

Civil Society



HALL OF FAME 2015

WORKING FOR INDIA

Dr Sudha Sinha in the ward for children suffering from cancer at the MNJ Hospital in Hyderabad



'CORRUPTION IS AN ATTACK ON HUMAN DIGNITY'

Sanjiv Chaturvedi, winner of the Magsaysay, on cleaning up govt.

Pages 8-9

12th

**Anniversary
SPECIAL ISSUE**

LEAD SPONSOR



CHILD FRIENDLY STATION

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GOONJ'S PIECE OF CLOTH

Pages 12-13

CRUTCH WITH SHOCKERS...

Pages 16-17

JACKFRUIT BY THE PACKET

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PRODUCTS

Pages 47-50

12th Annual Issue



Civil Society is an unusual magazine touching upon and examining unusual issues. When the world of journalism seems to have been

overtaken by commercial considerations, *Civil Society* stands out. All the articles are well researched and the analyses incisive. What is most remarkable is the selection of topics for presentation. These mostly relate to aspects that are normally not touched upon by the media. One looks forward to each issue eagerly as the content provides a lot of food for thought.

Anil Swarup, Secretary, Govt. of India



Civil Society has emerged as the best produced and most readable magazine reporting on India's energetic and creative world of non-

governmental initiatives. Marked by high editorial quality *Civil Society* is packed with fascinating reports and columns on sustainable development strategies and solutions. No one else offers such a wide window into India's effervescent civil society.

Sanjaya Baru, Director for Geo-economics and Strategy, International Institute for Strategic Studies



I have been a subscriber to *Civil Society* magazine and I have enjoyed reading it very much. This is a unique publication giving voice to ordinary citi-

zens who are not only dreaming of a better India but also working towards it. The magazine gives much hope and confidence that when civil society members participate in the functioning of society, a lot can be achieved.

Nila Vora, Physician, Chicago

Feedback

READERS TELL US WHAT THEY THINK



I am an avid reader and a great admirer of *Civil Society* for over a decade now. *Civil Society* is unique in so many ways. The incredible empathy

and the deep sensitivity of Umesh and Rita shows up on every page. Over the years, *Civil Society* has not only engaged me but inspired me with its stories of incredible human endeavours, gamechanging social innovations and bold thought leadership on issues related to planet to people to policies. To me *Civil Society* is not a magazine, it is a great movement, an inspiring message and a profound mantra for building a unique Indian civil society of our dreams.

R.A. Mashelkar, National Research Professor & Chairman, National Innovation Foundation



In these times when the media, both print and visual, are projecting all that is negative in our society, *Civil Society* brings in positive energy, brim-

ming with hope. I consider this freshness as the single biggest asset of the magazine. The magazine has brought to the fore vital issues considered by many as beyond resolution. People definitely like to read such articles. I wish you would compile all these articles and bring them out in a book format. I take this opportunity to thank you for publishing the article on how we could fight corneal blindness in the country. That was a real eye-opener. Also, a word of praise for Skymet considering how unreliable our Meteorological Department is when it comes to predictions on weather.

Dr Prashant Garg, Director of Education, LV Prasad Eye Institute



NASVI shifted its base to Delhi in 2009 with the mandate to get a Central law on street vendors. *Civil Society* magazine was the first to give space to the

cause. Through a continued process of capturing our activities to interviews scoping our vision to listing components of a possible Central law and even to tracing the history of our struggle, *Civil Society* magazine kept the fire burning for us. Had there not been *Civil Society* magazine, our cause would not have got the much needed initial push. Continuous coverage till the enactment of the law in 2014 February was of great help. We hope to get the same support till the law is implemented across India.

Arbind Singh, National Coordinator, National Association of Street Vendors of India (NASVI)



Civil Society is more than just another magazine. It is an honest and dedicated effort to bring good news out and share something which is happening unnoticed. It is also an inspiration for many in the space of development journalism simply as a case study of how you can carry on without succumbing to commercial considerations!

Anshu Gupta, Founder, Goonj



Civil Society has a distinctive and unique position as a truly independent voice of societal engagement on a wide spectrum of issues. At this juncture of its development cycle, India clearly needs such a voice.

Vinayak Chatterjee, Chairman, Feedback Infra



I learnt of *Civil Society* at a conference on social entrepreneurship. The magazine has the ability to identify an issue or a person or an intervention while still nascent and not in the public eye and the courage to back it, which is a rare quality.

Another rare attribute is the intrepidity and the uprightness of the publication. Its publisher and I became friends following our first chance meeting. Later the magazine was covering one of the social interventions being promoted by my organisation, but refused to share with me the draft version, saying it would not be "journalistically honourable". *Civil Society* went ahead with its uncompromised version, which I may add was outstandingly objective. That showed me that the various articles that we read every month are not coloured.

Anurag Kashyap, IL&FS Social Inclusion Group

Feedback

READERS TELL US WHAT THEY THINK



In times when the media are increasingly becoming more concerned with maximising advertising revenue than providing unbiased reporting and unfettered views, *Civil Society* stands out as an exemplary exception. As a regular reader, I salute it for its courage and tenacity in addressing crucial issues which otherwise would be woefully neglected. Carry on the good work.

Jug Suraiya, Senior Journalist

Civil Society covers important national issues on health, water, sanitation, livelihoods and related areas in a format which is engaging and uplifting.

Vishvesh Prabhakar, Management Consultant



In the early years after its founding I used to wonder how *Civil Society* survived. Public interest in civil society organisations and their work at that time was minimal. And here was a journal that was devoting all its attention to studying the work of such organisations carefully and reporting on what and how they were doing!

In the years since its founding it has acquired an enviable reputation for consistency, high production values, the research that goes into every article, the meticulousness of its reporting and its standards of writing. It has become a reference work for NGOs that want to improve, new entrants with an idea, and increasingly the information source for prospective funding agencies.

It is not a public relations handout. It is objective in its reporting and does not give credit where it is not due.

Surendra L. Rao



Congratulations on completing 12 years in the publication of *Civil Society*. We have been subscribers for the last five years and have observed the growing development in its narrative of the achievements of ordinary people with extraordinary aspirations.

What we like most about *Civil Society* is its positive outlook, grounded in the realities of this great country. Perhaps, what is different in your approach is that while most journals highlight the problems in our society you have chosen to focus on the solutions. Your stories of struggle, innovation, idealism and social responsibility are a potent narrative in these critical times. Would you like to consider how you can reach a younger, school-going audience?

John & Anjoo Mason



I just can't believe that it's been 12 long years since the launch of this wonderful magazine. It still appears fresh and as relevant as it was at the time of its launch. I remember the early days of *Civil Society*. We were very happy to know of this initiative, as in those days Internet was not as easily available, and *Civil Society* provided much needed reliable, unbiased information on what is happening in a very professional manner. We have been subscribers to *Civil Society* since then and thoroughly enjoy reading every issue. Each issue presents new stories and highlights many wonderful people and initiatives. This has been a source of motivation. It makes us introspect and innovate. It also helps us in connecting with similar minded people. Even in this age of mobile apps and search engines, *Civil Society* is still very relevant due to its editorial efforts. I compliment its editors and entire staff for this excellent publication.

Shantanu Dixit, Coordinator, Prayas

IN THE LIGHT

SAMITA RATHOR



Civil Society is an informative magazine covering various topics of our society. The magazine highlights the genuine efforts of many to improve our communities. I'm humbled and yet inspired by reading such stories! We subscribe to and share *Civil Society* magazine with children in our schools (www.seedschools.in) so they can learn about such efforts and are motivated to improve their communities.

Harish Mamtani, Entrepreneur

Feedback

READERS TELL US WHAT THEY THINK



Civil Society enshrines the values of independent and alternative journalism, an endangered activity in contemporary India. It tells us what many of us want to know but mainstream media denies us — the little-publicised but inspiring stories of individuals and groups making small transformations that accumulatively may change our country — instead of the screaming headlines and repetitive breaking news that suggest there is nothing else of significance on a particular day. Small is much more beautiful. Keep up the good work, CS!

Prof. Ananda Lal, Writers' Workshop



I first came across the magazine around seven years ago at the Oxford Book Store in Kolkata and since then, I have read every issue. There are two reasons why I like the magazine. First, it is an exceptional platform for sharing news about truly outstanding efforts at bringing about transformational change and improving the quality of lives. Second, the change-makers are simple people, whose stories remain unknown though they have demonstrated exceptional creativity and leadership. More importantly, they have taken ownership of the 'problem' and demonstrated how it might be solved. It is for this reason alone that their stories need to be told. They are our unsung heroes and *Civil Society* introduces them to us. Thank you Umesh, Rita and your marvellous team for your commitment and outstanding contribution.

Amit Dasgupta, Head, Mumbai campus of the SP Jain School of Global Management

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COVER PHOTOGRAPH: P. ANIL KUMAR

ANNUAL DOUBLE ISSUE

This September-October issue of *Civil Society* marks completion of 12 years of the magazine.

The next issue will be in November.

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Civil Society

READ US. WE READ YOU.

As we turn 12...

EVERY anniversary of our magazine has meant something special to us. It has come with its own achievements, challenges and hopes. This anniversary is no different. At 12 we have reason to celebrate but also need to prepare for a different stage in our journey — both as an enterprise and editorial offering.

When we started out we were first movers in this space. There was almost no professional reportage on the social sector. Readers at large were unfamiliar with the words 'civil society'. Our reporting on NGOs and people's movements was not just refreshing but also informative because activism was acquiring new dimensions. We looked out for change makers and treated them with the journalistic seriousness we felt they deserved. Many of them had already been around a long while — like Aruna Roy, Medha Patkar, Darshan Shankar, Anupam Mishra, Anna Hazare, Rajender Singh. Some were just getting their feet wet. Among the new faces was Arvind Kejriwal, who was on our first cover in September 2003, long before he began appearing regularly in the media.

Our magazine also covered new age businesses and the solutions they provided to social and economic problems. We looked at CSR, privatisation and GM crops. We tracked the formulation of new legislation as diverse as the right to information and the promotion of breastfeeding. We were doing stories on affordable housing when the concept itself was just beginning to take shape in India. The cost of healthcare was another area of interest. NGOs in politics and an effort by Gurgaon's RWAs to win seats in the Haryana assembly elections figured as two cover stories.

The past 12 years have seen changes much in line with the coverage we pursued in our magazine. We feel very kicked about that and which journalist wouldn't? It means we were on the ball and picked up trends before others did.

We continue to think ahead and retain a sense of wonder. What we cover and how we go about covering it will change. You will find us more vigorously present on the Internet for instance. We will grow interactive engagements. Reportage on governance, where we already have considerable strengths, will increase.

But what will not change is our role as journalists capturing information and taking it to our audiences. It is our belief that for all the ups and downs of the media industry, the role of the journalist, who can tell a story and marshal information, will remain indispensable. It will continue to be our mission to promote good, independent journalistic skills.

We have many people to thank for our survival as an enterprise. We need to thank our friends and partners for keeping our spirits up when times have been tough — as they frequently have been on the financial front. We, of course, need to thank our readers for buying us and appreciating our work. We owe a very big thank you to the companies who advertise with us. They do so because a good journalistic effort needs to be kept alive. People at various levels in these companies — sometimes CEOs, sometimes down the line — make a special effort to include us in their advertising spends.

Finally, we have a supportive and caring advisory board whose members we turn to for solace and solutions. They always have time for us.



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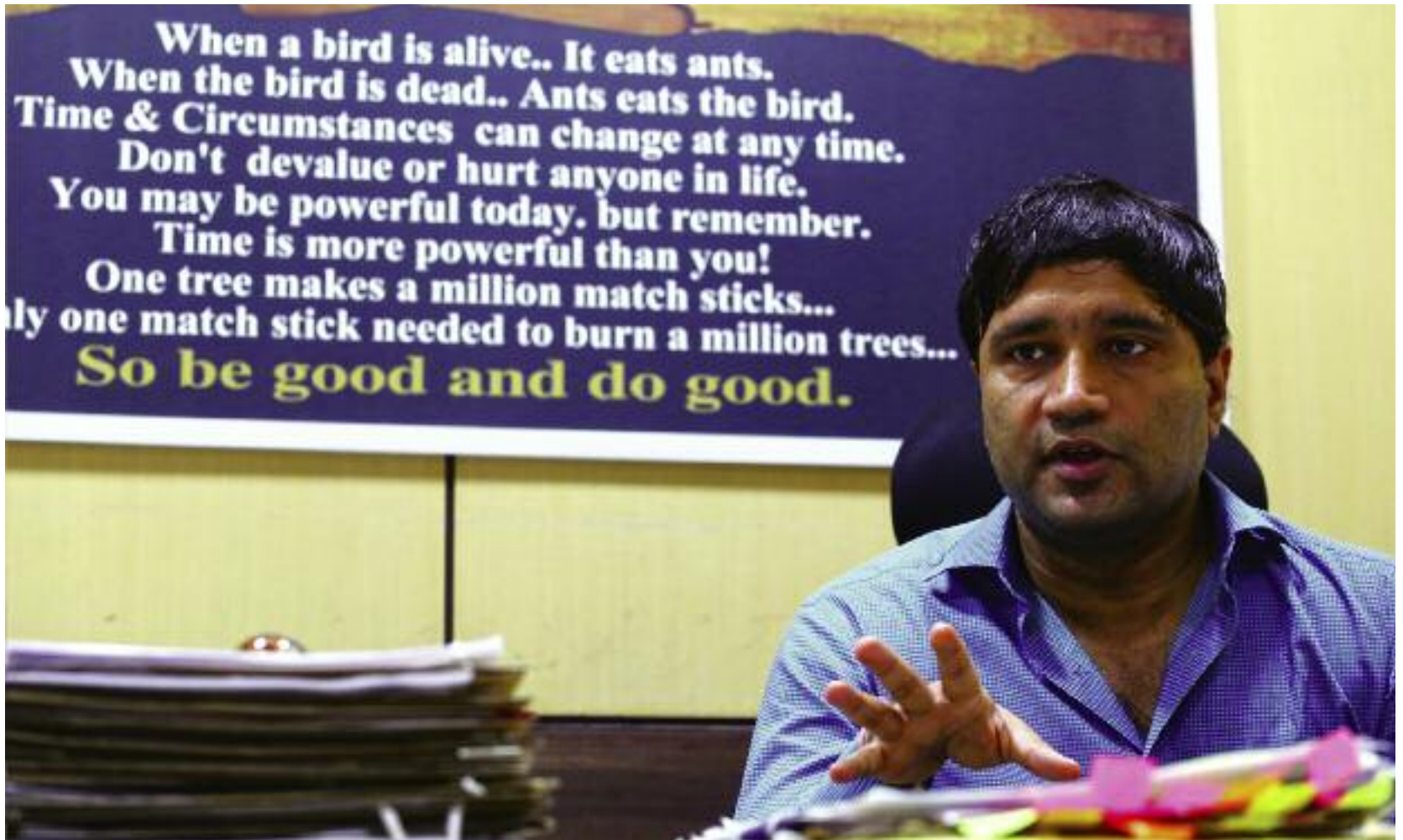
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Sanjiv Chaturvedi: 'As civil servants we are custodians of people's trust'

'Graft attacks human dignity'

INTERVIEW

SANJIV CHATURVEDI

SANJIV Chaturvedi is amiable and patient as journalists stream into his office at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in New Delhi. He is one of the recipients of the prestigious Ramon Magsaysay Award this year.

Media attention isn't new to him. As an officer of the Indian Forest Service, Chaturvedi has been making headlines by exposing corruption and ruffling feathers in political circles. He has gone after people with powerful links and succeeded in having them punished.

At his very first posting in Kurukshetra in Haryana he took stern action against illegal felling of trees and poaching of animals by contractors inside the Saraswati Wildlife Sanctuary.

The then Hooda government came down on him, transferring him to a 'punishment' posting and booking him for insubordination in 2007. He was suspended. Yet Chaturvedi was vindicated when the state forest department took action against the very

same contractors based on his report.

Chaturvedi went on to expose misappropriation of money for an internationally funded tree plantation project in Hissar and Jhajjar districts.

In June 2012 he was finally transferred out of Haryana and sent to AIIMS as its deputy director and Chief Vigilance Officer (CVO). True to his reputation, he initiated 200 cases of corruption in India's most prestigious medical institute. Seventy-eight officials were punished, 87 chargesheeted and 26 cases went to the CBI for investigation — in just two years.

