

Civil Society

SCHOOL IN THE SKY



AN EDUCATION INITIATIVE REACHES FORGOTTEN CORNERS OF ODISHA

MLA ORGANISES JOB MELA

Pages 8-9.....

KATHPUTLI SHIFT BEGINS

Pages 10-11.....

THE SHARED WORKSPACE

Pages 22-23.....

INTERVIEW

‘DISABLED PEOPLE NOW WORK IN THE BEST COMPANIES’

JAVED ABIDI

Pages 6-7

THINK TANK FUNDING

Pages 25-26.....

BHAGALPUR AND AFTER

Pages 29-30.....

AYURVEDA ADVISORY

Page 34.....

The learning deficit

SCHOOLING isn't just about having schools, whether government or private. So, though we have schools, a learning deficit casts its long shadow over us. This is because teachers are not teaching and children are either dropping out or just getting by. As a result, millions and millions of young people won't be employable except in menial jobs. Better quality education delivered on a scale that suits the size of the country is the way out. Only the government has the resources to do it.

The 1,000 Schools Project by Tata Steel and the NGO, Aspire, in three districts of Odisha is an interesting initiative by a private player to strengthen the government system. It deals with many complex issues like enthusing teachers, empowering communities and improving pedagogy. It draws on information technology to speed things up and address diversity.

Transforming education in India requires being in mission mode. Targets and strategies have to be ambitious. The government must be the provider for the purpose of scale and inclusion, but the private sector can be a useful partner by providing managerial skills and innovation. It is in the two coming together that a new energy can be found.

In barely two years, the Odisha project has begun to show important results. It has had an impact on the school system and that too without the formal participation of the state government, which seems to have some difficulty in accepting realities like the dropout rate, that the project openly addresses.

Through example, the project has raised the bar for what government school staff should aspire to. Students who knew little or nothing till now feel motivated to study. Parents and others in the community are learning to demand better quality education. A whole new cadre of education professionals at the grassroots is being created.

The project also goes much beyond the conventional notions of corporate social responsibility. For sure, it is in Tata Steel's catchment but it seeks to do much more than the company needs to. It is imbued with the larger goal of ushering in far-reaching social change. It is this vision that sets it apart as an example of what companies can do for nation-building.

We have always taken a keen interest in covering disability. Our interview with Javed Abidi — to whom must go the credit for making disability a rights issue in India — takes a look at the new law on disability. The law has come about after many a hiccup. It is not perfect and much remains to be done to give disabled persons a fair deal. But it is an improvement in many ways and therefore to be celebrated.

Resettling slum dwellers remains one of the big challenges in our cities. Every attempt is made to throw them out but then that is not a realistic solution. In situ resettlement is the answer so that people remain close to work. There are also questions about the kind of alternative accommodation to be built. We carry in this issue the story of the traditional performers in the Kathputli slum in Delhi as they slowly begin to move.




COVER STORY

School in the sky

Tata Steel and Aspire have come together to improve the functioning of 1,000 government schools in Odisha by raising teaching standards and empowering communities.

16

COVER PHOTOGRAPH: AJIT KRISHNA

Tosa Maidan on tourist map 12

Star PDS has got glitches 13

The roots of 27 diseases 14

Banana stem on path to fame 24

Teaching life skills 26-27

Jackfruit replacing rubber 28

World's wondrous heritage 31

The lost Northeast migrant 32-33

Ayurveda: Hairfall has its roots 34

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Harvesting Rain for Profit

Name: Shri Muniraj,
Village: Muthur, Krishnagiri district, Tamil Nadu

Muniraj, a marginal farmer with seven acres of land from Muthur village of Krishnagiri district, had a greenhouse where he practiced floriculture. However, a falling water table meant that irrigation became a problem — especially during summer months even for drip irrigation.

