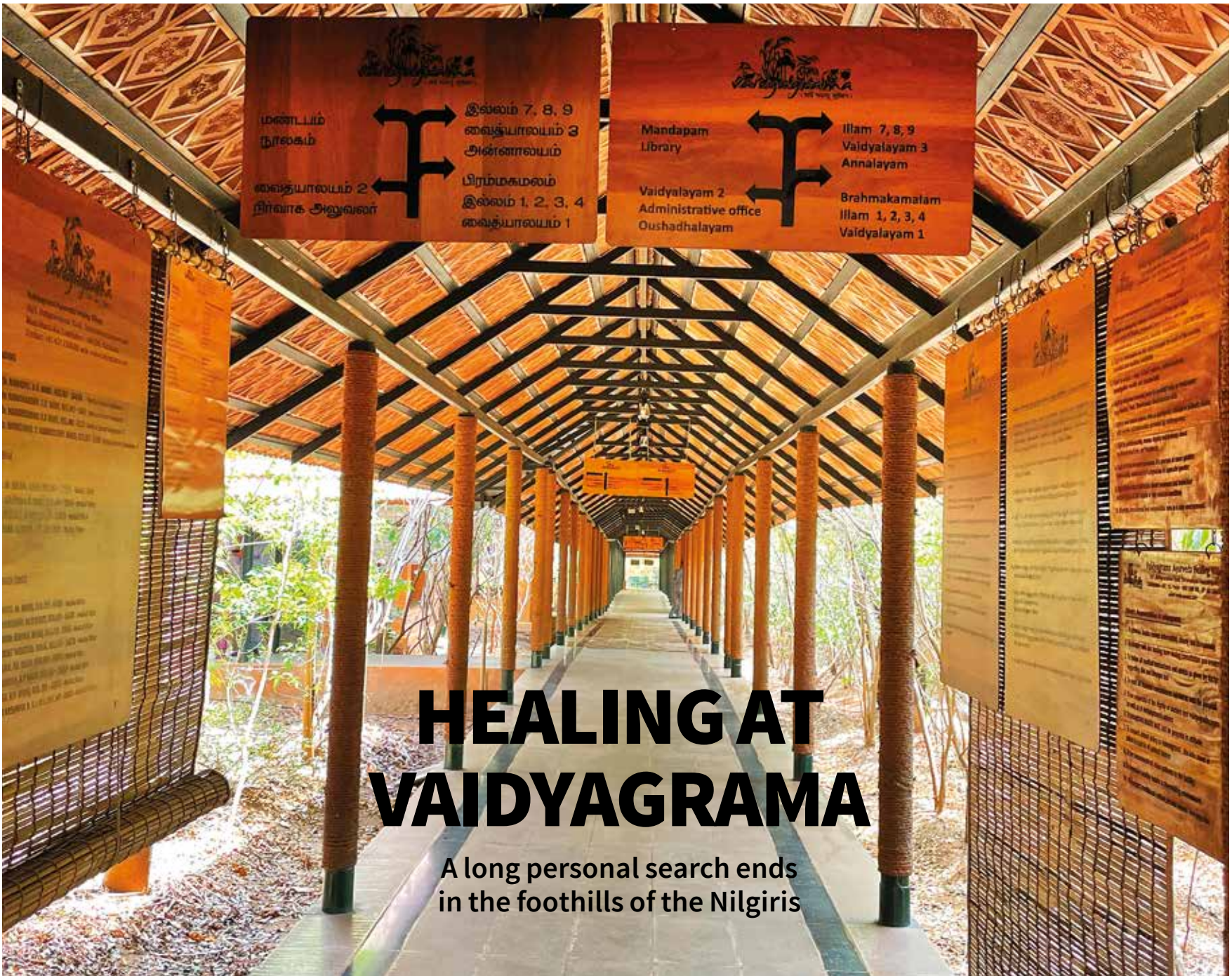


# Civil Society



## HEALING AT VAIDYAGRAMA

A long personal search ends in the foothills of the Nilgiris

### SRI LANKA AND SIKKIM

Page 10.....

### STAR MANGO A LOSER

Page 12.....

### BLUE UMBRELLA DAY

Page 14.....

### INTERVIEW

### 'IT IS GOVERNANCE BASED ON DATA'

AMITABH KANT ON IMPROVING 112 WORST-OFF DISTRICTS

Page 6

### WARS OF THE FUTURE

Page 21.....

### OTHER INDIA CLOSES

Page 24.....

### CAN'T WAIT FOR CANNES

Page 26.....

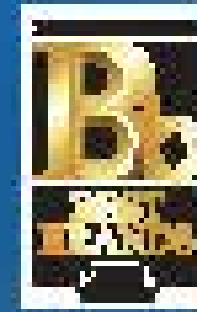


# You read it first in Civil Society

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



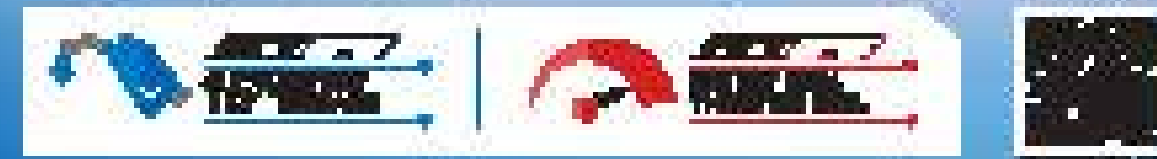
## READ US. WE READ YOU.



OUR INNOVATION DELIVERS

WHAT YOUR HEART DESIRES

India's first and only dual platform  technology



BETTER AVAILABILITY | BETTER DURABILITY | IMPROVED RELIABILITY | EASY MAINTENANCE





IN THE LIGHT

SAMITA RATHOR



LETTERS



Admirable efforts

I enjoyed reading two articles in your April issue: 'Baksa sets a record with 196 anganwadis in three months' and 'The street child's newspaper.' I really appreciate the initiative taken by the deputy commissioner. The second story breaks new ground. I hope NGOs working in the field for the welfare of street children will pick up this idea. I must, however, confess my inability to understand why politics occupies so much space in your magazine. In the April issue, the politics of Goa, Punjab and the whole country have got unduly large space. Anyway, I greatly enjoy reading your magazine.

Devendra Oza

I admire the vision shown by Aayush Garg, the DC of Baksa district. His personal commitment has made it possible to build better lives for the children of this remote district.

Dr Digambar Narzary

Cancer hospital

Thanks for your article, 'Muzaffarpur hospital gets going with surgeries, chemo.' Cancer patients in Bihar can now get the best treatment from the best doctors of the Homi Bhabha Cancer Hospital in Mumbai.

Kumar Ajitesh

The cancer hospital in Muzaffarpur is an excellent example of what the government and civil society can do if they work together with the clear focus of improving public health. Thanks to *Civil Society* for beautifully bringing these stories of change — carried out by simple citizens — to light with careful and sensitive reporting and none of the noise of social media or mainstream media.

Dr Ravikant

Junk hill

I read your piece, 'Getting rid of a garbage mountain,' in your March issue. The garbage mountain in Ghazipur needs to be urgently addressed. If it can't be dealt with in India's national capital, how are we going to solve the looming garbage problem in other states? The solution begins by separating garbage at its source into four or six separate categories.

Recycled materials can then be sent to recyclers. Medical waste and electronic waste must be packed separately. Most of all, people should carry cloth bags or strong reusable plastic bags for shopping. The municipality should only handle material that can be composted.

Madhu Devineni

Palm oil

Reference your review, 'The deep forest and its many treasures in Arunachal', let's face it, the Arunachal state government is clueless about the costs of monoculture and the damage that palm oil plantations can wreak on Arunachal's environment. Look at Indonesia and learn from their mistakes. Just because the central government is encouraging palm oil plantations, the state government in Arunachal is parroting the same tune. When experts like Aparajita Datta are available there is no reason not to take their inputs when formulating a state forestry policy. But then sycophancy always pays better in the short term than common sense.

Bappu Deshmukh

Temple trek

I liked reading Murad Ali Baig's travel piece, 'Drive to Masrur, discover a mysterious temple.' The stories and articles in this magazine are most satisfying to the spirit. They are like a whole nutritious and yet sumptuous meal in just a few bites!

Bharati Mullick

Film review

Thank you for a lovely write-up and review of *Mahishasur Marddini*. Since it's a new release, it would benefit readers if you could at least mention where the film can be watched or post a link to the teaser of the film. Is it available online or due for a commercial release?

Abhishek

We have had several enquiries. The film is yet to be released. Contact [ranjankghosh.in@gmail.com](mailto:ranjankghosh.in@gmail.com)

Letters should be sent to [response@civilsocietyonline.com](mailto:response@civilsocietyonline.com)



**SUBSCRIBE NOW!**  
BECAUSE EVERYONE IS SOMEONE

One year Print + Digital



₹1400

Individual

Name:.....

Address:.....

.....State:.....Pincode:.....

Phone:.....Mobile:.....Email:.....

Cheque to: **Content Services and Publishing Pvt. Ltd.**  
Mail to: The Publisher, Civil Society, A-16, (West Side), 1st Floor, South Extension - 2, New Delhi - 110049.  
Phone: 011-46033825, 9811787772 E-mail to: [response@civilsocietyonline.com](mailto:response@civilsocietyonline.com)  
Visit us at [www.civilsocietyonline.com](http://www.civilsocietyonline.com)

One year Digital



₹1000

India



\$12

International



Districts and their aspirations

ON more than one occasion, as we would go about our stories, we would hear someone or the other say: 'You see, we are an aspirational district' or words to that effect. Frankly, we didn't understand what was meant and we took no notice. We were clearly focused on the story we were doing and 'aspirational district' or not didn't matter to us.

But as one story led to another, we found ourselves writing to Amitabh Kant in NITI Aayog for an interview on the Aspirational Districts Programme, which he leads at the central level and for which a whole team, many of them young, bright-eyed and energetic, has been put in place.

The programme is aimed at improving governance in 112 of the least-developed districts in India by generating data in real time and providing targeted support to local administrations. A ranking system becomes the basis not just for competition among these districts, but also to show them where they stand in relation to the rest of the country.

As a result, in four years, many of these district administrations have begun thinking on their feet and there are improvements that are visible. We know this from our own outreach and NITI Aayog's data as well. Is it enough and will it endure? We can't say. There has been third-party evaluation, but for us it remains to be understood how complete the evaluation has been. But without hesitation any effort that seeks to drive accountability in government should be welcomed and given a chance.

We have interviewed Kant in the past for *Civil Society* when he was overseeing the Delhi-Mumbai corridor. He was generous with his time once again now in his role as CEO of NITI Aayog.

Before the interview, as a part of our homework, we asked around and found that there was no shortage of criticism of both Kant and the programme. In our interview with him, Kant didn't try to duck criticism. He spelt out the programme in great detail and the efforts being made to ensure the data generated is not flawed. Kant says he is happy to engage with all of his critics.

On another note, as we watched Sri Lanka's economy go to pieces, we couldn't help noticing how impetuous it had been in trying to go organic in agricultural production. Perhaps this is an example of how governments should not blindly follow activists no matter how well meaning they may be. Sri Lanka would have done well to learn from Sikkim's government-driven initiative in going organic and several other examples in India.

Personal journeys are always fascinating. Our cover story comes out of one such. Vaidyagrama is clearly a special centre for holistic treatments. Its importance also lies in its founders seeking to preserve the traditional values of Ayurveda. Too often is Ayurveda made to compete with modern medicine when it is a science in its own right. While it is important to build bridges between the ancient and the modern, one must watch out for what gets lost in translation. The popular avatars that Ayurveda is taking are at times weakening it at its roots. More initiatives like Vaidyagrama are needed to strike a balance.



COVER STORY

HEALING AT VAIDYAGRAMA

Set up in 2008 by four *vaidyas* to preserve the true values of Ayurveda and discard the hype around it, Vaidyagrama is where people from all over the world come to seek healing.

16

Insights into Adivasi livelihoods..... 9

Why a celebrated mango is a loser..... 12-13

Blue Umbrella buddy for boys..... 14

Atmanirbharata redux..... 20

Counting daisies?..... 22

Underfunding disability..... 23

Products..... 28

Volunteer & donate..... 29

Plant power..... 30

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

**Publisher**  
Umesh Anand

**Editor**  
Rita Anand

**News Network**  
Shree Padre, Saibal Chatterjee, Derek Almeida, Jehangir Rashid, Susheela Nair, Kavita Charanji

**Desk & Reporting**  
Surmayi Khatana

**Layout & Design**  
Virender Chauhan

**Cartoonist**  
Samita Rathor

**Write to Civil Society at:**  
A-16 (West Side), 1st Floor, South Extension Part 2, New Delhi - 110049.  
Phone: 011-46033825, 9811787772  
Printed and published by Umesh Anand on behalf of Rita Anand, owner of the title, from A-53 D, First Floor,

Panchsheel Vihar, Malviya Nagar, New Delhi - 110017.  
Printed at Samrat Offset Pvt. Ltd., B-88, Okhla Phase II, New Delhi - 110020

Postal Registration No. DL(S)-17/3255/2021-23.  
Registered to post without pre-payment U(SE)-10/2021-23 at Lodi Road HPO New Delhi - 110003  
RNI No.: DELENG/2003/11607  
Total no of pages: 32

Advisory Board

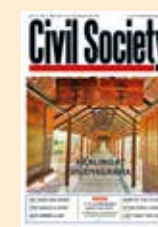
- R. A. MASHELKAR
- ARUNA ROY
- NASSER MUNJEE
- ARUN MAIRA
- DARSHAN SHANKAR
- HARIVANSH
- JUG SURAIYA
- UPENDRA KAUL

Get your copy of **Civil Society**

Have **Civil Society** delivered to you or your friends. Write to us for current and back issues at [response@civilsocietyonline.com](mailto:response@civilsocietyonline.com).

Also track us online, register and get newsletters

[www.civilsocietyonline.com](http://www.civilsocietyonline.com)





## Amitabh Kant on improving 112 worst-off districts

# ‘It is not about more funds, but governance based on data’

Civil Society News  
New Delhi

VISIBLE improvements in government services are being reported from 112 backward districts in India under a special initiative involving the Centre, state governments and local administrations.

Called the Aspirational Districts Programme, the initiative seeks to develop some of the worst-off parts of the country. It promotes data-based governance by assessing the performance of a district on a month-to-month basis, giving district officials feedback and helping them meet their challenges.

The programme looks at 49 indicators across health, nutrition, school education, agriculture, water, financial inclusion, skill-building and basic infrastructure.

District administrations are encouraged to improve on their own scores, thereby recognizing that they have unique problems. But a spirit of competition is also engendered through a dashboard of scores that shows who stands where.

To find out more, *Civil Society* spoke to Amitabh Kant, Chief Executive Officer of NITI Aayog, who leads the programme at the national level.

Eloquent and energetic, Kant took us through various aspects of the programme at the renovated offices of the NITI Aayog in New Delhi which are well-lit, upbeat and process-driven. Below are edited excerpts:

**Q: The Aspirational Districts Programme has three overarching goals of Convergence, Collaboration and Competition. In broad strokes, could you tell us how successful you have been in achieving these? What are the mechanisms that you feel you have gainfully employed?**

These are 112 of the most underdeveloped districts in India. We don't call them backward. We call them aspirational. They are geographically far-flung and very difficult to access and so on. Historically these districts have not done well. Not from a lack of resources, but because of lack of adequate staff, lack of morale and basically lack of governance.

Since Indian states are very large, state-level competition hides intrastate variations. That's why we looked at the district. It was the Prime Minister's idea to pick up the most poor districts and improve governance there.

We launched the programme in January 2018 and the Prime Minister personally told district collectors to take it as a challenge, a rare opportunity, to transform these districts.

So our objective was to ensure that there is better governance. And how do you improve governance. When I was a collector in Kerala in the late 1980s and early 1990s, I did not know whether my district was going up or coming down because data used to come in five to six years later. But today it is possible to get data on a real-time basis, analyze that data and put out rankings of performance.

