

# Civil Society



## CITYSCAPE TRACKING

Maps to show what is there, going and gone

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# ORIGINAL JOURNALISM

Great stories of change across India  
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# CONTENTS



## Urban concerns

OUR cover story this month is an example of small but important efforts that can be taken to improve Indian cities. Urban spaces, long mired in neglect, cannot be transformed overnight. This is especially so in the face of the diversity that exists in India with rich and poor jostling for control.

Nevertheless, beginnings have to be made. The more conversations the better. The green maps which landscape architects Geeta Wahi Dua and Brijender Singh Dua, a husband-wife team, have come up with show the scope of what is possible with some dedicated research and fresh thinking.

If rapidly urbanizing India is not discovering the solutions it needs, one reason is that enough competent people aren't involved in urban management. Municipalities require more engineers, architects and technocrats so that they get the cutting-edge innovations that will keep pace with their problems.

An important way forward is also to raise the status of local urban governance and elected councillors and mayors. Currently they count for little or nothing. As municipal decision-makers are given more recognition and authority so also will cities improve.

There isn't a single Indian city which can count among the best in the world. Interestingly, this wasn't always so. Urban spaces in India were actually better managed in the past with systems that worked. They were envisioned in keeping with their local topography and ecology and were therefore fundamentally more sustainable. Many a big city now in decline was at one time equipped to meet its needs. Cities had character, too, which they derived from their buildings and open spaces alike.

But long years of neglect and the failure to equip cities afresh to meet the demands being made on them have brought about a seemingly irredeemable situation of chaos and collapse. A modern and competitive India should have cities it can be proud of.

Our lead interview this month with Nikhil Dey seeks to provide a bottom-up view of the rural jobs programme. Is the government right in cutting funds for the project? Dey's contention is that though envisaged and successfully implemented to provide a guarantee of jobs to the rural poor, the programme is being made dysfunctional, bit by bit. The recent budget cut is just one more blow.

We have a detailed story on the division of the Mhadei's waters which is mired in inter-state politics between Goa, Karnataka and Maharashtra. But should we be looking only at the politics, or the much larger ecological issues involved which have national importance? Sharing of rivers deserves national attention for environmentally efficient solutions.



### COVER STORY

### KEEPING TRACK OF CITIES

Even as cities grow they need to find balance. Green maps that show what cities were and what they are morphing into is one way of keeping track of them.

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The magazine does not undertake to respond to unsolicited contributions sent to the editor for publication.

<p><b>Publisher</b> Umesh Anand</p> <p><b>Editor</b> Rita Anand</p> <p><b>News Network</b> Shree Padre, Saibal Chatterjee, Derek Almeida, Jehangir Rashid, Susheela Nair, Kavita Charanji</p> <p><b>Photographer</b> Ashoke Chakraborty</p>	<p><b>Layout &amp; Design</b> Virender Chauhan</p> <p><b>Cartoonist</b> Samita Rathor</p> <p><b>Write to Civil Society at:</b> A-16 (West Side), 1st Floor, South Extension Part 2, New Delhi -110049. Phone: 011-46033825, 9811787772 Printed and published by Umesh Anand on behalf of Rita Anand, owner of the title, from A-53 D, First Floor,</p>	<p>Panchsheel Vihar, Malviya Nagar, New Delhi -110017. Printed at Samrat Offset Pvt. Ltd., B-88, Okhla Phase II, New Delhi -110020</p> <p>Postal Registration No. DL(S)-17/3255/2021-23. Registered to post without pre-payment U(SE)-10/2021-23 at Lodi Road HPO New Delhi - 110003 RNI No.: DELENG/2003/11607 Total no of pages: 36</p>	<p><b>Advisory Board</b></p> <p>R. A. MASHELKAR</p> <p>ARUNA ROY</p> <p>NASSER MUNJEE</p> <p>ARUN MAIRA</p> <p>DARSHAN SHANKAR</p> <p>HARIVANSH</p> <p>JUG SURAIYA</p> <p>UPENDRA KAUL</p>	<p>Get your copy of <b>Civil Society</b></p> <p>Have Civil Society delivered to you or your friends. Write to us for current and back issues at <a href="mailto:response@civilsocietyonline.com">response@civilsocietyonline.com</a>.</p> <p>Also track us online, register and get newsletters</p> <p><a href="http://www.civilsocietyonline.com">www.civilsocietyonline.com</a></p>
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## IN THE LIGHT

SAMITA RATHOR



## LETTERS



### Deep dive into CSR

Your anniversary issue on corporate social responsibility (CSR), 'Does CSR work?', was instructive and informative. It was good to discover that the number of companies extending support to the voluntary sector has jumped from 16,500 to 23,000. All this has happened in the past decade since CSR became mandatory. The sad fact, however, remains that such efforts have not had a significant impact on the number of people going to bed hungry. India has the largest number of people living below the poverty line. Some studies say it is as much as 30 percent of the population.

This is a crying shame considering that India is now among the fastest growing economies of the world and the fifth largest as well. Inequality in the country is equally distressing. CSR funds must support efforts to tackle hunger and inequality and

reach out to SCs/STs and minorities. CSR needs to focus on the real challenges that beset the country.

**Gautam Vohra**

Your anniversary issue was thought-provoking as it critically examined a range of concerns pertaining to CSR. It analyzed the significance and relevance of the commitments of the corporate sector to society in real terms — does the 2 percent norm really do any good, or is it merely a tax-saving exercise aimed at boosting profits?

Despite the 'benefits' that a CSR policy might seemingly accrue for society or the company itself, there are a host of concerns regarding the sectors in which

spending is concentrated. As Madhukar Shukla pointed out, most funding (54 percent) was spent on just three sectors — education, healthcare and rural development. In a large country like ours this would result in neglect of other areas of development.

A range of eminent experts in your magazine addressed some of these issues. The point is, have there been concrete changes on the ground or is this entire exercise simply one of perceptions, altered and influenced by big-budget advertising and spend on public relations?

**Deepak Castelino**

Madhukar Shukla's analysis, 'Spends have been rising, but why

so skewed?' was such a useful analysis supported by telling statistics. The business media needs to focus more on these CSR realities.

**Sevanti Ninan**

Excellent insight by Madhukar Shukla. Greatly helps the CSR community in realigning its investment in creating superior social good!

**Guru Sharan Sachdev**

Sanjaya Baru's article, 'Going from trusteeship to electoral trusts', was a perceptive analysis showing how the idea of CSR has been distorted. Dr Manmohan Singh had the right approach when he urged industry to look after workers, practise affirmative action and reduce inequality.

**Ashwin Kumar**

### Leafy greens

I liked reading Shree Padre's article on the Soppu Mela or Green Leaves Festival. What a great idea to hold such a festival. Every state should organize such events. It will help farmers, consumers and the environment.

**Venkatesh S.**

### Goa's dilemma

Thanks for the interview with Abhijit Prabhudessai on the destruction of Goa's environment. This beautiful state will soon become like any overcrowded, dirty, dusty Indian tourist hotspot.

**Gilbert Fernandez**

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## Nikhil Dey on what is happening with rural jobs

## ‘Budget cut is part of a larger effort to disrupt NREGS work’

Civil Society News  
Gurugram

IS the national scheme for guaranteeing rural employment becoming dysfunctional? Activists believe it is and especially so after this year's budget cut because there won't be money enough to pay accumulated dues or to fund 100 days of work in the year ahead as stipulated under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act.

While the recent cut in funds is the immediate problem, the scheme has been under constraints such as delayed payments from the Central government to the states and the use of online technology for identity verification which fails as a result of poor connectivity in remote villages.

Lack of funds, delayed payments and technological challenges mean that fewer people now turn up for work when the original idea of the scheme was to enable people to easily find manual work close to them in villages and, by adding to incomes, stimulate the rural economy.

Supporters of the scheme say it has been a lifeline for the rural poor. It was particularly impactful during the pandemic and the lockdown that followed. Over the years, local rural assets like tanks, bunds and roads have been created.

But the scheme carries the burden of its political legacy, having been passed by the Congress-led UPA government in 2005. While the law stays in place, obstacles slow down demand for jobs and finally show up the National Rural Employment Scheme (NREGS) as a failure.

The law came out of a broad-based campaign in which the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) played an important role. They remain closely engaged with NREGS. To get a bottom-up view of how NREGS is faring, we spoke to **Nikhil Dey** of the MKSS.

**Q: How do you see the cut in the Union budget for NREGS?**

The cut should not be seen in isolation but as one in a series of measures. What makes the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) under which NREGS comes, unique is that it is not a budget-restrained law. Money has to be made available as per demand. The government has sought to control the programme by imposing budgetary constraints. It's totally inimical to the law.

The finance minister is paying lip service to MGNREGA when she says that the cuts don't imply that the budget has been constrained, and that the Centre always gives money at the time of the revised estimates. The revised estimates come at the end of the financial year, three months before the Budget, which means nine months have passed.

The government says post-pandemic there is not much demand for jobs under NREGS and that there has been economic recovery. But if you were to give 100 days of work to the people who are coming to work as of today you would actually need ₹2,78,000 crore. And if you were to



Nikhil Dey: 'If there is corruption, act against the corrupt, the officials'

give them 40 or 50 days of work, which is what you are actually giving them on average, you would need ₹1,28,000 crore. So, the ₹60,000 crore budget (allocation) is going to yield just 20 days of work at the most.

Now in those 20 days of work, every year you end up with ₹20,000 crore in pending liabilities from the previous year. So, you actually end up with a NREGS budget of ₹40,000 crore. Where do you distribute ₹40,000 crore in a country where you need ₹1,28,000 crore to just continue with today's constrained number (of people seeking work). How do you wait for revised estimates that come nine months later? It's not even one month of work.

**Q: Why do you think this is happening?**

This year's budget cut is the most severe and actually equivalent to killing the programme itself. There are some other factors which show you it's part of a pattern. In the last one year they have not given West Bengal even one rupee. For a year and three months nobody has received payment in the state. West Bengal used to have 10 percent of the NREGS workforce and about 10 percent of the budget. About ₹1,000 crore was spent in the state.

They are saying there was corruption. If so, then they should be taking action against the corrupt, the officials. Instead, they are punishing workers who came to work to their sites. Basically, they've been using every excuse in the book to not give money.

Secondly, they've used the tool of social audit to deny funds. They've written letters everywhere saying we won't even consider your labour budget unless you do full social audits. Ironically, they are supposed to fund the social audit units. But those social audit units are not being funded. So, they have created a Catch-22 situation.

Third is the use of technology mechanisms. They have put this ridiculous app right across the country where twice a day they say photos have to be uploaded online from hundreds of thousands of remote work

sites all over. If you don't upload photos of each worker, then that person does not get that day's attendance.

You can imagine what a negative factor this is for the worker. You walk three to four kilometres to the site, then do the work. If the morning's attendance does not get uploaded, you won't get paid. Some workers find out only weeks later when they are not paid. They've gone to work for 10 days and they get paid only for seven days. Some are turned away from work because the app is not working.

This National Mobile Monitoring System has made it a nightmare for people because they don't know whether their photos have been uploaded and it's completely arbitrary.

**Q: So there are multiple assaults to disrupt the NREGS?**

Giriraj Singh (the rural development minister) has said they are going to propose an amendment to MGNREGA that says the states should pay 40 percent of the labour budget. Now MGNREGA clearly lays down that 100 percent of the labour budget will be borne by the Centre along with 75 percent of the materials budget. That's the condition under which the act came into force so to propose this is like repealing the act.

**Q: Since the states don't have the funds, will it render MGNREGA non-functional?**

Completely. The states will say they don't want to do this. But the law did not come in this way. It came in with the provision that the Centre will fund it. This (amending the law) is like repealing the law.

Finally, they've passed an order effective from February 1 saying that anyone who is not on an Aadhaar-based payment system will not be paid. Now that means having an Aadhaar card which is linked to your job card and then linked to that bank account which is linked to NREGS payments which is mapped on the National Payment Corporation of India (NPCI).

On the day they put this order into effect only 43 percent of NREGS workers were thus mapped. That means 57 percent or more than half of NREGS workers will not get paid. The Supreme Court has said that delayed payment is a human rights violation and a violation of Article 23. But this is not just delayed payment. This is denial of payment to the poorest workers who need daily wages.

**Q: What is the current demand for NREGS work?**

There is a constant demand. It should not be budgeted in nominal budgetary terms but looked at as a percentage of the GDP. Because if we are saying the GDP is growing then a percentage would show roughly how much you should need and give you an idea if NREGS demand is actually coming down.

In the beginning it was roughly 0.4 percent of GDP. The only year it crossed to 0.5 percent was the year of the pandemic. They had no choice but to turn to rural employment guarantee and they put in an additional ₹40,000 crore. The MGNREGA budget went up from ₹73,000 crore to ₹1,13,000 crore. That year the demand was the highest.

Now, instead of MGNREGA being demand-driven it is being turned into a supply-driven law. If you give more money, people turn up for work. If you don't give money and delay payments, making them wait for the next year, you are asking them to do other things. The demand is huge from what we see everywhere but people are not given their dated acknowledged receipts.

There is huge demand post-Covid which is not being met. MGNREGA has brought women into the workforce. When you cut funds, you are hitting them the most. This was their only means of returning to the workforce again.

**Q: The government and its votaries claim they are building rural infrastructure and so a rural job guarantee scheme is not needed or needed less. What is your opinion?**

These are assertions which have no basis in reality. If you increase the drinking water budget or the housing budget, you hardly generate any

labour demand. Around 90 to 95 percent of the budget (in such schemes) is spent on materials. Already the housing budget is going into MGNREGA so you might marginally increase labour. Drinking water is again a very material intensive budget.

The Central government asserts that the economy is doing very well. The whole budget is what they call capex. The problem is they don't see work done under MGNREGA as a rural infrastructure building programme. Why is a small check dam not capex? Why are rural roads not capex? Because your big contractors are not making money since MGNREGA has a ban on contractors.

Your only priority are big highways, plants, airports and bullet trains which only benefit a certain class. Their wealth increasing means the GDP is going to one segment. All they need to do is put more money into MGNREGA. If it gets saved at the end of the year, use it elsewhere.

**Q: One of the successes of the rural job scheme has been to create rural infrastructure, isn't it?**

The Economic Survey had a whole segment saying MGNREGA is producing fine assets in certain areas. That is true. MGNREGA doesn't just build check dams or a road or a water-harvesting structure or change wastelands into forests or re-green pastures. MGNREGA also changes non-arable land into arable land. In Jharkhand, there is digging of wells. A lot of horticulture activity is taking place. Individual productive assets, apart from housing, are being created.

**‘They’ve put this ridiculous app across the country, where they say twice a day photos have to be uploaded from hundreds and thousands of remote work sites.’**

The Economic Survey is recognizing all this. But the rural development minister is saying there is huge corruption, it's terrible, it's a wasteful programme. The trouble is that those responsible for implementing MGNREGA don't seem to believe in it. Although this is a law passed unanimously in Parliament.

They keep saying it's created lazy people, that it is not productive. MGNREGA is the only programme in the entire government where people are paid per output. They are not paid a daily wage but as per output. Which government servants are paid as per output?

**Q: How can technology be used more effectively?**

Disbursement of money is through DBT (direct benefit transfer) into bank accounts. It is working. Now suddenly they have introduced this additional technology into Aadhaar, a kind of dictatorial technology monster because you have no choice. When you say technology does not offer options then you are being anti-science and anti-technology. This technology is causing huge pain. Since 50 percent of workers won't get paid, it becomes direct pain technology.

Pensions in Rajasthan, for instance, are also being disbursed into bank accounts (through DBT). Around nine million pensioners are getting their pensions. There is going to be a pension law in the new budget of Rajasthan of ₹1,000 pension with a 15 percent increment.