In August 2014, the former BJP health minister, Harsh Vardhan, removed Chaturvedi as CVO though he continues to serve as deputy director.

Thereafter he has sought and got a transfer from the Haryana cadre to the Uttarakhand cadre.

Chaturvedi was born into a middle class family in Uttar Pradesh. His father was a government engineer. He studied in government schools and graduated from the Motilal Nehru National Institute of Engineering in Allahabad before joining the government.

A large poster behind his desk extols people to do their duty. That is his philosophy too. Chaturvedi is no noisy crusader. He is persevering and diligent

about putting better processes in place to deal with corruption. Extracts from an interview:

You are a government official, yet you have been exposing and fighting corruption within the government. What motivates you?

I believe that it is important to do your duty, whether you work for the government or the private sector. Everybody encounters problems. But we have to learn to face them. In fact, tackling problems helps your personality to evolve.

Isn't there something more than a sense of duty? We notice you are also a sportsperson.

Yes, I believe physical fitness is linked to mental fitness. I do yoga. My work to curb corruption in AIIMS has been highlighted by the media. But I have also worked to resolve issues and put systems in place at AIIMS. We have 3,500 contractual workers here. They would either never get their salaries on time, or they wouldn't get their full salaries. Sometimes, service providers would cut their provident fund. Sometimes their ESI (Employees State Insurance) money would not be given.

We have started issuing salary slips to our contract workers, just like we do for our permanent

employees so that they know exactly what their dues are. I began monthly meetings with service providers to sort out why contract workers were facing such problems.

If I can make people happy, bring a smile to their faces, it gives me a sense of satisfaction. It's a powerful feeling, hard to quantify.

Similarly, if I get a case of an officer who is very corrupt and very powerful I try to tackle it in a professional manner and take it to its logical conclusion. Many times people feel nothing can be done. When they see action being taken against the corrupt officer, it restores their faith in the system.

In our country, people have been let down so many times. From zilla to tehsil they travel with great hope in their hearts that the officer will address their grievances. They think, what is happening is wrong, we will bring all our papers and place it in front of the officer, he will surely take action based on merit.

So as a civil servant I have to see that this trust people have placed in us is not broken. Basically, we are custodians of this trust. If that is broken ours will not be a vibrant democracy.

Are you trying to make the system perform?

My first posting was in Kurukshetra in Haryana. I was completely new to the system. Of course I had read all the rules. In the largest protected area of Haryana measuring around 11,000 to 12,000 hectares a project was coming up. It needed clearances. But the project proponents were violating laws. They were forcibly acquiring forestland. I went there and saw that thousands of trees had been felled. Poaching was taking place.

I knew this was the chief minister's pet project and he was keen to get it completed. I also knew that if I did anything to hamper the project I would be in direct conflict with him. If it was another officer, he might have kept quiet. But I could not help myself.

I filed FIRs against poaching, felling of trees and other violations of the Wildlife Protection Act. The chief minister got very angry. I was transferred from Kurukshetra, suspended, and an FIR was lodged against me.

But the truth has certain strength and power and that's what helped me through that difficult phase. Both Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela relied on the path of truth.

When I came to AIIMS I had already gone through a bad phase. The chief minister had refused to relieve me. I had to go to court. My files were with three ministries — the ministry of health, environment and forests and the DoPT (Department of Personnel and Training). The state government reopened a five-year criminal case against me. There were orders to even arrest me. But I sleep peacefully at night because I am treading on the path of truth. I have no feelings of guilt.

What are the chief sources of corruption in government according to you? Is it land, issuing of tenders, discretionary powers...

Actually, we are very creative as far as corruption is concerned. Whatever the subject, we find ways and means to make money. If you want to register an FIR, you have to give money to the police. To get them to

investigate, you have to bribe them. To file a chargesheet, the names that will be included, the sections that have to be invoked... everything is negotiable.

So why aren't we equally creative about tackling corruption?

When APJ Abdul Kalam was President of India he came to my convocation. He said that if we want to tackle corruption in the long term, we have to learn the right values from our parents and teachers. That's the only hope. Unfortunately, there are many incentives for the corrupt and many disincentives for the honest. You have to reverse this system.

If we have a grievance redress law, better processes within government won't that help?

That is so. For example there is the RTI Act, a landmark law that has helped people like me survive in

'The departmental inquiry route takes less time and inflicts the maximum damage on the corrupt employee who also suffers social stigma if he is thrown out of service.'

the system. You also need changes in government processes. We should take punitive action against corrupt persons. In AIIMS I was able to get some of them chargesheeted by the department. That sends out a very, very strong message. It is worth more than 1,000 speeches.

What are the actions you have taken which have given you satisfaction?

During my posting in Haryana and at AIIMS I found that you can tackle corruption in two ways: one is to begin criminal proceedings and the other is to start departmental proceedings.

It is very difficult to prove the offence in criminal proceedings and establish the physical trail of money. In disproportionate asset cases you have to prove that the money acquired was transferred from one account to another and this money was used for transaction of the work.

So I opted for departmental proceedings. The burden of proof is less onerous as compared to the courts. You have to ensure that you complete all the procedures, that the officer accused of corruption has been given a fair hearing, that you took into account all his submissions.

After all procedures have been completed you can take a decision to throw him out of service, or censure him or stop his increments. But you need political support because ultimately the files will go to the minister for approval.

You have to prepare a watertight case. So you need to be meticulous. No lacuna must be found at any stage. If you have the approval of the concerned minister, the courts normally don't intervene. The departmental inquiry route takes less time and inflicts the maximum damage on the corrupt

employee who also suffers social stigma if he is thrown out of service. I found this method to be very effective in AIIMS.

Do we need a Lokpal and a grievance redress law?

Personally I feel existing institutions should be strengthened. We have good policies and laws on paper but the reality on the ground is very different. Yes there is scope for legislative improvements but the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) is there. Institutions dealing with the corrupt are grossly understaffed. Is it deliberate? Both the CBI and the CVC have enough powers.

How much has corruption undermined development?

Corruption is the most serious issue confronting our country. And it goes beyond taking money.

Corruption is a direct attack on human dignity and human rights. I have seen the way money is extorted from ordinary people, how people who are below poverty line are implicated in false cases and blackmailed. Wherever they go they have to pay a price. This is a direct attack on their dignity.

In developed countries corruption exists in high places, in things like defence deals or share markets. But in our country, unfortunately, corruption is endemic at the grassroots. It exists wherever you go — to the thana, the tehsil, the school...

In developed countries when high corruption is uncovered, judicial proceedings are swift and punishment is exemplary. This acts as a deterrent. Officers like me are dubbed 'anti-development'. But unless we get rid of corruption our country will never become a developed nation. Corruption is illegally depriving people of their own resources.

But will things be the same as before once you get transferred from here?

We have introduced some systemic changes that will last, including some checks and balances. For instance, all proprietary items that are bought are listed on our website. There is a financial check on purchases. As a result, the amount spent on proprietary items has fallen significantly.

A shop, that had political connections, had opened here in AIIMS. It sold expensive medicines. We demolished it and introduced a shop selling generic medicines and giving free medicines. Then, we had a filthy canteen here run by private operators. We replaced it with a clean canteen run by AIIMS on a no profit, no loss basis. We also sorted out the problems of the contract workers. So these changes will continue. ■

Subir Roy
Kolkata

ONE of the best places to look out for children who need help is a big railway station which serves a large rural hinterland. Children who are abandoned, have run away from home, or are taken away for trafficking usually pass through large railway stations. Sealdah in Kolkata is one of 20 large railway stations across the country that have been chosen to set up Child Help Desks to ensure that children coming into contact with the railways have the right care and protection, making the station 'child friendly'.

This has resulted from a programme of the Union Ministry for Women and Child Development in response to a directive issued by the Delhi High Court. The ministry has nominated Child in Need Institute (CINI), which has been working for disadvantaged children since 1974, to help the railways run the programme at Sealdah station.

In fact, what has happened is that what CINI has been doing mostly on its own initiative for a quarter century on railway platforms has got formalised through a government programme that makes a government entity (the railways) responsible. Since mid-June, CINI and the railways have been working together according to a standing operating procedure that has been laid down and made formally functional.

A child helpline kiosk manned by CINI at a prominent spot in Sealdah station is there round the clock to respond to any information about a child who seems to be lost or appears to have been deserted or even more critically may be transiting in the process of being trafficked. There are also announcements over the public address system about a child lost or a child found with the kiosk as the go-to spot.

On the outskirts of the station CINI has been running two centres, 'Udaan' for 11-plus children and 'Uttaran' for children between five and 11 years old. During the day these very functional places work as drop-in centres where children who have been brought or come to the kiosk are sent and which at night become shelters where they are fed and looked after.

There is also a child helpline, 1098, which can be called any time to report a child in need and those calls for which the kiosk is the place to go to are directed to the kiosk. The helpline is manned by a call centre run by CHILDLINE India Foundation under the government's Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS).

The drill under the operating procedure goes something like this. When the kiosk receives a message about a child in need it sends a rescue team to get the child, obtains particulars, to the extent the child can or is willing to open up, takes down the details (name, where he/she comes from and who the child's parents are), a police general diary is made, and the child is taken to the drop-in centre/night shelter.

The child is produced before a Child Welfare Committee within 24 hours while the police network tries to track down the parents, bring the child and the parents together and ideally hand the child

Sealdah station is now safe for lost, runaway children CINI and the railways team up



A CINI staff member provides first aid to a child near Sealdah station

back to the parents for them to take him/her home. But sometimes when the child does not want to go back or the parents have deserted the child, he or she is sent to the state run children's home. The stay at the two centres is usually a short one.

CINI has four to five people manning the kiosk and patrolling the platforms to pick up and take care of children gone astray. The NGO works closely with the Railway Protection Force (RPF) and Government Railway Police (GRP) who are really mandated to protect the unprotected child who may have been spotted first on a train or a railway platform and taken into custody. Once a child reaches the kiosk, the NGO running it takes over the task of looking after the child though the legal responsibility for the child remains with the railway police.

Part of CINI's job is to sensitise officialdom, not least of all the railway police with whom the NGO has been working for several years now. A long

journey has to be made in terms of mindset for a policeman — from unthinkingly shooing away a wandering child to, on seeing such a child, having an alarm bell go off which asks, "Is this child lost, has he or she been abandoned?" There is a continuous process of orientation with monthly sessions for the railway police and security staff on child rights and protection.

The difference between then and now is that the chances of a lost or abandoned child being spotted by the system are higher and takes place faster and the drill thereafter is more rigorously followed under the standard operating procedure. Early intervention allows greater scope for counselling, both child and parent, and restoration (to parents) where possible, says Manidipa Ghosh, assistant director for the urban programme at CINI. The process is aided by creating a conducive environment at the station. In the six years that she has

PICTURES BY PRASANTA BISWAS



Children at the CINI centre near Sealdah. The main objective is to reunite children with their families

A child helpline kiosk manned by CINI at a prominent spot in Sealdah station is there round the clock to respond to any information about a child who seems to be lost or appears to have been deserted or even more critically may be transiting in the process of being trafficked.

been at the job, Ghosh has found the railway police become more child-friendly and overall the authorities taking on more responsibility and becoming more accountable.

Many children, who eventually reach CINI, have been abandoned by their parents, sometimes when a child has failed in the annual school examinations. Hence CINI lays great store to counselling both the parents and the child. After parents agree to take back their child and follow-up action indicates that the going-back-home is a success, then it is “gratifying”. There is the case of a child who became a dropout over two years ago, went back home and as a result of the counselling the quality of life at home changed. He is now in Class 8 and both parents and child are “very grateful”. It is “success stories like these that keep us going,” Ghosh adds with a smile.

According to Dr Samir Chaudhuri, secretary and

founder-director of CINI, what is needed is a place where children can talk, where there is somebody to listen to them. The main objective is to reunite children with their families. When you ask a child where his/her home is or who the parents are, often he/she will at first say nothing. Then slowly the information will come out. The aim is to make everybody more sensitive so that they treat those affected with care.

One big hurdle is, of course, resources to run such projects. As for people who are willing to work on such projects, Dr Chaudhuri says that in these commercialised times an NGO like CINI cannot pay market salaries. People will join and leave for better prospects. Only those who are committed will remain and come to form the core team. Then with a twinkle in his eye he says, why not add a line in the story saying that those who like the programme can get in touch with CINI at cinifru@cinindia.org.

Trying to identify and help children in distress can have its own pitfalls. Recently there was some communal tension in areas around Sealdah when 63 children, aged between six and 17, were travelling from the Purnea-Kishengunj belt of Bihar to Pune, accompanied by a madrasa teacher and his wife. According to news reports, they were being taken to Maharashtra for higher studies.

They were taken into custody by the GRP on a tipoff by CINI staff when they were trying to board a train to Maharashtra and kept in custody. The child welfare committee officials were informed and eventually the group was sent back to Purnea under police escort, according to the chairman of the West Bengal State Commission for Protection of Child Rights. The children had no proper identification papers and “we could not take any risk,” he said. The local people, who were upset over this, asked if you needed passports to travel within the country. ■

‘Clothing isn’t even a topic in

Civil Society News
New Delhi

ANSHU Gupta won the Ramon Magsaysay Award this year for “transforming the culture of giving in India” and “treating cloth as a sustainable development resource for the poor”. It is an initiative he began in 1999 when he left the corporate sector to start Goonj.

Goonj would collect clothes from the middle class in cities and take it to the poor in rural areas. It was a simple idea with enormous potential and in 16 years Goonj has reached out to the poorest districts in the country in 21 states.

It also has a lot of learning in disaster management. Goonj loads trucks with relief material and finds its way to the spot, handling logistics and cooperating with the local administration. When an earthquake struck Nepal recently, Goonj was there to help. But, says Gupta, for him the worst ongoing disaster is poverty.

Over the years Goonj has found a myriad ways to use discards for development. The non-profit’s initiatives are uniquely trash-based and not cash-based. Villagers pinpoint what they need. It could be repairing a bridge or a school. Goonj pays them in cloth in exchange for their labour. It has created livelihoods by starting small manufacturing units. A Sujni Centre in Rishikesh makes rugs, mattresses and quilts by stitching layers of cloth. Other units manufacture inexpensive sanitary pads.

Civil Society has covered Goonj closely. But in this interview Anshu Gupta goes back over the years of his journey and the learning at his non-profit:

What inspired you to start Goonj?

Honestly speaking, I can’t pinpoint any one thing that inspired me. Yes, some incidents left a strong impression on me — the story of Habib Bhai, for example. Many years ago, after my journalism studies, one winter morning in Old Delhi I read a line in Hindi ‘*Dilli police ka laash dhona wala*’ (the picker of abandoned dead bodies) on a rickshaw. A bit shocked and intrigued I followed the rickshaw and then started spending time with Habib and his blind wife, Aamna Begum, to understand this strange profession.

I talked with him and accompanied him to see the entire process — from the information provided by a child about a dead body in a park to going there to pick it up. Two statements from him and his little daughter shook me completely. One, when Habib said, “In winters my work goes up,” and I found that sometimes he picked up 10 to 12 dead bodies in 24 hours. He said this was double the number he picked up in summer! This meant more deaths on the roads simply due to cold.

And the second line came from his little daughter, who very innocently told me, “When I feel cold, I hug the dead body and sleep. It does not trouble me, it does not turn around!” This was happening in a



Anshu Gupta: ‘We have created a network of stakeholders across urban and rural India’

city where people have so much stuff in their wardrobes that they don’t wear and yet don’t know whom to give to.

I found it tough to accept the fact that “people die of cold” because my logic was: winter is not like an earthquake whose tremors kill people or a flood where excess water drowns people! If cold kills people then I should also have died. I survived because I had clothes and the person on the road died because he didn’t have anything to cover himself. So it’s not cold. It’s lack of clothing which kills people.

I also realised that in the vast list of development subjects clothing is not even a topic although when we talk about three basic needs we say – food, clothing and shelter. I had no background of any such work. I come from a family of hardcore engineers. Yet I started an informal group — Goonj — and began working on this issue.

From giving discarded cloth to the poor, to development in villages, to manufacture of sanitary

napkins and disaster relief work, what has spurred Goonj’s consistent expansion?

