of calculations and deliberations the village community decided the length and breadth of the steps for the patch they had decided to experiment with. They opted for wider strips that would allow a pair of bullocks to move with the plough. The height between

the two strips was almost one metre. However, they came up with an innovative solution for the movement of cattle between strips: they made a small alley on one side of the terrace which the bullocks could climb to reach the strip above for ploughing.

For stability of the terrace they decided on stone pitching as they had plenty of stones available in the village. Alongside, they explored the possibility of grass pitching and plantation of sisal (*Agave sisalana*). As the land here has a very thin layer of good soil, they decided to first dig out the topsoil and store it somewhere on the field. After construction of the terrace, the topsoil was spread on all the strips.

Ramdulare and his wife, Lalwa, were the first to come forward to try this on their field. Then, Sugmanty and Fulkali followed suit. Around 13 volunteers of different ages and both genders finished four stairs in Ramdulare’s field in two days.

Eventually, terracing was done on three patches of land (on two acres) in Chataniha before the onset of the monsoon this year. It is a context-specific model of farm-terracing. Villagers invested their own funds and labour. The PRADAN team and villagers explored the possibility of mobilizing funds for better and quicker implementation from different government schemes.

District authorities visited Chataniha and became convinced about the feasibility of farm-terracing. They included it in their shelf of work under MGNREGA. Now, farm-terracing is done in neighbouring villages in the district. Around 25 farm-terracing structures (on 15 acres) are either completed or ongoing in nearby villages in five panchayats.

The outbreak of COVID-19 has impacted the plan. Nevertheless, the villagers are hopeful that through terracing, the problem of soil erosion can be addressed and soil fertility will increase in the long run. With more cultivable land, vegetables and cereals can be grown — leading to food sufficiency, nutrition and a more stable income. ■

Parijat Ghosh, Dibyendu Chaudhuri & Jostine A. work for PRADAN

DCB Recurring Deposit

Start small today to make it big tomorrow

Start a deposit with just ₹6,000 per month at 6.95% p.a. for 120 months and receive on maturity ₹10,39,339/-



Give a missed call on 70972 99043

www.dcbbank.com

Terms and conditions apply. Interest earned and accrued is pre TDS and on assumption of quarterly compounding frequency for a 120 month deposit, when interest and principal are paid at maturity.



In the Masarhi hospital, facilities are as good as in a city hospital

THE NEXT PANDEMIC?

Our time to build a public health system starts now

By Dr Ravikant Singh



MASARHI is a village in Bihar so steeped in grinding poverty that its people are known to hunt rats in their fields and eat them. In the midst of the coronavirus pandemic, however, these hapless people with so little have what many residents in cities don't — an easily accessible and affordable hospital with state-of-the-art facilities to treat patients sickened by the virus.

It is just a small 50-bed hospital and it began in 2015, much before the pandemic, as an even more modest community health centre set up by Doctors For You (DFY) after we helplessly watched an elderly resident of Masarhi die in his hut before he could be treated.

The small hospital now makes a world of difference to Masarhi, but back then all we at DFY wanted was to give the village and its nearby areas access to at least some basic care. The government-run primary health centre (PHC) that was meant to serve Masarhi was at a distance and in terrible shape. Patna, being the capital of Bihar, had hospitals and was merely 25 km away, but getting there meant a difficult journey of more than an hour because of broken roads and the absence of ready transportation.

In the face of such odds, it was common for patients in Masarhi to die in their huts from diseases that could otherwise be easily diagnosed and treated. The death we witnessed prompted us to act.

As our health centre came up, it provided the villagers of Masarhi with options they had never had before. From pregnancies and deliveries and tracking child and maternal well-being to dealing with local outbreaks of diseases, the health centre brought important improvements to their neglected lives.

My colleague, Dr Taru Jindal, did most of the heavy lifting involved in setting

up the health centre. She gave up her life in Mumbai and a teaching assignment to relocate to Masarhi. Engaging with the local people on a daily basis, she created new levels of awareness in them about their health.

Over time, what we planned as a simple health centre has acquired the dimensions of a miniature hospital. It is now called Vistex Hospital in recognition of the support we have got from Vistex Foundation, which has helped make possible ₹3.8 crore in capital investments. It has annual running costs of ₹84 lakh. There are six doctors and 12 nurses.

And with the pandemic suddenly coming upon us this small hospital has quite easily morphed into a facility for treating coronavirus patients. It has oxygen support, ICU capacities and treatment protocols that equal many urban facilities.

In fact, the villagers of Masarhi are now, at least in this respect, better off than many of the residents of Patna, even though it has the exalted status of being the capital of Bihar and by contrast Masarhi is difficult to find on the map.

Healthcare infrastructure doesn't get made overnight. It can, of course, come up quickly during a pandemic, as we have seen. But not with the same long-term benefits as a healthcare system designed to serve large numbers of people steadily and with equal access.

To build a dependable public health system calls for vision and commitment. It is like a giant jigsaw in which each piece has to be crafted to serve a combined purpose. Required are doctors, nurses, technicians, field staff, testing and diagnostic capabilities and hospitals, both big and small.

The Masarhi hospital is an example of what can be achieved with a sense of mission and purpose and professional involvement. It is donor-driven and patients are currently only charged a token fee of ₹5. But over time, as it begins providing secondary care, we expect the hospital to become sustainable.

A public health system has to take shape through multiple such initiatives tied to a national objective of taking healthcare to the people who need it most. A big responsibility rests with the government, which must invest significantly more than the 1.3 percent of GDP that it currently does at the national level.



Masarhi village: People live in abject poverty



A patient is monitored and put in prone position in the Masarhi hospital

Hospitals like the one at Masarhi serve an important public purpose. But they come with inherent limitations, being dependent on donors and the spiritedness of physicians of the kind you will find associated with DFY. It is important that governments see the energy flowing here and use it creatively to grow a larger healthcare system. Finally, it is only the government that can provide the overarching structure for a broad-based healthcare system that a country with diverse patient loads like ours requires.

MOTIVATION NEEDED

At Masarhi we can handle 50 patients at a time. That is great, considering that there were no facilities available earlier. But it is not enough. DFY is currently managing coronavirus patients in 12 hospitals all over the country. Dr Rajat Jain, DFY president, has worked with other colleagues to set up facilities in Bengaluru and Delhi. Everywhere it is the same story of the healthcare system falling far short of requirements.

The government would do well to rally around doctors, scientists, planners, funders, NGOs and community groups, and do so soon because there is no time to be lost. When governments are supportive and give a free hand to professionals, the results are immediately visible. An example is how Dr Suresh Kumar, in the midst of the pandemic, has transformed services at LNJP Hospital under the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government in Delhi.

Even as we struggle to cope with the current pandemic, it is clear that there could well be more pandemics on their way. Before the novel coronavirus, technically known as SARS-Cov-2, came along, there have been HIV, SARS-CoV, Nipah, Ebola, Zika, Swine Flu and going back further in time the devastating Spanish Flu.



Entry to the Masarhi hospital



Cleaning up in one of the wards

To build a dependable public health system calls for vision and commitment. It is like a giant jigsaw. The hospital at Masarhi is an example.

A public health system has to have the strength and flexibility to measure up to such unpredictable outbreaks and also handle the disease burdens that exist in the normal course. In India think TB, cancer, dengue, malaria, heart disease, diabetes, HIV and more.

As a result of high consumption, exploitation of natural resources and global warming we now experience more natural disasters than ever before. Getting healthcare to everyone who needs it should be a national priority going much beyond the investments we see in private hospitals. The system as it exists is not just inadequate but teeters on the verge of collapse.

WUHAN TO PATNA

When my brother, who is a municipal employee in Patna, contracted COVID-19 recently, I took him to Masarhi for treatment, confident that he would be better-off there than in any Patna hospital. I treated him in Masarhi for two weeks and he was ready to go back to work though his was a severe case and not without some complications.



A mother with her baby at a Delhi hospital COVID ward

Photo: Civil Society/Shrey Gupta



In action mode: A Doctors For You team at the Commonwealth Games Stadium

It is not the first time that I have had to take care of a family member in the middle of a much larger public health emergency. Last year, when Patna was flooded and my mother got infected with the dengue virus, I treated her in a makeshift clinic in a tent because hospitals were all under water.

In an interconnected world it doesn't take long for a virus to show up at your doorstep, often having journeyed across the globe. It took no time at all for the novel coronavirus to get from Wuhan to Patna. The question no longer is whether we will have another epidemic or pandemic. It is when. We can't afford to live in denial.

There are more than one million viruses on the planet with the potential of being transmitted from animals to human beings. If we see the pattern of emergence of highly infectious pathogens of pandemic potential over the past few decades, it is very clear that almost every decade has experienced two to three major outbreaks.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has recorded more than 5,000 major and minor disease alerts and one new disease outbreak each year.

The rat and bat are two major carriers of multiple deadly pathogens. The bat, being the second most common mammalian species, is a very good vector for thousands of viruses.

It is very difficult to exactly predict the date and location of an outbreak although we know the major hotspots where there is potential for an outbreak. But what we do know is that there is no substitute for perpetual preparedness.

CRISIS SPECIALISTS

I founded Doctors For You in 2007 at KEM Hospital when I was a post-graduate student to get people to donate blood platelets during a dengue outbreak in Mumbai. But the inspiration really came from Doctors Without Borders, a collective of physicians who serve internationally at hotspots.

Doctors For You set out to do the same thing in India and its neighbourhood.



Beds laid out at the Commonwealth Games Stadium

As we struggle with the current pandemic, it is clear there could be more on the way. A health system has to have the strength and flexibility to measure up.

Doctors would make themselves available in crisis situations and supplement the regular healthcare system. In India, rushing medical talent to hotspots is all the more important because of the ragged state of public healthcare.

Over the years, we at Doctors For You have seen the number of natural disasters escalating. In 2019, for the first time, we responded to more than seven emergencies in just eight months. They came in rapid succession starting from Cyclone Fani in Odisha to the acute encephalitis syndrome (AES) outbreak in the district of Muzaffarpur in Bihar, the Kerala floods, Bihar floods, Assam floods, Maharashtra floods and finally the giant flood in Patna.

It was a year marked by natural disaster upon disaster and as we thought we would catch our breath and revive ourselves; we were confronted with the coronavirus pandemic in 2020.

At Doctors For You we have been engaging with governments and seeing their preparedness for calamities. It has never been enough. Some efforts are made in the form of mock drills, training exercises and post-calamity assessments. Such efforts are mostly for the record and don't add up to much. A much larger machine needs to be in place and ready to swing into action, but as of now it simply doesn't exist.

So, what can we do to be better prepared for crisis situations and, most dreaded



A children's ward in Delhi

of all, another pandemic, should it happen? Here are a few suggestions that come from our experience at Doctors For You:

■ Promote scientific leadership

India needs scientific leadership to look up to during a health crisis. The government's policies and decisions should be shaped by experts with domain knowledge.

Ordinary people need both services and credible information. It can be tricky in the case of a disease about which not much may be known. Assessments keep changing and it is important that qualified people of a certain standing take the decisions that need to be taken.

Locking down, quarantining, testing, contact tracing and even defining social norms such as mask wearing and distancing are essentially scientific decisions. Professionals should take the lead in these matters.

The pandemic in India has been addressed under the Epidemic Diseases Act of 1897 amended by an ordinance, which has now been replaced by a bill moved in the Rajya Sabha to enhance the authority of the Centre.

Having a strong central authority has its uses during a crisis. But there shouldn't be any compromise on having scientifically qualified people in charge. On the contrary, during the pandemic we have seen bureaucrats and politicians calling the shots with a few of their chosen people from the scientific world.

The result has been that decisions and public positions have at times bordered on the absurd. For instance, long after it was apparent, community transmission of the virus was not the accepted official position.

It was similarly an embarrassing fiasco when the director of the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) ordered in a letter that an Indian vaccine would have to be ready by August 15 or Independence Day. There was no way a vaccine could have been ready by then.

The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) originally had eight members and it currently has three. Not one of them is a public health expert. When there were eight members of the NDMA under the Congress-led UPA government, many of them were random political appointees.

Containing a pandemic requires medical doctors and scientists to show the way. High levels of scientific sophistication are needed to deal with a rapidly spreading infection.

The Secretary-General of the United Nations, Antonio Guterres, has rightly said, "Responsible leadership matters. Science matters. Cooperation matters — and misinformation kills."

India is rich in medical and scientific talent. The country also has access to an array of respected experts in a diaspora of Indians that stretches across the globe. It is imperative that we bring this wealth of expertise together and give it an all-important role in the design and governance of healthcare systems.

There is also a great deal of learning to be done from this pandemic — here in India and in countries all over the world. Some of it has to do with treatments and the behaviour of the disease and some of it is about systems. Assimilating this learning and transforming it into a better medical response should be the work of experts.

■ Improve the public health system

There is no substitute for a robust public health system, which is accessible, affordable and run by the government. If the government healthcare system is today in a shambles, it is because of the neglect shown to it and the different degrees of bias in favour of the private sector. An imbalance has been created — it ranges from doctors' earnings to management systems. A perception now exists that government hospitals are so bad that they can't be trusted and are actually beyond reform.

The fact is that India has a well-structured healthcare system, which goes from the PHC up to the tertiary hospital. If it were made to work better, it would deliver results like it once used to. States like Tamil Nadu and Kerala that invest in their public health systems reap the benefits. They have done better than other states during the pandemic.

We often hear that doctors don't want to serve in the government system and take up difficult assignments. The impression is that they are only interested in making money. The reality is more nuanced. At Doctors For You we have a long list of doctors and paramedical staff who are only too happy to take up challenges. They often risk their lives. What they need is motivation and a sense of purpose.

When I landed in Delhi in the middle of coronavirus cases spiking, I got a desperate call from a private sector company asking Doctors For You to set up a hospital for their staff and family members. I asked why they needed this when all the big corporate hospitals were empannelled with the company. The answer



Photo: Civil Society/Shrey Gupta

Arvind Kejriwal and Manish Sisodia inaugurate a COVID ward at LNJP Hospital in Delhi



was that these hospitals weren't taking in the company's patients.

Of course, government hospitals are also known to have turned away patients. But having a strong and resilient public health system is the foundation for an effective emergency response. If systems are weak even during normal times, it is foolish to expect even an optimal response during a mega crisis like a pandemic such as the one we are experiencing.

The government needs to set up a special fund for pandemics and other medical emergencies. As it is, the healthcare system is underfunded. Putting aside financial resources for crises will spare the system having to take the additional burden.

At Doctors For You we have found that companies are eager to come forward to support public health initiatives. They would be significant contributors to a special fund. Or there could be a small levy to raise funds for healthcare in the way a levy is used to raise funds for education. A levy would go a long way in raising the sizable funds required.

An alert health system with enough infrastructural facilities, equipment and skilled manpower is a prerequisite to mounting an effective crisis response. For a health system it is vital to quickly test, trace, isolate, treat and increase additional bed capacity in response to an emerging infectious disease outbreak.