**Q: Is it the several layers of technology that is creating this chaos?**

There are two issues for that. Money goes into bank accounts and it always has. Uploading a photograph does not mean the person has worked. What is happening is that twice a day people come, take photographs and go home. You are not measuring productivity through that photo. The best possible method is to make everything open to the community. They know who comes to work and who gets paid. Make MGNREGA a community monitored system. ■

# Parting the troubled waters of the Mhadei

## The ecological issues run deep

Derek Almeida  
Panaji

THE division of the waters of the Mhadei has become a political hot potato with Karnataka planning three dams on tributaries of the river which has traditionally flowed unimpeded into Goa where it finally joins the iconic Mandovi.

On February 13 the Supreme Court told Karnataka that it could not go ahead with construction activities on the Kalasa and Bhandura nullahs of the Mhadei river without obtaining necessary forest and environment permissions.

The court essentially upheld the 2018 verdict of the Mhadei Water Disputes Tribunal which gives 97 percent of the flow of the river to Goa and 5.32 tmc to Karnataka and Maharashtra.

Goa, though bound by the tribunal's order, holds the view that no water at all should be diverted from the Mhadei because of the adverse impact that it will have on the natural resources of the state.

The belief in Goa is that the Mhadei will dry up and die and with it the environment it supports will be destroyed, if water is diverted by Karnataka, even though it is yet to produce a scientific study to prove its point. Despite this hiccup, the tribunal accepted Goa's contention that allocation of the river's waters must take into account environmental needs.

The total length of the river is 111 km with 35 km in Karnataka and the remaining in Goa. The river has a catchment area of 2,032 sq km, with 1,580 sq km in Goa, 375 sq km in Karnataka and 77 sq km in Maharashtra.

The water availability in the Karnataka catchment area is 32 tmc, in Maharashtra 7.21 tmc and the remaining 148 tmc is in Goa.

The river flows through some of the most beautiful and bountiful parts of the three states and environmentalists in Goa argue that diversion of water from the Mhadei by Karnataka and Maharashtra would damage the rich flora and fauna along the river's route.

### LACK OF DATA

During the hearing of the Tribunal, Rajendra Kerkar, who deposed as an expert witness on environment, ecology and forest, said the water requirement for environment flow was around 50 tmc (preferred) and not less than 28 tmc.

He was the only one who presented a study on environmental flows.

Kerkar was, however, hard-pressed for an answer when the tribunal questioned if any study had been done to ascertain the effect on the environment by diversion of 72 tmc by Goa for irrigation through various projects yet to be implemented.

In the end, Kerkar's arguments of environmental flows required in the river were rejected for want of a scientific approach and lack of data.

Kerkar has been following development along the Mhadei in Karnataka for over two decades and the saying in Goa is that if Karnataka places even one brick, Kerkar would get to know about it.

Speaking to *Civil Society*, Kerkar made it amply clear that he did not agree with the

**Is letting rivers flow freely the best policy? What effect will dams built on tributaries have? Are inter-basin transfers sustainable?**

findings of the tribunal. "The yield in the Mhadei is less than 100 tmc and the tribunal overestimated the total water in the river to favour Karnataka. Mhadei is a west flowing river and old formulae was used to calculate the yield. The Inglis formula used by the tribunal was developed in 1947 since rainfall and runoff data were not available."

### ECOLOGY, WILDLIFE

When asked why Goa was protesting against trans-basin transfer of water when it has been held as legal by two water disputes tribunals, Kerkar said transfer of water from the Mhadei to the Malaprabha would intensify the man-wildlife conflict. "Trans-basin transfer of water will destroy the natural flow coming in the direction of the Mhadei Wildlife Sanctuary, while transfer of water from the Bhandura will affect the Bhimgad sanctuary."

Several complex ecological issues have arisen. Is letting rivers flow freely the best



Goans don't want any water from the Mhadei diverted



The Mhadei flows through ecologically rich areas

policy? Are inter-basin transfers sustainable? What effect will dams built on tributaries have on the Mhadei? Should river waters be diverted for agriculture at a cost to wildlife and forests?

The tribunal addressed these issues but didn't find the arguments placed before it adequately researched and substantiated. It allowed Karnataka to divert 2.18 tmc from the Bhandura nullah, 1.72 tmc from the Kalasa nullah and use 1.5 tmc for in-basin consumptive purpose. (1 tmc is equal to 2,831 crore litres.)

The tribunal also allowed Maharashtra, which is a party to the dispute, to divert 0.56 tmc to its Viridi project and an additional 0.77 tmc for four other projects.

The quantum of water given collectively to Maharashtra and Karnataka is around 5.32 tmc from the total of 188 tmc which flows down the Mhadei in a given year. This means that, by default, Goa's share is around 97 percent.

However, not all of it can be used. The tribunal allowed Goa to utilize 24 tmc for the

59 water projects that it hopes to build in addition to the 9.3 tmc that it is already drawing from the river.

The Supreme Court's order has been interpreted in different ways in Goa with Chief Minister Pramod Sawant saying it was one more step towards safeguarding Goa's interests and protecting "our Mhadei" and Goa Forward Party president Vijai Sardesai saying the order was a setback as the interim reliefs sought by the state were not granted.

Goa had rushed to the apex court after the Central Water Commission had, on December 29, 2022, cleared a detailed project report (DPR) for the construction of three dams submitted by Karnataka.

The DPR envisages construction of one dam each across the Haltara, Kalasa and Bhandura tributaries. Water from the Haltara dam will be transferred to the Kalasa dam through an interconnecting gravity canal. And from the Kalasa dam a second gravity canal will divert

the water to the Malaprabha river. From the Bhandura, water will flow along a gravity canal to another tributary of the Malaprabha river.

These three dams and interconnecting canals will have a capacity to transfer 7.56 tmc, but water diversion will be restricted to that permitted by the tribunal. The total land required for these projects is 731 hectares. Of this, 499 hectares is forest land, most of which will be submerged.

While the Bhandura project falls within the Bhimgad Wildlife Sanctuary, the first two projects lie on the border of the Mhadei Wildlife Sanctuary. Water will be diverted during the monsoon season and during the non-monsoon months water will be allowed to flow downstream.

**What became apparent during the hearings was that neither Karnataka nor Maharashtra had done scientific studies to ascertain the impact of diversion of water from the Mhadei on ecology, wildlife, flora and fauna, fishing.**

The tribunal held that Goa had succeeded in proving that the requirements of states must be determined after setting aside water for environmental needs.

### DEMANDS OF STATES

What became apparent during the hearings was that neither Karnataka nor Maharashtra had undertaken any scientific study to ascertain the impact of the diversion of water on ecology, flora and fauna, wildlife, fishing, agriculture and aquatic ecosystems. Both were directed to undertake detailed studies on these important subjects.

When Karnataka, Maharashtra and Goa approached the tribunal for equitable distribution of Mhadei water they had made specific demands.

Karnataka had stated that its equitable share was not less than 24.15 tmc for consumption. It wanted 7.56 tmc for drinking water for the twin cities of Hubli and Dharwad and 5.5 tmc for diversion to the Kali hydro-electric project. The remaining water was to be used for generation of power at the Kotni dam. From this dam, 7 tmc would be diverted to the Malaprabha basin and 1.5 tmc for in-basin use.

Maharashtra demanded a total of 6.25 tmc — 3.57 for use within the Mhadei basin and diversion of 2.85 to the Tillari basin.

When taking a final decision on the distribution of water to the three states, the tribunal noted that the information provided by all states was inadequate. "As a matter of fact, the information and details provided by the party States are neither (a) consistent, nor (b) based on proper investigation, nor (c) backed by scientific research, nor (d) supported

by detailed analysis, nor (e) presented in the form of bankable project reports."

The tribunal then issued an order to the three states and Central government to secure the relevant material and data to enable it to judicially allocate water from the river.

Despite this order the three states and Central government failed to provide the required information.

The tribunal lamented, "In particular, the specific issues such as (a) the economic and social needs of each basin state, (b) the dependence of the population on the waters of the basin in each basin state, and (c) the availability of other resources, have not at all been examined by any of the States in scientific manner. In this regard, the tribunal also notes

that two important aspects, namely (a) sustainability, and (b) minimization of environmental harm, have not been scientifically examined by the States while presenting their case for future projection of water demand."

The tribunal concluded that in view of the lack of relevant data it was unable to allocate the entire water of the Mhadei to the three states and instead apportioned water based on projects.

The result was that 97 percent of the water was allowed to flow back to Goa with only 3 percent being shared between Karnataka and Maharashtra.

### DAM IMPACTS

Abhijit Prabhudessai of the Rainbow Warriors in Goa is against dams in general. He said, "Damming and extraction of water from our rivers is wrong since it is now an accepted scientific conclusion that rivers should flow freely. Neither Goa nor Karnataka should dam the river and divert water. Instead, conserving, augmenting and restoring of groundwater and aquifers is the way forward."

When asked why Goa is at loggerheads with Karnataka when it has an agreement with Maharashtra to transfer water from the Tillari basin to the Mhadei basin, he said, "The Tillari dam is a disaster in all ways. Firstly, it has destroyed the best tiger and elephant territory in this region and gravely affected the critical Western Ghats corridor. The Tillari dam has also enabled profit-driven land use changes in Perineum, Bardez and Bicholim taluks, destroyed local water resources and displaced local communities." ■

## Learnings from the banana-flour campaign

# In search of the hybrid dryer to beat the monsoon

Shree Padre  
Kasargod

**D**URING Covid times, when farmers couldn't take their bunches of bananas to markets, a campaign was launched to encourage them to convert the bananas into flour at home instead.

A very easy method was found for converting raw bananas — of any variety — into flour. Nutritionally, banana flour is far superior to cereal and pulses flour. Its low glycemic index makes it suitable for diabetics too. It was a good idea for which a market seemed to exist. Many farmers responded enthusiastically to the campaign.

But, like all great ideas, this one too came with a hitch. The bananas had to first be dried before being ground into flour. It was monsoon time. In banana-growing areas, where it rains for four months of the year, solar dryers are of no use. With inclement weather due to climate change becoming a reality, dryers have become an essential tool for farmers. Even in low rainfall areas, unpredictable showers are now a regular feature.

Even as most farmers struggled with this challenge, those in one district, Uttara Kannada, didn't seem to have a problem. The district has 5,000 dryers, the highest in Karnataka. For 20 years farmers have been using dryers. Initially they bought dryers which ran on biomass and then, as power supply became less erratic, they started buying electric dryers. The banana flour movement was a big success there.

Broadly, there are three types of dryers: electric, biomass (firewood) and solar. There are manufacturers of such dryers across the country since industry also uses them. But in the agricultural sector, where dryers are really needed, uptake has been slow.

Solar dryers don't require recurring expenditure. The quality of the farm produce dried is good, retaining aroma and colour. But in areas of heavy rainfall or prolonged monsoon, solar dryers cannot be used for four months. And this is exactly the time farmers need dryers the most.

What is really needed are hybrid dryers which run on both solar and electricity and biomass. Although such dryers are available, their inefficiency hasn't made them popular with farmers. But here are some examples of dryers that have become popular.

In coastal Karnataka, arecanut is the main cash crop. It needs 50 days to dry in the sun. But if there is unseasonal rain, transferring the crop quickly from the drying yard is laborious and sometimes impossible. So,

**In banana-growing areas, where it rains for four months of the year, solar dryers are of no use. Hybrid dryers are needed.**



An efficient low-cost solar dryer



A solar dryer invented by farmers in coastal Karnataka for drying arecanut

a few farmers came up with their own crudely designed low-cost solar dryer which resembles a tiled roof. A sloping scaffolding is built, and an ultraviolet stabilized transparent polyethylene sheet is erected over it with one or two doors for entry.

This low-cost solar dryer became so popular that there are very few farmers who don't own one in this coastal belt. Sensing demand, local agencies began building and advertising such dryers with mild steel supporting structures and UV sheets of good quality. These dryers are generally dome-shaped and cost about ₹100 per square foot.

About 50 agencies in Dakshina Kannada construct such dryers for arecanut farmers, says Muralidhara Shastry, proprietor of Sneha

Traders who constructs such dryers. The district has probably thousands of such locally made dryers. The professionally constructed, built on-site ones last for seven or eight years whereas do-it-yourself structures have a life span of three to four years. Information about such models is spread by YouTubers.

### SMALL VERSUS BIG

However, large dryers like these are not suited for drying fruits or value-added food products hygienically. A domestic, smaller dryer is ideal for such tasks.

Many crops are harvested during the monsoon. Among them are nutmeg, jackfruit, banana and minor fruits like bilimbi, carambola, fig and sapota. Farmers can dry surplus produce and consume it themselves. Or they can sell their dehydrated products locally.

During the banana flour campaign, it was found that even some of the Krishi Vijnan Kendras (KVK) did not have a single dryer. While seminars on "doubling the income of farmers" have increased, KVKs not having an essential component like a dryer exposes the fallacy of the government's avowed agenda.

It is the KVKs that need to create awareness among local farmers on how to augment their income using dryers. By grooming a few model farmers, word can spread. Unfortunately, instances of such efforts are few.

Some KVKs in Wayanad, Kannur and Kerala Agriculture University's Vellayani campus in Thrissur have tried to help. Farmers can fix an appointment and take their surplus vegetables or fruits for processing to these centres which convert them into dehydrated or value-added products using their own machinery and staff. A nominal charge is sought for this service. The dryer is the main machine used. Such work also creates awareness among farmers on how to generate income from surplus farm produce.

Another example is from Sagar in Shimoga district in Karnataka. With four months of monsoon rain, this is an area with heavy precipitation. Apart from arecanut, the main crop, farmers grow coconut, banana, pineapple and many minor fruits.

In Sagar, Nagendra Sagar and his wife, Vanishree, who are farmers and entrepreneurs, are helping small farmers dehydrate their produce and earn an income. They dehydrate pineapple, banana, fig, and other fruits and vegetables on their farm. Vanishree has been designated the district resource person for the ODOP (One District One Product) project by the agriculture department. The couple are dynamic social activists too.

### INVALUABLE ASSET

"A good dryer is an invaluable asset and essential for lower middle-class farmers in Shimoga. If they use it wisely, they can recover their investment in just three years," says Nagendra. They are helping farmers start micro-ventures with an investment of just ₹2-3 lakh. Nagendra says some farmers invested just ₹1 lakh.

The couple visits small farmers and then invites them to see their own ventures. They handhold farmers and instil confidence in them. When small farmers make some headway, Nagendra writes about it and posts it on his Facebook page to give them more exposure.

As a result, in the past year and a half, some 60 electric dryers have been bought by small farmers. "Seventy-five percent of farmers bought

**Most farmers have opted for dryers with 50-kg capacity which cost about ₹1 lakh. About 40 to 50 farmers have set up small units to extract coconut oil. Around 15 families are using the dryer to make papad or to dehydrate fig, banana and local minor fruits.**

dryers to increase their income. Unlike biomass and solar dryers, the electric dryers provide uniform heat. You don't have to change the position of the trays and the quality of produce is also good," says Nagendra.

Most farmers have opted for dryers with 50-kg capacity which cost about ₹1 lakh. About 40 to 45 farmers have set up small coconut oil extraction units, using their dryers. They have invested in small oil extractors that run on 2 HP power and produce about 12 litres of oil per hour.

Around 15 families are using the dryer to make jackfruit papad and other types of papad. Some are dehydrating banana, fig, and local minor fruits.

The Sagars organize buyer-seller meetings too. "Discussion with entrepreneurs instils confidence in these farmers who are otherwise hesitant and prefer to remain inside their shell," says Nagendra.