I think for us at Goonj some core aspects remain the same, like the persistent use of material as a tool for development work. Other aspects — like sanitary pads, school material, disaster relief and so on — have really emerged from constantly assessing the needs of people at the grassroots and matching the material to their needs. The expansion has happened in terms of volume of material and the spread of work but if you look closely you will see a clear work model in place.

We have created a network of stakeholders all across rural and urban India. Through this network we keep channelising material from cities to villages based on their needs. At one place it could be woolens, at another place disaster relief material, while women in many different villages seek out our NJPC (Not Just a Piece of Cloth) work.

To some extent Goonj is sector agnostic, meaning we don’t go into rural or urban India with an agenda like education, healthcare and so on. We basical-

development'

AJIT KRISHNA



ly share our work in other areas to tell people all that can be achieved with material. Then people take a call on how they would like to utilise material as a tool. We do feel some areas like menstrual hygiene or small issues like a broken road are neglected issues. So we talk to people about what's bothering them on a day-to-day basis and encourage them to work on those issues.

In more than a decade of your involvement what is the change, if any, you have seen in middle-class attitudes to Goonj?

I have seen many changes from the time we began back in 1999. For one, there is much larger participation of the middle class in giving, especially for disasters. We have been consistently speaking to people about the do's and don'ts of giving. This has, in turn, embedded a culture of mindful giving. People do think before giving their trash in the name of charity.

There still is a big part of society which just dumps what it doesn't need in the name of charity. But over the years the number of such people has gone down. Also, initially, people would come and give us only their old material and they would contribute money to other agencies. Over the years, as the people have better understood our work, they are our biggest supporters in material and monetary contributions. I think the biggest change has been that social or development work is no longer the domain of a few. People in general are playing a bigger part and taking an interest.

You also interact with people who are very poor. What, in your opinion, are the crucial areas that NGOs are still not working in?

I think the biggest issue is that the poor have different problems in different areas. We, as development sector organisations, need to listen to their voices

and then work accordingly instead of offering our own agendas and solutions to them. Also, as social organisations we need to work collaboratively to avoid wastage of resources. We need to understand first of all that it is we who want to go and work with the poor. They don't come and ask us to work with them. They live their lives as best as they can. We need to respect their self-respect and dignity while doing any work with them.

You have been playing a frontline role in relief operations. What can the country learn from your experiences?

Ours has been a long journey across disasters starting from the Gujarat earthquake to the recent Nepal earthquake and now the Manipur floods. There has been a lot of learning in the process. One key learning is that just after a disaster people don't need clothes. Clothes are something you wear one at a time and a disaster normally takes away your storage capacity first.

Also we have found that disasters tend to hit the poor the hardest. That's why we look at disasters as an opportunity to catch public attention to the needs of people and geographies which people don't generally notice. We need to channelise as much material as we possibly can and bring resources to the area under long-term rehabilitation work.

We have also realised that people even though they are hit by disaster, want to retain their dignity. Whether it's the Bihar floods or the Uttarakhand floods, people who got relief material at the time of the disaster later came back and did community work under our Cloth for Work initiative even though no additional material was given to them. It was their way of paying back for what they received as relief material.

Disasters are a time of challenges and we found that challenges give birth to innovations. For us our Sujni initiative, where rural women make quilts out of waste cloth, emerged out of the Bihar floods. Our MY Pads and cloth sanitary pads emerged out of our work with those hit by the tsunami. Each disaster is a learning if you go into it with an open mind and heart. ■

SAMITA'S WORLD

SAMITA RATHOR



Crutch with shock absorbers, app for the disabled

Civil Society News
New Delhi

SANDEEP Kumar is the first person on a wheelchair to be employed by an airline. Archana Konwar, from Assam's Dhemaji district, has invented crutches with shock absorbers for her crippled friend after noting her discomfort. Abha Khetrapal has designed an app that provides information to people with disabilities. And Priti Shah Soni ensures that those with hearing disability have access to know-how.

These are some of the people who were honoured at the sixth NCPEDP-Mphasis Universal Design Awards on August 14. Started in 2010, the objective of the awards is to, first, promote 'universal design' that can be used by everyone and secondly provide 'accessibility' to information, to the physical environment and to services for those with disabilities. India has 70-100 million people with disabilities.

The awards are given in three categories — persons with disabilities, working professionals and companies and organisations.

Suresh Prabhu, Union Minister for Railways, presented the awards this year. He said he would make sure that rail travel became more accessible for people with disabilities. "I will ask mechanical department officials of the railways to look into how to make rail bogies accessible for disabled people," he said. It can't be done straightaway, he explained frankly, but he would start the process. Some companies have provided wheelchairs at railway stations in Delhi under their CSR projects, said Prabhu, and he asked them to contribute more to making railway stations disabled-friendly.

Javed Abidi, honorary director of NCPEDP (National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People), outlined some of the difficulties people with disability faced while trying to travel by train. He said those with visual disability cannot book tickets online. People with hearing disability couldn't get any information from officials since nobody knew sign language. He said railway coaches and footbridges weren't designed keeping people with disability in mind. Getting inside rail coaches and using the rest room were arduous tasks. The government does issue an identity document to people with disability but it is of no use since the railways don't recognise it.

The winners in different categories are:

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Abha Khetrapal has launched Cross the Hurdles, the first app that makes information accessible for people with disabilities. Cross the Hurdles covers education, employment, health, accessibility, legal guidance, transport facilities, disability sports, assistive devices and social protection. It can be



Suresh Prabhu, Union Minister for Railways, presented the awards. He said he would try to ensure that rail travel became more accessible for disabled people.



Above: Javed Abidi with the winners
Left: Union Railway Minister, Suresh Prabhu, presenting awards to Archana Konwar and, below, to Abha Khetrapal and Sandeep Kumar



downloaded at the Google Play Store for free. You can log in to her website, www.crossthehurdles.org for free online counselling on careers and vocational courses as well as personality development. There is also a Cross the Hurdles E-Magazine.

Priti Shah Soni, CEO of Deaf Can Foundation (DCF) in Bhopal, helps those with hearing disabilities in small towns to access information and knowledge. Priti converts educational curricula, latest news and general awareness information into videos using sign language and captioning services.

PICTURES BY AJIT KRISHNA



The videos are then distributed widely. DCF provides free education to the hearing disabled in sign language. It also offers lessons in spoken English, using computers, leadership and personality development and matrimonial services to those with hearing disability.

Sandeep Kumar is the first person with paraplegia to be employed in the aviation sector. He works as a Customer Service Officer with IndiGo Airlines. While his job is to help all passengers travelling with IndiGo, his special focus is on passengers with disabilities. His inputs have helped the airline improve services to passengers needing special assistance. Sandeep is also a keen singer, a Paralympics contender and a gold medalist in web designing at the National Abilympics in 2013.

SPECIAL MENTION

Simon George, the founder-chairman of Prathyasha Foundation, has started a 'Barrier Free India,' campaign to create an environment that the disabled find easy to use. A wheelchair user himself, it was Simon's efforts that led to the High Court of Kerala and the Panchayat Office in Ernakulam District becoming accessible with ramps.

The foundation has an IT Training and Development Centre for people with disabilities. Simon hopes to make Kochi the first barrier-free city in the country.

WORKING PROFESSIONALS

Archana Konwar is from Bordolopa village in Dhemaji, one of the most remote and backward districts in Assam. Seeing one of her friends struggle with crutches, Archana, a Class 8 student in 2010, developed a crutch with shock absorbers, a bell to alert other commuters and a light that can be used at night. India's National Innovation Foundation recognised her idea and got the product developed. Discussions are on for technology transfer and commercialisation of Archana's invention.

M. Balakrishnan, a professor at IIT Delhi, has set up a full-fledged research group (ASSISTECH) to develop affordable technology solutions for mobility and education of visually impaired persons. SmartCane is their flagship product. Thousands of visually impaired people are now using it under the government's Assistance to Disabled Persons Scheme. To make public transport accessible to the visually disabled, ASSISTECH has developed a device named OnBoard, which helps the blind identify the route number of a bus and guides them to its entrance. It has been successfully tested on some of Mumbai's buses.

COMPANIES/ORGANISATIONS

Accenture is a global management, consulting, technology services and outsourcing company that believes in inclusion and diversity. The company provides a work environment that is physically, techno-

logically and attitudinally accessible. So its offices are barrier-free and technology used is democratic. To change attitudes of employees towards those with disability, the company has an online training programme. Accenture respects the individual and merit.

D J Academy of Design (DJD): Founded in 2004 DJD is the only institute in the country that offers a regular course in Universal Design as part of its curriculum. It admits candidates with disabilities if they meet the admission criteria. As part of this course, students undergo simulation exercises and get first-hand experience and understanding of physical challenges. Several Universal Design projects are generated as a result and then exhibited during a Design Degree Show held every year to promote public awareness.

Indraprastha College for Women, Delhi University: This is probably the only college in Delhi where the number of students with disabilities enrolled surpasses the three per cent quota prescribed in the Persons with Disabilities Act 1995. More than three per cent of its employees too are people with disabilities. Over the last six years the college has created a safe environment where students with disabilities can be part of mainstream learning. The college provides transport and residential facilities to them. Students can get financial waivers to study, and there is access to aids and technologies for skill development and employability.

Mindtree: The company's Mindtree Incubated Guided Humanitarian Technology (MIGHTY) has incubated several technologies for those with disability. These include ADITI-C, a computer-access switch for children with cerebral palsy, KAVI-PTS, a software application that works on Android and makes communication easy for children with mental disabilities, Finger Switch, a tactile-based computer access switch for children with cerebral palsy and a Smiley Switch. It is also developing two technologies for those with visual disabilities: WYLI-WIS: (What-You-Listen-Is-What-It-Sees) and WYTIWIS (What-You-Touch-Is-What-It-Sees).

Sightica Solutions: Founded by Sunil J Mathew in March 2014, Sightica Solutions is a social enterprise in Kochi that aims to encourage the elderly and those with visual disabilities to use mobile devices. Sightica is building a low cost universal mobile phone assistive technology device and with it, an ecosystem of service providers with back-end support systems. It is working on creating two apps: Kuluk and Mapseeker.

H&R Johnson: The company, a leading tile manufacturer, has launched 'The Red Ramp Project', to encourage people and policy-makers to think seriously about providing disabled people proper access in public spaces. It has created a portal www.redrampproject.org asking people to sign online petitions providing their inputs and comments. The portal has a 'geo-tag location' facility where people can mark public spaces that need to be improved for better accessibility. ■

Jackfruit by the packet

There is some sharp thinking going on into selling jackfruit. Small producers are processing it in different ways and getting it into many homes. Here's a quick look at their inventive products.

JAXO CAKE

The Palakkad Social Service Society (PSSS) in Kannur is getting a lot of orders for its Jaxo Jack Wonder Nut Cake. The cake is made with 40 per cent jack seed flour, 20 per cent unripe jack carpel flour, jackfruit pieces, eggs and sugar. No maida or wheat is used. The cake is gluten free. Jaxo is replacing conventional cakes at birthday parties and weddings.

Contact: Palakkad Social Service Society, Phone: 094464 20395
Email: psspngo@gmail.com

TASTY NOODLES

Hallisiri, a women's organisation in Tovinakere in Tumkur district of Karnataka, has invented a variety of noodles, sevia, murukku and chakli from raw jackfruit batter. The women are now keen to set up an enterprise that can produce and market their products. They are looking for a food processing expert or a Krishi Vigyan Kendra to train them. Padmaraju, a farmer, journalist and social activist, is helping the team realise their aspirations.

Contact: Padmaraju: 099453 23787
Email: padmarajuhj@gmail.com

SEED FLOUR

Jackfruit seeds are a wonderful resource but go mostly to waste. Units in Kannur like Artocarpus Foods and the Palakkad Social Service Society (PSSS) are producing jack seed flour and raw jack carpel flour. Both are good alternatives to maida or white flour. Artocarpus Foods also sells a range of jackfruit products from chips to juice and pulp.

Contact: www.artocarpus.in
PSSS: 094464 20395
Email: sspngo@gmail.com

PACKED CHAPATTI

Deltas Food Products Ltd, a chapatti making and bakery unit set up just two years ago in Kannur, Kerala, has recently launched packed chapattis made with jack seed flour. "I believe in doing something different," says Ismail, proprietor of Delta. "When I heard that jack seed flour is available at Artocarpus Foods, I lost no time in rushing there. I experimented with the flour and now we have launched our packed chapattis." Jackfruit lovers may like to congratulate this 38-year-old entrepreneur.

Contact: Ismail can be reached at 094950 87418

COOKIES

Ogale's, a small unit in Devgad, Maharashtra, has recently launched, on an experimental basis, jackfruit cookies made with 40 per cent jack seed flour and the rest, whole wheat. "The feedback we have received is quite encouraging. We need another year for trials before we release our cookies in the market," said Shridhar Ogale.

Contact: Shridhar Ogale: 094035 95190
Email: spogale@gmail.com

SWADESHI JACK

Mini Udayakumar, a housewife from Thiruvananthapuram, enrolled for a training course in jackfruit value addition six months ago. Mini now produces a range of products from jackfruit – chakka varatty, mixture, halwa, jam and jelly. Her husband Udayakumar helps her. Mini is selling her products under the brand name, Swadeshi. She plans to start a small manufacturing unit.

Contact: Mini: 90205566123

JACK KURE

At a recent function, KP Mohanan, Kerala's minister for agriculture, was pleasantly surprised when he was offered Kure, a crunchy snack made with whole-wheat flour, jack seed flour, cornflour, salt and spices. No preservatives and additives are used.

Contact: CARD-Krishi Vigyan Kendra (0469) 266 2094, 2661821

Email: cardkvk@yahoo.com

Website: www.kvkcand.org

JACK TRAINER

CARD-Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) in Pathnamthitta has set up an incubating hub to train people who want to manufacture jackfruit products. Kerala's Agricultural Department is funding the hub to the tune of ₹52.5 lakhs. KVK has developed 10 technologies in jackfruit processing and is offering training in three: dehydrated tender jackfruit, dehydrated raw jackfruit and dehydrated jack seed. These three primary processed products have the potential to produce hundreds of products for the market.

Contact: CARD-Krishi Vigyan Kendra: (0469) 266 2094, 266 1821

Email: cardkvk@yahoo.com, www.kvkcand.org. ■



Compiled by Shree Padre

Kavita Charanji
New Delhi

A palpable air of excitement hung over an event to announce the winners of the India NGO Awards 2014-2015. Organised by The Resource Alliance with the support of EdelGive Foundation and The Rockefeller Foundation, the ninth edition of the awards had an interesting line-up of finalists — ranging from small NGOs like Centre for Unfolding Learning Potentials (CULP) and Sports Coaching Foundation (SCF) to medium-sized contenders like Agramee, Saath Charitable Trust as well as large organisations such as the Akanksha Foundation and CRY.

The long wait was finally over when the winners were announced at the end of the evening. In the small category, CULP and Technology Informatics Design Endeavour (TIDE) were jointly announced as winners. The first in the medium category was Saath Charitable Trust while the large NGO to emerge as winner was the Swami Vivekananda Youth Movement (SVYM). A new introduction, The Big Picture, Small Budget award, was wrested by Jabala Action Research Organisation.

“The awards are a recognition of NGOs that promote excellence, transparency, accountability, innovation, best practices and good financial management,” said Dr Shashi S. Narayana, executive director, The Resource Alliance, India.

For Naghma Mulla, COO, EdelGive Foundation, the awards were an extension of its mandate to extend financial and capacity-building support to non-profits. “Our organisation gives weightage to identifying problems, solutions and people who can provide solutions in the social sector,” she said.

Chief guest Rajesh Tandon, founder and president of Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), pointed out that the NGO sector is “under threat to demonstrate the longstanding relevance of our work. Stories of relevance need to be told loudly, boldly and smilingly. These stories should be taken to every neighbourhood, community, district, state, college, university and the corporate sector.”

A quick introduction to the winners:

Centre for Unfolding Learning Potentials (CULP): The NGO consists of a team of innovative professionals dedicated to promoting education at the grassroots. CULP has pioneered Pehchan, an initiative to ensure better education for out-of-school girls in rural Jaipur, strengthen the school system through community mobilisation, boost teachers’ professional skills, and organise bridge classes for mainstreaming of out-of-school children. Addressing the long standing needs of the girl

NGO winners big and small



Winners of the India NGO Awards with chief guest Rajesh Tandon (centre) in grey jacket

child, CULP creates a better socio-economic environment for them and forms adolescent girls’ forums after they finish the bridge courses to sustain social change in communities.

