

# Civil Society

THE YEAR IN CINEMA

## South sets the pace

By Saibal Chatterjee



*Kantara, the blockbuster success from Karnataka*

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# IN CIVIL SOCIETY EVERYONE IS SOMEONE

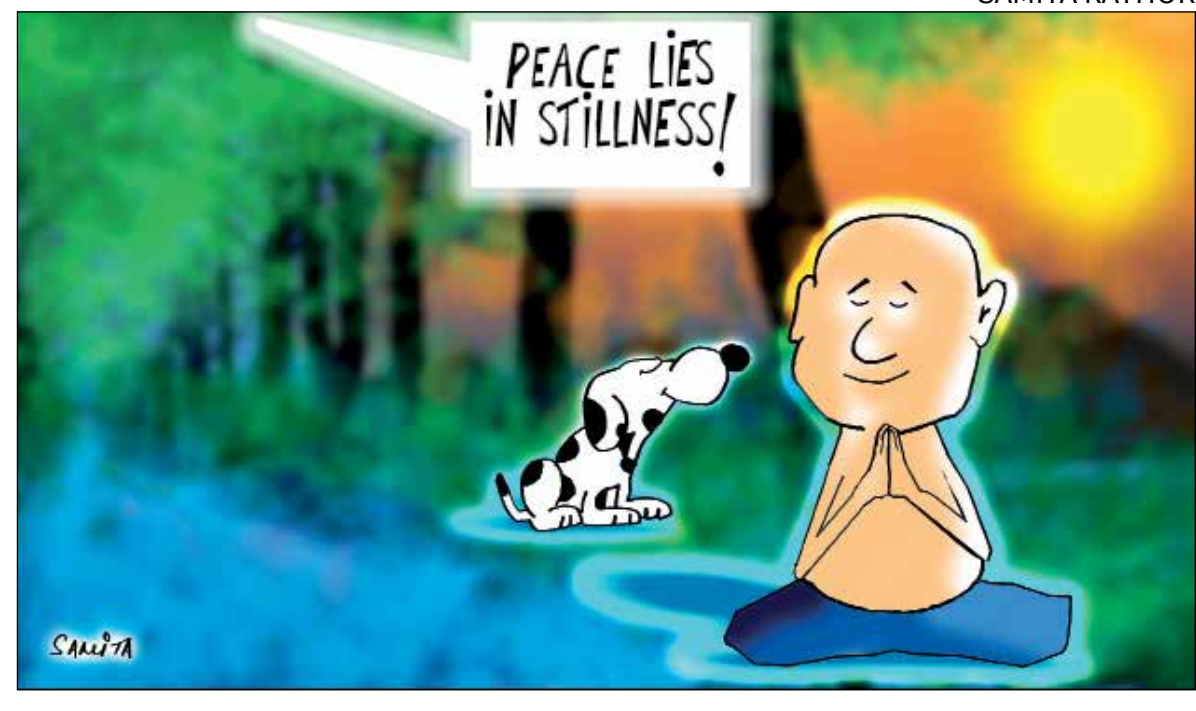


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IN THE LIGHT

SAMITA RATHOR



LETTERS



Green homestay

Thanks for your cover story, 'At home in a forest'. Having just returned home from a wonderful holiday in India, I have to say our last four days spent at Salban were the icing on the cake. What a truly fabulous place Jhampan and Sheema have created! It is a bit of paradise in the forest.

You are made to feel like one of the family with the most wonderful home-cooked food and very comfortable bedrooms. Jhampan and Sheema should be so proud of what they have created and their knowledge on just about anything you can think of is amazing. I will remember for many years sitting around the log fire in the evenings, and their wonderful home-cooked meals. I came away feeling I'd made good friends with them and their dog.

Marion White

Salban sounds ideal for a senior single woman like me to spend a

few days and recharge my batteries!

Sharada Nayak

Beautiful account of a committed couple who have truly made sustainability their mantra! Thank you for your inspirational work, Sheema and Jhampan. I would love to be in Salban soon!

Prabhat Pani

Road woes

Your interview, 'More people die in pothole mishaps than terror attacks', was very interesting. I hope the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways takes note of this interview.

They need to work with such technologies to eliminate accidents due to potholes, reduce

accidents, wear and tear of vehicles, save fuel and lower pollution. Some work is needed to make better speed-breakers. There are many speed-breakers on the road and they become vehicle breakers. Most speed-breakers are accident-prone. There are no markings on the speed-breakers to warn people to reduce the speed of their vehicle.

D. Madhusudana Rao

PotHoleRaja is doing a good job. Please tell us how the common man can help you.

Yashpaul Jindal

Back to swadeshi

I'd like to comment on Sanjaya Baru's piece, 'Atmanirbharata redux'. He writes: "With hindsight

today it would appear that Prime Minister Modi was prescient in his call for *atmanirbharata*."

It doesn't require a genius to know that we should be self-reliant as much as possible. Even my great-grandmother living in India knew that. The important thing is for the people in power to mobilize the masses, cut bureaucracy and nepotism, and develop non-corrupt administration. Hope that happens soon.

Krishna Chadalavada

Soul food

Susheela Nair's story, 'The *sattvic* meal', was excellent. I found it interesting and informative. The *sattvic* meal is especially relevant for people who need to improve their immunity. Thanks for this wonderful article.

Nalini Krishnankutty

I really enjoyed reading this article. I appreciated the description of various dishes, both north Indian and south Indian. I would definitely like to try them out. I also liked the author rounding off the article with helpful briefs about *sattvic* foods.

Deepak Chatterjee

Qutb Shahi Tombs

The Qutb Shahi necropolis is remarkable for its water system. The engineers of those days were really very smart. It's heartening to note we have revived some of those skills.

Nasneen

Letters should be sent to response@civilsocietyonline.com



COVER STORY

SOUTH SETS THE PACE

When a string of big budget movies from Bollywood flopped, films from the South filled the void with hyperlocal stories, gloss and technical finesse that captivated national audiences.

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A new year and hanging in

AS 2023 is ushered in, it is time to look back and ahead. The past year has been a tough one for us in this magazine in financial terms. Why so, you might well ask when there would appear to be money enough all around us.

The answer lies in the changing perception of what the purpose of media is and the ends it must serve. We all seem to be caught in the gross hurly-burly of an emerging economy. Changes in technology and the bewildering torrent of information in their wake has also skewed the role of media, altered how stories are consumed and, alarmingly, made it difficult to distinguish between real and fake.

Everyone's affected and we think it is a sad thing to happen because India is at a juncture when journalists are needed to go out and discover a zillion changes taking place in the country and the world at large and make sense of them for readers. Skills, credibility and inquisitiveness are needed, not curated offerings that by serving certain interests conceal more than they reveal.

At *Civil Society* we continue to do stories and interviews that we feel will surprise our readers and make them better informed. We see this as our role — to surprise readers with information they never imagined they would need to know. We cast our net far and wide and each month to put together an editorial offering that to us has some intrinsic merit. It isn't dictated by anyone. So, over the past year you would have found coverage of health, education, energy, cities, conservation, wildlife, medicinal plants and more. All this coverage is unique to *Civil Society* and we like to believe that we have taken real value to our readers. Our coverage invariably gets picked up and carried forward — it makes us happy that we are influencers of a higher quality of information.

Going ahead we propose to keep our journalistic goals firmly in sight. We will continue to do stories that make sense to us and apply the rigour and creative standards that we are happy to own. The civil society space is one of growing importance. Inclusion is the hallmark of a successful economy. A strong and resilient India needs everyone on board. Good journalism is as much the need of the hour as better governance and corporations with conscience.

This month's cover story on cinema is an example of the range we explore as a magazine. We bring you books, music, cooking, Ayurveda and travel with as much dedication as we do stories on water harvesting, pollution, human rights and poverty. We wish our readers and advertisers a very happy New Year. Thank you for reading us and supporting *Civil Society*.

*Shashi Arora*



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## Banwang Losu on a Wancho written language



Photo: Civil Society/Umesh Anand

Banwang Losu: 'We are just starting to teach the script and document folktales and folksongs which are dying'

# 'It took me 12 years to research sounds, come up with a script'

Civil Society News  
Jamshedpur

MUCH store is placed by early learning in the mother tongue. But what if a child is born into an oral language and if the way the community speaks varies from one set of villages to the next with intonation changing the meaning of the same word?

Such is the case with the Wancho tribals of Arunachal Pradesh. There are 56,886 of them, mainly in 67 villages in the district of Longding. But the dialects spoken by different village clusters differs so much that members of the community have to intuitively swap words to understand what is being said.

But now the Wanchos have a script of their own thanks to the innovative efforts of Banwang Losu of Kamhua Noknu village. He has brilliantly used sounds and objects native to the Wanchos to create an alphabet of 46 letters consisting of 15 vowels and 29 consonants. There are digits from zero to nine. Punctuation marks are the same as in the Roman script.

Linguistically, the Wanchos are classified into three groups: Upper Wancho (Tang group), Middle Wancho (Sang group) and Lower Wancho (Sang group). Each has its own dialect with variations in intonation completely altering the meaning of words.

The script for the first time empowers the tribe to communicate uniformly in writing. Tone markers make it possible to understand the Lower, Middle and Upper Wancho meanings of the same word. The

script is entirely steeped in local culture. The letters represent human actions, animals, birds, plants, tools, tattoo marks and so forth.

Losu says his purpose is to improve communication as well as keep the Wancho ethos alive. The script has been adopted by the government and is being taught in schools with primers as a language. On the internet it is available as a language in its own right.

It took Losu, who is now 40, all of 12 years to create the script. He started at the age of 20 when he was still in Class 11. Given an assignment to collect social and economic information from Wancho villages, he couldn't find the Roman equivalents for the sounds of the local words and this prompted him to begin creating a separate script.

As a child Losu heard only the words used by the Upper or Tang group of Wanchos. At a very young age he was admitted to the hostel of the Inter Village School, a government-run institution, where the use of Hindi and English by teachers bewildered him and reduced him to memorizing letters and numbers.

But he persisted, finally completing his board exams and then going on to become a schoolteacher, taking classes in maths and science. The decision to invent a script also came out of his memories of his struggle to get an education in alien languages.

In 2017, Losu was given a fellowship by the Tata Steel Foundation as part of its initiative to revive and promote tribal languages and culture. As a fellow, he has been travelling to other countries and gatherings within India to talk about the script and of course the Wanchos. He leads the Wancho Literary Mission. Edited excerpts from an interview he gave

Civil Society on the sidelines of Samvaad, a tribal festival in Jamshedpur:

**Q: What gave you the idea of inventing a script for the Wanchos?**

Actually I had no intention of developing this writing system. But when in Class 11 we started working on a socio-economic profiling of the Wanchos and I tried to put data we had collected into my mother tongue using Roman alphabets I found I couldn't. The Roman alphabets were not adequate for capturing our sounds. Our language comes under Tibeto-Burman languages and is a tonal language. Meaning changes with the sound.

**Q: Even a slight change means something completely different?**

Yes, a different meaning. It was also difficult to capture that sound in another script writing system. I was not aware of phonetics, being in Class 11, and there was nobody to help me. You know, an expert like a linguist. So, it took a very long time for research because of the variations in our community — that is, Upper Wancho, Middle Wancho and Lower Wancho.

**Q: And you are?**

I am Upper Wancho. So, I was not very familiar with the language of the Lower and Middle Wanchos. To create the script I had to learn their language also.

**Q: How many years did it take?**

It took as long as 12 years to finish my research. Then I showed my research work to my friends, some seniors, those who were well educated and in government service. After seeing my work they came forward to support me.

**Q: How do people from the Lower, Middle and Upper Wancho speak to one another? How can they understand one another?**

The sound is different. The tone is different. But we understand. It is like you use different words for the same thing. In Hindi, for instance, when you say *pahad* and *parvat* they are synonyms. So also *gagan*, *akash* and *asman*. It is like that. We recognize one another's words for the same thing. So in Upper sky is *gum/gun*, in Middle it is *jum/jun*, in Lower it is *rum/run*. When we speak we understand.

**Q: Can you give another example?**

For water, in Upper Wancho we say *csi* and also *sung*. In Middle it is *di/ti*.

**Q: Now for all three there is one script?**

For all three the script is the same. Only the tone marker is different.

**Q: What was the turning point for you?**

It was when I could not write our sounds using Roman letters. We needed some different tools to write the tone and sounds. So I was doing continuous research and collecting sounds in our language. Finally, I found 44 sounds with glottal stop. Glottal stop means to stop suddenly. Like 'Ka', 'La', 'Na', 'Pa'. These sounds were not available in other scripts like those used for Hindi and English. We have 15 vowels and 29 consonants with diacritical marks to identify the tones. The long mark means Upper language, the dot Lower language. The script doesn't vary. Only the tone does.

