

# Civil Society



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**THE BIG FIGHT**  
**IN THE STATES**  
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Woh rishton main vishwas, woh vishwas ki mithaas  
Har mithaas jo hai khaas...



Aao manain  
Mawana ke saath **Har  
pal  
Tyohaar** (e)



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COVER STORY

**THE BIG FIGHT IN THE STATES**

Much is at stake for the BJP and regional parties in the elections being held in five states as can be seen from the high-voltage campaign that has been conducted.

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**Civil Society**  
READ US. WE READ YOU.

**Covering politics**

OUR readers tell us that they don't want us to cover politics and politicians. They would much rather we put our energies into stories that they don't get anywhere else. We heartily agree, but when it comes to an important election, we do think it is required for *Civil Society* to do its bit.

So, for this issue's cover story we have asked Sanjaya Baru to weigh in on the implications of the five states going to the polls and turn his regular column with us, Delhi Durbar, into the cover. Much is at stake in these elections and Baru, both as a journalist and someone who has been in government, has a keen sense of what is happening in the world of politics.

This is also not the first time that we have done a cover on elections or politicians. In fact, Narendra Modi has been featured twice as our cover story and we have tracked his journey in our own style. Earlier there were stories we did on Manmohan Singh, Sheila Dikshit and of course Arvind Kejriwal, among other politicians big and small.

Kejriwal was in fact our first cover story when we launched in September 2003. He was then an activist on leave from the income-tax department. We now continue to cover him in his political avatar.

The distance between activism and politics has also been narrowing. Social sector activists don't seem to hesitate in making their preferences known. It is becoming increasingly difficult to find the kind of activist who stays with a cause and has the capacity to deal with any party in power. Anupam Mishra, our late friend and board member, was one such activist in an old-fashioned way. He had his views but kept an even keel.

For us as journalists, there can be no question of taking sides. Staying tuned to politics and politicians in an impartial way has its dividends when tracking policy and government decision-making. We have the acquaintance of many politicians of different persuasions. Some can be counted as friends as in the case of the Deputy-Chairman of the Rajya Sabha, Harivansh, who is on our advisory board because that is where he was first before getting into politics.

It is always fun to revisit a story because you get to know what happened next. We interviewed Dr C.R. Elsy, the agricultural scientist, to catch up on her effort to get geographical indications for farm produce in Kerala. Any talk of improving the lot of farmers must really begin by working with them in their fields and empowering them in meaningful ways. Dr Elsy's contribution has been in enabling farmers to navigate the complex terrain of intellectual property rights. The fact that she has done so as a scientist is particularly interesting.

In our Living section we feature women making an entry into the Indian hip hop scene. Female rappers have their own stories to tell. We also explore the world of secondhand books. With everything going online and bookshops dying, the circulation of pre-loved books too has been disrupted.

*Umesh Anand*

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# You read it first in Civil Society

Great stories of change across India from a magazine built on trust



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## VOICES

IN THE LIGHT

SAMITA RATHOR



### LETTERS



#### Healing people

Thanks for your cover story, 'Doctors as Leaders'. I found each story inspiring and absorbing. Each doctor you write about is truly special. I'm amazed at their dedication, courage and compassion. An impressive Hall of Fame issue.

*Ishu Agarwal*

Dr Taru Jindal, through her efforts, has really enlightened the rural community and demonstrated that dedication, motivation and participation can make a big difference. There are still miles to go in the health sector especially in rural India. I had once got the opportunity to meet Dr Ravikant of Doctors For You during the earthquake relief efforts in Assam. I applaud the entire team for their contribution to the health and well-being of people.

*Ronney Rajkumar*

Dr Taru Jindal is a role model for youngsters. She did what many only think of doing. She has this missionary zeal to serve society.

*Vijay Manchanda*

I have been a strong supporter of *Civil Society* for your courage to swim against the tide in the world of journalism. You have stood apart and tall for writing stories of real people and situations where extraordinary work is being done and organizations are purpose-driven. May you continue to enlighten us about these islands of hope in our country.

*Evita Fernandez*

God bless each of the doctors you have written about and all those who are tirelessly serving humanity and haven't been recognized as yet for

their efforts. May their tribe increase and I hope youngsters emulate these noble souls so that the task of shortlisting names for the next Hall of Fame becomes much more difficult!

*Srikanth K.*

I know Vijay Anand and Anne so well. I have personally visited Makunda Hospital two or three times. Both my sons worked there at different times. It makes me happy that a person like Dr Roshine Mary Koshy, with similar commitment, is taking over.

*Giovanni Gnanadurai*

Dr Vinod Shah's story was just amazing! It shows what one person with an idea he is passionate about and determined to achieve, can do. I heard of the MD in Family Medicine

and always felt that it was an idea whose time had come but I never knew it was Dr Shah's brainchild.

*Dr Seshadri Harihar*

I would like to thank Dr Vinod Shah for designing this course despite the odds and working hard at it. I am a better physician thanks to his vision.

*Dawn*

Thanks for the heart-warming story on Dr Rajkumar Ramasamy and his wife, Dr Mary. It's true that the provision of primary healthcare requires support. It increases the responsibility of the faculty in medical colleges who train students in primary care. As Dr Mary rightly pointed out, the enthusiasm has to be passed on to the juniors by the trainer.

*Mary Ramola*

Words are just not enough to express the wonder and gratitude I feel at the amazing service Dr Mary and Dr Rajkumar provide to underprivileged people.

*Dr Saravanan M.*

#### City forest

Apropos your story, 'What now for urban forest in Gurugram?' It was nice to read about I Am Gurgaon's prolonged efforts to revive a degraded area especially to replicate hardy tree species suited to the Aravalli landscape. It was very heartening to read how those trees adapted after three years of irrigation and then managed to survive in semi-arid climatic conditions. We, the Save Aarey campaign, are very proud of the entire I Am Gurgaon team.

*Lawrence D'Souza*

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## Dr C.R. Elsy on the search for unique crop varieties

## ‘GI status gets better prices but quality is important’

Civil Society News  
New Delhi

WHEN Dr C.R. Elsy did her Ph.D. it was in breeding rice plant varieties. But when she retired this month as a professor of the Kerala Agricultural University (KAU), her legacy will be her unique initiative spanning a decade or so to get farmers their intellectual property rights over their crops.

Thanks to her sense of mission, a host of crops in Kerala have received Geographical Indication or GI status which means they are unique in the world. To achieve this Dr Elsy has worked with farmers in their fields, hand-held them through the legal process and also helped them create brand identities for their produce.

From her home in Thrissur, Dr Elsy spoke to *Civil Society* on crops which have received GI status and what it has meant to farmers:

**How many crops have you succeeded in getting GI status and how many are in the pipeline?**

We got the first GI status in 2007. Till date we have succeeded in getting GI status for 10 products and we are working with another 10. They are at different stages.

We have submitted the application to the GI Registry for four products and for two products the formalities are over. We still have to conduct meetings with farmers for two products. Due to the COVID pandemic our meetings got delayed. For six products, we are doing the characterization, documentation, quality analysis, testing and interviews with the farmers.

**Can you tell us about these six products?**

One is a mango variety from North Kerala called Kuttiattoor, a place in Kannur. Its speciality is its medium sweetness, beautiful colour and it is also fully embryonic. It is specifically available in two or three panchayats in Kannur district.

The second is an Edayoor green chilli variety from Malappuram district. When I presented this chilli to the GI Registry they said five chillis have got the GI status, what is the speciality of your chilli? I told them this is the chilli with the least pungency. People always consider high pungency to be a unique characteristic. But our chilli has the least pungency or hotness. So people consume it as a vegetable, as a fried chilli or as a curd-chilli. This chilli is available in a panchayat in Malappuram district.

Another two products we have submitted are from Attappadi, a tribal area in Palakkad district. It is infamous for malnutrition and poverty. We worked with the tribal community to identify a few products eligible for GI status.

One is a red gram locally known as Thuvara or in general as *Cajanus cajan*. It is widely cultivated in Attappadi. When we compared the speciality of that red gram with other red gram available in other parts of our country, we found it was totally different. It is a wide seeded variety, and its size is different from the normal red gram variety. It is less bitter in taste. The tribal community also uses it as a vegetable. It has less thiamine content.

Another crop is the Dolichos Bean, also called Lablab or Amara. It is used as a



Dr C. R. Elsy: 'More farmers are now aware of the benefits of having crops with GI status'

vegetable and is specifically available only in Attappadi. There is also Snap Melon or Pottu Vellari. When the fruit matures it breaks open and it can then be scooped out or used as a drink.

We are currently tracking a garlic variety from Vattavada and Kanthalloor panchayats near Munnar. This garlic, a traditional variety, is smoky white in colour and somewhat smaller in size to the North Indian variety. Its pungency and flavour are different and it has more medicinal qualities.

I visited the garlic market in Vadugapatti. It has 46 shops which sell only garlic. The preference is for the traditional variety. People ask for the Vattavada or Kanthalloor garlic. It sells for around ₹350 per kg. The North Indian variety sells for some ₹250. Traders also buy the traditional garlic to sell in other places.

And, recently, we've started a project on *Alpinia galanga*, a new crop in Kerala. Farmers in Pathanamthitta district in southern Kerala have been growing this crop. There is a lot of demand for it with enquiries coming in from other countries either for galangal or the oil that is extracted from it.

Our minister suggested we see if it can be registered as a GI product. We collected samples and documented the galangal's area of cultivation. It's an ongoing process and may take some more time before we submit it to the GI Registry.

**Has GI made a difference to farmers in terms of price?**

I have quantified the difference for two crops: the Changanlikodan banana and Marayoor jaggery. We did a small market survey.

Changanlikodan is a special type of banana available only in Thrissur. During the Onam season demand for bananas goes up. Ten to 15 years ago the price difference between the Changanlikodan banana and the ordinary Nendran banana was only ₹3 to ₹5.

After getting the GI tag the popularity of Changanlikodan gradually increased in the market. In 2019, the price difference was ₹30 per kg. The total production is valued at ₹1 crore. People are coming from other districts and sometimes even

from other states, including political leaders and VIPs, and asking for the Changanlikodan banana. That's how the price differential has increased to ₹30.

**So you are saying that the GI status gives it a fresh identity and demand goes up?**

Yes. Marayoor jaggery followed a similar trajectory. In 2016, when we started documenting Marayoor jaggery, a lot of fake products were being sold under its name. People were adding chemicals to give it a certain colour. Our agriculture minister, Sunil Kumar, requested us to consider it for GI registration. He supported us in every way.

After GI registration, farmers and traders tell us demand for this jaggery has gone up because we told them not to add colour and to let it be dark brown. If colour is added it changes to golden brown, even red, but it's harmful for health. A company in Munnar selling this jaggery told us that they sell as much as 500 kg per week and pay ₹100 per kg to farmers. When we started, farmers used to get only ₹45 per kg. I think the price may reach ₹150 to ₹200 per kg. And that, I feel, is due to GI registration.

**Is there scope for farmers to start a few agro-industries for such unique varieties?**

When the prices of such products increase we find that people from outside that area are keen to come and start a small industry. But farmers are hesitant. They think factories are run by really big fellows, that they will incur losses and that everything will go into the hands of the factory owners.

But there are many others who do think of forming a cooperative society. The government is also thinking of supporting such societies and farmer-producer organizations. The agriculture department also helps farmers start their own units. They can also sell online.

But my request to farmers and producers is, don't compromise on quality. They must have a quality standard otherwise demand will decline in a year or two.

There are other issues to be resolved for, say, Marayoor jaggery. The sugarcane has a harvesting period of more than 12 months. But when the price of the jaggery goes up the farmers tend to cut the crop by the 10th month. The quality will then be poor.

So we are continuously telling farmers, maintain your quality, harvest at the right time and don't use colour. Then demand will continue to rise and you will get better prices.

**Has the process of getting GI status become simpler over the years?**

Frankly, I feel it is becoming more and more difficult. When we started in 2007, it was simpler. They find some problems, they add clauses and legal fines. We have to comply with all that. We have to work hard for getting GI for a product.

It isn't only because of a problem with the (Geographical Indications) Act. Sometimes a problem will erupt between two states like the West Bengal and Odisha quarrel over GI status for the rasgulla. To avoid such legal fights the GI Registry is telling us to be very careful while putting in our applications.