Technology Informatics Design Endeavour (TIDE): The non-profit’s mission is to address the development concerns of the impoverished through technological interventions. Since the past 20 years, TIDE has worked on over 200 projects, experimenting with about 30 technologies and products. The rewards have percolated down to the impoverished and the grassroots. Technologies developed and replicated by the organisation have resulted in an annual biomass saving of about 40,000 tonnes and grassroots entrepreneurs have earned an income of about ₹7 crores with sizeable profits through biomass energy enterprises. TIDE’s innovative technologies have also enabled poor women to access livelihoods. Over 50 women made a collective profit of over ₹10 lakhs in the last five years.

“The NGO Award will open some interesting partnerships for TIDE. It will also help us extend our grassroots and capacity building reach,” says K. Sumathy, executive director of TIDE.

Saath Charitable Trust: Based in Ahmedabad the

Saath Charitable Trust’s ambit is to improve the quality of life for the urban and rural poor in Gujarat, Rajasthan and Maharashtra (primarily Mumbai). With a focus on health, education, livelihood, infrastructure development, affordable housing and microfinance, the aim is to empower local people so that they can improve the quality of their lives.

Keren Nazareth, the 33-year-old executive director of Saath, is particularly enthused about the NGO’s microfinance initiatives that have spawned successful urban and rural communities. “Cooperative members, primarily women, have to be active savings members before they can get loans,” she says. Nazareth is also upbeat about Saath’s non-traditional livelihood services. Pointing out that women from slums have been trained and placed as masons, electricians, drivers, sewing

machine repairers and plumbers, she says that Saath Livelihood Services has also identified and trained women to be efficient and professional ‘home managers’.

Swami Vivekananda Youth Movement (SVYM): The SVYM engages in grassroots to policy-level action in health, education and community development. The organisation is widely recognised for its work in the field of AIDS prevention. With operations primarily in the

Mysore district of Karnataka, it runs community-based health and education projects and undertakes several community development initiatives that touch the lives of about 40,000 people, mostly tribals and rural poor. It also trains and builds capacities of upcoming NGOs. The organisation runs eight institutions and has over 50 projects in the sectors of health, education and social empowerment. Its training, research, advocacy and consultancy activities give it a pan-India reach.

Jabala Action Research Organisation: Jabala is a human rights organisation that works in Kolkata and several districts of West Bengal. Its target areas are trafficking, HIV/AIDS, child marriage, domestic violence and child labour. The NGO undertakes all-round development of survivors and victims. It carries out skill development programmes, cultural therapy, behavioural and communication development. It also runs clinics, health camps and awareness camps. Jabala provides education and legal assistance to women and children.

Future Leaders Programme 2015: The winner of the new Future Leaders Programme 2015 was Namrata Gulati Singh, executive secretary of Rural Litigation Entitlement Kendra (RLEK). ■

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Jagruti stands up for women

Bharat Dogra
New Delhi

JAGRITI Mahila Samiti (JMS) which has been working for the welfare of women, particularly those from weaker sections, in various colonies and slums of West Delhi and Outer Delhi since 1990, has earned a well-justified reputation for its sincere and honest efforts.

Although JMS mostly confines its work in and around Delhi, Nirmala Sharma, its leading light, lends a helping hand to deprived and exploited women in other parts of the country too. Sharma is ably assisted by a team of educated and committed workers in her efforts.

Shanti's world seemed to have collapsed when her husband was killed and their property usurped by vested interests. From a happy housewife she was reduced to a domestic help, till someone told her about JMS.

Realising the graveness of her situation, JMS gave priority time to her and after several rounds at government offices and legal wrangling her property was restored to her. What is more, JMS established a close bond with her and thanks to its various well-wishers facilitated the marriage of Shanti's daughter.

Chandra Prabha had lost all hope of her decade old dispute with her estranged husband being settled and her dowry and other money being returned to her. But thanks to the effective intervention of JMS she could obtain a settlement of ₹3,55,000 within a short time of seeking the organisation's help. This enabled her to start life anew.

Preeti (name changed), a girl from a lower middle-class family was forced, mainly due to economic circumstances, to marry a mentally challenged youth from a very rich family. She decided to adjust herself somehow, but a worse fate awaited her. Taking advantage of her vulnerable situation, her father-in-law started to exploit her sexually. She had no other choice but to tolerate this for some years, till her eldest daughter reached an age where she could understand what was happening. The daughter motivated her mother to revolt. The result was that both mother and daughter were subjected to more harassment to put it mildly. It was at this stage that Preeti was given the address of JMS.

JMS helped Preeti take on her exploiters (as well as officials in collusion with them) boldly and for the first time the father-in-law was finally confronted. He realised that his crime had been uncovered and he offered to compensate his victim. Since Preeti was concerned about bringing up her daughter away from the shadow of this exploitation, JMS helped her to reach a settlement in such a way that she can now live peacefully with her daughter in another city.

Shanta (name changed), a girl from Hissar, was married in Ferozpur, where her husband and other members of his family badly mistreated her. One day her husband pushed her out of the second floor of the house and Shanta sustained serious injuries.

When this was brought to the notice of JMS, Nirmala Sharma herself went to Ferozpur and brought Shanta from there. For the first time Shanta felt that she had strong support and could send her tormentors to prison. However, for the sake of her family she was still willing to give them a chance. So long talks followed and her husband admitted to his mistakes. He agreed to live with her separately in Delhi for some time. JMS continued to monitor the

When JMS tried to intervene, some persons objected saying that the organisation should stick to women's issues. Brushing these opinions aside, JMS volunteers demanded that the hutments be restored. During this movement some members of JMS, including Nirmala Sharma, were implicated in false cases and put behind bars. However, despite the repression unleashed on them the struggle continued and ultimately the hutments were reconstructed

AJIT KRISHNA



Nirmala Sharma has been helping women in distress in Delhi for several decades

JMS first tries to fight injustice. In cases where misunderstandings can be ironed out and an amicable settlement reached JMS tries to work in this direction.

situation for a long time to ensure that the husband didn't go back to his old ways.

When women victims come to JMS, its first effort is to fight this injustice. But in other cases where misunderstandings can be ironed out and an amicable settlement can be reached, JMS tries to work in this direction. Hundreds of family disputes have been settled as a result of the intervention of JMS.

What is more, JMS is now taking the fight to other areas. The organisation had been carrying out educational and other developmental work in a hutment colony in Subhash Nagar, West Delhi. Sometime back, the authorities pulled down the hutments.

on the same land in a better condition than before.

Similarly, JMS fought a long struggle on behalf of vegetable vendors who were evicted from a place that had been allotted to them in Paschim Vihar. Along with the vendors they sat on a *dharna* and fast, braving the bitter Delhi winter. Finally, the administration ordered an inquiry and found that the site had been legally allotted to the vegetable vendors but vested interests were trying to grab this land. The vegetable vendors were given back their space.

Deep concerns for the welfare of women prompted JMS to take up the challenging task of confronting those who were making a fortune selling liquor in these hutment colonies. The anti-liquor efforts of JMS led to the exposure of several liquor mafias, particularly the largescale distribution of liquor by them at election time. Sale and consumption of liquor in some slums declined as a result of the efforts of JMS.

However, JMS activists regret that their efforts could not go further ahead because of victimisation of several of their activists by implicating them in a number of false cases. Many of them have been beaten up badly by the police as well as gangsters. Despite all this, JMS has continued its good work. ■

12th
Anniversary

CIVIL SOCIETY HALL OF FAME

IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE AZIM PREMJI FOUNDATION

— Dr Sudha Sinha —

HYDERABAD, ANDHRA PRADESH

— Archana Godbole & —

Jayant Sarnaik

PUNE, MAHARASHTRA

— Dr Sitanath De —

JHARGRAM, KOLKATA

— Indraani Singh —

GURGAON, HARYANA

— Puli Raju —

MEDAK, TELENGANA

— Sumoni Jhodia —

RAYAGADA, ODISHA

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RITA & UMESH ANAND

IT is six years since the Civil Society Hall of Fame was launched. It has over this time grown in popularity and been picked up by others, but for us it has remained a simple device for citizens to felicitate citizens. We reach out to people who work for a better India and say thank you to them for making that effort.

The Civil Society Hall of Fame does not attempt to be a perfect process. We look, we ask and we identify. Of course there are others, as and perhaps even more deserving than those who make it to our final list. But that doesn't matter because it is impossible to be everywhere. Instead we recognise useful contributions where we can find them. It is heartening to see that the choices our jury makes resonate with our readers each year. It is wonderful to hear the applause at the recognition ceremony we hold at the India Habitat Centre in New Delhi.

Our role in this magazine is to take you into zones beyond prime time. We look for the stories that redefine success and usefulness. It won't do to be a society that only celebrates toppers and overachievers. We have got to do a lot better than that.

The people who make it to the Civil Society Hall of Fame come from all over India — many of them from corners of the country so remote that they have never been to New Delhi. These are people who haven't bothered about scale. They don't file quarterly reports. Instead, they are driven by ideas, passion and a strong sense of duty — attributes that can't be quantified and valued or bought and sold. They don't obsess with fame and success. They are the kind of outliers we need to take India forward.

The one big message that we get from the lives of the people who make it to the Civil Society Hall of Fame is that democracy works best when we work at it every day in our different roles. The smaller and less known the effort the better, is what we say.

This year's Civil Society Hall of Fame has in it two doctors, a teacher, a woman tribal leader, a botanist and her activist partner and a pilot. They have each lived

PRIME TIME

remarkable lives dedicated to finding solutions to India's problems.

What they have in common is that they have each tried to make the government system work and get people their rights. They have done this in their own original ways by shaping solutions as they have gone along. In their own independent contexts they have created replicable models for connecting people to government and vice versa.

Each of them has chosen to engage with a flawed system with the idea of improving it. Dr Sudha Sinha, who appears on our cover page, returned from the US a well-qualified medical oncologist with many years of valuable experience. She worked initially in a private hospital in Hyderabad, but soon realised that true satisfaction lay in treating the vast majority who needed her medical knowledge and skills.

Dr Sinha joined MNJ Hospital and decided to contribute her bit to making the government health system deliver. Though not trained specifically to treat childhood cancers, she took children as her patients. She succeeded in getting the hospital to have a ward with 13 beds for children. She had 13 children coming to her at that time and she needed 13 beds. Now the ward has expanded, but, more importantly, Dr Sinha has shown how good doctors can have an impact on public healthcare if they choose to.

Decades ago, Dr Sitanath De returned from England with his young English wife and decided to set up a practice as a surgeon in Jhargram in West Bengal. He had many options but he chose this one because he believed that doctors should serve where they are needed most. Dr De is now retired. He dedicated his life to saving lives in an area where modern surgical skills were not available and quality facilities were lacking.

Puli Raju has gone from being a farmer to a decently paid government school teacher at Gajwel in Medak district of Telengana. Unlike his siblings he has got himself an education and escaped from the many vagaries of life on the land. But he chooses to be a voice for farmers,

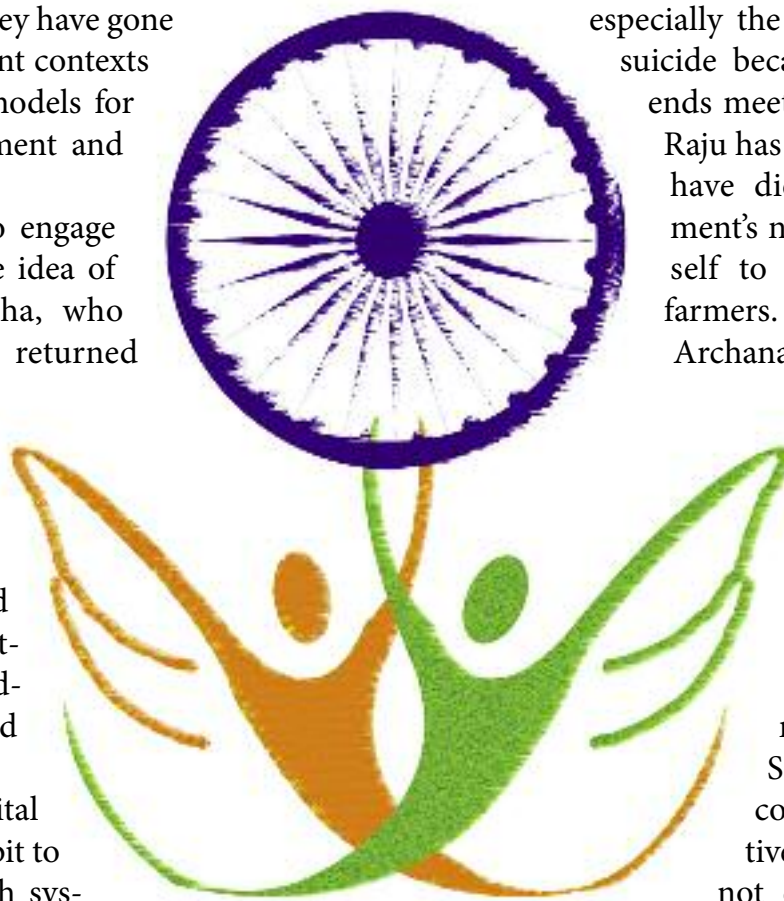
especially the families of those who commit suicide because of their inability to make ends meet in a collapsing rural economy. Raju has his own lists of the farmers who have died. He questions the government's numbers. He also dedicates himself to highlighting the problems of farmers.

Archana Godbole and Jayant Sarnaik have innovated with conservation in the North Western Ghats in Maharashtra where the majority of forests are privately owned. Saving the biodiversity of the Western Ghats from mindless development is essentially an environmental concern. Godbole and Sarnaik have successfully made conservation economically attractive by compensating farmers for not cutting their trees. They have also worked to preserve sacred groves,

which are the last repositories of valuable gene pools.

Sumani Jhodia and Indraani Singh are two completely different faces of activism in modern India. Jhodia has fought for tribal rights in Odisha and asserted herself despite the lack of formal education and equal opportunities. Singh is an empowered woman pilot, the first to fly an Airbus in India. When not flying she has, through Literacy India, educated poor children and helped women build livelihoods. They are both admirable women and they together represent the vast reservoir of diverse human talent that exists in India.

The Hall of Fame process is greatly enriched by the participation of its jury. As in the past we need to thank Aruna Roy, Anupam Mishra, Darshan Shankar, DPS Toor, Vir Chopra and Nasser Munjee for their time and effort. ■



PICTURES BY P. ANIL KUMAR



Dr Sudha Sinha in the ward for children at the MNJ Cancer Hospital

DR SUDHA SINHA

The caring oncologist

THE MNJ Cancer Hospital at Red Hills in Hyderabad has a good reputation as a government facility. But till six years ago it had no clue as to what to do with the number of children brought to it for admission. The hospital was only for adult patients and the children would be sent to the Niloufer Children's Hospital next door though it didn't have the specialists or infrastructure to treat cancer cases.

Things changed in 2008 when Dr Sudha Sinha joined here. A medical oncologist, she had spent several years in the US. Back in Hyderabad in 2005 she had first worked in a private hospital and then in 2006 opted for government service to have a bigger impact.

Dr Sinha wasn't a specialist in children's cancers, but since there wasn't such a specialist at MNJ Hospital, she would attend to the children in addition to her adult patients. The problem was that the children could not be admitted and she had no means of knowing how they were responding to the treatment. They would go to the Niloufer Children's Hospital and that was the last she would know of them.

A time came when she had to take care of 13 children and she wondered how to treat them over a long period. Dr Sinha had to act. She pitched with the director of MNJ Hospital for a ward with 13 beds. In a fortuitous turn of events, the ward became a reality. Today it has grown to 40 beds, and is perhaps the only one of its kind in the coun-

try. It is indeed a great example of how public health infrastructure can be expanded.

"In oncology in the developed world cancer in children is a major success story," says Dr Sinha. "The latest data we have is that in blood cancer 90 per cent get cured. With other cancers if they come early or even in the fourth stage, the cure rates are between 50 and 60 per cent. For blood cancer almost everybody is being cured abroad," explains Dr Sinha.