■ **Celebrate the NGO sector**

Such are the deficits in public healthcare in India that a giant national effort is needed. The voluntary sector has to be an important part of such an effort. Many deliverables become possible with the spirit of voluntarism. Doctors For You is an example of what a non-government organisation (NGO) can do.

There are several small hospitals in the voluntary sector. They are serving communities that would otherwise get no healthcare at all. Similarly, there are a few hundred rural surgeons with excellent degrees who forgo lucrative practices to work in rural areas.

These are great examples of the values and the spirit of service traditionally associated with medicine as a profession and not just as a business with the goal of making money.

A public healthcare system needs to be nourished with such values. Certainly, for it to work well, doctors have to be paid good salaries and given congenial conditions to work in. The management of government facilities has to serve the needs and aspirations of people employed in them. But, finally, it is the spirit of public service that has to be engendered.

An important aspect of improving public health is bringing about behavioural changes in the population at large. People with communication skills in advertising agencies can help shape effective messaging in the mass media. But the government needs socially-driven people in NGOs to go that last mile. It can't do it on its own. NGOs have committed foot soldiers to take healthcare messages into people's homes.

In the voluntary sector, don't forget donors. During this pandemic the private sector has repeatedly come forward with funds. If public healthcare were to be put in mission mode, the private sector could play an important role in providing money, technology and managerial inputs.

■ **Be sustainable**

We have a consumption-driven model of growth. We need to be more Gandhian in our values. Our economic policies can't be seen as divorced from the issues of environment and people. In fact, it should be a national objective to reduce our footprint on the planet and encourage the young to live more sustainably.

Viruses are emerging from the destruction of natural resources. The felling of forests and loss of biodiversity are ruining the balance in nature. In terms of the planet as a whole, this has its own implications. But there is enough evidence to suggest that environmentally sensitive policies translate into a better quality of life. How India manages its rivers and forests and deals with pollution will be crucial to public health. The record right now is a dismal one and has to improve. ■

Dr Ravikant Singh is the founder of Doctors For You. www.doctorsforyou.org



FEDERAL CHESSBOARD

CENTREING THE STATES

SANJAYA BARU | VINAYAK CHATTERJEE
 P. D. RAI & SUSHIL RAMOLA | KIRAN KARNIK
 VIMALA RAMACHANDRAN
 R. BALASUBRAMANIAM

Pages 24-35



STRONG CENTRE AND THE POLITICS OF FEDERALISM

New Delhi has to show greater sensitivity to the individual personality of states, especially of those that are on the nation's physical periphery.



SANJAYA BARU

THE Centre is a conceptual myth! So declared film-actor-turned-political leader N.T. Rama Rao, founder of the Telugu Desam Party and the first non-Congress chief minister of Andhra Pradesh. He joined hands with such powerful provincial leaders as Jyoti Basu in West Bengal, H.N. Bahuguna in Uttar Pradesh, Sharad Pawar in Maharashtra, Farooq Abdullah in Jammu & Kashmir and Devi Lal in Haryana to demand more power – fiscal and administrative — for states and non-interference by the Centre in areas that were constitutional responsibilities of state governments. In office in West Bengal and Kerala, the Left Front joined NTR and other non-Congress state governments to mount a major campaign in the early 1980s for more equitable Centre-state financial relations. West Bengal Finance Minister Ashok Mitra, a distinguished Left economist, led the charge, convening a national conference on Centre-state relations in Kolkata, and many non-Left economists of repute, like fiscal policy expert I.S. Gulati, joined that campaign.

Not only was that alliance of state leaders a powerful one, but the Centre was at the time in the charge of a chastened Indira Gandhi. Defeated in the post-Emergency elections of 1977 for running what was by then the most centralized administration since Independence, Indira Gandhi returned to power in 1980 saddled with a weak economy and problems of various kinds. In a conciliatory mood, she appointed the Justice Sarkaria Commission on Centre-State Relations in 1983. That was the first attempt after Independence at a review of Centre-state relations.

While the Constitution describes India as a "Union of States", its principal architect, B.R. Ambedkar, described the arrangement as "unitary in extraordinary times" but "federal in ordinary

times". War was mentioned as one such 'extraordinary' situation when the Centre can assume a variety of powers at the expense of the state. There is also a constitutional provision for the declaration of a 'financial emergency'. The Sarkaria Commission made several recommendations aimed at reversing an incipient trend towards centralization, introduced mainly during Indira Gandhi's Emergency regime. Though, to be sure, the first time constitutional provisions were misused by the Centre to dismiss an elected state government was when Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru dismissed the government of communist leader E.M.S. Namboodiripad in Kerala in 1957.

BALANCE OF POLITICAL POWER

While the Constitution defines India's federal/unitary governance structure, in practice the balance of power between the Centre and the states has been shaped more by politics than by the Constitution. Thus, in the 1950s Nehru was the all-powerful PM in Delhi but he had to deal with a number of politically powerful CMs in states and so an equilibrium of sorts prevailed at the time. The 1960s, on the other hand, was a decade in which India had relatively weak PMs (Nehru in his last years followed by an uncertain Lal Bahadur Shastri and an Indira Gandhi in her "goongi gudiya" (dumb doll), pre-Bangladesh war phase). The Sixties was a decade of powerful CMs — EMS in Kerala, Atulya Ghosh in West Bengal, K. Brahmananda Reddy in Andhra Pradesh, C.N. Annadurai in Tamil Nadu, Mohanlal Sukhadia in Rajasthan, Kamalapati Tripathi in Uttar Pradesh and so on.

The pendulum swung the other way in the 1970s, with Indira Gandhi emerging the all-powerful PM and appointing puppet CMs in Congress-ruled states and dismissing governments of non-Congress CMs. The 1980s then saw the rise of non-Congress 'regional' parties and provincial leaders and, despite having over 400 MPs, Rajiv Gandhi found his writ did not run easily across the country. Interestingly, the period from 1989 to 2004 saw a balanced equation emerge between the Centre and the states with Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao and Atal Behari Vajpayee functioning as consensual leaders, given their narrow parliamentary majorities, and the PMs of four short-lived coalitions — V.P. Singh, Chandra Shekhar, H.D. Deve Gowda and I.K. Gujral — depending on several CMs for their own survival in office.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's decade in

office was defined by a paradox as far as Centre-state relations are concerned. On the one hand, being a minority government in alliance with a powerful Left Front, the Singh government in Delhi had to be mindful of the sensitivities of state governments and regional parties. On the other hand, given the enormous increase in central government spending in areas which are the responsibility of state governments — education, health, urban development, social welfare, rural roads and so on — the Centre exerted enormous influence on the functioning of state governments. Programmes like the National Rural Health Mission and the National Urban Renewal Mission had incentive systems that sought to influence state government policy by linking it to financial allocations.

While the so-called 'era of coalitions', 1989-2014, saw a more balanced political equation emerge between the Centre and the states, the expansion of central funding in areas that are the responsibility of states through 'centrally-sponsored schemes', increased the Centre's fiscal clout over states.

COOPERATIVE FEDERALISM

As chief minister of Gujarat, Narendra Modi identified himself with the view that the centralization of funding through centrally-sponsored schemes went against the federal spirit of the Constitution. He found it demeaning that as an elected political leader and head of a state government he had to lobby with unelected, non-political professionals at the Planning Commission to get the funding he needed for projects that were his government's priorities. It was this experience that encouraged him to promise that as prime minister he would adopt "cooperative federalism" as his mantra. This was widely welcomed by advocates of fiscal federalism who imagined that as a former chief minister he would be more sensitive to the interests of the states in his new avatar as prime minister.

However, in practice Modi has been no different from other powerful PMs and he is now being accused by most non-BJP CMs of running an excessively centralized regime. In his most recent newspaper interview (*Economic Times*, October 29, 2020) Modi defended his record as PM, stating, "The last six years have seen the spirit of competitive and cooperative federalism in all our actions. A country as large as ours cannot develop only on the one pillar of the centre, it needs the second pillar of the states." He went on to claim that in dealing with



The Prime Minister has had no real contact with Chief Ministers. The first videoconference with them was three weeks after the lockdown

the COVID-19 pandemic, "Decisions were taken collectively. I had videoconferences with CMs multiple times to hear their suggestions and inputs, which has no parallel in history."

Apart from the fact that Modi's first video-conference with CMs was on April 10, 2020, three weeks after the first lockdown decision was unilaterally imposed on the entire country, the truth is that there were no regular consultations with CMs through his entire first term in office. Modi is the first PM to have dispensed with the institution of the National Development Council, a gathering of central ministers and chief ministers that has been an important institution of cooperative federalism. Modi's critics say that the PM initially tried to play the national hero, unilaterally imposing a nationwide lockdown with four hours' notice and urging all citizens to clap hands and light lamps, and only when he realized the pandemic and the lockdown could prove politically counter-productive did he begin involving the states and placing the burden of managing the consequences on them.

THE FISCAL DIMENSION

At the heart of Centre-state relations lies the problem of finance. In recognition of this the Constitution provided for the appointment of a Finance Commission once every five years to examine and recommend principles for the "distribution of the net proceeds of taxes between the Union and States and also the allocation of the same among the States themselves". The Finance Commission is also expected to examine and define from time to time the devolution of revenues and financial relations between the Centre and the states. Interestingly, till 1998 all the Finance Commission chairpersons were politicians and some, like Y.B. Chavan and K. Brahmananda Reddy, had even served as chief ministers and were known to be strong advocates of greater devolution of finances to states. From 1998, however, the central

government began naming professional economists and bureaucrats, with a record of serving the central government, as chairpersons.

Successive Finance Commissions have helped increase the states' share in centrally collected taxes that become part of the divisible pool. The shift to a Goods and Services Tax (GST) was also managed well with the Centre taking the states along with it. At the parliamentary event at which GST was officially launched the then finance minister, Arun Jaitley, paid handsome tribute to four state finance ministers for their cooperation in enabling a national consensus on the GST scheme adopted. The four were West Bengal's Amit Mitra (TMC), Kerala's Thomas Isaac (CPI-M), Bihar's Sushil Modi (BJP) and Jammu & Kashmir's Haseeb Drabu (PDP). This was, in many ways, the high point of 'cooperative federalism' in Modi's regime.

In his second term and faced with the economic and fiscal challenges posed by the post-COVID lockdown, Modi has been less sensitive to the needs of state governments. It took considerable protests on the part of state governments and the coming together of non-BJP governments for the Centre to relent on the issue of helping states bridge the revenue gap due to the negative impact of the lockdown on economic growth and the consequent loss of revenues.

The Fifteenth Finance Commission has been tasked by the central government with exploring ways in which the Centre can fund its rising defence budget. It remains to be seen how the commission will address this. There is every possibility that it would recommend increasing the Centre's share of the divisible pool. Given the nationalist mood of the ruling BJP, it can easily generate support for this. However, the real reason the Centre is unable to fund the activities it is required to under the Constitution, like national defence, is because it has been increasing its funding of activities that ought to be in the realm of state governments. This has

happened for half a century, since prime ministers like to be remembered by what they do at the community level. Thus, centrally-sponsored programmes in areas such as health, rural roads, education and social welfare have been named after successive PMs. Unless there is a more rational reallocation of spending priorities between the Centre and the states, the central government will find it difficult to find funds for defence and national security, which are about the only things that the Centre is required to do. For the rest, the responsibility remains with the states. That is precisely why NTR said the Centre was a conceptual myth. But politics has inverted the equation.

Going forward, the BJP will have to come to terms with India's essentially federal character and not view this as a weakness. Rather, India's strength lies in the concept of 'unity in diversity'. Thus, allowing greater fiscal and administrative autonomy to states need not be viewed as weakening the nation. It ought to be viewed as strengthening the bonds of unity. In converting Jammu & Kashmir from a state, that was demanding greater autonomy, to a Union Territory directly administered by New Delhi, the Modi government has taken a step away from the spirit of the Constitution. Restoring statehood to J&K and granting greater administrative autonomy can only strengthen the bond with the state.

This principle holds true for the rest of the country. China, Canada and the United States offer good examples of strong provincial governments. New Delhi has to show sensitivity to the individual personality of states, especially of those that are on the nation's physical periphery like the Northeastern states, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, J&K and the island territories, and desist from imposing the BJP's monochromatic "Hindu-Hindi-Hindustan" view of this multi-lingual, multi-cultural, multi-ethnic republican democracy of ours. ■

Sanjaya Baru is a writer and Distinguished Fellow at the Institute for Defence Studies & Analyses in New Delhi.

STATES SHOULD WAKE UP AND FIND NEW REVENUE STREAMS

A model proposed for Punjab a decade ago is relevant in the current context to finance infrastructure and drive growth. Well-crafted projects will find bidders.



VINAYAK CHATTERJEE

THE shift in the balance of power between the Centre and the states has huge implications for infrastructure creation. Before the Goods and Services Tax (GST), the federal structure was not merely political, but also had fiscal and financial dimensions. Now with sales tax and octroi gone, the states find themselves in many ways fiscally impotent.

At the same time, the federal political structure is such that a chief minister cannot disown responsibility for the economy because of the lack of revenue certainty. The chief minister is there to deliver growth, prosperity, increase in real wages and generally meet the aspirations of people who vote a party to power in a state.

The finances of the states were already stretched before GST, but with collections falling short and promised compensation also not being transferred to the states, they suddenly find that they have no money to spend.

So the question now is what is the model that the states can adopt to replace the earlier one and meet the expectations of delivery that remain unchanged. One path is fighting with the Centre, but that is hardly a solution.

Some time ago, in the late 1990s, we addressed the problem of a state's dwindling finances in the face of needing to invest. We came up with the Punjab PPP Model, which is based on recognizing infrastructure as the biggest driver of jobs, livelihoods and economic activity in general. We identified infrastructure, both rural and urban, as the engine, which if made to run energetically, can deliver the goods that people want.

It is a particularly relevant proposition today. If the states can define creative ways of funding infrastructure, they can realistically move on from the difficult situation in which they find themselves

— and move on they will have to since changes in the federal equation with the Centre and restoration of their share in GST seem improbable in the foreseeable future. A state really has no option but to get its act together, give up its dependence on the Centre and become the arbiter of its own destiny.

I was instrumental in selling the Punjab model to the then chief minister, chief secretary and finance secretary. What we created was a twin structure. It was a state-level infrastructure fund twinned with a Punjab Infrastructure Board. So, there is a fund and there is a board that governs the fund. The creativity and commitment with which such a board is set up will determine the success of the state.

Obviously, it's easier to set up a board than to fund a fund. So the question is what do you do to fund a fund. Other than starting capital, which can come from the state budget, a few lakhs of rupees, the model is that the state must now find sources of revenue and direct those revenues into this fund.

MGNREGA spending is spurring growth in rural areas. Investing in local mini public works creates jobs — a panchayat office, a water body, roads drive consumption.