Uttara Kannada district seems to be the frontrunner in use of dryer technology. Arun Kumar Joshi, owner of Joshi Dryers, is a farmer himself. His company must have constructed nearly 800 dryers in the past 20 years which were bought by farmer families to keep arecanut moisture-free and fresh during the monsoon months.

Post-monsoon, when the dryers were lying idle, housewives started using them for dehydrating jackfruit and bananas to make papad and chips. The advent of online marketing through social media made it easier for them to sell their products.

Today, dozens of housewives in Uttara Kannada, otherwise shy and stuck to their kitchens, are promoting their products through Facebook and other social media platforms. They receive orders online and dispatch their products by post or courier. Many housewives are now earning an income by making pickles, jackfruit chips, papad and dried banana — a great example of women's empowerment through a simple technology. ■

### Samita's World

by SAMITA RATHOR



# Bridges, rail lines where small rivers once flowed

Ruchi Shree  
Bhagalpur

IN recent years the incidence of floods in states like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh has gone up exponentially. My experience of living in Bhagalpur district of Bihar for three years gave me first-hand experience of floods. I was told that Bhagalpur faces floods every alternate year, but I witnessed flooding almost every year. Last year, Bhagalpur was flooded twice in the span of just three months.

In 2020, while teaching a paper on environment education to my political science students, I floated the idea of a project titled “Know Your River”. I asked them to gather information on small rivers near their villages or native places. We started documenting Bihar’s disappearing rivers through a three-step process. The first step is to gather information from all available secondary sources. Then, we go to the river to observe and document its current state. The last step is to collect the narratives of people living close to the banks of the river.

The importance of small rivers cannot be overstated. Rivers reflect the health of society. Small rivers or tributaries play a significant role in a river’s network and ecosystem. It is pertinent to note that ‘rejuvenation’, ‘restoration’, ‘riverfront development’ and ‘inter-linking of rivers’ is changing rivers in India on a massive scale.

A recent report cited by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) suggests that 18 rivers of Bihar are immensely polluted, just like rivers across the country. The report, titled “Polluted River Stretches for Restoration of Water Quality 2022”, by the National Water Quality Management Network is worrisome. The silver lining is that some steps are being taken to restore and revive dying rivers in five states.

In the course of my research, I came across two small rivers, namely, the Andhari in Nathnagar block and the Nada in Jagdishpur block of Bhagalpur district which have had no water for the past decade.

I visited numerous villages such as Daradi, Kajraili, Karharia, Sanhaoula and Gonudham in these two blocks between April and September 2022, to trace the remains of the two dead rivers through the canals and bridges in their names.

Massive plantation had been done by the forest department on the dried riverbed of the Andhari over the years as part of the Bihar government’s Jal, Jeevan, Hariyali Mission. The plants are growing, and the area is likely to have trees in years to come. But this will not bring the river back.

Since there is a bridge and railway track named after the Andhari and Nara, these rivers remain etched in the memory of local people. They explained to us the impacts of dying rivers. These included massive migration from villages and the changing pattern of agriculture with excessive dependence on groundwater. Under the Har Ghar Nal ka Jal scheme of the government of Bihar, some residents of Daradi village have taps but water supply is irregular.

A resident of Daradi village on the bank of the dry Andhari told us: “Ever since the new bridge came up on the river, there is no water in it.



Here is a bridge over a river that is missing

Our villages have become like towns since there is no drinking water. The water in our taps comes once in two or three days and we have to depend on handpumps.” The women said that sometimes they are unable to bathe for two or three days due to lack of water.

For the past three years I have been collecting facts and narratives around the Champa river, a tributary of the Ganga in Bhagalpur district, to assess the range of problems facing small rivers. An ethnographic study of two villages, Deldarpur and Biharipur in Nathnagar block of Bhagalpur district on the bank of the Champa, suggests that river-dependent communities, especially fisherfolk and boatmen, are forced to switch to other occupations such as wage labour or vegetable selling. Due to increased pollution and less water in the river and the dwindling number of fish, fishermen are forced to migrate to cities like Surat and Mumbai to earn a livelihood.

## PEOPLE REMEMBER

The residents of Biharipur told us that the Champa used to have water throughout the year until a decade ago. It was their main source of irrigation. The river water was used for everyday purposes from bathing cattle to washing clothes. Now the river has water for only four to six months. So, we may say that the Champa was a perennial river which slowly turned into a seasonal one.

It was striking to note that the villagers call the Champa river Chhoti Ganga (small Ganga) and say it is their lifeline. They say, “*Shaher ke log nadi ko ganda kar dete hain, hamara toh jeevan hi nadi se juda hai*” (City dwellers make the river dirty. But our lives are intertwined with the river). They also say that the “Champa is a *nullah* (drain) for city dwellers but for us it is a river”.

Deldarpur is a *diara* (land created in the middle of the Ganga due to deposition of sand over decades) village located between the Champa and the Ganga. The village, of around 2,000 residents, is connected to the mainland or to Bhagalpur city through a small manmade bamboo bridge. During the monsoon, the only way to reach the village is by boat. The village remains under water for almost three months every year.

Deldarpur has no primary health centre (PHC) and only 30 percent of households have access to toilets. The groundwater is contaminated with a high amount of iron and arsenic. Like Biharipur, Deldarpur too faces seasonal migration of its residents for better work opportunities. Both villages contend with floods every year and residents are forced to shift



The disappearance of small rivers has increased the frequency of floods

the chief ministers of five states: Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal.

The River City Alliance (RCA) project of the NMCG was launched in February 2022. Thirty cities along the banks of the Ganga have been selected to plan sustainable management of urban rivers. They include four cities in Bihar, namely, Patna, Begusarai, Munger and Bhagalpur. In Bihar, in the past few years, parts of Lakhndei river in Sitamarhi district, the Dhanauti river in East Champaran district, and the Falgu river in Gaya district have been rejuvenated by the collaborative efforts of the state and civil society.

Lakhndei, a tributary of the Bagmati, originates in Nepal, enters Bihar in Sitamarhi and pours into the Bagmati at Katra in Muzaffarpur. The estimated length of the river is nearly 18 km. Callous waste disposal and encroachment on river land has caused the river to deteriorate over the years. Lakhndei has now been revived after 40 years. This rejuvenation programme was undertaken by the Bihar government under the Ministry of Jal Shakti’s Jal Shakti Campaign in 2019. The revival plan, yet to be completed, is likely to boost agriculture on nearly 2,540 acres spread across four administrative blocks.

East Champaran won the Best District award under the Rashtriya Jal Puraskar in 2020 for rejuvenating an 80-km stretch of the Dhanauti river, a tributary of the Burhi Gandak. About ₹69 lakh was spent on desilting the riverbed and close to ₹2.5 crore on plantation on both banks, utilizing NREGS funds.

A riverfront development project was also completed which included beautifying the banks to enable residents to spend time there. Although the efforts of the district administration have been lauded, local residents are not happy. They were formerly engaged in fishing but lost their livelihood due to the deteriorating state of the river and consequently migrated to other states in search of employment.

The findings of my ongoing research suggest that eco-centric planning of cities is the need of the hour. The state and society must come together to involve local communities in river rejuvenation. We need to stop dumping garbage in rivers and encroaching on riverbeds. To clean the Ganga and other major rivers, we need to pay equal attention to the numerous problems faced by their several tributaries, the small rivers across the country. ■



All that’s left of the Nara river is a tatty board with its name

to safer areas nearby for a few weeks to a few months, depending on the intensity of the flood. This pattern of floods and agriculture is undergoing slow and steady transformation.

During my research on small rivers with special reference to the Champa river in Bhagalpur district, I came across rampant sand mining in adjacent areas, fast depleting groundwater, dumping of garbage on the riverbed, and massive construction close to rivers, to name a few factors. Consequently, the flora and fauna of the river’s ecosystem are adversely affected. The Champa is likely to die a slow death in coming years. The Bhagalpur region used to be called Angchampa at one time. Now, the Champa Nalla is just a deserted part of the city.

## REVIVAL AND RESTORATION

However, an effort is underway to revive small rivers. Over the past four years, 75 small rivers, mostly in UP, have been identified for rejuvenation under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS). The National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) has proposed drafting urban river management plans (URMPs) and that river-sensitive master planning be made mandatory for river cities. In December 2022, a meeting of the National Ganga Council (NGC), the apex authority of NMCG, was held in Kolkata. The NGC includes the prime minister and

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# Getting to know non-profits

## Much-needed report has its shortcomings

MADHUKAR SHUKLA

THE contribution made by non-profits in the growth story of India has remained largely undocumented. Their presence is ubiquitous, but little is recorded about the significant ways in which they touch citizens' lives. Going beyond plain vanilla voluntarism, non-profits have been behind many institutional and policy reforms, resulting in a modernizing and transformative effect on governance.

Despite this contribution, non-profits have in recent years been finding themselves under pressure from governments and subjected to unreasonable regulatory control. There seems to be a lack of understanding of their role and their capacities for bridging the gaps in society.

It is in this context that a report, "India's Million Missions — India's Non-Profit Sector" is significant and timely. It is perhaps the first substantive report which attempts to highlight the diversity of contributions which the sector has made and the depth of impact it has had on society. What also makes this report unique is that it is the outcome of a collaborative effort of about 20 civil society organizations called the CSO Coalition@75.

Across its different and somewhat disconnected and collated sections, the report delves into the vast terrain of the non-profit sector, its historical antecedents and its diversity. It highlights and enumerates the innovations and achievements of non-profits in transparency, education, health, livelihoods, skill development, disability, women's empowerment, social justice, etc.

The research team behind the report also conducted a survey across some 850 non-profit organizations (NPOs). The findings of the survey throw up some interesting insights about the nature of their activities, reach and governance.

For example, the primary area of work of most NPOs is education, health, poverty reduction and gender equality. Smaller NPOs predominantly rely on self-generated revenues (through sale of products and membership fee) and retail donations, while the funding for larger NPOs mainly comes from CSR and national and international grants. Contrary to common misperception, more than 95 percent of NPOs have their accounts audited.

Overall, the report contains a fairly holistic picture of the sector. It would be unrealistic to expect a report of this nature with such a humongous canvas to be perfect. It is also a challenging task since data and information about the development sector is scarce and scattered. Despite these constraints, as a first attempt, this report has managed to assemble and highlight the contours of the sector reasonably well.

There are two aspects, however, which the report could have tackled with greater rigour. Firstly, a more nuanced approach in reporting the quantitative estimates of the size and contribution of the sector would have added to the credibility of its conclusions. Based on the 2012 report of the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MOSPI) on "Non-Profit Institutions in India", the report highlights the vast size of the sector: there are 3.17 million NPOs with a workforce of 18.2 million out of which 2.7 million are

paid jobs and the rest are full- or part-time volunteers. The sector contributes to about 2 percent of GDP.

These numbers are impressive and are quoted in the report to establish the credibility and significance of the sector. However, one needs to exercise intellectual caution. Identifying NPOs based on their legal registration is beset with risks of inaccuracy and counting the "false positives".

The MOSPI report was an enumeration of organizations which are registered under the Society Act or the Bombay Public Trust Act or as Section 8 (earlier Section 25) companies. While an estimated 90 to 95 percent of civil society organizations are registered as these legal entities, not all organizations registered as societies, trusts or Section 8 companies are non-profits.

For instance, a vast and diverse range of organizations like institutes of higher education, research institutes, industry bodies, film societies and even resident welfare associations are registered under the Society Act. Similarly, many high-end multi-specialty hospitals, places of worship, endowment funds, and so on are also registered as trusts.

On the other hand, as even the MOSPI report admits, these estimates do not include the NPOs which are registered under other acts or are unregistered. For instance, the estimates do not include mutual benefit organizations such as cooperatives, SHGs, social movements or informal community clubs whose contribution to the sector has been significant. While the number of "false positives" or uncounted organizations may be small, a mention of this definitional confusion would have added greater

credibility to the report.

Secondly, such a report is useful not only to underline the significance of the sector, but to build a case for a more enabling and supportive environment, and for influencing policies and institutions.

In this respect, the crucial section, "Recommendations for Enabling the Civil Society Sector," leaves much to be desired. One expected something more substantive than generic one-line bullet point suggestions about acknowledging the service provided by the sector, recognizing their leaders, workers and volunteers, ending excessive regulations, and so on.

In fact, there are many suggestions and pain-points of the sector in the report itself to build more focused and practical recommendations. Some of these include the revival of the 2007 National Policy for the Voluntary Sector, which was approved by the then cabinet but could not be implemented and a dedicated department or ministry for the sector for policy consultations and grievance redressal.

Also, a review of policies and regulations governing NPOs to ensure accountability and autonomy and accreditation to encourage good governance.

Similarly, while the recommendations suggest establishing an Ease of Doing Good Index, a little elaboration about the factors or dimensions to create the index would have made the suggestion more realistic. Despite these limitations, as the first report of this nature, it is a significant milestone and a valuable contribution. ■

*Dr Madhukar Shukla is a former professor of XLRI in Jamshedpur.*



# No takers for Jogi baskets

Shefali Martins  
Ajmer



Indra and Mangu Jogi selling baskets outside their settlement with their children

DESPITE a ban on single-use plastic by the government, the women of the Jogi community find there are no takers for their eco-friendly bamboo baskets. But they continue to weave baskets, big and small, because they say this is their traditional occupation.

“Our families have been making these baskets or *chhabris* for generations. We sell our baskets by the roadside, but on most days we aren’t able to sell even one basket now,” says Indra Jogi, who has been weaving baskets for the past four years.

This impoverished nomadic community of seven families lives in a settlement in Saradhana village on the outskirts of Ajmer. Their houses, located just off the road behind a railway line, are rigged together with old canvas cloth and reed grass. An earthen stove, a couple of cots and broken chairs lie outside their makeshift structures. The fencing round their homes is made of wooden sticks, logs and dry bushes.

The women sit on the ground weaving baskets, some in the sun, others under the shade of a tree. Ready baskets are piled up for sale on a table by the roadside. The men usually split the bamboos for making the thin strips that are used for weaving.

The *kirana* shops located on the road to Saradhana village do sell baskets but the shopkeepers do not buy them from the Jogis. Instead, they source them in bulk from Assam where, due to easy availability of bamboo, the wholesale price of each small basket is about ₹10. The Jogis of Saradhana can’t afford to sell one for less than ₹30.

“If we sell a small basket for ₹10, we won’t even be able to cover our cost price. A lot of time and trouble goes into making each basket. It is made entirely by hand,” explains Mangu Jogi, Indra’s mother-in-law. Each family makes about four or five baskets in a day. The base material, a bamboo stalk, costs them ₹200.

Mukesh, Indra’s husband, says they sometimes get orders to build temporary hut-like structures inside hotels. This work is done by the men. The women concentrate on making baskets.

Till about 15 to 20 years ago, the bigger baskets had a market. Farmers would buy them to fill fodder to feed their cattle. Now, with

cheaper options available in plastic, farmers no longer buy these baskets so their low-profit business has taken a massive hit. There is no village fair or any commercial space where they can sell their sturdy, plastic and pollution-free handiwork.

“But what other work can we do? No one offers us anything else. Our forefathers taught us this. We are supposed to earn a living from weaving baskets. We could never go to school, nor do we have any farmland,” rues Mangu.

**‘Our families have made these baskets for generations. But on most days we are not able to sell even one basket now.’**

Right next to Mangu’s house lives 30-year-old Jamna, wife of her nephew, Shankar. Her 12-year-old daughter, Ekam, studies in Class 5 in a government school nearby. Ekam hasn’t started learning basket making as yet, but Jamna says she will teach her. “If we don’t do this work, how will we eat two square meals,” says Ekam.