To overcome the problem of insufficient water, Srinivasan Services Trust (SST) encouraged Muniraj to save every drop of rainwater falling on his green house. SST provided technical information and engineering support for creating a pond, next to the greenhouse, large enough to collect six lakh litres of rainwater. To prevent loss by seepage, the pond was lined with a polythene sheet and a shade net was used as cover to help arrest loss by evaporation. The pond gets filled up with 3 days of rain. The water saved in this pond is sufficient for the crop needs for one season.

IMPACT: Muniraj is now financially secure and earns more than ₹30,000 per month. He has built a pucca house and also bought a car. He has become an expert on rainwater harvesting and offers advice to several villages in the area.

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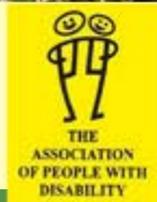
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EMPOWERING DIFFERENTLY-ABLED



Himalaya has partnered with **'The Association of People with Disability (APD)'**, a not for profit organisation based out of Bengaluru to support and empower people living with disabilities.

Too often people who are differently-abled are barred from the public sphere, pushed to the margins of society and end up living in deplorable conditions with little or no income. Every year, 70 associates who are differently-abled are trained on a 'medicinal plant program' which enhances their knowledge and know-how on select medicinal plant cultivation.

This program is not just limited to classroom concepts, but Himalaya also provides quality seeds to the associates and imparts best practices on how to increase yield. Additionally, cost of packaging materials and transportation is borne by Himalaya.

Himalaya is also raising funds for other rehabilitation programmes for APD through campaigns and tie-ups including our employees. We are hopeful that through this program, differently-abled person will gain self-confidence and build their self-esteem.

Himalaya
SINCE 1930

VOICES

IN THE LIGHT

SAMITA RATHOR



Girish Bharadwaj has truly dedicated himself to serving the people. This is a rare quality these days. I greatly respect his dedication. Being from Dakshina Kannada myself I really wonder why I didn't know about this gem of a person earlier.

Srikant Nalkur

The India story

Your January issue is a perfect example of why I am always anxious to get *Civil Society* here in Hawaii. For a non-Indian wanting to learn, the stories on Anupam Mishra, jackfruit, the Koh-i-Noor, are all reasons why more westerners should be exposed to your magazine and Indian life. We have much to learn from you. Thank you for the chance.

Ken Love

Midwives' cadre

An exclusive midwives' cadre is a good idea but I feel we may need to include soft skills in their training programme. They need to acquire a positive attitude and empathise with their patients.

Sujoy Roy

I think it's critical to train midwives thoroughly. It would bring down maternal mortality rates hugely. But who is going to do this? The midwives should also be paid for their services.

Shikha Tiwari

Letters should be sent to response@civilsocietyonline.com

LETTERS



Saibal Chatterjee's piece is a tribute to the documentary. It hasn't been given the status it deserves. Doing such a film means getting a great crew and script together, persuading people to talk to you, ensuring your script is factually correct, getting past the Censor Board and more. At the end of it all you make no money. Consider yourself lucky if you get an audience. Most multiplexes won't even screen it. You do it out of sheer passion and the desire to tell a story you are obsessed with.

Ashutosh

Bharadwaj and Chintakindi Mallesham for being given the Padma Shri award by the Government of India. Bharadwaj really deserves it for the inexpensive and sturdy bridges he has built connecting remote villages. Thanks to Shree Padre, he was featured for the first time in your magazine. Mallesham, too, deserves the Padma award for his invention of the Asu machine which makes weaving the Pochampally Ikat saris so much easier for women. He was honoured in your Hall of Fame. I am also happy to note that the awards were more democratic this year. It is good the government has honoured people who are quietly serving the nation.

Ganesh Parthasarathy

Padma awards

I would like to congratulate Girish

10 films

Saibal Chatterjee's cover story, '10 films for your 2017 bucket list' was a good read. But how do I get to see these films? It's difficult to find the documentaries he writes about. There is no multiplex that shows them. Neither is there any dedicated website that we can pay and download such films from. I am especially keen to see Supriyo Sen's, *Our Grandparents Home* and, of course, the film on Sunny Leone.