In Punjab we suggested an increase of three percent in *mandi* cess since Punjab is a rural and agriculturally prosperous state. We said, out of the 14 crops you have in the *mandis* increase the cess on three crops by three percent. We chose mustard, cotton and something else. The cess would provide an annuity/income every year outside the budget. It would serve as a stream of income.

Every state can't follow the Punjab model. If a state is rich in tourism, for example, it could probably have, like in Singapore, a tourist tax. A state like Himachal should probably have a tourist tax of five percent on all hotel bills where tourists check in normally or where you are buying tickets for entry. Each state has a DNA on the basis of which it should craft a cess in a manner that doesn't

cause a public uproar.

A state can no longer do sales tax and GST and levies on alcohol, petroleum, aviation fuel, etc, are anyway being used to fund existing state expenditure. The only solution is to have an additional stream of revenue by way of a cess the public is willing to pay.

Once the state has funded the infrastructure fund, there is potential to leverage it. Leveraging is done in two ways. One, if the project costs ₹100, then you put in ₹40 or ₹20 from the fund you get, the private sector puts in another ₹20 as a 50:50 PPP, and then the state raises the balance ₹60 as debt. Effectively, with a ₹10 corpus of the fund you have catalyzed a ₹100-crore project.

The other way to do it is the Mumbai-Pune Expressway model or the Lucknow-Agra Expressway model. The state takes the money from the fund and finishes the road project itself. Once it is ready and demonstrable and working, you then sell it, which means you monetize it by giving the toll collection rights to somebody for 40 to 50 years and you get your cash back.

There are mega infrastructure projects with high visibility, which can be funded by the state. The Jewar airport in Noida, Uttar Pradesh, is an example. Similarly, there are traditional state highways, ports and rural roads. Such projects will always exist.

RURAL UPSURGE

But a plethora of mini projects also drives growth brilliantly. We are right now witnessing an upsurge in rural India. I'm on the JCB Board and it's astounding how many earthmoving machines are suddenly selling. Similarly, you have retail cement sales. What is causing this rural boom? It is not happening because there has been an 18 percent increase in the *kharif* sowing area. Sowing doesn't lead to prosperity, harvesting will. But it is nevertheless happening. I have traced ₹150,000 crore of central expenditure that has been pumped into rural India under different schemes, principally MGNREGA, and that is touching around ₹300 crore per day.

It is greatly beneficial to invest in local mini public works — a panchayat office, cleaning up of a water body, roads in the hills, or from district town to village, a street with lighting, solar panels. Such investment drives local consumption. The moment you are creating an embankment, bricks are selling, cement is selling, electric wire is selling, tiles are

Photo: Civil Society/Shrey Gupta



A betterment levy can be used to bolster state finances where public investment leads to private gain

selling, chaps who are masons are getting jobs. Creating a panchayat office suddenly creates workflow for seven or eight people. And then 15 products start selling from locally assembled furniture to lights, switches, and fans.

At one level a state's infrastructure fund could be thinking what Yogi Adityanath is thinking — Jewar airport, the Agra-Lucknow road and so on. But spend also at the doorstep of the village where the unemployment is, where the misery is — on mini public works.

An infrastructure fund put together by a state using its own devices gives it credibility and visibility and improves its chances of raising more money. It puts it in a position to attract central spending and even direct it to areas where it needs investment most.

A very interesting model is in Kerala, which for the first time floated bonds for a State Sovereign Guaranteed Infrastructure Fund. It is the only state that has ever been allowed to do so. Having given permission to Kerala, the Centre suddenly woke up to the fact that collecting money internationally, be it from Abu Dhabi or NRIs, created a foreign exchange liability for India. The result is states are banned from raising funds abroad.

But that doesn't prevent states from issuing bonds and raising funds in India. All a state needs is credibility and evidence that it has the revenue streams to pay back investors.

Municipal bonds are also a solution that states need to explore. Every city in this country is strapped for funds because cities never had a financial destiny of their own. They depended on largesse from the state capital. The time has come for the states to take an interest in municipal bonds.

You've got to reform your city administration. You've got to have double entry accounts. You've got to start charging for services like water, garbage and effluents, and you have to create an income stream. Escrow it, put it up to financiers and say how the

bonds will be repaid. The Centre has not stopped the states and municipal administrations from issuing municipal bonds. On the contrary, successful examples such as in Pune already exist. More needs to happen.

FARM REFORMS

Another point I want to make is that the agriculture reforms that have just been announced open up a vast area in the hinterland of states to create a new generation of infrastructure in the agricultural sector, which is a state subject.

There are opportunities in cold chains, cold storages, *mandis*, sorting and grading centres. These are all investments waiting to be made. They have the potential to quickly translate into farm-related employment and prosperity as local entrepreneurship grows.

Whether it is a big or small project, a state government needs to be intelligent in crafting a product that has demand. If it crafts it well, there are bidders for it. The market takes over.

Jewar airport serves as an example. There is a strong undercurrent for landowners in the Noida area because their land prices go up 100 times. It's a win-win situation for everybody. UP says it has an international airport, the landowners benefit.

The UP government is putting in very little. It has broadly paid for the land acquisition. And it has very intelligently managed its equation with the Centre to get Airport Authority permission and other clearances. Zurich Airport has won the bid and is putting in the money. What will be created is one more aero-city that will lead to more businesses and the creation of a lot of jobs.

Or take the example of the massive expressway from Lucknow to Agra. You tell LIC to just fund land acquisition to put the project design and DPR together. Then you put it up for bidding or build and monetize it. If you have specific projects backed by physical assets or a bidding plan, if a credible

proposition is put up, money is not the problem even under today's strained conditions.

Another important source of funding is monetization of state-owned assets. Why can't the government of West Bengal bundle its highways and put them up for bidding just like the Centre does? There will be takers. Bus terminals in Durgapur and Asansol are sitting on prime land that can be monetized for commercial complexes. Why can't the state government sell the space on top for people to build commercial complexes? The government of West Bengal owns power-generating companies. It should be selling them off.

A betterment levy can also be used to bolster state finances. It works like this: the moment an arterial road is built, or any infrastructure project happens which is broadly linear — like the Rapid Rail from Delhi to Sohna — the land around it appreciates 10 or 20 times. The expenditure is public expenditure, but the spin-off benefit is private and goes to cronies of political systems or brokers. How can the state get a share of that?

A betterment levy makes it possible. Any land transaction along the alignment of the project can attract a levy over and above the stamp duty — it could be 15 percent from 0 to 500 metres from the carriageway; 10 percent for 1,000 metres to 1,500 metres; and five percent beyond that.

Like this, when public expenditure leads to private gain, there is at least a mechanism to capture something. If the Centre is building a national highway it is only fair that the betterment levy be shared by the Centre and the states it is running through. But if the expenditure is made by the state government, then it should take 100 percent of the value captured of the surrounding land for 10 years.

The current crisis will force states to think creatively and if they come up with the right ideas and the mechanisms to implement them, funds can flow into their coffers. ■

Vinayak Chatterjee is the chairman of Feedback Infra.

IN THE MOUNTAINS, HEAVY LIFTING DESERVES REWARDS

There is huge asymmetry of power between the Centre and the mountain states. They are inadequately represented in Parliament and not understood.



P.D. RAI & SUSHIL RAMOLA

THE states and areas of the Indian Himalayan Region (IHR) represent a substantial part of India's forests, water sources and biodiversity. Together they account for 16 percent of the country's landmass. But these regions remain poorly developed in comparison to most states and are inadequately represented in Parliament. As a result, in the give and take of federal equations, they have traditionally fared poorly. There is little understanding of their special needs and their voices when heard aren't adequately accounted for. Landlocked, denied old trade routes, and custodians of natural wealth they must preserve, the mountain states are in urgent need of national attention.

What exactly is the IHR? It comprises the mountain states of Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura, Mizoram, the districts of Dima Hasau and Karbi Anglong in Assam, and Darjeeling and Kalimpong in West Bengal and the newly formed Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) and Ladakh.

The diverse altitudes and agro-climatic zones, glaciers and river sources, biodiversity, cultures, tribal traditions, languages, dialects and remoteness make this region unique in its natural assets and cultural heritage and yet less developed and less understood. With 16 percent of the area, it contributes only four percent to the population of India. On the other hand, 30 percent of the forests, 32 percent of the carbon stock, 36 percent of India's biodiversity are found here. Rivers originating in the Himalayas account for 56 percent of the river catchment area in the country.

The ecosystem services the region provides to the

country are not immediately understood or valued but are vital to the well-being of the nation.

These states are landlocked. Before 1947, there was a lot of inter-country trade from the border passes like Moreh in Manipur and Nathu La in Sikkim. Burma teak was a famous import. Tibetan wool, imported via Nathu La, was the input for all kinds of carpets and other products in the region. The closure of the borders has meant that for all goods and services as well as markets for any produce one has to look to the 'mainland'.

This has in many ways stymied the development trajectory of the region. The development potential of the region is further negatively affected by inaccessible terrain, severe climatic conditions, proneness to disasters, low population densities, poor connectivity and infrastructure, and central laws disallowing usage of forests that cover about 70 percent of the land.

This has led to extreme financial dependence of the Himalayan states on the Centre. Relative lack of economic activity has caused extensive out migration. With climate change threatening water resources and agriculture, migration has increased. As per the HIMAP study conducted by ICIMOD (International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development) which concluded in 2019, even if global warming can be restricted to a 1.5 degree increase by the end of the 21st century, temperatures will rise by 2.1 degrees in the Himalayan region which will mean large-scale melting of glaciers and a serious threat to water security not only for the people of this region but foremost for North India.

WEAK VOICE AT THE CENTRE

In our democracy, where representation in Parliament is proportionate to population, the mountain states individually and together have a very weak voice. Uttar Pradesh (UP) alone sends 113 MPs to Parliament (80 to the Lok Sabha and 33 to the Rajya Sabha). In comparison, the 10 mountain states combined have only four percent. Add to this the fact that the MPs from the mountain states are often from diverse political parties and it is not difficult to see why the voice of MPs from the mountain states is rarely heard on matters of import.

Subjects for discussion and debate are also

politically driven. Unless there is a massive problem like insurgency there is very little effective reflection in the House about the development needs of this region. Further, there is huge asymmetry of power between the Centre and the mountain states. The kind of technologies and market-driven mechanisms that are defined in Delhi do not necessarily work in the smaller, sparsely populated states in the Himalaya which are very different from each other in addition to facing vastly different challenges than the plains.

The point we are driving at is that sustainable development agenda or any other agenda for the mountain states will not be brought up and given any weight unless there is a concerted effort by the majority party or a large number of MPs across parties and states. This is hard to achieve even in the best of times.

In times of crisis like the current economic crisis in which the world is floundering due to the coronavirus pandemic, the situation of the mountain states becomes precarious. Therefore, it is fundamentally important to reflect on alternative models of development which enable enough thought to state and local issues and take the people along in decision-making.

India's Constitution has a combination of unitary and federal elements to hold the nation together against internal and external challenges and yet provides enough power to the states to enable the diversity of regions, cultures, languages and socio-political desires and needs to find expression.

Much has been written about the current centralization push including the three agricultural laws, the National Education Policy (NEP) and the labour laws recently passed by Parliament. We believe that many elements of these laws are welcome reforms even as we are concerned about the specific issues of the mountains being ignored in these changes leading to further marginalization of the IHR.

When India adopted the Constitution in 1950 it was already clear in the minds of its framers that India would have to adopt a more centralized power structure than, say, the US. It is also well-recorded that the centralization impulse becomes more dominant when there is a strong single party at the Centre. The decentralization impetus finds some expression when the central government is a coalition government or is supported by regional parties. The pushes and pulls since then, between



The Himalayan region states have 30 percent of the forests, 32 percent of the carbon stock, 36 percent of India's biodiversity

states and the Centre, have been well-documented by the Justice Sarkaria Commission in 1988 and more recently by the Justice M.M. Punchhi Commission constituted in 2010. The felt deficit in democracy and a consequent demand for decentralization over time led to the 73rd and 74th amendments to the Constitution which introduced a third tier of government, one that has unfortunately been implemented rather imperfectly in most parts of the country.

HOW CENTRALIZATION AFFECTS LIFE

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, India locked down completely on March 25, 2020. But what followed was simply a case of increased centralization both at the Centre and at the state level.

Parliament and the assemblies have been rendered ineffective during the pandemic, perhaps sidelined, willy-nilly. The states are staring at empty coffers and mounting debt. Consensus in Parliament which led to the setting up of the GST Council in 2017 to levy GST was hailed as a great example of cooperative federalism. The states gave up their fiscal autonomy — the power to levy sales tax in return for assured GST revenues for a period. The Centre has failed to honour its commitment to states to pay the planned guaranteed GST dues, citing poorer collections due to COVID-19. This issue is of immense significance for the future of Centre-state relations as it has to do with the credibility of the Centre.

The mountain states, in particular, are fully dependent on central grants and budgetary devolutions to run state finances. In the past, they received Plan funding from the Planning Commission besides devolution of taxes from Finance Commissions and streams of funding from centrally sponsored schemes. Ever since the Planning Commission was disbanded in 2014, the mountain states have lost a major source of funding. Today, in the absence of a Plan, the only resources to the states, besides the Finance Commission

devolution, come as centrally-directed schemes which carry with them huge discretion by the central government. Recent examples of this include the linking of funding to the implementation of the New Education Policy and the new farm bills passed by Parliament.

Small states of the Himalayan region are fully dependent on funds from the Centre after the Plan Commission was disbanded in 2014.

COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

Integrated Mountain Initiative (IMI), a civil society organization, was set up by a diverse group of leaders from different states to understand the challenges and opportunities of IHR and bring all stakeholders together to resolve the complex and long-term issues of climate change adaptation, changing livelihoods, increasing risk of disasters, sustainable habitats, and water security, among others. IMI has engaged a large cross section of people from the Centre and the states in this effort as a volunteering, non-partisan and inclusive civil society platform. IMI realized early on that these problems don't respect artificial boundaries of states and nations and therefore have to be understood in an unbiased and collaborative way.

IMI's founding president, the late Dr R.S. Tolia, was invited as a member of a working group on Development of the Hill States commissioned by the Planning Commission in 2011. The resulting B.K. Chaturvedi Report recognized for the first time that in spite of providing ecosystem services to the country and having strategic significance

because of the international border, the mountain states lacked the basic building blocks for economic development. The report found that the mountain states suffered a development disability and recommended a green bonus of two percent of gross budgetary support to the mountain states. This was, however, never implemented although Finance Commissions thereafter have begun to consider this issue in some measure.

More recently, IMI brought IHR issues to the attention of the 15th Finance Commission and leaders in each state. This led to all the mountain states coming together and representing their case to the Union finance minister, chairman of the 15th Finance Commission and the vice chairman of NITI Aayog. It is our hope that the final report of the Commission will be responsive to the articulated need of the IHR people.

We believe that the people of the IHR need to accelerate their journey to economic independence within the extant constraints and that this can only be done by better implementation of the 73rd and 74th Amendments and community empowerment.