Even farmers are now more aware of the benefits of having crops with GI. Everybody wants their area to be included in the area of production of the GI product. But we cannot put all the names of the societies in the application. We have to convince them that only one or two groups can be applicants.

**Has the idea of having an IPR cell spread to other states?**

Most states may already be having an IPR cell because the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) directed them to set up IPR cells in 2003. But they have to know how to work with farmers, proceed with legal formalities and put in applications.

Experience helps you do it in a better way. When I started in 2007 I did not know the legal formalities involved. I'm a plant breeder, basically. Gradually I studied all the legal formalities. It is a marriage between science and law. Many things come together: plant breeder science, farmer rights and GI registration. I tell my colleagues, if we have a mind and a will, we can do it.

**Have any states outside the South reached out to you and asked if you can create such a cell for them? Has there been any sharing at a national level?**

No, they have never asked me to come and help set up the IPR cell. I think the IPR cell has been implemented in states and universities but their way of working will be different. May not be very active, or it could be that the science part is an issue.

I am a plant breeder and I have studied characterizations of plant varieties and GI registration. People with an economics background may see all this differently.

But I'm happy my university gave me this chance to work with farmers. During the last 10 to 13 years I was able to make an impact in the area of intellectual property rights especially GI registration, farmer rights and the conservation of traditional varieties with the support of this IPR cell. And definitely, the agriculture minister gave us a lot of support. Even the prime minister is now telling people to go for local products.

**How do you choose a particular crop for GI registration? Does the approach come from farmers or does it come from you?**

It varies from product to product. In the case of Pokkali rice, it was my decision. When the Act was implemented in 2003, I considered what product could be taken up for GI registration in Kerala. I began searching. I found Pokkali was available in a particular area in Kerala and that it had specific qualities. When I visited the International Rice Research Institute in the Philippines, they told me how important Pokkali is due to its ability to tolerate salinity. The genes for salinity tolerance in plant breeding throughout the world come from the Pokkali variety. That was the first project I attempted and it was chosen by the university itself.

But in the case of Marayoor jaggery the situation is entirely different. I did not know much about it. The minister visited that area and people complained to him about its low demand and low price. He suggested the university take up the project for GI registration.

For Changanlikodan, when we visited that area people told us this is a special banana with high demand during the Onam season and asked if there was any way it could be marketed better. We decided to go for it.

And then there are my students who are doing PG and Ph.D. under my guidance. I used to give them projects for characterization, evaluation and to assess plant quality. We use that data in our application.

**‘The genes for salinity tolerance in plant breeding throughout the world come from the Pokkali rice variety which is available in a particular area of Kerala.’**

**Apart from genetic characteristics, do you also have to delve into the social aspects or history of the crop?**

Yes, definitely. The first question the committee to whom we make our presentation asks is, what is the uniqueness of your product? It is like being the defence in court. We have to answer all questions on how special our product is.

Historical documents are very important. They ask us our product's history of cultivation in a particular area. We used to go to different libraries, collect maps and other documents and put these in our application. Social work, extension work, everything gets mingled in geographical indication.

**You have also been supporting conservation in several ways?**

Actually, recently two farmers supported by our IPR cell were given the Innovative Farmer Award by the ICAR in New Delhi. IPR is also a part of farmer rights. But farmers don't know much about their IP rights. It is our duty to support them.

The Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers' Rights Authority in New Delhi gives Plant Genome Saviour Awards every year to farmers who are conserving traditional varieties and for the development of new varieties by research institutions.

Till now 22 farmers or farming communities nominated by our IPR cell and by KAU have received this national award. The Changanlikodan banana received the community award. They have given ₹10 lakh to help them enhance their activities. Individual farmers receive ₹1 or ₹1.5 lakh. Kerala occupies the top position with the maximum awardee farmers.

The application forms for the awards are either in Hindi or in English. Our farmers cannot put in applications in these two languages. Whatever appreciation or reward is given by the Government of India or state government, we ensure farmers can apply.

Our IPR cell helps farmers fill in the application forms and we also do a follow-up. Our farmers don't have the mechanism to receive emails so we step in. We inform them and make travel arrangements so that they can receive the award. This year, despite COVID, 20 farmers have applied and we are awaiting the outcome. ■



Qutb Shahi tombs amidst 106 acres of greenery near the Golconda Fort

# Coming soon in Hyderabad

Civil Society News  
New Delhi

EVERY city has its surprises and they show up for those who look for them. In Hyderabad, the Qutb Shahi tombs don't usually find mention. But these tombs are marvels of architecture, design, craftsmanship and engineering.

Come 2024, the Qutb Shahi Heritage Park will be drawing visitors from all over the world to see an outstanding conservation effort which not only puts the tombs back in all their intricacies, but revives around them 106 acres of greenery together with ancient water-harvesting structures.

The Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC) began the conservation project in Hyderabad in 2013, drawing on its immense success in Delhi with the revival of Humayun's Tomb and surrounding monuments together with Sunder Nursery, Delhi's Heritage Park.

"When our work is completed in 2023-24, it is going to be a destination that people travel to Hyderabad to visit," says Ratish Nanda, projects director and CEO of AKTC in India.

"Just as in the case of Sunder Nursery, few people know about this site, which is shocking. Also, like Sunder Nursery, we would like to look after the site for a few years and put in place an international

standard of heritage management," says Nanda.

"We are basically trying to demonstrate how good conservation can lead to fulfilling a lot of the government's agenda. Whether it is economic opportunities, whether it is tourism, whether it is employment creation, whether it is restoring a sense of pride, all of that. These are tombs that are protected by the government of Telangana and it has been really supportive," says Nanda.

The tombs, 80 in number, are at the foot of the Golconda Fort. The 106 acres they sit on used to be a significantly larger area earlier. The project involves restoring the monuments and landscaping the open areas.



Ratish Nanda

"Every day, we make discoveries. And we discovered that unlike the Mughals very little is really known about the Qutb Shahis. So, one of the first things I was told when I went there was that they are not Mughals and they don't build gardens. And very soon we found foundations of garden enclosure walls. So these tombs were enclosed in garden walls. Then last week we found incredible tile work buried beneath the cement almost as if, you know, it was a Mughal period tomb," says Nanda.

The project is much larger than what was envisaged at first. The 80 tombs could really be 100 and four of them are the size of Humayun's tomb.

Says Nanda: "There is nothing quite like it simply because there is no other necropolis that I know of

which has about a hundred monuments in the same complex. So, for me, the most fascinating part of the Qutb Shahi tombs is that wherever the portion of garden you're standing in, you see 10 to 20 domes rising all around you and that is just incredible. It's just a mind-boggling feeling. There is individual beauty in each building. But, for me, it's their coming together as an ensemble that is of value."

The project signals the importance of ecological balance. The greenery and water systems are testimony to a culture of conservation which has modern relevance. The Qutb Shahis were, in this sense, more evolved and attuned to their needs than the Hyderabad of today.

One of the first things that the project team had to do when they started was to buy water. But then they found seven *baolis* or traditional water-harvesting structures.

"Now, we collect about over 10 million litres of water in the *baolis* every monsoon. It means we are water surplus. This year we should be planting at least 10,000 trees. We are creating ecological buffers on both sides," says Nanda enthusiastically.

The project flows from the experience of restoring Humayun's tomb and reviving Sunder Nursery. It draws on a growing pool of conservation expertise and a vast number of workmen with traditional skills. What it doesn't have is the social aspects of that initiative as in the renewal of Nizamuddin Basti. But in terms of conservation and restoration, it is expected that it will be a model for other states in south India which are rich in similar heritage. ■

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# The new check dams of Puttur

Shree Padre  
Kasaragod

EVERY year A.P. Sadashiva Marike, a middle-class areca nut farmer near Puttur in Karnataka, would construct a *katta* across a stream that flowed past his gardens. The *katta* was dutifully made, at considerable expense, without fail every December since his late father's days.

The *katta* is a temporary check dam built with local materials like compacted soil, areca nut wood and branches of trees. To build one requires substantial skill. The *katta* checks the flow of water in the stream and stocks a huge amount by artificially raising water levels upstream.

The benefits of the *katta* are manifold. Unlike bore wells which devastate groundwater levels, the *katta* raises water tables. Marike's earthen tanks fill up and the sub-soil moisture in his gardens increases, thanks to his *katta*. If he builds a series of *kattas* across the stream, the water flow will last for one or two months.

The problem is that the *katta*, though laborious to build, lasts just a season. Fresh soil, brought from nearby areas for its construction, gets washed away in the monsoon. "In the site from where we brought soil year after year, a large hole was created the size of a usual house site," recalls Marike.

Generally, it requires 60 mandays to construct the traditional *katta*. Though these *kattas* are fairly stable, they can't withstand floods caused by untimely rains. This means Marike has to reconstruct the *katta* — at much expense.

High labour costs, a shortage of skilled labour, the crab menace and anxiety that the traditional *katta* might be breached in surprise showers has made farmers look for low-cost and more durable check dams. A number of check dams has now been designed, some by farmers themselves.

## THE DAM SEARCH

Faced with the unreliability of his *katta*, Marike began to consider how he could reduce his cost of construction and build a more stable check dam that wouldn't collapse during a flash flood.

A decade ago, he had opted for a check dam built with sand bags. It saved him labour. He built it with just 10 workers. Though the sand bag check dam was an efficient option, Marike sought an even more sustainable model. Wracking his brains, the idea of using mild steel sheets struck him.

He had been to Puttur city and seen mild steel sheets used for making slabs during construction. "That attracted my attention. Why not use this for my check dam, I thought," he says.

To do so he had to reinvent the way the *katta* was constructed. A good concrete foundation has to be laid in summer. Marike's stream is 23 feet wide. A 'C channel' is fitted to support the mild steel shutters. A series of shutters made with 150 mm mild steel is placed in front of this, side by side. To withstand the hydraulic pressure, the shutters are placed in a slightly slanting position. A silpaulin (waterproof) sheet covers all these shutters from inside.

The biggest advantage of this type of check dam is



Jogibettu Govinda Bhat, a farmer, with his unique check dam built with mild steel sheets



The check dams are stable and can withstand surprise showers

**High labour costs, shortage of skilled labour, the crab menace and the fragility of the *katta* have made farmers look for more durable check dams.**

that it can easily be constructed or dismantled. Two people can do it in two hours. Secondly, there is no recurring expenditure.

Marike applies mud oil after the shutters are dismantled and taken home every summer. This prevents rusting. The entire check dam, including the concrete foundation, cost him ₹20,000 in 2013. Eight years later, it is still in good condition.

The trend in Puttur and its surrounding areas encompasses sustainable semi-permanent check dams that can be constructed in half a day.

Jogibettu Govinda Bhat, a farmer in adjoining Sullia taluk, was also interested in a semi-permanent check dam. Along with six partners, he was constructing a traditional *katta* nearby. The others lost interest. Bhat found himself building his sand bag *katta* alone. Only a few labourers were willing to lift heavy sand bags.

Bhat approached Pathanjali Bharadwaj, owner of Bharath Grama Sampark Nirman, a fabrication company in Sullia. Bharadwaj, an M.Tech from the National Institute of Technology, Karnataka in Suratkal, designed a mild steel sheet check dam for Bhat which is bigger and slightly different in design

and dimension from Marike's. This is the second year it is being rigged up.

Bharadwaj's design is unique. The distance between the banks is 32 feet. The check dam has eight shutters, each eight feet in length. There are no concrete pillars in between. Instead, detachable iron pillars are used. Holes are made in the concrete foundation into which these pillars are inserted when the dam is made in December.

While setting up the dam, two shutters 2.5 feet in height are fixed between these iron pillars. Each shutter is convex in shape to withstand hydraulic pressure. Water gets stored to a height of five feet up till 300 metres upstream. One of the central shutters has four pipes and a cap to drain the stored water whenever necessary.

"When we were constructing the traditional check dam with compacted soil and wooden branches, we required 35 to 40 man days. Our wage bill came to a minimum of ₹20,000. After we shifted to building sand bag check dams, our cost of labour reduced to ₹5,000 for 10 workers. Today, two labourers can easily erect or dismantle our check dam in half a

*Continued on page 12*

## KNOWLEDGE SHARING TO ENSURE CONTINUOUS LEARNING



There is a 76% survival rate for children fighting cancer in India when they receive good medical treatment. But due to extensive treatment and chemotherapy sessions, these kids miss out on going to school or continuing their education. Providing educational support to these kids while they undergo treatment at the hospital boosts their morale and helps them return to school with dignity and confidence.