**Q: How many letters are there in your script?**

There are 44.

**Q: And you came to 44 based on the sounds you are using?**

Yes.

**Q: How did you choose the letters?**

It is all relevant to our culture, cultural items or crafts.

**Q: So where do they come from? There was no script.**

These designs come from tattoo marks, insects, birds, animals, crafts.

**Q: It means these are all creations of yours. You have created them?**

Yes, I have created them.

**Q: Okay, you took the sounds and then you came up with the letters based on what was around you from tattoo marks to animals to postures and so on.**

So that people understand easily.

**Q: Are children being taught in the script yet?**

Yes. In government schools. This is the schoolbook (he shows a primer) printed by the government of Arunachal Pradesh. This book is for the sixth, seventh and eighth standards. This is by the State Council of Education and Research and Training department of Arunachal Pradesh.



School primer: Common words in the Wancho script with Hindi and English equivalents

**Q: Is there a problem getting teachers?**

There is a huge crisis. So I approached the government to recruit teachers especially for this, but the government says it has no funds for salaries.

**Q: Are you then using the regular teachers?**

Yes.

**Q: But they don't know the script.**

We are training them. But it is not up to the mark. Not as we wish.

**Q: Of course there is a shortage of teachers, but does a child learn geography or history or mathematics in this script now?**

No. We are just starting to teach the script. Folktales, folksongs which are dying — to document them.

**Q: You are propagating the script which matches the way people talk and you are reviving your folktales and songs.**

Yes, at first only this. It is important to revive folktales and songs otherwise they will die. Next we will translate course material in science, social science, mathematics, geography.

**Q: For how long has this script been in use in schools?**

It was started in 2016. At first it was in select schools. Now the government has introduced it in upper primary and middle schools for Classes 6, 7 and 8.

**Q: This is an achievement. From a village in Arunachal you create this script. You're a leader. What does your community think of it?**

They are very happy.

Continued on page 8

# Dung divine: Dairy man's trays for seeds cut plastic, save water

Shree Padre  
Kasaragod

SHAJI Varghese has two skills: he is a farmer and a welder. Combining both, he has designed a machine which uses a die that makes pro-trays from cow dung instead of plastic. His innovation has caught the attention of farmers and the state government of Kerala.

Pro-trays, which look like egg trays, are the trend amongst vegetable farmers in the state. Instead of planting seeds into the soil, farmers raise seedlings in pro-trays made of plastic. This methodology has advantages — the menace of insects and disease striking young plants is less. If some plants get sick, it's easier to protect the rest. There is less expense on seeds and the survival rate, once the seedlings are planted in the field, is higher.

In fact, large-scale vegetable farmers don't sow seeds at all anymore. They simply place their order with the local nursery and, once the seedlings are ready, go in a vehicle and pick them up.

The downside is that pro-trays are made of plastic. Their popularity is contributing to the serious environmental problem of plastic waste.

But 41-year-old Varghese, who owns a dairy in Taliparamba in Kannur district, has found an elegant solution by coming up with the cow dung pro-tray.

Once the seedlings are ready, the farmer simply has to place the plant with the cow dung pro-tray it sits on into the soil. No raw material, apart from cow dung, is needed. To make the tray fresh cow dung is filled into the tray frame and pressed down. The water gets squeezed out. Then the tray is gently lifted and kept in the shade for five days. That's it.

The prototype Varghese has made is bulky. It weighs approximately 60 kg. "In future we hope to make a lighter machine, say, around 10 to 15 kg that can be easily operated by women and perform faster," he says.

Varghese made waves at the annual rural innovations event held by the Kerala State Council for Science, Technology and Environment (KSCSTE). His pro-tray compressing machine won the second prize of ₹25,000 at the annual Rural Innovators Meet held in Kasaragod recently.



Shaji Varghese

"It is a simple, sustainable, eco-friendly solution," says Dr K.P. Sudhir, principal secretary of KSCSTE. "Once the plant is ready you just need to place it in the soil. Though cow dung pots aren't new at all, I haven't come across such a simple pro-tray-making machine."

How did Varghese get this smart and green idea? He owns a few cows and runs a small dairy farm. Earlier he could sell dry cow dung from his farm for ₹300 a bag. But with the decline of rubber farming, demand for cow dung decreased. No one is ready these days to buy cow dung even for ₹200 per bag.

"I thought we needed an alternative to the plastic pro-tray that is being widely used. Why not value add to cow dung in the form of a seedling tray?" he says.

An experienced welder, he started developing the die and the machine in his workshop. Three months ago, with the first version ready, he began testing it. He used his cow dung pro-trays for raising different types of seedlings — chillies, tomato, brinjal and other vegetables.

The pro-tray has 25 depressions or cups for sowing seeds. Varghese points out its benefits. "First and foremost, it is biodegradable. You need less water for irrigation because cow dung has very good moisture retention quality. In plastic trays you need 26 days for transplantation. But in the cow dung pro-tray, seedlings grow much faster so you just need 15 days. You can directly plant a seedling with the tray. For many short

duration crops, you need less manure."

A question that people asked him was: how do you separate the seedlings for transplanting? "It's pretty easy. Take a long knife and cut it the way you cut a slice of bread," he replied.

After reports of Varghese's cow dung trays appeared in the media, he was flooded with phone calls from all over Kerala. Many people wanted to buy the mould and the trays. Owners of nurseries were particularly interested.

"To make different types of trays we will first have to make different moulds. I have started planning them," says Varghese. He intends to make dies for trays with four, eight and 15 cups apart from the one with



Shaji Varghese's machine and die make cow dung pro-trays in which seeds germinate and become plants that can be placed directly in the field

25 cups he has made now. Depending on the number of seedling cups required for each tray, the producer has to just change the die.

Cow dung pro-trays, he says, can be sold for about ₹30 each. "With the improved and lighter models I will be making, one can make about 25 trays in an hour," he says. "It is a bit early to estimate the price of the die and machine. But I hope to make it available for less than ₹5,000."

Dr Sherin B.M. from KSCSTE and this year's coordinator for the Rural Innovators Meet, said, "Plastic pro-tray makers claim that their trays are reusable. But after two or three uses, the tray gets torn and adds to the pile of plastic waste unlike this cow dung tray which is biodegradable. In villages, families rear cows. Women can start units making trays of cow

dung and sell them in addition to selling milk."

She had a useful suggestion too. "Young seedlings succumbing to fungal diseases is common. If a fungicide can be mixed in the cow dung when the trays are being made, it will protect the seedlings from fungal diseases. This could be an added incentive for buying these trays."

Cow dung, a very valuable manure, is wasted in rural areas for many reasons. Varghese's innovation has national implications. It can reduce the application of chemical fertilizers and be a livelihood opportunity for rural India. With a small investment, rural families can make cow dung trays and sell them to nurseries and homestead vegetable growers. ■

Contact: Shaji Varghese — 95625 69938

## Wancho script

Continued from page 7

**Q: You come from a farming family.**

My father and mother both are farmers. Now I'm basically a government servant. I am in a teaching job.

**Q: When you went to school you knew only the Upper Wancho dialect?**

Yes, at that time.

**Q: What language were you studying in?**

It was mainly Hindi and English, as in government schools.

**Q: And you had no difficulty using Hindi**

**and English though you only knew your Upper Wancho dialect?**

It was difficult. It's very difficult for children.

**Q: What was the process of learning?**

We used to learn the alphabets and numbers.

**Q: Fully paid for by the government?**

Yes. It was the Inter Village School in my village, Kamhuk Noknu.

**Q: The school was located in your village and it was serving a whole lot of other villages as well?**

Yes, five villages.

**Q: Your family home was in the village but**

**you used to live in the hostel?**

Yes. It was very strict at that time. We were never allowed to meet our parents except on holidays.

**Q: But they never came from your village.**

Not from my village.

**Q: So they were teaching from scratch? You were learning Hindi and English.**

And Assamese.

**Q: You were saying that in Class 11 you were 20. Delayed schooling, was it?**

Yes. In terms of the literacy we talk of, you know, we are still behind. I got to go to school very late. ■

## Samita's World

by SAMITA RATHOR



# From super broom to mobike as tractor

Kavita Charanji  
New Delhi

INDIA'S villages create inventions which are sometimes so useful they even catch the fancy of a global clientele. Take, for instance, Bullet Santi, a motorcycle-turned-tractor invented by Mansukhbhai Jagani, a farmer from Mota Devaliya village in Amreli district of Gujarat.

About 14 Bullet Santis have been sent to Kenya under a 'transfer of technology' agreement, facilitated by SRISTI and GIAN (Grassroots Innovations Augmentation Network). In 2003, Jagani got a US patent for his invention.

Almost 10,000 Santis and its adaptations, Sanedo and Handiyo, are sold every year. To keep up with the times, the current Santi model does not use a motorcycle chassis. Instead, new chassis are made for three-wheel and four-wheel ploughs or small tractors.

No wonder Jagani was one of those who stole the show at the recent People's Festival of Innovations, jointly organized by GIAN, which is part of the Honey Bee Network and C-CAMP (Centre for Cellular and Molecular Platforms), at the India International Centre to coincide with its Diamond Jubilee celebrations.

As many as 100 grassroots innovators and deep tech innovators — entrepreneurs whose start-ups are based on high-tech science — took part in the 10-day event, which was meant to showcase inclusive innovation, build collaboration and link innovators to investors, entrepreneurs, policymakers and the ordinary middle-class citizen.

Jagani was discovered by the Honey Bee Network. His invention was born of dire distress. Frequent drought, a shortage of fodder for bullocks, scarce farm labour and no water had made survival difficult for small farmers in his part of Gujarat.

When a desperate farmer approached him, Jagani decided he needed to find a solution. He took a cue from the Chhakdo, a local three-wheel taxi, to design the Bullet Santi. He replaced the rear wheel of an Enfield Bullet motorcycle with a two-wheeled attachment. A tool bar fixed to the attachment enabled it to be used in farming operations like ploughing, weeding, sowing and spraying. Better still, it was easy to assemble and take apart, so it could be used as a motorcycle as well.

Bullet Santi turned out to be a fuel-efficient, easy to operate farm machine. Though Jagani

has a patent for his invention in India too, he looks the other way when fellow farmers or small-time fabricators rig up his design. His philosophy is 'live and let live' — barring big companies, of course.

Today there are around 400 fabricators who make variations of his tractor and thousands of Santis ply the roads in Saurashtra. Jagani's invention has had far-reaching impact on employment and living standards in Saurashtra.

Another serial inventor who attracted attention was 24-year-old Bissu Hang Limbo from Geyzing, Sikkim. Limbo has devised the Noha Selroti-maker, a hand-held implement which helps make *selroti*, the traditional sweetbread of Nepal. He was motivated to invent it after he noticed how arduous it was for his mother to churn out *selrotis*.

Limbo's *selroti*-maker has a food-grade stainless steel cup which looks like a ship, with a hole to spread the batter evenly. It has a wooden handle to prevent the user's hand from getting burnt, a common hazard in making *selroti* manually. Thus far, Limbo has sold 200 pieces of his *selroti*-maker in Sikkim, West Bengal, Bhutan, Assam and Nepal.

Limbo studied at the local Industrial Training Institute. An inventor since the age of 16, he has devised 10 products which he says fill a gap in the market.

One such invention is his two-in-one Shena broom which has a pincer-like attachment at the bottom to easily rake up garbage. He said that a minister from Sikkim and an MP who visited the exhibition were so impressed by his broom that they picked up 15 pieces for a trial run.

The Shena broom has been recognized by the Department of Science and Technology's National Innovation Foundation (NIF). The government of Sikkim has given a grant of ₹1.5 lakh to develop it.

Other innovations by Limbo include a floor mat attached to a bell, a can in which to carry and dispense milk, a vehicle disinfectant bay for which he received ₹2.5 lakh from NIF and a corn roaster. He is now in the process of developing a cardamom harvesting machine.

"Some students in Sikkim are very active but don't have a proper platform to develop, showcase or patent their innovations. I want to be a role model for others in my state," says Limbo confidently.

It is the Honey Bee Network, founded by Dr Anil Gupta, which has been discovering innovators like Jagani and Limbo.



Bullet motorcycle becomes a tractor



One of the many improved variants of the Santi Bullet tractor



The Rocket Stove runs equally well on almost any fuel

foldable LPG cylinder carrier. Cold chain technology to transport perishables like farm produce. Ayurvedic oils that can be used for a range of ailments including diabetes.