We have the contrasting examples of Sikkim and Mizoram in the handling of the coronavirus epidemic. Mizoram was highly successful because it relied on its local and traditional grassroots institutions. Sikkim, on the other hand, was not because of its top down approach. There were no deaths in Mizoram and 59 deaths in Sikkim.

In summary, the IHR is landlocked with closed borders, sparsely populated and its people have very little voice in Parliament and in public policy formulation. It is a key geographical feature of the country contributing immense biodiversity, water resources and other ecosystem services. Centrally driven policies will not work locally. It may seem like swimming against the current of centralization but a new paradigm of state-Centre engagement is the need of the hour and one which is more decentralized in design. ■

P.D. Rai is president of IMI and former MP (Lok Sabha) from Sikkim. Sushil Ramola is a former president of IMI.

STATES SHOULD COMPETE AND ALSO WORK TOGETHER

It is not just about devolution of power from the Centre. Much more can be done within the existing framework for better governance at the grassroots.



KIRAN KARNIK

INDIA is more than one country: it is, in reality, composed of many countries united into one. Even if the thought is a cliché, it is borne out by any number of facts and figures. Each region has its own uniqueness, and the diversities across the country cover almost all conceivable dimensions, including culture, language, cuisine, ethnicity, religion, dress, climate and topography.

Over time, the initial structuring of the Union, based on “princely States” or kingdoms and British-governed territories, was replaced through the formation of linguistic states. This further evolved towards also recognizing the distinctiveness of a region or culture, with new states being created on this basis.

Interestingly, Andhra Pradesh, arguably the first state created (in 1956) on a purely linguistic basis, is now the latest example of regional considerations outweighing linguistic ones, as evidenced by the creation of Telangana in 2014.

Does the creation of this new state signify a greater emphasis on economic considerations? For, one of the main reasons behind the agitation for a separate state was the perceived neglect of the Telangana region.

On the other hand, many may argue that the driving force was not economics, but politics; that it was the need to have a greater voice in governance. The same can be said for other states born in this century. This desire for empowerment has broader ramifications with regard to structure, decentralization and devolution of authority.

As a union of states, the Constitution delineates certain items that are within the purview of states (law and order, for example), some which are with the Centre (defence, foreign affairs, etc.) and a few that are shared or in the “concurrent” list.

Over time — partly by law and partly by precedent

— the Centre has accumulated more power, at the cost of state autonomy. For example, while law and order remains the responsibility of a state, the Central Bureau of Investigation is playing an ever-bigger role. Similarly, central financial agencies like the Income-Tax Department or Enforcement Directorate carry out investigations and raids and file cases across the country. In addition, there is the newer National Investigation Agency, with a broader remit.

There are a few instances of a voluntary surrender of powers by states, for a broader good: GST, for example, through which states have given up their power to impose certain taxes. This is cooperative federalism — the new mantra — in practice. However, such cases of real cooperative federalism are hard to come by, whereas competitive federalism seems more common. Sharing of river water and boundary disputes between states sometimes make the headlines. Recently, the closing of some state boundaries in response to the coronavirus epidemic resulted in supplies getting blocked and created

There is no reason why states can't take up initiatives for better schools, universities and hospitals.

much ill-will between some neighbour states. Similarly, occasional blockades due to inter-state or tribal disputes in the Northeast have created bad blood.

There is, though, a growing effort to use competitive federalism for positive ends. The NITI Aayog and other government agencies have created metrics for scoring and ranking states on performance in a few key areas. This has fostered competition amongst states, with the more successful ones using the rankings for high-visibility advertising, showcasing their performance so as to attract investments.

This is a welcome development, but it would, indeed, be good if the importance placed on ease-of-doing-business is also given to indicators related to health, livelihoods, education, gender equality, caste discrimination, crime and equity. Competition could also extend to quality of life, which means

better facilities for education, healthcare and entertainment, as well as better connectivity — both physical (roads and airports) and electronic. This would enable states to attract talent: the creator and accelerator of economic growth and jobs. As a result, unnecessary migration in search of livelihoods may reduce.

Competition amongst states presupposes that they have the autonomy to make the critical interventions and decisions that are needed in any given field. The greater their autonomy, the more robust will be the competition. Devolution of the maximum possible power to states will, therefore, be the crucial element in ensuring that they seek to out-perform each other, enabling bigger benefit to people and to the country as a whole.

It is not merely — or even necessarily — formal devolution from the Centre that is needed. The states could do a great deal more within the existing framework. A major part of the problems with regard to most of the social areas relates to on-ground implementation. This is already very much within their ambit. Initiatives and good governance by states can make a big difference, as some — Kerala and Delhi, amongst others — have shown in school education.

SOCIAL BENEFITS

Cooperation between states — which is what “cooperative federalism” should mean (rather than merely cooperation with the Centre) — is far less common. This need not be limited to neighbouring ones, where there is obvious need and scope. It can extend, for example, to issues related to migrant labour, where long-distance migration is common: Bihar to Punjab, Odisha to Gujarat, Assam to Kerala, U.P. to Maharashtra.

There is dire need for the states concerned to work together to ensure various social benefits, travel and children's education for these migrant workers, who contribute so much to the economies of both the state they come from and the one they work in. This will require ways of transferring eligibility for benefits, based possibly on authentication through Aadhaar or some special ID, and close collaboration on a number of other matters. Children of seasonally migrant labour should have a way of doing part of their academic year in one state and the rest in another. Health records for all members of a family should be easily accessible or transferable. Voting from any location must be allowed and facilitated.



There is dire need for the states to come together to work for the benefit of migrant workers.

A more contentious issue, possibly a political hot potato, could test cooperative federalism. Not many may recall that in 1977, Parliament approved a law that froze the number of Lok Sabha seats at the 1971 level, up to the year 2000. The thought was that states which did well in promoting family planning and curbing population growth should not be penalized.

In 2001, the freeze was further extended to 2026. Meanwhile, some states (Kerala and Tamil Nadu are exemplars) have been very successful in controlling population growth, while some are yet seeing rapid increases (Bihar, U.P.). Therefore, when the freeze ends and Lok Sabha seats are divided amongst states on the basis of population, some states will gain seats while others will see a reduction.

The result is likely to be an increase in the clout of the “Hindi-speaking” states. This is bound to have serious political ramifications, which may well amplify the population-growth divide through other fault-lines related to prosperity, literacy/education, language and culture, following contours similar to the long-standing North-South one. These could stress the fabric of our nationhood, and be a major challenge for the country.

Sorting this out, without ill-will and rancour, will necessitate statesmanship of a high order. It may also require structural solutions and further decentralization of power, so as to provide reassurance and comfort to the states that are negatively affected. It is an opportune moment to think of replacing or restructuring the Rajya Sabha with a body in which each state (irrespective of area and population) has equal representation. A compact body, with no more than two or three elected members from each state (and possibly one from each Union Territory), whose approval on key laws in all defined fields is required, will safeguard the interests of all. Some models exist, albeit indirectly: the decades-old Central Advisory Board on Education, and the more recent (and empowered)

GST Council. Many obstacles will have to be overcome, much detail worked out, and Constitutional amendments enacted. It is, therefore, necessary to embark immediately on first building a political consensus, and then taking the numerous actions that are required.

VALUE OF DECENTRALIZATION

In addition to this restructuring, there is need for more decentralization and devolution of power: not only to states, but also to the local bodies and panchayats, which are constitutionally recognized as the third level of governance. Over decades, the Centre has slowly accrued more power, formally (by shifting more items from the state list to the concurrent one) or through its financial clout. Some of this is by default, partly due to poor financial management by the states, putting them at the mercy of the Centre.

Yet, there is no reason why at least a few of them could not take up initiatives on their own, pushing the boundaries of their power, where necessary. For example, why is it that no state (Delhi state might be the only exception) has schools, universities or hospitals that are as good as some of the central ones? If money is a constraint, why are neighbouring states not collaborating to do this (or joint industrial parks) in suitable locations near their common borders? Should the Centre play a role in promoting this?

The importance of decentralization was brought home forcefully by the coronavirus pandemic. The heavy-handed and disastrous blunt instrument of a nationwide lockdown — a manifestation of a centralized command-and-control mindset — sensibly gave way to more limited lockdowns and later to even narrower containment zones. Now, as planning begins for mass vaccination, arithmetic may further drive decentralization. Assuming a two-shot vaccine to be given to all of the country's 1.3 billion people in two years (a stretched time-

line), means over 3.5 million vaccinations every day of the year. This seems a daunting — if not impossible — task, and will be possible only if there is a great deal of decentralization in all aspects: training of vaccinators, supply chain logistics, ensuring universality, collecting data, follow-up for the second round, etc. Even as systems and procedures may have to be centrally determined, this must be done with the active collaboration and inputs of the states. Implementation will have to be not only by states, but by local bodies, which need to be appropriately empowered. This massive exercise could well mark the beginning of far greater decentralization and devolution of power.

In a country as diverse as India, decentralization is a necessity. Wherever a standardized, centralized approach has been used, it has inevitably failed. Agriculture and health — both dependent on local weather — require local decisions and action. So does the creation of jobs and livelihoods. Education depends on local language, environment and culture. Most important, true democracy requires empowerment and is best served by governance that is locally accountable. In many of these, technology can play a role. Though it is not a magic bullet which decimates all problems - there are socio-cultural, economic and structural factors that are key to tackling issues, especially societal ones. - yet, technology has always been a great enabler, accelerator and catalyst of development. Now, emerging technologies — unlike the centralizing ones of the past — will facilitate decentralization.

For India, federalism — both competitive and cooperative — positively implemented, is a good way ahead. Given its size and diversity, decentralization and devolution of power is a necessity. There is no other way we can meet the many challenges that lie ahead. ■

Kiran Karnik is an independent strategy and public policy analyst. His recent books include Evolution: Decoding India's Disruptive Tech Story (2018) and Crooked Minds: Creating an Innovative Society (2016). His forthcoming book is on India in 2030.

WHERE ARE THE TEACHERS FOR PRE-SCHOOL LEARNING?

The ICDS cannot provide pre-primary education across states. It is hobbled by overburdened workers. A new professional cadre of teachers is needed.



VIMALA RAMACHANDRAN

NUTRITION and the health of children has been the main focus of *anganwadi* centres under the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS). The recent National Education Policy (NEP) introduces pre-schooling from the age of three. Can the *anganwadis* provide quality pre-schooling?

Understanding and addressing the different kinds of challenges faced by the states of India is the key to ensuring that children are not only physically healthy and well-nourished, but are also ready for schooling.

The nutritional and health status of young children is a sensitive indicator of the overall well-being of society. A child born in a remote rural area or an urban slum does not have the same chance of survival as a child in a rich household. The picture varies across different states in India, across rural and urban areas, economic groups, social groups, gender and household educational levels.

While releasing the Mobile Creches' report on the Status of the Young Child in India (2020), M. Venkaiah Naidu, vice-president of India, said that while Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana have neonatal and infant mortality rates equivalent to developed countries, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Assam and Meghalaya are still struggling. The situation among Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes (SCs/STs) and other marginalized communities remains grim.

The National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) data report of 2018 reveals that the Age Specific Attendance Ratio (ASAR) was only 29.2 percent for children from three to five years. The reported children could either be attending pre-primary institutions (the ICDS) or pre-school—government and private). While the percentage was above 50 in Kerala, Punjab and Telangana, it was between 30

and 50 in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Haryana and West Bengal. The situation in most other states was closer to the national average. It is important to clarify that ICDS centres, catering to children aged 0-6 years, may be perceived as feeding centres and thus not reported as pre-school.

The data released by the Ministry of Women and Child Development in 2014 shows that across India only 37.9 percent of children 3-6 years old were enrolled in the ICDS' *anganwadi* centres; 30.7 percent went to privately-run pre-schools and 26.9 percent were not enrolled or attending any centre. While social group differences are not marked, 51.4 percent of children from the lowest wealth quintile depended on the ICDS, and only 15.4 percent of those in a higher wealth quintile attended the ICDS. It is in this context that the recommendations of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 to include pre-primary in the first foundational cycle is important.

While malnourishment, undernourishment,

The ICDS works in the southern states, the western states and Himachal Pradesh where governments have taken great interest in ensuring the programme worked.

stunting and wasting have rightly been the focus of attention of the ICDS programme, what is not always acknowledged is the critical role pre-school education plays in enabling children to successfully traverse schooling. Early stimulation through play-way methods are known to exert a positive influence on the ability of children to cope with schooling.

Since the mid-1970s the ICDS has not only been the largest provider of child nutrition and the focal point for immunization, but also for pre-school education. Successive surveys and studies have pointed out that while its immunization and nutrition functions are performed with some degree of seriousness, pre-school education has been the

weakest aspect of the ICDS. The 2011 Census reported that out of 158.7 million children under six years, around 76.5 million (48 percent) were reported to be accessing the ICDS programme.

The remaining 30 to 40 million children did not access these services. This could include children from richer households and perhaps a fairly large number of the most marginalized who do not access any service. Among them would be seasonal and short-term migrants and the urban poor. What is, however, disturbing is that while the ICDS centres catered to 37 million children nationwide, "just over three million children attended pre-schools attached to government primary schools in 2014-2015. Close to 27 percent of children aged 3-6 years did not attend any pre-school facility, and just about 58 percent of those enrolled attended regularly" (Mobile Creches' Report 2020).

The NEP introduces the concept of foundational literacy and numeracy — by clubbing children from three to eight years in the first of the four education cycles, namely, five years of pre-school and Classes 1 and 2; three years in Classes 3, 4 and 5; three years in Classes 6, 7 and 8 and finally four years of secondary education in Classes 9, 10, 11 and 12. Essentially, NEP 2020 makes pre-school education an integral part of the educational journey of children from the age of three.

POLITICAL WILL

What is the implication of this for the ICDS and for pre-school education in India?

The question that is often asked is whether the ICDS workers — known as *anganwadi* workers and helpers — have the time, aptitude and capability to conduct pre-school education alongside nutrition and immunization related work. It is important to remember that they are not only part-time workers but that they are paid just a small honorarium. They are also the focal point for all programmes for infants, children, pregnant and lactating mothers and adolescent girls. Adding pre-school education to their work chart has not worked everywhere. As a result, pre-school education has remained the most neglected aspect of the ICDS.

Over the past 30 years I have personally seen the ineffectiveness of pre-school education in the ICDS centres in many states. In several studies from 2003 to 2019, I explored the factors that lead to successful primary school completion.

What I saw in rural areas and urban slums is that there are significant state-wise differences. The



Workers need to be paid as professionals and not as volunteer part-time workers

governments of the southern and some western states and, to some extent, Himachal Pradesh, showed great interest in making sure the ICDS programme worked well. However, in most of the more disadvantaged states in the heartland of India, the core tribal belt, northwest states and the eastern and northeastern states I did not see evidence of commitment by governments to ensure smooth and effective functioning of the programme. The most notable difference was the total absence of pre-school education in states that saw this purely as a feeding programme.