(For these 112 districts) we have 49 indicators across health, nutrition, school education, agriculture, water, financial inclusion, skill-building and the creation of basic infrastructure.

After getting data right from the grassroots, we monitor it, analyze it and put out the rankings of the districts on a monthly basis so that everybody knows

Photo: Civil Society/Lakshman Anand



Amitabh Kant: 'There is transformation on the ground'

**‘Our objective is to be focussed on monitoring in real time, sharing of best practices and the creation of effective teams for transformation at the district level.’**

how they are performing.

It is not a historical ranking, but how they have performed during the course of the month on each one of these indicators. The 112 districts compete with each other. And every month we have been announcing a winner.

The best performing district gets an award of ₹10 crore and the second, ₹5 crore. And on each one of these indicators, we give ₹5 crore to the best performing district. The collector can do anything good for his district with that money.

So, the objective is it should be based on data. It should be put out in the public domain. It should actually lead to transformation on the ground.

This competition has led to transformation of these districts. Two different studies have been undertaken, one by UNDP and another by Michael Porter of Harvard. Both these studies have highlighted how transformation has taken place in these districts.

We've been requesting the state governments to ensure that young collectors are posted to these districts. We have asked that they remain there for a long time and not be transferred regularly.

Our objective is to be focussed on development around 49 indicators, real-time monitoring, sharing of best practices and the creation of effective teams for transformation at the district level.

And lastly, we want to make all this development which we have done into a very big mass movement, a *jan andolan*, at the grassroots level. At the field level.

The Champions of Change platform (on which the scores of each district go

up) is a great tool for the districts to pay special attention to some of the critical indicators. It brings to light issues as to why movement isn't happening in indicators, or, if it is slow, what are the potential reasons behind it. This process by itself is complex and differs from district to district.

**Q: So a mass movement looking at certain development solutions....**

Every district has done something unique, something different. And all these best practices are documented today. The best practices of one district have been replicated in others.

**Q: How have you managed to make the collaboration part work?**

Collaboration is based on several factors. One is the team of officers there. We have said keep the team of the district medical officer, district education officer and collector intact.

Two, state governments were asked to have a *prabhari* officer so that any assistance required by the district should be made available there.

The central government also added a *prabhari* officer for these aspirational districts and therefore we assisted them from the Centre in all this. We try to work in regular partnership with the districts and the state governments.

We have been able to push state governments into allocating the necessary teachers and doctors so that the district would go up. And because these are aspirational districts, we have been constantly monitoring performance.

It is data-based governance. Government never works on data. Government never works in real time. It never works in competition. Government never works on naming and shaming. Government never puts data in the public domain. All these have become the hallmarks of good governance under this programme.

**Q: The states, how did they respond? What are the problems with funding?**

See, this programme is not about funding. It is very important to understand this. It is not that these districts do not get funds. They get the same amount of funds as any other district. But the utilisation of funds is very poor. Outcomes are not there. There is lack of morale, lack of teachers, lack of doctors.

So the challenge is not of funds. It is a challenge of good governance. How do you bring in good governance was the challenge. How do you say that this district has performed badly, when the district didn't even know that it was performing badly. Our job was to see that in four years' time it is able to come up to the average of the best performing district in the state and in seven years' time become the best performing district in the country.

So, the majority of these aspirational districts have become better performing. They have become better performing than the best performing districts of the state. They have jumped up substantially. If they become better performing than the best district of the state, that means they're going up. There are various examples. And now our job is to ensure that these districts actually become the best performing districts in the country.

**Q: Is there inertia at the state level? Has this been an issue?**

No. Since data is being put out, in everybody's face, if you're a non-performer, the state chief minister would come to know about it. If a district is performing well, the chief minister would also come to know about it. This is data-based governance with all the data put in the public domain whether the state likes it or not. A state has no other option but to show that its district is able to compete with others and ensure that it does better than the others.

**Q: So states are not left with much option here?**

I wouldn't say that. I would say that we regularly met the chief secretary and we sent the performance of these districts to the chief secretary. We regularly made presentations to the chief secretary in Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Bihar, so that they could come to know how their districts were doing, how they were performing. Whether they're going up or down. So we kept the chief secretary fully informed.

**Q: But the states must have required some handholding on things like health?**

All the central ministries have their own action plan for implementation in

these aspirational districts. All of them utilize their own resources for transforming these aspirational districts. It is a programme that was launched by the Prime Minister.

The central government quite often gets very far removed from the grassroots. The intention also was that the government should understand the challenges of the *anganwadi*, understand the challenges of school education, understand the challenges of health. In addition to that our own officers have been regularly visiting the districts.

**Q: So you feel this programme has in four years made a big impact?**

Yes, it has had a tremendous impact.

**Q: It is visible to you?**

Yes, it is visible and it is a transformation.

**Q: You must have used the private sector.**

We have used civil society organizations.

**Q: Mainly NGOs?**

We've used a whole lot of NGOs. We are strong believers that it's not possible for government to transform everything. It's not possible without working in partnership with civil society organizations. So we have the Piramal Foundation, Tata Trusts and a number of foundations working with us for doing this transformational work. We are strong believers that civil society organizations at the cutting edge play a very critical role and do a lot of development.

**‘We’ve used a whole lot of NGOs. We are strong believers that civil society plays a critical role and it is not possible for government to transform everything.’**

**Q: Since we're on this topic, a lot of civil society organizations tend to think that they're getting left out.**

We've tried to include as many civil society organizations as possible. We have allowed everybody to do this partnership.

**Q: The Piramal Foundation or the Tata Trusts have a certain presence. We see them and we see the others as well. There are a lot of others.**

We welcome anyone who wants to work in the Aspirational Districts Programme. Many organizations have associated with this programme as development partners to share their resources in terms of technical expertise and human resources.

The Piramal Foundation has positioned a team of three to four fellows in each aspirational district and they are working closely with the administration in education and health.

Similarly, ITC is working in the agriculture sector. The Bachpan Bachao Andolan and Save the Children are involved in child health and education. TRIFED is working for tribal development. CSBC for behavioural change. And there are many more.

**Q: What about states like UP, Bihar...?**

We have districts from all over. The selection of the 112 districts was very transparent and based on indicators.

**Q: Do you think this will have an impact on, you know, the overall indicators in UP and Bihar, for instance?**

Continued on page 8



Continued from page 7

It has had an impact. If the worst-performing districts rise up, the overall performance of the state improves.

**Q: So in four years itself, you could see this change?**

Yes. We got third-party analysis done.

**Q: What are the interesting districts that catch your eye?**

There are a lot of interesting stories. For example, Lohardaga district in Jharkhand, an LWE (Left-Wing Extremism)-affected area, has raised registration of pregnant women within the first trimester from just four percent in 2018 to 95 percent in 2022.

Districts such as Karauli in Rajasthan, Namsai in Arunachal Pradesh, Dhalai in Tripura have increased the percentage of institutional deliveries from an average of around 40 percent to more than 90 percent. Many districts like Sukma, where less than 50 percent of children were immunized until 2018, the immunization rate has now gone above 90 percent. Almost each of the 112 districts has shown extraordinary achievement in at least one of the themes of the programme in the past four years.

**Q: What does your programme ignite at the district level?**

Passion and commitment for change based on good governance. The focus is just good governance, nothing else. And data-based and outcome-based. Which is never there in government. That kind of data monitoring, that kind of outcome-based monitoring is never done.

In the past four years we have seen some innovative projects funded through the competition amount won by the districts. For instance, Project MITTI or Multilateral Initiative for Technical Transformation of Rural Institutions was proposed by district Simdega in Jharkhand. MITTI focuses on strengthening self-governance at the village level by introducing the Chabutra, Haat and Pustakalaya. The Chabutras were used in the villages to conduct *mohalla* classes and improve the spread of awareness about vaccination. The Chabutra and Haat are the real setting for bringing any behavioural change in society.

**Q: What about people's participation? Gram sabhas and so on?**

In all districts, we have set a *jan andolan* as our objective. Everybody should participate. This transformation cannot take place without participation. That's why we have the involvement of civil society organizations. Normally, government machinery is not geared to do all this, which is why this participation has been very, very important.

**Q: The districts you have chosen are the most backward. We realize change doesn't come overnight. There has also been a pandemic for the past two years. But going just by the numbers you have on your dashboard, what is the transformation you can envision? Especially in education and health which carry the most weightage.**

Since the inception of the programme, significant improvement in health, nutrition and education has been noted, along with a positive social and economic impact. According to Round 5 of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS), in critical care areas — such as antenatal care, institutional deliveries, child immunization, use of family planning methods — the aspirational districts have shown relatively faster improvement.

Aspirational districts have also shown significant improvement in the latest NFHS-5 survey results when compared to NFHS-4, especially in indicators that are also tracked in the programme.

The districts showed significant improvement in indicators related to the health of pregnant women, such as ANC registrations of pregnant women in the first trimester and institutional deliveries. In ANC registration, districts from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar have improved from 36 percent to 56 percent, and districts from Madhya Pradesh from 47 percent to 71 percent.

Antenatal care is important in the lifecycle of women's care that ensures maintenance of health of the mother during pregnancy. ANC check-ups help in identification of high-risk cases and prevent development of complications.

In institutional deliveries as well, districts from Uttar Pradesh have improved from 53 percent to 79 percent, and districts from Bihar from 62 percent to 74

percent. ADP focuses on various indicators pertaining to women's health which are central in improving national indicators.

**Q: You have critics of this programme who question the numbers and say there is inadequate third-party verification. Would you say there could be some merit in this criticism or is it completely over the top?**

Please ask the critics to write to me directly. I will be happy to engage them in fixing the data pipeline for the government.

See, since the beginning of the programme there have been quarterly, granular, and household sample based third-party surveys to validate as well as collect critical data.

Up until the beginning of the pandemic, we had already done three rounds of sample surveys which gave district-level estimates. Using Small Area Estimation for select indicators, we have also been able to look at block-level estimates in some cases. These survey estimates have been shared with the districts, as well as the states for necessary action at their end.

Additionally, data on skill development as well as financial inclusion comes from the respective transactional systems and the districts have no role in entering the data. Similarly, for other themes, we keep track of various alternative sources of data. For example, for the health sector, my team routinely checks in with the MoHFW on the data that is being reported to them. Such triangulation methods do help keep the margin of variation in check.

For the past two years, we have developed an anomaly detection system that runs through the submitted data from the districts and raises data quality flags

**'We have an anomaly detection system that raises data quality flags to the districts that have to justify uneven increase/decrease in data before it is accepted.'**

straight to the district collectors or magistrates before our systems take up the submitted data for ranking purposes. The district administrations are expected to justify uneven increase/decrease in data before it is accepted. For example, if there is a sudden rise in immunization rates, my team is able to flag if the data might be a reflection of seasonal variation in pregnancies and deliveries, or whether it was a result of estimation at the level of the ministry of health.

Please note that we work with a lot of data where the universe is very challenging to know, even in the more connected urban centres, let alone the aspirational districts.

The back-and-forth feedback approach is informed by the concepts of behavioural economics. Through nudging the system to think critically of data, we are generating various discussions on data at different levels of public administration so as to improve the understanding of data as well as the links between data and service delivery.

At the end of every rank release cycle, consolidated performance reports are shared with the district administrations as well as the chief secretaries of the concerned states/UTs so as to aid them in conducting reviews at their level.

The real issue is not whether we need less or more third-party assessments, but how to develop robust systems of monitoring and review which ultimately help us in improving last-mile service delivery and assisting district administrations in having systems for reporting data that reflects the progress made on the ground.

We prioritized core indicators because these core indicators affect a larger number of other indicators. Instead of tracking everything and overwhelming the system with reporting, we are trying to keep the monitoring framework efficient enough to drive improvements in service delivery.

The systems of data verification we deploy also need to account for extant staff availability and capacity and we believe that we are appropriately balancing the various constraints to the best extent possible.

If any one of our critics has better ideas, they are most welcome to write to us. In fact, I am very happy to organize a hackathon or a workshop or something. But when these solutions come to me for review, I will expect that the critics have thought through the full lifecycle of service delivery provision in the context of the 112 aspirational districts. ■

# Insights into Adivasi livelihoods

Civil Society News

New Delhi

A report from an ongoing study on the livelihoods of Adivasi communities underlines the extreme deprivation in which they live despite laws and policies ostensibly meant to benefit them. Not much has changed and Adivasis continue to remain the most impoverished people in India with the worst human development indicators, lagging behind in health and education.

Listed mostly as Scheduled Tribes under the Constitution, Adivasi communities grapple with new challenges. Development schemes over the years have robbed them of their lands, deprived them of their forests, denuded their environment and eroded the social cohesion of their communities. Around 55 percent of people who have been displaced from their lands because of dams, mines, wildlife sanctuaries etc, are Adivasis.

The study, which is called *The Status of Adivasi Livelihoods Report*, was conducted by PRADAN from March to April 2021 in Jharkhand and April to May 2021 in Odisha.

Altogether, 5,500 Adivasi and non-Adivasi households in 16 Adivasi-dominated districts of Jharkhand and Odisha were surveyed. There were also focus group discussions with Adivasi communities in 28 villages and interviews with 40 leading Adivasi and non-Adivasi intellectuals.

PRADAN, a voluntary organization of long standing, has worked closely with Adivasi communities in Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Chhattisgarh and West Bengal on issues of livelihood for the past 40 years and has a detailed understanding of their concerns.

"The paradox of want and deprivation in the midst of natural bounty and professed State support has puzzled us quite a bit," writes D. Narendranath, executive director of PRADAN, in the report. "It has been our considered view that we need a more nuanced understanding of Adivasi livelihoods and the socio-cultural setting that shapes their livelihoods if we are to evolve an appropriate response to end their plight."

This report delves deep into the lives and livelihoods of Adivasi communities. The status of Adivasis and other communities in the same region have been compared. The study also examines the impact of government measures. The idea is to share such findings with governments and NGOs to enable more efficient and appropriate interventions.

Adivasis comprise 8.6 percent of India's population and around 75 percent live in the Central India belt. Their culture is distinct: reverence for forests and nature, collective aspirations, a deep sense of community and a focus on need, not greed. A perspective that is gaining ground is that development initiatives often fail because they aren't designed keeping in mind Adivasi cultural and economic aspirations. For example, school education isn't imparted in an Adivasi language, health services don't factor in



Brooms being made at an Adivasi village in Odisha

traditional practices, forests don't have trees they access for food and more.

"Earlier we used to get forest products like honey, bamboo, sal seeds etc, but nowadays we are not getting all these. Earlier we used to get medicinal plants and bark of certain trees for fighting malaria but those are not available these days. Earlier there were sambar deer, barking deer, spotted deer, peacock etc in our forests. After the intervention of industry and mining which has rapidly destroyed our forests, there is extinction of flora and fauna," states Sumani Jhudia, a tribal activist.

Here are some highlights of the report: Adivasi communities live in the undulating hill and forest terrain of Odisha and Jharkhand in Chhota Nagpur and the Eastern Ghats. Both regions are blessed with rivers and rainfall and were densely forested till a few decades ago. It still has sal forests and elephant herds. Individual landholdings are very small, under two hectares, on slopes and topsoil is thin, making conventional agriculture challenging.

A considerable number of Adivasis are also landless. In Odisha, 14 percent of Adivasis, 28 percent of non-Adivasis and 47 percent of PVTGs (Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups) said they were landless. In Jharkhand, the figure was 12 percent and 30 percent, respectively. Irrigation facilities are scarce. Fifty-three percent of Adivasi households depend on forest produce in Jharkhand and 75 percent in Odisha.

Section 4 of the report is on infrastructure, roads, telephones, education and health infrastructure. Internal roads seem to be missing. Fewer Adivasi villages were connected to the block headquarters as compared to non-Adivasi villages. Public transport likewise connected fewer Adivasi villages than non-Adivasi ones. Mobile connectivity was 73 percent for Adivasi villages and 90 percent for non-Adivasi villages. More NGOs worked in non-Adivasi villages. As for community forest rights, the

results were pathetic. In Jharkhand, for instance, seven percent of Adivasi and three percent of non-Adivasi villages applied and one percent of Adivasi and three percent of non-Adivasi villages received those rights.