Also, interestingly, there were deep-tech innovators scouting for investors to scale up their inventions.

Arun Cherian, a US-returned techie, is founder and head of Rise Bionics, an enterprise he founded two and a half years ago. He is looking for the right investors to support his pan-India plan.

Based in Bengaluru, Rise Bionics makes affordable and high-quality prosthetic and orthotic devices for the whole body. Cherian says, "Rise Bionics democratizes public access to high quality affordable assistive devices so that people can get back to their lives and integrate themselves into society."

The company uses advanced technology to make customized orthotic devices within just a day or two of scanning a patient. In contrast, public hospitals take up to two years to provide such devices.

Rise Bionics has simplified the procedure.



Rise Bionics provides customized yet affordable orthotic devices based on scans

All that local healthcare practitioners need to do is scan the head, hand, neck, spine or leg for assistive devices in just two minutes at the home or hospital. They upload the file to the Cloud. A central facility digitally modifies the file according to the diagnosis. Finally, the device is fabricated with sub-millimetre accuracy and couriered within a few hours to the healthcare provider for fitting.

So far Rise Bionics's devices have helped around 1,000 patients, including patients in the Indian Army, corporate and community hospitals and NGOs in South India.

Under its Help a Child Walk programme, Rise Bionics has tied up with the government of Karnataka to provide assistive devices to children with special needs studying in

government schools in Bengaluru or children from BPL or low-income families.

To expand operations further in India, Cherian hopes for closer collaboration with the Central government in the form of technology transfer, and orders from patients in rural India.

Robin Singh, founder and CEO of Cluix Llp, is another deep-tech innovator who describes himself as a serial entrepreneur. A graduate in electrical and electronics engineering from Thapar Institute of Engineering & Technology, Patiala, he has many inventions to his credit.

He has developed what he describes as a super-efficient wireless charging technology for electric vehicles. He has also developed and patented an automatic solution for protection of the electrical transformer, reactor and turbine from fire and explosion.

At the festival he showcased his latest innovation — a portable water quality analyzer developed by Cluix Llp. The analyzer monitors and consequently minimizes the consumption of undetectable contaminants through tests on eight critical drinking water parameters, such as turbidity, pH, free residual chlorine and lead, among others. Once the tests are done, the data can be shared with the Jal Shakti

Ministry's Water Quality Monitoring and Surveillance System.

Tracing his journey, Singh says during the Covid pandemic he volunteered with INMAS to invent green sanitization and outbreak containment solutions. He went on to win the Startup India challenge for developing the portable device for water quality testing. He received a grant of ₹25

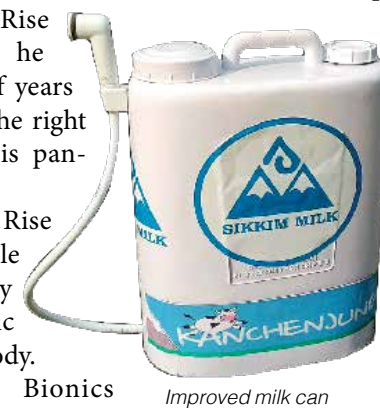
lakh from the Jal Shakti Ministry and one of ₹10 lakh from Nidhi Prayas. Once the project was incubated at IIT Delhi, Singh says he formed a team, worked out the technology, and developed the device this September.

"The Jal Jeevan Mission has ownership of the water analyzer, so even an anganwadi worker will be able to deploy it to test all eight water parameters bi-weekly. If there is an issue about any of the parameters, the data can be sent to the Jal Shakti Ministry for corrective action. Consequently, there will be no lag between training people, collecting water samples and sending it to a lab because there will, possibly, be a lab in each gram panchayat," says Singh.

For his start-up the government offers the biggest market so far. But Singh hopes to sell his invention to consumers and businesses too. Labs, schools, regional labs for water quality, packaged water manufacturers and residential societies would all be likely customers. ■



Portable water analyzer



Improved milk can



The warrior dance of the Nagas



Everyone together to celebrate the Adivasi way of life

## Johar, everyone!

NINE YEARS after it was launched, Samvaad is back as a space for tribal voices from across India and some other parts of the world.

Between November 15 and 19, tribal people (2,500 from 100 tribes is the count) showed up in Jamshedpur, asserting their identities and concerns.

Speaking different languages and dressed in their own styles, they came together for a vibrant and colourful parade.

This Samvaad followed a two-year hiatus because of the pandemic. The Tata Steel Foundation, organizer of the event, was active and in touch with tribal communities during the interlude, but an event was not possible.

It resumed this year with the old energy. From morning prayers and personal stories of courage and struggle to evenings reverberating with song and dance, Samvaad once again sought to be an open platform.

There were no curbs on the craftspeople, performers, musicians, healers and village activists who came. They pretty much spoke and did as they liked.

We showcase here some of the colour and spectacle of Samvaad captured in pictures shot for *Civil Society* by senior photographer Ashoke Chakraborty. ■



Paying homage to Birsa Munda, the freedom fighter, on the first day of Samvaad



The Sahariyas in an act filled with antics and acrobatics



Dwarf performers from Assam with the message of inclusion



A Santhal plays the sakhua at the inauguration



Munda tribesmen play the bher



A shared moment



Handicrafts on sale at the Samvaad venue

# A pond mission from the heart

Rakesh Agrawal  
Dehradun

WHEN Sukhdev Chamoli's 87-year-old father died, he was overwhelmed with grief. He too is an elderly 67. His mother had died some years before. "She used to say, die today and tomorrow is another day, which means the dead are soon forgotten," recalls Chamoli.

But he wanted to do something to preserve the memory of his parents. Chamoli says his father was a very hardworking man though somewhat quarrelsome. He spent long hours tending to his small 0.2-hectare terraced field, mostly to irrigate it. Chamoli also remembered him as a loving father to his three children.

On his mother's birthday, Chamoli decided to honour his parents' memory with an unusual gesture. He dug a tiny pond on his family field in Chamkot village in Uttarkashi district. "They will bless me for recharging the earth with water and rejuvenating my small field," says Chamoli.

He was inspired by Dwarika Prasad Semwal, an elderly Gandhian activist, who has been leading a pond digging campaign across Uttarakhand called *Kal Ke Liye Jal* (Water for Tomorrow) since 2021.

"I realized, as a Gandhian, that travelling is very educative. It taught me that you must align people's emotions with the change you seek to bring. The emotional connect is so important," says Semwal. "Water, land and forest are organically related, intrinsic to survival and close to people's hearts."

**He dug a pond in the family field to remember his parents. Change requires people to connect with emotion.**

Semwal also heads the Himalaya Paryavaran Jadi Booti Agro Sansthan (HPJBAS). For his water mission he realized it was important to get the women involved. In three villages, Chamkot, Kulhad and Siror, he set up a Ganga Sakhi Sangathan (GSS) and couched his message in religion. He said saving water was an intrinsic part of Hinduism.

"We worship Vishnu with water before any auspicious work is started. We offer water to Shiva. Quenching the thirst of humans and animals is *punya ka kaam* (a virtuous act)," says Mithila Bhatt, a GSS secretary.

Initially, the reaction was tepid. Then Semwal hit upon the idea of asking people to dig ponds in memory of their loved ones or to mark an important occasion like a birthday or anniversary.

The GSS, consisting of 70 members, took a pledge to dig small water pits. "In the old days kings, landlords and rich traders would dig ponds. The government pays zero attention to this so we the ordinary people have initiated this movement. Every member will dig 50 water pits or *jalkunds*, three feet wide and 1.5 feet deep in the memory of their ancestors or for a birthday or anniversary," says Ramkumar Chamoli, *pradhan* of Chamkot village.

Sukhdev Chamoli dug 50 water pits. Six villagers dug 185 pits which were bigger. "In this case one pit is counted as two," says Mahendri Semwal, president, GSS. Parvati Devi, a small farmer, dug a larger pit and Vinita Devi dug one on her wedding anniversary.

Altogether 3,500 water pits have been dug in Chamkot village and its adjoining mixed forest of three sq. km.

Last year the water mission spread to other parts of Uttarakhand. In Srikalkhal village of Uttarkashi district, 50 students of the Government



Women are leading the pond digging campaign



A pond is dug in memory of a loved one



It can be a large pond or a small water pit

Inter College dug four ponds to honour their teacher, Suraksha Rawat. They even harvested rainwater from the school building terrace, directing it to the four ponds they had dug. "It was my birthday on August 12 and my students gave me this precious gift," says Rawat.

In September, Dwarika Prasad Semwal asked Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami if they could dig a pond for him on his birthday. Dhami agreed and a pond was dug in Dudhli forest on the outskirts of Dehradun in honour of the chief minister.

Enthused by the wide media coverage his mission received, Semwal has decided to train young people in large numbers to become water soldiers. He plans to dig 1,000 water pits in Dehradun next year. ■

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THE YEAR IN CINEMA

# SOUTH SETS THE PACE

SAIBAL CHATTERJEE

BOLLYWOOD had expected fans to return in hordes to the multiplexes in 2022. They did rush back for the theatrical experience but not for the movies whose makers had pinned their hopes on a post-pandemic, back-to-business-as-usual run. A string of big-budget Mumbai films struggled to find takers. The void was filled by films from the South: *RRR*, *KGF 2*, *Pushpa* and *Kantara*.

The Bombay industry was plunged into disarray. The growing panic was best illustrated by the events that followed the October release of the teaser of the upcoming mythological extravaganza, *Adipurush*. Based on the *Ramayana* and starring Prabhas and Saif Ali Khan as Rama and Ravana, respectively, the movie, reportedly the most expensive ever made in India, promised eye-popping visual effects. What viewers got instead in the teaser was tacky computer-generated imagery. They gave vent to their disappointment on social media.

The director of *Adipurush*, Om Raut, alarmed at the flak the teaser received, deferred the release of the film by six months — from January 12 to June 16. It was time to return to the VFX machines and initiate a salvage operation. Raut admitted as much but to earn the brownie points that many Mumbai filmmakers have been chasing in the last few years, he declared grandly on Twitter: “*Adipurush* is not a film but a representation of our devotion to Prabhu Shri Ram and a commitment towards our *sanskriti* (heritage) and history.”

Raut’s explanation reflected not only a narrow notion of “our *sanskriti*”, but also complete ignorance of the fact that there is a substantial difference between history and mythology, something that many Mumbai film producers prefer to ignore in order to curry favour with the ruling dispensation.

All the reverses notwithstanding, it wasn’t a wasted year for Indian cinema. Away from the hurly-burly of commercial Hindi cinema, 2022 began with *Writing With Fire*, directed by Sushmit Ghosh and Rintu Thomas, earning an Academy Award nomination in the Best Documentary Feature category.

Early in the year, Delhi-based filmmaker Shaunak Sen’s *All That Breathes* won the Grand Jury Prize in the World Cinema Documentary competition of the Sundance Film Festival. In May, the film added another major triumph to its list of accolades — the Cannes Film Festival’s Golden Eye Prize for the best documentary.

*Writing With Fire* is about a newspaper run by Dalit women in Uttar Pradesh. *All That Breathes*, which establishes a metaphorical parallel between Delhi’s severe air pollution and the rise and consequences of divisive politics, is about a pair of Muslim siblings who rescue and save injured black kites that fall from the city’s smoggy skies.

Pan Nalin’s Gujarati-language *Chhello Show* (Last Film Show), an ode



*RRR* was a blockbuster from the South that filled the void created by failed Bombay films

to cinema of the pre-digital era, was deservedly picked as India’s official submission for the best international feature Oscar.

The year ended with young Shimla filmmaker Siddharth Chauhan’s *Amar Colony* bagging a Special Jury Prize at the Tallinn Black Nights Film Festival. So, independent Indian cinema did enough in 2022 to keep the flag flying.

When *Adipurush* hits the screen in mid-2023, it might prove detractors wrong but the storm it has run into and the filmmaker’s response to the kerfuffle sum up what large swathes of the Mumbai movie industry are up to: serving the agenda of hyping India’s past in keeping with a majoritarian political ideology.

In light of the above, consider the sorry fate that befell big films like *Samrat Prithviraj* and *Ram Setu*, both starring Akshay Kumar. They arrived in the multiplexes amid great fanfare but did not create so much as a ripple. The makers of the two films learnt the hard way that it is far easier to falsify history and peddle pulpy myths than to inveigle today’s audiences into buying into unabashed claptrap, especially when it is aggravated by incompetence.