Those children who do not attend the ICDS centres but enrol in private pre-schools do not get the nutrition and healthcare they should. It is important to acknowledge that it is not only the rich and middle classes who avail of private pre-schools — in urban slums and larger villages even the poor avail of privately-run 'play schools' or NGO-run *balwadis*. The biggest conundrum since 1975 is that the various domains of child development are divided between the women and child development ministry/ departments and the education department. Often, pre-school education falls through the cracks.

The differences across states is not confined to the ICDS. One can see a similar pattern in elementary education. The Young Child Outcome Index, developed by Mobile Creches, reveals significant state-wide differences. The report, a must-read for anyone interested in the social sectors, argues that what India needs is "five policy enablers — to alleviate poverty, strengthen primary healthcare, improve education levels, augment safe water supply and promote gender equity..."

This index is a grim reminder of state-wise variations across different domains — poverty, food security, health, nutrition, education and gender relations.

TRAINING AND SALARIES

Coming back to the implications of the recommendations made in NEP 2020, administrators, child development workers, activists and researchers fear that pushing pre-school education onto the already overflowing plate of *anganwadi* workers may not give us the results we are seeking which is high quality pre-school education that stimulates cognitive development, encourages creativity and helps children grasp new ideas and concepts. Equally worrisome is the

The biggest problem is that since 1975 the various domains of child development are divided between ministries and pre-education falls through the cracks.

expectation that a proposed six-month refresher course will transform the *anganwadi* worker into a pre-school educator.

In most developed countries this aspect of education is perceived as being important and the training of pre-school teachers is rigorous and not a casual six-month module. There is, therefore, an urgent need to create a rigorous pre-school teacher education programme in accordance with the best national and international experiences.

To this end, the Government of India (GOI)

needs to set up a high-level task-force to work out the details of how pre-school teachers will be trained and demand an additional education worker in the ICDS programme. Civil society organizations like Mobile Creches, the FOCUS (Focus on Children Under Six) network, and the alliance of Montessori teachers need to be brought on board to design a two-year diploma or degree in pre-school education. Equally important is that these workers need to be paid as professionals and not as volunteer part-time workers.

The truth is that the *anganwadi* worker and helper cannot be transformed into pre-school educators. We need a new cadre with appropriate aptitude, grasp of the philosophy of pre-school education and the skills to deliver it in the school or the ICDS centre.

The NEP 2020's vision of a robust pre-school programme for all children from three to six years cannot be realized without focusing on the pre-school teacher, her training and ongoing academic support.

It is equally important to ensure that children continue to receive immunization services, supplementary nutrition, health monitoring, regular de-worming and, wherever necessary, other supplements. In this pathway, state-wise variations need to be accommodated with context-specific design and priorities.

India's civil society organizations have ample experience and can support state governments in this important endeavour. The GoI should reach out to experts/practitioners from different parts of India and create a high-powered working group that can develop a roadmap which can be adapted by the state governments. ■

Vimala Ramachandran is Director of the Educational Resource Unit, Jaipur and Delhi, a research and consulting group which she established in 1998.

BRING STATES TOGETHER ON OBJECTIVE NATIONAL GOALS

India needs to draw on the strengths of its diversity and fashion a narrative that fosters partnership based on mutual respect, trust and dignity for all stakeholders.



R. BALASUBRAMANIAM

EVIDENCE from around the world emphasizes how geography matters in the development of a community, country or civilization. India is uniquely positioned to benefit from its vast geographical diversity but can only do so when the country's many regions come together as a unitary whole. Multiple strengths in human and social capital have to combine for a common advantage leading to economic consequences.

India is struggling to find a balanced development approach that is pragmatic to implement while ensuring sustainability at the same time. The leading narrative is being set by the Government of India and it is expected that the state governments will follow.

The agenda is set with the vision for becoming a \$5 trillion economy, the new education policy, health Insurance cover with Ayushman Bharat, rural jobs under the MGNREGS and so much more. Recent laws on labour and agriculture also define national objectives. This is apart from the several Centrally sponsored schemes that were used as instruments of development and politics when the Planning Commission existed.

The federal structure of India necessitates that states formulate and implement their own development interventions while at the same time following the Union government's line. While there has always existed a national narrative on the emotional plane, there was very little of an integrated view of the country as one entity willing to capitalize on its inherent geographical advantages. The reality of our states having been divided on the emotionally surcharged basis of language further accentuated separation rather than unification.

The regionalization of political power has further weakened the goal of creating one national development narrative. The coronavirus pandemic

exposed the lack of cohesion vulnerabilities and the challenges that the individualized model of development poses and how people began to be seen as Biharis or Odias or Assamese and categorized as migrants within their own country instead of as Indians in distress.

Prime Minister Modi's call for 'cooperative federalism' when setting up NITI Aayog was refreshing and timely, especially when seen in the context of seemingly irreconcilable diversity. The narrative and agenda that were mentioned were about strengthening the state governments in fashioning their own contextually relevant development agenda within a loosely defined national framework. The states would be free to have synergies with one another and promote a healthy exchange of talent, knowledge and expertise.

It was hoped that cooperative federalism would free up internal trade and commerce and promote the free movement of men and materials. A goods

A balanced national approach requires having people from all over the country in institutions like NITI Aayog to bring understanding of cultural diversity to decision-making.

and services tax (GST) and governance initiatives like 'one nation one ration card' would create a facilitatory environment for the much needed integration. However, bringing the states together on objective national goals remains largely a work in progress as we have seen from the multiple differences that have erupted. The spirit of federalism needs greater nurturing both in emotional and economic terms.

Can a new approach to development be constructed that can at once address the demands of comprehensive and sustainable human development of each individual state without losing sight of the large national canvas? Can one attempt to synergize

the efforts of the many development players including individual state governments, build and sustain partnerships and ensure human progress for every Indian? Can India's development be fashioned and achieved on the narrative that fosters partnership based on mutual respect, trust and dignity among all stakeholders, state and Union governments and accompanied by a genuine desire to make a positive change to the country as a whole?

To understand this, one must comprehend that India is a country with several countries within it. Historically, national identity has remained by and large emotional and evident only during times of crisis or in sports, while local identities are reinforced each day by our language, dress, food habits, regional sentiments and distance from the national capital. This feeling of separateness gets reaffirmed and reinforced by vested political forces for narrow electoral gains.

Designing a balanced national approach amidst all this demands sensitive governance and an administrative mechanism driven by the Government of India through its various national institutions including NITI Aayog. It necessitates populating national institutions with people from around the country who can bring the much needed context and understanding of the situational realities and cultural diversity into the decision-making processes.

Evidence of this thinking has been symbolized in many ways — whether it is the spatial distribution of industrial units and Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs) or national research institutions or banks and tribunals. One needs to dig deeper to understand whether these symbols alone were enough to drive a national perspective, or are they continuing to be disparate elements without the soul of unity embedded in them. It is also true that the DNA of inclusion in an institution needs to be driven by sensitive, mature and self-aware leadership heading them. The Union government has to take the lead and provide the agency for the states to engage in the process of cooperative federalism that ensures a sense of national identity without fear of losing their own unique individualism.

Incidents like the AYUSH secretary calling out officers from Tamil Nadu for not knowing Hindi or the linguistic discrimination that Kanimozhi, Member of Parliament, underwent at an airport, necessitates digging deeper into the structural reality that national institutions are manifesting.



Incidents like Kanimozhi facing linguistic discrimination are symptoms of a deeper systemic issue

Can these incidents be dismissed as one-off or are they the superficially visible symptoms of a deeper systemic issue that needs to be addressed? One can begin by taking a look at the prevailing ecosystem and measuring it against the yardstick of adequate representation at the leadership level within government Institutions that have a bearing country-wide, in individual states and amongst the general citizenry across the country.

Beginning with the office of the prime minister, it is interesting to note that India has had 15 prime ministers till date and only two have been from South India. If one were to take into consideration the period served by them cumulatively, it would still be less than what A.B. Vajpayee served. Though Indira Gandhi represented Chikmagalur constituency, one cannot consider her a person with South Indian domicility.

Out of the 13 most senior PMO officials, only two have South Indian domicility. Not to be far behind, only seven of the 28 finance ministers till date have been from South India. Another key cabinet position is that of the home minister of the country and only six of the 31 till date have been of South Indian origin. Since Independence, 29 defence ministers have been appointed and only eight have been from southern states.

The current government has only four out of 21 cabinet ministers and two out of 29 ministers of state from the south. There are no South Indians among the ministers of state holding independent charge. While this may be born out of the compositional reality of elected members from the ruling party, one needs to keep in mind that the scenario has not been very different in previous cabinets.

While the current composition of the judges of the Supreme Court reflects fairness and balance, one needs to keep in mind that only 12 of the 44 chief justices were from South India till date. There have

been 27 generals appointed to the Army till date and only five were from the southern region. Only three of the 26 admirals of the Navy and three of the 25 chiefs of air staff have been from southern states.

The current serving heads of various other national and constitutional bodies do not reflect a different reality either. The chief election commissioner of India, the CAG, the head of the Finance Commission, of the National Commission for Scheduled Castes, of the National Commission for Backward Classes, the chairman of the UPSC, the vice chairperson and CEO of NITI Aayog, the NSA, the Lok Pal of India and the head of the National Commission for Women are all persons of North Indian origin.

Though none can cast any aspersion on the competence of these persons, one cannot ignore the fact that all major nationally significant organizations with a pan-India bearing are headed by non-South Indians. While one can gain a cognitive understanding of different geographies, one cannot discount personal appreciation of regional and cultural realities and expertise to deal with local contexts that domiciliary people are embedded with.

While I am neither intending to nor making an argument based on just appointments to key posts and the inherent skewing against the southern states, I am concerned about what this could mean for the larger construct of the sense of national belonging that needs to be nurtured and nourished in every citizen. The State not only has an obligation to be fair and transparent to all its citizens but it needs to build a working mechanism where the pulse of the entire nation is felt and understood by all the arms of the government.

One needs to recollect how Dr B.R. Ambedkar described India and its states: "one integral whole, its people a single people living under a single

imperium derived from a single source." Beyond this sentiment, it is also a practical necessity to preserve the unity and integrity of the nation and move the development agenda collectively forward.

The changed relationship between the Centre and the states needs actions to reflect this sentiment in letter and spirit and the Inter-State Council set up in 1990 was in this direction. With NITI Aayog all but subsuming this role, it now needs to ensure that cooperative federalism does not remain wishful thinking but manifests itself in a sensitive, fair and practical manner.

Ensuring political, executive and judicial balance is indeed a difficult call, but then running a country as complex and diverse like India is not easy. Beyond political acumen, it needs the spirit of consultation, engaged participation from all stakeholders and transparent mechanisms that signify this intent.

It is a challenging demand, but the spirit of consultation needs to manifest itself in the composition of bodies like NITI Aayog or the several committees constituted by each of the ministries of the Union government, or in a fair re-distribution of revenues driven by the per capita contribution of the citizens. What the country needs are pragmatic expressions of the cooperative federalism that Prime Minister Modi espouses. This feeling needs to percolate to all the other actors within the system.

And when this happens, people will no longer have to worry about speaking or not speaking in Hindi or the accent with which they speak. They need not have to live with the insecurity of living in a state that is not home to them or concern themselves with the politics of language or region. All that will drive them will be the national agenda of building a resurgent India and only then can we truly talk about a 'New India' arising. ■

Dr R. Balasubramaniam, founder of the Swami Vivekananda Youth Movement, Mysuru, is a development activist and author. www.drvalu.com

TIME FOR A RESET WITH MORE ELBOW ROOM FOR THE STATES

The Centre has encroached on funds, functions and functionaries. Occupying more space and changing the balance that was originally envisaged.



VIJAY MAHAJAN

OUR national anthem extols the extent of India by naming a few provinces of those days: 'Punjab, Sindh, Gujarat, Maratha; Dravid, Utkal, Banga'. To many of us who have had the opportunity to travel through the length and breadth of our nation, the phrase "unity in diversity" comes alive. One can travel from Kerala where the new year is ushered in on Bisu, typically April 14, to Punjab where it is Baisakhi and Assam where it is called Bihu — all on the same day. Yet the colours, the costumes, the cuisine and the customary dances are all different, each with a hoary tradition of over two millennia.

The Constitution of India in its very first article says, 'India, that is Bharat, shall be a Union of States.' The role of states was sanctified in the Constitution through a number of provisions, including state Legislatures, with authority to legislate divided between the Centre and states. The Constitution also provided for High Courts in each state, with authority to adjudicate on constitutional matters. The Constitution also established State Public Service Commissions. Most importantly, it provided for a Finance Commission to decide on devolution of funds from the Centre to the States. Thus, the Union in operational terms was meant to be federal.

In this article, we assess the state of federalism in India, by looking at three main mechanisms of governance — funds, functions and functionaries — and how these are shared between the Centre and the States.

MONEY MATTERS

The situation of state finances is bleak. As per a study of the Budgets of State Governments by the Deutsche Bank, the average fiscal deficit of 17 big states was 2.8 percent of their GSDP in 2019, the average tax base was 6.4 percent while the average

borrowing was 25.2 percent, or 3.9 years' tax collections!

The average was from a wide range, with Maharashtra and Gujarat having borrowed equal to 2.2 and 3 years of tax collections respectively, while Rajasthan and Punjab had borrowings equal to 5.8 and 6.7 years of tax collections respectively.

Just to make this easy to understand, most housing finance companies do not give loans to individuals more than 1.5 years' of their income. So clearly, even the best states have borrowed too much. The situation was grave in 2019 and the economic downturn post-COVID has brought it to the brink.

According to a study by India Ratings, cited in the *Financial Express* on 1st October 2020, the collective fiscal deficit of 18 states was at 40.7 percent in April-June, while the revenue deficit soared to 285 percent of their Budget Estimates in April-June.

Under such a situation, the States have to look to the Centre for funds. The Centre pretty much

Indian states are big. Uttar Pradesh could have been the fifth largest country of the world by population and 15 of India's states would appear in the list of the top 50 countries.

renege on its commitment to pay compensation to the States under The Goods and Services Tax (Compensation to States) Act, 2017. Under this, compensation was to be provided to the states for a period of five years from the enactment of the respective State GST Act, with the growth rate of revenue for the five-year period assumed to be 14 percent per annum, starting 2015-16 as the base year. To enable the Centre to make these payments, a GST compensation cess was established and the collections from that were used to pay the states.

The mechanism worked fine in the first two years, but in the 2019-20, there was a problem. As per data

put together by PRS India based on replies to parliamentary questions, the cess collection was ₹95,444 crore whereas the compensation payable was ₹165,302 crore. The Finance Minister announced in her Budget Speech in February 2020 that compensation would be limited only to collections of the GST compensation cess. The Centre on August 28 wrote to the states suggesting they borrow to make up for the ₹2.35 lakh crore shortfall in GST revenues. The states were understandably reluctant to do so. Eventually, the Centre on October 15 made a "concession" to the states and offered to borrow from the market and pass it on to states as a 'back-to-back loan' that will reflect on their own books.