The next section profiles Adivasi households. The average family size is of five members. A large majority of the heads of household are not educated. Sixty-three percent had studied up to primary school and less than 12 percent up to Class 10. Tribal women fare even worse. Better income leads to higher literacy. Adivasi without land were found to have low levels of education in both states.

Although most Adivasi households (88 percent in Jharkhand and 84 percent in Odisha) are marginal or landless farmers with no access to irrigation they produce one rainfed crop per year. Interestingly, they could grow as many as 20 crops indicating rich crop diversity.

The average annual income of an Adivasi household was merely ₹75,378 in Jharkhand and ₹61,263 in Odisha. In Koraput it was just ₹42,183. There were six sources of income generation — farming, animal husbandry, forest produce, wage work, salaries/pension, non-farm work and remittances. Income from forest produce was very low in Odisha and also very modest in Jharkhand. Adivasi villages were located around 2 km from the forest in both states.

Almost half the Adivasi villages surveyed reported poor food consumption (46 percent) as compared to non-Adivasi households (23 percent). In Odisha, the PVTG households were the most undernourished. The study also found that children in as many as 50 percent of households were undernourished. The report also analyses the factors influencing income, literacy, food security etc.

This is a painstakingly detailed report and its findings should be implemented by all governments at the state and centre. ■



INDEX OF GREEN AMBITIONS

# Lanka could learn from Sikkim how to go organic happily

Civil Society News  
New Delhi

WHEN the Sri Lankan economy collapsed with a sigh recently, prominently sticking out of the debris was a failed attempt to take the island nation into full-scale organic agricultural production.

The Rajapaksa government had virtually overnight ordered a switch to organic agriculture to save foreign exchange on the import of chemical fertilizers and pesticides.

But going organic, instead of being the solution, became a bigger problem with food crops failing and the famed Sri Lankan tea industry withering.

Now Sri Lanka has turned to India for food aid, but it would have done well to have earlier sought advice on what it really takes to transition from chemical to natural farming.

India has in Sikkim an entire state which has been declared organic. India also has a robust and growing organic food industry which handholds farmers as they go from chemical pesticides and fertilizers to natural practices.

Sikkim grows its local rice, millets, vegetables, fruits like oranges and avocados and spices organically. There are no studies as yet on how much more farmers earn by selling organic produce, but the fact that they haven't looked back indicates a high level of satisfaction.

The example of Sikkim is particularly interesting because the switchover was conceived of and managed by the Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF) state government under then Chief Minister Pawan Kumar Chamling.

It is also worth noting that organic practices were traditionally prevalent in Sikkim, many of its farms being too remote for chemical fertilizers and pesticides to reach them.

Nevertheless, when it came to having a complete makeover by giving up chemicals, the state chose to hasten slowly.

The transition was a careful one. It took all of eight years or so from 2008 to 2016, when Prime Minister Narendra Modi went to Gangtok to declare Sikkim India's first organic state.

Farmers going completely organic in their fields had to wait three to five years and during that time the state had to ensure that they felt encouraged to go the distance.

"Yes, a three-to-five-year frame is what you're really looking at. A farmer would have to wait that long. But in Sikkim already we were not that inorganic, unlike maybe Sri Lanka or other places. Therefore, you know, changeover was also maybe easier," says Prem Das Rai, who was in the Lok Sabha for two consecutive terms from Sikkim and also head of the sub-committee of organic agriculture in the State Planning Commission.

Farmers had to be incentivized and the decline in production had to be compensated for. Equally, when fall in production would affect supplies, imports from the plains were possible.

"I think our productivity levels did fall. We will definitely accept that. But those shortfalls were made up by whatever import was needed at that particular instance. Things are back to normal and you can get any amount of organic vegetables and organic legumes and organic stuff that you want within the state. And being a local person, we don't really look for labels or anything else," says Rai.

"So we definitely didn't have to get through the kind of problem Sri Lanka has had. Sri Lanka has given a very, very bad and exceptionally negative



Strife in Sri Lanka and (below) the good life on one of Sikkim's organic homestays



Photo: Civil Society



P.D. Rai: 'We incentivized farmers'

narrative to organic farming. I think that's very, very sad because that could have been avoided," he says.

In Sikkim much had to be anticipated and planned for. Certification, for instance, is a complicated and expensive process. Almost 76,000 hectares had to be certified. Farmers could not be expected to pay for certification so the state government had to underwrite the cost.

A whole range of biopesticides were also brought in so as to avoid a situation in which there would be crop failure because of a pest attack.

Several agencies with good credentials were brought in to train master trainers who would train others who would go to

villages and into the fields.

"The Indian Council for Agricultural Research (ICAR) has almost like a centre of excellence of organic farming in Sikkim. So they continue to give a lot of training to farmers and so on and so forth," explains Rai.

Chamling and the SDF were in power in Sikkim for 24 years from 1994 till 2019. He was a strong man, virtually unchallenged in his party and the state.

But despite his sway, he let the shift to organic take all the time that was needed.

Chamling's early years in power coincided with the green concerns which defined the early and mid-'90s. Across the world the green movement was growing. In India, the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) under Anil Agarwal was recognizing chief ministers for their green policies and Chamling topped this rating.

The Chamling government had also decided to frame a vision document for the state for which it went to Dr Ashok Lahiri at the National Institute of Public Finance and Policy.

"They suggested that if we really wanted Sikkim to prosper and be sustainable, we should go the green way," says Rai.

Armed with this vision for the state in 2001, the political supremacy Chamling enjoyed and the intellectual realization that India was changing along with the rest of the world, the SDF government began looking at the possibility of going organic.

"We didn't know fully where we were headed at that time. But we felt it wasn't a good idea to have too much inorganic stuff inside and so we should go the organic way," says Rai.

From 2003 the organic agriculture question was debated in the government and the state planning commission. Rai headed a sub-committee on organic

**'For farmers to make the switch to organic in Sikkim it took three to five years during which they had to be encouraged, trained and given incentives.'**



Sikkim was already 50 percent organic

agriculture. Finally in 2008, it was decided to go ahead and a resolution to this effect was passed in the Sikkim Assembly.

## A COMPANY IS BUILT

In roughly the same number of years, Raj Seelam has built up Srestha Organic whose brand 24 Mantra is now widely recognized as the first choice of a growing number of families.

The company works with tens of thousands of farmers across India and has been an active partner in Sikkim's emergence as an organic state.

"Organic is a certain philosophy and one needs to have conviction. Sri Lanka was prompted to go organic by its foreign exchange crisis," says Seelam. "Additionally, the opening up of the economy in the 1970s and 1980s, I was reading somewhere, has haunted the economy of the island because a lot of agriculture got destroyed. So, liberalizing blindly is perhaps also one factor," he explains.

"A lot of preparation is required for going organic because it is not just a question of stopping use of fertilizers and pesticides. It is an alternative system. We have to figure out different means of building up soil and fertility.



Raj Seelam: 'Trust matters. You have to work with farmers'



Former Sikkim Chief Minister Pawan Chamling: Strongman with a vision

Second is creating a natural balance so that you don't need to make chemical interventions," he explains.

"For farmers we work with it takes three to four years and that is also the period for certification. Just convincing farmers and enrolling them takes three to four field visits. Afterwards we have full-time people stationed there. In our case for every 200 to 300 farmers we have one of our persons stationed there. Their job is to visit the fields regularly, train the farmers, if they have any problem provide solutions, and if they don't understand, they immediately reach out to our agronomist. We have an app for all our staff and they're able to kind of see the solutions there. And otherwise, we have a specialist, an agronomist, they can reach out to. So it's fairly intensive. Typically, each farm gets visited anywhere between two to three times a month. And that's a continuous effort," says Seelam.

The process of going organic also results in a fall in yields during the transition. Typically, it is 10 to 15 percent in the first year, says Seelam. Since Srestha Organic is not in a position to compensate farmers, it encourages them to go organic in phases. So, someone with 10 acres may do two acres at a time.

Seelam says organic practices have been successful with staple crops like cereals, oilseeds and spices. With spices there is a "bit of a challenge in terms of pests and disease management" and work is on to find solutions.

"Otherwise with most crops, we don't see many challenges. In fact, I think there's an ICR Research Institute called Cropping Systems Research Institute. So they have done quite a few studies and they found that in most cases, organic yields are comparable with conventional yields except for two or three crops," he says. ■



# FAMOUS MANGO IS A LOSER

## Kuttiattoor struggles in the market

Shree Padre  
Kuttiattoor

WHAT ails the Kuttiattoor mango? In the past seven years the stars seemed to shine on this luscious mango. It received a Geographical Indication (GI) tag, thanks to the Kerala Agriculture University's (KAU) IPR Cell, till recently headed by Dr C.R. Ely. Media coverage made the Kuttiattoor mango famous throughout Kerala. People began to grow it, making it a household name.

Then, Kannur airport started operations four years ago. The airport is just half an hour's drive from Kuttiattoor panchayat. In fact, the road to the airport passes through 16 km of Kuttiattoor. Surely that would have made it super easy for the Kuttiattoor mango to find global markets.

Surprisingly, nothing worked. Kuttiattoor's mango production may boom in one year and bust in the next. It really doesn't matter. The Kuttiattoor mango is a loser. It doesn't fetch much of an income to the farmer. It grows in abundance on the tree yet just a minuscule quantity is available for sale.

The mango is the first to arrive in the market. By March, it is ready. That should have given it an edge. Growing tall, each tree produces two to three quintals of fruit. A few trees yield around one tonne of fruit too.

Kuttiattoor panchayat, comprising two villages, Kuttiattoor and Maniyoor, is 16 kilometres from Kannur city in northern Kerala. It is unique in more ways than one. The soil type here in this coastal area is hard laterite. Every household in the two villages has a few mango trees of this variety. The panchayat has over 7,000 households and around 20,000 to 25,000 mango trees. The mango season at Kuttiattoor lasts for a maximum of three months. But why doesn't it fetch an income to its growers?

### ACTION AND REACTION

In June 2015, *Civil Society* published a story on the unusual Kuttiattoor mango. Immediately, interest levels in Kuttiattoor rose.

The panchayat convened a meeting of scientists and development agencies. It was attended by Dr Dinesh M.R., a mango expert from the Indian Institute of Horticultural Research (IIHR) who subsequently became its director.

"The Kuttiattoor mango is the first to be ready in the season. That itself opens up great marketing opportunities," said Dr Dinesh.

He reasoned: "If this mango is found suitable for pulping, mango pulp factories can open here about a month in advance. You can also brand the mango and sell it on roadsides by erecting temporary stalls as sales outlets."

The IIHR team suggested ways to control fruit flies and anthracnose. It also suggested that farmers use low-cost ripening chambers which the institute had developed. The Kannur KVK sent samples to a pulping factory in Karnataka. The factory said it



Kuttiattoor Mango Producers' Company staff packing the fruits in small boxes

was suitable for pulping. But elections came in the way, bringing such development activities to a standstill. Panchayat elections were followed by Assembly elections and then the general election. There was some talk of convergence between

**The mango is picked up by traders from Kannur and nearby towns. But growers get peanuts. And a major share of the yield is unharvested.**

agencies but nothing came of it.

Climate also became a spoiler of sorts. "The cool weather of November-December is crucial for mango yields," says V.O. Prabhakaran, chairman of Kuttiattoor Mango Producers' Company Ltd. "If it rains during the mango's flowering time, the yield drastically reduces. We got a good crop in 2017-18. In the past three years, yields were pretty low. This year, it would be around 30 percent."

### GROWERS' BLUES

A host of issues plagues harvesting, marketing and selling of the Kuttiattoor mango. Middlemen continue to buy the fruit and sell it in various markets. They pay for the whole tree and get it

harvested by an expert climber. The Kuttiattoor mango sells for ₹100-₹120 per kg in Kannur and nearby towns. But the grower gets peanuts. And a major share of the mango remains unharvested, sitting pretty on the tree.

M. Chandran, 69, a resident of Kuttiattoor, has 20 big trees. One of them yields six quintals of fruit. "To harvest only mature fruits, you need to carry out four or five rounds of harvesting. But lately we have been facing a paucity of expert climbers. So, the number of middlemen has also declined. In the past few years mango growers are earning just a 15 to 20 percent increase in prices."

Jishil K. owns a hotel in the village and has 15 mango trees. He started a sales counter adjacent to his hotel to sell his mangoes directly to interested buyers at ₹120 a kg in March, and at ₹80 per kg during the peak season. He began buying from his neighbourhood, paying ₹1,500 to the climber and ₹800 to a labourer to catch the fruit that falls from the tree with the help of a gunny bag. He sold 200 kg through a courier to 40 customers. "All my customers were happy. In the process, I learnt a few lessons," he points out happily.

Climate change is an issue. In the past, the mango used to be ready very early for harvesting. But now seasonal changes are affecting production. "You will find mangoes ripening at various times on the same tree," says Jishil. "If there is a heavy downpour in summer the fruit gets ruined."

The Kuttiattoor mango also varies in taste and fibre content depending on which part of the village it is growing. "Trees growing in pockets like Veshala and Pomdarap in Kuttiattoor village get good

sunlight. Trees in the fully lateritic belt without any shadow falling on them also yield fruit of good quality and appearance," says Chandran.

Some farmers now sell their mangoes in makeshift stalls at roadsides. A small value-addition unit producing pickle, squash and jam has also been set up. But it doesn't make a dent even in the local market.

In 2016, the Kuttiattoor Mango Producers' Company, a Farmer-Producer Organization (FPO), experimented with selling naturally ripened mangoes directly to customers. The demand was overwhelming. But harvesting and selecting quality fruits proved to be a hurdle. This year the FPO started with new vigour, thanks to a new administrative committee. It opened a stall in Kuttiattoor town to sell mangoes in three-kg carton boxes. This was popular.

In April, the CPI(M) organized its 23rd Party Congress in Kannur. Kuttiattoor mangoes were sold at the venue and got some national exposure. As a result, the FPO got a lot of trade enquiries and even hired an expert harvester for better supply. "But we could not harvest so many mangoes and we ended up meeting just a small portion of the demand," lamented Prabhakaran.

The Kuttiattoor Mango Producers' Company has tried to boost marketing. It has enlisted 2,000 farmers who have high-yielding trees. Production, if all goes well, is expected to reach 4,000 to 6,000 tonnes. The panchayat has also organized Farmer Interested Groups (FIGs) in each of its 20 wards with the ward member as its convener. The FIG is supposed to arrange harvesting, grading, ripening and supply of Kuttiattoor mangoes. But no progress has been achieved along these lines.

Jayaraj P., head of the Kannur Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK), says: "Unfortunately, we don't have a single mango orchard to show visitors. We plan to raise an orchard in the village itself, using grafts from carefully selected mother trees. We would like to go for a high density model, with well pruned trees from which anyone can easily harvest fruit. This would also serve as a demo orchard which villages can see and emulate."

Kannur KVK has recently installed a ripening

chamber at a farmer's home for other mango tree owners to consider. The chamber is a do-it-yourself model and costs around ₹9,000. Mature mangoes are to be kept inside for five days. "The response is very good. We get uniform coloured mangoes. Wastage is also reduced," say KVK sources. According to Dr Jayaraj P., "Mangoes ripened in the chamber also have a longer shelf life of about a week instead of two or three days." KVK has proposed setting up 10 ripening chambers in different parts of the panchayat. Currently, locals say contractors artificially ripen the fruit and transport it long distances.



A makeshift roadside stall

Value addition and fresh fruit sales are two major possibilities for Kuttiattoor to generate an income from its wonderful mangoes. Unfortunately, value addition faces more challenges than prospects.

First, because value addition can be done only during the brief crop season of three months. This means the unit can't employ regular staff. Secondly, there are any number of companies producing jam, squash and related products. Achieving one-upmanship for Kuttiattoor mango products is not easy. Developing regular trade channels is also out of the question because of limited period of operation. All processing activities are currently being done manually and its output is pretty small.