Akshay Kumar, who delivered other resounding duds in 2022 (*Bachchan Pandey*, *Raksha Bandhan*) was by no means the only A-list Mumbai movie star who suffered debacles. Ranbir Kapoor’s *Shamshera* sank without a trace, Ranveer Singh’s *Jayeshbhai Jordaar* went out with a whimper, Ajay Devgn’s *Runway 34* did not take off at all and Aamir Khan’s *Laal Singh Chaddha* found itself in the red.

One film that did not do anything to disguise the demonization of a community with the aim of fanning hate — *The Kashmir Files* — mopped up huge profits but it did great damage to an industry that was once celebrated for its commitment to social harmony.

The massive vacuum created by the continued underperformance of

the Bollywood biggies at the box-office was exploited to the hilt by blockbusters from down South — *Pushpa*, *RRR*, *KGF 2* and *Kantara*. These pan-Indian hits changed the rules of the game. Bollywood suddenly realized that hyper-local themes were the order of the day.

Not that any of these South Indian films, barring the Kannada-language *Kantara*, had any intrinsic merit beyond their surface gloss and glitter. One might argue that the Telugu-language *RRR* is all the rage in the West today, getting two Golden Globe nominations. Its maker, S.S. Rajamouli has been adjudged best director of 2022 by the New York Film Critics Circle. The fact remains that it is just another manipulative, crass Indian potboiler, only flashier and louder than any Hindi competitor has ever been.

In *RRR*, history receives a merciless mauling. The scale and ambition of the movie are impressive, no doubt, but it devotes an inordinate amount of energy to trivializing the under-documented history of tribal resistance against the British Raj and other forces of exploitation about 100 years ago.

The nuances ingrained in the battles that marginalized communities wage or any meaningful detailing of time, place and character are beyond the ken of *RRR*. So, what was it about the movie that made the very elements that undermined the likes of *Samrat Prithviraj* and *Ram Setu* the reason for its enviable commercial success? Hard to put a finger on it.

In mythologizing the real struggles of real

personages, *RRR* appropriates the struggle of forest dwellers and tribals and uses it as a mere pretext for an SFX-laden, power-packed cinematic blitzkrieg that obviates all possibility of a genuinely empathetic account of the rebellion of oppressed people.

Nagraj Manjule’s *Jhund*, starring Amitabh Bachchan and a host of amateur actors, was at the other end of the spectrum. The three-hour film failed at the box-office but it showed exactly how the theme of caste and class oppression can be handled without turning it into a pretext for meaningless spectacle.

*Jhund* is a story of the walls that the socially marginalized run into, and are thwarted by, at every turn. It does away with two mythologies that form the foundation of mass entertainment in this country: one springs from the Hindu epics, the other from the dominant idioms of Indian popular cinema.

With both given a wide berth, what emerges in *Jhund* is a structure and a style that are embedded in the very nature of the struggle that the dispossessed are engaged in on a daily basis merely to keep their heads above water.

*Jhund* puts one of the biggest stars of Hindi commercial cinema front and centre and, drawing upon true events, constructs a narrative that captures a motley group of marginalized youth who, through a mix of good fortune, bold assertion and daring action, seek to break free from the life of petty crime, drug addiction and privation that they are condemned to due to social ostracism,



*KGF 2*: Surface gloss and glitter?



Ponniyin Selvan: Mani Ratnam's film is a treat for the eyes as much as it is for the mind



Sanjay Leela Bhansali's Gangubai Kathiawadi was a compelling tale of one woman's individuality

poverty and lack of education.

Between *RRR* and *Jhund*, 2022 saw big-budget Bollywood paying a high price for underestimating an audience that has evolved since the coronavirus outbreak thanks to its exposure via the streaming services to cinema of all kinds and from diverse geographies.

The steady stream of Bollywood disasters was punctuated by stray success stories, *Bhool Bhulaiyaa 2*, a horror comedy, and *Brahmastra Part One: Shiva*, a superhero fantasy that enabled Ranbir Kapoor to live down the abominable *Shamshera*.

*Brahmastra*, which kicked off Bollywood's first proposed superhero trilogy, has dashes of originality to go with its sweep, scale and style. That is not to say that it is perfect. Parts of it are tawdry, others are somewhat enervating. What it does well is stir up the conventions of the superhero that aren't slavishly derivative.

The most striking aspect of *Brahmastra* is its firm eschewal of the kind of hypermasculinity that films of this nature usually perpetuate. With Ranbir Kapoor anchoring the action and the screenplay steering clear of the peddling of unbridled machismo, the film's male protagonist willingly gives the woman in his life — played by the lead actor's real-life wife, Alia Bhatt — all the leeway that she commands.

Bhatt spearheaded another of the year's better commercial movies, Sanjay Leela Bhansali's *Gangubai Kathiawadi*. Women of the world's oldest profession plying their trade and fighting for justice in Bombay's Kamathipura in the Nehruvian era are at the heart of the film.

Factual accuracy isn't the period drama's strong suit. But Bhansali, aided by a gifted female lead, squeezes every ounce of dramatic effect out of the script. The result is an immersive film that does not feel overly stretched even though it runs a little over two and a half hours.

The visually sumptuous character study, more baroque than 1950s Bombay, is at once sweeping and intimate. With the aid of relentless drama and unwavering empathy for women sold for a song and forced to make a living in a hellhole, *Gangubai Kathiawadi* is a compelling tale of



Amar Colony got international accolades



Laal Singh Chaddha ended up in the red



Jhund showed how the theme of caste and class oppression can be handled

one woman's individuality, tenacity and meteoric ascent to power.

Meant to be a scathing satire on patriarchy and obscurantism, *Jayeshbhai Jordaar*, one of many releases in 2022 from Mumbai's top production banner, Yash Raj Films, that failed to connect with the masses, despite Ranveer Singh's no-holds-barred performance, lacked the requisite bite.

*Samrat Prithviraj*, also produced by Yash Raj Films, is, expectedly, a purveyor of fanciful history draped in the glossiest of Bollywood finery. It is colourful, action-packed and laced with music but spectacularly soulless. The hollow pomp and pageantry and the shallow drama that it serves up for the purpose of pushing an expedient narrative about India's past add up to a crashing bore.

Apart from the fact that *Samrat Prithviraj*, written and directed by Chandraprakash Dwivedi, plays fast and loose with facts, it reduces its principal characters to convenient caricatures, a tendency that most such Mumbai films, in their eagerness to please the masters they serve, fall prey to.

Another Yash Raj Films dud, *Shamshera*, was an excruciatingly bad



Chhelo Show: Pan Nalin's deftly crafted Gujarati-language film

action flick that inflicted more torture on the audience than the sadistic villain in the film does on the people he enslaves and brutalizes. After dragging the audience through two hours of absolute trash, it throws a mindless melee of a climax its way.

*Shamshera*, set in the second half of the 19th century, an era in which the heroine is allowed to be draped in new-millennium fabrics, throws a bundle of things into a cauldron that turns everything to ash and dust.

*Laal Singh Chaddha*, a reworking of the 1994 Hollywood hit, *Forrest Gump*, wasn't half as bad. Screenwriter Atul Kulkarni made a fair fist of the exercise. The film gave star Aamir Khan enough elbow room for expressing the emotional range of an awkward but doughty man coming to terms with the complex world around him without losing his innocence, optimism and gumption.

The principal strength of *Laal Singh Chaddha* stemmed from its stress on the power of hope in a time of violence and venality. Unity in diversity isn't a particularly original idea, but its reiteration, no matter in what form, had never been more necessary.

Unlike *Laal Singh Chaddha*, Aanand L. Rai's *Raksha Bandhan* is set in contemporary times. But it could be mistaken for a 1950s film, given its shockingly regressive ideas. *Raksha Bandhan* would have us believe that girls are worth nothing if they are not married and domesticated. It was headlined by Akshay Kumar (Bollywood's poster boy of all things *sanskari*) who played big brother to four girls incapable of finding their way in the world.

*Raksha Bandhan* summed up the redundancy of Bollywood's old ways.

It was hard to believe that anybody would make a film such as this in 2022. The girls of *Raksha Bandhan*, like the film and the industry, were caught in a time warp.

One of the high points of 2022 was *Ponniyin Selvan – Part 1*. Shrinking a complex five-volume novel into a two-part movie was no mean feat. Mani Ratnam pulled it off in style. The sprawling, spectacularly mounted film is an ambitious, near-flawless adaptation of a much-loved work of Tamil literature.

Needless to say, the tale makes huge technical and artistic demands on Ratnam and his cast and crew. They prove equal to the onerous task of attaining the magnitude, the pacing and the stylistic flourishes that the story demands and available image-making technology allows.

Ratnam does not resort to sensory or visceral overdrive, drawing strength instead from the smart script written by him, B. Jeyamohan and Elango Kumaravel and from a cast of actors at the top of their game. *PS-1* is a treat for the eyes as much as it is for the mind.

History and mythology coalesce purposelessly in *Ram Setu*, a cinematic abomination of epic proportions. The film occasionally cites books and other sources of knowledge to draw a convenient conclusion about the

**Ponniyin Selvan was one of the high points of 2022 with Mani Ratnam adapting flawlessly a much-loved Tamil novel into a two-part film and pulling it off.**

*Ramayana*, Lord Rama and Ram Setu that smacks of brazen mendacity.

Parts of *Ram Setu*, based on a story by creative producer Chandraprakash Dwivedi (who helmed *Samrat Prithviraj*, which was designed to serve a largely similar narrative) pretend to be science fiction. Experts are huddled in a floating laboratory aboard a ship out at sea and terms such as carbon dating, sonar imaging and global warming are bandied about. But let alone science, *Ram Setu* isn't even serviceable fiction.

Light and the magic that it can create combine to serve as the leitmotif of *Chhelo Show* (Last Film Show), Pan Nalin's deftly crafted Gujarati-language film about a nine-year-old boy in a remote Saurashtra village who falls under the spell of cinema and finds his metier.

The film revolves around the encounters and adventures that shape the boy's imagination. It is helped along by a cast of actors — no recognisable faces here — who merge completely with the milieu and enhance the enticing tangibility of the characters they play and the rural and urban spaces they inhabit.

The visually arresting, emotionally engaging coming-of-age tale plays out in the course of a summer about a decade ago and hinges on two decisive turning points — one that opens a door for the young protagonist, and one that changes the way films are made and delivered.

Two inventive Mumbai movies that made amends (towards the end of the year) for all the low-grade stuff that Bollywood foisted upon its fans were Amar Kaushik's *Bhediya* and Anirudh Iyer's *An Action Hero*. The former, filmed entirely in Arunachal Pradesh, subverted the body-horror genre to craft a tale about the man-animal conflict and the need to protect indigenous cultures and reverse the denudation of forests.

The latter tapped into the conventions of a revenge tale to construct a lively and entertaining commentary on notions of heroism, the nature of movie stardom, the scourge of media overreach and distortions of reality in a world where truth is invariably buried under an avalanche of noise, images and hysteria.

In the guise of a thriller, *An Action Hero* held up a meta mirror to Mumbai movies and the masses that consume them. The relationship between the two has been fraught of late. Repeated box-office failures have compelled complacent film producers to shed dead habit and return to the drawing board. ■

## End the plan holiday



**DELHI DARBAR**

**SANJAYA BARU**

WE have had ‘plan holidays’, that is, a break from five-year plans, many times before. In the late 1960s, the late 1970s and the early 1990s. The first and third were occasioned by economic crises that made extant plans impractical. The break from a five-year plan in the late 1970s (1978-80) was not referred to as a ‘plan holiday’ but as the adoption of a ‘rolling plan’. The latest plan holiday, if one can call it that, after the winding up of the Planning Commission in 2014, has lasted long and now appears to have outlived any purpose.

It is now clear that the Indian economy is stuck at a point well below its potential growth rate. Recall that after three decades (1950-80) of 3.5% growth, the economy logged 5.5% for two decades (1980-2000) and 7.5% for another decade and a half (2000-15). Even if the ‘high’ growth years (2003-09), when national income grew at close to 9.0% per annum, were an aberration that over-heated the system, generated non-performing assets and piled up debt, the fact remains that an annual average growth rate of 7.5% had come to establish itself as feasible and sustainable. The view since then has been that an annual average growth rate of 8.0% is India’s potential and sustainable growth rate.

Since 2015 the economy has performed well below this potential. While economists may continue to disagree on what the average growth rate of the economy was in the period 2015-22, it has certainly been below 7.5%. Not surprisingly, therefore, the Central government has now set for itself a 7.5% growth rate as its medium-term target growth rate. In other words, returning to the growth path of the first 15 years of this century.