In India it is just the opposite. Children die for want of specialised hospitals. Diagnosis is late and follow-up poor. In private hospitals the cost of treatment is forbidding and beyond the reach of the majority. It is a sorry state of affairs.

Cancer treatment involves extended engagement with the disease to beat it at its own game of variations. In developing countries like India the problem is abandonment of treatment half way. Patients give up and vanish either because they can't afford the cost of treatment or because facilities and specialists are lacking.

It is possible to change things around if doctors and administrators have the vision and put in the effort. At MNJ Hospital, the children's ward is a success story. A transformation everyone thought impossible has been achieved.

HALL OF FAME

With 40 beds, the impact on childhood cancers at MNJ Hospital is a 15 per cent abandonment rate and a 40 per cent cure rate. Earlier the cure rate was barely 2 per cent and the abandonment rate was 50 per cent. The plan is to have 150 beds, which could bring down the abandonment rate to zero and increase the cure rate to 90 per cent.

The children's ward we see today is a combination of the essentials of public healthcare: expertise, efficiency and basic infrastructure.

The floors are clean and the ceiling has bright paint. Well-trained nurses are purposefully busy. Orange case files lie on a table. A teenage boy with a sparkle in his eyes, wearing a cap to cover his hairless head, sifts through the files, perhaps looking for his medical record.

There is an easy-paced professionalism in evidence here. Systems are in place. Treating cancers is complex and medical teams need to go beyond competence to be inventive and adaptable in taking on the challenges that a deadly disease like cancer throws at them.

There is space in the ward, not too much, but enough to ensure dignity. Anxious parents are at ease comforting their children. A young mother strolls through the ward with her toddler holding onto her finger. There are no frills, but the dehumanising congestion of a government hospital is not there.

Patients outnumbering the number of beds come asking for treatment and need to be admitted. It is a challenge for which solutions will have to be found. For now the rush of patients exists, but it is not so open.

TRACKING PATIENTS

"After I joined MNJ Hospital, for the first three months I was one of two medical oncologists. After that I was the only medical oncologist. The institute, in fact, did not admit children and was meant only for adults. There was no children's specialist. Two or three children somehow got admitted and there were others who would come to me for treatment," recalls Dr Sinha.

"I would write the treatment schedules and send them to the nearby children's hospital. If the child survived the parents came back, but I had no denominator to work with. If the child died I would not know about it. If they stopped the treatment I would not know about it. I would give treatment A, B and C and they would go to the children's hospital and whatever happened to them happened. It was not very satisfying."

The Niloufer Children's Hospital has 800 beds. Dr Sinha began to go in search of the children she had sent there and ask the families to bring them back for treatment.

"We held a series of meetings with the parents and decided that MNJ should do something here in our hospital," says Dr Sinha.

"The director said to me that it was a good idea but I would have to find the space — 'You know how expensive real estate is in this city!' he said to me. I then spoke to the heads of department of surgery and radiation and they said it was a brilliant idea and that we should do it. The head of radiation gave me his space and, there and then, I had a ward for 13 children," Dr Sinha remembers.

The ward became a reality but it needed beds, equipment, medicines, nurses and doctors. MNJ Hospital being a government establishment, it meant dealing with procedures and pursuing permissions across departments.

NGO IS SET UP

To make matters simpler and faster, Dr Sinha set up IMPACT, an NGO in 2008 with her sister and friends as trustees. IMPACT is the acronym for Improving Access to Care and Treatment. Through IMPACT money was raised for hiring nurses, buying medicines and equipping the ward. The NGO donated the funds to MNJ Hospital, which took the expenses on its books.

For instance, six nurses had to be hired and specially trained for the children's ward. Sanction of funds from the government would have taken very long. Instead, IMPACT provided the funds for the salaries of the nurses and other support staff who were paid and trained by MNJ Hospital. Over time, the number of nurses and sup-

The children's ward is a combination of the essentials of public healthcare: expertise, efficiency and infrastructure. The floors are clean and the ceiling has bright paint.



Anxious parents are at ease comforting their children



The ward is clean, efficiently run and friendly

port staff increased and the arrangement continued till very recently when funds from the government were finally approved.

Similarly, additions to the 13 beds of the ward came from a sponsor so that now there are 40 beds and further additions are likely to be made in the same way.

IMPACT's mission is to build a "sustainable and replicable model". It seeks to bridge the shortcomings in public health infrastructure by "creating a comprehensive ecosystem of partnerships to provide specialised care including accommodation, food, transport, blood products and lab services". It has what it calls CARE values: Commitment, Accountability, Respect and Efficiency.

When Dr Sinha returned to Hyderabad after several years in the US, she was a qualified medical oncologist with valuable experience. It was a family decision that brought her and her husband and two boys back. They wanted to live in India and Hyderabad after all was home.

Finding employment was easy. She was soon working in a private hospital and life may well have continued at that comfortable pace had it not been for one of her patients in that hospital, a teenage boy, whose family couldn't afford his treatment beyond a point.



Dr Sudha Sinha with her team of nurses and medical staff



A mother with her baby

“Somehow I felt responsible for his entire treatment. I could not bring myself to say, ‘ You have no money, now go wherever you have to,” says Dr Sinha.

So she reached out to friends and wrote to the Telugu Association in the US and raised around ₹4 lakh for the boy’s extended treatment. It wasn’t so easy to bring in donations. It was also stressful for the boy’s family.

“I could not see the boy die just because the family didn’t have money to pay for his medicines. I also persuaded the wealthy grandparents of another child being treated by me to contribute to the cost of the medicines,” recalls Dr Sinha.

It was a case that made Dr Sinha think. If this was the plight of just one child and his family, then what might have happened to the tens and thousands of others who couldn’t even make it to a private hospital? Where did they go? What did they do?

“It made me wonder, if for just one child I had to raise such money where was the solution? I thought I should try harder to join a government set-up and have a bigger impact,” says Dr Sinha.

“We have to make our government system deliver so that everyone

has access to quality healthcare.”

HELP FROM MEMPHIS

After she joined MNJ Hospital, Dr Sinha reached out to bring in as much support as she could for her mission. Apart from better systems, funds and strategic support, she herself needed to upgrade her knowledge of treating child cancer patients.

She connected with St Jude Children’s Research Hospital in Memphis, Tennessee. It is one of the foremost centres for treating children with cancer. Its mainstay is donor-driven treatment and it is known for not turning patients away who can’t afford. Also, a very small percentage of its cases are paid for through insurance.

There was a natural fit between what Dr Sinha was setting out to achieve and St Jude. Soon Dr Raul C. Ribeiro of the department of oncology research there agreed to visit Hyderabad.

“He came and said he was very happy with what he could see. I asked him what there was to be happy about. He said since the situation was so bad, it could only get better from here,” recalls Dr Sinha.

Over time, St Jude has been an important partner for improving systems, training and understanding the challenges of treating childhood cancers, not least among them being abandonment of treatment. St Jude is rich in experience because it also works in other developing countries to bridge gaps in the public healthcare system. It is the best advice that MNJ Hospital could get.

By any measure the children’s ward at MNJ Hospital is a success. There are innumerable case studies to establish this. The ward aspires to have the best systems and protocols. The nurses are specially trained and empowered. Provision has been made for palliative care and counselling which are both essential cancer treatment.

Dr Sudha Sinha has shown what doctors can achieve when they go from the private sector to a government set-up and bring to it a certain degree of excellence that everyone can benefit from. ■

Umesh Anand and Photographer P. Anil Kumar visited the MNJ Hospital in Hyderabad and spent time with Dr Sudha Sinha



Archana Godbole and Jayant Sarnaik in the dense and slippery jungles of the North Western Ghats

ARCHANA GODBOLE & JAYANT SARNAIK

Guardians of the Ghats

A narrow mud path begins under a sprawling banyan tree and takes us up rocky slopes thick with green cover. It is slippery underfoot because it has been raining and we have been told it would not be wise to go more than a short distance. The climb will be manageable, but the way down can be tough and messy, perhaps even dangerous. Being July, we are in the middle of the monsoon in the Western Ghats, one of the world's 34 biodiversity hotspots. As is to be expected, the fecund forests here are burgeoning with new life. The undergrowth is difficult to negotiate. And there are venomous snakes and other forms of wildlife to think about.

So we don't go too far in, but the periphery in itself is an important landmark. A solitary metal board dwarfed by magnificent greenery announces a unique effort in conservation. From here begin 800 acres of forests under the village of Umre where local dwellers have signed three separate conservation agreements not to cut trees for the next five years in return for financial compensation. Up ahead there are another 538 acres in the village of Kalambaste for which similar agreements been put in place.

The Applied Environment Research Foundation (AERF) is the driving force behind these two conservation agreements. The two parcels of forest are contiguous and connect with the buffer zone of

the Sahyadri Tiger Reserve. A swathe of hillside in the Western Ghats has in this way, through agreements, been conserved as a habitat for rare trees, medicinal plants and wildlife.

The Western Ghats are mountains that run parallel to the entire west coast of peninsular India. The sea is not more than 30 km away. Multiple gene strains continue to thrive here though they are also getting decimated and many are either extinct or almost so because of felling and mining.

The villages of Umre and Kalambaste are in the Sanghameshwar block of Ratnagiri district. They fall in what is called the Sahyadri-Konkan Corridor in Maharashtra. It is the North Western Ghats.

Unlike in the rest of the Western Ghats, most of the forests in the north are privately owned. Just six per cent of the forests here are protected areas under the forest department.

The AERF has worked with the private owners of these forests to shape conservation agreements that compensate them adequately. If the agreements had not been signed, it is almost certain that trees would have been felled indiscriminately and sold.

Felling has been quite common in these parts. Local dwellers in need of money are quick to have deals with contractors who put cash down. The wood goes to nearby industries for use as timber and fuel.

HALL OF FAME

But now the conservation agreements have provided an alternative. It is possible to preserve the trees for almost the same money that would have come from felling them.

Archana Godbole and Jayant Sarnaik founded AERF in 1994 to save the biodiversity of the North Western Ghats. It has been their mission to find ways of making conservation financially attractive and meaningful to people. Telling people to protect the environment is not enough. It is more impactful to show how natural resources can be used sustainably for economic gain.

Godbole, 52, is a botanist, who began coming here in search of sacred groves when she was working for the Botanical Survey of India and simultaneously doing her Ph.D. That was in the late eighties. Sarnaik, 47, got involved as a public-spirited nature lover but has gone on to acquire a deep understanding of biodiversity. After 20 years of fieldwork and studies they are regarded as experts on the region's natural resources and environmental traditions.

The three days we spend with Godbole and Sarnaik are as packed with learning as they are full of visual delights. Sacred groves, rambling forests, ancient temples, medicinal plants, rare birds and hoary trees — we go on a magical tour of nature's mysteries.

BIG FAMILIES, SMALL HOLDINGS

As we stop our vehicle at a high point on the first day, Godbole and Sarnaik point to vast expanses of greenery on the slopes of the North Western Ghats that they tell us are privately owned. The land belongs to families with very many members. The forests themselves are not more than a few decades old and date back to the time when these families stopped farming on their land.

Since the claimants within a family are many, big holdings are broken up into very small ones in the records, sometimes as little as an acre. This prevents the government from taking them over.

The farming families, being essentially poor, use the trees when they need emergency money, easily turning them into cash by calling in a logging contractor.

Selling the land outright is not an option because ownership within the families is complicated. The locations are also not good for



A sacred grove at Vashi where conservation efforts have been successful



HCL funded the planting of indigenous trees at a sacred grove



A bird's eye view of the North Western Ghats where most of the forests are privately owned but are rich in biodiversity



Community temples in sacred groves have traditional architecture and beautiful interiors

‘The time has gone when you could ask someone not to cut a tree to save the planet. No one buys that argument. For conservation to be successful it has to make economic sense.’

tourism since they are remote and on slopes. Access is difficult.

But these small private forests play an important ecological role. Taken together they represent substantial forest cover. They are home to rare plants, trees and animals.

“It is not that the people here don’t know the inherent value of keeping the forest standing. They have that knowledge. But it is their economic need that drives out that wisdom and makes them hand over their trees to a logging contractor,” says Sarnaik.

“They will tell you how healthy forests are linked to rainfall and groundwater recharge. All this they know, but they also need money in their pockets,” he says.

“The time has gone,” says Godbole, “when you could ask someone not to cut a tree to save the planet. No one buys that argument. For conservation to be successful it has to make economic sense.”

TARGET IS 10,000 HECTARES

The first agreements AERF signed were in October 2008 with five farmers for five years. Ten areas were identified and 10 farmers were approached. Five agreed. Last year, when the agreements matured, all five farmers agreed to renew them.

AERF is particularly fond of these five farmers because they were the original believers in this novel attempt at conservation. But between 2008 and 2013, many more agreements were signed and 2,800 acres have been secured in the Sanghameshwar block of Ratnagiri district.

“We are targeting 10,000 hectares,” says Godbole. “We expect to protect the forests under such agreements till 2050. That is the target

we have set.”

Before the agreements were signed, AERF did GIS studies and validated them on the ground to identify good tracts that had not been cut. In this way it zeroed in on the original 10 areas.

“The local people said the logging contractor gave ₹5,000 for a clump of trees. We said at first that we could give ₹3,000 to ₹5,000 over five years,” says Godbole. “Then we negotiated and checked the quality of the forest and reached a figure of ₹3,000.”

The terms were that the owners could not sell or lease the forest. They couldn’t undertake subsidy-based plantation because that would mean cutting the forest. They could not build a road or undertake any development.

The first agreements were funded with ₹5 lakh from the Rufford Small Grants Foundation (RSG). From 2008 to 2013, AERF worked hard to assess biodiversity, mark trees with carbon sequestration and plant more trees.

To expand and do more agreements, AERF launched a web-based initiative called My Forest to appeal to the urban nature lover. It became possible for individuals and companies to sponsor forests in the North Western Ghats. A Business and Biodiversity Programme was also launched.

“There are people who are serious about conservation but don’t know what to do. To them we said you can sponsor a forest,” says Godbole.

Praj Industries and Innoventive Industries based in Pune took 50 acres each. Pukka Herbs, based in the UK, took another 50 acres. Further down the line, money came from the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund.

Unlike the logging contractor, AERF was specific about money and area. Boundaries have been mapped and guarded. “They now say to us, ‘We want to give you forests so that you will keep them safe for us.’ Ultimately the aim is the same — to conserve the forest,” says Sarnaik.

SACRED GROVES AS HERITAGE SITES

At the core of AERF’s conservation effort is the sacred grove. In contrast to private forests, the groves are on land owned by the revenue department but managed by communities. Temples have been built



Under AERF's My Forest initiative, individuals and companies can sponsor conservation of trees

to local deities who came out of folklore. A dream was translated into a belief and from that came an idol and then a temple. Around these temples grew trees and plants. Water sources were protected.

Some of the oldest, most valuable and now endangered trees exist in sacred groves. Linked to the presence of the trees in the sacred groves are bats, giant squirrels, eagles, the Great Pied Hornbill and the Malabar Pied Hornbill.

In the North Western Ghats there are an estimated 2,200 sacred groves. Godbole says she began by working in 10 sacred groves and by 2008 took up another 40. In the past couple of years, 30 more sacred groves have been added. AERF now works for the preservation of 80 or so sacred groves.

"The sacred groves represent a traditional mechanism by which people get connected to nature. They are examples of community management of resources," says Godbole.

"Sacred groves are the remnants of primary forests in the area. In them you will find the original biodiversity of the area. Sacred groves are the stepping stones to conservation. They are the building blocks of valuable diversity. So if these blocks vanish we don't see any future for conservation on a larger scale," explains Sarnaik.

Birds like the Great Pied Hornbill and the Malabar Pied Hornbill nest in old trees found in sacred groves. They look for natural cavities in the *Bahera* tree (*Terminalia bellerica*). The birds eat fruits and seeds and play an important role in promoting germination.

"Once the seeds pass through the alimentary canal of the birds they germinate. This is why birds like the hornbill are called forest farmers. So there is a complete link — sacred groves, *Bahera* trees, hornbills and dispersal of forests across the landscape," says Godbole.

"One Great Pied Hornbill occupies an area of 50 sq km," says Sarnaik. "They are big birds who eat a lot and so you can imagine the amount of seeds the bird can disperse over the landscape. But for that to happen the hornbill needs its natural habitat. It nests in the natural cavities of *Bahera* trees, and such cavities form in trees that are 100 years old," says Sarnaik.