The mechanism of a Finance Commission was provided in the Constitution to ensure that the devolution of tax revenues from the Centre to the states is principle-based. Successive Finance Commissions have tried to play this role quite diligently, but even at the peak, the Finance Commissions' recommendations never exceeded 50 percent of the total funds devolving from the Centre to the States, thereby leaving a lot to the discretion of the ruling dispensation at the Centre.

The Chairman of the 15th Finance Commission, NK Singh said on September 21 that the recommendations of the first report, including that of devolution, may no longer hold, because of the pandemic. He went on to add that the five-year horizon for Finance Commissions may be too long in an era of volatility and uncertainty. But if the horizon is reduced, it could lead to short-term ad hocism and pave the way for quick fix solutions with the Centre as the saviour of the last resort for the States.

LISTS AND FUNCTIONS

The Parliament and state legislatures enact laws, empowering the respective executive to perform various functions. The subjects on which the Centre can legislate are specified in the Union list, the ones on which the States can legislate is in the State list, and then there is the Concurrent list where both can legislate, though the Central law would prevail. Despite these clear provisions to the contrary in the Constitution, the legislative functions of the States are being appropriated by the Centre.

For example, the Centre recently got three Bills related to agriculture approved by Parliament. One of these, the Farmers (Empowerment and



N.K. Singh has said that the five-year horizon for Finance Commissions needs to be shortened

Protection) Agreement on Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020, the Clause 16 baldly states:

"The Central Government may, from time to time, give such directions, as it may consider necessary, to the State Governments for effective implementation of the provisions of this Act and the State Governments shall comply with such directions."

This when the Constitution lays down clearly that enacting laws on "agriculture, including agricultural education and research, protection against pests and prevention of plant diseases," is in the State List of subjects.

Though entry 33 in the Concurrent List of the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution does enable the Central Government to enact laws related to "Trade and commerce in, and the production, supply and distribution of... (b) foodstuffs, including edible oilseeds and oils," and cattle fodder, cotton and jute, it does not in any way give the Centre powers to give micro-directions to the states, which the "state governments shall comply with," as implied in the clause 16 cited above. This is just one of the numerous examples of the States' powers being encroached upon by the Centre.

OFFICIALS AND POSTINGS

To implement its functions, the Executive is empowered to hire functionaries. Indeed, the whole of Part XIV, Chapter I of the Constitution deals with Services under the Union and the States, including the process for recruitment, the terms and conditions of services, constitutional protections to public servants under Article 311 and the concept of All India Services, which the

Parliament may establish under Article 312.

Article 312 (2), a carry forward from the colonial era, says: "The services known at the commencement of this Constitution as the Indian Administrative Service and the Indian Police Service shall be deemed to be services created by Parliament under this article." Due to this colonial legacy, they staff key field positions as District Collectors/Magistrates, District Superintendents of Police and Divisional Forest Officers.

At least these three all-India services have the concept of a state cadre and officers generally spend at least 40 to 50 percent of their career in cadre states and the rest in Central postings, mostly in Delhi.

But the other civil services like the Indian Revenue Service, the Indian Audit and Accounts Service and the Indian Economic Service have no concept of a state cadre. Thus even in the third key aspect, the Centre has a lot more power than the States, which it exercises by selecting and deploying key functionaries.

INTER-STATE COUNCIL

Article 263 of the Constitution provided for the establishment of an Inter-State Council. The Sarkaria Commission was set up to in 1983 to examine the central-state relationship. Its 1998 report had recommended that this be done and this was formally constituted in 1990.

Since then, however, the Inter-State Council has had a rather indifferent track record. It has met only 12 times since 1990. The other recommendations of the Sarkaria Commission, particularly with reference to the appointment of governors, are still

awaiting action. It is not clear what changes in the political front will usher in a structural shift towards more equitable Centre-state relations.

With the states having been reorganised linguistically since 1956, each state has a distinct cultural identity — in most cases, going back over a thousand years. In addition, the Indian states are big. Uttar Pradesh could have been the fifth largest country of the world by population and 15 of India's states would appear in the list of the top 50 countries in the world, if they were listed on the basis of population. Thus, it is important that states are enabled to achieve their fullest potential, both economically and in terms of human development, while ensuring environmental sustainability.

These dimensions are well covered by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030, which India has adopted. For SDGs to be achieved, all three aspects of the states — funds, functions and functionaries — will have to be strengthened, not just in numbers but in terms of quality. That can only be assured through wider citizen participation and greater transparency and accountability of elected governments.

Where this has been done successfully, the results in terms of the human development index speak for themselves: the top states were Kerala, Punjab, Haryana and Tamil Nadu among the larger states and Goa, Himachal, Sikkim and Mizoram among the smaller states. The 2014 Election Manifesto of the Bharatiya Janata Party committed itself to 'place centre-state relations on an even keel' and 'strive for harmonious centre-state relations'. It is time that promise is redeemed. ■

Vijay Mahajan is CEO of the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation



LEADERSHIP WITH TRUST

OUR VALUES

Integrity **Pioneering**

Excellence **Unity** **Responsibility**

/TataCompanies |
 /TataCompanies |
 /TataCompanies |
 /TataGroup
www.tata.com

LIVING

FOOD | TRAVEL | AYURVEDA | PRODUCTS | GIVING

Some good coffee for the soul Black Baza protects growers and nature

Civil Society Reviews
Gurugram

SHOULD a coffee be named after a tree? Or a coffee company after a bird? Of course, that's so apt. The best coffees come from within forests. In the shade of traditional trees, a collaborative effort by birds, bees, butterflies, fallen leaves and other life forms helps the coffee plant along, giving its berries the attributes that make them special. It is a slow process of ecological mingling nudged along by Nature in ways too wondrous to be easily understood.

So here we are in dusty Gurugram, drinking a coffee called Ficus from the Black Baza Coffee Company. Ficus is the lovely fig tree in the shade of which this coffee has been grown. The Black Baza is a medium-sized bird of prey that is known to swoop on insects and make a meal of them.

Ficus is easily the best coffee we have had in a while. The way we brew it is a heaped tablespoon per cup in a plunger, allowed to stand for four minutes and then milk and sugar to taste. What you get is a mildly strong coffee, with a welcoming aroma and not too much body. Coffee is as much about aroma as flavour and even before our first cup of Ficus is brewed, the pack parked on the shelf of our pantry for a few days has made its presence felt.

It is thanks to the internet that we are able to savour Ficus in Gurugram, a few hours from the desert in Rajasthan and far removed from the lush forests of the Western Ghats where this coffee was grown. It is an Arabica/Robusta blend sourced from responsible farmer-producer organizations (FPOs) in Karnataka and Kerala.

Coffee's popularity has grown in India. There has always been filter coffee in the south. But elsewhere, the earliest memories of coffee drinking in homes are of Nescafe beaten up with a little milk and water to get a froth. A spoon or two of instant coffee powder would also be added to a glass of milk.

Outlets of India Coffee House provided brewed coffee. Restaurants like Skyroom in Calcutta of an era gone by offered what they called Kona coffee, which was also supposed to be brewed. You could get some real coffee in Connaught Place in Delhi as well.

But a consumer culture around coffee drinking in India is relatively new and coffee shops as we now see them around us have only come about in the past decade or so. The price of a cup of coffee has risen rapidly, but does that ensure its quality? Sadly, no. At a Barista, Starbucks or Café Coffee Day, the coffee is often undrinkable. The high prices are needed to pay for the rent and the décor to draw in people. Blue Tokai sells some good beans and blends sourced from estates, but at its friendly coffee shops the cup you get can make you go ugh!

We at *Civil Society* are coffee drinking types and so we have adventurously gone much beyond sourcing beans from a trusted trader for our personal consumption to checking out uniquely named offerings like Sleepy Owl and Blue Tokai. The experience has been mixed. Smart brands led by young entrepreneurs are the order of the day. The packaging is sharp and the messaging carefully meaningful. But after the initial impression, the experience tends to slacken with time. Curated coffees from



Arshiya Bose: 'Small producers wanted to access fairer markets and be recognized'



Coffee diversity comes from Bose working with 650 small farmer producer groups whose holdings may not be more than an acre and who use organic practices.



Arshiya Bose at her roaster



Talking to a grower

Black Baza helps growers compete and sell. In the coffee business, the grower gets a mere 2.8 percent of the final price. Baza gives growers 17 percent.

plantations have their limitations.

Black Baza, however, promises to go much further. It has a bigger and more motivational story to tell. Positioning itself as “diversity friendly”, Black Baza works with small growers and community groups whose holdings are meagre in size, encouraging them to be organic in their practices and respectful of nature in the traditional ways they already know.

In doing so, it promotes livelihoods, which might otherwise have been trampled upon in the rush to cater to markets. Growers are not only reassured that they can survive, but Black Baza also helps them compete and sell when they would otherwise have been left out. In the coffee business, the grower gets a mere 2.8 percent of the final price. Black Baza gives growers 17 percent.

The invitation to the customer is to get on board this transformational effort.

It is a personalized appeal. When you buy a pack of coffee from Black Baza, it comes with your name handwritten on it. The message is: “Your cup of coffee is kinder to the environment and the grower.” You don’t just get a good cup of coffee, but you also “secure livelihoods and strengthen coffee farming practices that conserve biodiversity. We invite you to participate in the process. This is a great step one. But we can do more”.

Arshiya Bose, 30, is Black Baza’s founder. She has a PhD on the political ecology of markets for biodiversity conservation from Cambridge University. She was researching sustainability certifications for coffee when small producers in the Kodagu area of Karnataka reached out for support.

Black Baza really came out of the need of farmers with small holdings to engage with markets. “It was they who took the initiative, not me,” says Bose.

In her journeys through Coorg, Bose found that Indian farmers continued to largely grow coffee under trees, thereby preserving a rich biodiversity. This was unlike other parts of the world where forests have been felled for coffee plantations.

“They wanted to access fairer markets and to be recognized for the good farming practices that they were already doing. They wanted a support system to enable them to farm ecologically,” says Bose.

In India, too, tree cover was being lost in keeping with the global trend. So, helping farmers retain the trees and ecology friendly practices while at the same time being profitable became a mission worth taking up.

Bose set up Black Baza Coffee Company as a private limited entity in 2016. It continues to be a business, but with well-structured ethical foundations. Its slogan reads: ‘We are an activist company. Our coffee is radical.’

She now works with 650 producers, mostly indigenous and tribal communities, to bring to consumers ‘the best of the diversity of coffee’.

Black Baza has a manifesto, which pledges the company to fair trade, authentic sourcing and ecological balance, whether it is preserving trees or eschewing use of chemicals. It is also an evolving manifesto as conversations happen.

Collaborations with farmers are defined by conservation agreements, which stipulate maintaining 100 trees per acre, protecting sources of water, reducing and abjuring use of chemicals and maintaining a certain percentage of shade so that the cutting of tree branches is restricted. Many growers have just an acre but preserving their forest cover enables them to access other produce like honey.

And what makes a good cup of coffee? Apart from forest cover and plant care, you have to pick the right beans at the right time, and ensure moisture levels are just right, explains Bose. Coffee beans then are roasted to perfection in a roastery. Each step is micro-managed.

“We set up FPOs and we work with existing ones. In Kerala, we partner Fair Trade Alliance. Governing FPOs is challenging but democratic. All our decisions are participatory which makes the experience so much richer,” says Bose.

For small farmers, Black Baza Coffee Co is a lifeline. It has been made possible by Bose’s unique transition from academia to the marketplace. It helps them engage with the world at large in ways that preserve and promote their identities and traditional practices.

Black Baza’s brand is built on its honesty and intellectual purpose. The farmers couldn’t have hoped to do this without Bose. Equally important is Bose’s market-savvy approach. Naming coffees Jumping Ant, Wanderoo, Otter and Luna is being original and claiming space in a market where others spend large sums on brand building. Black Baza sells online, and to stores and top-end hotel chains.

In a networked world someone with a real message tends to be heard and followed. For Black Baza, the first steps on that journey have been taken. If its coffee stays as good as it is and its mission doesn’t get diluted along the way, we will be buying a whole lot of it and so, we suspect, will a great many others. ■

GENTLE ENOUGH FOR BABIES

Sidika Sehgal
New Delhi

THE Moms Co was born when a young mother just couldn’t find safe, natural products for her babies. She searched high and low. But all the soaps, powders, diaper rash creams and other such stuff she found contained chemicals.

“The company started with my own struggle of not being able to find good quality products,” says Malika Sadani, who founded The Moms Co in 2017 with her husband, Mohit.

“The last thing a mother should worry about during her pregnancy is what products she should use for her child,” remarks Malika. The company produces wholly natural products for babies and a dedicated range of natural cosmetics for pregnant women struggling with skin and hair care issues during and after pregnancy.

One of their first products was a natural baby wash which is now recommended by parents on parenting blogs. Instead of using sulphates, which are used in detergents, a mild coconut-based cleanser forms the base for the product. The baby wash has avocado oil for moisturizing, chamomile and aloe vera gel to soften the skin.

Apart from baby wash, there is hair oil, diaper rash cream, shampoo, massage oil, lotion, talc and more for babies. The massage oil has sesame, almond and avocado oils while the baby shampoo contains argan, moringa and coconut oil. The



Malika and Mohit Sadani

diaper rash cream has chamomile and calendula oils and 15 percent zinc. A Baby Pampering Suitcase Kit for newborns is also available.

But most baby products are already tear-free and soap-free. How is The Moms Co different? Malika says they go a step further and keep all toxins out.

They found that there are global toxicity databases like Environmental Working Group, Paula’s Choice, and Safe Cosmetics Australia, among others.

Environmental Working Group (EWG) rates ingredients on a scale of 1-10 where 1 is the safest and 10 the most

toxic. Ingredients in The Moms Co baby wash have an EWG rating of 1 or 2. “Certification is a rigorous process, as it should be,” says Malika. “We’re asking people to trust us with their day-old baby. There’s no room for error.”

There is a range of products for young mothers too: body butter and oil to tackle stretch marks, pain relief oil, nipple cream, hair masks, under-eye cream, foot massage cream, and more — all made with natural oils and ingredients. There is also a Mom-to-be Complete Care Gift Set.

It took them time to build a team of formulators and doctors who could develop the products. By 2016, the first range of products was ready. These were tested for a year before being launched in 2017.

The Moms Co has a team of formulators from India, Germany and Australia, who work on product development. The advisory board has doctors in India whom they consult from time to time.

“Someone saying, ‘my daughter uses it and loves it, that’s the most heartening thing,’” says Malika. ■



Frozen jackfruit is cool

Shree Padre
Palakkad

FROZEN jackfruit is all set to become the golden goose in parts of Kerala and Karnataka. Farmers, entrepreneurs and small traders are hoping to cash in by selling frozen jackfruit or by supplying it to larger processing units that churn out jack cutlet, jack chips, jack pulp and more.