There is, however, a problem. In the period 2000-15, India logged 7.5% at a time when the global economic and geopolitical environment was very favourable for the country. In the next two, if not five, years the global environment is unlikely to be as favourable. Already India’s exports are down, trade and current account deficits are up and the global economy faces the

threat of a recession in the West and a slowdown in the East.

Whatever the government and ruling party spokespersons in New Delhi may say in public about the economy, there seems to be an implicit recognition within policymaking circles that everything is not going well. An important reason for this is the worsening external economic environment, following the Ukraine war, the financial sanctions imposed by the US and EU and America’s monetary policy. While recent editions of the finance ministry’s Monthly Economic Report claim that the domestic economy is chugging along even though global challenges are mounting, it should be obvious to anyone that the two are not decoupled. The global economic slowdown



NITI Aayog has no policy-influencing ‘teeth’

and new challenges to globalization are bound to impact Indian economic growth.

It is true that the Indian economy has performed better than most major economies. India has been able to absorb the impact of COVID-19 and the policy response to it. It is also true that the domestic corporate sector has insulated itself to an extent from the slowdown. However, not only is the small, micro and medium scale industrial sector in the doldrums but employment generation has lagged far behind potential demand.

Indeed, even when macro-economic growth was reasonably high, above 7.0%, employment generation remained below par. This phenomenon of ‘jobless growth’ has been widely written about. The challenge is even more today as capital-intensity of all three sectors — industrial, agricultural and services — is going up. India needs medium- to long-term thinking on strategies for employment generation in an era of automation. Any such thinking also requires greater coordination between the Centre and the states.

It was not an accident that the Planning

Commission also became a federal institution as a meeting ground for Central and state ministries in a range of areas. The Commission and the National Development Council were two institutions that facilitated medium- to long-term thinking on policy and consultations between the Centre and the states.

When Prime Minister Narendra Modi abolished the Commission and created, in its place, NITI (National Institution for Transforming India) Aayog, no one in government paid any attention to what role the new institution would play in devising medium-term strategies and coordinating policy between the Centre and the states. Reduced to a government ‘think tank’ with no policy-influencing ‘teeth’, the Aayog has failed to devise a medium-term strategy for growth. Buffeted between a slowing domestic demand and investment growth, and growing external challenges the Indian economy requires medium- to long-term strategies that can be pursued by both the Centre and the states. Influenced by the private sector policy of reporting quarterly results, even governments have begun to report quarterly growth rates, however weak the data. While markets seek such short-term data, the economy’s rhythm is based on medium-term trends.

There is little steam in all the talk about ‘double engine’ governments — with the same political party in power at the Centre and in the state — if there is little coordination between the two engines. Experience teaches us that neither individual Central ministries nor the Prime Minister’s Office can function as ‘federal’ institutions that can facilitate policy coordination and the pursuit of medium-term development strategies.

With the finance ministry placing greater emphasis on public investment as an engine of growth and with the Central government deploying industrial policy to revive manufacturing activity there is today greater need for medium-term planning. Prime Minister Modi may fight shy of altering the name of NITI Aayog and reviving the Planning Commission, but he need not fight shy of altering the Aayog’s agenda and his style of functioning, building greater competence within the Aayog and greater trust between the Centre and the states. ■

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

## Food fashions and the future



**LOOKING AHEAD**

**KIRAN KARNIK**

A much-used slogan is *roti, kapda, makaan*. Of these, food is a survival necessity, and has long been on top of the agenda. The vagaries of the weather — now worsened by climate change — with their impact on crops, create uncertainty, making food a perennial point of concern. Irrigation and grain storage facilities assure availability but, even today, far too many go to bed hungry. However, for a large proportion of the population, food is no longer a concern.

Yet, for the well-off in urban India, food continues to be high on the agenda — for reasons other than scarcity or affordability. For them, it has moved from necessity to a lifestyle product. What and where one eats has become an important issue, as vital as the routine task of consuming a meal. The composition and content of a meal at home is driven not merely by taste, but by the latest recommended diet: organic, Keto, gluten-free, intermittent fasting, low-salt — endless possibilities, and new advice every day from “experts”!

Dining out entails choosing between the wide varieties of cuisines now available in restaurants. This, and the growing willingness to savour diverse foods, has resulted in a mutually reinforcing loop between availability and consumption. As a result, one can find restaurants that serve cuisines from different parts of India: besides the standard “South Indian” (*idli, dosa*) and “North Indian” (*chhole, paneer, chicken tikka*), one can also savour momos from the Northeast, Hyderabadi *biryani*, Bengali *machher jhol*, Rajasthani *dal bati* and much else from the diverse regional cuisines of the country.

For those with wider tastes, there are restaurants dedicated to food from Thailand, Lebanon (actually, Mediterranean), France, Japan, Korea, Burma — even Vietnam and Peru. Often, some of these are covered under the broad title of “Continental” or “Southeast Asian”. Then there are — far more common — those that serve Chinese and Italian food, though both pizza and most Chinese recipes have been so thoroughly localized that they have become a part of Indian cuisine!

Many restaurants are inevitably multi-cuisine, serving an assortment of Chinese dishes, pizzas, and burgers, besides standard Indian dishes. At dinner parties in homes, as well as at wedding receptions, it is common to have a mix of global cuisines, with pasta hot stations competing with wok-fried noodles; *teppanyaki* with *shawarma*; *tandoor*-fresh kebabs vying with piping-hot *dosas* or *appams*. Clearly, as far as food is concerned, globalization is alive and thriving!

Apart from what is served (including fusion foods, the new form of globalization), restaurants are categorized by how they serve (self-service, takeaway) and how fast they do so. Fast food outlets (quick-service restaurants, or QSRs, in hotelier jargon) compete with fine-dining restaurants — those that provide a more formal décor and ambience (at higher prices!)

A sub-category of fast food is roadside or street food, available off a *thela*: a low-cost and

session in the sauna. Where you eat and what you eat will be an indicator of your personality and identity. Already, common-interest groups are forming around food choices, some as strongly bonded as those around golf or bridge or Sufi music.

Another important element of the food story has been the change in status of the “manufacturer” — the lowly cooks and the under-appreciated *khansamas* in remote “travellers’ bungalows” of yore have evolved into much-celebrated chefs. To be recognized and spoken to by one in upmarket restaurants is the ultimate dream of status-seekers. Doubtless, in years to come, some chefs will be celebrities, competing for popularity with cricketers and movie stars. Meanwhile, some home chefs have turned entrepreneurs (triggered by COVID lockdowns) and, with so many single-person or both-working households, the demand for such home-cooked food is bound to boom.

Meanwhile, the sad state of health — especially amongst the poor — evidenced by the dismal figures for child stunting, wasting, infant mortality and so on is largely due to poor nutrition. While access to food has vastly improved, proper nutrition is still a problem. In future, thanks to science, this may well be overcome by packing all necessary nutrients into a single tablet. This may extend further to one tablet providing the day’s need of food: a quick “meal” for those in a hurry. QSRs may be replaced by UQM — ultra-quick meal — tablets.

What is all this doing to the social aspect of eating, of friends and family breaking bread together? Already, the concept of a daily family meal, exchanging the day’s events and banter over the dining table, seems to be dying. Will eating in a group be limited to an occasional fine-dining outing? Food has always been a part of culture (and is now a major force in India’s soft power); how will the new food practices alter culture?

Molecular gastronomy is now in fashion. Artificial intelligence and data analytics will take this further and combine it with tastes, specific diet requirements and other factors, creating a new field: computational gastronomy.

With all these changes, as we look ahead, it is interesting to speculate about how this evolution in the way we look at food and eating will play out in all its dimensions: nutrition, business, science and sociology. ■

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



Food has become a lifestyle product for the well-off in urban India

mobile QSR. These generally cater to the floating population around busy office complexes, markets, and transport terminals, providing an essential service in a cost-efficient manner. Some attain fame for the quality of food and become drive-in eateries for car-owners. Their equivalent on highways is the *dhaba*, a wayside restaurant intended mainly for truck-drivers. Here too, some have a reputation which attracts the well-off to specially drive down to savour the best-tasting food. As a result, some — like their city brethren — have evolved into fancy (and high-priced) restaurants, no longer catering to a low-income clientele. The same evolution has taken place for the “shacks” on Goa beaches. In many ways, restaurants reflect both the inequity and diversity of our society.

In the years ahead, food seems set to be a lifestyle definer, like one’s clothes or accessories. A leisurely meal in a fine-dining restaurant is as different from a hurried one at home, as a quick, functional bath is from a slow, relaxing

# Floods now on climate agenda



**LIVING RIVERS**

**VENKATESH DUTTA**

**M**ORE and more towns and cities across the world are facing the threat of extreme flooding. Climate change is increasingly being held responsible for the rise of such extreme weather events. The connection between global warming and floods is clear. A warmer atmosphere is capable of holding and subsequently releasing more water. Rapidly rising flood waters are usually brought on by intense rainstorms in a shorter timeframe. They are called flash floods. When a river exceeds its banks and inundates otherwise dry terrain during flash floods, settlements are badly affected.

There is broad consensus among governments regarding the science behind climate change. Nevertheless, there is a lack of consensus over who is primarily accountable, how to monitor emissions reduction targets, and whether poor and vulnerable countries should be compensated for climate-related damage. Poor and vulnerable countries blame rich countries, who are the big emitters, for speeding up the rate of warming that causes such catastrophic climate events. At the recent international negotiations, they demanded a damage fund that could compensate them for the loss.

The fight for global climate justice takes formal shape inside the framework of the United Nations. Therefore, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) has set up a yearly Conference of Parties or COP. This is the highest decision-making body under the UNFCCC that convenes once a year to review actions taken to contest global climate change.

Climate justice has been a central discourse at the annual COP. Many civil society organizations and groups have been pushing the agenda of compensating vulnerable countries for the catastrophic impacts of climate change. The most compelling impact has been floods whose magnitude, impact and frequencies have increased in South Asia.

At the beginning of September 2022, Pakistan experienced record rainfall, which caused one-third of the country to be

submerged. The destruction and suffering caused by the floods cost almost \$30 billion worth of damage and economic losses. Global warming had indeed intensified the impact and severity of the floods. With the horrific destruction still vivid in everyone's mind, Pakistan joined forces with other frontline countries to advocate for financial compensation for the damage at COP27 held at Sharm el-Sheikh in Egypt. Despite the best attempts of rich countries to drive a wedge between developing countries on the issue of loss and damage, Pakistan, being the president of the G-77 plus China negotiating group, was successful in keeping poor countries unified. The message from Pakistan was clear: 'loss and destruction is not about charity; it is about climate justice.'

Developing countries typically negotiate as a group known as the G-77 plus China, which



*The central discourse is climate justice*

was created in 1964. It is the largest intergovernmental organization of developing countries in the UN. Incidentally, Pakistan held the chairmanship of G-77 (which rotates on a regional basis between members from Africa, the Asia-Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean) for 2022. In spite of its name, the group now consists of 130 developing countries. These countries came together and became the most unified and cohesive group at COP27 despite their own differences of interests, perspectives, and socio-economic settings. As part of the expanding movement for climate justice, the pressure from climate-vulnerable countries became a major force in developing a momentum around loss and damage, and unifying it under a single banner.

The floods in Pakistan sparked an argument at COP27 over who should pay for such losses. The devastating floods made it difficult for world leaders to turn a blind eye to setting up a loss and damage fund. In the negotiating

rooms, there were frequent but relatively silent demonstrations calling for climate justice. The media from around the world broadcast activists and climate specialists calling out big emitters like the US, UK, European Union, and many other global leaders.

At COP27, participants reached an agreement to pay for loss and damage to vulnerable countries that had been severely impacted by climate-related disasters. During earlier COPs rich countries rejected such proposals. This time, John Kerry announced that the US would also support the creation of such a fund in principle. In this way, the US reversed its longstanding policy of opposition. This is seen as a significant step in the process of developing a specific fund to compensate for loss and damage. The G7 and the V20 (also known as the 'vulnerable twenty') initiated additional commitments of seed funding of over \$200 million under the Global Shield against Climate Risks initiative.

Since COP26 in Glasgow, there has been rising demand for global action towards setting up a climate fund. The idea was to provide relief to poor and developing countries from extreme events and also help them in developing mitigation and adaptation against climate change. The first set of actions taken under the UNFCCC was the Kyoto Protocol, which was signed in 1997 and continued from 2005 to 2020. The Paris Agreement, which replaced the Kyoto Protocol, took effect in 2016. Despite the carbon reduction commitments by the big emitters, the Paris Agreement is not sufficient to limit a rise in average global temperature of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.