Jamna, Indra and Mangu often sit outside their settlement with piles of baskets for sale. Village folk come to buy the smaller ones to keep *rotis*. Vegetable vendors also buy small baskets to use in their shops. To supplement the family’s income, Ekam and her younger siblings and cousins work as rag pickers and collect bottles from neighbouring areas to sell to the neighbourhood *kabaadi wallah* (scrap collector) for a meagre amount.

“We mostly make only the smaller baskets now. Ever since plastic took over, the big ones stopped selling. Else, we could have earned ₹400 per basket for the bigger ones. We used to

make at least 20 to 25 baskets in a month when they were in demand. Today, we don’t get buyers for the smaller ones for 10 to 15 days at a stretch, nor do we get any loans to support ourselves,” Jamna says.

“People do come and ask us about our problems during elections, but after that they forget us. They come for votes and then disappear,” says Mangu.

The only bright time of the year for the Jogis is the festival of Navratri. At that time, they make Ravana effigies and sell them in Ajmer. “We make the effigies at home and the men go to sell them. We make them through the day and keep them ready,” Jamna explains, dipping bamboo strands in water before she begins to weave them around a basket frame.

This rolling of strips and weaving has its own perils. “We get hurt by the knife sometimes. The prickly strands of bamboo get into our fingers. It hurts, but we are used to it,” says Jamna, cheerfully. She also says proudly that Saradhana is where she grew up and her husband is a *ghar jamaai*. Her natal family subsequently migrated to another place.

The families of the women survive on credit from the local grocery store. Sometimes, they earn around ₹5,000 to 6,000 per month. “Baskets are in demand during the wedding season but people buy them wholesale from vendors. A *chhabri* is used to send the bridal outfit to the bride’s house, but those are usually the decorative ones. One odd person may buy it from us. Our main customers are usually villagers and vegetable vendors,” says Jamna.

On most days, these families aren’t able to make even ₹200, which, they say, is the minimum amount needed to run a family of five. But they go on making their baskets tirelessly, awaiting that one customer, hoping a large basket will sell. ■

Shefali Martins is an independent journalist and educator from Ajmer, Rajasthan. This article is sponsored by the Sanjoy Ghosh Media Fellowship instituted by Charkha. Email: connect@charkha.org

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# CITYSCAPE TRACKING

## Maps to show what is there, going and gone

Civil Society News  
New Delhi

CITIES are caught up in relentless change. For the better or not it isn't always clear. But in a city, it is possible to be in the same place with everything being quite different. Over time, neighbourhoods vanish, highrises mushroom, roads and flyovers get built, rivers and waterbodies dry up, trees are chopped down and monuments decay.

While these changes are visible, mostly there is no validated record of how they came about or what has gone missing — such is the topsy-turvy style in which urban spaces have been evolving in India. But what if it were possible to plot the crazy paths that burgeoning cities take?

Could there, for instance, be a map which not only shows what currently exists but what was also once there? Is it possible to freeze-frame cities so that people know what they have and also learn from the past?

Such an effort has in fact been underway for some time. Green maps of Jaipur and Lucknow have recently been put into circulation. These are cities with much history, culture and natural resources. One is on the Gomti river and in the heart of the Gangetic plains, the other borders the desert in Rajasthan. They are geographically apart but equally caught up in cycles of change. Both are on a roll and expanding. Their populations appear to be growing. Developers are on the loose with housing projects. Municipalities struggle to cope with garbage and sewage. Water supply is a growing problem.

Nothing can put the brakes on Jaipur and Lucknow, but the green maps of the two cities provide an opportunity to pause and think. We can see in these simple but unique maps how Jaipur and Lucknow have come about over hundreds of years with ecological and locational challenges addressed over generations. The maps highlight important landmarks, heritage, greenery, traditional water systems and so on. These get juxtaposed with the teeming present and the challenges that rapid urbanization poses.

The Jaipur and Lucknow green maps are part of a series of such maps. Five other cities have been covered — Delhi, Pune, Bengaluru, Kolkata and Dehradun. The maps capture current realities, but while that is easy enough to document, their real value is in their tapping into history, community knowledge, environmental expertise, traditions and urban



The Duas in their home office in Delhi

choices made over generations.

Behind this thoughtful initiative is a husband-and-wife team of landscape architects — Geeta Wahi Dua and Brijender Singh Dua who have dedicated themselves to a practice which espouses a balance between design and local ecology in the hope of making urban spaces sustainable.

Generally, landscape architects earn a living by prettying up the surroundings of a development. A five-star hotel would perhaps want to be bathed in greenery. An expensive private hospital might like an aura of serenity. Upmarket housing projects see value in extravagant invocations of nature. Landscape architects serving market needs are scene makers. They are makeup artists of a kind.

It isn't the way it was meant to be. Landscape architects have a serious role to play but seem to have yielded to the hurly-burly of the

construction business. The Duas, however, seem to prefer to be professionals in their own style. Despite being well qualified and not short of commercial opportunities, especially since they are based in Delhi, they have instead channelized their skills, energy and resources into the Landscape Foundation India from where these maps have come. They also publish the LA Journal, a quarterly, which addresses issues of sustainability and balance about which they feel their profession should be concerned.

It has been all of 22 years and they continue to work from their small home office. Others might not see such dedication as being worth the time and effort. But the Duas in their pursuits seem to have an entrepreneurial spirit that puts them in a zone of their own.

Of what use are physical maps in the age of Google, one might ask. Entire cities can be closely scrutinized on desktops. Is a map on paper

then the hallmark of luddites? But great ideas are often known first by their imperfections. The green maps, though seemingly outmoded in technological terms, have a contemporary value that satellite imagery and algorithms don't provide.

The green maps go beyond the visible contours of urban spaces to bring them historically and culturally alive for people. They draw on narratives that emanate from the community. These are perspectives that might not otherwise have emerged. Cities are best understood from one street to the next. There are systems that served cities well but no longer exist. Uncovering multiple layers of urban life is the work of researchers who discover the stories that don't get told.

The maps seek to create a sense of community ownership and belonging, and, emerging from that, perhaps a better future for cities. The maps also foster a spirit of enquiry. If people ask questions about the way they live, they could perhaps improve the quality of their lives and make their urban environment more meaningful. No city can be what it was before, but even as cities implode with people and services, looking back a little to learn from the successes and failures of the past can be beneficial.

"In 2017, we conceptualized the study of knowing our city, Delhi, from the point of view of learning about its urban history in the context of its relationship with natural resources," say the Duas about how their first map came about.

**Green maps capture current realities. But while that is easy enough to document, their real value is in their tapping into history, community knowledge, traditions and urban choices made over generations.**

"The idea was to emphasize the strong need to define cities and their histories in adequate environmental terms and place the urban built environment within the larger framework of the physical world," Geeta explains.

"Along with deciphering the history part, we also tried to explore, identify and list significant natural and manmade landscape sites and places that play an important part in maintaining the city's environmental and cultural health," says Geeta, the more outgoing, who speaks for both of them in multiple interactions with *Civil Society*.

### EVOLVING CITIES

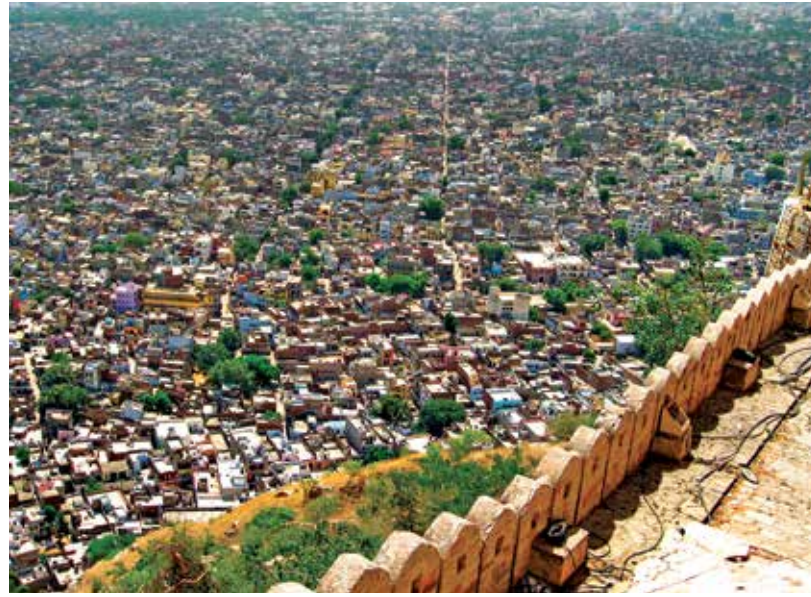
To the Duas, such projects are useful for bringing "clarity and coherence to urban research". Probing and recording the inception, growth and evolution of a city places its present-day realities in context.

Environment and conservation are key to the way the Duas think. Their studies, from which the maps come, seek to define an "environment-integrated historical perspective". Doing so enables cities to better understand their current environmental problems and plan more efficiently for now and the future.

"Placing development strategies in context is especially valuable when the country is undergoing a fast pace of development on a large scale," the Duas explain.

"Civilizations are about sequential narratives. Starting from the earliest settlement to the present, there is a temporal sequence, where there cannot be a present without a past or a future without both," they point out. "Nature and culture are integrated in a single connected process."

If this sounds a bit too arcane and up in the clouds, it isn't that the Duas are mere theorists. On the contrary, the putting together of the



The teeming city of Jaipur as seen from the Nahargarh Fort and the serene Hawa Mahal

**JAIPUR HILLS, FORTS AND LAKES**

**1 INHABITING THE REGION**  
The region of Jaipur is a syncretic one. It is a mix of different cultures and traditions. The region has a long history of habitation and is known for its rich cultural heritage.

**2 A SYNCRETIC CULTURE**  
The region of Jaipur is a syncretic one. It is a mix of different cultures and traditions. The region has a long history of habitation and is known for its rich cultural heritage.

**3 A NEW CAPITAL ON FOOTPATHS**  
The region of Jaipur is a syncretic one. It is a mix of different cultures and traditions. The region has a long history of habitation and is known for its rich cultural heritage.

**4 EMERGENCE OF PUBLIC SPACE**  
The region of Jaipur is a syncretic one. It is a mix of different cultures and traditions. The region has a long history of habitation and is known for its rich cultural heritage.

**5 THE HERITAGE CAPITAL**  
The region of Jaipur is a syncretic one. It is a mix of different cultures and traditions. The region has a long history of habitation and is known for its rich cultural heritage.

The Jaipur map

# Putting together the maps has been a journey of discovery. In Delhi, what was once a stream of the Yamuna along the Red Fort, is now the metallised Ring Road. The Yamuna was a fast flowing river and not the main source of water.

maps has been really hard work that has required gathering information from an array of sources. In addition, there have been the hurdles of funding, printing and distributing the maps. The Duas are of course driven and have it in them to be long-distance runners. They keep going even when the odds seem too much.

Explaining how they began, Geeta says: “We adopted Delhi as our pilot project. While working on the project, a thought was also there to bring this work closer to the understanding and sensibilities of larger society, common citizens and the young generation of students from regular colleges and not only for professional circles. There was a strong urge to reach out to other groups.”

The outcome of the Delhi project was the first map, double-sided and easy to refer to. It was in two sections — Journey So Far and Mapping Nature. There were two versions, in Hindi and English.

“The environmental knowledge about cities is not divorced from their economic, social and political milieu. They are densely interlinked and intrinsic to the holistic perspective. Various data sources, based on multiple disciplines, have helped us to form a meaningful and enlightening perspective towards understanding these cities,” says Geeta.

The Duas have referred to academic books, archival records, archival paintings and maps, gazettes and reports, literature and films, stories in print and on the web.

“For the mapping section, we have referred to Google Earth and Google Open Street maps to create the main frame, which gets further informed by latest tourist maps, municipal maps and other relevant information available in the public domain,” they say.

The process of arriving at a narrative has been one of consultation with experts in different fields who belong to these cities. They have

talked to historians, ecologists, writers and authors, social scientists and design professionals. A crucial part of the study has been site visits to validate information.

For the Duas the role of the landscape architect is to “provide stewardship” combining natural resources with design and planning. It is also to recognize and syncretize different perspectives because India is a multicultural and geographically diverse country with a rich cultural past.

### THOSE AHA! MOMENTS

“For us it is the most fascinating and at the same time challenging spatial design discipline. Reinforcing ideas of maintaining natural and cultural continuities, celebrating diversity, adopting a multidisciplinary approach while working on different scales, has been our philosophy,” the Duas say about what inspires them.

With this orientation, putting together the maps has been rewarding,

a journey of discovery. In Delhi, what was once a stream of the Yamuna along the Red Fort is now the metallised Ring Road. The Yamuna itself was a fast flowing river and never regarded as the main source of water. It was only under Feroze Shah Tughlak in the 14th century, when the Western Yamuna Canal was built, that the river flowed to pastoral landscapes around settlements.

When settlements shifted from the southern side to the east along the Yamuna, Delhi’s network of baolis, tanks and channels deteriorated because they were no longer so important.

“The river played an important role in the siting of settlements like the Purana Qila, the shrine of Hazrat Nizamuddin Aulia, Humayun’s Tomb, the Red Fort, Feroz Shah Kotla, to name a few. But except for the glimpses in history, archival paintings, photographs and maps, there is no tangible physical evidence on the ground. That relationship is lost forever!” says Geeta.

### KOLKATA'S WETLANDS

Kolkata was India’s first modern city, which may be difficult to imagine given its current state. It had a brilliant canal network and an intricate water transport system. Channels, streams and rivers were connected. It was India’s first modern city with underground drainage, piped water supply, garbage disposal, transportation networks and a grid pattern of development.

In Kolkata’s Botanical Gardens in the late 18th century were laid the foundations of plant taxonomy. And spread over an area of 12,500 hectares, the East Kolkata Wetlands were and remain a natural waste recycling zone, taking sewage from the city, cleansing it by keeping it standing in ponds and growing fish in the nutrients-rich water before it



Hussainabad ka talaab and the concretized Ram Manohar Lohia Park in Lucknow

flows into the river. East Kolkata ranks as the world’s largest wastewater-fed aqua culture system.

Jaipur, because of its proximity to the desert, devised traditional water harvesting systems for its survival. Tanks, lakes and baolis were part of an evolved water management system which remains relevant today even though with neglect such structures have gone into disuse.

Conceptualized as a Rajput capital, Jaipur was the new capital after the shift from Amber to the plains. It combined principles of Vaastu shastra and the grid iron pattern of street planning taken from Europeans.

In Lucknow it is the Gomti which played an important role in the city’s development, underlining the need to keep the diminishing river healthy today. The city was known for its confluence of cultures and traditions. It was also known for its gardens and orchards — some 22,000 hectares were recorded as being under orchards. There are pointers for present-day Lucknow in these details.

These and other moments of discovery abound in the maps as they juxtapose past and present in the search for effective urban solutions. The message being that there is much to take from the urbanization efforts of the past.

The maps have been funded from various sources. The Delhi one was crowd-funded. Research grants and donations from philanthropies have seen them through. As may well be expected, post-Covid funders have been difficult to find. The Jaipur and Lucknow maps were funded by the Duas themselves.

Their circulation has been limited as is only to be expected from a small initiative with a paucity of resources. In purpose and spirit and the intricate connections they make, they are, however, a valuable contribution to rethinking Indian cities. ■

## Foreign funds, Indian minds



**DELHI  
DARBAR**

**SANJAYA BARU**

A few years ago I had written in these very pages of *Civil Society* a column titled “Funding the Indian Think Tank”. I was commenting on a controversy raging at the time on the issue of Indian think tanks getting foreign funds. That column followed a 2013 column I had written in *Business Standard* titled “Indian Minds, Foreign Funds”. Both columns noted the fact that India’s premier think tanks and research institutions find it easier to raise funds abroad than at home.