In comparison, direct fresh fruit marketing is far more promising. If a local group puts in dedicated efforts, branding and online marketing is not a far-fetched dream. If a reliable supply chain is created and the quality of mangoes is ensured, the Kuttiattoor mango can be sold in at least half the state. Besides, the mango has a GI tag.

### DO-NOTHING MANGO

"One of the main reasons why the Kuttiattoor mango hasn't taken off is because it is taken for granted. It is a do-nothing homestead crop like jackfruit. Families don't see it as a commercial crop or look at it from an agribusiness angle. You need a dedicated campaign to change mindsets," says Dr Jayraj P. "Take the issue of fruit flies. They can be well controlled with pheromone traps. We had distributed 500 such traps free of cost last year. But people don't come forward to spend ₹100 and repeat the process."

More than half the trees are pretty big. Many old trees have parasitic vanda plants on them, making the Kuttiattoor mangoes an inaccessible wealth. The Bala Saheb Konkan Krishi Vidyapeeth (BSKKV) in Dapoli in Ratnagiri district of Maharashtra faced a similar problem. Their famed Alphonso mango trees grew to a huge height. In a three-year project beginning from 2014, they pruned some 3,500 trees to a manageable height.

"We retained a height of only 12 to 15 feet. It took us three years to get a good crop again," says Mahesh M. Kulkarni, assistant professor at BSKKV's department of horticulture. "We have held demonstrations in about 100 villages and put together a team of 4,000 master trainers. You need to spend about ₹1,500 on each tree. Nearly 35,000 farmers from Karnataka, Maharashtra and Gujarat have come to see this success story."

Now Kuttiattoor and the Kannur KVK have reached out to BSKKV and an exposure visit to study Dapoli's mango rejuvenation is being planned. But the question is: will the indifferent mango tree owners of Kuttiattoor respond with enthusiasm? Local groups are determined to make this rejuvenation technology a game changer. ■

### Samita's World

by SAMITA RATHOR





# Blue Umbrella buddy for boys

Civil Society News  
New Delhi

TALK about sexual abuse of children tends to focus on girls, but what do boys go through? Figures put out by the Indian government reveal that 53 percent of all children face some kind of sexual abuse and of that number as much as 52.9 percent are boys.

Such abuse mostly isn't spoken about and tends to be kept under wraps. In a patriarchal society, boys are supposed to look after themselves and if they don't, they are branded sissies.

But on April 14, Blue Umbrella Day, a campaign was launched by Family for Every Child (FFEC), an alliance of 41 NGOs from 37 countries headquartered in Britain, to spread awareness of sexual violence against boys.

The campaign hopes to change such attitudes and start a discourse. It aims to sensitize adults into being more caring and protective towards boys.

Butterflies, a Delhi-based NGO which works with street and working children, is part of the alliance. On Blue Umbrella Day, it launched its survey report, 'Breaking the Silence on Sexual Violence against Boys in India,' which examines the links between concepts of masculinity, sexuality and sexual violence against boys.

"Butterflies and 13 NGOs from nine states in India, who are members of the National Alliance of Grassroots Organisations (NAGN), are running the Blue Umbrella Day campaign. We have created a special song, initiated social media activities and mobilised the media on this issue. We hope to start a public discourse, challenge dominant social norms related to gender, masculinities and sexuality and give all children, girls and boys equal adult protection, care and guidance," said Rita Panicker, head of Butterflies.

The slim and informative report, limited to Delhi, includes survey findings and recommendations. The NGO identified boys who experienced sexual interactions from cases in their Mental Health Unit or one of its partner organizations.

A total of 20 boys between 15 and 18 years participated in extended interviews. Another 15 boys and 15 girls from the general population took part in six focus group discussions. The study also covered 28 stakeholders including parents, professionals such as teachers (three males), six female social workers, experts in child protection, Child Welfare Committee (CWC) members and one member from the Juvenile Justice Board (JJB). Altogether 78 people participated. Field work was carried out over a period of four and half months from mid- July to October 2018.

Here are some of the findings of the report: A few are surprising.

The majority of boys interviewed were sexually abused between the age of 14 and 16. A few victims were found to be around 10 years of age. Almost all the perpetrators were known to the boys and only in three cases were they strangers. Known persons included close relatives, neighbours, older friends and adult acquaintances. Boys from middle-class



A street performance on Blue Umbrella Day



Rita Panicker: 'We hope to start a public discourse'

families were also sexually abused, although their representation within the sample group was low. Three boys from middle-class family backgrounds shared their troubled experiences.

Most of the boys were sexually abused in public spaces, such as on the street, in school and in community premises. A minority were sexually abused in the privacy of their homes. Boys living on the street and boys who followed non-conforming gender practices, were found to be more vulnerable to sexual abuse and discrimination.

Families gave boys the notion that they had to be 'masculine', 'courageous' and 'independent' beings who were supposed to take care of themselves, their families and the community. This was further underlined by bringing out the sexual division of labour within households. Girls did housework but not boys. So the boys were free to roam around but not the girls.

Almost all the boys who were sexually abused

expressed their experience in one phrase: "Mere saath galat kiya." Gifts, food and even drugs were given to boys in some cases. A boy mentioned: "He gave me food and 'solution' and I agreed". In cases where women, older friends and peers were perpetrators, persuasion was used.

Almost all the survivors of abuse said they felt fear, anger, rage and shame. They got no support or even a sympathetic hearing. Some of them absented themselves from school, lost interest in studies and some even dropped out of school. The boys also lacked awareness of sexuality, its social meaning or health implications, including knowledge of HIV.

Yet, boys who later got into consensual relationships said the experience was positive. But worryingly, some of the boys displayed harmful or problematic behavior in consensual relationships with their girlfriends or partners. The boys while recounting these experiences did not regard their behaviour as violent.

"Viewpoints of boys further explored multiple situations of anger in which expressions of varying forms of violence were normalized," says the report.

The boys were most influenced by family, peers and the media. Patriarchal notions of masculinity and sexuality came mostly from the family. But parents and family were not sources of information. All the boys developed their understanding of sex and sexuality through their childhood sexual experiences and interaction with the media and peers, according to the report.

The boys got their information through mobile phones, computers, TV and books. Almost all the boys accessed pornographic materials through mobiles and shared such content with their friends through WhatsApp and Facebook.

There is a real need to introduce sex education in school, include male counsellors and change the way boys think of themselves. The report includes such recommendations. ■

DCB BANK

## DCB Savings Account

Here's something of high interest to you!

Earn upto

6.75% p.a.\*

Savings Account Balance Range	Interest Rate (p.a.)
Upto ₹1 Lakh	2.50%
More than ₹1 Lakh to less than ₹2 Lakh	4.50%
₹2 Lakh to less than ₹10 Lakh	5.00%
₹10 Lakh to less than ₹25 Lakh	6.25%
₹25 Lakh to less than ₹50 Lakh	6.50%
₹50 Lakh to less than ₹2 Crore	6.75%

DCB Customer Care: Call 022 68997777 ■ 040 68157777  
Email [customer@dcbbank.com](mailto:customer@dcbbank.com) Web [www.dcbbank.com](http://www.dcbbank.com)

Terms and conditions apply. These Savings Account interest rates are w.e.f. 7th February, 2022 and subject to change without prior notice. Interest will be calculated on progressive balances in each interest rate slab as applicable. Visit [www.dcbbank.com](http://www.dcbbank.com) for applicable interest rates for all amount slabs. \*Earn 6.75% p.a. on balance from ₹50 Lakh to less than ₹2 Crore.



DCB Bank Limited





A question and answer session with patients

# Healing at Vaidyagrama

## A personal search ends in the foothills of the Nilgiris

**JYOTI PANDE LAVAKARE**

GENTLE, smiling therapists help me off the hard and slippery wooden table, bathing me like a baby, with lukewarm water and powdered green gram, wiping me down with a rough, thin cotton towel.

Then, they apply *rasnadichoornam* on the crown of my head and wave it under my nose, to prevent me catching cold, also smearing *chandana* and *kumkum* on my forehead and throat.

After measuring my blood pressure, they send me back to my room, where a tiny, double-bottomed steel cup of warm green gram soup awaits me.

I am at Vaidyagrama, a healing village 40 km from Coimbatore in a dusty and remote corner of the foothills of the Nilgiris. It is a centre for traditional Ayurvedic therapies.

My journey here is more than just the flight and car rides from my comfortable home in south Delhi. It is really a leap of faith.

In my desperate search for healing and a reset through traditional medicine, I had surveyed and checked out many facilities. None seemed to be what I was looking for. They were either too slick or too dour. A retreat near Palakkad in 2011 had been good and yet not the real thing.

But after I found Vaidyagrama, I went rapidly, as though preordained, from Vaidyagrama's homepage on the internet to turning up there to lay claim to the sparse room and frugal meals that awaited me.

Vaidyagrama was what I had been looking for. Instantly, there was a sense of belonging. Its remoteness enveloped me. An easy flow and uncontrived simplicity embraced me and I merged with it easily.

As part of the initiation for patients, one of the *vaidyas*, or traditional

Ayurvedic physicians, spoke of the importance of surrendering to the Ayurvedic treatment that was to follow, of going along with the Universe.

To allow another grown human being to bathe you, as I have just described, is to truly hand yourself over. It is the kind of surrender from which inner beginnings are made.

My quest for such a place began with the personal turmoil that followed my mother's passing from lung cancer which could be traced to air pollution and long years in Delhi. The loss of a parent brings unanticipated grief. Additionally, it made me angry that she had died from a disease merely because she breathed. It was hers and everyone's right to breathe safely.

After her passing, I wrote a grief memoir referencing air pollution to put the issues surrounding it more firmly in the public domain. Prolonged sitting to get the book out quickly had resulted in tailbone pain. And then I got infected with the Delta variant of COVID-19 which left my body wracked.

The 17 days I spent at Vaidyagrama didn't result in a miraculous cure. But they introduced me to Ayurveda in ways more wondrous than I could have thought possible.

I am city-bred and long accustomed to the hurly-burly of urbanized living. As I entered my small room in Vaidyagrama, with its limited furniture, no television and weak telecom signals, I confess I wondered how the days would pass.

Time did hang heavy to begin with, but as the daily rhythm took me along, I realized that the slowness of everything was therapeutic. It was at the heart of the treatment I had sought out, together, of course, with a lot more like the changes in diet, ingesting of ghee, oil massages and use of herbs.

At Vaidyagrama, patients are gently discouraged from doing anything vigorously — walking and yoga included. The treatment lies in finding inner

balance and discovering the boundaries of your being. Silence and slowness are needed for this. It is an internal process.

### FOUR FRIENDS AND A DREAM

The more I learnt about Ayurveda, the more I found I learnt about Vaidyagrama, so intricately were the two linked.

Vaidyagrama was created in 2008 by four third-generation *vaidyas* who had studied around the same time at the Coimbatore Ayurvedic College in the foothills of the Nilgiri mountains.

Although they didn't know it then, their experience of learning the science of Ayurveda in the lap of nature in the *gurukul*-like environment of their college in the late 1980s was going to lead to the creation of Vaidyagrama 20 years later.

"We used to have elephants walking up to our windows. Often, we bathed under clear, cold waterfalls — something we didn't much like back then. But college, being so close to nature, left a deep impact on us. We also found our life there prepared us well in body and mind. It made us as strong as steel. It reinforced in us how Ayurveda should work for people," says Dr Ramkumar Kutty, one of the founders.

But over the years, Ayurveda hospitals were becoming fancier in order to match conventional hospitals and raise the comfort levels of patients. They were providing air conditioning, television and internet connections in rooms.

"This was not how it was meant to be," says Dr Ramkumar, recalling the growing dismay among Ayurvedic physicians who had begun to feel that the drift in values would undermine the nuanced scientific foundations of the system they had been trained in.

It was around then Dr A.R. Ramadas, Dr E.K. Ramanandan and Dr K.K. Harikrishnan, his college mates from the late 1980s who were all working in their traditional family practices at that time, came together with him to create Vaidyagrama.

"The land here was barren. There was hardly any water, so farmers were happy to sell to us. The first thing we did was to set up six wells to recharge the groundwater," recalls Dr Ramadas.

Thanks to that water harvesting, today, almost 14 years later, despite the growing community, Vaidyagrama is water self-sufficient with five borewells and no piped municipal water.

At first, the four *vaidyas* and their supporters had no resources — just their ideas and their idealism — but they pushed ahead, designing their community as a natural healing environment.

They minimized the use of chemicals, chose natural materials for construction and adopted renewable approaches to energy. There was a strong focus on circularity, especially in waste management.

I didn't see any waste lying around. The steel dustbin in my own tiny room remained empty because there was nothing to throw! I learnt that even the oils used in the massages are poured off to make candles and soaps. Bright yellow and parrot green painted terracotta pots visually encouraged garbage segregation and composting is integral to Vaidyagrama.

"We wash all clothes only with pounded soapnuts in our washing machines to avoid chemicals from detergents or soaps," Sandhya Mol K. told me as she took patients on an orientation tour. She pointed to the lines of thin cotton towels, sheets and laundry belonging to patients drying in the sun.

Rooms are cleaned every morning by gentle, uniformed women employed from local villages using lemongrass oil, which leaves the rooms smelling citrusy and fresh. The equivalent of the turn-down service leaves the mosquito net tucked into the hard mattress. *Guggul* and *dhoopam* are used to purify the air and are also quite effective in driving away mosquitoes.

Three tiffins, two tiny cups of herbal tea (once with fruit) and one cup of green moong soup/congee appear magically each day like clockwork for everyone. It is the *choornams* and *kashayams*, made fresh in the *illam* pantries to maintain potency, that are customized for each patient.

All cooking is done in a Vaastu-compliant *annalayam* or kitchen in the southeast of the premises. Fruits, grains, vegetables, herbs and medicinal plants



Food is medicine and all cooking is done on a yellow flame like in ancient times



Dr A.R. Ramadas



Dr K.K. Harikrishnan



Dr Ramkumar



Dr E.K. Ramanandan



A community meal: The diet is simple, non-oily, non-spicy

are locally sourced and seasonal. Vaidyagrama is trying to grow its own food but is not there yet.

"We cook only on a yellow flame, the way it used to be in ancient times. The yellow flame of natural fire sources — firewood or biomass briquettes — is healthier for cooking food, than the blue flame of liquefied petroleum gas," explains Aparna Sarma, the quietly efficient patient coordinator who has worked with one of the Vaidyagrama founders for 22 years, even before the healing village came into existence.

The diet is simple, non-oily, non-spicy, following another Ayurvedic principle of eating locally and seasonally.

### LEARNING EVERY DAY

Every day, I learnt a little more. About Ayurveda. About Vaidyagrama. And about myself.

I already knew about the three *doshas*, Kapha (unctuous, constructive), Pitta (fiery, transformative) and Vata (dry, windy, degenerative), but intimate daily afternoon sessions with different *vaidyas* with just a dozen or so patients like me taught me much beyond these basics.

Ayurveda treats healing as a journey. It doesn't just treat the disease or merely its symptoms, but the body — holistically, at its deepest level, clearing blocked energy channels, detoxing the smallest of cells to allow the body to repair itself.

Unlike conventional Western medicine, Ayurveda doesn't treat human bodies homogeneously, with standard medicines for standard diseases or symptoms. So, it won't do, as has become the fashion, to pop capsules of *ashwagandha* to reduce stress and anxiety; *brahmi* for memory; and *guggul* for cholesterol management.

Ayurveda in its true form is a deeply complex science. Each patient's condition is addressed differently. Body types are taken into account. Multiple variables



come into play: time of day, season, age, stage of life, physical and mental state and dominant *doshas* of the *rogi* and his digestive fire.

Of utmost importance are the *vaidya* and his insightfulness in diagnosis. Medicines chosen are from among herbs, *kashaayams*, oils, diet, *panchkarma* or some mix used to balance the *doshas*.

Dr Ramkumar speaks about the difference between cure and healing. “Ayurveda is not about a temporary suppression of a problem. It is about healing, about the body-mind complex, creating a paradigm shift that allows the natural intelligence of the human body to act.”