"Since the rate of deforestation is increasing, the hope is that only these trees in sacred groves will survive," says Sarnaik. "Some of these trees have been around 200 to 300 years. The sacred groves are there-



Dried Bahera fruits in sacks

fore heritage sites."

As with the My Forest initiative, AERF has built an economic aspect into the conservation of sacred groves. At one sacred grove, HCL, the software company, had sponsored the planting of traditional trees that have now grown.

AERF has also been training and involving local people in collecting and processing the fruit of the *Bahera* tree, which is one of the constituents of triphala, used in Ayurveda as a medicine. The dried and processed *Bahera* tree fruit is sold to Pukka Herbs in the UK.

AERF has also shown how to use the bark of the *Bija* tree to make wooden tumblers. The *Bija* bark is known to control blood sugar. Water stored in the tumbler overnight is supposed to be good for diabetics. The wooden tumblers are smartly packed and for sale. The profits from such initiatives are expected to bring economic benefits to the community and promote the conservation of traditional trees in sacred groves. ■

Umesh Anand and Photographer Ajit Krishna visited the North Western Ghats to spend time with Archana Godbole and Jayant Sarnaik



Dr Sitanath De near his home in Jhargram where he still lives

DR SITANATH DE

Jhargram's first surgeon

SITANATH De's main interest in life initially was to play football. But very early in life he also helped out his doctor uncle in their native Jhargram as a compounder assistant, sometimes preparing even a complex item like castor oil mixture. The uncle instilled in him the need to someday become a doctor and serve the poor people of Jhargram — then as now, a small town in a backwater region with a significant Adivasi population and then, more than now, extensively forested.

The two worlds of football and medicine came together when young Sitanath, after securing a 'mild second division' in his intermediate science examination, applied for admission to the undergraduate medical course in Kolkata's National Medical College under the sportsmen's quota. The big thing for him was his football skills being tested out by the legendary footballer Goshta Pal. Sitanath made the grade in football, and got in.

In the initial years in medical college his greater interest lay in representing the college in football but the umbilical cord that tied him to Jhargram and its ailing people refused to snap. Every time he came home on a short visit, his uncle had a group of patients ready for him to chaperon to Kolkata for treatment not available in Jhargram. But,

steadily, the doctor thing began to grow on him and he became aware of the calling that had been thrust upon him — serving the ill in a rural area where most were poor.

Today, at 80, Dr De is one of that unique group of rural surgeons who have kept the flag of modern medicine flying in a part of the country where 70 per cent of the population lives but is miserably underserved by a bare 30 per cent of its doctors.

What makes his story even more distinctive is he went on to become an FRCS (Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons), the finest appellation of specialisation that a surgeon anywhere in the world could acquire at a time when British degrees remained king even though the empire was gone. A close acquaintance, who has seen him work in Jhargram for decades, says matter-of-factly, "He could have earned crores but money never mattered."

Seeds of the idea of pursuing a rural practice dug roots when Dr De saw as a young man the result of there being no good doctors around. "Imagine the trauma of a patient who had to go for treatment to Calcutta from a place like Gopiballabhpur on a makeshift stretcher, first by boat across the Kangsabati river, then on the roof of a bus to Jhargram and thereafter by train to Kolkata." After getting his MBBS

HALL OF FAME

degree he joined the West Bengal Health Service but on being posted in Calcutta, resigned after three days!

The next milestone in his life was going to the UK to specialise in surgery while working for the National Health Service from 1960. And he knew what he had to do – learn all he could and get as much experience as he could in every branch of surgery from general to thoracic to orthopaedic to ophthalmic to neuro. “My surgery was good and I got a lot of practice,” he recalls.

He also boned up on the minimum equipment needed to run a surgery and operation theatre as in a rural area he would have to set things up himself. The one area of surgery he avoided was gynaecology. During his students days in Kolkata while working in the labour room he almost dropped a baby as it emerged from its mother's womb. The nurse in attendance was furious, called him “useless” and advised him not to become a gynaecologist!

In the UK he met Letitia Wilson, now 73, who was reading for her degree in analytical modern philosophy at London's King's College. They got married in 1964. She remembers his main attraction being “very idealistic and strong willed.” As happens with sportsmen, he was also “a good decision maker”. Her father was a Conservative MP from Cornwall and her parents believed in education. She still teaches youngsters English in a backroom of her house. She was “bookish, wore glasses and we children – I was the youngest daughter – never grew up materialistic,” recounts Letitia.

Her family had an India connection and she describes it as a “Raj family”. Her grandfather was a civil engineer who came to India in the late 19th century and supervised the construction of the all-weather port in Madras. After being married for seven years, Dr De returned to India in 1971, two small children, aged six and four, and British wife in tow. They became part of a joint family in which there were 19 children and “my in-laws were very good to me,” says Mrs De.

TESTING TIMES

They rented what was really an abandoned bungalow which had no running water and only single phase electricity. A nursing clinic was set up on the ground floor (the family lived upstairs) using only locally available material, with the operating table built by a carpenter under Dr De's direction.

There was no car, no telephone and if you wanted to call a local doctor to help you with a surgery then you had to go on bicycle. At the Jhargram government hospital there was no X-ray, no ECG machine and for the smallest of things patients had to be taken to the Kharagpur railway hospital. Yet, Dr De never felt things were “too difficult”. He was “very cool and calm and the local people really helped,” recalls Letitia.

Two weeks into his life as a rural surgeon in 1971 came, not the chance, but the compulsion to conduct his first major surgery. A patient turned up with an easily diagnosed cancer of the rectum. But what could he do? The operating theatre was a blocked-off portion of the verandah with open access from all sides and smell coming in from the drain next to the nearby railway line. He operated on an awkward wooden table whose height was raised when needed by using bricks and instruments were sterilised by boiling them in a large aluminium pan on a wood fire. There were three or four local doctors whom he could call upon for help but none of them was a surgeon. He was able to finally turn away the patient by saying that the four bottles of blood needed for the operation could only be had from the Central Blood Bank in Calcutta.

Then, a month later, the same patient was back, not after an operation but stretching out his hand to offer a bag containing four bottles of blood packed in sawdust and ice and entreating him to please now conduct the operation! The patient had got himself admitted in Calcutta and his operation kept getting postponed. On the third occasion his nephew, with the requisition slip for the blood, took delivery of it and went to Howrah station. He himself quietly slipped out of his hospital bed later and joined his nephew at the station and

At the Jhargram government hospital there was no X-ray, no ECG machine and for the smallest of things patients had to be taken to the Kharagpur railway hospital. Yet, Dr De never felt things were ‘too difficult’. His wife, Letitia recalls that he was ‘very cool and calm.’



Dr De with his wife Letitia



Dr De in his chamber. Patients still turn up for medical advice

both took the train to Jhargram with the blood!

Now Dr De had no place to hide. Plus the supreme confidence of the patient in him, an ‘FRCS’, was “infectious and I felt my professional instincts rising to the challenge.” A patient agreed to keep the bottles of blood in his fridge (Dr De's was still coming from the UK) and he then set out on his bicycle (no phones in his area) to contact his local doctor friends.

Two rods were attached to the foot end of the operating table for the patient to be kept in a ‘lithotomy’ position and a spotlight was organised; gowns, drapes and caps were stitched by a local tailor and sterilised and two simple tables set up for instruments. For the operation, which took two and a half hours, local doctors performed the func-

Continued on page 43

PICTURES BY AJIT KRISHNA



Indraani Singh with a group of cheering students

INDRAANI SINGH

Pilot on a literacy mission

IN 1995, Indraani Singh was appointed by Indian Airlines as commander of an Airbus-300, the first female pilot in Asia to fly the big plane. Accolades poured in. Yet the attractive pilot, an icon for girls, found herself in a reflective mood, wondering how she could do more.

She found her answer after a chance conversation with her local vegetable vendor in Palam Vihar, a colony in Gurgaon where she lives. The vegetable vendor approached her with a humble request. Could she help pay his daughter's school fees? He was a poor man and didn't have the money. Indraani said, she would, but the man's request got her thinking.

"I thought if I can help one child's education, I can definitely help many more," she reminisces.

Her mission, she decided, would be to spread literacy among the underprivileged.

With this idea was born Literacy India, a non-profit organisation that provides education and vocational skills to children, youth and women who can't join mainstream schools or enrol in courses because they don't have money or social status.

"That vegetable vendor's daughter is an engineer today, although

her father still sells vegetables in the same locality," says Indraani.

Twenty years on Literacy India has a campus in Bajghera in Gurgaon with a school, a vocational centre and a factory that rolls out recycled paper. "This used to be a jungle in 1995," says Indraani. Literacy India's school now has more than 4,000 children on its rolls. It supports about 50,000 people — women, youth and children with education and skill-building programmes in 55 centres across the country.

Indraani's first shortlived venture though was a small mobile creche for the children of construction workers. In those years, Gurgaon was being transformed from a small sleepy town to a big city populated with the auto sector, BPOs, call centres and the garment industry. Residential colonies were popping up everywhere. But construction workers building the Millenium City lived in shacks in pathetic conditions.

"Their children loitered all over. We hired a teacher to teach them at the construction site and we took them for picnics. That's how we began a small mobile creche," says Indraani.

But in the dust, dirt and din of the construction site, children couldn't learn and teachers found it hard to teach. Chiranjeev Bharti

HALL OF FAME

School in Palam Vihar offered Indraani their empty classrooms after school hours. She also rented a building in nearby Choma village. But construction workers were indifferent about sending their children to her school. Initially, just five children enrolled.

"We bought a rickshaw to transport children from construction sites to our classrooms. The rickshaw-puller, whose services we hired, ran away with our rickshaw. In Choma village, there were incidents of eve-teasing. The children used to steal as their parents didn't bother much about their basic needs," Indraani recalls.

She found herself battling a whole lot of issues with her son Kunal who was just four years old then. "I had to run to the police and deal with the local panchayat all by myself with my little son in tow. Juggling work hours and this mission was the least of the challenges I faced. Many of my pilot friends thought that I was preparing to venture into politics," she laughs.

All this while, she invested her own income in Literacy India. Then a friend from Kolkata, also a pilot, visited Literacy India on a flight break. He was so impressed by the non-profit's earnest work, he became its first donor.

Indraani believes she has been blessed by destiny. "The Bajghera campus was bought with money which came to us most unexpectedly. My pilot friend from Kolkata said he and his friends had collected about ₹50 lakhs for the medical treatment of a child but she had died, tragically. He said that they decided to give that money to me. And so I bought this land," explains Indraani.

LEARN AND EARN

Right from the start Literacy India understood that they could never isolate education from employment. Most of the parents who send their children to Literacy India's school work as migrant labour. They come from Bihar, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.

Then there are women who need to earn a livelihood. They are from farming families whose agricultural land was sold to builders. The men spent the money recklessly on alcohol and consumer goods. "Our holistic mission is livelihoods for all these people. If the women



A woman working for Indha Crafts stitching a bag



The recycling unit at Literacy India's Bajghera campus



Children from low income homes learn English, computers and can join vocational courses

12th Annual Issue



Classrooms are bright and teachers friendly



Every classroom has a small library

achieve economic empowerment, half my job is done. They become confident enough to fight for their own rights then," says Indraani.

Literacy India's school, called Vidhyapeeth, is from Class 1 to Class 10 and affiliated with the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS). Its Pathshala programme helps street children with basic literacy and dropouts with tuition so that they can rejoin mainstream schools. The Gurukul project sponsors higher education for meritorious students from an economically weak background.

Literacy India started Indha Crafts in 2004 organising women into a self-help group and teaching them skills. Indha is the name of a broad cloth cushion which Haryanvi women place on their heads to carry water pots. Indha Crafts produces attractive handbags, laptop bags, notebooks, photo frames, jewellery boxes and quilts.

"About 6,000 women have been trained under this project in tailoring, embroidery, block printing and making recycled paper products. Many work with us at the centre in Gurgaon while others work from home and send us the products here. Today, about 25 companies including Microsoft, the Fortune Hotels Group and even Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) buy products from us for corporate gifting which is our biggest market," says Satya Prakash, coordinator for Indha. Literacy India has its own recycled paper making unit that produces about 300 sheets per day from wastepaper and cloth.

Their Karigari project teaches youth and women skills that can help them become economically independent like tailoring, computers, driving and so on. Women, for instance, have learnt driving and got jobs with Maruti-Suzuki, the auto manufacturer in Gurgaon.

"In the economic strata where we work, vocational skills matter as much as academics. We can't aspire for all our children to get jobs that require very high qualifications. But we can help them stand on their own feet and take care of their families," says Sohil Yadav, lead coordinator of Literacy India's projects.

Children who lag behind in studies can learn AC repair, electronic operations, para-nursing and housekeeping, even as they grapple with schooling.



The Karigari project teaches youth and women skills like tailoring and computers. Women have learnt driving and got jobs with Maruti-Suzuki, the auto manufacturer in Gurgaon.

Since the last two years, students of Vidhyapeeth have been organising an activity called 'Feriwalla'. They stack up vegetables and repaired electronic products on a cart and go around selling these in nearby villages. "The idea is to teach them sales, marketing and even business management," says G.S. Dubey, in-charge of activities at Vidhyapeeth.

TECH TOOLS

Literacy India also forayed into technology in 2010, inventing an education software called Digital Dost with an IT company in Bengaluru. Digital Dost introduces children to basic concepts in language, maths, social studies and science and even tells them how to open a bank account. It has, fortuitously, sparked interest in education among indifferent learners and street children.

Digital Dost has helped Literacy India reach out to more than 20,000 underprivileged children. In fact, digital smart classes are the new fad in its centres across West Bengal, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Himachal Pradesh besides Delhi and the National Capital Region (NCR).

"Too much technology, I understand, isn't a good idea, but again, with the kind of population that we deal with, our first task is to get children interested in studies and there technology helps a lot. I have seen street children, deep into drug abuse, very distracted and used to a nomadic

life, getting engrossed in solving games and listening to stories on the Gyantantra software. Even if it isn't teaching them to write, it is exposing them to the world of visual and oral literacy," says Indraani.

Literacy India also discovered that technology was a great tool for motivating teachers. It helped them rethink and turnaround their methods of teaching. "Our students feel more confident thanks to this digital empowerment. They feel the world has opened up to them with the Internet. Many of them are working as data entry operators for their panchayats," says Indraani.

Literacy India's focus is on the 3Es — education, employment and empowerment. But it also has wider objectives, like raising a socially responsible younger generation. Under its "We the People" programme children learn about their fundamental rights and civic rights and use the knowledge practically.

So students at Vidhyapeeth have lobbied with the administration to construct and maintain a road in front of their school and remove garbage regularly from a nearby area. "There is no point in just teaching them theoretical civic lessons. They must be confident enough to use this knowledge. The students write letters to the administration with the teacher's help and a representative group even approaches government officials," says Sohit Yadav.

And, of course, Literacy India's foray into theatre and sports has won them laurels. Their Shiksharth programme encourages creative activity like painting, pottery, dance and theatre. Students from Literacy India have acted in movies like *3 Idiots* and *Bhag Milkha Bhag*. They have taken part in football and judo tournaments at national level.

Wearing more than two hats has not been easy for Indraani. Her son, now 22, took time to understand and value her goals. Even as she plays mother to her father who is suffering from Alzhiemer's, Indraani remains unfazed and happy to be making a difference each day of her life. ■

Ravleen Kaur and Photographer Ajit Krishna spent time with Indraani Singh at Literacy India's campus

PICTURES BY P. ANIL KUMAR



Puli Raju holds up lists with names of farmers who have committed suicide

PULI RAJU

Lister of farmer suicides

PULI Raju, 42, is a government schoolteacher at Gajwel in the Medak district of Telengana. His wife is also a teacher and with two incomes they are well off, living as they do in a small town. But Raju has shown no inclination to sink comfortably into a secure existence. It is several years now that he has been taking up the problems of farmers in a troubled rural economy. He has a list of 1,800 names of farmers who have taken their own lives since 2004 because they haven't been able to manage their fields successfully.

Many of these farmers had small agricultural holdings and they have left behind shattered families who don't know how to meet the debts that have devolved on them. In most instances they are also defenceless women-headed families who don't know how to get by without men who took decisions and dealt with the outside world.