Be it owing to a bureaucratic and feudal governmental system or a miserly and disinterested corporate sector, research across most disciplines in the sciences, social sciences and even critical technology sectors gets poorly funded in India. If Indian authorities are worried about foreign funding they ought to help encourage greater domestic funding of research rather than merely targeting foreign funding. For, after all, India does produce many keen minds interested in pursuing research who find funding a key constraint, apart from other bureaucratic constraints.

India’s private sector hardly invests in research even in the fields in which it is commercially engaged so for it to be interested in other unrelated fields, that too of little commercial value, is far-fetched. Nation-building requires long-term commitment to research and its funding. It should be the duty of both government and the corporate sector to fund research in a substantial manner, and ensure that there is adequate freedom for the blooming of a thousand flowers. If government and domestic corporates will not fund research and foreign funding is not allowed or is viewed with suspicion and

discouraged, who then will fund research?

The subject of foreign funding of research has once again attracted public attention in the light of the Central government’s decision to suspend the registration of the Centre for Policy Research (CPR), New Delhi, for a period of 180 days. This follows the Centre receiving an income tax notice and a query as to why its registration should not be cancelled. The CPR has defended itself clarifying that all due procedures have been followed in the matter of accounting for its revenue and expenditure and in the auditing of its budgets.

Having been a member of the CPR governing board in the past, and knowing many members

I was invited to be a member of the CPR governing body in 2003. Three distinguished civil servants chaired the board during those 13 years — P.K. Dave, K.C. Sivaramakrishnan and Eric Gonsalves. I stepped down from membership of the board in 2016. In 2003, when I had joined the board, domestic sources of funding accounted for about 70 percent of the budget, while foreign funding accounted for 30 percent. By the early 2010s this ratio had been reversed with foreign funds accounting for more than 70 percent.

At board meetings I would repeatedly draw attention to this trend and recommend that the Centre be encouraged to find more domestic sources of funding. Some of the Centre’s faculty were able to raise funds from the Central and state governments and some business leaders — Rahul Bajaj, Gita Piramal and Nimesh Kampani — also stepped in to help. Despite these attempts it seems CPR remains excessively dependent on foreign funding.

While attempts to alter the ratio must continue, with more government and private sector funding being made available for research, the targeting of CPR by the Central government is suspect, especially in the context of the encouragement various ministries and NITI Aayog have been giving to foreign-funded think tanks and consulting firms. Functionaries from the government have happily moved from their government offices to western lobby groups, funding organizations and think tanks, ministers of the government are happy to empower their forums with their presence, and yet the government will not trust Indian citizens when they conduct research transparently and publish their work for all to read.

Call it hypocrisy, schizophrenia, political witch-hunting or what you will but there is no consistency in the Modi government’s approach to foreign institutions in the field of research. The same goes for teaching. The government’s new higher education policy has granted greater academic autonomy to a

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*Nation-building requires research and its funding*

**Government functionaries have happily moved from their offices to western lobby groups, funding organizations and think tanks.**

on the board today, I can certainly say that the Centre would have complied with the law and done nothing illegal. However, apart from the matter of tax compliance there is the more opaque issue of dependence on foreign funding that many enthusiasts of the present dispensation in New Delhi draw attention to. On this matter CPR has made itself vulnerable in recent years. It has been reported that in the period 2016-21, CPR received a total funding of over ₹140 crore for various research projects and of this about ₹122 crore was from ‘foreign’ — multilateral, bilateral and non-governmental — sources while a mere ₹14.54 crore was raised at home, mainly from government sources.

## For a ban on polygamy



**MINORITY  
REPORT**

**ZAKIA SOMAN**

**I**NEQUALITY between man and woman is one of the key features of an unfair male-dominated world order. Although India is a secular democracy and all citizens are equal, it needs no reiteration that women are relegated to a low status in society across caste, religion, and ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

Laws enable protection to women against social maladies, but the latter often persist owing to patriarchal mindsets and traditions in society. Legislation against misogynist practices such as *sati*, widow ostracization, bigamy, dowry, domestic violence are good examples of the law coming to the aid of women’s dignity and human rights. Injustice to women may continue forever in the name of religion and culture without legal safeguards. Polygamy amongst Indian Muslims is an apt example.

Injustice to women happens under polygamy when a man is entitled to more than one wife. It was quite common till 50 years ago for men across India to have two or three wives.

Section 494 of the Indian Penal Code made polygamy illegal for all citizens — Hindus, Sikhs, Christians and Parsis — except Muslims. Muslims are allowed to marry up to four wives under the Shariat.

Special legal provisions allow bigamy among the Hindus of Goa and permit certain tribal customs as well in different parts of the country. For all others, bigamy is punishable with a jail term of up to seven years.

We conducted a survey on polygamous marriages for which questionnaires were given to 290 women and we undertook 50 case studies in the states of Delhi, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Odisha, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh.

Apart from sharing the details of their lives, the women also highlighted the need to end polygamy. Those calling for an end to polygamy included women who were first wives as well as those who were second wives. Their responses highlight the fact that such relationships are not advisable at all.

Our survey indicates that being in a polygamous marriage causes tremendous emotional trauma to the woman apart from economic and other hardship. It affects the woman’s sense of self-respect, self-esteem and dignity. They face educational and economic deprivation as they are in no position to raise their voice and demand fair treatment.

Most wives in polygamous unions have low levels of education and income status. Seventy-seven percent of first wives are dropouts below Class 10 and 43 percent do not have an income. Further, a large proportion of women in such arrangements — about 52 percent — have an income below ₹10,000. This indicates that women in these marriages are deprived of economic independence. In 45 percent of cases



*Eighty-four percent of women felt that polygamy should be outlawed*

**An overwhelming number of women said they felt a sense of betrayal, loss of dignity and loss of self-respect when the husband chose to get married again.**

the age of the husband at the time of the first marriage is between 21 and 26 years and in 38 percent of cases the age of the husband at the time of the second marriage is between 21 and 26 years.

With only 9 percent of husbands having studied up to graduate or post-graduate level, it can be concluded that the education levels of husbands in polygamous unions is also quite low. Another important finding is that in 49 percent of cases where the woman happens to be in a polygamous union, the parents have

selected the spouse. This shows the relatively little autonomy that women have within this institution and makes a mockery of the Quranic provision of consent. It also highlights that assumptions about free, autonomous choice of spouses in polygamy is not true.

It is clear that women hardly have the same bargaining power as men when it comes to their choice of spouses, especially in instances of polygamy. An overwhelming number of women said they felt a sense of betrayal, loss of dignity and loss of self-respect when the husband married again.

The survey highlights the severe mental health issues that plague the women. Fifty percent of women said that they were depressed most of the time. They also reported other symptoms of depression such as lack of adequate sleep (43 percent), frequent aches and pains (33 percent), not feeling good about themselves (33 percent) and even a tendency to self-harm (43 percent). An overwhelming number of women (84 percent) felt that polygamy should be outlawed. Seventy-three percent even said that a husband who takes a second wife should be punished.

Twenty-nine percent of girls who were first wives and 18 percent of second wives had been married before the age of 18. Seventy-seven percent of first wives were school dropouts and only 11 percent had studied up to Class 10. Twenty percent were illiterate, 4 percent were graduates and just one percent were postgraduates.

They also lived in extreme poverty. Forty-two percent of first wives had no income at all; 40 percent had an income below ₹1,000. Among second wives, 45 percent had no income and 34 percent reported an income below ₹1,000.

Ninety percent of first wives said their husbands did not seek their permission to remarry. Only 23 percent of husbands informed the wife about their second marriage. Seventy-two percent of women learnt about their husband’s second marriage through family or their neighbours or friends.

The husbands cited various reasons for taking a second wife. Thirty-five percent said they fell in love with someone else; 11 percent cited no children and six percent wanted to remarry to support a widow or divorcee. Twelve percent said their parents had asked them to remarry and four percent said their wives were bedridden. Ten percent blamed

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their wives, six percent wanted sons and 11 percent were not happy with their spouse's physical appearance — the colour of her skin or her figure (too fat, too thin). Forty-five percent of husbands threatened to divorce the first wife if she resented the second marriage.

Some of the first wives — 29 percent — approached a Qazi for redress after the husband's second marriage. Forty-two percent of women reported that they were told to adjust since the Shariat allows the man to take a second wife. Ten percent of Qazis said it was the man's right in Islam. Twenty-two percent of the women were advised to take Khula or divorce the husband. Twenty-six percent were asked to file a case against the husband if they were unhappy.

The women reported a deterioration in relations with the husband after his second marriage. Forty-one percent of first wives said their husbands did not live with them anymore; 25 percent said they spent less time with them; and 15 percent said the husbands did not care for them at all.

Just 40 percent of husbands paid monthly maintenance money to the first wife; 47 percent did not pay at all and 13 percent paid irregularly. Forty-four percent of women started working after the husband remarried.

Most women, about 41 percent, moved to their parents' house; 35 percent lived in the same house as before; 14 percent lived on their own on rent; and 10 percent lived in a new house provided by the husband.

Forty-five percent of women said they tolerated the second marriage because they had no option, and they were concerned about their children. Over 50 percent of women suffered mental trauma such as depression, self-blaming and suicidal tendencies.

### QURAN AND POLYGAMY

It is commonly believed that Muslim men are allowed to marry up to four wives as per Quranic injunctions. But the truth is to the contrary. It depends on how the verses are interpreted. Polygamy has been in practice in Arabia and elsewhere throughout cultures and regions much before the advent of Islam. It is believed by some that by restricting the number of wives to four, Islam attempted to regulate its rampant practice at the time.

## Foreign funds...

Continued from page 22

foreign university than what bureaucrats and politicians are willing to grant Indian universities. The Association of Indian Universities has raised a question on this in the light of the Central government granting greater autonomy to an Australian university that proposes to open a campus in Gujarat than what is at present granted to even

## FINDINGS OF THE SURVEY

### UNDER-AGE MARRIAGES

29% of girls who are first wives and 18% who are second wives were married below the age of 18.

### LOW EDUCATION

71% of second wives are dropouts below Class 10, 20 percent are illiterate, 4 percent are graduates. Of first wives 77% are dropouts below Class 10, 11% studied upto Class 10, 7% are graduates and only 1% are post-graduates.

### POVERTY

42% of first wives have no income at all; 40 percent have an income below ₹1,000. Of second wives, 45% have no income at all and 34% have an income below ₹1,000.

### WIFE'S PERMISSION

Only 23% of husbands informed the wife about their second marriage and 72% of women learnt about their husband's second marriage through family or external sources like neighbours or friends.

### REASONS FOR SECOND MARRIAGE

35% of the husbands said that they fell in love with someone else while 11% cited having no children, 6% said they remarried to support a widow or divorcee and 12% said their parents asked them to.

### ROLE OF THE QAZI COURT

29% of the women approached a Qazi for redress after their husband's second marriage and 42% of the women were told to adjust because it is allowed by the Shariat while 26% were asked to file a case against the husband if they were unhappy.

The Prophet of Islam was monogamous in his first marriage to Bibi Khatija. After her demise, he entered into marital alliances for largely political and tribal interests except in the case of Aisha. The Quran permits polygamy in a certain context and with strict conditions. The Quran does not encourage polygamy remotely. Today the context is very different to 1,400 years ago. There are no wars happening leading to a shortage of men. On the contrary, sex ratios are adverse with a fewer number of girls than boys. There are no orphans and widows in need of protection through marriage since they can empower themselves and decide the course of their lives independently.

The Quranic verse Sura AnNisa' 4:3 says, "Marry women of your choice, two, three or four" but goes on to add "but if you fear that you will not be able to deal justly with them, then marry only one". Further, verse 4:129 says, "You are never able to be fair and just between women even if you desire to" and

the best Indian universities.

One aspect of the government's attack on CPR that has not received adequate attention is the fact that so many ministers in the Modi government, including Smriti Irani and Anurag Thakur, have travelled overseas, as Members of Parliament when they were in the Opposition, on programmes at US institutions that were in fact hosted by CPR. The academic programme for parliamentarians on which scores of MPs have gone to the US and UK,

therefore, "marry only one".

A selective reading of verses has led to abuse of provisions without considering them in totality. The spirit of the Quran is centred on justice, kindness, compassion and human wisdom. How are these upheld by marrying four wives?

Besides, we live in a modern world where girls and women have opportunities to attain their human potential through education, awareness and economic independence.

Muslim countries like Turkey, Tunisia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan don't permit polygamy. Neighbouring Bangladesh and Pakistan permit it after written permission of the first wife and approval by a council. Muslim women as Indian citizens are entitled to the constitutional rights of justice, equality and human self-worth. There is no reason for this injustice to continue. ■

*Zakia Soman is a founder-member of the Bharatiya Muslim Mahila Andolan, a mass organization of Muslim women in India*

with Ms Irani taking great pride from her visit to the Yale University campus, was hosted by CPR with private sector funding.

While I am in favour of increased domestic, national funding for research and also support scrutiny of the activities of foreign-funded research and teaching institutions, the political hounding of a contrarian institution does not do democratic India any good. ■

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

# Kanyashree is the answer



## HERE & NOW

SUBIR ROY

THE Assam government's recent drive against child marriage, which has led to several thousand arrests, has created a turmoil in a section of society. There are hugely disturbing reports that teenage mothers-to-be are avoiding going for medical check-ups or hospital visits out of fear that this will bring the police to their doorstep looking for their husbands and other elderly close relations like parents-in-law.

Newly arrived babies are also being denied medical attention out of the same fear of their parents who are not taking them for medical check-ups. Some pregnant young girls have even gone to the extent of seeking out medical people they trust and asking for abortions in order not to have to go through the impending childbirth. As a result of all this, ante-natal visits to some public hospitals have dropped. ASHA workers who visit homes to track pregnancies and manage inoculation have been caught in the crossfire and visits to anganwadi centres to meet them have also dropped.

The official reason given for the crackdown is that it is part of the attempt to bring down maternal and infant mortality rates which are often caused by girls marrying and bearing children too early. Early marriages should indeed be avoided but the issue is if the way to bring this about is by creating fear of falling foul of the law. Using official machinery and the long arm of the law to address the issue of underage marriages appears to enjoy the support of the more educated and better-off sections of the state's populace.

The existing body of research points in a different direction. There is a degree of consensus that the way to address the issue of early marriage is to strive for girls to be better educated and achieve a degree of financial independence by earning. Once this happens, girls will not only cease to be a financial burden on their families but may even be able to help the family out financially. It is often the case that parents get their daughters married early in order to have one less mouth to feed.

Available data indicates that the incidence of child marriage is indeed high in Assam. But

successive rounds of the National Family Health Survey indicate that there has been a steady decline in the practice over the years. As child marriages are declining, women are bearing fewer children. According to 2019-20 data, the fertility rate has gone down to 1.9, that is, below the replacement level. You could hardly ask for more.

Data also indicates something more significant. High levels of underage marriage are prevalent among the minority communities like Muslims and Christians but they also happen to belong to the poorer sections of society. It is significant that as people get better off they tend to move away from early marriage. Also, maternal mortality is crucially affected by anaemia which has nothing to do with the age of marriage but everything to do with poverty and undernourishment. This, plus the



Families are offered financial incentives to keep their girls in school

reasons cited above as to why parents get their daughters married early, indicates that instead of letting loose the police on the practitioners of early marriage, the state should improve their incomes. That will achieve the desired result.