Healing, according to Ayurveda, is internal, a continuous process that doesn't stop when you leave Vaidyagrama. Treatment here just kickstarts the process by removing imbalances and rebalancing the *doshas* that are responsible for that ailment. But the patient has to continue the discipline of Vaidyagrama even after leaving.

Over the weeks, it becomes clear to me that the *vaidyas* see disease as a spiritual experience and fear as its biggest lock. This is why all *panchkarma* begins with preparing the body for treatment. Ayurveda believes that stress is the beginning and toxicity the next step in almost all diseases.

Thus, it recommends appropriate relaxation, cleansing and repair, using literally tens of thousands of herbs in various time-tested recipes and fine-tuned treatment techniques to achieve renewal of body and mind, before beginning actual treatment.

#### PATIENTS FROM ALL OVER

I'd been a little anxious about time hanging heavy on my hands, but to my surprise, I settled quickly into the slower pace of this *ashram*-like life. Daily learning sessions with junior *vaidyas* and question-answer sessions disguised as *satsangs* with senior *vaidyas* kept me busy, educating me on many aspects of healthy living and eating.

“We have these just so you all don't fall asleep in the afternoons,” joked Dr Ramanandan. Ayurveda doesn't encourage naps in the middle of the day because that increases the body's *vatadosha*; a daily *yoganidra* session of guided relaxation was offered instead. “Rest is not sleep and sleep is not rest,” says Dr Ramanandan.

These *satsang* sessions were more than wholesome entertainment to keep us awake. They often transformed into intense conversations on science versus faith or debates on spiritual matters between patients and doctors. A diverse patient community made these interactions lively.

Karla from New York and I would take feverish notes, whereas Monique from New Mexico just listened intently and intensely, absorbing the knowledge like a sponge. This was her 10th year back and she has seen Vaidyagrama grow from one cluster to 12.

Ahalya from Whitefield in Bengaluru asked questions about sleep and trauma even as Carolina from Chile nodded in silent agreement with Arun and Pragitee from Chennai.

Aruvita, an Indian-born Canadian, giggled and whispered with her Indian-American cousin while Astha and Devesh from Mumbai, Jaipur and Dubai looked on indulgently.

Astha and Devesh are full of youth and vitality, fit and beautiful, but Astha suffers from vertigo and has benefitted enough from Vaidyagrama to come back a second time within a month to complete her treatment. She is a jewellery designer whose family is in the diamond business.

Devesh surprises me with the stillness with which he sits through morning and evening prayers, eyes closed in meditation, his athletic millennial body and tall frame unmoving. He works in his family's gold business and moves in celebrity circles that are at complete variance with the simple, spiritual life we are all living here.

Then there is Vijaya, an asthmatic Kashmiri who has lived in Chennai for 20 years and now lives in Coonoor, who says: “I am from everywhere and nowhere.” He is currently undergoing chemotherapy and “feels like a new man.”

“My BP has settled at a normal 130/80, my breathing is easy, and the hot flushes I was getting due to hormonal injections have not appeared even once,” he writes in his journal. Years ago, an off-roading accident in Botswana broke his neck, but not his enthusiasm for life. He is 80.

His neighbour, Raja, a music lover who comes from a family of musicians, is



Cluster consisting of four rooms

diabetic. Raja is a friendly charmer, in his seventies, easy to talk to, and by the time we bid him goodbye, I feel like I've known him for years. He says he is feeling lighter, better and his sugar levels are under control. He plans to return with his daughter, who lives in the US, in December. He is also making plans to visit Vijaya in Coonoor. Every patient I meet is accomplished in his or her own way.

Another patient who fascinates me is Subhash Chandra Bose, whose roots are in Tamil Nadu but who lives and works in Dubai. He suffers from a genetic muscular disorder, muscular dystrophy, and I can see the debilitating effects of this disease in his walk. He tells me he came here in a wheelchair. When he leaves, after planting the customary tree each patient does before leaving, I see him walk out. His wife, Surya, walks beside him with shy pride. I've seen her praying daily in the *brahmakalam*. Their two-year-old boy is with his grandmother.

There is also Arun Mugilan, a Chennai businessman and scion of the Precision Engineering Group, a solemn-looking young man in his early thirties whose psoriasis was completely cured at Vaidyagrama in 2020 after he had tried everything.

“I was spending several thousand rupees per session of treatment, but nothing worked — until I came here,” he says. He was put on the traditional *snehapanam* treatment and had to drink increasing amounts of medicated ghee. This treatment scrapes out toxins from deep within the cells, the *vaidyas* tell us. Arun's psoriasis responded immediately to the ghee treatment, clearing up in the first round.

“But I went back to my old ways,” he says wryly. “My stress levels were high and I noticed some skin reactions reappearing.”

Before things could get worse, he returned to Vaidyagrama and has benefitted again. His wife, Pragitee, loyally accompanied him both times and has taken treatment for her polycystic ovaries syndrome on this visit.

There are many other such stories but I am chary of positioning Vaidyagrama as a place for miracle cures. It is clearly much more than that.

For various reasons patients come from all over India and from all over the world. Some of them have been coming to Vaidyagrama for several years. They are doctors, scientists, designers, jewellers, software developers, teachers, Bollywood casting directors, self-professed hippies....

What I find amazing is how quickly completely diverse strangers from across



There is no waste: Bright yellow and parrot green pots encourage segregation



Simple rooms with sparse furniture

the globe develop such strong social bonds — I wonder if it is being together in a non-competitive environment where the focus is on health, well-being and learning. Or perhaps it is what I felt the moment I entered this space — a certain stillness and deep restfulness.

It is positive, healing energy that I sense comes from chants and prayers that reverberate through the day. They provide the healing energy.

“Intensive treatments may affect the body and certain emotions may surface,” says Dr Ramadas. “Daily prayers conducted by the physicians themselves become very important as enhancing healing energies.”

Dr Ramadas takes the morning and evening prayers, going into an almost trancelike state during the 45 minutes of chanting Vedic *shlokas*.

#### LIVING AYURVEDA SCHOOL

“Vaidyagrama is also a living Ayurveda school, where we guide healers of tomorrow,” another senior *vaidya*, Dr Harikrishnan, tells me. His Arogyadayam Vaidyasala in Kerala is one of the three pharmacies that prepare and supply Vaidyagrama their herbal medicines. I visited his Arogyadayam Ayurveda Hospital in Palakkad in 2011 and find him almost unchanged physically since I last met him.

True to his words, I see daily meetings of junior *vaidyas* as well as weekly meetings of therapists within the *illams* in this healing community. This is how authentic Ayurveda can be made contemporary without compromising on its core values. It feels totally possible to experience *sarvebhavantusukhinah* — may all be happy — here.

“We realized very early that we cannot create a true healing space here if the villages around us are unhealthy, the people unhappy,” says Dr Ramkumar. He is wearing his usual crisp white mundu and a coloured shirt, his face glowing with vitality and passion.

He reminds me a little of the modern-day seers, visionaries who have evolved to the next level. He exudes a certain strength and sense of purpose, a combination of drive and anchored stability, compassion and detachment that is unusual.

If he is the brain behind Vaidyagrama, Dr Ramadas is its soul and Dr Ramanandan and Dr Harikrishnan are its beating heart and pulsing nerves.

They have set up trusts to manage the multiple ideas they want to execute. Geetha Mohandas, an ex-banker who volunteers as a nominated trustee of the Punarnava Trust that runs Vaidyagrama, happens to be here because her daughter, who lives in the US, needs treatment. She is babysitting her granddaughter as she goes about her tasks and explains how healing the surrounding environment, along with the lives of the village folk, has become part of the integrated plan of the trust.

Apart from Lakshmigram, they already have a residential Balagrama that educates and vocationally upskills selected children of single parents from local communities as well as a Nivrittigram (senior citizen living). A Krishigram (sustainable farmer community), Kalagrama (an artists' village) and Bhashagrama (a linguistic community) are also planned to be integrated into this model.

The trust also plans to open a university close to Vaidyagrama, perhaps at the site of a living temple, that will concentrate on Indic knowledge systems, including Ayurveda and all other disciplines that have come down as oral traditions and through texts that are extant today.

These include astronomy, mathematics, *itihasa*, physics, chemistry, biology and other sciences. The possibilities are endless. But it all begins with healing.

Our body, the *vaidyas* tell us, is like the cosmos. A microcosm of that macrocosm. And when we heal it, we can begin to heal the universe.

I leave Vaidyagrama after 17 days, not cured but healing. I have a lightness of mind and spirit. The pain in my tailbone is still there, but I have a newfound capacity to bear my pain with dignity. ■

Jyoti Pande Lavakare is a Delhi-based journalist and author of *Breathing Here is Injurious to Your Health*, a grief memoir on the human cost of air pollution. She is the co-founder of *Care For Air*, a non-profit.



## Atmanirbharata redux



**DELHI DARBAR**

**SANJAYA BARU**

WHEN Prime Minister Narendra Modi first spoke about the concept of *atmanirbharata*, many mainstream economists criticized him for reverting to a discarded view of 'import-substituting industrialization'. Part of the initial confusion about what he meant was based on the fact that many within the Sangh Parivar, led by the Swadeshi Jagran Manch, had been critics of India's economic liberalization programme after 1991. Even though the government of Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee took forward the trade and industrial policies initiated by Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao in 1991-96, many in the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) had been critical of India's reintegration into the world economy.

In response to these concerns, Prime Minister Modi rephrased his 'Make in India' concept to state 'Make in India, Make for the World'. In other words, the emphasis was on localization of manufacturing, but with such manufacturing capacity aimed for both the domestic and global markets. *Atmanirbharata* was defined as the ability to address domestic needs and wants while at the same time developing the capacity to compete globally in an inter-dependent world economy.

Much of the contemporary debate on industrial and trade policy has been conducted within the dominant post-Cold War narrative of globalization that was based on what economists call the Washington Consensus and neo-liberal economics. It consisted of a set of ideas promoted by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and Western governments that saw free markets, free trade, free enterprise as the way forward for all economies, developed and developing. It drew attention to the rise of rapidly industrializing East Asian economies that benefitted from global integration.

If the post-colonial consensus in the developing world was about minimizing dependence on the external world, dominated by colonial and neo-colonial powers, the post-Cold War view was that international inter-dependence benefitted all economies, developed and developing. Globalization and multilateralism in trade and finance were built on these premises.

However, the recent decision of the United States,

supported by its Group of Seven partners, to weaponize global inter-dependence by using trade and financial sanctions to discipline adversarial nations, has brought this entire thesis into question once again. All of a sudden, Modi's *Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan* has acquired a new relevance and resonance. Both with respect to foreign policy and economic policy, many ideas at present put forward by Prime Minister Modi and his colleagues echo the ideas of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and his advisers.

Modi's views on *atmanirbharata* today in fact echo the concept of self-reliance first put forward in the First Five Year Plan document, written in 1951. On the issue of self-reliance and dependence on external assistance, the First Plan drew attention to two alternative country examples. The US, it argued,



had developed rapidly in the inter-war period based on investment flows from Europe while the Soviet Union and Japan had industrialized based mainly on their own internal resources. India too should try and develop based on domestic resources, the Plan document suggested, setting out the framework for external assistance in these words:

"External assistance is acceptable only if it carries with it no conditions explicit or implicit, which might affect even remotely the country's ability to take an independent line in international affairs. There are also obvious risks in excessive reliance on foreign aid which depends on the domestic political situation in lending countries and which might be interrupted by any untoward international developments. And yet, external resources at strategic points and stages can be of so much assistance in a period of rapid development that it is desirable, consistently with other objectives, to create conditions favourable to their inflow."

Explaining the thinking behind this view, one of the Plan's principal authors, economist K.N. Raj, who was later a key architect of the Delhi School of Economics and founder of the Centre for

Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram, defined the four main objectives of the Plan as follows (K.N. Raj, "Indian Planning: Outline of a Critique and an Alternative Approach", in *Alternate Policies for the Fourth Five Year Plan*, State Planning Board, Government of Kerala, Trivandrum, 1969):

1. Doubling of the real per capita income in the country by about the 1970s;
2. Reduction in the share of agriculture in the total working force from over 70 percent in 1950-51 to 60 percent by the mid-1970s, while raising land and labour productivity;
3. Self-sufficiency in foodgrains and development of capital goods industries; ensuring that availability of foreign exchange does not impose a constraint on development and make the country less vulnerable to external economic and political pressures; a total end to reliance on foreign aid by the mid-1960s to ensure further development of the economy self-sustaining;
4. Reduction in the inequalities in income and wealth and in the concentration of economic power; reducing social and political tensions associated with growth and creating conditions favourable to the development of a truly democratic India.

I draw particular attention to the First Plan's considered caveat that external assistance is "acceptable only if it carries with it no conditions explicit or implicit, which might affect even remotely the country's ability to take an independent line in international affairs" (emphasis mine). The document points to "obvious risks in excessive reliance on foreign aid which

depends on the domestic political situation in lending countries and which might be interrupted by any untoward international developments". Raj pointedly refers to the need for making "the country less vulnerable to external economic and political pressures".

In the 1950s India's political and economic leadership was worried about Big Power rivalry and the hangover of colonialist attitudes in Europe. How different are our concerns today when in the context of renewed Big Power rivalry we are asked to fall in line or face the consequences?

With hindsight today it would appear that Prime Minister Modi was prescient in his call for *atmanirbharata*. The concept was developed in response to India's growing economic dependence on a politically and militarily aggressive China. However, it has become all the more relevant in the context of the assault on globalization by the US and its European allies. The idea of self-reliance returns against the backdrop of re-emerging neo-colonial attitudes. ■

Sanjaya Baru is a writer and Distinguished Fellow at the United Service Institution of India.

## The future wars



**LOOKING AHEAD**

**KIRAN KARNIK**

THE war in Ukraine has busted many a myth. Most have felt, for some years now, that the days of direct military confrontation between nations are over and that national security will mainly be a matter of handling possible terrorist strikes and cross-border incursions limited in frequency, duration and depth, besides any internal strife. This writer, too, had, in a recent book, commented that "frontal attack wars between nations may become a rarity. Proxy wars — through terrorism...cyber attacks — will increasingly be the norm." How wrong has been this prognosis!

An epitome of "civilization" and progress, especially over the past 75-plus years, Europe would have been the last place in which to expect a reversion to old-style wars of the first half of the 20th century and earlier. Yet, for some two months now, a full-fledged and brutal war has been on in Ukraine. There have been a few missile and drone strikes, besides aerial bombing, but we have also witnessed armies fighting on the ground involving soldiers, tanks and shelling — all facets of more conventional warfare.

The war has, however, once again highlighted new battle technologies. Precision missile strikes, for example, can target a specific building. Drones can be even more focussed. Reports indicate that in Afghanistan, US drones — launched from afar and controlled by a "pilot" thousands of miles away — were able to target even one chosen car. Cameras in drones or in satellites can pick and track the target, as also provide post-strike visuals. The combination of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and space assets is a deadly one, allowing war-from-a-distance, with no chance of human casualties for the attacker. For the other side, there is a high price to pay, including the now-common euphemism of "collateral damage".

Such non-human (or, inhuman, to use a more appropriate word) warfare is becoming more common now. Apart from Afghanistan (and the many other US interventions), Houthi forces have been using drones to attack oil processing facilities in Saudi Arabia, and Israel regularly uses them in its on-going Palestine and Syria attacks. The rapid evolution of drone technology clearly makes this a key weapon in future wars.

Precision-guided bombs, delivered by aircraft,

UAVs, or missiles, are another variant of targeted attacks. They generally do not have the manoeuvrability of drones but have other advantages. The new hypersonic missiles can change course and — like low-flying cruise missiles — substantially evade radar detection. This, and their ability to arrive from any direction, makes them extremely dangerous. China is an acknowledged world leader in this; in addition, it has demonstrated anti-satellite capabilities — crucial weapons that can destroy space assets which provide key military as well as civil applications. These weapons are present dangers and not hypothetical future developments: facts that should set off alarm bells in India.