Raju filed a right to information (RTI) application to know from the government the official figure for suicides by farmers in Telengana. He was told 1,474 had taken their own lives between 1999 and 2012. The information came out of the Crime Records Bureau.

Raju disputes the figure. He says it should be around 3,000. Sitting on a divan in the small living space of his rented flat in Gajwel, he shows many lists to prove that he has been diligent in coming to the

figure of 1,800 suicides since 2004. These are only those suicides that have been recorded. He is sure there are many others that haven't come to public notice.

"I have been collecting data since 2004," he says. "I have interacted with 370 families. My list of 1,800 farmer suicides includes proper documentation like First Information Reports (FIR), death certificates and all other proofs of identity."

According to Raju, most of the farmers who committed suicide had debts of between ₹300,000 and ₹600,000, which are significant amounts considering that 90 per cent of farmers here are small farmers with holdings of not more than five acres. As small farmers they are entitled to loans of only ₹30,000 from banks.

As per the State Crime Records Bureau 1,474 farmer suicides have taken place between 1999 and 2012. When Raju filed an RTI asking for the number of farmer suicides they gave him an approximate figure of 1,400 suicides between 1998 and 2014. But, according to him, many cases go unregistered and the actual figure of farmer suicides would be close to 3,000.

"The government prefers escapism. It gives smaller numbers because it does not want its reputation tarnished," says Raju.

HALL OF FAME

The deaths have disturbing social implications. They also signal a deep malaise in the rural economy. There are multiple reasons for the financial problems that invariably drive farmers to suicide. Farming as an occupation is becoming unsustainable and there aren't alternative forms of employment either.

Explains Raju: "After the head of the family commits suicide, the family undergoes many problems. Usually boys in this region get married between the age of 20 and 25. Girls get married between 18 and 20. Ninety percent of widows here are between 20 and 30. As long as the man lives, the women face no problems. But after his death, everything changes. She has to take care of her family, her children, their education and marriage expenses. The lady who never even purchased a matchbox will now have to bargain over seeds and pesticides with the agents."

"Above all, moneylenders harass them for the money their husbands borrowed. The woman has to pay back the debt because these moneylenders themselves aren't rich and live off the interest," says Raju. "Since the women have no option they end up selling whatever little they have."

Asked why the women don't remarry, Raju says: "So far, I haven't seen any woman remarrying. This is because they have a lot of responsibilities like children, in-laws and debts."

The children suffer too. They drop out of school and work in the fields as daily labourers.

Raju takes us to meet Yadamma, who lost her husband, Kishtaya, in December last year. This family owns no land, but has taken a few acres on lease at ₹15,000 an acre. When the crops failed, Kishtaya sank into debt.

Says Yadamma: "My husband couldn't clear the mounting debts and spoke to me about it a couple of times. But I never thought he would leave us and go. I am not educated. All I know is farming. As a daily labourer, I get paid ₹100 per day. And this is the only income I have with which I have to raise my children."

We had picked up her two boys, Sandeep and Satish, from a government school on the way to the fields where we were to meet Yadamma. As we walked up to her, the boys broke into a run and clung to their mother.



Lists of farmer suicides kept by Pulli Raju

MEDAK DISTRICT FARMER SUICIDE JANUARY - DECEMBER					
S.N	DATE	NAME	AGE	MEDICAL	VILLAGE
JANUARY					
1	2/1/2009	RAMAYATH MURTYA	38	RAJANJAYAM PET	USANTHAN
2	4/1/2009	REDDY NARAYAN	30	CHINTAL	MAJAMPUR
3	5/1/2009	DASARAJAN	35	SEETHY	BAJAMPUR
4	6/1/2009	DHANDARATHI	35	WANGLOOR	GOTLA MA
5	15/1/2009	MU NAGESH REDDI	25	RAJANJAYAM PET	MASALA
6	16/1/09	GANGULA LAKSHMAN	40	DALIHARAD	YADU RA
7	16/1/10	ANBOTHU VESHWARATHI	50	RAJANJAYAM PET	MAJAMPUR
8	20/1/09	TRICALA ANJANEELU	30	TODURAH	MAJAMPUR
9	22/1/09	SRINIVAS YADUJAN	40	D. RAJAN	MAJAMPUR
10	29/1/09	GOLLA KJEMALIN	30	SEETHY	MAJAMPUR
FEBRUARY					
11	3/2/09	MALLARATHI	30	TRICALA	MAJAMPUR
12	4/2/2009	KUPPA RAMESH	30	RAJANJAYAM PET	MAJAMPUR
13	5/2/2009	CHANDRA YADUJAN	30	YENAGURU	MAJAMPUR
14	12/2/2009	AVUTHI NARAYAN	30	MAJAMPUR	MAJAMPUR
15	14/2/09	A. RAJANJAYAM REDDI	30	TRICALA	MAJAMPUR
16	15/2/09	YEMMANI NYSARAJAN	30	TRICALA	MAJAMPUR
17	24/2/09	YADUJAN	30	TRICALA	MAJAMPUR
MARCH					

The official record got by him through RTI



Yadamma with her sons, Sandeep and Satish



Puli Raju with his students at the government school where he teaches



Medak is a water scarce region

The government is far removed from the personal trauma that such families experience. Neither the state's suicide figures nor its promises of financial relief take into account the emotional upheaval the family undergoes. 'At one point, I stopped sending my children to school and made them work with me as labour in the fields,' says Yadamma.

The government is far removed from the personal trauma that such families experience. Neither the state's suicide figures nor its promises of financial relief take into account the emotional upheaval the family undergoes.

"At one point, I stopped sending my children to school and made them work with me as labour in the fields. But one of their teachers (in the government school) insisted that I send them to school. Now they are continuing with their education," she says.

The teacher, P. Papi Reddy, says: "I adopted Sandeep and Satish. Their mother wanted them to work. But I insisted they continue to come to school. I get them books, pens and clothes. I'll support these children as much as I can."

The state provides no social support at all. It is left to individuals like Puli Raju or Papi Reddy to reach out in their limited personal capacities. With rural distress growing there is actually very little that individuals can do.

RUINOUS FIELDS

Raju comes from a farming family that owns 15 acres. But it was his grandfather who first advised his father to get an education and find a job. That didn't happen. Raju, however, did a Masters in economics and became a teacher. When he goes home on leave, he still works in the fields with his siblings who haven't been able to move on in the way he has.

Raju says chemical fertilisers and commercially grown seeds are major reasons for the decline in agriculture in Telengana. There is also a chronic shortage of water. The area is rain fed and wholly dependent on groundwater, the search for which goes deeper and deeper. Water harvesting could have been a solution, but it is not promoted.

"During my childhood, we used organic fertilisers like cow dung and droppings of pigs, goats and sheep. Then artificial fertilisers came into the picture and we used two kg of fertiliser per acre. At present we use six to seven kg of fertiliser per acre," says Raju.

It is the same story with seeds. Families used to store and use their own seeds. They began buying seeds from companies in the belief

that yields would rise significantly. Commercially grown seeds are good only for two crops after which they have to be bought again.

“We were influenced a lot by the agents who come from nearby towns and convinced us to buy and use company seeds. We had no complaints as long as we used our own seeds. But now we have to buy seeds repeatedly from the same company,” says Raju.

“At times, we are tricked by local agents who sell us poor quality seeds. There is no way of knowing this till the crop comes up. It is a lose-lose situation for us.”

As a result of these developments, expenses have kept rising and productivity has gone down. The absence of regulation has led to the promotion of unscientific practices for commercial gain. Since the farmers’ rights as consumers are not protected, they have no authority to turn to. Finally, there is little access to finance that helps farmers out of dodgy situations. They are forced to turn to exploitative moneylenders.

“When employees can get housing loans, vehicle loans and personal loans, why can’t farmers get loans? They only get a loan up to ₹30,000. And it is tough to get the loan approved. The farmers who approach banks asking for loans are always humiliated and disrespected by the employees of the banks. Completing the loan procedures is a herculean task and to make multiple trips to the banks during the kharif season is something which any farmer would hate,” says Raju.

The lack of water has also assumed menacing proportions. Raju speaks about his family’s experience, but he could just as well be speaking for all the farmers in Medak district.

‘At times, we are tricked by local agents who sell us poor quality seeds. There is no way of knowing till the crop comes up. It is a lose-lose situation for us.’

“We completely depend on borewell water. In our fields we dug a borewell in 1993 and water was traced only after 300 feet. We still depend on the same borewell. After that, we dug five borewells and none could provide water. We don’t do water harvesting. Our lands get water only when it rains. Farmers spend a lot on borewells. A failed borewell costs around ₹45,000. And the cost of a successful borewell, which gives water, goes up to ₹100,000.”

Raju believes that awareness programmes are needed to help farmers update themselves. NGOs should provide a counterbalance to commercial interests. Social enterprises can boost market connectivity, putting more money for produce into the hands of farmers.

The major solutions to farmer suicides are supply of water, loans and income security, Raju says. This is well-known. Yet the state does not move a finger. ■

Umesh Anand, Photographer P. Anil Kumar and Harsha Sai visited the Medak district in Telengana to meet Puli Raju and see his lists

Jhargram’s first surgeon

Continued from page 35

tions of anaesthetist and keeping an eye on the blood transfusion.

The operation was successful, the patient got two and half years more of quality life until metastasis took him away three years from the operation.

FINALLY, A CLINIC

Two years later in 1973 Dr De started his own nursing home, Banaphool Clinic, a couple of houses away from the permanent home he moved into after the first address. It finally came to have a consulting room, a pre-operative area, operation theatre and observation area. Set in ample grounds which had a well, there was a spacious covered verandah.

He used several devices to cut costs and enable himself to function. He trained at least 20 local youth, B.Com failed and passed, to become expert clinical assistants. Some of them remained with him for three decades. One of them with a good handwriting became an expert in maintaining medical records. Plus he got patients’ relatives to do much of the nursing. They brought their own provisions, cooked the patients’ food, according to the diet prescribed, at a kitchen outside and had a place to stay overnight to keep an eye on the patient.

The result was, the rent the patient paid for a room on a twin sharing basis was ₹6 to begin with and rose to ₹10 and finally ₹12 when Dr De sold his nursing home in 2008. By then there were six plus one bed and a facility was created on the first floor to go up to 20 beds. But that never happened as Dr De could not find another doctor to train who could work for him with his approach.

As a rural surgeon, Dr De’s lifelong effort has been to deliver “safe, adequate, effective, affordable surgery at the doorstep of the rural poor.” Can this be replicated and how practical is it for the outer reaches of the public health service to deliver this?

Dr De feels that “all but a handful of difficult cases can be safely and effectively treated at the rural block and sub-divisional hospitals. Most of the infrastructure needed is already in existence, along with

sufficient trained auxiliary staff which, unfortunately, in most cases, remains unutilised.” He is convinced that “our physicians and surgeons should be trained to meet local conditions and needs.” Instead, what is happening is “blindly emulating a ‘western style’ of learning.” What is important is that the “administration of local and sub-divisional hospitals must be professionally managed.”

ARSI IS BORN

At the annual conferences of the Association of Surgeons of India, he found big new technologies and procedures which were getting more and more sophisticated being discussed but nothing about rural surgery, when a patient had to travel miles for a simple incision. There he met like-minded doctors and out of this was born the Association of Rural Surgeons of India (ARSI) 22 years ago. It has become an active forum for sharing peer experiences and demonstration of procedures, like how to conduct cosmetic surgery in a rural clinic to set right a cleft lip.

With two knee replacement surgeries and the nursing home gone, Dr De is a bit like a grounded pilot whose flying skills are still intact. As we talk, a middle-aged couple comes in, taking someone’s name, with the arm of the wife in bandage, having had a fall. Dr De takes a look, feels there is no fracture but still advises an X-ray. They come back after an hour with the X-ray plate, Dr De takes one look, says nothing wrong, asks his wife for a strip of cloth from which he makes a sling for the patient, advises rest for the arm and asks them to go.

They are disappointed that he has prescribed no medicine. The couple make him scribble something and ask him what they should pay. Dr De smiles and says they can pay one rupee, but they leave a ₹100 note and go away thanking him.

We are lucky we can get this glimpse of the retired doctor at work who will not take us to see his old nursing home which has changed unrecognisably (it has been hugely built upon) both in appearance and the way in which it offers care.

Today, it is one of several large nursing homes in Jhargram with cars and SUVs waiting outside. In Dr De’s driveway stands his own Maruti Alto. There is no need to say more. ■

Subir Roy and Photographer Prasanta Biswas met Dr De in Jhargram



Sumoni Jhodia in her neat and tidy village where development funds have been used efficiently

SUMONI JHODIA

A forest revolutionary

SUMONI Jhodia sits outside her hut in Siriguda village. There isn't a trace of garbage around as far as the eye can see. Every home composts its waste. Siriguda has a school, a community hall, a fair price shop and a dam that they built themselves across a stream.

"My story isn't just a story to be related over two days," says Sumoni laconically. As she begins to talk we realise her story is epic.

Sumoni Jhodia, 60, is one of Odisha's most prominent tribal leaders. She presides over the Ama Sangathan, a federation of several tribal groups. It produces brooms and deals in minor forest produce and other local products. Sumoni is also a member of the state's Tribal Advisory Committee and part of the Kashipur panchayat in Rayagada district.

She was born into an impoverished family but her father, Ravi Jhodia, was a progressive man who sent her to school, which was 3km away. The long trudge forced the little girl to drop out after six months. She got married and her first child was born when she was 17.

In those days, tribal people in Siriguda village would run and hide in the jungle if they spotted a man dressed in shirt and trousers. They thought he was either a policeman or a forest official who had turned up to throw them into jail on fake charges of stealing minor forest produce. Or maybe he was a moneylender looking for tribals who

were working for him as bonded labour.

Ramdhar Jhodia, the most literate man in her village, had studied till Class 9. He was working as a night schoolteacher with Agragamee, a local NGO. The elders in the village persuaded Sumoni to enroll. She was a shy young lady burdened with poverty, housework and child rearing but she decided to learn how to read and write.

At Agragamee she went beyond literacy. The NGO's 'leadership development' programme gave her confidence and helped her see the exploitation her people were being subjected to. The NGO has backed her solidly all these years.

In 1991 she fought her first battle — against hunger. "Our income lasted for only six months. During the monsoon we depended on moneylenders for food. In return we worked for them for ₹1.50 per day, when the minimum wage rate at that time was ₹6 per day," says Sumoni.

She talked the villagers into starting a grain bank. It would provide them food security during the monsoon and save them from the clutches of moneylenders, she reasoned. The men were sceptical but the women understood. Eventually everybody contributed 4 kg of grain. A village grain bank committee was set up with Sumoni and six others as its members. The grain bank now has 200 quintals of grain

and fulfills its purpose. After opposing it for two years, the money-lenders joined it too.

CHARTER OF 10 DEMANDS

When social mobilisation wins political support a lot can be achieved. So it was when Sumoni met the then Chief Minister Biju Patnaik in 1993. “We had held a meeting in Kalahandi district that was attended by 450 women from 10 districts. The outcome was a list of 10 demands. We sent this charter to the Chief Minister. He called 20 of us to come and meet him and he asked me to be part of his advisory team,” recalls Sumoni.

Demands that men and women be given equal pay, that local liquor breweries be banned, that village communities get rights over minor forest produce and that land be given to the landless were acceded to.

One of the most important outcomes was that the Chief Minister agreed to her demand that people should be informed of all development work to be carried out in their villages in Oriya so that they could oversee its implementation.

As a result, hundreds of village committees in Kashipur block were formed. They took up development works and ensured those were completed. This way there was no room for corruption. The government has paid people for their labour.

Implementing all that the Chief Minister had agreed to proved tough. “We were harassed at block and district levels. But we never gave up. We took out rallies, conducted meetings, submitted petitions and met officials. I once locked up the BDO’s (Block Development Officer) office,” she recalls with a smile.

Liquor breweries were a major concern for tribal women. Whatever little money they were saving was being handed over to the liquor mafia by their men. Biju Patnaik had agreed to a ban. Eight tribal women, including Sumoni, were given ‘special policing powers’ to keep a check on the local breweries.

But implementing the ban was easier said than done. Led by Sumoni, the women would hold rallies in the local market. This incensed the local liquor barons. Rati Majhi, the owner of one such brewery, threatened Aundhari Majhi, one of the women with special policing powers.