Abhijit Sengupta

In India we need a dedicated chain of small cinema halls where we can see documentaries and art house cinema. If such halls come up near places like colleges and universities, they could do rather well. The Habitat Centre in Delhi, for instance, could think of having one.

Shikha Sinha

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‘Disabled people now have jobs in best of companies’

Javed Abidi says a recently passed law will be a big boost

Civil Society News
New Delhi

A new law on the rights of people with disabilities was passed in the winter session of Parliament. It had been all of seven years in the making. Now, 21 disabilities have been listed compared to nine earlier. The private sector has also been covered in terms of access though job quotas only apply to the public sector.

These are significant gains, but much remains to be done. “We are still a blip but earlier we weren’t even a blip,” says Javed Abidi of the National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People (NCPEDP).

The need for a new law was proposed to the UPA government because the 1995 law for the disabled was “unkind and arcane”, says Abidi. It took several rallies, *dharnas* and agitations before the UPA agreed to draft a new law.

Then began the long wait while the bill made its way from the centre to the states to the Rayja Sabha where it got stuck when the UPA lost the last election.

The disability rights movement that began in the mid-1990s has quietly gained traction over the years. People with disability are finding jobs, getting education and are no longer invisible to the nation. But the pace is still very slow. It is hoped the new law will speed things up.

You described the Rights of Persons with Disabilities law as historic. Why?

We are very happy with this law. At the outset I can concede that no law is perfect. I think that if you heard contradictory voices it is because they were searching for perfection. This process (of drafting a new law) started six or seven years ago. In our search for perfection we lost that many years. Honestly, I would give the new law 7 on 10. It gives us so much that we did not have.

I look upon disability as a movement. As late as 1995 we did not even have a law to protect our rights. Forty-eight years, nearly half a century since Independence, went waste. The 1995 law gave us a starting point. I refer to it as Phase 1 of the disability movement. This law skyrockets us into Phase 2.

There are things that can be improved or changed. We can go back to it in course of time.

What are the significant changes that have been made?

Several. One, the number of disabilities included in the new law has gone up. In the 1995 law only seven types of disability were recognised. That has gone up to 21. Learning disability was not considered a disability in India. Haemophilia, Thalassaemia, dwarfism, muscular dystrophy, cerebral palsy, autism were not considered disabilities either. So people with those disabilities who weren’t even considered disabled will now get that protection. That in itself is huge.

Second, the 1995 law did not cover the private sector at all. This law devolves responsibility to the private sector as far as accessibility is concerned. When it comes to jobs, the quota is restricted to the government. We are okay with that.

I personally don’t believe in the philosophy of quotas, to begin with. But the new law very categorically says that anything that the private sector constructs, whether it is universities or offices or shopping places, has to be accessible. In the education sector the previous law restricted accessibility to establishments of the government. The new one extends it to establishments funded by the government or recognised by it. This extends the responsibility of providing accessibility to the private sector.

Third, for the first time the law is saying that people with mental disabilities, including those with intellectual disabilities and psychosocial disabilities, can work. This is being said in a country where until very recently people with mental disability were sort of equated with being vegetables. So to say now that even if you have a mental disability you can work, and you should be provided that opportunity, is to my mind a huge paradigm shift. It will impact employment not just in the government but in the private sector in a big way.

The fourth significant gain is accountability and teeth which were not there in the 1995 law. Everyone is talking about the chief commissioner and saying he does not have enough powers. But what is missed is the section that talks of special courts where it categorically says all state High Courts have the power to set up special courts where cases arising out of this law can be fast-tracked.

There is so much in the new law for the blind and the deaf, which was not there in the 1995 law.



Javed Abidi: ‘Once a company opens its doors, even hesitatingly, it completely changes corporate culture’

You have been consistently advocating more employment for people with disability. Has the tide turned? Are more companies hiring people with disability?