Amidst this new hardware, human armies — "boots on the ground" — are yet a requirement, especially if one wants to capture and hold territory. This continues to be important, despite theories of the irrelevance of land capture. Russian troops marching into Ukraine exemplifies this. The



New weapons and devices are now available to the soldier

**It is an old-style war in Ukraine but with new technologies employed in battle. Drones guided from far away can target even a chosen car.**

infantryman is, however, going through a complete makeover. Light-weight, bullet-proof armour; night-vision glasses; protective masks (against chemical or biological weapons); clothes that act as self-healing bandages to treat wounds; helmets with built-in GPS and a display which relays satellite/drone images of the battlefield; and a host of weapons: all these are going to be part of the routine couture of a soldier. Further, with changing social

mores, this infantryman-of-the-future may well be a woman! Soon enough, "s/he" may also be a robot. If both sides are so equipped, war becomes more like a computer game! With few humans on the battlefields, it will save many lives — but may make war more common.

Amongst the new weapons, a powerful one is cyber-attack. A country's financial system, air-traffic control, rail movement, road-traffic regulation or electric power can be brought down by malicious software. Examples abound: from destruction of uranium-enrichment centrifuges in Iran, to power-distribution system attacks in India, to orchestrated attacks on a country's total digital network. Some cyber-attacks could cause more damage than bombs.

Apart from the covert attacks, cyberspace has become the battleground in a different way too. Wars are today no longer merely about on-ground victories; they are equally about public perception, morale, and building global support bases. These

battles are carried out through conventional media like the press, radio and TV, but are now mainly fought on social media platforms (which also influence the traditional media). Faced with a far superior military force, Ukraine — with the advantage of having a professional communicator as President — launched a war via airwaves, on TV and social media. By all accounts, it has scored huge victories here, and seems to have won global sympathy and support.

Looking ahead, what does India need to do? Ideally, we will never face a war, but the best way of preventing one is to prepare for it: a policy of deterrence. Allies and alliances (QUAD-like or other) may not help

much, as Ukraine has discovered. Little wonder that NATO is now expanded as "no action, talk only". Building indigenous technological capabilities — therefore, investing heavily in R&D — is a necessary step, as obvious as having military strength. Further, today it is comprehensive national strength (to borrow a Chinese phrase), a multi-faceted approach to security, which matters. Another key lesson from Ukraine is the crucial role of communication (especially social media) in today's hyper-connected and very vocal world. It has virtually consigned a more powerful neighbour to the global doghouse.

The biggest lesson, though, is the vital importance of social cohesion. The Russians seem to have presumed a divided society, with a strong pro-Russian tilt. Instead, the Ukrainians — led from the front by a suddenly rejuvenated President — stood as one behind their flag. Social harmony brought cohesion of purpose, stalling military advance. Till sovereign states exist, this may be the best way to counter bigger neighbours. ■

Kiran Karnik is a public policy analyst and author. His most recent book is *Decisive Decade: India 2030*, Galleto or Hippo.



# Counting daisies?



## TIME TO LISTEN

ARUN MAIRA

IT takes a child to tell an emperor that he is not wearing any clothes. My seven-year-old grandson made me realize that the Planning Commission and the Government of India were not listening to the people. Driving with me in New Delhi, in my government car with a red light atop, past beggars at traffic crossings, he exclaimed, "What's the government doing? Counting daisies?" The Planning Commission, of which I was a new Member, was trying hard in those days to prove, with statistics, that poverty had greatly reduced in the country since the liberalization of the economy.

I explained to Viren that evening what the purpose of the Planning Commission was, and I brought him the next day to the Planning Commission to show him my big office and to introduce him to the many personal staff attending to me, who spoiled him with biscuits and sodas. When Viren returned to his school in the US, he had to write an essay, like other students, on what he had done during his summer holidays. Viren wrote a 14-page book on the Planning Commission of India, with sketches he had drawn too.

At the end of his book, he referred to the Planning Commission as the "Planning Community of India". There was a picture of a man in a big office behind a big table, across which sat a skinny man with folded hands. Viren wrote below it, "The Planning Community is a place where all the poor people of India can come, and there will be someone there to listen to them, and then they will not be poor anymore." That's how the Planning Commission should function, he implied. But it wasn't. We were analyzing statistics and arriving at conclusions about the economy the 'scientific' way. We were not listening to real people to understand their real problems.

Thousands of farmers, many with their wives and old parents, camped around India's capital for a year during the COVID-19 pandemic, demanding that the central government hear their views about the new farm laws the government had rammed through Parliament without even a discussion there. The government refused them permission to come into the city to make their views heard outside Parliament. The government claimed that the views of stakeholders had been considered already and these farmers were obstructing reforms that would increase their incomes. Experts had examined the data, it claimed, and the best scientific minds had opined. The farmers said the experts were misguided in their solutions.

The Supreme Court had to intervene to break the impasse. It appointed a committee to hear all sides.

The committee submitted its report but the Hon'ble Court did not take further action. Meanwhile, the government conceded the farmers' demand to withdraw the controversial laws. It is obliged to go back to the drawing board. But will it listen to the farmers this time, whose incomes the government had promised to double and has failed to, and who are the real experts about the conditions in which they work and live?

The committee which was set up to listen to farmers, who are the principal stakeholders in the reforms, seems not to have heard them much, as records of its consultations reveal. Perhaps that is why the Court chose to set apart its report. The committee had interacted directly, either through video conferencing or physically, with only 73 of the

time, the experts dismissed most as not making sense.

The Planning Commission used less high-tech, traditional methods. Selected representatives of citizens were invited, TA/DA paid, to meetings in the Planning Commission. They sat around U-shaped tables, a senior official of the Commission at the head. The official would make some opening remarks; then each person around the U would be allowed to speak briefly. They would be assured their views were noted; meeting ended. The overall numbers so cursorily consulted would be totalled. Reading the final plans full of numbers, the people knew they were not heard. The Commission was "counting daisies", as Viren said, not listening to the people.

Photo: Civil Society/Shrey Gupta



Farmers camped on the borders of Delhi: The greatest indignity for a human being is to be considered merely a number

306 farmer bodies it had invited for consultation. The committee also claimed that of the 19,207 representations it received as online feedback on its portal, two-thirds supported the farm laws. But the report also shows that out of the 19,207 responses, only 5,451 came from farmers. Similarly, of the 142 representatives who participated in the meetings of the committee, only 78 were from farmer organizations while 64 belonged to industry bodies and other organizations. It is also very likely that the industry bodies made their case in more modern scientific terms than earthier, less "educated", tillers of the soil could.

I made it my business in the Planning Commission to observe how the government listens to citizens. The Maharashtra government mandated that city improvement plans be posted for feedback from citizens before implementation. Pune's plans were posted on the municipal website and citizens were invited to comment within 30 days. Slum dwellers could not download the large files. Even if they could, they could not understand the experts' language. When they could give any suggestions in

The greatest indignity for a human being is to be considered merely a number, like prisoners in concentration camps. When a human being is looked in the eye and listened to with respect, she is acknowledged as an equal human and becomes richer in dignity. Moreover, poor people in slums, those working in informal enterprises, and those toiling on farms and construction sites, who constitute the majority of Indians, have practical knowledge of their problems, and the possibilities in their circumstances. Tracking GDP and stock market indices cannot reveal the realities of the lives of 97 percent of India's citizens who have no investments in markets, and for whom GDP is pie in the sky. If the government really listened to them, its urban renewal, agricultural, and employment policies would have greater effect in improving their lives.

So, let's talk about how we can listen better to people not like ourselves, and also listen to the biases within our minds that are dividing us. ■

Arun Maira is the author of Listening for Well-Being: Conversations with People Not Like Us.

# Underfunding disability

BHARAT DOGRA

PRIORITIZATION of funds for disadvantaged sections is a long-accepted precept of fiscal policy in India, and persons with disability (PwDs) clearly comprise a very important part of disadvantaged sections. Yet there is increasing evidence that their welfare needs suffer due to underfunding.

This injustice is rooted, to start with, in significant underestimates of PwDs. In India most planning and policy for PwDs is based on an estimate of PwDs comprising 2.2 percent of the total population. Contrast this with the worldwide estimate made by the World Disability Report (prepared by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Bank) which says that about 15 percent of the world population is affected by disability while 2.4 percent is affected by more serious difficulties in functioning.

Earlier WHO estimates had found about 10 percent to be affected by disability but the latest estimates indicate a much higher number. The World Disability Report states that there is clearly an increasing trend due to more ageing people and more people with chronic diseases.

If the world average has about 15 percent of the population affected by disability, how can the figure be as low as 2.2 percent in India? The World Disability Report has also provided indications regarding areas where the number is likely to be higher than average. In countries where accidents, including road accidents, are high, where disasters are more frequent and serious, where malnutrition and poverty are at high levels, where substance abuse is a serious problem, there is a likelihood of disability levels being higher. On the basis of all these indicators, disability levels are likely to be higher than the world average in India.

Approaching this issue of numbers from another angle, we see that the 2011 census in India reached the percentage of 2.2 percent on the basis of seven identified disabilities, the most obvious ones. However, when the Rights of People with Disabilities law was passed in 2016, 21 disabilities were identified. So, after this major increase in the number of identified disabilities, how the number of PwDs can possibly remain at 2.2 percent, as the latest government data for 2019 states, is unclear.

Even on the basis of the government's estimate of PwDs being just 2.2 percent of the population, the budget allocations for them are shockingly low. The budget estimate for allocations specific to disability affected persons in 2022-23 is extremely low at 0.0084 percent of GDP. However, if the number of PwDs is closer to or higher than the world average of 15 percent, then this low allocation is simply unacceptable. Surely the government needs to do some serious rethinking on this issue, and the opposition parties should also raise this issue on behalf of PwDs.

Unfortunately, even this abysmal share of the GDP in the budget for PwDs has been declining —

from 0.0097 percent in 2020-21 to 0.0093 percent in 2021-22 to 0.0084 percent in 2022-23. No less inexplicably, as pointed out by a recent (2022) report of the Centre for Budget Governance and Accountability titled "In Search of Inclusive Recovery", the percentage of unutilized resources has also risen in recent times from 5 percent in 2018-19 to 16 percent in 2019-20 to a very high 35 percent in 2020-21.

One result of this denial of government funds is that most PwDs continue to suffer due to lack of assistive devices. Even if we view the data of only those who have been recommended assistive devices (not counting those in remote villages who

exceptional difficulties, this important scheme faced cuts rather than increases.

The Deendayal Updhyaya Scheme for Rehabilitation faced a cut from ₹130 crore to ₹83 crore of actual expenditure in 2020-21. The following year the BE of ₹125 crore was reduced to ₹105 crore.

Another problem is that due to the government's curbs on NGOs their ability to contribute for such help, which has been found to be significant in the past, has also declined. With their specialization, considerable experience and community reach, these organizations could have been particularly useful in taking the new law (2016) forward and



**India estimates that disabled people are just 2.2 percent of its population. How is this possible, when the world works with a 15 percent average.**

are entirely neglected), according to National Sample Survey data of 2018, only 24 percent of those with locomotor disability have assistive devices, while 31 percent of those with visual impairment and 19 percent of those with hearing impairment have assistive devices. Despite this huge challenge of catching up with actual needs, the ADIP scheme of Assistance to Disabled Persons for Aids and Appliances has seen frequent cuts. In 2020-21 its actual expenditure was ₹189 crore compared to the original allocation or BE of ₹230 crore. In 2020-21 the BE of ₹220 crore was cut to ₹180 crore. Thus, at a time of disruption and

also preparing updated reliable estimates of people who need help, but their scope for work has become greatly restricted due to new, uncalled-for curbs.

The Scheme for the Implementation of Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (SIPDA) faced a cut from ₹315 crore to ₹217 crore in 2019-20, then from ₹252 crore to ₹103 crore the next year, in terms of comparing BE with actual expenditure. In 2021-22, the BE of ₹210 crore was reduced to RE ₹147 crore.

There were cuts also in allocations for scholarship programmes and the Indra Gandhi National Disability Pension Scheme in the three previous years. The allocation for important autonomous organizations working in this area was ₹466 crore in 2020-21 but the actual expenditure was only ₹281 crore.

Mental health problems have been increasing during COVID times, requiring increase of resources but allocation for the national mental health programme has also faced cuts.

Clearly, there is a definite need for preparing more reliable updated estimates of the number of PwDs and stepping up funds' availability for their welfare in a major and significant way, in keeping with real needs and actual numbers. ■

Bharat Dogra is Honorary Convener, Campaign to Save Earth Now. His recent books include, Protecting Earth For Children and Man over Machine.





The bookshop when it was trying to survive

## Other India finally calls it a day

In the '80s the Alvares were ahead of Amazon, but ...

FREDERICK NORONHA

IMAGINE a bookstore run like a mini Amazon. Com, long before the latter was even thought of. The Other India Book Store (OIBS) used the mail-order approach, and very successfully, a decade before Jeff Bezos famously began operations out of his garage in the US in 1994.

Sadly, in March this year, OIBS, iconic bookstore that it has been, downed its shutters for the last time — no longer able to cope with the fallout of the pandemic, as also the current pressure that bookselling, publishing and distribution face because of deep discounts and digital editions.

OIBS was yet another of a long list of bookshops across Indian cities and towns that have folded up in recent times, in a country that already lacks sufficient bookshops.

It follows the closing down of bookshops in Pune (Popular, Manney's, Twist 'n Tales), Mumbai (Strand), Srinagar (Landmark), New Delhi (Full

Circle) and Hyderabad (Walden), besides possibly other smaller and unnoticed ones.

In Goa itself, bookshops have been struggling. The charming and quaint People Tree (run in both Delhi and Goa) along the Anjuna main road shut recently. So did the Candolim outlet linked to Khalil Ahmed's Broadway, a network which changed the face of bookselling in Goa. Some time back, operations linked to hotels like Fidalgo, Nova Goa or the Mandovi, which once kept interesting selections of Goa-related titles, dried up too.

Yet, the passing of OIBS is different. It began with a vision in the mid-1980s. It had a unique approach to books, to bookselling, to readers, and to building an interest in books.

At first it was known as the Third World Bookstore Society and its goal was to "celebrate and promote" literature from Asian and African regions.

Its conceptualizers and founders were Norma Alvares and her husband, the environmentalist, Dr Claude Alvares. Both are well known names in the

world of campaigns. Norma is a green lawyer of standing. Claude began as a freelance journalist and has made a nationwide impact as an environment campaigner. They were among the disaffected youth who returned to Goa, opting out of the rat race in the big cities of India, in the 1970s.

But, to understand more, one needs to see the vision and impact this tiny bookstore had. Goa is a small state, with limited book reading. Not for this reason alone, the OIBS focus was mail order.

It understood that there were many Indian cities which simply lacked a bookstore in those days. Plus, there was the reality that a whole lot of alternative information was being brought out in India, but was not easy to access. The bookshop helped to bring all this material together, make it visible, and also distribute it nationwide through postal deliveries.

To begin with, the bookshop focussed on alternative and NGO literature, content from English-speaking Asia and Africa.

"We knew there was a wealth of literature, so

many authors, and India knew nothing about them. We also reached out to countries in Asia and Africa for books," Norma told *Civil Society*.

They got a grant and went to Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya to scour bookshops. There was no single source, no master catalogue. They had to identify titles and take a call on what the interest in them would be.

African bookshops wanted Indian buyers to pick up their books through London, where the prices were marked in pound sterling. So OIBS negotiated to find ways to get the books across, and sold, at more affordable rupee rates.

OIBS became an institution that lasted several decades — not just for Goa but also for a huge clientele all over India and even people in other countries who had heard about it from diverse sources as word about them spread.

In a short while, it set up what was probably the first exhaustive collection of books about Goa. Many were self-published, once again making it tough to put together a definitive list of titles.

The bookshop was located in Mapusa, the main commercial town in North Goa, which is better known for its spices and colourful Friday market than books or things intellectual.