Fortunately, there is an example of a state government initiating a programme to address the economic roots of early marriage — the Kanyashree programme of West Bengal. Started a decade ago, it offers financial incentives to poor girls so that they keep going to school and do not get married too early. By seeking to prevent early marriage, the scheme targets improvement in infant and maternal mortality rates which go down as child bearing age goes up. Along with these aims, the scheme also reduces chances of child trafficking. Poor parents will not be tempted to let their young daughters go if they cease to be a financial burden on the family.

Under the scheme a girl in the 13 to 18 age group and in Classes 8-12 or an equivalent vocational training programme gets an annual

scholarship of ₹1,000 so long as she keeps going to school and remains unmarried. Plus, on reaching 18 the unmarried girl gets a one-time grant of ₹25,000. The state is paying the dowry which the parents would get if they got their daughter married!

After being in place for a decade, it can be said that the scheme works, and has in a way become a part of the educational and social landscape. Over 1,800 institutions are registered under the scheme and 2.7 million applications have been registered under it.

Kanyashree has won international recognition. It secured the 2017 United Nations Public Service Award, becoming one of three schemes across the world to be placed in Category I for "reaching the poorest and most vulnerable through inclusive service and participation". The scheme is easy to access.

What is more, it is efficiently implemented, something that cannot be said about many government schemes. Because of all its merits it has been adopted as a model for the Central government's Beti Bachao Beti Padhao scheme.

One reason why Kanyashree has worked is that it uses information technology for implementing as well as monitoring the work done. It is delivered through a dedicated web-based portal [www.wbkanyashree.gov.in](http://www.wbkanyashree.gov.in) which reduces paperwork and response time. UNESCO is a partner for the project and keeps an eye on it.

To enrol for Kanyashree a girl has to fill in a form and get it certified by the head of her educational institution. When this form is presented at a bank branch it opens a 'zero balance no-frills account' and uploads the data. If the application is approved, payment is transferred to this account. All primary data on the scheme is entered by educational institutions. The head of a school affirms that the procedure for completing forms and registration is hassle-free. The school's database on the portal is updated weekly and leaves those who interact with the scheme satisfied.

To put it simply, to help girls carry on with their studies and not marry too early it is schemes like Kanyashree which deliver and make all who deal with them happy. As girls marry later, maternal and infant mortality rates fall. Along with all this the girls' families are financially a bit better off. This is the way to go, not by letting the police loose on hapless victims of inherited social and economic realities. ■

*Subir Roy is a senior journalist based in Kolkata.*

# How cities swallow rivers



## LIVING RIVERS

VENKATESH DUTTA

WHILE working on the older Corona satellite pictures of Lucknow, I was impressed by the number of rivers that the city used to have in the early 1970s. A large network of streams is visible in satellite pictures connected with the Gomti river. There are big ponds — sometimes more than 100 hectares, holding water throughout the year.

As I looked at recent satellite pictures, I was disappointed to see that many of these rivers and ponds had disappeared due to the development of roads, colonies and shopping complexes. Apart from the Gomti, eight rivers used to flow through Lucknow, namely, the Raithi, Behta, Kukrail, Bakh, Nagwa, Akraddi, Kadu and Sai. Out of these, four have disappeared in the past 50 years because houses, colonies and roads have been built on their beds. And three rivers are known as *nalas* or drains.

During the late 1980s and 1990s, many colonies came up on wetlands and terrace floodplains of rivers, rivulets and natural streams. Such structures caused irreversible damage to rivers and wetlands which are otherwise sought to be protected by law. Now every year, the groundwater level declines by one metre in the city as we have lost most of our natural recharge sites.

The public property of revenue villages like *nalas*, ponds, *chakroads*, pastures and the like was sold to builders and land development agencies. The Lucknow Development Authority (LDA) built colonies on big ponds. According to satellite pictures 70 percent of the city's ponds have disappeared in the past four decades. When there is rapid decline in recharge areas, how will groundwater be replenished? Agencies like the municipal corporation and LDA take the side of the builders and colonizers. In January, a case of encroachment of ponds in Gomti Nagar came up in the High Court. In Gomti Nagar extension, buildings were constructed on the land of 17 ponds with the full knowledge of the administration. Why are the people in charge playing with the future of the population?

Many smaller rivers and rivulets in India are disappearing. Many of them got converted into

sewage-carrying drains, while others were encroached upon by private and government colonizers. No legal provisions have been made to protect the land adjoining these rivers. In many cases, roads and houses were built on river banks, reducing the flow path of the river. Many upcoming cities do not have a master plan, and those with master plans are least concerned about natural streams and wetlands. The choices that have been made about urban growth and governance have repeatedly ignored encroachments on the floodplains of rivers, which has led to the destruction of a number of ponds, wetlands and water systems that were once linked with the river. Our cities have also experienced an increase in the frequency and severity of flooding incidents as a direct consequence of the removal of a



At one time eight rivers used to flow through Lucknow

**Many newer cities do not have master plans and those that do are unconcerned about wetlands and natural streams.**

number of these naturally occurring sponges and the consequent lessening of the flood-carrying capacity of the rivers.

The Vishwamitri in Vadodara, Musi in Hyderabad, Godavari in Nashik, Gomti in Lucknow, Mutha in Pune, and Noyyal in Coimbatore are only some examples of how these rivers have been severely mistreated as they flow through the cities. Their smaller tributaries are disappearing fast from the map. The rapid pace of urban development with negligence toward drainage systems of our cities and their suburbs have caused the rivers to recede into the background. Sewage and industrial effluents discharged into the river,

polluted storm water outfalls, and many other sources of pollution have all wreaked extensive ecological degradation.

A deeper look at the master plans of some cities reveals that urban growth is legitimizing large-scale land use changes — often transforming natural river banks into publicly accessible river promenades, similar to the highly publicised Sabarmati Riverfront Development in Ahmedabad. Creating channels that are lined with concrete will alienate bank vegetation and prevent groundwater from getting in along the river. A more strategic priority would be to lessen the amount of impermeable surface area in the entire segment of the river.

Master plans address the rivers in a piecemeal manner, to the point of ignoring the larger watershed and hydrological network of which a river is a part. The idea of modifying the riverbanks and holding water all year long will impair the entire biological function of a perennial river that undergoes many seasonal changes; it can transform the river into an impounded pool of water that has lost all ecological integrity. Important biological niches will be lost if the riparian areas are paved over with concrete, as this would prevent vegetation from growing there.

Once upon a time, rivers and streams were focal points of our collective consciousness, celebrations, cultural identity, memories, rituals, tales, and daily needs. Now, cities are restructuring the hydrology of urban watersheds, resulting in distorted dynamics of recharge, flooding and even vegetation cover. The administrative zones or limits are always used as the criterion to determine the development zones, while ecological boundaries are ignored in consideration during the development process. We need to reverse this trend. Ecological boundaries should get prominence over administrative boundaries in our master plans.

We need master plans that don't merely have the purpose of making the river an amenity for humans to use; rather, the goal should be to protect the ecological integrity, improve the health of the ecosystem, enhance natural biodiversity and integrate the socio-cultural identity of the place. Smaller streams, rivulets and rivers can transform a city's landscape and can be great natural assets. They can also improve the quality of life of people. But only when we decide to protect our water endowments. ■

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

# Will India seize the moment?



## LOOKING AHEAD

KIRAN KARNIK

THE tagline of the rap song "*Apna time aayega*" (My time will come) from the recent Hindi film, *The Gully Boys*, could equally have been the refrain of India itself for many decades. A left-handed compliment is that India has for long been a country with great potential — and continues to be so.

We have, of course, moved far from the days of dire predictions of chaos, of a break-up, of ship-to-lip foreign foodgrains to stave off starvation, from the days of sending gold out to repay our debts to "India shining". In the world's mind, the Indian with the begging bowl has given way to one with a (computer) tablet in her hand.

From the heyday of the first dozen years of the new millennium, when India was increasingly the flavour of the decade, the country did stumble for a few years in the last part of the 2010s. And then Covid-19 hit the world. Everything — health, global trade, social relationships, jobs, economic growth — seemed to go for a toss. The country suffered grievously during the second wave. Its international image took a beating with photographs of corpses floating in the Ganga, cremations on the streets and chaos outside hospitals. Much of this was soon redeemed by a very successful vaccination programme. Yet, like "long Covid", the economic impacts of the pandemic linger on.

Problems in China, disruption of supply chains, high interest rates, inflation, trade restrictions — together, they have given a jolt to the world economy. This has been further exacerbated by the war in Ukraine and the consequent sanctions. Supplies of foodgrains, fertilizers, oil and gas have all been affected, with developing countries bearing the brunt of the impact. India appears to be handling this successfully — just as it has skilfully navigated between the two warring blocks and charted its own course.

This and a confluence of other factors have positioned India well for comparatively strong economic growth. In fact, India is expected to be the star performer as the fastest growing major economy this year. In addition, India now presides over the G20, the forum of the world's 20 biggest economies. Its firm

independent stand in the Ukraine imbroglio, amidst many pressures, has won it wide respect in the "global South". Also, in Russian eyes, it has further cemented a relationship with them despite the perceived closeness to the US and West. Geopolitically and economically, India is on the ascendant.

One result of India's consistent economic growth — through various ups and downs — is that its cumulative impact is now becoming increasingly visible at the individual level, more so with the slower rate of population growth. At the same time, India's large population translates into a large market, offering immense scope to both domestic and foreign companies.



The impact of growth is being felt at the individual level

A few numbers tell the story. PRICE, a research organization, estimates India's middle class (those earning between ₹5 lakh and ₹30 lakh per annum) at 432 million, and over 700 million by 2030. The proportion of poor will go down from 14 percent to 5 percent. The fact that two-thirds of India is below 35 years is also important: it means energy, innovation and a willingness to buy now, pay later.

While a poor country pulling itself up by the bootstraps necessarily needs economic growth, this must take place in a manner that does not create its own problems — immediately, or for future generations. An appreciation of this has led to the concept of sustainable development, in which the natural environment is not to be despoiled in our haste for growth. Cutting trees for timber brings immediate income but may well cause floods, droughts or landslides next year. The human and even economic cost may well outweigh the income, as we have sadly seen in our country. Joshimath is but the most recent example. It is ironic that within

weeks of the disaster, a sensible decision to limit the number of visitors to nearby shrines was opposed by some local vested interests.

Most people view sustainability only through the ecological lens. There is, however, also the issue of social sustainability. Here, there are serious concerns about the development model that the country has adopted. Inequity seems to be rising, almost in proportion to the number of billionaires. A larger share of the growth pie is being captured by those who are better off, even as the middle class grows. With rapidly rising aspirations fuelled by high media exposure, ostentatious displays of wealth, and want creation by marketeers, we may well be entering dangerous territory. An increase in their own income may no longer satisfy those who see a far larger jump in the prosperity of those around them. Jobless growth leading to unemployment and growing informalization (work with no security of tenure or social benefits) are adding to dissatisfaction, especially amongst the youth — always a volatile segment of the population.

Some studies (PRICE) do indicate trickle-down effects (share of bottom 20 percent in disposable income was 6.5 percent in 2016, 3 percent in 2021, 4.5 percent now), but other telling statistics indicate the top or luxury brands growing so much faster than the average in so many sectors. Moreover, signs of disparity are visible and felt in day-to-day life. Beyond a point, patience may wear thin, especially in urban environments.

Added to this is the social sustainability of fractious and divisive politics, supplemented by doses of violence. The discriminated, disadvantaged, and deprived may, at some point, revolt. Sustainability requires harmony, and we have too little of it.

Doubtless, key social safety nets like free grains, cash transfers to farmers, healthcare and insurance, subsidies and the like have been of immense value. MGNREGS too has played an important role (and it is high time to roll out its urban counterpart). Together, these have assuaged the poor, taking many beyond the poverty line. However, there is no equivalent balm yet for our frayed and further-fraying social fabric.

Yet, this could be India's time. This decade will be decisive in laying the foundation for rapid growth and overall sustainable development. Will we grab the opportunity before the window closes? Watch this space. Or, as they say more colourfully in Bollywood, picture *abhi baaki hai*. ■

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

# More rules, more dog attacks

MEGHNA UNIYAL

A four-year-old child was surrounded and killed by stray dogs in Hyderabad. An infant was bitten to death in a hospital in Rajasthan. Yet, no measures are taken to remove stray dogs roaming wild in our cities. Why has the stray dog become such a highly protected animal?

Until 2001 dog control was implemented under State Municipal & Police Acts (removal/ euthanasia of unowned and dangerous dogs) and the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act (sheltering/euthanasia of unowned dogs).

In 2001, the Ministry of Culture under Maneka Gandhi — a ministry that has nothing to do with animal or disease control or public health and safety — passed the Animal Birth Control (ABC) Rules that mandated the opposite of dog control. Stray dogs were to be released and maintained on streets, outside schools and hospitals, in and around markets and public parks and even airport premises, regardless of whether they had attacked or killed citizens.

Officials of the Animal Welfare Board of India (AWBI), who are equally responsible for coming up with and promoting the ABC policy, also started to promote the idea that wherever animals like dogs are found, it is their “territory”, laws and Constitution be damned. Not surprisingly, there has been complete mayhem and conflict between people and dogs for over two decades thanks to this policy.

Instead of taking cognizance of the complete failure of the ABC Rules in tackling the issue of stray dogs, the AWBI has doubled down on its callous attitude towards a critical public health and safety issue. It has decided to introduce the ABC Rules 2022, an ‘updated’ version that was needed because, by its own admission, “The board has been receiving complaints on rampant cruelty in carrying out the ABC programme including the imperfect surgical procedure carried out by the incompetent veterinarians and para-veterinarians engaged by the Animal Welfare Organizations.”

Strangely though, the draft ABC Rules 2022, aim to address and resolve the problem of stray dogs that have attacked or killed citizens by simply renaming them “community animals” that have to necessarily be maintained in a state of homelessness in public places.

Clearly, being aware of the fact that the new ABC Rules would still be in contravention of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, something that the AWBI will be required to

explain to the Supreme Court in the coming months, the Board decided to amend the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (PCA) Act as well. The strategy and logic applied is — since the ABC Rules have failed in controlling stray dog populations, remove the word “stray dog” from the rules altogether, since the ABC Rules contravene the parent Act, change the Act itself...and so on.

The AWBI was set up as a statutory body under the PCA Act to further the Act by playing an advisory role to the Central government. Over the last few years, the AWBI and NGOs have voiced concern over the insufficient monetary fines for animal cruelty and this lacuna was to be addressed in the amendments to the PCA Act. However, the 61



We now have some 60 million stray dogs

**The ABC Rules have resulted in complete mayhem and conflict between people and dogs for over two decades.**

proposed amendments are essentially clearly an attempt to completely modify the goals, intent and objectives of the principal Act.

Perhaps the most dangerous part is how AWBI members are recommending an overarching, supervisory and executive role for themselves as well as NGOs, with extra-judicial authority over citizens and even Constitutional bodies like municipalities and the police. These include the power to levy fines, penalties, confiscate animals for any reason and merrily play judge, jury and executioner, sidestepping constitutional procedures like due process and rule of law.

The proposed amendments are replete with illegal and unconstitutional provisions

including that “causing the death” of an animal, even in an accident or in self-defence, is to be considered deliberate cruelty, resulting in massive fines and a jail term.

Even more concerning is the fact that the Ministry of Animal Husbandry, that has inexplicably been given the task of handling the critical issue of animal control and therefore public health and safety, and under which the AWBI functions, remains both clueless and mum on the issue of such brazenly illegal acts of endangering public health and safety and subverting the Constitution.

The actions of the AWBI can no longer be taken lightly in view of how it has corrupted the very ideals of the Act it was set up under. It’s also high time public officials, who mess around with Constitutional provisions, leading to attacks, diseases and even the killing of citizens, do not get to remain nameless, faceless entities behind government boards and ministries but are held directly liable and culpable for the consequences of their policies on citizens.