The warming of the planet is causing an increase in the frequency and severity of natural disasters such as floods, heat waves, wildfires, and droughts. These climate-related extreme events are causing huge loss to humans, animals and the entire ecosystem. The loss and damage fund is not even close to being perfect. For the time being, it is just an empty pot of money, built on promises. It is certain that the issue of climate loss and damage is going to remain controversial; obviously, some countries will back down from this resolution in the days to come. Despite all of its inadequacies, there is no other option. The difficult part will be working out the details with the transitional committee, which will begin its work this year. ■

*Venkatesh Dutta is a Gomti River Waterkeeper and a professor of environmental sciences at Ambedkar University, Lucknow*

# Dog-feeding is not compassion

**MEGHNA UNIYAL**

**N**GOs and feeders, led by the Animal Welfare Board of India (AWBI), have long held that feeding stray dogs on the streets is a "compassionate duty", an "occupation" and even a "religious right". While sounding seemingly benevolent, the AWBI, in fact, continues to obfuscate and mislead.

A duty is just that — a duty. It is not a right nor does it give rise to any corresponding rights to carry out that duty, that too while infringing on the rights of others. There is no law or act in India that allows or even mentions feeding stray animals on the streets, leave alone labelling it "compassion" or an "occupation".

Additionally, right to religion is not absolute and is subject to public health and order. Courts have held that "a sharp distinction must be drawn between religious faith and religious practices". What the State protects is religious faith and beliefs that are an "essential and integral part" of the faith and not religious practices and customs.

In October 2022, the Supreme Court, that has been hearing multiple cases challenging the validity of the ABC Rules for stray dog control since 2009, stated that there would be instances of stray dog conflict that "require urgent hearing and decisions would depend upon relevant prevailing facts in an area or location" and directed parties to approach their "jurisdictional High Courts for appropriate relief".

Consequently, in an ongoing case regarding the stray dog menace, the Nagpur Bench of the Bombay High Court passed interim orders prohibiting feeding stray dogs in public places and directing feeders to do so either after adopting the dogs or in shelters.

Expectedly, this was challenged by 'animal rights' NGOs and feeder groups in the Supreme Court and the matter was heard in November 2022.

The AWBI is a statutory body whose primary functions include furthering the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act (sheltering of homeless animals, preventing straying of animals). Instead, AWBI members and lawyers — presumably paid for by public money — spend a disproportionate amount of time promoting the maintenance of homeless dogs on the streets, casting aspersions on the character and motivations of the citizenry and making unsubstantiated and defamatory allegations of

cruelty against them. All dog attacks, they claim, are in "self-defence", and that "the human aggressors shall be the only ones to blame".

These "human aggressors" include children and senior citizens mauled to death by stray dogs and, most disturbingly, this is put forward repeatedly and brazenly in official AWBI literature and court submissions.

Conversely, individuals and groups affected by stray animals and their feeding in public places and who endorse animal welfare (as opposed to 'animal rights') also intervened as caveators in the case and argued that the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (PCA) Act promotes sheltering of homeless dogs and that stray dog feeding in public places is illegal and harmful.

The result was that while the apex court did not prohibit stray dog feeding in public places



**While the apex court did not prohibit dog feeding in public nor sheltering of dogs, it did not set aside the High Court order.**

nor direct sheltering of homeless dogs for the time being, it did not set aside the HC order nor the ongoing High Court proceedings either. Importantly, for the first time the apex court used the words "public nuisance" and "endangering people" with reference to the activity and directed that the same must be avoided.

A few days ago, another bench of the Supreme Court dismissed a petition by a feeder stating that "keeping stray dogs does not mean you will take them to streets, fight and affect

the lives of the people".

The apex court also allowed for relocation of stray dogs when necessary, something prohibited by the AWBI — with zero authority to do so — even if a pack of stray dogs has mauled a child to death. According to the AWBI and animal rights NGOs, 'evil humanity' is cruel to animals and so stray dogs, in "self-defence" and due to "provocation", kill people once in a while. So what?

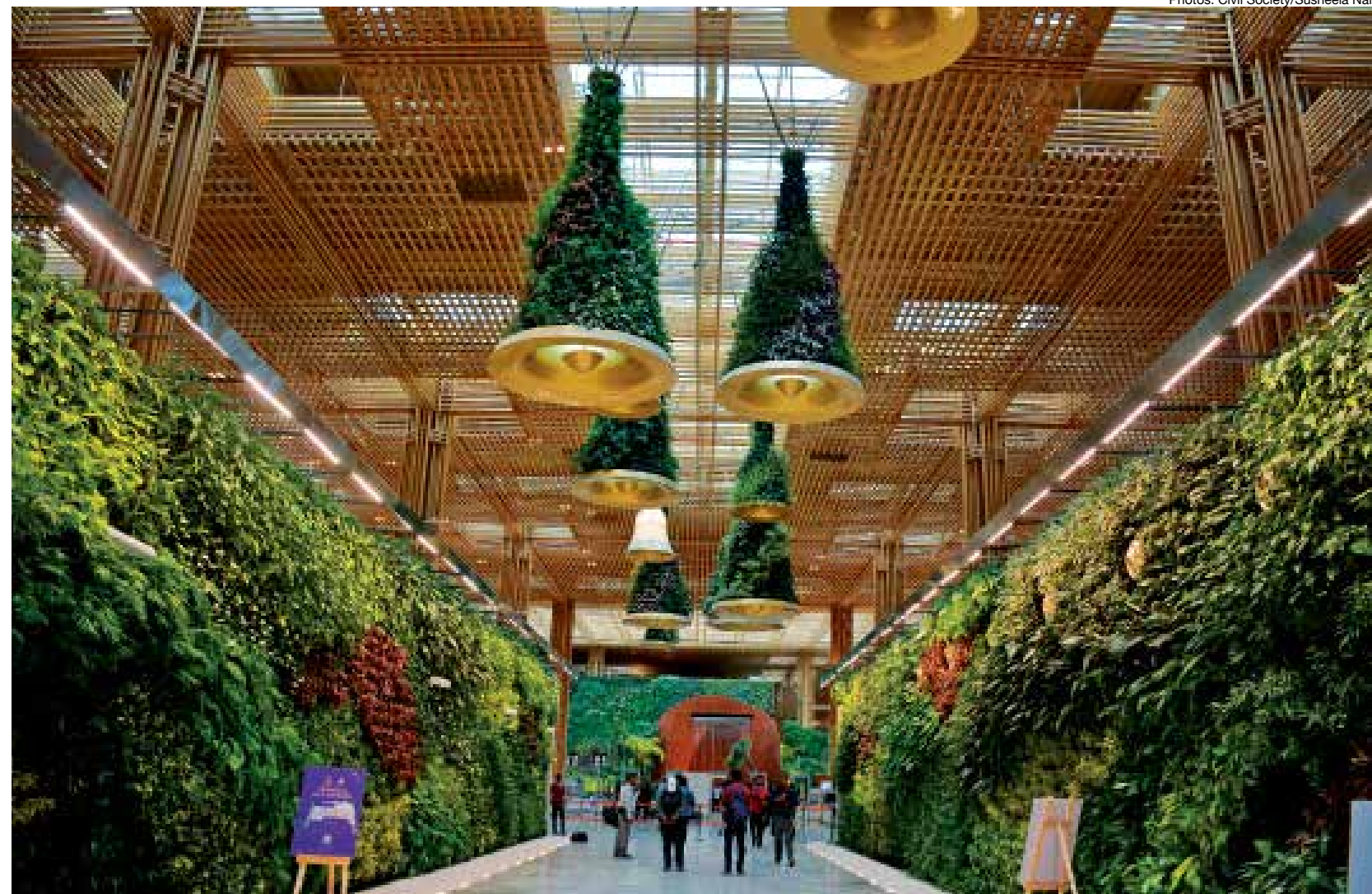
While considering the sheltering of homeless dogs, the apex court asked where "street dogs" could go since they did not have private residences. It is pertinent to note here that it is the AWBI and the ABC Rules that have invented an entity called "street dogs" not found in the parent Act nor found in state municipal laws.

The term slyly implies that since these dogs are on the streets, they belong there. Whereas the PCA recognizes that they are simply stray dogs — domestic, companion animals, roaming the streets because they are abandoned/lost or were born and continue to live there due to homelessness. A small but critical distinction, but one that muddies waters enough to justify the mutilation and killing of citizens by "street dogs".

The AWBI has also misled courts claiming that "hungry dogs get aggressive". However, science and numerous studies on dog behaviour tell us just the opposite — hungry dogs will go in search of food and not expend their limited energy on aggression towards people. Further, that dogs who congregate due to feeding naturally become territorial about areas where they are fed and are therefore aggressive towards anyone in those spaces. This is not rocket science, it's why dogs make such excellent guard animals — they guard the home, a place where they are looked after and fed.

Exploding numbers of stray dog attacks on citizens, resulting in strife and conflict in society and the suffering and deaths of both people and dogs due to the maintenance and feeding of stray dogs on the streets, has reached a tipping point in the country. The PCA Act, state Municipal Acts and public nuisance laws mandate removal of dogs from the streets to protect both people and dogs. The only conflicting policy and aberration are the ABC Rules that must be repealed with immediate effect. ■

*Meghna Uniyal is Director & Co-founder, Humane Foundation for People and Animals*



Photos: Civil Society/Susheela Nair

Passageway lined with vertical gardens

## GOING ALL GREEN IN TRANSIT

### Bengaluru airport is an eco-friendly marvel

**SUSHEELA NAIR**

THE first sight that struck me as I entered the swanky Terminal 2 of Bengaluru International Airport Limited (BIAL) were the green vertical walls around the terminal with hanging gardens cascading from the terminal roof on bells and veils suspended from the ceiling. Filled with lush greenery, the airport provides a unique outdoor experience in the comfort of an indoor environment. The verdant ambience also extends to the green lagoons within its premises and the extensive forest belt between the terminal and boarding piers.

Designed by New York-based architectural firm SOM T2, the 255,661-sq.-m terminal is a tribute to the lovely city of Bengaluru. T2 is a first-of-its-kind 'Terminal in a Garden' and gives Bengaluru airport the status of being the ideal extension of Bengaluru city's green aesthetics. The terminal and the area leading up to it are designed to give passengers an experience of walking in a garden. Right from the entry into the airport

campus from the Main Access Road (MAR) to entering T2 and then boarding the aircraft at the piers, passengers will be visually treated with varying shades of green. The four guiding principles that have influenced the design and architecture of T2 are: terminal in a garden, sustainability, technology, and art and culture.

Hari Marar, MD and CEO, BIAL, said, "What makes T2 special is not just its scale and size, but also the fact that it's inspired by Bengaluru city. Built as a terminal in a garden, T2 reflects all that Bengaluru stands for — a green, modern, innovative, sustainable, and culturally rich city. Over the past 14 years, BLR Airport has evolved as the Gateway to South India and with this next phase of expansion, we aim to position the airport as the new Gateway to India."

The key highlights of T2 are 255,661 sq. m of built-up area, 25 million passengers per annum (MPPA), passenger boarding bridges, 30 departure immigration counters, 35 arrival immigration counters, 90 check-in counters, 34 fully-automated self-baggage drop units, automatic

tray retrieval systems and 40 self-service check-in kiosks. It is also the first airport to offer 5G services.

**3,600 PLANT SPECIES** T2 is a treasure trove of unique flora and fauna. One can spend endless hours gazing at the vibrant blooms of a myriad orchids, anthuriums, lilies and lotus species. "We have sourced a total of 620 endemic plants, over 3,600 plant species, 150 palm species, 7,700 transplanted trees, 100 varieties of lilies, 96 lotus species and 180 rare, endangered and threatened species from multiple ecological habitats. Plant species have been selected based on their need for water. They are nurtured by a smart auto irrigation system. The hanging plants are grown in soil-less media. Various sensors have also been installed to alert us about the health of the green walls," says Prasanna Murthy, head of landscape, Bengaluru airport.

The garden surrounding the terminal maintains a microclimate that is two to three degrees lower than its surroundings. The flora and fauna, skylight filtered through delicate lattices of bamboo, and indoor waterfalls inspired by the waterways of Karnataka all provide for a sensorially rich transit for passengers. Inspired by the temples and homes of Karnataka, the bells and veils of T2 are covered with plants.

**ENGINEERED BAMBOO** Strolling around the terminal, the interiors clad in engineered bamboo inspired by traditional Indian cane weaving grabbed my attention. Besides being fire retardant and long-lasting, it lends the terminal a contemporary yet classic look. Apart from enhancing the beauty of the terminal, these are also essential components contributing to the sustainability pillar of T2. Terminal 2 is created with sustainability principles woven into the design. Equally impressive are the unique bell-shaped lighting fixtures crafted out of banana fibre paper, embellished with Kasuti inspired motifs.