Himalaya is supporting Samiksha Foundation, a creative learning initiative for children with cancer and their caregivers. Samiksha has centers at the Kapur ward in Kidwai Memorial Institute and Mazumdar Shaw Cancer Center, Narayana Health, Bengaluru.

The initiative focuses at motivating these children by providing them with educational, creative, and spiritual support while they undergo treatment. As part of the curriculum, the children are taught yoga, meditation, art, and have access to a multilingual library with a plethora of books. Storytelling sessions are also conducted to make these knowledge-sharing activities more engaging and are very popular among the children at the hospitals.

Himalaya has been actively associated with Samiksha Foundation from 2016 and has supported around 1800 children so far. Children getting admitted to these hospitals for cancer treatment can enroll with Samiksha and avail all the facilities provided to help them continue with their education.

Himalaya has always been committed to addressing primary and community healthcare challenges. Through initiatives such as comprehensive community health camps, we have strived to take care of the basic healthcare needs of socially and economically marginalized groups. We have also worked towards spreading awareness about menstrual hygiene management, WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene), CHD (Congenital Heart Disease), zero hunger, and cleft-lip treatment.

Continued from page 10

day,” explains a happy Bhat. The entire structure cost him ₹1,75,000. He hopes it will last 10 to 15 years.

Bhat’s cousin, Udayakumar Mogape, also a farmer, is impressed with Bharadwaj’s dam. His family has been constructing the traditional *katta* for decades. Mogape’s *katta* has some unique features. It has traditional pillars, locally called *gurji*, which provide strong support to his *katta* from behind.

“Yet, sometimes my *katta* gets breached during the irrigation season because of unexpected floods upstream. My cousin’s check dam is more stable and won’t collapse so easily,” he remarks.

Mogape has already placed an order with Bharadwaj for a mild steel sheet check dam. Next summer he will construct a concrete foundation and build the new check dam, eight feet by 26 feet, at an overall cost of ₹2 lakh.

“We can manufacture mild steel sheet check dams upto a span of 30 to 40 feet. As the width of the check dam increases, its stability reduces,” explains Bharadwaj. “The foundation has to be carefully constructed before summer ends. We can erect such check dams even if the flow of water in the stream is a trickle. We can design this model upto 10 to 12 feet and manage the shuttering process manually. If the dam is higher we can provide two layers of shutters. Manual shuttering with shutters more than 12 feet is risky.”

#### SPOTTING THE BEST

The Kasaragod Development Package (KDP) is a special development programme for the district by the state government. A KDP team consisting of engineers from the Minor Irrigation Department and officers of the Soil Conservation Department visited Marike’s check dam in January last year. After studying it carefully they approved three innovative check dam designs for mass implementation in the district. Marike’s is one of them.

E.P. Rajamohan, head of KDP, was very impressed by Marike’s check dam. He got one built for the KDP last year. Fabricated at a local workshop, it cost ₹25,000.

Earlier, the zilla panchayat (district council) of Dakshina Kannada, Marike’s home district, had sent a team hoping to disseminate this design with some fine-tuning. News and videos were circulated widely. But the idea was unceremoniously dropped. The panchayat cited lack of funds.

Due to the unstable nature of *kattas* and the high costs incurred, semi-permanent check dams are likely to rise in popularity. “There are challenges, though,” says Sajangadde Shrihari Bhat, president of the Neera Nemmadige Padre, a water conservation movement in Padre village in neighbouring Kasaragod district. “A single design can’t suit diverse situations. The type of check dam to be built will be dictated by the stream span, its quantity of water, type of riverbed, the status of its side walls and so on. So, we require different models to suit different streams.”

The Neera Nemmadige Padre held a ‘*Katta Utsava*’ (*Katta* Festival) in 2020. It was KDP that picked up the idea. It plans to hold a check dam festival every two years to create awareness and encourage the building of check dams. ■

A.P. Sadashiva Marike – 94492 82892  
Jogibettu Govinda Bhat – 94481 53327 / 82176 34275

# Kambala gets kinder and more popular

Susheela Nair  
Mangaluru

**B**LARING microphones, blowing horns and the beat of drums heralded the much-awaited Kambala, an annual sporting event in which buffaloes race down a slushy track to the frenzied cheers and chants of spectators. A traditional sport, the event took place at the Goldfinch grounds in Mangaluru this year.

During the racing event, the arena is taken over by a huge, hectic country fair, marked by colour and gaiety. From being a marketing hub for agricultural implements used to spur buffaloes while ploughing, the venue now attracts elaborate stalls peddling everything from toys to food. The air is filled with the chatter of thousands of villagers who congregate here to witness the buffaloes racing to an earthy victory. Men huddle in groups and comment on the animals and the skills of their rider.

Every winter the southern part of coastal Karnataka comes alive with people who gather there to witness Kambala. If you are there during this time, partake in the celebrations and get swept away by the excitement of the races when a strong-muscled farmer surfs his way down the track behind the beasts while balancing precariously on a trailing wooden plank. The prize goes to the swiftest in these races. Normally, Kambala is held on muddy tracks adjoining a rice field. The 135-metre-long track is prepared by curing with water and made slushy. The *jodukare* or the twin-racing tracks are considered popular. Water is pumped into the tracks throughout the event to ensure constant flow of fresh water. *Toranas* or cloth banners are strung across the track at a height of five metres.

The genesis of Kambala can be traced to the fourth century, when the present Tulu region was ruled by members of the Alupa dynasty, who were feudal chieftains called *arasus* or kings. What began as a royal pastime (*arasukambala*) metamorphosed into a rich man’s sport with affluent landlords hosting it on specially laid tracks on fields set aside by them for this purpose. They reared the best animals and took pride in winning trophies during the annual racing competitions. Even today, a person who owns Kambala buffaloes enjoys special status in rural society. But this rural sport gained popularity in the early part of the 20th century, when farmers would race their buffaloes home after a day in the fields.

This spectacular rural sporting event has become

part of the land’s ethos. Good prize money, rich sponsors and mass passion keep this ancient sport alive and kicking. “As Karnataka Tourism has not marketed Kambala races, we have curated cultural and culinary tours during the Kambala season to woo tourists,” says Ravi Menon, managing director, Arjun Tours and Travels.

Preparations for the mega event start months in advance. Utmost care is taken to choose the best animals and the selected ones are made to go through rigorous training under a team of specialized jockeys. The valuable buffaloes are



A Kambala jockey with his pampered buffaloes

**This spectacular sporting event has become part of the land’s ethos. Good prize money, rich sponsors and mass passion keep the ancient sport of Kambala alive.**

pampered and prepared like thoroughbreds. The bovines are fed a nutritious diet of pulses soaked overnight in water, peanuts ground to a paste, chickpeas, coconut mix and rice, given regular massages and hot water baths daily. To make their muscles strong and flexible, they are taught to sit, stand, crouch, bend legs during the training before they are taken to makeshift racing tracks for practice. Some owners even provide a swimming

Susheela Nair



Buffaloes and their jockey race through a slushy track

pool for the bovines to wallow in during the heat. Racing buffaloes in training are rarely put to work in the fields.

Decked in colourful ropes covered with tinsel, and with headpieces of silver and brass, the buffaloes are paraded before the gathering to the sound of a brass band and drums. Then two pairs of buffaloes and their jockeys trot up to the starting point on the slushy track and the bovines are spurred into action. The Kambala races have different versions. In one, the man runs alongside the buffalo; in another, he rides on a wooden plough-board attached to a pair of bullocks, literally surfing his way down the track behind the beasts. In another version, a specially designed wooden block is used which lifts and sprinkles the water as it runs.

Dressed in a short lungi and a coloured turban,

the barechested rider mounts the wooden plank attached behind a pair of animals while the trainers hold the buffaloes, waiting for the green signal. With the driver’s prodding, the huge animals surge forward and begin to gallop. The race gathers momentum as they speed towards the finishing point, spraying and splashing mud in the air. The frenzied crowd cheers the participant who causes the biggest splash that touches the *torana*. The riders display their prowess in manoeuvring the plank to produce the tallest and widest splash of muddy water. The performances of the buffaloes are judged on the basis of pace, style, speed and the height and breadth of the water splash created while racing.

Earlier, the prize for winners was a bunch of coconuts and bananas. Today, expensive gold

souvenirs are given away to the owners and riders of the winning animals. But it can hardly match the prestige of those who rear and race buffaloes. Modern racing, while retaining some trappings of religion and culture associated with traditional races, has an element of entertainment. While traditional racing was strictly guided by an auspicious day and time decided by a temple priest and was limited to three hours on the designated day, the modern races stretch up to two days, often including both day and night racing with flood lights. A heartening factor is that Kambala is no longer a ‘cruel’ sport as the animals are not goaded to a harsh extent anymore — thanks to the efforts of animal rights activists. ■

Season: From November to April-end  
Contact: Arjun Tours & Travels for Cultural & Culinary  
Tours in coastal Karnataka (mobile: 99019 09419).

#### Samita’s World

by SAMITA RATHOR



# Pashmina weavers wait for central law

Jehangir Rashid  
Srinagar

THOUSANDS of pashmina weavers are living in despair in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), forced to use their skilled hands to do labour work instead of spinning delicate threads. The state is now a Union Territory and central laws are applicable. But a law which could protect artisans and is critical to the livelihood of thousands of families is not yet applicable.

“The Government of India’s Handlooms Reservation of Articles for Production Act, 1985 protects artisans working with different handlooms. Initially, pashmina was not included in this Act, but it got incorporated in 2008. Unfortunately, it has not been implemented despite J&K now being a Union Territory,” says Showkat Ahmad Mir, who is acting president, Kashmir Pashmina Kaarigar Union (KPKU).

Hundreds of power looms producing cheap pashmina products have proliferated in the state and the original pashmina weaver who works with his or her hands has been pushed into a corner.

According to Mir there is currently no law by which the Department of Handicrafts can take action against the power looms that have proliferated across the Kashmir Valley. He says the textile sector is deriving maximum benefits under various government schemes and the handmade handicrafts sector is being totally ignored.

“The policy of the Department of Industries & Commerce is flawed since handicrafts and textiles are lumped together. There is nothing specifically for handicrafts which is why an important handicraft like pashmina is virtually dying a silent death. One of the major challenges that we are facing is that there is no Act to stop violations,” says Mir.

He said they met Jitender Singh, minister of state (MoS) in the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO), in December 2020 and apprised him of the problems of pashmina weavers and their families. They said that they emphasized to him the need to get the Labour Act implemented in J&K so that weavers get proper wages.

“We stressed the importance of early implementation of the Labour Act. Once it comes into force it will provide financial and social security to artisans and their families. The minister assured us of speedy action. Hopefully, he will keep his word,” says Mir.

Rauf Ahmad Qureshi, founding member and



A pashmina weaver at work spinning delicate threads into fine fabric



**Hundreds of power looms producing cheap pashmina products have proliferated and the pashmina weaver who works with his hands has been pushed into a corner.**

former president of KPKU, said that the invasion of power looms has dealt a severe blow to the shawl industry of Kashmir. He points out that, instead of taking action against power loom owners, the government is promoting them and that’s why looms in hundreds have sprung up across Kashmir.

“The beauty of the original pashmina shawl is that it is made of fine fabric. Women in their homes sift the soft wool and then extract the fine fabric to spin it on the handle. With the invasion of power looms all this has gone. Shawls are being made of

impure yarn on machines. Even today there is great demand for original shawls, nationally and internationally,” says Qureshi.

He also said that the pashmina industry can be revived if the weavers are given yarn on credit by the Small Scale Industries Development Corporation Limited (SICOP) for a period of six months, the time taken to complete a shawl in the traditional way. Once the product is ready it should be acquired by the concerned department.

“The irony is that the emporium wing of the handlooms department sells shawls made on power looms. This has to be discontinued. Instead, people making traditional pashmina shawls must be encouraged. It is due to this apathy that 95 percent of pashmina weavers have given up and are now doing menial jobs,” says Qureshi.

His union presented a memorandum to Prime Minister Narendra Modi more than five years ago following which ₹50 crore was released for the preservation of this handicraft. He said since then there is no clue as to where that money has gone. A similar memorandum was presented to Manmohan Singh when he was prime minister, says Qureshi.