She filed a complaint at the Tikri police station. But the police took no action against Rati Majhi. Sumoni says she mobilised 5,000 women from the length and breadth of Kashipur block. The women surrounded the police station in full force and demanded that Rati Majhi be arrested. The police was forced to round him up.

FOREST PRODUCE

A bigger battle was to follow — the demand for minor forest produce. “You can say Sumoni started a civil disobedience movement,” says Divya Das, joint director of Agragamee.

At that time, the right to collect minor forest produce had been leased by the government to the Tribal Development Cooperative Corporation (TDCC) and private companies like Utkal Forest Produce. The Chief Minister had agreed in principle that tribal women would be given this right on condition that they organise themselves and register.

In those days Agragamee was training 40 women in carpet weaving. This group, called the Mandibisi Mahila Mandal, had registered themselves. One day, Hitmai Majhi, a tribal woman, approached them for help. She complained that her stock of grass, with which she made brooms to earn an income had been forcibly seized by officials of the TDCC and the forest department.

Twelve women of the Mandibisi Mahila Mandal along with Sumoni went with Hitmai to complain to the District Collector about this arbitrary action by the TDCC and the forest department.

The District Collector tried to negotiate. An offer was made to the women. The Mandibisi Mahila Mandal could buy the grass for making brooms. They would be given ₹2 lakhs for starting such an enterprise. But they would have to sell their brooms only to the TDCC with just a two per cent margin of profit.

Sumoni’s bigger battle was the demand for rights over forest produce. ‘You can say she launched a civil disobedience movement,’ says Divya Das.



Siriguda has a grain bank financed by CAPART, a government agency



Members of the Ama Sangathan

The women said nothing doing. Instead they pooled the stipend they were earning from the carpet training course and bought 174 quintals of grass for making brooms. But TDCC officials turned up with the police and ordered the women to sign documents saying that they were selling the grass to TDCC.

The women point blank refused to sign. The TDCC officials then forcibly seized their entire stock of grass. The women tried to stop them by blocking the road. But, says Sumoni, the police cheated on them and the TDCC officials escaped with their grass.

The women filed a complaint at the Kashipur police station. All attempts at negotiation between the TDCC and the women failed. The Mandibisi Mahila Mandal refused to budge from its stand. Finally, their grass was returned. The government said it could consider giving the women the right to resell forest produce. But it couldn’t be restricted to just one Mandibisi Mahila Mandal.

Immediately all 12 Mahila Mandals of Kashipur block came together and formed one federation called the Ama Sangathan. They elected Sumoni as their president and got their new organisation registered and in 1995 the Ama Sangathan got the licence to buy, purchase and market brooms.

But the problem was not yet solved. The Ama Sangathan found itself confronted with another dilemma. According to rules, you need-



Sumoni Jhodia at the broom making warehouse with Susheela Majhi, secretary of the Ama Sangathan



Sal leaves being sold to traders

ed to pay royalty to the government for selling minor forest produce. The government increased this royalty every year. So the first year the Ama Sangathan paid ₹45,000. The second year it coughed up ₹75,000 and the year after it was saddled with a bill of ₹1,50,000.

The irony was that the royalty levied by the government on bauxite was only ₹35 per tonne. So the state was allowing miners to take bauxite almost for free and charging tribals amazing sums for grass.

As word about Ama Sangathan's success in making brooms spread, the movement for rights over minor forest produce expanded across Odisha. During the agitation it came to light that the TDCC was not paying the royalty that it owed to the government. The Utkal Forest Produce Company had been given 30 forest items on lease on condition that it set up a processing plant to generate employment and revenue. But it had not set up a single processing plant.

Finally in 2000, the Odisha government passed rules that gave vil-

lages in tribal areas rights over 65 minor forest produce items. Royalty was reduced to ₹100 and the money was to be paid to the local panchayat.

BROOM POWER

The Ama Sangathan, which started with 300 members, now has 1,200 members. It pays ₹35 per kg for the grass for its brooms. Every day around 20 to 30 women come to the Ama Sangathan centre in Mandibisi to make brooms. They are paid ₹70 to ₹80 per day.

The Ama Sangathan also deals in sal leaves, cereals, mustard and turmeric. It processes *dals*. Till 2010 the sangathan used to supply *dal* for the public distribution system and for the school midday meal programme.

The Ama Sangathan continues to mobilise people to demand their rights. If things go astray they correct it. "We came here for five years. After 35 years we are still here. Issues never end," remarks Achyut Das, director and founder of Agragamee.

In 2008 the Ama Sangathan once again imposed a ban on local liquor breweries. Under Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, gram sabhas now have the right to regulate liquor shops. The sangathan first got the Mandibisi gram panchayat to pass a resolution against the liquor breweries. Other gram sabhas passed a similar ban.

Sumoni continues to lead. Recently she was invited to a meeting of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). She was told that IFAD plans to introduce coffee plantations under the Odisha Tribal Development Project.

"I told them you are introducing coffee here but we will not be allowed to sell it. So are we supposed to eat it? I am drinking coffee for the first time in my life in this meeting and it will be the last time," says Sumoni. The plan for growing coffee was junked and agro-forestry was introduced instead. ■

Photographer Ajit Krishna travelled to Siriguda to profile Sumoni Jhodia

Individual crafts people and producer groups make products that often don't get the attention they deserve. Here are paintings, personal care products, foodstuff, home decor items, brooms and composters . Just try.

✓ ORGANIC BREAKFAST

BEGIN your morning with foods that are good for your mind and body. Dubdengreen, an organic food store in Delhi and Bengaluru, offers a range of breakfast cereals, jams, honey, tea, artisanal coffee and fresh bread at reasonable prices. Instead of cereals suffused with artificial flavours and preservatives, try Dubdengreen's ragi flakes, multi millet flakes, wheat flakes or cornflakes dunked in milk and sweetened with a spoon of honey. The tea comes in many flavourful herbs: lemon, ginger, cloves and cinnamon. The store also offers spices, rice, eco friendly soaps, detergents and personal care products. You can order online as well. Dubdengreen is an enterprise founded by Ganesh and Jayashree Joshi Eashwar, pioneers of the organic farming movement. Twenty years ago they set up an organic farm near Bengaluru. In 2003, they opened their Dubdengreen store in Delhi. ■



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Phone: 32905310, 9810131343 Email: dubdengreen@organicbounty.com
Online store: www.organicbounty.com



✓ SAURA ART

DELICATELY painted on tussar silk, Saura art with its fine lines and colours can perk up a bland wall. Devi Prasad, a painter of Saura art, says this genre originated with the Saura tribe of Odisha, one of the oldest tribal groups in India.

The art depicts the Sambalpur dance. The predominant colours used are black, white, ochre and red. Devi Prasad is a Saura too. He says he studied at the BK College of Art and Craft in Bhubaneswar and began painting Saura art, modernising it deftly with his brush. His Tree of Life painting, he says, attracts the most buyers.

The Saura artists have been formed into a cooperative of 2,000 members. They have access to training. Devi Prasad sells a range of paintings from Odisha, including the familiar pattachitra that now depict modern themes that appeal to the middle class. Prices are very reasonable. ■



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12th Annual Issue

✓ HOLY COW

THIS year, Dastkar's icon at its annual Nature Bazaar in Delhi was the cow. Cute replicas of the cow dotted the fair grounds. There were stalls selling cow products. Holy Cow Foundation, which cares for this gentle animal, also set up a stall. They were selling desi ghee with medicinal properties, manure for gardens, a floor cleaner made of neem and gobar, a chemical-free mosquito repellent, joint pain oil, incense and sticks made of cow dung for religious purposes. Holy Cow Foundation comes to the rescue of sick, abandoned and injured cows. It prevents old and infirm cows from being sent to the slaughterhouse. Holy Cow has surveyed genuine gaushalas (cow shelters) that are looking after homeless cows. It thereby stops cows from roaming the streets of the city and living off garbage. Holy Cow appeals for donations and gives this money to gaushalas. Just ₹40 per day feeds a helpless cow. Holy Cow's tag line is 'Each one, feed one'. The foundation also raises money by selling cow products. You can adopt a cow. Or help them by buying a natural cow product. ■

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✓ BROOM BOOM

KANTA Kharse travelled all the way from her village, Pindrai, in Madhya Pradesh to Dastkar's Nature Bazaar armed with brooms. She heads a Self-Help Group (SHG) of 12 women called the Mahalakshmi Swashayta Samooh Aajeevika Mission who make brooms, big and small, from khajoor leaves. As head of the SHG, it is Kharse's job to ensure the brooms sell at a good price.

The brooms are sturdy and attractive and sweep away grime and dust with a flourish. Kharse says her SHG was supported by the National Rural Livelihood Mission which loaned them ₹25,000 as initial start-up capital.

Dastkar invited her to join their network when she was manning a stall at an exhibition in Pragati Maidan. "They have given me this stall free of cost," says Kharse with gratitude. "It's an important gesture because we rely wholly on exhibitions to sell our brooms. On average, at one exhibition I sell around ₹30,000 worth of brooms," says Kharse.

This tiny enterprise has improved the incomes of the women. Kharse says the time is ripe for them to scale up broom production but they don't have a dedicated retail outlet. Interestingly, the broom has become a compelling emblem of sorts in recent years. ■

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✓ NATURE'S GIFTS

THREE years ago, Purvi Mehta, an architect and photographer, left Mumbai to settle in the Bhayander Hills in Thane district of Maharashtra, with her husband, a graphic designer. She says the beauty of the countryside overwhelmed her. "I did not want to despoil it in any way. I thought a lot about how we could replace the many chemicals we used at home with natural products."

She began growing lemongrass, aloe vera, neem and other plants. Mehta began looking up Ayurveda texts to figure out how she could produce natural products. That led to her starting a small cottage industry that manufactures a range of chemical-free soaps, face and body serums, anti-frizz hair potions, rosewater eyedrops, natural loofah, lip balm and baby oil.


Her company's name is Beautiful Garden. You can buy wheatgrass soap, lemon and coconut soap, honey cream and oatmeal soap, herbal hair serum and a neem comb enriched with neem oil. Purvi began by selling on ebay and Amazon. She now exports her products to many countries. ■

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PRODUCTS

≡ CAMEL BAGS



VINOD Kumar and Mohammad Tanveer manufacture and sell a range of bags made with camel leather. There are travel bags, backpacks, laptop bags, handbags, clutches and purses in different shades of brown. “All our bags are made from 100 per cent natural leather. We are careful to buy leather only from dead camels. We also don’t use chemicals while processing. A generous rub of mustard oil gives the leather a darker tan,” explains Vinod Kumar.


The designs are attractive and fashionable. “We download them from the Internet,” he explains.

Their small business is based in Udaipur, Rajasthan. Both Kumar and Tanveer say this is their traditional occupation. Mostly tourists buy their bags. They travel to exhibitions across the country and online retailers now approach them.

The problem, they say, is credit. It is difficult for them to get money to expand their business from government sources. “You need a guarantor. Where do I get one from? Government officials won’t sign for us,” says Kumar. Recently he managed to get a small loan and he hired eight workers. “But if I can get a bigger loan, I can hire more people and even try exporting my bags. I could set up my own online retail site. We don’t know, as yet, how to take advantage of the e-commerce boom. The government should help us,” says Kumar. ■

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≡ BANISH WASTE



MAKE your kitchen waste disappear and reappear as manure for your garden. Daily Dump offers a range of composters in attractive shapes and sizes with a complete kit to ensure that your household waste dissolves quickly.

The Leave-it pot is a store and maturation chamber for semi-composted material that is generated in other composters like the Mota Lota, Kambha, Patta Kambha, Gamla, Remix Bind and Manthan. It comes in four sizes and can be used to compost your garden material alone.

The Kambha is in three tiers and comes in two sizes. Dump your kitchen waste here and cover with dried leaves or shredded newspapers.


Started in Bengaluru by Poonam Bir Kasturi, Neelam Chibber and Geeta Ram, Daily Dump has expanded to seven outlets in Delhi-NCR. “We now provide customers with an accelerator to speed up the initial composting process,” says Priyanka Satyawakta who manages the Vasant Kunj outlet. “Once they see the results, we encourage them to compost using dry leaves.” The composters are made of terracotta and are all outdoor products. You can also buy gloves, rake, lemon spray, neem powder and other accessories from Daily Dump outlets. ■

Contact: Priyanka Satyawakta : 09891855458

≡ QUIRKY CANDLES

CELEBRATE Christmas this year with aromatic Mom Candles wedged into old bottles of Johnnie Walker and Signature whisky. You can buy candles in various shapes and sizes. Some look like flowers while others resemble elegant glass goblets. There are cheerful candles that look like beer mugs too.

The candles are made by women of Jagadamba Camp, a slum near Sheikh Sarai in New Delhi. Sweccha, a non-profit that manufactures quirky products from waste, has trained the women.



“We have a group of seven women who work for two to three hours a day making these beautiful candles from scratch,” says Neha Pradhan, Head of Programmes, Sweccha.

The non-profit has a well-stocked store called Green the Gap in Hauz Khas village. It has a range of inventive products made from waste. The candles, launched just before Diwali, can be bought on Sweccha’s portal. “We will also be taking bulk orders,” says Pradhan. The candles are priced between ₹150 to ₹425, depending on their size and design. ■

Contact: Kanchan Rana: 9560120295; Green the Gap Store, 24/3, Hauz Khas Village, New Delhi. Website: www.greenthegap.com



ARTY BRASS



IF you want a beautiful door for your apartment or house, ask Ram Avtar Sharma. An artisan from Jaipur, he makes unusual doors with *tarkashi* inlay work for architects and interior designers. His stall at Dilli Haat displayed samples of his deftness. There were small pieces of artistic knickknacks like boxes, bangles and artifacts made with wood and brass.

There were some cute wooden elephants and tortoises too.

He was also selling pretty key-holders with miniature paintings embossed on them. "After painting the miniature we sprinkle crushed gems to brighten it up," explains Sharma. He has a showroom in Jaipur and says tourism has helped sales hugely. But he says he can't export his *tarkashi* products. "*Tarkashi* takes a lot of time since it is handcrafted. It is difficult for us to meet export deadlines. Also, we can't manufacture standardized products. Every piece is unusual," he says. His father, Ramswaroop Sharma, is a national award winner for *tarkashi* work. ■



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SMART STUFF

ACTION for Autism's Aadhaar Vocational Centre helps young autistic adults, above the age of 18 to be independent, creative and sociable. Courses include craft, baking and stitching.

Young interns who opt for craft produce a range of products. There are colourful durries, mufflers, scarves, notebooks, door chimes, key-rings, coin purses, trendy jute bags, mobile phone covers, jewellery and so on. *Rakhis*, *diyas* and Christmas decorations are also made.

These products are sold directly to consumers and institutions or at exhibitions and melas. The entire revenue generated is ploughed back into purchasing raw materials for fresh production and paying a stipend to the young adults who work there.

Interns are encouraged to interact and make friends. They go together to see movies or to a café, a *mela* or on a day trip to another city. Such activities help young autistic adults to be independent and strong and deal with the rest of the world — on their own terms. ■

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RUGGED BASKET

IN Delhi, Manipur is becoming famous for its baskets, mats, black pottery and tribal trinkets. Several NGOs and trusts in Imphal are helping collectives of artisans to modernize their designs to attract urban consumers in north India.

Among them is the Humanity Foundation and Trust in Imphal. It has a network of craft collectives in different districts of the state. Siddharth Keisham, coordinator, says the foundation seeks out international and national designers to create stylish, contemporary products from natural material that can then be replicated by Manipuri artisans and crafts people.

Humanity Foundation also micro-finances the artisans so that they can buy raw material. Marketing and export of finished products is done by the foundation.

"We face a lot of logistical problems in moving our products from Imphal to Delhi," says Keisham. "Our transport expenses are high since we have to move our goods from remote hilly areas. The long, exhausting trip to Delhi really cuts into our modest profits."

But, he says, the journey is worth it. The mats, mattresses, baskets and eco-friendly furniture they produce sell in Delhi. "Good response by the public brings joy to our artisans and management groups. We should have *melas* devoted to products from the Northeast at least two or three times every year," suggests Keisham.

Humanity Foundation has a counter at Panthoibi Manipur Emporium in central Delhi. ■

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