The gardens and forest cover naturally cleanse the air. Solar panels and daylight harvesting result in overall 24.9 percent energy savings. Rainwater harvesting, six major rainwater-fed ponds with 413 million litres of water to cater to the airport's requirements, and multipurpose lagoons where pollutants are cleaned naturally — all these are an integral part of the long-term sustainability plan. The bamboo-covered skylights reduce use of power to light up the space. The bamboo-clad pillars lend an earthy touch.

Other sustainability initiatives include use of natural materials such as bamboo, local granite, exposed brick work and so on. Terminal 2 has a skylight area of 10,494 sq. m. which is almost 12 percent of the roof area. Enhanced indoor air quality strategies like entryway systems and interior cross-contamination prevention, treated reverse osmosis (RO) water used for heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems further strengthen the airport's sustainability practices. Based on the



Seating area with palms and exotic orchids



Bamboo-clad pillar exudes an earthy look

sustainability initiatives, T2 is recognized as the largest terminal in the world to achieve LEED Platinum Pre-Certification by USGBC (US Green Building Council), prior to the commencement of operations.

The upcoming integrated solid waste management plant will convert biodegradable waste to fuel and manure, leading the airport towards sending zero waste to landfills. The airport believes in going green and its environmental management mantra is simple — responsible reduction, recycling, rejuvenation and re-vegetation. With such innovations, Terminal 2 has established several benchmarks in sustainability with 100 percent usage of renewable energy across the campus.

**SEAMLESS YATRA** One of the key driving forces behind T2 is innovation and technology that's been applied rationally to make passenger experience simplified, seamless and effortless. Several integrated technology features power the terminal to keep it customer-centric, operationally efficient, and innovative.

Several technological innovations are being executed for passenger ease. This includes using Digi Yatra — from entry into the airport until boarding, passengers can experience an easy check-in process, self-baggage drop, faster security check and convenient boarding.

Digi Yatra remains one of the smartest and easiest processes that has enhanced passenger journeys. With the 'your face is your boarding pass' technology, travellers can pass through security checks without any hassles.

The face of a passenger today has become the single biometric token, and BLR Airport has been at the forefront of developing this smart security implementation to facilitate more accurate screening and higher passenger throughput since 2017. BLR Airport supported the Government of India in rolling out Phase 1 successfully on August 15, 2022.

The 60 artworks featuring works of 43 artists from Karnataka and across India, exhibited at strategic locations, made me pause, reflect and enjoy. The insightfully curated art and décor elements are indeed a visual delight that have the ability to make

passengers observe, introspect and feel rejuvenated.

The focus of the Art Programme at T2 is to exhibit the cultural diversity and unique art forms of Karnataka in particular, followed by other South Indian art forms. The Art Programme is based on two themes — Karnataka's rich heritage and culture and the broader Indian ethos, and Bharata's *Natyashastra's* Naurasa or nine emotions. All these facets accord T2 a special status as a terminal that is modern yet rooted in culture, and an airport that offers a memorable 'destination' experience to all travellers.

One of the heartening features of T2 is that it is user-friendly for the visually impaired with several signages in Braille along with the tactile flooring. ■

# Out of whack? Try Praana

SURMAYI KHATANA

USHER peace and spirituality into your home with Praana's range of soy candles, essential oils, diffusers and roll-ons. Started by graphic designer Peali Dutta Gupta during the trying days of the Covid-19 pandemic, Praana's mission is to help people achieve a state of mindfulness and calm.

"Each essential oil has certain qualities. Lavender, for instance, is calming. The aim is to find balance by using the senses," says Dutta Gupta, a practitioner of reiki and meditation who is doing a course in aromatherapy. She wanted to share her ways of meditation, aromatherapy and spirituality with other troubled souls during the lockdown.

Dutta Gupta has her own studio, Pealidezine, in Vasant Kunj where Praana too is located. She has worked with newspapers like *HT City*, *The Tribune*, and designed coffee table books for over 20 years. All Praana products have been beautifully packaged by Dutta Gupta using her skills as a designer with an eye for detail and style.

The Chakra Collection — the first that Praana began with — is inspired by the seven *chakras* of the body. Each essential oil is matched to a *chakra* and can be used for meditation. The *chakras* are imbued with the seven colours of the rainbow. The team of graphic designers at Praana tuned into the vibes and perception of each rainbow colour to match them to an aroma.

"Each *chakra* has a certain essence that helps energize the *chakra*," says Dutta Gupta. The Chakra Collection consists of seven diffuser oils and is priced at ₹2,100.

The soy candles are hand-poured, vegan, and organic. The Chakra Collection of mini soy candles is priced at ₹1,900 and can be sent across India. For people trying spiritual healing and meditation for the first time, the Chakra Collection is a perfect starter kit.

The Zodiac Collection, the latest in Praana's catalogue, includes aromatic candles and essential oils specifically matched to Zodiac signs. The diffuser oils have been blended for each Zodiac's traits. Calming and relaxing oils like lavender, frankincense and peppermint are for Aries who are considered bold and fiery. Spicy scents like sandalwood and rosemary are for Aquarians to spark their creativity. For those interested in the Zodiac, the collection makes for a fun and intriguing gift.

Praana's Elements Collection focuses on air, fire, water and earth, the four elements that comprise the earth. The earth diffuser oil and candles are a blend of sandalwood and jasmine and the fragrance is earthy. Rosemary and frankincense come together for the fire element. A soothing jasmine and orange blend describe water. Lavender and the sharp notes of eucalyptus depict air. The colourful and aesthetic candles are priced at ₹1,700.

Behind Praana is a small team consisting of Shamik Kundu, product development manager, and Karan Khanna, head of operations. They are both also part of Dutta Gupta's graphic design studio.

Leela and Muskaan are product packaging assistants. The packaging team comprises predominantly of young women between 20 and 24 years of age and this work enables them to financially support their families and pay for their children's education. One of the reasons



Peali Dutta Gupta: "Each *chakra* has a certain essence that helps energize the *chakra*"

Praana was started was to help young women earn an income and escape situations of domestic violence. Dutta Gupta says she'd like Praana to graduate from being a micro home-based enterprise to becoming a larger enterprise that will provide employment, healing and hope for victims of domestic violence.

The inspiration for new products is driven by Dutta Gupta's own experiences in spirituality, pranik healing, and meditation along with her friends' and family's experiences.

Praana has tied up with producers of essential oils who customize the oils according to their needs. The oils are derived from flowers, bark and other natural sources. All raw products and samples are tested by the Praana team and tweaked to perfection. "There is a lot of trial. I use the samples, try them out in my home, give it to my friends, then customize it all," says Dutta Gupta.

It is word of mouth and sharing with friends that has helped market and sell Praana products. Purity, honesty and style have earned Praana a place on the shelves of Silhouette, a salon at The Oberoi in New Delhi.

Dutta Gupta hopes her products will be available in more stores and outlets. Praana's offerings have visual and olfactory appeal. This year there has been an uptick in their sales during Diwali. "Many people pick up Praana products as gifts for their friends and family for the balance they need and also the packaging," she says. ■



# Peace, sheep at Tosa, stay a while in village homes

JEHANGIR RASHID

TRY an adventurous trek in Kashmir this summer after you're done with Srinagar's Dal Lake and Tulip Gardens. Tosa Maidan and its adjacent scenic spots in Budgam district are opening up for tourists with a yen for the outdoors.

You can spend the night in a homestay and go on a trek with a guide. The trekking route starts from Mujpathri, traverses Doodhpathri or the Valley of Milk and culminates in Tosa Maidan. Walk through verdant pastures dotted with sheep and dense alpine forests. Cross rivers and gurgling streams and spend time at a high altitude lake. This year, some 5,000 trekkers including foreigners undertook treks through Mujpathri.

Tourism really started here as a means to curb timber smuggling, a booming activity rampant 20 years ago. In 2005, villagers in Sitaharan and its adjoining villages near Tosa Maidan and Doodhpathri decided to take on the responsibility of protecting the adjacent forest. But their efforts were frustrated because of the timber smugglers who kept felling trees.

Volunteers led by Sheikh Ghulam Mohi-ud-din alias Adil, sarpanch of Sitaharan village, reached out to the smugglers. "At the end of the day it boiled down to the issue of livelihood. The timber smugglers said that they weren't happy to cut trees, but they had no choice since they didn't have jobs. This was a tricky situation and we had to find some solution," says Mohi-ud-din.

The volunteers got support from the Jammu & Kashmir Right to Information Movement (J&K RTIM) led by Dr Shaikh Ghulam Rasool. The J&K RTIM filed an RTI application to find out the extent of timber smuggling. They discovered that timber smuggling was rampant right from Mujpathri to Tosa Maidan. At that time the Tosa Maidan Bachav Front (TBF) had been formed to free the *maidan* from the Army which was using it as a firing range. The Army's lease expired in April 2014 and the *maidan* was given back to the people.

The movement against timber smuggling received support from the TBF. "Providing a means of livelihood to timber smugglers was a challenge. The timber smugglers were motivated to protect the forest. They were engaged as tourist guides and adventure tour operators and asked to take people on trekking and adventure tours," says Dr Rasool.

The trekking tours gave an impetus to rural tourism in Sitaharan and adjacent villages. Homestays have come up in these villages near the tourist spots of Doodhpathri and Tosa Maidan.

"Rural tourism has started here, but it needs to be given a proper fillip. We are not in favour of the kind of tourist infrastructure that has come up in Gulmarg, Pahalgam and Sonamarg. We want our villages to be developed on eco-tourism lines," says Mohi-ud-din.

Roads, washrooms and mobile connectivity are urgently needed. The road from Sitaharan up to the Dum Dum shrine needs to be macadamized. Locals say they don't want roads in the interiors of Doodhpathri and Tosa Maidan because that would disrupt the fragile ecological balance of the region.

"Once tourists reach Tosa Maidan near the Dum Dum shrine they can hire horses. That way they can enjoy the beauty of this meadow. Right now a small number of tourists are being hosted by the people of Sitaharan village. The government has given permission for homestays but there are very few and their number needs to be increased," says Mohi-ud-din.

Mohi-ud-din pointed out that once more homestays come up in

Photos: Civil Society/Bilal Bahadur



A flock of sheep graze in Tosa Maidan



Go on a trek through pastures, forests, rivers and high altitude lakes

Sitaharan and adjoining villages, employment opportunities will increase. He said the government should construct washrooms at Tosa Maidan and Doodhpathri. Currently tourists don't have any such facility.

"Mobile connectivity is abysmal in both places and the villages adjacent to them. All mobile operators should be asked to improve their services. Tourists can then call their near and dear ones back home. If these facilities are provided Tosa Maidan will become a popular tourist destination in Kashmir," adds Mohi-ud-din.

Over the years guides have been taking groups of travellers on the trekking routes of Mujpathri and other villages in the vicinity of Tosa Maidan. The magnificence and beauty of 12 high altitude lakes adds to the beauty of the overall surroundings. These lakes include Konisar, Domailsar, Tatakutisar, Badarsar, Gaadsar, Guriwansar, Damamsar, Sandooksar and Paanisar. The main attraction for most trekkers is Kadlabal near Tosa Maidan.

"Adil Sahib should be given the credit for mobilizing and motivating villagers here to stop timber smuggling and then finding a means of livelihood for the former timber smugglers. Adil and 52 sarpanches have been instrumental in making the dream of rural tourism a reality in Mujpathri and adjoining villages," says Dr Rasool.

He and Mohi-ud-din also emphasize they don't want mass tourism in villages close to Doodhpathri and Tosa Maidan. They say promotion of local cuisine and local culture is a priority and would enhance the tourist experience. They have already initiated steps to include food and culture as an important aspect in the villages. It costs ₹1,000 per night with breakfast and dinner to stay at a homestay. A night at Tosa Maidan costs ₹1,200. The guide charges ₹1,200 and so does the pony man.

"There should be no interference with flora and fauna, waterbodies and glaciers at Doodhpathri and Tosa Maidan. The local economy needs a boost and that is only possible when locals are engaged to serve tourists. But the tourism department has cold shouldered our suggestions," says a disappointed Dr Rasool. ■

For homestay and other facilities contact Sheikh Ghulam Mohi-ud-din alias Adil Sahib at 06006404740.