There is significant improvement. The whole rationale of setting up this organisation was to catalyse employment for those with disability, particularly in the private sector. The 1995 law restricted itself to providing us with two to three percent reservation in government jobs. Also, by 1995, the era of liberalisation started. Jobs were moving away from the government to the private sector.

We were basically anti-quota. We felt an organisation was needed to create awareness and sensitisation, especially in the private sector. That’s how NCPEDP was set up. The first few years, even talking to industry was impossible. Every time I would knock on the doors of the FICCI and CII, they thought I had come for a donation. We told them, we are not here for your money but to talk business.

That was the era when all of them had charters on children, women, the environment, HIV-AIDS, but nothing on disability. We had to sometimes arm-twist them. We had to organise *dharnas* and rallies against them.

Slowly the environment started changing and slowly they started listening to us, particularly the IT sector — that’s when the tide turned. Millions of people with disability have now got jobs in some of the best companies.

It isn’t only the IT sector anymore but the

garments sector, the hotel industry, gems and jewellery...everywhere. The latest glass ceiling we have broken is disabled people getting jobs in an airline. If Indigo can give jobs to people with disability or Lemon Tree hotel can...I mean, I remember in the 1990s I went to the Hotels Association of India and they said, Sorry, we won’t touch people with disability with a bargepole. After some persuasion, they said, Okay, maybe we can consider them in our backroom operations but not the front office.

When I look back, it’s a mixed bag. Lots of companies are giving jobs. But if you look at the size of the Indian corporate sector and you realise as many as 5,000 or 6,000 companies are members of CII and then you look at how many are giving jobs to people with disability, that’s when the cookie starts to crumble. So we still have a long way to go but we are inching forward. This new law, once enforced, will give the entire disability movement a big push.

When companies hire people with disability, not one or two but many, does it change their corporate culture. How does it impact them?

It does, in a big way. Once a company opens its doors, even hesitatingly, it completely changes corporate culture. The disabled employees end up creating awareness and sensitise their fellow workers and the management.

I have interacted with some of the best brands and names in the corporate world that have hired disabled people and they haven’t regretted their

life. Because the disability movement has skyrocketed, the movement is unprepared. It’s an unfortunate fact that we don’t have enough well-educated and highly skilled people with disability. The reason is that our education institutions are inaccessible. So how do you go to Delhi University and be on a par? Even our technical institutions, whether NIIT or Aptech, are completely inaccessible.

In fact, I would say the opposite has happened. Suddenly, the job market has opened up for disabled people. But they aren’t well-educated and well-trained enough to take up those jobs.

Thanks to the 1995 law, our education institutions began opening up. Until 1997-98 even our IITs and IIMs weren’t open to people with disability. It was outright discrimination. We had to fight court cases, hold *dharnas* and rallies for the IITs and IIMs to open their doors. Today, hundreds and thousands of bright disabled boys and girls are studying in the top-most engineering and management colleges.

We monitor the top 20 colleges in 15 streams and the top 100 universities in India. So all these boys and girls are graduating and feeding into the job market. The civil services have opened up to disabled persons. It’s very dynamic and exciting.

In the general flow of the city the disabled still don’t have a place...

I agree. Even today, post the 2016 Act, disability is a blip on the radar of this country. Politicians still don’t see the disabled as a vote bank, though India has 70 million people with disabilities and their families, on a conservative estimate. Back in the 1990s, disability wasn’t in the manifesto of a single political party. Now there is a paragraph or a page, so we have evolved. In the past one or two elections the BJP, Congress, Communists and AAP had disability rights in their manifestoes. We contributed to all of them. I don’t think that disability rights have percolated to the regional parties as yet.

Many of the changes we aspire for would take only the stroke of a pen and zero expense. I can understand if I say, make sure all buildings in Delhi become disabled-friendly in the next one year. We don’t have that kind of resources.