The modest and cluttered premises were atop an old hospital with the entry at the rear of the building. Yet, thanks to mentions in the *Lonely Planet* travel guide, which discovered it early, OIBS would draw many (especially young) foreign tourists who would drop in after visiting the town's popular Friday market.

OIBS was a not-for-profit, but did good business. At its peak, it attained a turnover of ₹25 lakh, a significant sum in those days.

*Lonely Planet* labelled it "the best bookshop" in Goa, noting that the bookstore stocked no titles from Europe or America — only publications from Asia, Africa or Latin America.

In the late 1990s, OIBS' then manager, Jerry Rodrigues, told this writer they were proud of making "this concept work" and "able to compete even with mainstream outlets".

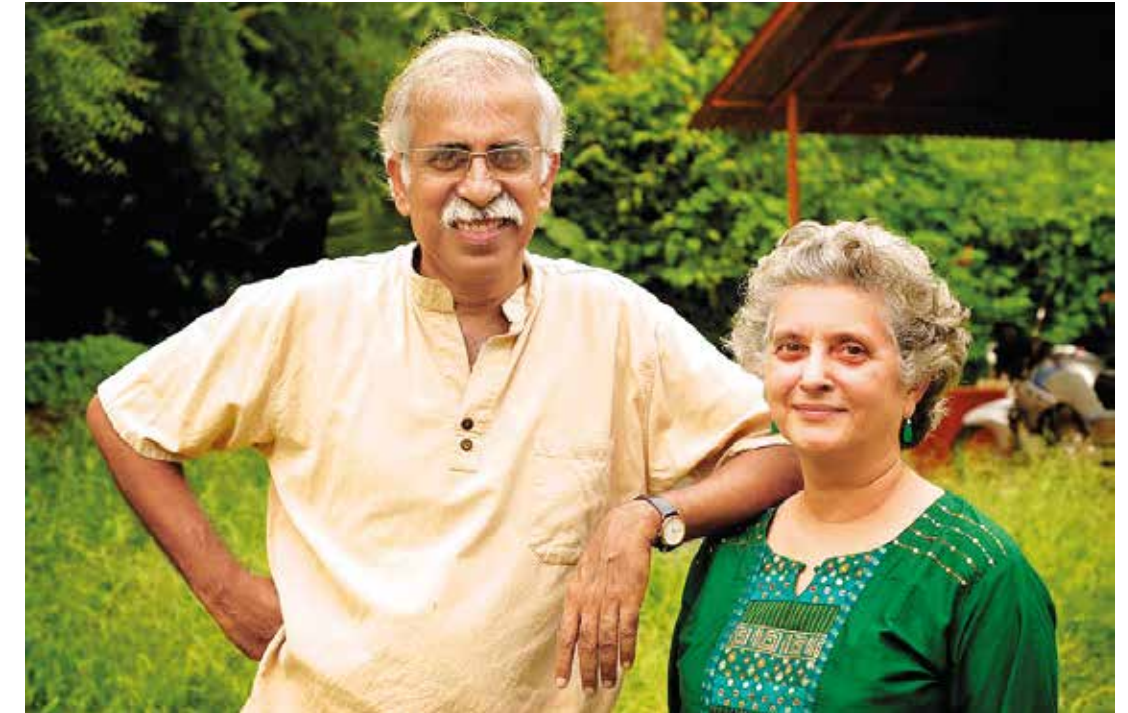
Initially, it aimed to promote books and magazines published in other parts of Asia, especially Malaysia and the Philippines. That led to a search for other Asian publishing on development, environment and Third World concerns.

In a world dominated by Eurocentric ideas, OIBS focussed on alternative Indian thought and writing from Asia and Africa. Among its selections were literature from Mexico, children's tales from Bhutan, a Malaysian lawyer's analysis of TRIPS and primers to understand Hindutva politics or the Lankan conflict.

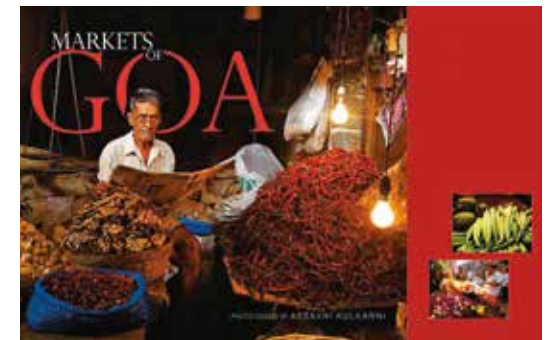
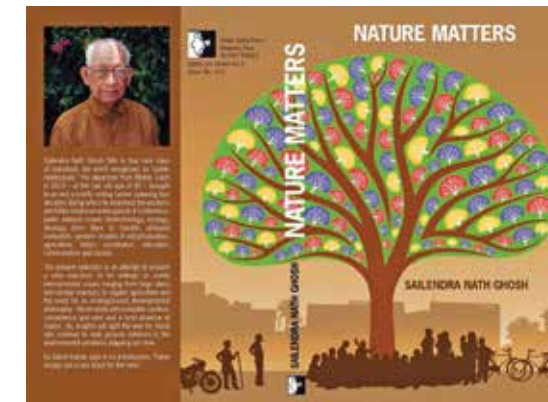
It also helped network diverse not-for-profit and activist groups across India, by making their publications visible. Its USP was that the books would arrive "at your door", packed well to withstand the rigours of Indian weather conditions and train journeys of thousands of kilometres.

The clientele grew. From NGOs to universities and colleges. Scholars recognized that NGO publications could often be closely tuned in to the grassroots. Bigger bookshops too began picking up what OIBS was distributing.

Their masterpiece was a carefully crafted catalogue of the books they offered and another on Goa books. Done with care and wit, the catalogues



Claude and Norma Alvares. And below: Covers of titles published by them



**In a world dominated by Eurocentric ideas, OIBS focussed on alternative Indian thought and writing from Asia and Africa.**

became collector's items as well as a source of information for book buyers.

One such catalogue listed a thousand titles, in tabloid size. This led to orders from Meghalaya and even the Andaman Islands. India Posts worked well in taking across the books.

The bookshop's partner, Other India Press, brought out some valued works like the *Organic Farming Source Book*, a 344-page tome that highlights the work of innovative and pioneering organic farmers across India. Former Union minister Maneka Gandhi's *Heads and Tails*, a book on animal rights, has gone into 13 editions.

OIBS' bestseller was undoubtedly *One Straw Revolution* by the Japanese guru of natural farming, Masanobu Fukuoka, with over a dozen editions. *Fish, Curry and Rice* was a widely-noticed environmental report on Goa. Its works on Dharampal changed the discourse within India.

Regrettably, the closure had been in the offing for



the past half-decade. The book business had changed. People were reading more and buying less with the ways that technology made possible. It would no longer do to send parcels of books by post. Greater online savvy was called for — all of which became too much for a standalone business to cope with. There just wasn't the cash to burn.

As Norma puts it: "We could not find anyone else who wanted to carry it on, in the same tradition it was run. Our manager left four to five years ago. The two staffers who had been with us for 25 years continued running it. But COVID-19 delivered a fatal blow. Sales just dropped. People were not at all interested in buying books. There's an overall crisis." ■



# Off to Cannes after two years, can't wait to be back there!

SAIBAL CHATTERJEE

THE Cannes Film Festival, the world's most important celebration of cinema, is approaching a landmark. The edition that is set to unfold on the French Riviera from May 17 to 28 this year is the festival's 75th.

It isn't, however, numbers that cineastes are focused on. The fact that Cannes is returning to near-normalcy after two years of uncertainty and that the quality of the line-up that festival director Thierry Fremaux has assembled is beyond any ifs and buts promise to be the biggest talking points during the 11-day event.

In 2020, the Cannes Film Festival was cancelled although Fremaux went ahead with the announcement of an official selection of films that earned the right to use a 'Cannes 2020' label as they travelled the world. In 2021, the in-person festival made a comeback but with several restrictions, including a COVID negative report every three days, in place. The attendance at the festival went down from the usual 40,000 to 20,000.

This year, Fremaux expects delegate and media registrations to rise to 35,000. The number is still short of the pre-pandemic mark because, he says, of the travel bans that are still in force in parts of Asia, which probably explains the absence of films from China in the official selection.

The Cannes 2022 official selection — at the time of writing, it is made up of 49 titles with the prospect of at least ten more films being added in coming weeks — isn't devoid of either diversity or depth. From the latest works of established masters to the films from emerging directors, the 75th Cannes Film Festival has laid out a spread that has something for everybody.

Nothing can rival the thrill of discovering gems from directors who are starting out in their careers or films from corners of the world that have minuscule movie industries. This year's official selection — seven of the titles in *Un Certain Regard* (which means 'A Certain Gaze') are from first-time directors.

At the other end of the spectrum, competing for the Palme d'Or (Golden Palm) are four previous winners, including a sibling duo who has claimed the festival's top prize twice. Belgium's Dardenne brothers (Jean-Pierre and Luc), Japan's Hirokazu Kore-eda, Sweden's Ruben Ostlund and Romania's Cristian Mungiu will have another shot at the coveted award alongside 14 other well-regarded directors.

The Dardennes — who won the Palme d'Or for *Rosetta* (1999) and *L'Enfant* (2005) — are back with another social-realist drama, *Tori and Lokita*, which tells the story of a young boy and an adolescent girl who have travelled from Africa to Belgium and have their friendship tested by the difficult circumstances that they are in.

Both Ostlund (winner of the Palme d'Or in 2017 for *The Square*) and Mungiu (*4 Months, 3 Weeks and 4 Days*, which won the prize in 2007) have new films that turn the spotlight on the state of



The Cannes red steps



The coveted Palme d'Or

humanity and world politics, something that many of the stories that will unfold on the screens in Cannes this year are likely to do.

In a post-selection interview to *Variety*, Fremaux said: "We always have to separate the artistic vocation of Cannes from the collective and political issues that are going on around the world. But obviously, political events are often reflected in films we show at Cannes because artists are making movies with social, political and environmental themes. What we strive to do at Cannes is maintain our legitimacy."

In *Triangle of Sadness*, a dark comedy, Ostlund serves up a commentary on what humans have become and how precarious socio-economic

hierarchies are. A luxury cruise ship under the command of a staunch Marxist captain sinks. A celebrity couple are stranded on a desert island with a group of billionaires and a cleaning lady. Equations are disrupted as the cleaning lady moves up the pecking order because she is the only one among the marooned who can cook.

Mungiu's *R.M.N.* raises questions about people who are under severe strain from rising intolerance. A man returns to his small village for Christmas and runs into a community overrun by strong anti-immigrant sentiments.

Kore-eda, 2018 Palme d'Or winner for *Shoplifters*, continues to explore the theme of broken families and parenting dilemmas in *Broker*, a film about



Crimes of the Future



Decision to Leave poster

"baby boxes" in which people can anonymously leave unwanted babies. A mother leaves her baby in a box and returns several years later to reclaim it.

A European festival held under the shadow of the hostilities in Ukraine cannot but contribute its mite to the unfolding discourse on war and peace. The Competition section includes *Tchaikovsky's Wife*, a film by dissident Russian director Kirill Serebrennikov, while Ukrainian filmmaker Maksim Nakonechnyi's *Butterfly Vision* has made the *Un Certain Regard* cut.

Serebrennikov was unable to travel to Cannes for the premiere of his previous two films — *Leto* and *Petrov's Flu* — because he was serving a suspended prison sentence (on what his supporters believe



Holy Spider



Brother and Sister

were trumped-up embezzlement charges) and was under a three-year travel ban. Serebrennikov is now in Germany, having been allowed to travel to Hamburg to direct a play based on an Anton Chekhov short story. So, he will probably be able to present *Tchaikovsky's Wife* in person.

"His film," Fremaux told *Variety*, "is a period drama that takes place in the 19th century. It's a great film that is classical and modern at the same time. So yes, we will be happy to welcome him." *Tchaikovsky's Wife* dwells upon the tumultuous relationship between the legendary Russian composer and his wife.

Talking of politics, two Competition titles that are likely to occupy a great deal of media attention

in Cannes are Iranian-born Swedish filmmaker Ali Abbasi's *Holy Spider* and the Egyptian-Swedish director Tarik Saleh's *Boy from Heaven*.

In the former, a family man sets out to 'cleanse' a holy Iranian city of street prostitutes. After murdering several women, his desperation grows rapidly as he begins to feel that his divine mission isn't receiving the public support it merits. *Holy Spider* is a police procedural that comments on the darkness at the heart of human existence.

*Boy from Heaven* serves pretty much the same purpose. In Saleh's film, the son of a fisherman is offered the privilege of enrolling at the elite Al-Azhar University in Cairo. On the first day back after the summer holidays, the grand imam of the institution collapses and dies. The resultant vacuum sparks an unseemly succession tussle. The film, described as a political thriller, is a rumination on the state of affairs not only in Egypt but also in the world at large.

While two world cinema octogenarians, Poland's Jerzy Skolimowski (*Eo*) and Italy's Marco Bellocchio (*Esterno Notte*) have films in Cannes 2022, the 79-year-old Canadian, David Cronenberg, a maverick who has never shied away from provoking the audience with his "body horror", returns to the Croisette with *Crimes of the Future*.

Although it shares the title of the 1970 Cronenberg film, *Crimes of the Future* is not a remake. If nothing else, the film starring Viggo Mortensen, Lea Seydoux and Kristen Stewart is expected to set the cat among the pigeons.

Gender parity has always been an issue with the Cannes official selection. Fremaux has consistently insisted that his choice of films isn't swayed by quotas. Last year, though the percentage of female filmmakers in the line-up wasn't exceptional, all the major prizes at the festival were won by women.

This year, only three of Competition titles have been directed by women but chances are that at least two of them — 76-year-old French auteur Claire Denis (*Stars at Noon*) and American filmmaker Kelly Reichardt (*Showing Up*) — are in with a chance of snagging awards.

We also expect Park Chan-wook (*Decision to Leave*), Arnaud Desplechin (*Brother and Sister*) and James Gray (*Armageddon Time*) to be on the radar of the jury when it sits down.

Last but not the least, Shaunak Sen's *All That Breathes*, which won the World Documentary Grand Jury Prize at the Sundance Film Festival, gets a Special Screening in Cannes this year. The film centres on two brothers who, amid Delhi's worsening air pollution and growing social unrest, devote themselves to rescuing black kites.

In the Special Screenings section, *All that Breathes* is in the company of documentaries by Ethan Coen (*Jerry Lee Lewis: Trouble in Mind*) and Sergei Loznitsa (*The Natural History of Destruction*), who has been disowned by the filmmaking fraternity in Ukraine because he has declared his opposition to Russian filmmakers being boycotted because of Vladimir Putin's invasion of his country. ■



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.

### Smell divine

Niyor makes perfumes that are natural and unusual. Founded by Ishan Bhasin in 2019, Niyor's perfumes are made from essential oils and are free of chemicals and alcohol. Niyor means dew drops in Assamese. Bhasin has invented a range of fragrances. Take your pick from Jasmine, Mint Chocolate, Onyx, Lavender, Allure Rose, or Lime Fresh. Some perfumes are named after places like Nicobar, a perfume with complex notes, or Alexandria. You can get a set of five perfumes for just ₹500. Or you can get your own perfume made by giving Niyor a call. What's more, all the perfumes are packed in pocket-sized bottles so you can slip one into your bag and spread fragrance wherever you go.

Contact: Ishan Bhasin 9874362633  
Email: niyor.perfumes@gmail.com  
Website: <https://www.niyorperfumes.com/>



### Organic cosmetics

Monica Jain, a botanist, nutritionist and naturopath in Delhi, founded Mom's Skin Essentials to make products for skin and hair without using harsh chemicals. Jain formulates her own beauty products with natural ingredients, including essential oils and cold pressed oils. Initially, her clients were members of her family but as word spread she began attracting more consumers. Jain offers skincare and haircare products freshly made and in small batches. You can buy whipped sugar scrubs and body butters, packed in glass jars, priced from ₹600-700. Their catalogue includes Ayurvedic hair oil and hair cleansers.