Mir says that mere announcements about acquiring a Geographical Indication (GI) tag will not help. What is needed is spreading awareness about the original pashmina through all forms of media like print, electronic and social media.

“There is a quality control wing in the Department of Handicrafts, but it is defunct. No quality check has been done by it since it came up in 1978. This unit needs to be activated so that original and quality shawls are produced and sold and not fake ones. The Department of Industries & Commerce should stop giving licences to people who want to start power looms,” says Mir.

Both Mir and Qureshi are all praise for retired bureaucrat Khurshid Ahmad Ganai, saying that he tried his best to revive the pashmina industry. They say that when Ganai was the financial commissioner and adviser to the governor, he prepared a roadmap for the pashmina industry but his recommendations were not implemented. ■

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Narendra Modi at a rally: Appealing to Bengali asmita



Mamata Banerjee in her wheelchair: Holding sway over Bengali sentiment

# Hindutva vs Bharat in big fight for states



By Sanjaya Baru

INDIA, that is Bharat, shall be a Union of States. Thus begins the Indian Constitution. The 'Hindu nationalist' Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), as it has come to be widely called, confronts the deep-seated loyalties of the Indian people based on language, culture, ethnicity and caste as it challenges what have come to be called 'regional parties' in the on-going state legislative assembly elections across the sub-continent.

Over the past six years, ever since the BJP secured an absolute majority of its own in the Lok Sabha, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has asserted his party's hegemonic dominance in governance and politics across the country. Yet, in large parts of India the voters' multiple loyalties beyond religion have come to

challenge the so-called nationalist discourse of the BJP. With the singular exception of Gujarat, where the BJP has remained in a dominant position for a long time, the party remains confined to Hindi-speaking regions of the country. In Karnataka it virtually stole an election to form the government and its writ is still constrained by the state's caste and linguistic loyalties that limit the scope of the BJP's religion-based nationalism. In Assam too the BJP's base has still not consolidated itself.

Nowhere is this contrast between the 'Hindu-Hindi nationalism' of the BJP and the 'regional' and caste loyalties of the electorate more stark than in the states of Tamil Nadu and West Bengal. Even though Andhra Pradesh was the first 'linguistic state', so to speak, it was Tamil Nadu that brought the politics of language, culture and ethnicity to the centre of national politics with its anti-Brahmin and anti-Hindi movements of the 1960s. Ever since Anna Dorai's Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) displaced the Indian National Congress in Tamil Nadu, the politics of the state has always been about 'national' political

parties aligning themselves with one or the other 'regional' party.

In many ways the same is true of West Bengal. Even though the Left Front, comprising the two communist parties, the CPI(M) and CPI, and a couple of other locally relevant political platforms, was constituted around a secular political ideology based on class mobilization — of workers and peasants — the reality is that the CPI(M), under the popular leadership of Jyoti Basu, tapped into Bengali sentiment to hold sway over the state for three decades until that sentiment swerved towards yet another Bengali leader, Mamata Banerjee.

Tamil Nadu and West Bengal, notwithstanding all the dissimilarities between them, have for long been bastions of powerful regional political loyalties that have overpowered national political parties. The outcome of the 2021 assembly elections will determine whether or not this regional sentiment remains intact and will hold its own against a renewed nationalist onslaught, this time launched by the BJP. The Left Front and the Congress party have been reduced to marginal players in both states.

## REGIONAL FORCES ARE STRONGER

In many ways the same factors are in play in the other states going to polls, including Assam where the BJP has established its presence based on a combination of regional and Hindu nationalist sentiment. However, unlike in the last round of assembly and Lok Sabha elections, this time Assam too is divided between the politics of regional and national sentiment.

The Left Front versus Congress-led front politics of Kerala has also been about more than economic and political ideology. Beneath the veneer of ideology, both communal and caste loyalties have played a significant, if not central, role in Kerala's politics. Given the pre-existing communal division of political loyalties, and the significant share of 'minority communities' — Christians and Muslims — in the total population, the task for the BJP in Kerala is more complicated. How can it ensure that the majority Hindu community, and significant caste groups within it, switch their loyalties away from the Left Front? Indeed, if Kerala's minorities decide to vote for the Left Front, switching their traditional loyalty away from the Congress-led front, then the incumbent Pinarayi Vijayan government may find itself back in office.

Interestingly, even into late March (when this comment is being written) there is still no evidence of a strong anti-incumbency sentiment in any of the states going to the polls. On the contrary, in almost all states the incumbent and the challenger seem evenly poised. Opinion polls in early March have given incumbents — the Trinamool Congress (TMC) in West Bengal, the Left Front in Kerala and the BJP in Assam — an edge over their challengers in their respective states. It is only in Tamil Nadu that early polls indicate the challenger DMK to be in a stronger position than the incumbent All India Anna DMK (AIADMK).

## THE SEARCH FOR LOCAL ICONS

For all its Hindu-Hindi nationalism the BJP has adapted itself to this regional and linguistic reality of Indian elections. Indeed, even in Gujarat Narendra Modi has fully exploited this factor, not leaving his political appeal to be defined purely in terms of the national party's Hindu-Hindi platform. Gujarati 'asmita' has been the cornerstone of Modi's politics in his home state. Indeed, one could suggest that Modi has in fact morphed Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, one of the tallest national leaders of the Indian national movement and the Indian National Congress, next only to Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, into a symbol of Gujarati pride with the installation of one of the world's tallest statues.

In an extension of this strategy, which is in fact no different from the politics of the Congress party, Modi has appealed to Bengali 'asmita' in West Bengal, Tamil loyalties in Tamil Nadu, Assamese sentiment in Assam and to Malayalee pride in Kerala.

While the railways and Metro engineer E. Sreedharan made some gestures to Hindu sentiment in making his rapid transit to a politician's avatar, the BJP has used him to tap into Malayali pride. After all, 21st-century Kerala has been built by its talented emigrants — from engineers, electricians and construction staff in the Gulf to qualified nurses in hospitals around the country. As the Malayalee engineer who built New Delhi's Metro, Sreedharan symbolises the emigrant professional who has done Kerala proud.

In Tamil Nadu the BJP hoped to tap into regional sentiment by attracting film star Rajinikanth to its side. Rajinikanth's withdrawal from politics after several years of contemplation, ostensibly on health grounds, has left the BJP stranded. The DMK and AIADMK have always been fair weather friends of national parties in power in New Delhi. Both have been in alliance at one time or another with both the BJP and the Congress. Hence, the contest in Tamil Nadu remains



M.K. Stalin of the DMK. Tamil Nadu epitomizes powerful regional loyalties



Rahul Gandhi campaigning: Congress is a marginal player



Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan: No anti-incumbency

**For all its Hindu-Hindi nationalism the BJP has adapted itself to the regional and linguistic reality of Indian elections. Indeed, even in Gujarat, Narendra Modi has fully exploited this factor.**



A sea of flags at the Left Front, Congress, Indian Secular Front rally in Kolkata



Chief minister of Assam, Sarbananda Sonowal, with Amit Shah



Chief Minister of Delhi, Arvind Kejriwal, has proved the BJP is not invincible

**The results of the 2021 assembly elections will shape the future dynamics of the national vs regional debate. If the TMC, DMK, Left Front win in West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Kerala it will spur a wave of coalition politics.**

one between two and more Dravidian parties.

The battle in Bengal, however, is truly between Hindutva and Bengali nationalism. It is for this reason that the BJP's inability to project a Bengali leader as its chief ministerial candidate remains its Achilles' heel. To make up for this the BJP has depended partly on crossovers from the TMC and partly on the popular appeal of individuals like cricketer Sourav Ganguly. The BJP has also tried to adopt longstanding heroes of the Indian National Congress like Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and Rabindranath Tagore, in the manner it did in Gujarat with Sardar Patel.

Each of these efforts to appeal to local linguistic and cultural loyalties of the voter, apart from caste loyalties, shows the limitations of using only a pan-Indian 'Hindu-Hindi' platform. While Modi's charisma, the BJP's and RSS's organizational skills and money power, and the virtual absence of a credible opposition have helped Modi return to power in New Delhi in 2019, at the state level the BJP and Modi have been forced to adapt to local social, political and cultural realities in seeking voter support. Even in the small state of Goa, the BJP was forced to send Modi's defence minister, Manohar Parrikar, back to his home state to utilize his local popularity to be able to form a BJP government. In the national capital, 'city boy' Arvind Kejriwal has repeatedly worsted the BJP in state and local polls, even though in elections to the Lok Sabha the BJP fared very well.

In states where the non-BJP parties have credible and powerful leaders the BJP has had a difficult time making decisive electoral gains. As a consequence, outside of Uttar Pradesh and Gujarat, and a clutch of smaller states, regional political leaders, including within the BJP, continue to hold sway. All this points to the continued tension between the national platform of a national political party and the regional factors that shape electoral outcomes in state elections.

#### WHAT IS AT STAKE

While the BJP has been able to acquire dominance at the national level, its position remains tenuous in state politics, especially where non-BJP parties have charismatic local leaders like a Mamata Banerjee in West Bengal, a Chandrashekhar Rao in Telangana, a Naveen Patnaik in Odisha, and so on. Where the BJP has its own local leadership, like Yogi Adityanath in Uttar Pradesh, the party is able to perform better. This would also explain the political survival of leaders like Shivraj Singh Chouhan in Madhya Pradesh, B.S. Yediyurappa in Karnataka and Vasundhara Raje in Rajasthan — all BJP leaders who are not beholden to the Modi-Shah duo in Delhi.

The results of the 2021 assembly elections will shape the future dynamics of this national vs regional debate in politics. If the TMC, DMK and the Left Front win in West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Kerala, it will spur a new wave of coalition politics with a new coalition of the willing taking shape in the run-up to the 2024 elections. Other regional parties like the Telangana Rashtra Samithi, Sharad Pawar's Nationalist Congress Party, Samajwadi Party, Rashtriya Janata Dal and so on may come together to challenge the BJP. On the other hand, if the BJP and its allies sweep these polls, Modi may well be tempted to push forward his idea of 'One Nation One Poll' — combining elections to the Lok Sabha with those to state legislatures — to ensure that his charisma plus the BJP's Hindu-Hindi nationalism deliver power even at the state level, weakening the appeal of regional political parties and their clout at the national level.

The future shape of national politics and governance and the health of the federal system in an India that is a 'Union of States' will be shaped by the outcome of the state elections of the summer of 2021. ■

*Sanjaya Baru is a writer and policy analyst. His most recent publication is India's Power Elite: Class, Caste and a Cultural Revolution, Viking/Penguin Random House, 2021.*



E. Sreedharan: Malayali pride?



HERE & NOW  
RAJIV KHANDELWAL & MAANSI PARPIANI

EARLIER this month, the governor of Haryana gave his assent to a bill providing 75 percent reservation in the private sector to job seekers who belong to the state. The law is meant to stay in force for 10 years and applies to all jobs with a monthly wage of upto ₹50,000.

The policy in itself is not surprising given that it was among the electoral promises of the current Haryana government and similar deliberations have been ongoing in other states particularly in the wake of the economic crisis and joblessness brought on by the pandemic. For instance, the state of Jharkhand has announced a similar policy though it is yet to come into legal effect. Yet, there is widespread shock at the viability of such a promise.

Constitutional experts argue that implementation of the policy could lead to a possible violation of the right to equal treatment of all Indian citizens regarding access to employment. Industry federations have also stated that the policy is bound to place new restrictions on private employers, who are already reeling under lack of investment, and hamper industry's productivity and competitiveness.

States often announce untenable and unimplementable policies for political atmospherics. The economic and development logic is left to be argued in the media. Governments, on their part, quietly exit the scene and ultimately hide behind the executive inability to enforce policies with "noble intent".

The Haryana job reservation announcement is likely to meet a similar fate if not struck down by the Supreme Court. In the meantime, however, the Haryana government would have credited its electoral account with some dubious populism.

There are at least two structural issues that make the policy intent of disproportionate reservation for jobs for local residents deeply flawed.

# INSIGHTS

OPINION | ANALYSIS | RESEARCH | IDEAS

## But where are the jobs?

Short-term labour migration from rural to urban and industrial areas has been one of the fundamental features of India's economic growth. Corridors of migration have evolved over decades, with multiple generations of workers seeking jobs in particular sectors and destination areas. High-growth regions like parts of Haryana have derived labour from poorer regions both in other states and in Haryana itself.