But why can’t we pass a stringent law or an ordinance which would say, No future construction without ensuring that it’s disabled-friendly? Or that no book will be published unless it is also available in an accessible version, as in the US? In India less than 0.5 percent of books are accessible to the blind.

Or take sign language on TV. The first time we raised it three or four years ago before Republic Day at the fag end of the UPA regime it became a war between us and the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.

Why? We were just saying that when the parade is taking place, deaf people can’t hear the commentary, so just ensure there is an interpreter in sign language in a box. It’s inexpensive. We had to do *dharnas*, rallies, police, *maar peet*...

Even now, it’s all piecemeal. When demonetisation was announced on 8 November, there was no sign language interpretation on TV. When the Padma awards are given there is no sign language interpretation either. The President’s address to the nation too isn’t interpreted. Why do I have to spend my time fighting for something that should be routine? ■

‘Earlier when I went to FICCI or CII they thought I had come for a donation. We said we wanted to talk business.’

decision. On the contrary, they have hired more. Take Lemon Tree Hotels. They are budget hotels, competition is tight and there is no charity there. They started by hiring one or two disabled people very tentatively. Now, 10 percent of their workforce comprises people with disability. They have gone on to employ deaf people, even those with Down’s Syndrome right there in their public areas like restaurants.

The IT sector has hired people with serious disabilities. Many of them have become ambassadors for the disabled. That is how more companies are gaining confidence and hiring people with disability.

In the coming years the job market is predicted to become tighter with automation and so on. Do you need new skill-building and enterprise programmes?

Skill-building and enterprise are essential facets of

NO JOB? MLA PROVIDES A RANGE OF OPTIONS

Shree Padre
Taliparamba

WHERE do you begin if you want to start your own enterprise? Most young people don't know. They search for answers, scanning newspapers, trudging to various government offices to figure out schemes and to banks to enquire about loans.

James Mathew, an MLA from Taliparamba in Kerala, understood the dilemma the unemployed in his constituency faced. For a long time he had wanted to help but as a member of the opposition he felt he lacked the leeway to do things the way he wanted to.

Once he was elected, he got down to work. After a lot of preparation with grassroots organisations in his constituency, he held a 10-day self-employment programme starting on 15 January called "Samruddhi — Livelihood Options Training and Exhibition".

It had over 50 stalls on more than 100 livelihood opportunities — all under one roof. Seminars were held as well. People could get basic knowledge of employment opportunities, government schemes and finance in just one day.

"I had been dreaming about this experiment for years," confessed Mathew. "In fact, I tried to organise such an exhibition some years ago when I was in the opposition. But very soon I realised that it is difficult to achieve such a thing, being in the opposition. So, now that I'm a ruling party MLA, I decided to take it up."

The stalls provided people with information on vegetable cultivation, hi-tech farming, agriculture task force formation, pepper cultivation, bee-keeping, animal husbandry, goat farming, poultry farming, aquarium fish-rearing, pig-rearing, vermi-composting and value addition of fruits, vegetables and tubers.

"It is very difficult for ordinary people to meet officers of different departments and get information. I thought, why not assemble all these department representatives with their exhibits at one place and facilitate an instant one-to-one interaction?"

"Next are banks and other financial institutions. Generally, they are helpful only to the big players. Ordinary people have to wait. Often, they don't get correct information or loans on time. We asked the banks to set up help desks at the event so that interaction starts from here and all people get easy access to information."