Someone also needs to explain why crores of the taxpayers’ money has been spent on keeping unowned dogs roaming the streets, while managing to neuter only 2 percent of the stray dog population in 10 years and ending up with a staggering 60 million stray dogs! In courts, what the AWBI refers to as “a few” incidents every year, are actually over 10 million stray dog attacks on citizens, 25,000 official human rabies deaths and crores spent on accidents and man hours lost every single year.

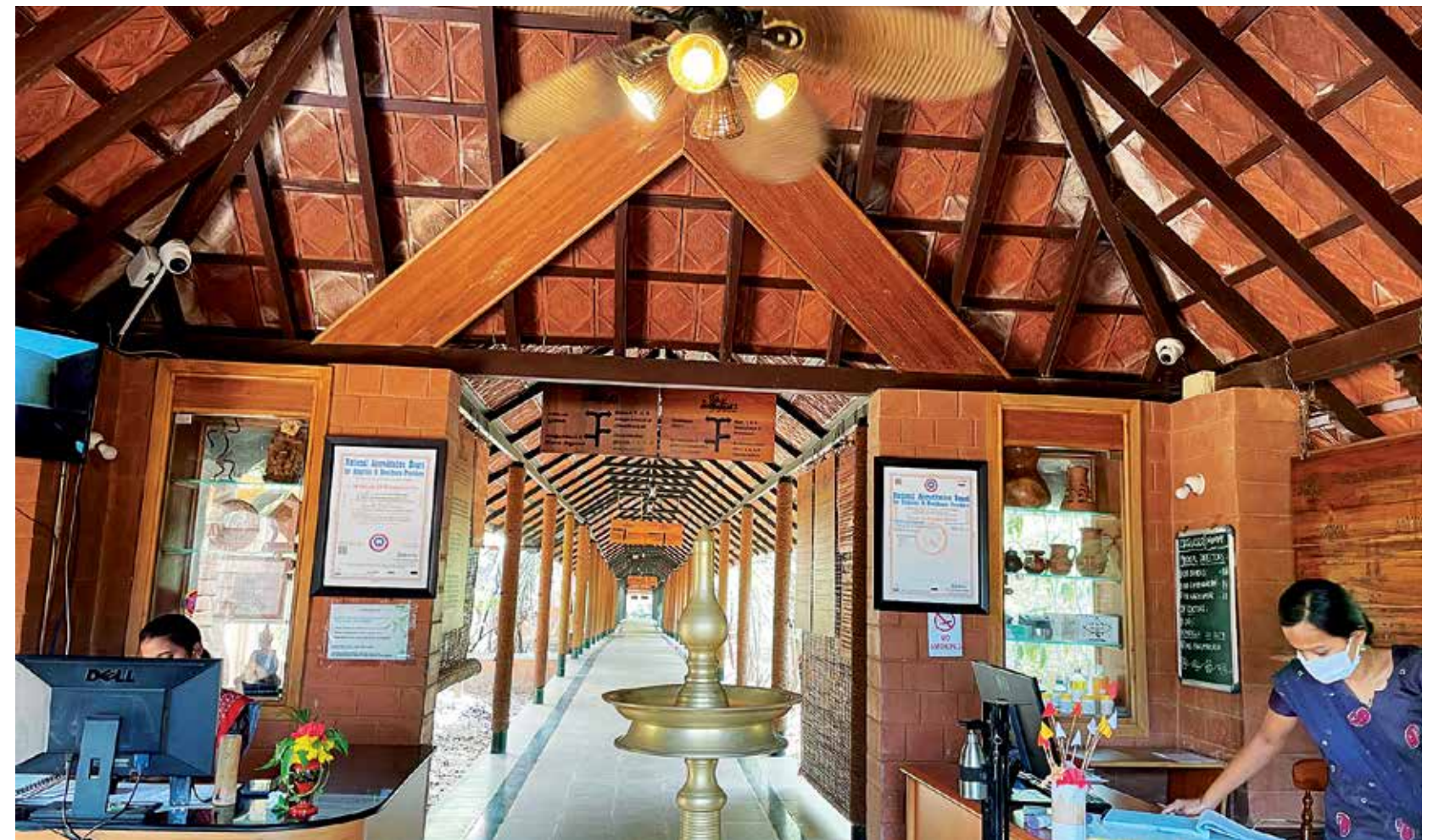
Crimes Against Humanity (CAH), as defined by the UN, include an attack against a civilian population, that may be widespread and/or systematic in nature, including acts intentionally causing great suffering or serious injury to mental or physical health. A crime against humanity can occur when there is no armed conflict and to be considered so, must be committed “pursuant to or in furtherance of a State or organizational policy to commit such attack” and requires that the State or organization “have knowledge of and actively promote or encourage such an attack against a civilian population”.

Thus, the mutilation and killing of Indian citizens by stray dogs via official government policy, pushed and funded by the AWBI and foreign and domestic NGOs, thereby violating the Fundamental Right to Life as guaranteed to citizens under Article 21 of the Constitution, is the definition of a Crime Against Humanity and must be treated as such. ■

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

# LIVING

FOOD | TRAVEL | REVIEWS | PRODUCTS | GIVING



The reception with its covered pathway

## Going back to Vaidyagrama

### It’s busier but hasn’t lost its serene healing touch

JYOTI PANDE LAVAKARE

REVISITING the experience of a lifetime fraught with uncertainties. Will it be as good? Can it be better? What if it is a let-down? So it was with me as I headed back to Vaidyagrama, an idyllic village of *vaidyas* or Ayurveda physicians nestled among trees in the quietly imposing Nilgiri foothills some 40 km from Coimbatore.

Ten months ago, I had spent 17 days there in search of a cure for my painful tailbone and solace for my wracked spirit after my mother’s death from lung cancer. I left chastened with the learning that solutions in Ayurveda aren’t available over the counter but are coded into your being. I left a ‘new person’ or so I felt. I felt rewired and enhanced.

Now, as I prepared to head back, I hoped fervently that nothing had changed.

Vaidyagrama was created in 2008 and has steadily built a reputation for itself as a place to go for treatment or just a reset. Its founders are four third-generation *vaidyas*: Dr A.R. Ramadas, Dr Ramkumar Kutty, Dr E.K. Ramanandan and Dr K.K. Harikrishnan.

I had found in Vaidyagrama a tranquil island of holistic healing. I prayed that nothing had changed and that the gentle pushback that I received while making my booking — “this is the busy season” — was not an indication of some bigger commercial change having overtaken the place.

Such fears melted away momentarily when Vaidyagrama’s familiar mud-and-brick coloured structure came into view. But wait, what was that new structure opposite its bustling reception? A large, gazebo-like edifice, attached to a familiar covered pathway leading to a spacious hall under a sloping tiled roof —

this was new! There were other buildings that looked strangely familiar. Vaidyagrama had expanded, and I couldn’t wait to explore! But first, I needed to meet my *vaidya* and start my treatment, I reminded myself, turning resolutely towards the reception.

As I settled in, indeed, much had changed. First of all, there were people. Lots of people. From all over the world, many of them non-Indian. They were from Norway, Switzerland, Turkey, Australia, Israel, the UK and, of course, the US. The largest contingent was from Los Angeles — actors, scriptwriters, filmmakers and recording artists.

Hollywood actors such as Nicole Cannon, Linus Roach, Rosalind Bennet sat in a meditative trance during *puja*. There were Ayurveda *vaidyas* from the West and authors such as Dr Robert Svoboda, Durga Leela who

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teaches the Yoga of Recovery, Karla Cain, who is an American Ayurveda and yoga practitioner and Grammy winner Krishna Das aka Jeffrey Kagel.

And there were writers, many who had authored books from chick-lit to serious non-fiction, books on yoga, addiction and therapies. At first, this demographic felt weirdly glamorous. I wondered how I would deal with celebrities, their egos and the potential distraction at the daily afternoon *satsangs* — deep discussions from the commonplace and mundane to the divinely spiritual — that I was so looking forward to.

The demographic had changed. Not just more foreigners, there were more men, more young people and more groups. There was no pressure to mingle. And my room, close to the large, new hall and the old Dhanvantari temple, was a quiet oasis to escape into.

“Pre-Covid, we used to get on average around 60-65 percent foreign patients and 35-40 percent Indian patients. During Covid, almost 85-90 percent were Indian. Post-Covid, the ratio is more even,” said Dr Kutty.

But right now it looked like there were 75 percent foreign patients and 25 percent Indians. Dr Kutty explained that this was due to the international vacation schedules and the gap that Covid restrictions caused — like the revenge tourism that other parts of the country were witnessing. Come March, this ratio would flip, with almost 75 percent of patients from India. But other ratios are also changing.

“We are also getting more male patients than before,” Dr Kutty said, noting that the male to female ratio has changed from 25:75 to 35:65. Younger patients have also increased. “Earlier, we saw patients in the 55 years-plus category, but now we are seeing increasing numbers of 40-plus patients.”

There were several groups too. Like a large group of young Turkish Ayurveda students, a smaller group of older patients recovering from different addictions led by Durga Leela, a charismatic Scottish woman from California, a yoga and Ayurvedic study group called Sattvic Sage led by Karla Cain, a knowledgeable American based out of Arizona and Illinois, and a group of women from Mumbai. Most of the groups congregated through the day even as members took treatment individually.

But even though every corner of Vaidyagrama seemed populated, my fears around this altered demographic turned out to be unfounded.

One reason was that we were a bunch of folks who had actively chosen Vaidyagrama. We were all suffering from some disease or affliction that we hoped to ease, looking for answers, in search of something we didn't quite understand. This meant that though people looked different, intrinsically we were very similar — in our openness and our approach to this alternative science.



The village has a forest and water-harvesting structures



Meals that heal

Furthermore, I really didn't have to explain myself or my culture. Most inmates already knew enough — some of them were chanting arcane Sanskrit *slokas* in impeccable accents that even I, with a fair knowledge of my religion and culture, didn't know or remember. In fact, my fear now was that I would inadvertently become part of a commune that was almost cultish in character!

#### FAMILIAR RHYTHM

By the second week, I realized nothing had really changed in essence. Patients checked out, and new ones checked in. Morning and evening prayers at Vaidyagrama's energy centre, the Brahmakalam, took place like clockwork. Treatments were still held in each



The glow of lamps

*illam's* treatment rooms on hard wooden tables by gentle therapists with a sense of service. Most things worked on schedule — from the regular appearance of little steel glasses with *kashayams* in the morning and evening and the large stainless steel tiffin carriers containing breakfast, lunch and dinner, to the efficient cleaning staff, laundry pick-up teams and reception staff. I could see, though, everyone, from the *vaidyas* to their assistants and the therapists, were stretched to capacity.

The essential culture of Vaidyagrama, of service, holistic healing and of encouraging enquiry and explanations without judgement, seemed unchanged. Dr Kutty is still the visionary brain behind Vaidyagrama. Dr Ramadas is its soul and Drs Ramanandan and

Harikrishnan its beating heart and pulsing nerves. Dr Hari Kumar, whose melodious evening *pujas* transported us to the *bhakti* path, is akin to its arteries.

These doctors, along with Dr Anupama, the team of *bhishaks* (senior assistant *vaidyas*), Dr Vinod and the team of *chikistaks* along with their gentle, accomplished therapists, are creating an authentic healing village, somewhere between a hospital and an ashram.

There were yellow cranes and trucks I could spot on Vaidyagrama's periphery, signifying it would grow further. “The next set of *illams* will be built slightly differently, based on patient feedback and our learnings,” said Dr Kutty. Some would include individual consultation rooms and courtyards as well as an area where larger groups could eat together.

**The demographic had changed. Not just more foreigners there were more men, more young people, more groups.**

Currently, everyone is expected to eat quietly, mindfully, in their rooms, except on Wednesdays, when patients congregate for a group lunch. The food is served to them by their doctors and therapists. In addition to second servings and jaggery sweetened desserts, they are encouraged to entertain one another with poetry, songs, readings and even dance which is not allowed if you are going through any intensive treatment. In the new buildings, that may change as groups may want to eat together every day.

Communities build so quickly at Vaidyagrama that people who prefer to withdraw into themselves find it too “noisy”, Dr Kutty says, his eyes twinkling as I look around in the serene twilight, a peacock's calls in the distance the only sounds I can hear.

But then I remember the daily evening sessions of music, which had become longer and longer, often lasting beyond the suggested time for turning in — between 9 pm and 10 pm. I remember the size of the group swelling, with more people joining as the music floated through the still night air. I have heard *ghazals* and umpteen old melodious Bollywood songs punctuated on occasion by a Nordic “troll song”, a Turkish love song, words of a revolutionary poem emotionally performed in English by an Iranian woman, and catchy songs by pop group ABBA.

The new architecture will allow groups to remain together, be communal more compartmentally and peacefully, without disturbing others. ■

## Noon chai and corn bread with zero-waste in Kashmir

JEHANGIR RASHID

THE next time you travel along the Mughal Road, enjoy a *noon chai* with a rustic slice of bread made with corn at a roadside stall, rather grandly called an eco-cafeteria. Set up by the School for Rural Development and Environment (SRDE) in collaboration with the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF), these stalls are meant to provide an income to local communities. The department of Wildlife Protection is also involved.

The big problem with roadside eating is that it generates trash that gets left behind and piles up. These stalls are therefore primarily meant to be zero-waste. Next, they promote traditional and local cuisine. Finally, they are low-cost contraptions that can be easily rigged together or dismantled, which is especially useful in Kashmir's weather conditions.

The initiative is as yet at the stage of a pilot for which tourist spots falling along the Pir Panjal range have been chosen. They are located along the Mughal Road that connects the Poonch and Rajouri districts of the Jammu division with the Kashmir Valley through the Shopian district.

“The stalls work on the concept of zero waste in partnership with local communities. Eco-cafeterias are set up and remain open from May to October. Since the area is covered in snow during winter no tourist visits the meadows so there are no eco-cafeterias during the winter months,” says Dr Shaikh Ghulam Rasool, founder, SRDE.

The project has attracted some initial local participation in Rajouri district. Consequently, stalls have come up at Dubjan, Dhoongimarg and Pir Ki Gali, which are known for the mesmerizing beauty of their meadows for which tourists show up. On offer are local traditional delicacies for lunch

and dinner with homemade bread. It is a stipulation that there should be no preservatives or food colours. Also, there is no wastage of food.

Local pastoral communities who move to the Kashmir Valley from Rajouri in summer have also been setting up these stalls in the Hirpora wildlife sanctuary that has of late seen footfalls thanks to the opening up of more areas to tourism.

“Since tourist places like Tosa Maidan and Doodhpathri are visited by people in good numbers, we intend to start the eco-cafeterias there as well. This would ensure that there is very little human interference at these tourist places and the ecological balance is maintained. Ladakh has taken a lead in the concept of eco-cafeterias. Fifty such eco-cafeterias have come up there,” said Dr Rasool.

The SRDE founder said that eggs are being provided to the stalls and people will be trained to make momos for tourists to add variety to the modest menu on offer.



The cafes offer tea, corn bread, lunch and dinner

The idea of having eco-cafeterias was initiated in 2021, but the pandemic brought tourism to a virtual halt. In the following year, however, these stalls did better business with their traditional foods and beverages. They are expected to fare even better this year as the number of visitors keeps increasing.

It is still a long shot, but the idea is that a proliferation of stalls will finally benefit the local economy in remote areas. Possible beneficiaries could be nomads though it remains to be seen how they take to running small enterprises.