This trend is especially catching on in the hills of Idukki district of Kerala where jackfruit grows nine months of the year. Otherwise, jackfruit is available only from March to July since it’s a seasonal crop.

Jackfruit is well-known for its health benefits. It is loaded with vitamins, minerals and dietary fibre and is especially good for diabetics because of its low glycemic load.

So this healthy fruit is now on the way to becoming available throughout the year for consumers, factories and small entrepreneurs. Food processing units can manufacture jack products throughout the year. Local entrepreneurs can make local delicacies for a longer time. And consumers can rustle up a jackfruit dish, rain or shine.

Empty deep freezers during the lockdown also had a small role to play in this jackfruit renaissance.

Seven women farmers in Palakkad had jackfruit



Jacme manufactures four frozen jackfruit products

trees they didn’t know what to do with during the pandemic. Last year, they had formed a group called Karshakamithra. This season, they bought deep freezers and began selling frozen jackfruit.

“We had no idea whether our product would sell locally. But some of our labourers bought it for their mates. Then a local shopkeeper started buying it from us regularly. Next year we will produce more,” says Rosalind Eapen, a middle-class farmer, evidently satisfied with the experiment.

Frozen jackfruit is a low-capital venture. All you need is a deep freezer, a vacuum-packing machine

and a generator. Blast freezing at minus 40 degrees Celsius and storing jackfruit at a temperature of minus 18 degrees Celsius, is more efficient but it’s an expensive process.

Ice-cream freezers were, in any case, available and shopkeepers were happy to rent them for frozen jackfruit, discovered Venkatakrishna Sharma Muliya, a farmer near Vittal in Karnataka. He used to make jackfruit *halwa* from March to July. This year he is still making *halwa* because he stored jackfruit flakes in ice-cream freezers.

The Krishi Vijnan Kendra (KVK) in Ernakulam is selling ripe frozen jackfruit, cut raw carpels and cut seeds. Dr Shinoj Subramanian, senior scientist and head of KVK, says the idea is to increase local consumption of jackfruit.

Another micro-enterprise that has come up is Jackbyte. Run by Bibil Thomas, a young farmer of Kumilyin Idukki, its Spized Organics unit makes frozen jackfruit products.

Jackfruit activists have also started a WhatsApp group called Frozen Jackfruit to Market to spread awareness about frozen jackfruit. Shrikanth Shenoy, co-founder of Indian Development Foundation, an NGO based in Bengaluru, is one of its administrators. This year, Pristine Tropical Fruits and Agro Products of Nilambur started producing four frozen jackfruit products: tender jackfruit, raw jackfruit carpels, raw cut carpels and Kumbili Appam. Incidentally, this is the first Indian company to preserve ripe jackfruit in a professional way. ■

What did you do in the lockdown?

Amit Dasgupta presents a collection of personal stories

Civil Society Reviews

THE lockdown forced people to retreat into their homes and lead a different life, a life of social isolation and virtual reality. Suddenly gone was the daily grind of work and meetings and long hours spent in traffic. For many it was replaced by a more languid, lonely existence with time to fulfil long-cherished aspirations or mundane tasks.

What did people really do with time on their hands? Amit Dasgupta, for one, brought out a book, the first on the lockdown in India. *The Phoenix Rises: Lockdown Chronicles* is a slim volume of short, anecdotal and reflective accounts written by journalists, writers, teachers, civil servants, artists and others. They take us into their shuttered lives and tell us as much as they are ready to reveal.

One picks up the book bracing for tedium. But the writers surprise us with distinct and well-crafted accounts — is this all them or Dasgupta the enthusiastic locked-down editor at work, one wonders. Their writings don't overlap and each chapter is different.

"We put the book together in just six weeks, first as an e-book and then, as demand grew, we published a print edition, three weeks later," says Dasgupta, a former diplomat and now country director of the University of New South Wales (UNSW) in Australia.

He, too, closed his office and remained in long-distance communication with his colleagues. Excitement at not commuting to work dissipated quickly. He tried to cheer up colleagues by advising them to call up people at random and ask them how they were. Dasgupta then decided to do that himself. He was surprised at the reactions he got. "Somebody said he was learning painting and someone said he was relearning maths to teach his kids," recalls Dasgupta. "I found these multiple reactions interesting."

"Everyone talked about the pandemic. I told myself why don't we capture the times, the emotions, the trials and tribulations? Why don't we share those thoughts. After some time attitudes to the pandemic will change. Already there is pandemic fatigue, a devil-may-care attitude," says Dasgupta.

Each chapter is lucid so it's not so easy to pick one over the other. Jug Suraiya, famed for his gentle self-deprecating humour, writes a cool intro and a piece, "Present Tense", on discovering the joys of using a neglected terrace by his bedroom after 24 years. Nikita Bathla writes on the crisis in the public health system. A doctor, she calmly followed the trajectory of the coronavirus and then found herself in the hubbub of the frontlines fighting this invisible enemy.

Randhir Khare writes a lyrical piece on a day in his life of solitude and stoicism. Jayshree Misra Tripathi describes how her delight at finally having time on her hands turned to misery as weeks went by and she got more and more lonely.

Sumit Mullick's humorous piece, "Sympathy for the Devil", is delightful. He spent his time getting to know viruses, fell in love with the malevolent coronavirus which he then proceeded to study minutely. There are other pieces which caught one's attention: Amrita Narayanan's vegetable hunt in Goa, Sohan Hattangadi on growing a beard and web narcissism, Navtej Sarna on death and dignity and Supriya Newal's poetry.

This isn't, as Dasgupta says, a comprehensive tome of the pandemic era. It isn't about the agony of migrant workers as they trooped out of cities. Or of hospitals, doctors and brave health workers, the warriors of the coronavirus pandemic. Or of shuttered businesses and the vulnerable elderly. This is about people like us, the English-speaking middle-class, who found their routine lives upended by the pandemic.

"So there is this incompleteness in the book," says Dasgupta. "But though we are in different boats, we are in the same storm," he reasons, philosophically.

"Anjum (Katyul, a contributor) sees the pandemic as an interruption but I see it as a disruption. The new normal, post-pandemic, is going to be very different from the world we knew. It will be a tech-driven world and



The Phoenix Rises: Lockdown Chronicles
Ed: Amit Dasgupta
Wisdom Tree
₹180



Amit Dasgupta: 'I told myself why not capture the times?'

One picks up the book bracing for tedium. But the writers surprise us with distinct and well-crafted accounts.

industry will say it's because of health and safety reasons. But I wonder, what will the new workplaces look like? Will social divides become sharper? Or will it be a kinder world?" Many more books on the pandemic are likely to crowd bookshelves but read this one for truly recollecting those strange days. ■

RANDOM SHELF HELP

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



The (Un)governable City: Productive Failure in the Making of Colonial Delhi / Raghav Kishore / Orient BlackSwan ₹895

The (Un)governable City explores the radical transformation of urban governance in Delhi between 1858 and 1911 as the bureaucracy expanded and new modes of governance, spatial, political and cultural, reshaped the city. The author, Raghav Kishore, a fellow in International History at the London School of Economics, examines how the tensions, contradictions and failures of colonial policies were responsible for the unintended development of state capacity and also provided opportunities for Delhi's residents and social groups to assert their claims to city spaces. The book presents fresh material on Delhi's urban property relations after 1857, the Delhi municipality's policing of public spaces, colonial arboriculture plans to 'improve' suburban lands, processional activities, as well as railway, traffic management and commercial growth initiatives after the 1880s.



Dust and Smoke: Air Pollution and Colonial Urbanism (1860-1940) / Awadhendra Sharan / Orient BlackSwan ₹775

Dust and Smoke examines the history of smoke in Indian cities, particularly in colonial Calcutta and Bombay. Relying on municipal archives, reports of the Smoke Nuisances Commissions, newspaper accounts, commercial advertisements for smoke-free appliances etc, this is a unique historical study of air pollution in India. The author, Awadhendra Sharan, is Professor at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies in New Delhi.



Labouring Women: Issues and Challenges in Contemporary India / Praveen Jha, Avinash Kumar & Yamini Mishra / Orient BlackSwan ₹775

Notions of work and employment in official data systems undermine women's work. While the gender gap in paid work has narrowed only slightly in developed countries, it has increased in 'emerging economies' such as India. *Labouring Women* explores these unfavourable trends and analyses the current position and condition of women's work. It argues that despite supposed development, policy changes and talk of equality, the experiences of labouring women show that their challenges have multiplied, both at work and at home, with longer working hours and greater reliance on unpaid work.



Religion and Secularities: Reconfiguring Islam in Contemporary India / Sudha Sitharaman & Anindita Chakrabarti / Orient BlackSwan ₹795

The study comprises a collection of essays on the reconfiguration of Islam in the world's largest democracy, India. Investigating the relationship between religion, civil society and the state, this

volume explores the nation's long history with Islam as well as the categorization of Muslims as a minority community. Based on ethnographic studies conducted in different regions of the country — from Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal to Karnataka and Kerala — the essays address diverse issues of religious piety.



Food and Power: Expressions of food politics in South Asia / Kanchan Mukhopadhyay / SAGE ₹1595

The book studies power relations between those who eat and those who decide (or at least try to decide) what people should eat. It explores how traditional food practices have undergone change owing to the influences of migration, globalization and popular media to understand how the ethos of the powerful affects the food relatively weaker ethnic, religious, occupational and gender groups consume.



Nation, Nationalism and the Public Sphere: Religious politics in India / Avishek Ray & Ishita Banerjee-Dube / SAGE ₹1195

From the shaping of identities and belongings through to current reconfigurations of nation, governance and state under a Hindu-Right dispensation, this book tracks the sentiments and structures that sustain the nation and nationalism in India and offers relevant and timely insights into the success of the Hindu-Right, the discourse of religious-cultural nationalism, and their ramifications for democracy and citizenship.



Post-Conflict Reconstruction: From extremism to peaceful co-existence / Sadia Sulaiman / SAGE ₹1150

This is a comprehensive presentation on the root causes of state fragility, which provides an enabling environment for violent religious extremism. It addresses various security, political, socio-economic and external factors that contribute to state fragility, which is further enhanced in a conflict environment. The book emphasizes the need to address the grievances of marginalized sections in all countries with fragile state structures.



Fractured Forest, Quartzite City: A history of Delhi and its Ridge / Thomas Crowley / SAGE-Yoda ₹795

A sprawling megacity of nearly 20 million people, Delhi has forgotten its ecological history, a key part of which is the Ridge, often referred to as Delhi's 'green lung'. Placing Delhi's environment at the front and centre of its unique history, this book tells the tale of the Ridge, which resonates far beyond the boundaries of India's capital. The Ridge offers a crucial vantage point for viewing these historical and geographical interconnections. ■

The fading rural life

Civil Society Reviews

IN July 2013, Aparna Karthikeyan, piqued by curiosity, travelled across Tamil Nadu to document rural livelihoods. The countryside didn't disappoint her. She met amazing people, listened to their stories and the result is this book, *Nine rupees an hour*. It has 10 stories of rural livelihoods struggling to survive. It also has uplifting stories of those who broke through gender, caste and class barriers to debut in cultural spaces which have historically shut the doors on them.

Also included are interviews with journalist P. Sainath, musician T.M. Krishna, Dalit writer Bama, farmers' activist P. Ayyakannu and others. So Karthikeyan's book is a holistic portrayal of the social and economic churning taking place in rural Tamil Nadu, a state known for its social welfare programmes and its transition to an industrialized economy.

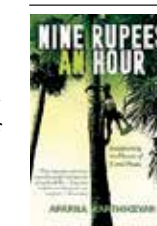
Little heed has been paid to its countryside, though. Farming continues to be insecure and unremunerative and it is slowly dying out, taking with it a spate of livelihoods, biodiversity and cultures. To glean an income from the land, women farmers multi-skill. They balance agriculture with cattle rearing and household duties. Yet they are always in debt.

There is a profile of Soundaram, a small, slight woman who owns half a dozen Kangayams, tall and sturdy stud bulls now used mostly for bullock cart races or Jallikattu. Decades of state policy have discriminated against indigenous breeds and favoured high-yielding Jersey and Holstein Friesian cows. Ironically, Indian breeds do pretty well in countries like Brazil. Read Sainath's wise opinion.

The fact is, most rural skills can be made economically viable. Tree climbing could be a career option if it was safer to climb up and methods of processing, packaging and marketing jaggery made from toddy were improved.

The title is from a chapter on the women weavers of the Pathamadai mat. Nine rupees an hour is the amount they are paid. Five women are state and district awardees. There are other stories as well: of Krishnamoorthi, creator of 10,000 designs of the famed Kancheepuram saree, Chandrasekharan who makes amazing hand-made sickles and Selvaraj, creator of the *nadaswaram*, a traditional wind instrument played on auspicious occasions.

Karthikeyan's gritty reportage on the outliers in the world of the arts makes interesting reading. Read how Kali Veerapathiran, a Dalit from the Adi Dravidar community in Kovalam, became an accomplished *Bharat Natyam* dancer. And how N. Kamachi became the 'queen' of *poikkalkuthirai*, a dance performed on stilts with a wooden horse strapped on the back. Karthikeyan's stories underline the lack of interest or any sense of pride in the skills of rural India. ■



Nine rupees an hour; Aparna Karthikeyan; Westland Books; ₹399

Small producers and artisans need help to reach out to sell their wonderful products. They can't advertise and they don't know to access retail networks. *Civil Society* happily provides information about what they have on offer, their skills and how you can get to them.

Masks with herbs

iVillage, a social enterprise started by Pardada Pardadi Educational Society (PPES), makes masks to suit every face and every need. The masks are made of cotton in triple layers. They can be washed and reused.

There are masks designed for doctors that cost just ₹25 each and there are masks made with organic cotton for greater comfort. The Ayurveda mask collection is made of cotton that has been dipped in turmeric, *tulsi* and neem. The masks are fashionable with stylish prints and delicate embroidery.

iVillage masks are available in four sizes for children and adults, and they are sanitized before being packaged.

iVillage trains, skills and employs rural women and youth in Bulandshahr district of Uttar Pradesh. Many women who work at iVillage are the only earning members of their families. Some are migrants who have returned from cities.

iVillage is happy to take bulk orders from companies. It can design masks with company logos too.

Contact: iVillage
Phone: 9987601586 info@ivillagefamily.in
www.ivillagefamily.in



Timeless ajrak

It is said that the origins of ajrak, a block-printed textile with rich colours, can be traced to the Harappan civilization. This technique of printing on cloth has survived millennia because the designs are so attractive and timeless. Rafiq Khatri, an ajrak printer, sells sarees, *dupattas* and running fabric at Kisan Haat.

Khatri said that making a single saree or dupatta can take upto 15 days. White fabric is soaked in warm water overnight to soften it and then washed and dried. This is done twice.

The white fabric is embossed with intricate patterns using wooden blocks which come from Gandhinagar in Gujarat. Multiple blocks are required to make one composite pattern. A blue circle is embossed and the cloth is left to dry. Then a second print, say, a red flower, is embossed within the blue outline. The fabric has to be dried after each print. It is truly a work of patience.