Migrant workers have contributed to the industrial and commercial might of these massive industrial economies. In fact, the post-Nineties industrial and real estate growth in Haryana has been made possible with the seamless access the

force is migratory in nature and their skills and supply might not be matched by local workers. While there is no disagreement on the urgent need to reduce distress labour migration, dismantling the carefully constructed networks, occupational niches and skill-sets of those migrating for work is bound to make the distress of migrants more acute.

Local joblessness is cited as the reason for the policy by its proponents. However, in the more prosperous states there are several segments of work which have long been vacated by local workers and they are unlikely to ever claim these opportunities. Job creation cannot be undertaken through reservation of jobs for 'locals' alone.

In the face of agrarian decline and loss of rural work, experts have been consistently arguing for a solid labour-centric industrial policy to be drafted and adopted. They argue that the contribution of manufacturing to GDP has remained at a sluggish 16 percent between 1991 and 2017 and its contribution to employment is similarly stagnant at 12 to 13 percent. During the exact same period, the number of labour migrants has grown from 10 to 50 million — even considering the most modest estimates.

In other words, job creation has not been able to keep up with the demand for work, forcing different constituents — young and old, men and women, rural and urban — to seek work wherever possible. It is important to note that rural-rural migration is an important component of such migration. In the absence of an accompanying programme for the boosting of rural jobs, this policy would be unable to solve either the migration or the employment problem.

In sum, the policy may appear a mere symbolic gesture given the fact that only 10 percent of the workers need to be domiciled in the same district as the hiring company. The remaining 65 percent could be from other districts in the state. This is probably already occurring given estimates that inter-state migration constitutes only 12 percent of labour migration with the bulk of the movement occurring within the state or district.

In the face of this fact, the new policy emerges as not only unviable and irresponsible but also unnecessary and damaging to the addressing of the real economic challenges. The drawing of sharp state boundaries and regional nationalisms may serve temporary political interests, but they are far from realistic, long-term sustainable policy solutions. ■

*Maansi Parpiani and Rajiv Khandelwal are with the Aajeevika Bureau*



Garment workers at a factory in Gurugram

**In the absence of a programme for boosting rural jobs, the new Haryana policy will be unable to solve the migration issue or the problem of employment.**

state has enjoyed to the millions of migrant workers. Jettisoning these workers overnight is not going to enhance labour productivity and output, as the industry federations have argued. Nor is it going to necessarily get the local youth interested in or provide them with the skills for the jobs being opened up for them.

Educational and skill mismatches are bound to occur in spheres of work where migrants have historically dominated. Take construction work. Estimates suggest that over 50 percent of the labour

# Education is soft power



## POINT OF VIEW

AMIT DASGUPTA

While it sent out its young population to study abroad, it simultaneously built its own educational institutions and research capability, several of which are now internationally ranked. The number of Chinese in Australia, for instance, is so large that the second most widely spoken language in Australia is Mandarin.

The globalization of international education is mutually beneficial. The push and pull factors clearly demonstrate the aspiration for quality education and for a better life. Till India is able to provide quality education at scale, overseas education will remain an attractive proposition. Even, thereafter, as is the case with several students



**Beijing recognized the importance of its human capital and how education is a multiplier of growth. While it sent out its young population to study abroad, it simultaneously built its own educational institutions and research capability.**

INDIAN students have been going to the US, in particular, for over seven decades to get higher education from some of the best universities in the world. The opportunity to work and settle down, to become American citizens and share in the American dream was deeply attractive. The US had projected itself as a melting pot, a welcoming land for immigrants and of opportunity. This was 'the pull factor' that initially triggered the outmigration of Indian students to distant lands, including the UK.

The Government of India myopically criticized this exodus as brain drain and as a loss in foreign exchange and started to contemplate obstacles to diminish numbers going abroad for higher studies.

Over time, India's own lack of focus and reforms triggered a deep crisis in India's education sector. Top-rated educational institutions were unable to accommodate the rapidly increasing numbers of aspiring Indian students. The minimum entry score for admissions was raised to absurd limits, making students scoring less than the high nineties ineligible for study in India's premier institutions. This gross debilitating demand-supply mismatch triggered the mushrooming of sub-standard educational institutions pan-India. Coupled with rampant corruption, India's higher education sector became the epitome of abysmal failure. The situation reached such proportions that barely five percent of India's engineering graduates were employable. This resulted in 'the push factor', whereby aspiring and meritorious students were pushed out to other countries for higher studies and a better quality of education.

Over time, Indian students became part of the Indian diaspora and came to occupy positions of professional and even, political influence. They blended well with the local population and culture. Perceptions of Indians living abroad dramatically shifted in New Delhi and they now came to be seen as 'the true ambassadors' of India. The Government of India now spoke of 'brain gain' instead of 'brain drain'.

But Indians were not the only ones who went abroad for higher studies. The Chinese top the list globally and it was a conscious policy of Beijing that young Chinese needed to acquire fluency in the English language, build networks and study at prestigious institutions. At one level, it was to establish a pipeline of intellectual property theft and they did this with great consistency and sophistication over several decades. Beijing also recognized the importance of its human capital and how quality education is a multiplier of growth.

from advanced countries, global and future-ready education requires openness and knowledge of other cultures. Workplaces of the future would increasingly become virtual and technology-driven, where your accountant might be sitting in Tamil Nadu, your executive assistant in Paris, your project manager in Tokyo and your marketing head in New York. Understanding and managing cultural diversity has already become a critical part of top-quality education because of the correlation education enjoys with employability.

International education providers and host countries also see international students as contributing to revenue generation. According to

US government reports, in 2018, international students contributed US\$ 44.7 billion in revenue to the US economy. According to the Australian Minister of Education, in 2019, international students contributed A\$37.6 billion to the Australian economy. This is not small change.

Student life is an extraordinary experience. Studying overseas opens the mind up to other cultures and new ways of seeing. You make friends from different parts of the world, you eat different, think different, behave different. You build a cluster of memories associated with your life abroad and the extraordinary friendships you made. This is the soft power of the international study experience. It is the basis of an open society and a globally integrated one. It makes us realize that while we might look and appear different, we are all essentially the same. ■

Amit Dasgupta, a former Indian diplomat, currently works in the area of international education. Views expressed are personal

# Travel on the cusp of big change



## TECH TALES

KIRAN KARNIK

COMMUNICATE, don't commute, advised Arthur Clarke. This famous aphorism-cum-prediction of the well-known futurist and sci-fi writer, made many decades ago, saw practical and large-scale realization around the world during the COVID-19 pandemic. India, particularly during the stringent and total lockdown enforced from March 25 last year, had little option but to practise this to the fullest extent that technological accessibility permitted. Travel, even to a nearby shop, had to be substituted by online ordering; work and classes were through the internet; entertainment moved to net-delivered streaming services; and even socializing was through onscreen video and audio. Clarke would have been happy to see that communication had, indeed, substituted commuting.

Most see this as the "new normal", with travel or commuting being minimal. Yet, as we increasingly see, sociology trumps biology. Inherently social animals, we need to flock together even if biology tells us that it is unwise to do so amidst a pandemic. Recent images of markets, of Shivratri dips in the Ganga, and of the audience at T-20 cricket matches tell the story better than words.

Now, organizations and individuals are realizing the difficulties of WFH on a continuing basis in crowded, noisy and small homes, often with unreliable power and internet connections. Clearly, commuting is not going away — or drastically reducing — anytime soon. Therefore, even as there is continuing focus on ICT as a way to facilitate connectivity, transportation will continue to be important.

The cost and speed of movement of people and goods is an important determinant of economic growth. Technology and innovations in transportation — even though this field is not as glamorous as ICT or electronics — therefore need attention. While this is an area in which change is relatively slow, there are sometimes big and sudden leaps. Steam ships, the railroad, automobiles and aircraft brought drastic changes in the speed and ease of movement. Now, we seem poised for another leap forward in the technologies of transportation.

In automobiles, the century-old internal combustion engine (ICE) is set to be replaced with electric vehicles (EVs) becoming ever cheaper and providing similar functionalities. Without a doubt,

the present issues around batteries — their efficiency, cost, recharging and weight — will be sorted out soon. The fewer components in EVs (compared to ICE engines) eases manufacturing processes, and their minimal air pollution is a vital plus. Yet, there are concerns. One is the power required for recharging batteries: if this is being generated by coal-fired thermal plants, it is only the point of pollution that is being shifted, without any big reduction in foul air quality. Second is the problem resulting from disposal of old batteries, which can result in toxic chemicals. Third is the fact that current batteries and EVs require raw material (lithium, rare earths) which are all imported, with China enjoying a virtual monopoly. As always, technology could take care of many of these



Elon Musk in a prototype of the Hyperloop pod

**In Hyperloop, passenger pods operate at high speeds. With another Musk venture, Boring Company, Hyperloop could run in tunnels under built-up areas.**

concerns, but that may be some years away.

A new and promising area is the use of hydrogen as a fuel. This technology still has cost and safety challenges (given the inflammability of hydrogen), but would minimize pollution, since the waste product from its use is water. Hydrogen is considered especially appropriate for trucks because of the heavy loads they carry. The Union Budget for this year has proposed launching a Hydrogen Energy Mission for generating hydrogen from green power sources. It will certainly give this technology a big boost.

For economic reasons, it is necessary to shift more goods transport from road to rail, and increase the efficiency of the latter. In this, we need to take many leaves out of China's playbook: in under two decades, it has the world's largest system of high

speed rail (HSR), adding 35,000 km in just the past decade. Its ambitious Belt and Road Initiative has created a train network from the factories of China to the big markets in Europe. Home-grown HSR technologies are enabling rapid expansion. We are yet hoping for our first high-speed train (from Ahmedabad to Mumbai, less than 400 km) by 2024. Substantial investment in HSR technologies and networks is essential, linking major ports, and commercial and industrial centres with one another. This can give a huge stimulus to the economy, while opening up the hinterland, decentralizing industry and decongesting cities.

China has also been an early mover in magnetic levitation, with the first Maglev train (in Shanghai, running at 400 kmph) beginning operation in 2004.

This could be an important transportation technology for the future, and one we must keep abreast of.

Hyperloop — a brainchild of Elon Musk of Tesla and SpaceX fame — in which passenger pods operate at very high speeds in a sealed low pressure tube — is another futuristic technology which is already being tested. Combined with another Musk venture — Boring Company, which creates tunnels — it could run in tunnels under built-up areas, facilitating travel right into city centres.

In the air, while changes in aircraft technology are likely to be mainly incremental, drones are revolutionizing delivery of not just bombs, but also goods and packages. This is especially useful for difficult to access or disaster-struck areas, but also for doorstep delivery. Many Indian ventures — particularly start-ups — are active in this sphere, and we need to ensure that we stay on top of this very promising technology.

As in aircraft, ship technology is unlikely to see disruptive change. The decades-old excitement about hovercrafts, for example, has stayed at the "potential" stage. Automation, efficiency and higher speeds of ships will definitely

be seen, but little beyond that. However, we can certainly use our many waterways for more and cheaper transportation, especially if they are made navigable.

Hugely expanding mass public transport is essential for intra-city movement. However, the best, most impactful and cheapest solution is a simple one. At little cost, we can re-plan cities to bring homes closer to workplaces, have proper pedestrian walkways, and create cycling paths that are safe. This will minimize pollution, reducing oil (or battery) dependence and make for a healthier citizenry. Of course, simple and low-cost solutions are the ones that are most difficult to sell! ■

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*.

# Children suffer learning loss

An extract from a field report by the Azim Premji University on the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on school education

SCHOOL closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic have led to either a complete disconnect from education for the vast majority of children or inadequate alternatives like community-based classes or poor alternatives in the form of online education, including mobile phone-based learning.

One complete academic year has elapsed in this manner, with almost no or little curricular learning in the current class. But this is only one kind of loss of learning. Equally alarming is the widespread phenomenon of 'forgetting' by students of learning from the previous class – this is regression in their curricular learning. This includes losing foundational abilities such as reading with understanding and performing addition and multiplication, which they had learnt earlier and become proficient in, and which are the basis of further learning. These foundational abilities are such that their absence will impact not only learning of more complex abilities but also conceptual understanding across subjects.