PLAN AND PREPARE

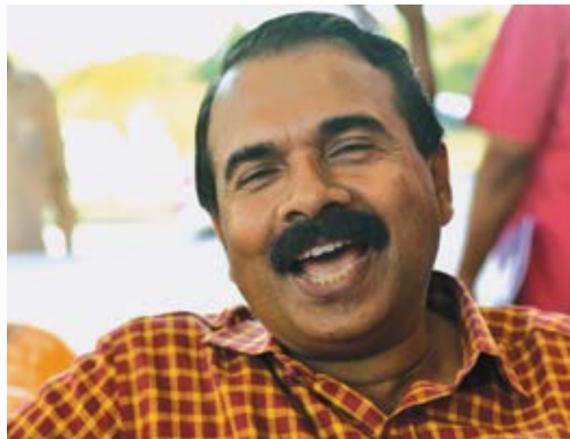
Mathew's assembly constituency in Kannur district of North Kerala consists of two municipalities and seven panchayats — thus totalling nine local self-government bodies. It has been preparing for this programme for three months. A house-to-house

survey was initially carried out which listed all those seeking self-employment. Each local self-government body was given a date exclusively for it.

The aspirants were split into batches of 40. A few batches were led to the stalls while others were sent to seminars. An entry fee of ₹50 was charged which paid for their breakfast and lunch. By afternoon, they had mostly seen and heard about all the livelihood options available.

At the end of the day, if they had made up their minds, they were asked to register by filling in a form with their contact details and their self-employment preferences listed in order of priority. The aspirants then left these forms in a bag.

The Central Tuber Crops Research Institute (CTCRI) was there with a range of value-added



James Mathew, MLA from Taliparamba

products made from tubers — crops for which Kerala is famous. "We have an incubation centre at our facility in Thiruvananthapuram where agri-business aspirants can learn value addition of tubers, make the product and sell it without investing any money," said Dr S. Shanavas, Senior Technical Assistant.

The institute has technology that can make 65 products from tuber crops. It conducts a one-day hands-on training session. Trainees are encouraged to make products from tubers themselves. If some of them want to study further, detailed sessions are held at a later date. For those who don't have finance or lack the confidence to plunge into commercial production, the CTCRI has an attractive offer.

It has machinery costing more than ₹60 lakh to perform tasks from peeling to packing. Trainees can just bring their tubers along, make the product of their choice, package and brand it, and start selling it straightaway. If a trainee is confident about the marketability of the product, he or she can start a manufacturing unit. The incubation centre started two years ago. Since then it has trained around 1,600 people and six have started their own units.

"For Nendran banana cultivation to be remunerative, a farmer has to get ₹50 per kg of banana from every cent of land," explains Shahnaz, an extension scientist from the Krishi Vijnan Kendra (KVK) in Kannur. "We have around 1,200 farmers



The exhibition attracted thousands of people who wanted to be self-employed



Women look keenly at an example of poultry farming

solely dependent on banana cultivation in our work area. Most of them are cultivating on *paatta* (rented) land ranging from 30 cents to an acre. Right now the average yield is 30 kg. The weight of a Nendran banana bunch is six kg. It has to go up to 15 kg to be economically viable. Of course, we have very few farmers growing 50 to 100 kg on a cent."

In Kadannappally panchayat in Kannur, three aquarium fish breeding centres are running profitably for the past year. "Five housewives can join hands and start an aquarium fish breeding unit if they have two cents of land. The government

provides a 50 percent subsidy," said Sandhya, Project Assistant at the Fisheries Department. "People pay fancy prices for aquarium fish and demand is increasing. The group can earn about ₹10,000 per month easily."

An NGO from Thiruvananthapuram displayed three types of modern goat houses for rearing five, 10 and 30 goats. "The 30-goat unit is advisable. From 10 female goats, you can get 30 baby goats. We have used HDPE slated sheets for flooring instead of wood. It keeps disease at bay. The goat house, though a bit expensive, is easy to maintain. Goat



Breeding fish for aquariums was depicted as a viable business

manure and urine can be cleaned out without any hassles," said Vinod, who worked for the NGO. "Fifty such units are running in Kerala. With an initial investment of ₹1,20,000, one can earn ₹2,67,000 per annum."

Roy Varghese of Panniyur, a farmer, displayed an innovatively designed bee box that makes handling bees very easy. It has an opening at the top to which a small Pearlpet jar can be fitted. Bees deposit honey inside the jar. Since the jar is transparent you know when it is full with honey.