# Beyond Limits goes further

SURMAYI KHATANA

INSIDE the brick walls of the Arpana Fine Arts Gallery the creativity and skill of 56 artists with disabilities adorned the exhibition hall. A painting depicting the art, culture and craft of Meghalaya draws you in with its colours and detail. The artist, 44-year-old Tribit Kumar Hajong, is from the Hajong tribe in the West Garo Hills in Meghalaya. He has a speech and hearing disability and is inspired by his roots.

With a variety of experimental, intricate and engaging artworks and sculptures, Family of Disabled (FOD) organized its annual art exhibition, 'Beyond Limits 2022' from December 2 to 11 in New Delhi. Curated by Preeti Johar, CEO of FOD, 56 artists took part and showcased 95 artworks. Thirteen were participating for the first time. Some 21 artworks were sold with prices ranging from ₹3,500 to around ₹5 lakh.

The painting by Tribit Kumar Hajong depicted *Pathin*, the traditional dress of the Hajong tribe. Each thread on the colourful weave was visible. "You can even see the intricate design on the *Pathin* that the women are wearing," said Preeti. Two men could be seen in the eyes of the man at the centre of the painting. His eyebrows were umbrellas and his mouth the head of an animal. You could also spot a child hiding behind the weave, a man smoking and animals.

Pranav Aggarwal is a 10-year-old artist with Down's syndrome from Gurugram. He finds the use of brushes boring and instead uses his fingers, paper and sponges for his art. Excitingly, his painting, *Tilti*, of a beautiful butterfly, was bought by the Shree Yash Art Gallery in Green Park, New Delhi.

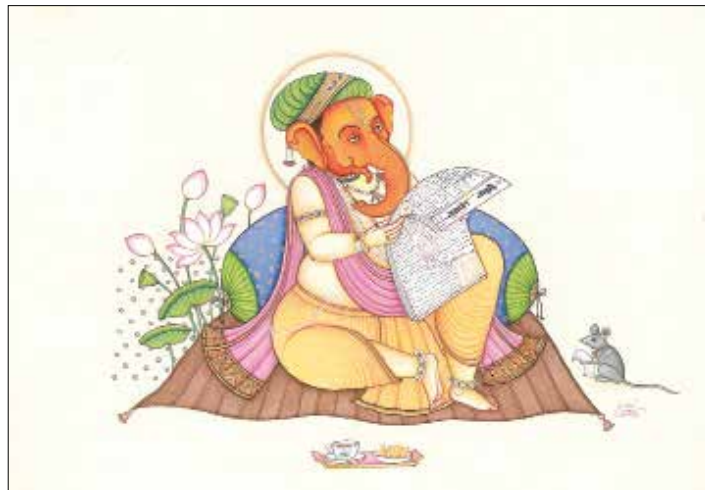
There were also several abstract paintings. Like an intriguing set by Anup Kumar Singh on mono-coloured backgrounds with a shaded person sitting on the ground surrounded by flowers and a cow whose horns grow into a forest. Forty-one-year-old Singh lives in Kushinagar in Uttar Pradesh and has a physical disability. He graduated from Benares Hindu University.

*Unfair Wheel of Life*, a set of four paintings portraying chickens, hens, eggs and a half-boiled egg in a pan by Shweta Singh Arya were colourful and detailed.

Forty-five-year-old Ashutosh Panigrahi, a Guinness World Record holder for painting the largest indoor mural, has an M. Phil in visual arts. He displayed an abstract painting in purple and yellow hues. Panigrahi has



An abstract painting by Anup Kumar Singh



Ajay Garg's paintings of Ganesha sold out quickly



Ashutosh Panigrahi's purple abstract



Preeti Johar at the inauguration



Hardeep Singh Kalsi's paintings depict life in rural Punjab

conjoined fingers in both hands which he uses to create unusual strokes in his paintings.

There were also some unique sculptures by four artists made out of fibreglass, bronze and iron. Jamaluddin Ansari's *born-deaf* was a bronze sculpture inspired by his own disability. Ansari is from Lucknow and has a master's in fine arts.


Some of the artists we covered last year also displayed their artworks. Miniature paintings depicting Ganesha in contemporary and playful settings by Ajay Kumar Garg sold out quickly. This time Ganesha was portrayed travelling in a red car, reading the newspaper and being pushed in a pram.

Niyaz Hussain's detailed black and white artwork of ink on paper titled *Rider*, was a political satire on the state of society. Hardeep Singh Kalsi from Punjab portrayed elderly women making cotton yarn. *Innocent Childhood* showed young children reading and basking in the sun on a farm.

Imamuddin Fayaz Ud Din Quazi painted tigers. His hyper realistic paintings are made with poster colours on silk. Shelly Bhutani's Tanjore painting depicted Radha and Krishna. The art uses gold foil and has an embossed look. "This is the first time we have had Tanjore art in the exhibition," said Srishti Sarraf, a volunteer for Beyond Limits since four years. ■


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.

## ALLEVIATE POLIO AND CONGENITAL DISEASES

 Established in 1985, the Narayan Seva Sansthan works to provide free corrective surgeries to patients from low-income communities suffering from polio and congenital diseases. The NGO's hospitals have a capacity of 1,100 beds. So far, Narayan Seva Sansthan has conducted over 400,000 polio corrective surgeries.

Narayan Seva Sansthan aims for an inclusive society with a secure future for people who are differently abled. Their other initiatives include setting up orphanages, hospitals for people with disabilities, vocational training centres, and even organizing marriages for people with disabilities. The NGO runs a digital education centre for underprivileged children called the Narayan Children's Academy. <https://www.narayanseva.org/about-us/> +91-7023509999 | [info@narayanseva.org](mailto:info@narayanseva.org)


## MITIGATE POVERTY AND ILLITERACY IN A CITY

 Nitya Foundation, an NGO in New Delhi, works on issues of poverty, child development, women's empowerment and skill development. They also have programmes for education of poor and street children, health initiatives, rural development and slum development.

The foundation arranges meals for people living in poverty. They also provide tuition to students as well as vocational training programmes. Nitya Foundation holds health check-up drives, plantation drives and environment awareness campaigns.

Nitya Foundation for the Blind is specifically for people with visual disabilities. The foundation offers internship and volunteering opportunities. <https://www.nityango.org/> Phone: +919818885691 Email: [info@nityango.org](mailto:info@nityango.org)

## ENHANCE THE LIVES OF YOUNG GIRLS

 Kamlabhai Charitable Trust, based in Jaipur, works to provide food, education and healthcare, especially to young girls. Through their 'Niwala-Ek Prayas' scheme, they distribute free food to people who come to Jaipur's hospitals from far-off places for medical treatment.

Their *Saware Bachpan* project works to ensure education for girls from financially weak backgrounds.

The project provides monetary support, course material, books, stationery and guidance.

Their Health Shivar project organizes free health check-up camps for 248 patients.

They have helped 94 patients with cataract operations and other treatment.

<https://www.kbct.org/> Phone: 08042756473 Email: [kbctindia@gmail.com](mailto:kbctindia@gmail.com)

## FIRST PERSON

ADITI INDORIA, 24, JHANSI, EXECUTIVE, THDC INDIA LTD

## 'I LIVED IN A WEAVER'S HOUSE FOR 15 DAYS'

I INTERNEED with the Jaipur Rugs Foundation for a month in 2021. Jaipur Rugs works with weavers in rural areas, especially women. I decided to volunteer after the first year of my master's in social work at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) in Mumbai. Our college encourages us to intern or volunteer to gain experience in social work. I heard about Jaipur Rugs Foundation through a friend and applied.

For the first few days I learnt how their organization works. We also did some field visits. I even learnt how to make a carpet with knots! I did a comparative study of three villages for which I conducted interviews with weavers to analyze the changes that Jaipur Rugs Foundation has



introduced in their business and whether these had positive or negative results. I helped facilitate some CSR projects.


This was my first interaction with the development sector, and it was amazing! I lived in a weaver's house for 15 days during my study. I got to explore all

sides of the carpet industry and saw how women dealt with their problems in rural Rajasthan. I began to see their lives with a fresh perspective. I also created good relationships with the community I stayed with. They still call me up after two years. The community was very loving and would feed me something new every day. I learnt how to talk to people, how to empathize and how to control my emotions in the face of certain realities.

Jaipur Rugs is a for-profit company which has been providing employment to rural women since 1978. The Jaipur Rugs Foundation is its social arm, which works with around 1,000 women.

You can apply to become a volunteer through their website.

## HELPING HAND FOR ORPHANS, ELDERLY


 Vatsalyapuram was started in 1980 with the aim of providing education and food to the children of single-parent families who were very poor. The NGO has been successful in helping and educating more than 8,000 such children.

The organisation also runs an orphanage for children. Currently, Vatsalyapuram is helping more than 300 children and is functioning in five cities.

The organization focuses on providing basic essentials like food, clothes, education, milk, and support to create a conducive environment for children. Their 'Feed with Joy' programme ensures food for senior citizens in Jodhpur.

<https://www.vatsalyapuram.com/> Phone: +91 8955688886 Email: [care@vatsalyapuram.com](mailto:care@vatsalyapuram.com)

## SKILLS FOR RURAL YOUTH

 Bunyaad was set up in 2016 to help rural youth access opportunities in higher education, life skills, and vocational training courses. The NGO believes in the principle that every person should have the opportunity to qualify for formal education as a matter of right. Bunyaad helps rural youth with academics, vocational training, life skills and access to training which will help in employment.

The expertise of Bunyaad foundation lies in working with marginalized communities. Their main focus areas are livelihood, capacity building, and education. They have mobilized over 6,000 candidates for employment programmes in UP, Bihar and West Bengal.

<https://bunyaadfoundation.in> Phone: 011-4999 7666 Email: [info@bunyaadfoundation.in](mailto:info@bunyaadfoundation.in)

# PRODUCTS

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.

## Tea and jam



Bring a bit of Darjeeling into your life through Darjeeling Connection. Started by Pratikchha Chhetri and Mangesh Shinde in 2019 to promote the cultural traditions and modern craft of the Himalayan region, Darjeeling Connection sells a variety of Darjeeling teas, including Oolong which is priced at ₹289 for 50 gm. Also available are jams, like strawberry and orange marmalade, made from freshly plucked fruit.



You can buy cast-iron teapots as well. Their catalogue includes zari embroidered tote bags with unique designs, priced at ₹900.

Contact: <https://darjeelingconnection.com/>



## Warm and cosy

Project Purkul is a cloth-based handicrafts collective situated in Purkul village near Mussoorie in Uttarakhand. The women artisans here are masters at applique, patchwork and quilting. A range of colourful products with pretty motifs is available. For your home there are quilts, table runners and buntings. For your kitchen, you can buy oven mitts, tea cosies and aprons. There are baby quilts and playmats for children and backpacks, diaries and bottle covers for adults. And for your doggie there are soft beds and playmats.



Contact: <https://www.projectpurkul.com/>



## Tangy flavours



Jar'ganic makes jams and pickles from seasonal, freshly plucked fruits and vegetables sourced from local farms. Their tagline is 'eat what you see'. All products are in eco-friendly glass jars so that you can see what's inside. Jar'ganic uses ingredients which make their jams and pickles healthy. Mango jam is made with mango pulp, jaggery and lemon. There is also grape jam and pineapple jam. Try grapefruit pickle, star fruit pickle or jackfruit pickle. Jams are priced at ₹220 and pickles at ₹250.

Contact: Preksha Prasad  
Phone: +91 7406560371; email: [jarganic@gmail.com](mailto:jarganic@gmail.com);  
website: <https://www.jarganic.in/>



## Daily green

Deepak Mann realized there was an acute shortage of green products for daily use when he went scouting to the market one day. That gave him the idea of starting Brand Zero, an e-commerce site which enables people to easily buy eco-friendly daily use products which generate minimal waste. You can buy essentials like bamboo toothbrushes and tongue cleaners priced at ₹220 for both. Also available are bamboo straws, metal straws, coconut cutlery, soy wax candles, wooden combs and scrubs. Brand Zero's products are crafted by local artisans and the company helps generate livelihoods.

Contact: Deepak Mann  
Phone: +91 8700785108;  
email: [hello@brandzero.in](mailto:hello@brandzero.in);  
<https://brandzero.in/shop/>



# Civil Society

EVERYONE IS SOMEONE

## The magazine that goes places Now make your connections

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**Our journey of partnering the nation's aim to build a technically skilled youth base, is now in its 10th year. Our Industrial Technical Institutes of Tamar (from 2012) and Jagannathpur (from 2017) have ushered a rigor in this vocation among rural youth and in particular, girls from tribal belt in Jharkhand. The need is strong, and so is the appetite to create more bases (the third at Chandil, from 2022), to provide many more trained hands for a resurgent India.**

**More than 650 youths  
trained and the  
journey continues!**