Thus, this overall loss of learning – loss (regression or forgetting) of what children had learnt in the previous class as well as what they did not get an

opportunity to learn in the current class – is going to lead to a cumulative loss over the years, impacting not only the academic performance of children in their school years but also their adult lives. To ensure that this does not happen, multiple strategies must be adopted with rigorous implementation to compensate for this overall loss of learning when schools reopen.

Our study, undertaken in January 2021, reveals the extent and nature of the 'forgetting/regression' kind of learning loss among children in public schools across primary classes because of school closure during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study covered 16,067 children in 1,137 public schools in 45 districts across five states – Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttarakhand.

It focused on the assessment of four specific abilities each in language and mathematics, across Classes 2 to 6. These four specific abilities for each grade were chosen because they are among the abilities for all subsequent learning – across subjects – and so the loss of any one of these would have very serious consequences for all further learning.

An assessment of the learning levels of children when schools closed as well as of their current status was necessary to understand any such regression. The former was best done through teachers who have been deeply engaged with their learners, and thus had a reliable assessment of children's abilities when schools closed in March 2020. Therefore, this baseline assessment of children's learning levels, i.e. where they were assessed on specific abilities in language and mathematics when schools closed, was done based on a comprehensive analysis by the relevant teachers, aided by appropriate assessment tools. All abilities associated with the previous class were not assessed; a few abilities critical for further learning were carefully identified and assessed.



Children can't recall what they learnt in the previous class

These are referred to as specific abilities in the document. 'End-line' was the assessment of the same children's proficiency in these very abilities in January 2021, which was done by administering oral and written tests.

Our key findings are:

**Language:** 92 percent of children on an average have lost at least one specific language ability from the previous year across all classes.

Illustratively, these specific abilities include describing a picture or their experiences orally; reading familiar words; reading with comprehension; writing simple sentences based on a picture.

92 percent of children in Class 2, 89 percent in Class 3, 90 percent in Class 4, 95 percent in Class 5, and 93 percent in Class 6 have lost at least one specific ability from the previous year.

**Mathematics:** 82 percent of children on an average have lost at least one specific mathematical ability from the previous year across all classes.

Illustratively, these specific abilities include identifying single- and two-digit numbers;

performing arithmetic operations; using basic arithmetic operations for solving problems; describing 2-D/3-D shapes; reading and drawing inferences from data.

67 percent of children in Class 2, 76 percent in Class 3, 85 percent in Class 4, 89 percent in Class 5, and 89 percent in Class 6 have lost at least one specific ability from the previous year.

The impact of learning loss due to children forgetting what they had learnt earlier is likely to be further compounded if nothing is done to compensate for this loss when schools reopen. Children will be pushed towards more complex learning abilities of the new class they will move to without having the prerequisite foundational abilities. This compounding of learning loss will expectedly be more for students from disadvantaged backgrounds who access the public school system.

It is critical to understand that this learning loss is not limited to public schools. Learning of significant numbers of children in private schools has also been interrupted by the pandemic. Even where private schools have taken the initiative of reaching children through remote modes, very little actual 'online teaching' has occurred; mostly, instructions and supplemental resources have been shared. Thus, the issue of learning loss must be addressed for all children across all types of schools and across all classes in the schools.

The principles of access, equity and inclusion that must inform school education are likely to be further tested in these circumstances. We must act now to ensure that the lost academic year as well as the loss of whatever learning children had acquired from the earlier class do not cumulatively impact the long-term prospects of our children.

The extent and nature of learning loss is serious enough to warrant action at all levels. Policy and processes to identify and address this loss are necessary as children return to schools. Supplemental support, whether in the form of bridge courses, extended hours, community-based engagements and appropriate curricular materials to help children gain the foundational abilities when they return to school will be needed.

It follows that teacher capacity to ensure student learning in these unusual circumstances must be in focus, particularly with respect to pedagogy and assessment needed to deal with students at diverse learning levels.

And, most importantly, the teachers must be given enough time to compensate for both kinds of learning loss – and we must not rush into promoting children to the next class. ■



Piles of secondhand books on a street in Kolkata

## Pre-loved books, anyone?

### Some help with shelf stress

#### CIVIL SOCIETY REVIEW

IF you happen to enjoy reading and are also a compulsive buyer of books, no doubt in the fond hope that you will read them some time in the future, chances are that you are familiar with that sinking feeling of running out of the real estate needed to indulge your passion. In these cramped times, there will never be the flat or house and certainly not the office big enough for all your treasured volumes.

Problems abound for the enthusiastic book collector. What for instance is to be done with books bought on impulse but in which after a while it is clear there is no real interest? So, also, with volumes graciously received as gifts but not the kind you would want to keep? Such acquisitions pile up and need to be disposed of, but how?

An even bigger problem is one that you might leave behind when you are no more. What should Kindle-users of the younger generation do with your legacy of books, which could be in hundreds or thousands? Where should such books go?

Along with most bookshops, those taking secondhand books and finding new buyers for them have mostly been wiped out by the books business going online. So, it is difficult to find people in the trade who will know the value of home collections.

Can the secondhand trade move online? A quick search reveals a growing list of nascent initiatives which are worth checking out.

Some of these could be just community efforts like a group on WhatsApp called the Goa Library Network, which was created by Frederick Noronha, a journalist and an evangelist for independent publishing.

From this group has emerged a smaller sub-group for preloved books. On offer are *Phantom* and *Mandrake* from Indrajal Comics at ₹299 each – "Back to back 3 parts, very, very rare Indrajal. Complete story" is the sales pitch in WhatsApp English.

There are also Dom Moraes titles that someone in Toronto wants to pass on – "Read them a long time ago and preferably want to sell them for a small amount of money..." Also on offer for ₹200 is *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* by Paul Kennedy.

A commercial effort online goes by the name of Battered Pages. It was started by Arundhati Kale, a 21-year-old law student, and Naman Ahuja, a 23-year-old digital marketer.

In a casual conversation the two of them realized they had a lot of books lying around and decided to put the books in motion instead of leaving them on their shelves.

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They have 8,300 followers on Instagram and that is where their interactions happen and orders get placed. Located in Delhi, they ship across India and accept books as donations from other cities.

“One of our first donations was from a lady who lived in Defence Colony and she gave us this huge box filled with a lot of Indian authors. That collection was one of our most amazing collections,” says Arundhati, as she recounts her

books business had a keen eye for picking up interesting and sometimes extremely valuable personal collections and then retailing them. They were eclectic in the way they made their choices. There was a second-market for literature, humour, murder mysteries, romance, treatises, manuals, plays, comics, research, biographies and more.

In a secondhand bookshop on Free School Street, in the heart of a quaint sin district in Kolkata, there would be Mao's *Little Red Book* next to Wodehouse, Ibsen, Brecht and Ian Fleming. You could buy *How to Fly a Plane*, *The Strumpets of Victorian England* and *A History of War*. On a good day, all of these could be acquired in one shot or you could sniff them out and keep going.

If Amazon has caused the death of bookshops, it has served an even bigger blow to second-hand bookshops, which have all but for the odd exception ceased to exist. As a result, old networks have collapsed and personal books have mostly nowhere to go when it is time to move them on. Since most people these days, in particular the young, tend to buy on the internet, if they do at all buy books, and also read online, the nourishing habit of mooching around for books is no longer in fashion.

On Free School Street just one secondhand bookshop remains from among the several that used to be there. Also gone is the ambience in which bookshops shared street space with bars and young women on the prowl for customers. College Street, also known for its secondhand bookshops in Kolkata, continues to hold out, but just about. College-going people aren't the freewheeling types they used to be. The bookshops, too, have changed their style and reflect the times.

Kolkata's story is that of Mumbai and Bengaluru. You can still find old books selling but it's not the same, and if there are shops have little doubt that they are on their way to being wiped out. In Delhi, much is made of the selling of secondhand books on the pavements in Daryaganj. But here books get bought by the kilo and are sold just as brusquely.

These days if you want to give your books away, they had better be suitable for 'underprivileged children' or 'community libraries'. It is, of course, right to donate to such causes. But what do you do with something like *No Orchids for Miss Blandish* or *The Bride Wore Black*? Where do you send your Forster, Hemmingway, Scott Fitzgerald and Orwell? Or your Naipaul and R.K. Narayan collections?

Ananda Lal has spent a lifetime studying and teaching drama. He has got a great collection of music. He is also super proud of his hoard of *Phantom* comics. Ananda's father, Prof. P. Lal, was a poet and essayist. He was known for his transcreation of the *Mahabharata*. He founded Writers Workshop for which he did everything from editing to proofreading to secretarial work. Writers Workshop was known for its slim and beautifully crafted handbound volumes. Vikram Seth and Anita Desai among others who went on to be famous were first published by Writers Workshop.

In his lifetime, Prof Lal sorted out his books and passed on a whole lot to a community library. But 10,000 of his books remain, we are told by Ananda. They will probably end up in a university library for safekeeping. Books apart, there are documents, pictures and other items of archival value.

There are other examples of significant collections being adopted by universities, foundations and state libraries. But not all books have archival value and it is ordinary folks who keep books circulating. They need to be part of a flow.

Will the old books trade, as it was once known, make a comeback? Almost certainly not given the cost of commercial real estate and changing reading habits. It will most likely be replaced by connections made online where huge possibilities exist. But with that will also end the joy of hunting down books, which can actually be as pleasurable as reading them. ■



**Basement is also on Instagram with a similar model. And in Chennai there is prelovedbooks.in whose vision is to provide a library in every home. It boasts of a collection of 500,000 titles! It is also into wholesale distribution.**

favourite experiences with donors.

“Another girl in Dwarka gave up her entire Harry Potter series collection. It was in perfect mint condition and even included spin-off books like *Crimes of Grindelwald* and other similar treasures,” she says.

Basement is also on Instagram with a similar model. And in Chennai there is prelovedbooks.in whose vision is to provide a library in every home. It boasts of a collection of 500,000 titles! It is also into wholesale distribution.

These are modern avatars of what used to be secondhand bookshops. But do they have as much character and the same aura? In years gone by, a vibrant trade in secondhand books made it possible for old and used books to move seamlessly from homes to shops and into other homes. People at the secondhand end of the



Wild Wild Women: 'The idea is to make a wholesome collective and broaden our horizons as a community powered by women'

## Watch out for Wild Wild Women

### Going beyond men in Indian hip hop

SURMAYI KHATANA

IN the midst of graffitied walls in Andheri East in Mumbai, seven women found a common beat to vibrate to at an all-women's cypher, coordinated on a WhatsApp group, and “just gave it a shot”.

Now they hang together as Wild Wild Women, turning that initial bolt of raw energy and bonding into a serious claim to space in the Indian hip hop and rap community so far ruled by men.

If hip hop is all about identities and personal journeys, and if it is rising fast in India, women need to be in it too. These seven women put that message out loud and clear.

“The idea is to make a wholesome collective, and broaden our horizons as a community powered by women,” they say.

On Women's Day this March 8, they released their debut song, 'I Do It For Hip Hop'. With hard-hitting lyrics and brilliant flow, the song introduces the six rappers and one breakdancer who make up the group.

The cypher happened on January 3 with Ashwini Hiremath aka Krantinaari and Preeti N. Sutar aka

**If hip hop and rap are all about identities, personal journeys and, if they are rising fast in India, women need to be in it too.**

Hashtag Pretty realizing the number of female rappers they knew. They decided to bring some of them together at Marol Art Village's Bharat Van Park in Andheri East.

“Honestly, until I went there for the first time and we actually met at our first cypher I could not believe that there are so many women who rap,” says Pratika E. Prabhune aka MC PEP. “It was quite exciting because there were no male MCs for the first time and it was just an all-girls thing.”

While not all the women who were present at the cypher became a part of the final group, it was an

experience that catalyzed the existence of the Wild Wild Women. The response they received at this informal freestyle gathering had them wondering about their future prospects on their common WhatsApp text group. “Let's just do a song together and see how it goes from there,” they agreed. And they sing:

*Power in the game, about to flip your aims  
All-girl gang, we ready to burn in flames  
Repping our city, getting wild in the lanes  
It's Wild Women Cypher, all out of your range!*

The song has a vibrant energy to it. The music video begins with all the girls posing in front of the camera exclaiming amongst themselves about the weather being too hot and not being able to hear the song, shushing one another and fixing their poses, before the beat kicks in. These first 10 seconds encapsulate the organic nature of their coming together.