Contact: Monica Jain +919717974910  
Email: moms.skin.essentials@gmail.com  
Website: <https://www.momsskinessentials.com/>

### Cane comfort

Makon Home makes furniture and other products from rattan cane and bamboo. Pooja Moirangthem founded Makon Home to market cane products handwoven by women in Manipur. You can get blue and green outdoor cane chairs and tables as well as bamboo baskets, trays, planters and laundry baskets. Also available are handwoven and hand-dyed cotton bedsheets, curtains, throws, dupattas and cushion covers. One can also place bulk orders for cane baskets and boxes.

Contact: Pooja Moirangthem +919810306264  
Email: makonhome@gmail.com  
[www.instagram.com/makon.home](http://www.instagram.com/makon.home)



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.

#### HEART SURGERY FOR CHILDREN

Children who are critically ill with congenital heart defects are helped by the Genesis Foundation to find treatment. The support provided is comprehensive and includes specific surgeries (including neo natal), Cath Lab interventions, recovery and post-surgery care. Genesis Foundation was founded by Prema and Jyoti Sagar who lost their child to a congenital heart defect.

Their Hope Programme identifies children who need urgent medical attention. The foundation handholds beneficiaries through the entire process, from doctor appointments to follow-ups. They work with doctors, hospitals, families and guardians to ensure the child gets the best treatment possible. The foundation partners 28 private hospitals and its work has resulted in some pioneering surgeries and treatments.

Genesis Foundation has supported the medical treatment of over 3,500 critically ill children whose parents and caregivers were unable to afford treatment. You can volunteer with them or donate to their efforts. [www.genesis-foundation.net/contactus@genesis-foundation.net](http://www.genesis-foundation.net/contactus@genesis-foundation.net) +91 96 506 03 438

#### BANISH DRUGS AND COUNSEL ADDICTS

With many years of experience SPYM (Society for Promotion of Youth and Masses) provides services in substance use deaddiction and prevention. They started their first Drug Treatment Centre in 1985. Since 2010 SPYM has also been the largest shelter management organization in Delhi taking in homeless children, women, men and senior citizens on a daily basis. They run 65 shelters in the city along with drug de-addiction centres for juveniles, adults and the homeless. SPYM works as the Technical Support Unit of National AIDS Control Organization. You can volunteer with SPYM or donate to them. <https://spym.org> | [info@spym.org](mailto:info@spym.org) 011-41003872

#### EMPOWER WOMEN, FIGHT FOR CHILD RIGHTS

Based in Ahmedabad, the Friends Care Foundation's forte is empowerment of women and child rights. The foundation supports orphanages, education, the elderly, as well as relief and medical programmes. They raise funds for patients in V.S. Hospital and Civil Hospital in Ahmedabad. Friends Care Foundation also organizes distribution drives for ration kits, footwear, clothes, sanitary pads and food. They are currently running a fundraiser to aid widows in Ahmedabad and for their COVID relief programmes. You can volunteer for one of their projects for women, children, or for medical access. You can also donate to their efforts. [www.friendscarefoundation.org](http://www.friendscarefoundation.org) | [care@friendscarefoundation.org](mailto:care@friendscarefoundation.org) +91-7600999977

#### PROTECT CHILDREN, ENABLE EDUCATION

Set up in 2006, ATMA is a non-profit based in Thrissur that works for individual empowerment, family welfare and community development. They run a children's home for underprivileged girls who don't have parents or a safe home. The ATMA Gurukulam enables them to become leaders in their chosen field.

ATMA also runs a 24/7 help desk at the Thrissur Railway Station for runaway, unaccompanied or trafficked children to ensure their protection, security and well-being. The help desk is run in partnership with Childline India Foundation. ATMA has a Digital and Financial Empowerment Centre which offers short-term training courses to enable financial inclusion. It also has a Mobile Training Lab for effective outreach into rural and under-served areas.

You can donate to their efforts. Their community health programme includes counselling and medical aid for the poor.

ATMA runs a volunteer development programme which includes training and workshops. <https://atmafoundation.org> | [info@atmafoundation.org](mailto:info@atmafoundation.org) +91 487 2325232, +91 9400995232

#### PITCH IN FOR BETTER COMMUNITY HEALTH

Nada India Foundation works to end drug addiction and prevent non-communicable diseases (NCDs). Its aim is to enhance community health and well-being. Set up in 1999, Nada runs the Nada NCD Prevention Network which consists of grassroots organizations working on NCD prevention and risk factors. Nada India organizes workshops on social work intervention for the prevention and control of NCDs. They help rehabilitate people with addiction issues in Delhi-NCR through various events, workshops and also marathons. They also work on skill-building and sensitization. Nada India undertakes research as well. They have researched the efficacy of auricular acupuncture as well as issues such as child rights, substance abuse, and adolescent health. You can donate to their efforts or volunteer with them. <https://www.nadaindia.info> | [nadaindia@gmail.com](mailto:nadaindia@gmail.com) +91 - 9810594544

#### BRIDGING GAPS IN BENGAL'S VILLAGES

AHEAD (Addressing Hunger, Empowerment And Development) is engaged in sustainable rural development. The NGO, founded in 2008 and based in Kolkata, works in 12 out of 18 districts in West Bengal and in one district each in Jharkhand and Odisha.

AHEAD partners panchayats and zilla parishads and engages village communities in implementing its programmes. It also helps local village institutions to provide last-mile support to government programmes. AHEAD trains villagers in growing food and improving nutrition through farming in homesteads or on fallow land. It also offers training in farm-based livelihoods. AHEAD has an after-school programme which teaches students how to create community-based livelihoods. Teachers are also trained in using creative means to enliven textbook-based learning. You can donate or volunteer with AHEAD. <http://www.aheadinitiatives.in> | [ahead@aheadinitiatives.in](mailto:ahead@aheadinitiatives.in) +91-033-40670369

#### SUPPORT A CHILD IN NEED OF HELP

Ray of Hope was set up as a social service organization in Hyderabad by eight engineers from the IITs and IIMs. They aid and support Pocharam village in Telangana and have helped 200 orphaned children with housing, schooling, medical and recreational facilities. They also work with visually-impaired children to facilitate their education.

Through their Child Sponsorship Initiative Scheme, an individual or group can support a child financially to pay for tuition, housing, hearing aids and speech therapy. Or well-wishers can spread the word. They have plans to build a school in Pocharam village. You can donate to their efforts or sponsor a child through their sponsorship initiative. <http://rayofhope.in/>

#### USING LOCAL RESOURCES WELL IN ODISHA

Founded in 1997, Udyama, an NGO based in Odisha, strengthens and builds the capacities of local communities to rejuvenate the environment, improve incomes and educate people on sustainable use of local resources. They also work on disaster risk reduction and resilience building. They work directly with communities. Udyama also trains communities on disaster preparedness and on the protection of biological diversity.

Udyama has set up micro models for water recharge and conservation by building community ponds, and digging wells and percolation tanks. The NGO helps farmers adopt sustainable farming practices. It has been installing home solar lighting systems. Udyama undertakes programs for women and children relating to food, nutrition and sanitation for improving livelihoods and finding targeted solutions to hidden hunger and malnourishment in communities. Udyama also provides free computer training and digital learning courses to young dropouts. You can volunteer for one of Udyama's many projects or support them by donating. <https://www.udyama.org> | [udyama.pradeep@gmail.com](mailto:udyama.pradeep@gmail.com), [info.udyama@gmail.com](mailto:info.udyama@gmail.com) | +91 0674-2475666



# PLANT POWER

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.



## Purple Morning Glory

Found in the drier parts of the Eastern and Western Ghats, Purple Morning Glory or *Argyria cuneata Ker Gawl* is a little known wild ornamental species worth introducing in gardens. The plant's brightly-coloured trumpet-shaped flowers easily become a favourite of gardeners.

It is also a hardy eye-catching plant. Unlike other ornamental morning glories, this one is not invasive in nature. It has a profusion of flowers, many large, up to 5 cm across. A sprinkling of bright pink flowers on dark green foliage always lifts any garden.

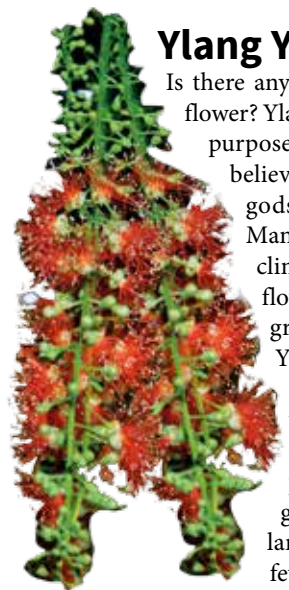
Purple Morning Glory can be clipped since its large clumps can sprawl on a trellis or run wild over a fence as a climber. It twines on all types of supports-vertical, horizontal or drooping. This kind of versatile role is played by very few species.



## Indian Oak

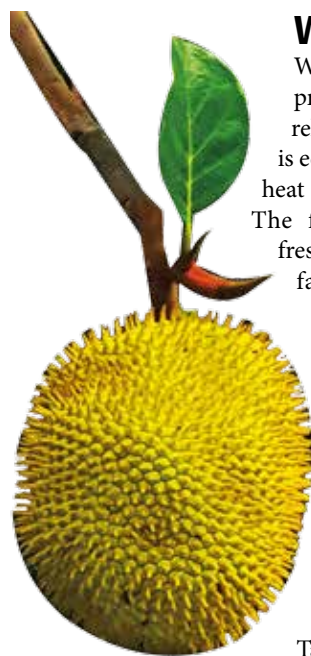
The Indian Oak is one of the most beautiful trees on Mother Earth. It is a freshwater as well as a marine loving evergreen and partially deciduous tree extensively used in the Ayurveda and Siddha systems of medicine. Numerous hanging racemes, up to 60 cm long, make this tree stunning and it enhances the landscape around

it. It has large flowers with numerous pinkish-white stamens which turn bright red post pollination. Indian Oak also has large and shining foliage, making it a lovely shade tree. It can be used to enhance building designs. Its flowers have a pleasing mild aroma. The tree can be planted in a row in gardens to serve as a decorative border. It can also be used as a windscreen or to create a private space. The tree attracts many pollinators, creating natural elements in urban settings. In traditional medicine Indian Oak is used to treat skin diseases, vomiting and diarrhoea.



## Ylang Ylang Vine

Is there anyone who isn't enchanted by the fragrance of this flower? Ylang Ylang Vine is highly recommended for religious purposes especially during the worship of the gods. It is believed that the person who offers this flower to the gods is instantly blessed. Popularly known as Manoranjita in most Indian languages, it is a large climber with highly intoxicating flowers. The vine flowers throughout the year. Its flowers are large and green and turn yellow when they mature. Ylang Ylang can be used to cover high walls or fences effectively. Bare walls can be decorated by growing this climber with its very shiny leaves. As it can easily grow vertically, it can be used to cover tall pergolas and roof-top structures in gardens. It is good at concealing unattractive structures and landscape features. Ylang Ylang is used to combat fever and as an antiseptic, aphrodisiac and hair tonic.



## Wild Jack

Wild jackfruit or *Artocarpus hirsutus Lam* finds pride of place in Indian kitchens. Wild Jack is a relative of our common jackfruit tree. Its ripe fruit is edible and sweet in taste. It is used to reduce body heat and treat anorexia (loss of appetite, taste, etc.). The fruit is also reportedly an aphrodisiac. Its fresh leaves are used as fodder for elephants and its fallen leaves are one of the best organic mulching ingredients for plant growth. The wood of the Wild Jack is used for house construction, boat-building and making furniture. Wild Jack is a lofty evergreen tree. Flowers are propped on 15-cm-long spikes, minute and greenish yellow in colour. Fruits are aggregated, globose to ovoid, covered with spine-like projections and orange-yellow when ripe. The tree is endemic to the Western Ghats of the southern states of Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu.



## The Calacanthus

The Large-flowered Calacanthus or *Calacanthus grandiflorus (Dalzell) Radlk.*, is a shrubby perennial that adds a dramatic look to any landscape. It is native to India. The plant produces large conical spikes with large, showy flowers and remains in bloom almost throughout the year thereby competing with exotic ornamental plants. Hence, this plant can keep the garden radiant and colourful all through the year. Its shiny green foliage contrasts attractively with its striking blue flowers. It is a beautiful addition to any garden when planted sensibly. Best of all, it is a shrub that does not require routine maintenance — like clipping, pruning, clearing.



## Kusum Tree

The Kusum tree is a monotypic genus in the family Sapindaceae. It can become a tall or a medium in height tree depending on the type of forest it finds itself in. It has a straight trunk and a very large, shade-spreading crown. In summer it is a cool tree to sit under and best suited for warm areas and hot summers. The tree's tender leaves turn to various shades of red from March to April making it look rather spectacular both in natural and man-made environments. Its flowers appear in long racemes interspersed with new foliage. Fruits are drupes, often echinate (thorn-like). Seeds are embedded in pulpy, tasty arils. The Kusum tree is used to treat skin troubles, rheumatism, and to combat hairfall. Kusum oil obtained from its seeds is handy for culinary uses and for lighting lamps. Its tender leaves are used as fodder for cattle. It is also a prominent nectar plant for bees! ■



Corporate Social Responsibility Initiatives...

## Network Partners & Associates\*

### National:

- All India Management Association (AIMA)
- FICCI-Aditya Birla CSR Centre of Excellence
- Global Reporting Initiative - India (GRI)
- Indian Institute of Corporate Affairs, Govt. of India
- National NHRD Network (NHRDN)
- The Economic Times
- Ranganathan Society for Social Welfare and Library Development (RSSWLD)
- BIMTECH Foundation

### International:

- CSR Asia (Hong Kong)
- Global Reporting Initiative
- Grameen Creative Lab
- International Business Leaders Forum (UK)
- UN Principles of Responsible Management Education
- UN Online Volunteer Programme

\*Above list denotes past and present partnerships.



<b>7000</b> + ALUMNI, INTERNATIONAL CHAPTERS IN LONDON, DUBAI, CANADA, US & SINGAPORE	<b>850</b> + ALUMNI AT SENIOR MANAGEMENT POSITIONS GLOBALLY	<b>62</b> + FULL TIME FACULTY DRAWN FROM LEADERSHIP POSITIONS IN INDUSTRY & ACADEMIA	<b>06</b> <sup>th</sup> RANK AMONG TOP PRIVATE B-SCHOOLS BY NHRDN & PEOPLE MATTERS BEST B-SCHOOL RANKING 2015	<b>34</b> YEARS LEGACY OF BUSINESS EDUCATION
INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCES WITH <b>64</b> + INSTITUTIONS	CLASS DIVERSITY STUDENTS FROM <b>26</b> STATES	WELL STOCKED LIBRARY HAVING <b>17</b> STATE-OF-THE-ART ONLINE DATABASES	SCHOLARSHIPS WITH AN OUTLAY OF OVER INR 1 CRORE <b>37</b>	FULLY SAFE AND BEAUTIFULLY LANDSCAPED WI-FI CAMPUS

## BIMTECH - A PLACE TO BE IN

### Courses Offered

- PGDM
- PGDM (International Business)
- PGDM (Insurance Business Management)
- PGDM (Retail Management)

### Birla Institute of Management Technology

Plot No.5, Knowledge Park II, Greater Noida, Delhi (NCR)  
Email: admission@bimtech.ac.in  
Tel: +91-120-6843000-10, 9355024501-10 extn.331/332  
Toll-Free-No.: 1800-5723-999

www.bimtech.ac.in



**TATA STEEL**

#WeAlsoMakeTomorrow



# BRINGING TOMORROW. TODAY.

Shaping young minds

Tata Steel has embarked on the "Thousand Schools Programme" to ensure elementary education for every child as stipulated under RTE in eight blocks in four tribal districts of Odisha & Jharkhand. This initiative is addressing the learning deficit among students and improving the school governance by empowering local communities. The program has directly impacted 2 lakh children in over 3,000 villages. In 6 years of the project, more than 90% habitations have become child labour free.



PRIMARY EDUCATION

[www.tatasteel.com](http://www.tatasteel.com) |     