Only natural dyes are used. Blue comes from indigo, yellow from turmeric, black from the rust on metal. Khatri, whose family has been in the business for 25 years, brings the fabric from Kutch district in Gujarat all the way to Delhi. Generation after generation of artisans are employed in the making of ajrak fabric.

Contact: To buy, call Rafiq Khatri: 7990327103



Salad heaven

Perk up your salads with inventive artisanal dressings you can match with your greens. Arugula & Co. offers a range of blends with many flavours. Apart from the familiar balsamic and olive dressing, there is a tangy peanut and lime dressing, a mellow cashew and mustard one, a nice wasabi and togarshi dressing and a chilli and jaggery one for the spice lover. Imagine the kind of salads you can rustle up.

Niharika Goenka founded Arugula & Co. in 2018 to help people eat better. All ingredients are locally sourced, 90 percent are certified organic and there are no preservatives, additives or colourings in the salad dressings.

When Goenka was doing her master's in Nutrition and Exercise Physiology from Columbia University, she got interested in sustainable food systems and what it means to eat well. Her philosophy is simple: "Nutritious food is that which is closest to its original form."

For Arugula & Co., she has partnered with farmers who practise sustainable farming. Other ingredients are sourced locally too. The soy sauce comes from a Japanese community in Allahabad and the coconut vinegar is sourced from Goa.

A 120-ml jar costs ₹240. A set of three salad dressings is priced at ₹650. A set of all five dressings costs ₹1,050. Each jar lists its nutritional facts and suggestions on what to pair the salad dressing with. Goenka has put a lot of thought into packaging and the salad dressings come in glass jars that can be reused.

Contact: Website: <https://www.arugulaandco.in/>
Phone: +91 8657436082 Email: hello@arugula.in



So you want to do your bit but don't know where to begin? Allow us to help you with a list especially curated for *Civil Society's* readers. These are groups we know to be doing good work. And they are across India. You can volunteer or donate or just spread the word about them.

FIGHTING CANCER WITH A GOOD DIET



CUDDLES FOUNDATION

A lot is needed to fight cancer. Chemotherapy and funds for treatment to begin with. But even the best treatment can fail without a nutritious diet. Cuddles Foundation helps bridge that gap for underprivileged children with cancer.

They partner with government and charitable hospitals where their nutritionists create diet plans and nutritional charts for children undergoing treatment. They educate parents in home-based nutrition and also provide hot meals, ration baskets and nutritional supplements if required.

Cuddles Foundation believes that food heals and helps medicine work. With the right nutrition, children fighting cancer not only have better immunity against infection but improved chances of survival. They work with 33 hospitals in 20 cities across the country. Among them are Belgaum, Madurai, Srinagar, Dibrugarh and Raipur.

www.cuddlesfoundation.org | 022-49790823
team@cuddlesfoundation.com

MENTAL HEALTH HELP FOR THE POOR



THE BANYAN

While one in four people in India has a mental health condition, the incidence is higher among the homeless. One in three homeless people suffer from a mental health condition.

The Banyan offers holistic mental health solutions to homeless people in Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Maharashtra. They run 16 centres and reach nearly a 100,000 people.

At their centres, patients have access to emergency medical aid, psychiatric and psychological care. There is an outpatient department and a long-term care facility. The Banyan helps with vocational training and reintegrates people into society. Nearly 70 percent of patients have been reintegrated.

www.thebanyan.org | Phone: +91-9677121099
Email: alamelu.venkatesh@thebanyan.org

SCHOOL WITH A DIFFERENCE



DIKSHA

Diksha is a school started to cater to children of construction labour working in its neighbourhood of Palam Vihar in Gurugram. As parents go from site to site, children lose out on an education. Diksha tried to fill a gap. Over time it has begun serving other low-income families as well. On any morning, neatly turned out children can be seen cycling and walking to the school.

The school doesn't stop at classroom teaching and books. It provides opportunities to learn folk art, dance, drama and sports. It teaches children to be responsible citizens. A child gets a uniform, books, a midday meal and health checkups.

www.dikshaschoolindia.org | dikshaschoolindia@gmail.com | 9818068141

HELP OUT A WASTE PICKER



KASHTAKARI PANCHAYAT

In Pune, Kashtakari Panchayat Trust's (KPT) sole focus is the waste picker's life and their mission is to make it better.

KPT conducts workshops and trainings for waste pickers on best practices. They train waste managers and municipal officials. They help waste pickers and their children access education. They facilitate college admissions and help with government and private scholarships.

During the lockdown, KPT provided PPEs and ration kits to waste pickers. You can help a waste picker by donating just ₹2,227, which is the cost of a month's ration kit and supply of PPEs. Your contribution can help elderly waste pickers who have lost their livelihood and income.

www.kashtakaripanchayat.org | 9158007062
kashtakaripanchayat@gmail.com

BREATHING EASY IN KOLKATA



KOLKATA CLEAN AIR

Breathing Kolkata's air is akin to smoking a minimum of five cigarettes a day. And five cigarettes is a conservative figure. It could even be as high as 25 cigarettes per day! Kolkata Clean Air started as a citizen's movement in 2017 to change this grim reality.

Since then, they have carried out tree plantation drives, encouraged vertical gardening and waste composting at the community level. They have also invested in research on Kolkata's air, carried out a transport and congestion mapping exercise and done health checks among police officers.

Support their efforts by becoming a donor or join as a volunteer. By devoting 5 hours a week, you could save lives lost to lung cancer, stroke and diabetes.

www.kolkatacleanair.in | 8336919233
kolkatacleanair@gmail.com

SPONSOR A CHILD'S EDUCATION



DEEPAALAYA

For a child, a life of dignity means an education and good health. Deepalaya runs two schools, one in Delhi and another in Haryana. Around 3.5 lakh students have received an education through their schools. Moreover, there are seven learning centres in Delhi and Uttar Pradesh where children can come for non-formal education or remedial classes to help with schoolwork.

Deepalaya's good work has empowered thousands of students. But 5,000 students still await financial help in pursuing an education. You can sponsor a child for a formal education programme or a non-formal programme. All it takes is ₹600 per month or ₹7,000 a year.

www.deepalaya.org | Phone: 011-28520347 | support@deepalaya.org

FROM STREET TO SCHOOL



CHILDHOOD ENHANCEMENT THROUGH TRAINING AND ACTION (CHETNA)

A child needs an education and street children are no different. In Delhi, CHETNA has contact points where they are taught formal subjects and also take part in sports. When the child is ready, he/she is mainstreamed into government schools.

CHETNA has been around since 2002, working directly with children. It is also a Childline partner, which means that if a child needs to be rescued, they show up. They also conduct workshops with stakeholders. One of their programmes helps make the police child-friendly. There are also two substance harm reduction centres to help children dealing with substance abuse. Your donation can take a child from the street to school.

www.chetnango.org | 91-11-41644471, 41644470 | info@chetnango.org

LEARNING TO CARE FOR ANIMALS



STRAY RELIEF AND ANIMAL WELFARE (STRAW) INDIA

A sick cat shows up at your door. Or an injured bird falls into your garden. What do you do? Most of us fumble for answers. Stray Relief and Animal Welfare (STRAW) India wants to change that through animal welfare education.

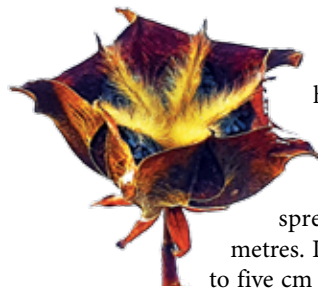
They collaborated with the Central Board of Secondary Education and other state educational boards and introduced a module on humane education. Their Compassionate Classrooms programme has reached thousands of children across India.

STRAW organizes nature walks to familiarize children with the natural world. There is also an animal helpline to counsel pet owners and coordinate rescue operations of injured animals. You can volunteer or donate.

www.strawindia.org/home.aspx
contact@strawindia.org

Flowers and plants almost always capture our attention. We wonder what their names are, where they originate and what they could be useful for. There are rare plants we may never see. Ganesh Babu, a botanist, is our guide.

Ulat Kambal



This lovely flower enchants you with its warm hues. It's called Ulat Kambal, which means inverted blanket in Hindi, an allusion to its drooping flowers and soft texture. Scientifically known as *Abroma augusta*, Ulat Kambal is a spreading shrub which grows to a height of five metres. Its flowers are deep maroon, showy and large, up to five cm across. The flower has delicate petals and a deep green bud, enhancing its beauty and adding a touch of glamour to any garden. A bunch of Ulat Kambal is like a work of art painted by nature. When its dainty petals quiver in the breeze, it seems this lovely flower is shyly trying to express its feelings.

In India, Ulat Kambal is found across the tropical forests of the Northeast and along the country's east coast. Ulat Kambal is often planted in gardens for its spectacular flowers. But it is also a medicinal plant, useful in healing irregular menstruation, polycystic ovarian syndrome and thyroid disorder.

Nelabevu



With its hooded white flowers spiked with purple tinges, Nelabevu looks artistic. It can enhance the colour palette of a garden.

Nelabevu means herbaceous neem tree in Kannada, a reference to the plant's bitter-tasting properties. This flower is well-known and has many names. In Sanskrit, it's called Bhunumba, in Tamil, Nilaveambu, in Telugu, Neala Veappa and in Malayalam it's called Kiriyaatu. Traders refer to it as Kalmegh. Its official, botanical name is *Andrographis paniculate*.

Nelabevu's petite flowers arranged on a stalk look like tiny birds sitting on tender branches. Densely packed racemose flowers can be gifted as seasonal bouquets. When planted in clumps its numerous stems and flowering twigs add colour to the landscape.

Nelabevu is used to prevent dengue and to combat influenza, itching due to poisonous bites, wounds, ulcers, and chronic fevers, malarial and intermittent fevers, inflammation, skin disease, intestinal worms, diarrhoea and dysentery.

Kaanthal



Kaanthal is the State Flower of Tamil Nadu. A poem on 99 flowers, found in *Kurinji Paattu*, a genre of Sangam literature, begins with the name Kaanthal, illustrating the importance of this plant. Kaanthal's botanical name is *Gloriosa superba*. The words 'glory' and 'superb' in its botanical name rightly describe the beauty of this wild flower.

The flower's striking arrangement of five red-tipped yellow petals are often compared with a lady's fingers decorated with henna in Tamil literature. The stamens of Kaanthal are very distinct, being four cm long with conspicuous rotating anthers. Kaanthal is also called Flame Lily. It is commonly found in tropical thorn forests and along wayside thickets near foothills. The flower blooms immediately after the monsoon.

In our traditional systems of medicine, Kaanthal is used for treating skin diseases, intestinal worms, chronic ulcers, leprosy, cancer, head lice and as an antidote for poisonous bites. It is known as Langeli and Agni Shika in Sanskrit, Gouriho in Kannada, Kali Haari in Hindi, Medoni in Malayam, Adavi Nabhi in Telugu, Kalalavi in Marathi and Dhoodiyovachan in Odia.

Indian strawberry



With its red berry, yellow flowers and green petals, the Indian strawberry is a pretty sight. The plant's botanical name is *Potentilla indica*. This flowering herb is a creeping, perennial which, when planted, covers the ground like a carpet. Its branches are reddish in colour with solitary yellow flowers two cm across in size with five petals.

The Indian strawberry is cultivated for its fruit and is introduced in gardens as an ornamental ground covering to limit the growth of other weeds. Its spreading branches with yellow flowers look exceptionally attractive on lawns.

The Indian strawberry is a wonderful choice for landscape design because it looks brilliantly wild. It is ideal for bordering gardens, for golf grounds and for man-made savannahs. Its edible fruit invites chirping birds!

Indian strawberry is recommended for eczema in our traditional systems of medicine. Fresh leaves are used in salads and dried leaves can be used to make tea. This flowering herb grows in the North and Western Himalayas at altitudes between 700 to 2500 m above sea level.

Sarpagandha



Sarpagandha, botanically known as *Rauvolfia serpentine*, is a Red-listed medicinal plant. That means it's a rare endangered plant especially in Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

Sarpagandha is a native, perennial, evergreen undershrub, which reaches a height of one metre. The plant grows in clusters of exuberant blooms.

Sarpagandha is an eye-catching plant with white flowers and reddish floral parts. It can pretty up any dull garden and convert a boring landscape into a glorious green-white one. This plant is a great backdrop for a lawn garden.

It also has medicinal properties. The roots of the Sarpagandha are used for treating hypertension, fever, wounds, sleeplessness, epilepsy, and giddiness. The plant grows in Himachal Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, the Western and Eastern Ghats as well as Eastern and Central India.

Kopouphool



This lovely Foxtail orchid is known as Kopouphool in Assam. It plays an important part in the culture of the Assamese people and hence has been adopted as the State Flower of Assam.

All orchids are stunningly beautiful. But Kopouphool, or *Rhynchostylis retusa*, is special because it also has medicinal qualities. An epiphytic orchid, it is famed for its marvellous, long-lasting blooms. Epiphytic orchids have special types of roots called velamen roots through which atmospheric moisture and nutrients are absorbed.

This species can be found hanging on to tree trunks. Numerous flowers on drooping stalks makes it look like a flowery waterfall. Pendulous long racemes entwined around tree trunks look as if the trees have been decorated with glorious garlands! Flowers are arranged in all directions of the stalk, yielding a 3D look!

The roots of the Foxtail orchid are traded in the name of 'rasna' and used to treat rheumatism. In Hindi and Kannada this orchid is called Draupadimaala (Draupadi's garland) and Annaanvaalan (squirrel's tail) in Malayalam. ■

Helping People Get Things Done



Tillers

Portable Water Pumps



F300

FJ500



Petrol

Diesel

WB15X

WS20X

WB30X

WV30D

Brush Cutters

Lawn Mowers

Portable Generators



UMK 425T-U2NT

UMK 435T-UENT

UMK 435T-U2NT



HRJ 196

HRJ-216



Silent Series

EP1000

Portable Generators

General Purpose Engines



Inverter Series

EX 2400S

EU30is

EU70is



GX25

GX80

GX160

GX200

Honda Siel Power Products Ltd.

Corporate Office:- Plot No.5, Sector - 41 Kasna, Greater Noida Industrial Development Area, GB Nagar (Uttar Pradesh)

Customer Care Number
1800-11-2323
(Toll Free)



TATA STEEL

 WeAlsoMakeTomorrow

WONDERS OF TODAY, INSPIRATIONS FOR TOMORROW.

Extraordinary strength, super lightweight, incredibly corrosion-resistant — Fibre Reinforced Polymers and Graphene, materials beyond steel, are ushering in a new era of technological advancement. From electric vehicles to medical equipment, they represent avenues where Tata Steel is enabling possibilities for tomorrow. Sure, we make steel.

But **#WeAlsoMakeTomorrow**.

We provide materials for making solutions for tomorrow

Alternative materials

To know more,
visit www.wealsomaketomorrow.com