The switching from English to Hindi to Marathi and to Tamil throughout the verses of this diverse

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group will have you on your toes while hearing the song. Along with the diversity in language, the song features a great amount of range in their vocals, balancing between dark and bright singing overtones.

With verses from each rapper that will have you nodding your head, we are sure they'll make their way to your playlist. The song ties together their individual experiences with rap and their journeys.

**It all started on a tiny little street called Chapel Road  
And life's been tough, but a woman's gotta stay bold!  
It's always been an uphill struggle.**

The Wild Wild Women include 19-year-old Shruti Raut from Sahar in Mumbai who raps about women's issues while balancing a job and studies for a college degree.

Sutar organizes camping and music events in her hometown, Vasai. Hiremath, rapping about her experiences as a woman in India, is the author of a book on sustainability called *Earth* and one-half of India's first female rap duo Won Tribe along with Prabhune.

A beatboxer and rapper, Jacquelin Lucas aka JQueen, who raps in English and Tamil, has featured in a rivetting rap scene in a web series called *HIGH*.

Prabhune does a range of vocal styles, including growl and scream vocals. She was previously a bassist and vocalist for Chronic Phobia, a metal band in Mumbai. Her role in Wild Wild Women apart, she sings jingles for advertisements, does music marketing and event management.

The youngest of the lot, 17-year-old Driti K. Panchmatia or Demyth is an underground rapper and one-half of a male and female rap duo in Mumbai while studying for her Class 12 examinations.

Bending the boundaries of what makes up a rap group, the collective features a B-girl, Deepa Singh, known as FlowRaw who has represented India in the Queen16 B-Girl Battle, Germany, in 2018 and was the runner-up at Red Bull BC-One Cypher, India's B-Girl Battle in 2019.

In their own words, they say, "We are not confined to being just rappers, we also have a B-Girl, a graffiti artist, and we plan to expand further to create a



Driti Panchmatia (Demyth)



Preeti N. Sutar (Hashtagpreetty)



Ashwini Hiremath (Krantinaari)



Shruti Raut (MC Mahila)



Pratika E. Prabhune (MC PEP)



Jacquelin Melvin Lucas (JQueen)

**Individually, the young women, who are between 17 and 27 years old, have gained social capital on the hip hop scene.**

Apart from the team onscreen, behind the scenes the production of "I Do It For Hip Hop" has involved young women at every step. The song's upbeat and energetic music has been produced by 17-year-old Anirudha Khavale, known as Poshak, and the video has been shot and edited by Prabhune. "Many of us are still young and new to this whole world of music releases, and there's a lot that goes on," she says.

The song has seen success on the internet in just a few days of release. The reception and engagement of the audience have been supportive, "The reaction has been really good, surprisingly! We've crossed some 5,000 views organically over the past few days. For a debut we did a good job!"

On the kind of themes they hope to rap about together in the future, they say, "We are in tandem with the ideas of feminism, optimism, and making a difference socially ... Every day, our goal and aim in life is to overcome obstacles, work hard, and be the voice for women in this country who cannot stand up or raise their voices. We want to give them the confidence to feel and think differently, and that's what we'll do!" ■

sustainable community using the strengths of different individuals."

Individually, the young women have gained a good amount of social capital on the hip hop scene. They are between 17 and 27 years old, capturing multiple diversities in this 10-year age span.

In a male-dominated hip hop scene, their goal is clear to them, "The aim with Wild Wild Women from the very start has been simple. We want more women to work together, collaborate, and find out the various talents they have that can be brought to the table."

**WHERE ARE WE BEING READ?**

## Civil Society is going places...

*Kutch, Porbandar, Chamoli, Bhavnagar, Ahwa, Tiswadi, Amritsar, Sabarkantha, Valsad, Sirsa, Hamirpur, Aizwal, Kinnaur, Dhanbad, Dumka, Palamu, Chamarnagar, Haveri, Madikeri, Malappuram, Jhabua, Amravati, Kolhapur, Osmanabad, Bishnupur, Dimapur, Rajsamand, Mokochung, Mayurbhanj, Bathinda, Fatehgarh Sahib, Barmer, Hoshiarpur, Jhalawar, Auraiya, Farrukhabad, Lakhimpur Kheri, Pratapgarh, Burdwan, Murshidabad, Pauri Garhwal, Cuddalore, Ireland, Sivaganga, Kancheepuram, Varanasi, Bellare, Erode, Ramanathapuram, Kanyakumari, Lohit, Perambalur, Pudukkotai, Shahdol, Goa, Tiruvannamalai, New York, Nalgonda, Domalguda, Bhutan, Tezu, London, Thailand....*

**Civil Society**



### DRIVING AROUND

# Mysterious temple of Masrur

MURAD ALI BAIG

EVERY summer, many thousand people drive on holidays to Kullu, Manali or Dharamsala but very few know that a small detour from their usual destinations will take them to one of the most amazing temples of India. It is also perhaps the oldest Hindu temple in north India. The earliest temples were cut inside caves or hewn out of living rock until the south Indian technology of building with prefabricated pillars, beams and panels became popular after the ninth century.

The Kailash temple at Ellora is the biggest and most famous temple of this type that was cut from top down out of a huge single rock face. Masrur is the only such temple in north India and is roughly dated to the eighth century. It is also built in the classic old style with 15 shikaras and a big water tank in front. The shikaras, like the peaks of the mythical Mount Meru, look remarkably similar to the famous Hindu temples

of Ankor Wat in Cambodia.

You will need about six hours to reach Masrur from Chandigarh so it is recommended that you break your journey to spend the night at Kangra or Dharamsala and then do an easy day trip to Masrur and back.

After driving on the national highway on the route to Kullu there is an excellent road to Pathankot that runs just south of Dharamsala. You can also go via Jalandhar, Hoshiarpur and Una to connect to this road. You then drive west for just over an hour. It is 32 km west of Kullu on the Nagotra-Surian link road.

It is a very picturesque drive through rocky Shivalik hills and small patches of cultivation with the majestic Dhauladhar mountain range to the north.

The drive is through some very rugged country with deep ravines and thorny trees that look as if dinosaurs are lurking in the shadows but visitors will be struck speechless when they see the magnificent stone edifice.

As there is no inscription or mention of Masrur in any ancient text, nobody knows who built this structure or when. It is also a mystery as to why this huge symbol of devotion was built in such a remote and infertile area. There is no record of which king was the patron for building such a spectacular temple that must have needed millions of man hours of devoted labour, to say nothing of huge funds that could not have been squeezed out of farmers in such a poor and rugged area.

The elaborate carvings, despite considerable damage from the 1905 earthquake, show that it was originally a Shiva temple that was abandoned because some wandering priests made it, quite recently, into a Ram-Lakshman temple with three black stones representing Ram, Lakshman and Sita inside the inner sanctum. The drive is a little off the beaten track but it is a most picturesque and rewarding experience with an astonishing view of the Himalayas and many lovely spots for a picnic on the way. ■

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.

## A HOLISTIC SYLLABUS FOR CHILDREN



### AAWAAZ EDUCATION SERVICES

Curricula in India mostly restrict students to rote learning and memorization.

Aawaaz works to modify curricula and make learning interactive and holistic. Critical learning, public speaking and creating awareness are their focus areas. Training is offered in theatre, dance and creative writing to ensure students can express themselves. Aawaaz takes classes from Class 3 to Class 12. It works in Delhi-NCR, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. Students taught by Aawaaz have won numerous competitions and have been selected for the World Schools Debating Championships.

You can sponsor a child's education with just ₹2 a day or ₹60 a month. Aawaaz has teamed up with the government of Rajasthan for an SMS learning programme for children without online access.  
www.aawaaz.co | 91-8800146995  
hello@aawaaz.co

## SURGERIES TO BRING BACK A SMILE



### MISSION SMILE

An adult or child with a cleft lip or palate finds it difficult to lead a normal life. He or she can't speak clearly or eat properly. It can also lead to ear infections, hearing problems and dental problems.

Mission Smile provides cleft lip and cleft palate surgeries for children and adults for free.

Till date, the non-profit has carried out 36,000 safe corrective surgeries and gifted 36,000 smiles to such individuals.

You can volunteer with them as they go from state to state, putting up camps and identifying patients. If you know someone with a cleft lip, connect them to Mission Smile. You could also support a surgery with just ₹28,000.

www.missionsmile.org | 9007883789  
contact@missionsmile.org

## RESCUING PEOPLE FROM THE STREET



### SEAL ASHRAM

The Social and Evangelical Association (SEAL) Ashram, founded in 1999, rescues destitute people, lost children, women and men with illnesses that could be fatal, from railway stations, streets and Mumbai's suburbs. Hundreds of such people have been provided shelter and medical aid in the past 20 years. Around 300 children have been rescued and given an education.

SEAL also works to reunite lost people with their anxious families. Around 400 missing people have been reunited. If someone does pass away, SEAL provides a respectful funeral and preserves their memory. SEAL is one big family, located at New Panvel in Raigad district.

You could donate to SEAL or volunteer.  
admin@sealindia.org | 9594780333, 9321253899, 9594969535

## TELL STORIES TO CHILDREN



### KATHA

In 1988, Katha began with a magazine for children from underserved communities. Katha's work links literacy, literature and urban development.

The non-profit brings children living in poverty into reading and quality education through the power of stories. Katha reached 151 underserved communities in Delhi through their I Love Reading project.

You can volunteer for Katha and help them with translations, voice-overs, or teaching. You could function remotely from home or from their office. You can sponsor a child's education with ₹820 per month or ₹10,000 a year or donate books to their community owned libraries.  
www.katha.org | volunteer@katha.org  
011-41416600

## SPREAD SMILES WITH STARS



### STARS

How can you bring a little happiness and hope to those who may be having a tough time? You could drop by and cheer things up with your very presence. You could also help with counselling, Zumba classes, football coaching and medical check-ups.

Spending Time and Reaping Smiles or STARS was formed in 2013 and is based in Goa. It supports youngsters under a scholarship programme so that they can go to school and to college. It helps single mothers and poor families with their monthly rations. There are also medical check-ups. Under their sports programme, professional coaches have been coaching children from four homes.

You could donate to STARS or volunteer if you are in Goa.  
www.thinkstars.org | 9850168166 | lushanferns@gmail

## RELIEF AFTER DISASTER



### SEEDS

The Sustainable Environment and Ecological Development Society (SEEDS) works with disaster-affected and at-risk communities. Founded in 1994, the non-profit has restored infrastructure, provided disaster relief and access to water to disaster-affected families across India and Nepal.

As part of their India Flood Response in 2019, SEEDS distributed 1,250 hygiene kits to flood-affected families in Maharashtra and Bihar and provided 1,100 students with student kits. SEEDS is working to restore nine schools and 14 damaged anganwadis.

Volunteer with SEEDS for a range of activities including research and fundraising, in virtual, part-time or full-time modes. Or donate to their current efforts in responding to and aiding families impacted by the Assam and Bihar floods, COVID-19, and Cyclone Amphan.

www.seedsindia.org | 91-11-26174272  
info@seedsindia.org  
volunteer@seedsindia.org

## HOME FOR EVERYONE



### APNA GHAR

Everyone needs a home. Apna Ghar Ashram is a home for the destitute, the sick and injured, the old and homeless and the mentally challenged who have nowhere else to go.

Apna Ghar volunteers find them lost or abandoned at railway stations, bus stands and at religious places.

At Apna Ghar, they have a roof over their head, food and medical attention. There are 35 such ashrams across the northern part of the country. You can support Apna Ghar with a contribution.

One inmate's daily expense is ₹70. You can also volunteer as a member of the medical team, or as a vocational trainer, or an IT professional.

www.apnagarashram.org  
+918764396811

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.

## SNOW LEOPARDS, YAKS

HAVE you seen animals from snowy Ladakh in warm Delhi? Of course not. But you could catch a glimpse of small lifelike replicas of wildlife from icy Ladakh at the Ladakh Festival in March at Dilli Haat. There were blue sheep, snow leopards, yaks, marmots, mountain rabbits and more — all made of sheep wool, warm to touch and inexpensively priced.

These doll-like animals are made by a self-help group (SHG) of women in the picturesque village of Rumbak located in the high altitude Hemis National Park, 32 km from Leh.