They live on the pastures of Kashmir during summer having come from different villages in the districts of Rajouri and Poonch. Putting nomads behind stalls is a challenge the project will have to find innovative ways around. But if the stalls increase the demand for corn bread, milk and pulses that itself will benefit the nomads. ■



# A cultural binge and a food trail to savour

Discover historic Mandu, checkout street food in Indore markets

SUSHEELA NAIR

THERE is much to see and savour in Madhya Pradesh, the heart of India. There are historical monuments, intriguing palaces and lakes. There are wildlife sanctuaries with tigers and cheetahs too. And then there is Indore, India's cleanest city with its aroma laden food street, certified as the cleanest, nationally.

I went first to Mandu to participate in the fourth edition of the five-day festival called Khojne Mein Kho Jao (meaning lose yourself in discovery), and to rediscover this quaint town with a past, replete with stories of romance and battle, courage and betrayal.

As I entered the historical hilltop fort town of Mandu, the roads sported a festive look decked with colourful flags and festoons, arches, streamers and multi-hued ribbons. The illuminated baobab trees and multi-hued buntings added to the flavour.

The festival was an immersive experience in culture. An eclectic mix of performing arts, workshops, art installations, architecture and music was on offer. Visitors could also enjoy an array of activities — hot air balloon rides, heritage walks, Maa Narmada Aarti at the Rewa Kund in the evening, sunrise yoga, cycling tours and poetry reading sessions.

"The entire festival was curated keeping historical relevance in mind. Delving into heritage, culinary experience and romance through Instagrammable locations, the festival also provided employment and business opportunities to local artisans," said Jai Thakore, COO and co-founder of E-Factor, an event management company which helped organize the festival.

"The heartening news is that Mandu has been included in the Tentative List of UNESCO World



Indore's famous Sarafa Bazaar becomes a crowded food hub at night

Heritage Sites," said Sheo Shekhar Shukla, principal secretary, tourism, and MD, Madhya Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation (MPTDC).

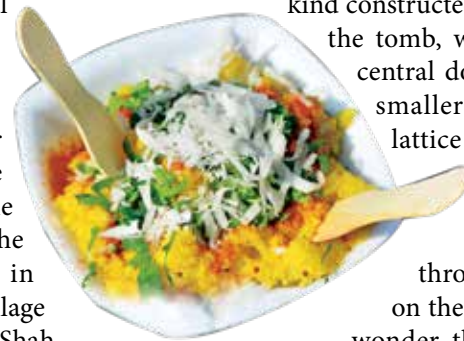
"This year, the spotlight was on the regal splendour of Mandu apart from positioning it as a rural tourism destination. Each monument in Mandu seems to tell a story, lending an aura of agelessness to the place. The storytelling sessions retell the love story of the legendary Baz Bahadur and his beautiful consort, Roopmati."

## FROM JAMI TO TAJ

We embarked on our monument-hopping spree with the Village Group at the Jami Masjid, patterned on the great Omayyad Mosque in Damascus, overlooking the village of Mandu. Begun by Hoshang Shah, it is considered the largest and finest example of Afghan architecture in India. The ornate Imam's pulpit next to the central niche is distinctly Hindu in decoration. I stood gazing in admiration at the beautiful courtyard

enclosed by huge colonnades with a variety of arches, pillars, bays and domes, all aesthetically laid out, evoking a sense of grandeur. The vast *masjid* can seat 5,000 people. Its variety of domes are sound-amplifying and echo-absorbing devices so that the frailest voice, speaking from the pulpit, would be heard miles away.

Hoshang's Tomb, located behind the mosque, is one of the first marble edifices of its kind constructed in India. The interior of the tomb, with a well-proportioned central dome, surrounded by four smaller domes, the beautiful lattice work, and the porticos and towers are overwhelming. Light enters the interior through stone *jalis*, and falls on the six tombs within. It is no wonder that Shah Jahan sent his architects on a *rece* to Mandu before they designed the Taj Mahal though few know that this is said to be the inspiration for the Taj Mahal.



## ON TO THE ROYAL ENCLAVE

From there we headed to the sprawling Royal Enclave which flaunts the Jahaz Mahal or Ship Palace — the star attraction of Mandu. It was built by Ghias-ud-din, son of Mahmud Shah, for his harem of more than 10,000 beautiful women. A striking two-storeyed palace with scalloped arches, airy rooms, and beautiful pools, it is flanked by two lakes, adding to its ship-like look. When viewed from afar, its open pavilions, balconies overhanging the water and open terraces are unforgettable on a moonlit night.

Next to this star attraction of the Royal Enclave is the Hindola Mahal, an

audience hall. It derives its name, meaning 'swinging palace', from its perceptibly sloping side walls which give an illusion that it is always swinging. It is valued for its trellis-worked sandstone and elegant façade. The famous Champa Baoli, a stepwell with underground chambers, and a *hammam* with chambers equipped with channels supplying hot and cold water and a steam sauna are other attractions.

## ETERNAL SAGA

The palace of Baz Bahadur, the last independent ruler of Mandu, is located beside Rewa Kund with an underground tank, and a water lift which supplied water to the palace. The palace is a blend of Rajasthani and Mughal styles of architecture. While strolling through the long corridors, amidst the numerous pillars and arched entrance, we could sense the echoes of a resplendent past.

Roopmati's Pavilion, located on the crest of a hill, gazes down at Baz Bahadur's palace, a magnificent expression of Afghan architecture. It was originally conceived as an army observatory, then became a look-out point for the lovely queen as Baz Bahadur's palace was visible from there. Roopmati is said to have been a very beautiful Hindu singer, and Baz Bahadur persuaded her to move to the fort by building this pavilion from where she could have sweeping views of the fertile Nimar plains with the silvery streak of the Narmada flowing across.

When Emperor Akbar marched to the Fort, Baz Bahadur fled, leaving Roopmati to poison herself. Mandu's ruins still narrate the tragic end. But the glory of Mandu lives on, in its palaces and mosques, in legends and songs, chronicled for posterity, and the balladeers of Mandu still sing of the romance of these lovers.

## POHA PERFECTION

After sightseeing in Mandu, we embarked on a culinary trail to the bustling metropolis of Indore which has many claims to fame. It is known as the commercial capital of Central India besides being the cleanest city in India. Another feather in its cap is that it has bagged the 'Clean Street Food Hub' certification from the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India. With its rich food culture, mindboggling array of vegetarian street food, and innovation of dishes, it can lay claim to the title of gastronomic capital.

As we ambled around Indore, exploring the food hubs of Chappan Dukaan (56 Shops) and Sarafa Market, we realized how passionate and fiercely proud Indoris are about their food. They take their food very seriously. It is truly a

culture imbued in the ethos of this vibrant city. There is so much to tickle your taste buds in these two eat-streets of Indore.

To relish Indore's specialty cuisine, we started our jaunt with Chappan Dukaan. Our first stop was Johnny Hot Dog, run by Vijay Singh, a culinary sensation. The dish served here is an in-house innovation in which Indore takes great pride. Hot Dog refers to a well-cooked and spiced mutton patty inside a soft bun with chutney and onions. We had spicy masala omelettes sandwiched between soft, round fresh buns served with chutney and ketchup. What baffled us was the speed at which the owner was flipping the burgers and serving them.

The local favourite, Indori Pohe, is part of the legacy of Indore. The unique combo of flaky *poha* and sweet and crispy *jalebis* is a popular item in the Malwa region of Madhya Pradesh. Wherever you go in Indore, you will find enticing mounds of *poha*, steamed to



Baz Bahadur's palace with its beautiful courtyard and tank

perfection and topped with *sev*, a sprinkling of coriander, and a dash of lemon. The breakfast isn't complete without *poha* along with a bite of crispy *jalebis*. Another must-have in this area is the sweet and spicy Bhutte Ka Kees, a savoury corn mash sprinkled with *chaat masala*. It is essentially boiled and grated corn tempered with *hing*, cumin, green chillies, and fennel seeds, topped with other spices, a touch of lemon, and served with shredded coconut.

The Sabudhana Khichdi blended with a variety of *namkeens* and crunchy chips, topped with spices and sprinkled with lemon and coriander, is equally tasty. Try out the Khopra Patties made up of perfectly cooked potato patties with a coconut filling and a generous amount of zesty chutneys. The Khatta Samosas, known for their sweet-tangy flavour, are worth a try. No trip to Madhya Pradesh is complete without savouring the *dal batti*, a delectable meal eaten in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. Made with lentils, wheat flour, and a whole lot of *ghee*, and served with salad

and a coriander dip, it will melt in your mouth.

When you have had your fill of snacks and savouries, head to Madhuram Sweets for the rich, creamy variety of Shikhanji. It refers to a sweet and delicious thickened milk drink. The Shikhanji glass is decorated with piles of dry fruit and has a texture between *rabri* and *lassi*. One must try the Jalebas, the giant form of the regular *jalebi* found in Indore. It is almost three times the size of a regular *jalebi*.

## SARAFI BAZAAR

In the evening we headed to Sarafa Bazaar for a night food exploration. It is one of the country's biggest jewellery markets. At night, after the shopkeepers pull down their shutters, the street gets transformed into an open-air food plaza, popular for its amazing variety of street food. It opens at 9 pm. It is believed that the idea of the food market was encouraged by the owners of the jewellery shops to ensure that the noise and bustle kept their stores secure at night.

The food street, which is open till 1 am, gets choc-a-bloc with food carts peddling an amazing variety of food ranging from fruit platters to 10 flavours of *pani puri*. The colourful varieties of fruit and flavoured *paan* here will grab your attention. Smoke *paan*, ice *paan*, fire *paan* and chocolate *paan* are some of them. The smoke *paan* is known for its strong flavours as the betel leaves are set on fire while preparing the *paan*. Don't miss the mindboggling variety of *chaats*, *parathas* and sandwiches.

Another favourite at Sarafa is the Flying Dahi Vada at Joshi Dahi Vada. What makes it distinctive is the way it is served. The owner deftly tosses the *vadas* in the air, ensuring that they land exactly on the serving bowl. After that, the quintessential Indori *seva* and spicy sauces are added for extra flavour. We were baffled by the expertise and dexterity with which the flying *vadas* were made. We watched in awe as the Joshi Dahi Vadawala twirled the bowl in the air, then added four different spices with a single pinch before offering you this melt-in-the-mouth tangy treat.

Braving my way through a sea of humanity, I reached a stall selling Garadu. This is Indore's take on Delhi's crispy and tangy Aloo ki Chaat. Garadu, a variety of yam, is sliced, cooked till golden brown, and then topped with a generous serving of a particular *masala*. Prepared with deep-fried yams, Garadu is a crispy and delectable street food. These fried yams are flavoured with an assortment of Indian spices and some lime juice for that spicy-tangy taste.

During the food trail, we were impressed not just by the multiple stall owners offering varied spreads, but also by the incredible quality of food and hygiene and safety standards. ■



Johnny Hot Dog, a big hit with foodies, is in the Chappan Dukaan

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.

## BUILD AND PAINT HAPPY PLAYGROUNDS

**ANTHILL CREATIONS** A small patch is all that's needed for Anthill Creations to conjure up a playscape for children. A non-profit based in Bengaluru, Anthill Creations Foundation builds sustainable playgrounds using upcycled materials for communities and schools that do not have play spaces. The playgrounds are built to improve public spaces by partnering local communities and are bright and interactive. Started by a team of architects from IIT Kharagpur, Anthill Creations has opportunities throughout the year for volunteers to assist in building playscapes by doing painting or other work.  
<https://anthillcreations.org/>  
 (+91) 973 822 1540  
[play@anthillcreations.org](mailto:play@anthillcreations.org)

## FIGHT FOR THE RIGHTS OF MIGRANT WORKERS

**Aajeevika Bureau** was founded in 2004 to help bring about an equitable world of work for migrating communities. The bureau focuses on the seasonal circular migrant workforce, the most vulnerable segment of the informal workforce. Migrant workers work for meagre wages under unsafe working conditions. Aajeevika Bureau fights for their right to safe working conditions and for their basic needs of housing, healthcare and food. It has set up Worker Facilitation Centres in Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra. The non-profit has a legal education and aid cell which helps migrant labourers get unpaid wages and access legal recourse, if required.  
<https://www.aajeevika.org/index.php>  
 +91 294-245-1062, +91 294-245-0682  
[info@aajeevika.org](mailto:info@aajeevika.org)

## SPREAD SOME LIGHT ON EYE CANCER

**Iksha Foundation**, a public charitable trust, focusses on creating awareness and supporting underprivileged children afflicted

**FIRST PERSON**

ASTHA TULSYAN, JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY, DELHI

**'WORKING WITH CHILDREN WAS A BEAUTIFUL EXPERIENCE'**

I VOLUNTEERED with Connecting Dreams Foundation (CDF) for two years. I always wanted to work at the grassroots and I liked their agenda. CDF works on multiple projects in Delhi and Mumbai and has college-level chapters with volunteers. I got to know about them when I graduated from Miranda House.

As part of Project Kilkari we taught children living in the informal settlements of Majnu Ka Tila and Malka Ganj in New Delhi. The team designed the syllabus and we would provide the children with stationery and other items through fundraising. We also worked to get the children enrolled in formal schooling. Project Jeevitha included organizing healthcare check-up camps and



distributing sanitary pads.

We worked on getting people their Aadhaar cards, ration cards and other identity cards. I met the MLA of Timarpur area and helped around 50 people update their cards or create cards as part of Project Pehchaan. Since Aadhaar centres were far from the informal settlements, our aim was to create an Aadhaar

camp closer to these people.

We also held a city-level conference where college chapters would come and discuss their projects. We held award ceremonies to motivate them. I was treasurer and worked actively with these three projects.

Volunteering with CDF was undoubtedly a learning experience. It made me conscious of ground realities and how privileged we are. Working with young children who were anxious to study was my most beautiful experience. We also took our students from Majnu Ka Tila to Miranda House's Diwali Mela for a trip. Holistically, it helped me understand the issues people deal with on a daily basis. I am glad I could do something to help them.

with eye cancer. The foundation also supports research in eye cancer to improve care. It is currently supporting children who have been diagnosed with retinoblastoma and are being treated at several hospitals in Bengaluru, Hyderabad and Pune. Iksha Foundation also supports custom ocular prosthetics for children who have lost an eye to cancer, and visual aids for children with diminished sight. You can donate to any of Iksha Foundation's projects or help to provide prosthetic eyes for children affected by retinoblastoma.  
<https://www.kbct.org/> 08042756473  
 Email: kbctindia@gmail.com

## JOIN A JOURNEY OF LEARNING

**Udaan India Foundation**, a Mumbai-based non-profit organization, provides education

to children from low-income families. Their primary aim is to ensure that children of school-going age gain access to holistic education of quality. Udaan also ensures academic and non-academic support that will enable children to continue and succeed in school. Most Udaan children come from families where there has been little or no formal education. A child's journey at Udaan starts at the kindergarten level and continues through school till they become employable.

The focus is on making learning a continuous and voluntary experience that will help the children discover and achieve their potential. You can volunteer with them or donate to their efforts.  
<https://www.udaanindiafoundation.org>  
 (+91) 9967885468  
[udaanindiafoundation@gmail.com](mailto:udaanindiafoundation@gmail.com)

## HELP MINORITIES AND MARGINALIZED PEOPLE

**Amanat Foundation Trust**, a social voluntary organization in West Bengal, channels educational and skill development resources towards minorities and marginalized communities.

The foundation's focus is on education, health and poverty alleviation.

Amanat works with the government as well as national and international agencies. Every year they organize a 'School Chalo Abhiyan' and campaigns for immunisation and vaccination. The foundation also offers skilling opportunities.

You can donate or intern with Amanat and help their efforts.  
<https://amanatindia.org>  
 +91 9830082725  
[info@amanatindia.org](mailto:info@amanatindia.org)

# Civil Society

EVERYONE IS SOMEONE

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