"When our women aren't busy tending to their fields of barley, wheat and vegetables, they stitch these," explains Lobsang Namgyal, their sales representative. The women were taught to make animal models by an international development agency. "Whatever they earn is put into their SHG corpus to spend on a group activity," says Stanzin Jigstal who runs a homestay. The critically endangered snow leopard prowls around Rumbak village and the Hemis National Park in search of blue sheep, its natural prey. You can trek through the lovely park and if you are lucky catch a glimpse of the elusive snow leopard as well as the splendid black-necked crane. Rumbak has a number of homestays.



Contact: Lobsang Namgyal – 9622994092  
Address: Village Rumbak, District Leh – 194101



## GOATSKIN GUITAR

TSERING Angchuk is a musician from Changtang in Ladakh. Sitting inside his stall at Dilli Haat, he strums a traditional tune on a colourful local guitar with six strings. Pleased with the small audience he has attracted, he plays another tune — this time with an instrument which has three strings and resembles a violin. Both instruments are made of goatskin and painted with bright floral motifs.

"I learnt from a musician in another village around 20 years ago," he says. "I have played for All India Radio and I have a repertoire of around 70 songs."

Angchuk says he plays for all celebratory occasions. It could be a wedding, a festival or a birthday party. A traditional dance called jabro cannot begin without his guitar and violin, he says. Ladakh has a rich tradition of folk music played on very old indigenous instruments. But, as disco replaces jabro, the region's music and dance tradition begins to fade away. Local people lose interest and since the remuneration is very little just a few musicians are left.

Angchuk is unfazed. He says that if people don't want to listen, it's okay. He plays at night for himself.

Contact: Tsering Angchuk – 9469360136

## NEEM TABLEWARE

THE wondrous neem tree is famous for its many medicinal qualities. While neem leaf and bark have been used for ages, neem wood is now gaining in popularity. It is being shaped into kitchenware. Since 2010, Tora Creations, a micro-enterprise in east Delhi, has been manufacturing spoons, spatulas, platters, bowls, coasters and other serve ware. Tora also sells razors, toothbrushes, tongue cleaners, combs and bottle cleaners made of neem wood.

"Ours is a family business," says Siddharth Gola, "We never cut trees. We buy all our neem wood from Chhattisgarh from forests where trees have been sustainably harvested." Neem products have been selling especially well due to the coronavirus pandemic and exports have been picking up. You can buy online and for Delhi customers a home delivery option is available.

Contact: Siddharth Gola – 9717723832 Email: toracreations@gmail.com  
Website: www.toracreations.in



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.



## Bonfire tree

The Scarlet Sterculia or the Bonfire tree, also known as *Sterculia colorata* Roxb, is a medium-sized tree with beautiful, large, showy leaves. Its tender leaves are spectacular. This deciduous tree sheds leaves in winter but its flower buds arise immediately after its leaves fall. Its orange-yellow flowers are dramatic as they quickly grow from bare stems. The whole inflorescence including the tree's stalks are covered with colourful velvety hair. Since its flowers are large and showy, the tree adds a brilliant look to gardens and avenues.

The Bonfire tree is a comparatively rare tree found occasionally in the Deccan hills, in the lower altitude of the Western Ghats and in parts of Assam, Meghalaya, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh. In Assamese it is called Jori-Odal, in Kannada Bettada Hatthi, in Malayalam Malamparatti, in Marathi Kaushi and in Tamil Malaiparutthi. The Bonfire tree is used in Ayurveda, homoeopathy and folk medicine for urinary disorders, mental problems and jaundice.



## Giant potato

The Giant potato or *Ipomoea mauritiana* Jacq plays a prime role in providing better health to women.

The Giant potato is a tuber-bearing vine with beautiful bell-shaped, pinkish-purple flowers belonging to the Morning Glory family, Convolvulaceae. Its flowers are pinkish-purple, funnel-shaped, up to 6 cm across with narrow tubes five cm long.

The Giant potato usually grows in open areas in moist deciduous forests. It has also been found in riparian vegetation, lowland forests and in grasslands throughout warmer parts of India. It is also cultivated for its medicinal tubers. The tubers are used to moderate menstrual discharge and often prescribed to increase secretion of breast milk. The Giant potato is also prescribed in case of debility after delivery and to increase weight.

The Giant potato is called Vidari or Ksiravidari in Ayurveda due to its lactation-inducing properties. In Malayalam and Tamil it is called Paalmuthukku. In Kannada and Telugu it is called Bhumi chakkaragedde and Bhuchakragedda, respectively. In Hindi and Marathi it is called Vidarikand or Bhuyikohala.



## Rattle pod

Rattle pod or *Crotalaria retusa* L., is a herb which reaches one metre in height and has many, clearly radiating branches near the ground. The appeal of this unique herb lies in its extraordinary inflorescence that attracts numerous pollinators especially colourful butterflies. If you are looking for flowers that thrive in the scorching sun and heat then this herb is your best choice!

Rattle pod can be grown in containers too. Every end of its branches is ornamented with 30-cm inflorescences with amazing yellow flowers. Its large petals look elegant with purplish lines and pinkish-orange backs. These flowering branches slowly transform into rattle sticks with many inflated attractive pods. These pods on maturity turn black and create an amusing sound when shaken.

In Hindi Rattle pod is called Ghunghunia, in Gujarati Ghughra, in Kannada Gijigiji, in Malayalam and Tamil Kilukiluppai and in Telugu Giligicha. According to ethnobotanical studies this herb is used against poisoning, fever and respiratory complaints.



## Flag Bush

Plants of ornamental value are generally grown in gardens to increase the aesthetic features of landscapes. The ornamental features of such plants may not necessarily be flowers but could also be brightly coloured foliage, curious looking fruits, unusual forms and textures of barks/stems and so on. *Mussaenda frondosa* L., belonging to family Rubiaceae, is one such wild beauty that can be spotted even at a distance due to its very shining, large, leaf-like floral part.

It is called Bellila in Kannada, Vellila in Malayalam and Shruvati in Sanskrit. In English, it is called Flag Bush or White Lady.

This wild beauty also has several medicinal uses. Its leaves and flowers are crushed and applied externally to heal wounds. Its shining leaf-like bracts are boiled in water and the water is used as shampoo for cleansing hair. It is also used in the treatment of jaundice. The juice of the plant is used to treat eye infections. The decoction of the leaves can be taken orally to get rid of intestinal worms. Bellila is a common plant which grows in moist deciduous forests and in the evergreen forests of the Western Ghats.



## Elephant Apple tree

The Elephant Apple tree or *Dilleniaindica* L. is a large evergreen reaching 30 metres in height. The characteristic features to identify this tree in the field are its ranchlets which have V-shaped leaf-scars. The Elephant Apple tree's leaves are strikingly large and prominently corrugated with impressively imprinted veins. The tree's flowers are conspicuously large, up to 20 cm across, and very showy, with huge white pendant masses of stylar branches surrounding deep golden yellow stamens and petals.

These trees will look absolutely spectacular in avenues and in landscaped gardens. The tree's fruits are large, up to 12 cm across, unique and technically a false-fruit where the yellowish-green sepals play the role of mimicking fruits. Seeds are many and embedded in fibrous, edible pulp. These fruits are reported to be a good source of food for herbivores especially for megaherbivores such as elephants and hence the name 'elephant apple'.

The tree grows in moist forests almost throughout India. Known as Bhavya in Ayurveda, it is used to tackle respiratory and central nervous system disorders and also considered to be a digestive drug. In Hindi the tree is called Chalta and in Kannada Kaltheega.



## Benga tree

Indian tradition is known for its close connect with nature and the respect it accords to Mother Earth. In this tradition, nature is seen as superior to man. Trees are held in high esteem. One such tree which is deeply appreciated is the Benga also known as *Pterocarpus marsupium* Roxb, belonging to the family Fabaceae.

The Benga tree reaches a height of 18 metres. Its trunk and branches exude a bright red resin.

The tree's bark is rough and longitudinally fissured. Inflorescences are panicles, terminal or axillary, up to 15 cm long. The Benga's flowers are two cm across and golden yellow. The bright yellow flowers interspersed with dark-coloured flower buds and stalks resemble a tiger's coat, hence the name Vengai in Tamil and Venga in Malayalam. In Sanskrit the tree is called Asana and in English it is known as the Indian Kino tree. Kino means medicinal resin. This resin is used for the treatment of bleeding and diarrhoea. The tree's bark is extensively used to tackle diabetes. Its leaves treat various skin problems. The tree is found in mixed jungles and in the dry deciduous forests of southern and central India. ■

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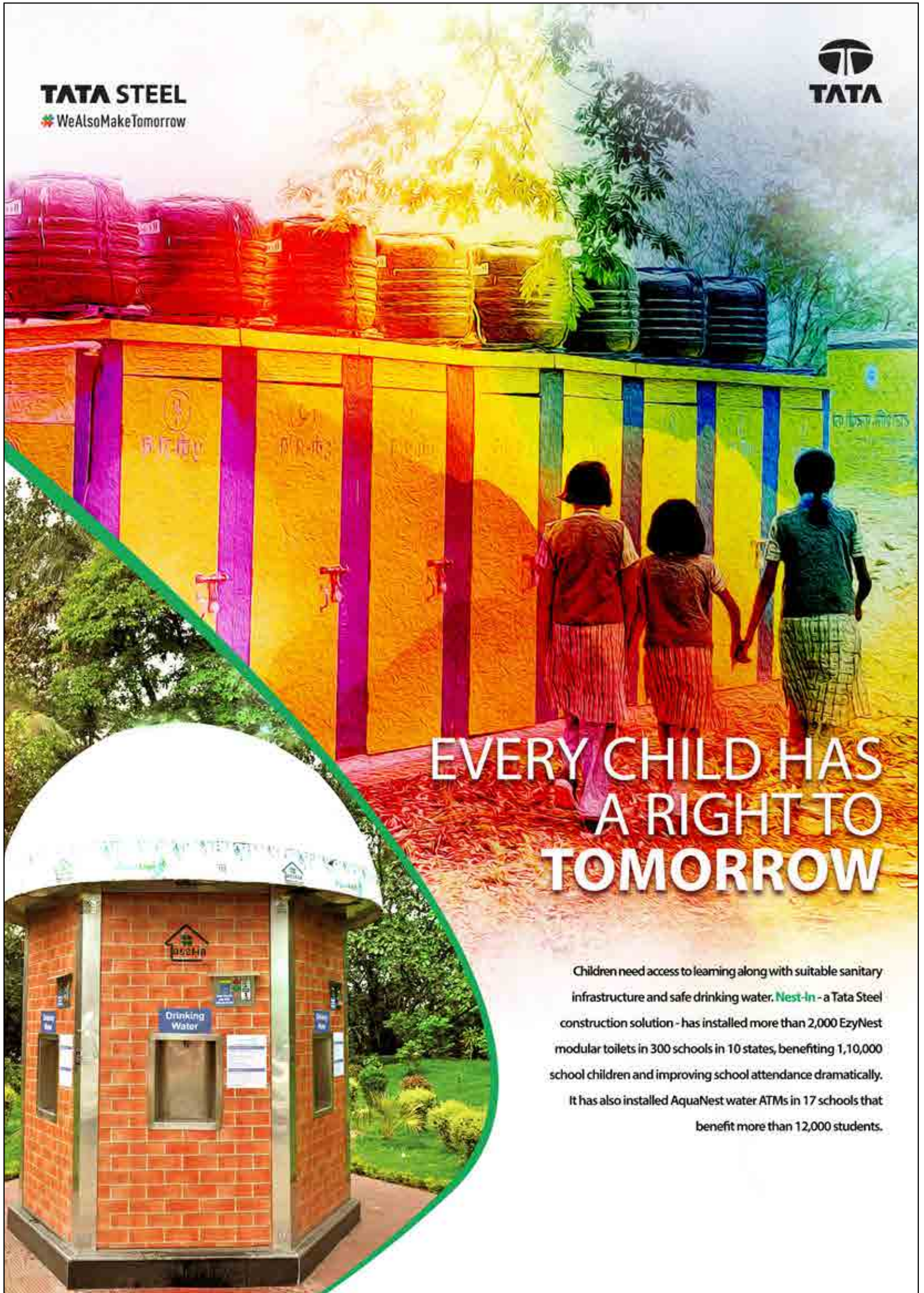
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