"Just pull off the jar and tap it gently so that the bees fly away. In just five minutes honey extraction is over," explained Roy, giving a demo.

Little bee honey is much sought after for medicinal purposes by companies manufacturing Ayurvedic medicine. Little bee honey is priced at ₹2,000 per kg. "In a year, good colonies produce around 500 gm of honey," said Roy. He claims to have sold 1,500 boxes. His box with a bee colony costs ₹2,500.

Financial institutions too were well represented. National and cooperative banks had put up stalls where they provided details of schemes, finances available and related details. RUDSETI (Rural Development and Self Employment Institute), a reputed self-employment training institute, informed the aspirants about the kind of training sessions it provides.

But some stalls were laggards. A striking case was the Pepper Research Station of Panniyur. Pepper commands a good price. Naturally, a section of people would be interested in knowing more about pepper. But there was nobody in the stall to explain.

On the whole, the event was well managed. An aide of Mathew said the MLA had conducted not less than 300 grassroots meetings to explain his experiment.

Around 7,212 people or 39 percent of those who came to the Samruddhi exhibition registered for a self-employment activity. So the event was a thumping success. Interestingly, more than 60 percent of those who attended were women.

THE NEXT STEP

The big question is, what next? How will Mathew and his team ensure that all government departments and financial institutions who converged for the exhibition help the people seeking self-employment?

"I am aware that if I drop the issue here and don't do any follow-up, just a few candidates will succeed. We will then be back to square one. So we will begin

PICTURES BY SHREE PADRE

our follow-up action by first sorting out the candidates who registered according to their panchayats," said Mathew.

"Before we started this event, I talked to the heads of all nine local self-government bodies. We will now request each of them to start a help desk at panchayat level. For three days a month in rotation, they will follow up with the aspirants."

Mathew said they would study all the facilities and incentives available for self-employment provided by the centre and the state. The panchayats can accordingly design projects to boost self-employment in their areas.

"Each panchayat will then set apart 40 percent of its planned fund for activities that aid self-employment. The total outlay in all the local self-government bodies will come to ₹4-5 crore. This can be used for creating opportunities for registered candidates," said Mathew.

Rajesh, President of Pariyaram panchayat, said, "We hope to groom at least five to six people from each of our wards. We can draw on schemes like poultry rearing and vegetable farming. But we will have to back up their efforts until they can sell their products in markets."

"Ours is a very small panchayat with a population of 14,000," said Pushpajan, President of Malappattam panchayat, "We have good scope for goat farming, animal husbandry, fish farming and so on. These products will sell at local level also. We will seek the help of all the agencies."

Mathew is planning to hire graduates from the Institute of Rural Management in Anand, Gujarat, to help the panchayats and those who registered.

He hopes such efforts will have a spin-off effect. "I have created an environment in my area for some sustainable livelihood options. So new seeds have been sown. From now on we need to care for the plants that emerge," he said.

"Out of the 7,000-plus aspirants, say, only 200 to 300 people eventually begin their own enterprises. That will set an example for others. Another 500 to 600 people will gain the confidence to opt for self-employment the next year by seeing these initial models. Our ambition is to facilitate each family to earn at least ₹15,000 a month by beginning a small venture."

The MLA's own enterprise in organising Samruddhi is also an example that's being appreciated.

P. Jayaraj, Programme Coordinator at the KVK in Kannur, said that by bringing all the panchayat presidents and municipal chairpersons on board, Mathew has put his initiative on a firm footing.

"At KVK we have many technologies. Unfortunately, these are not used for livelihood activities. Take, for example, the task force for agriculture that helps farming, especially paddy farming. This has already been tested and endorsed. It has potential. We have participatory models of income generating activities like pepper plant production that now has tremendous demand. We also have seasoned mentors who can provide hand-holding," he said. ■

Contact: James Mathew, Taliparamba MLA, phone: 94477 06782

With fear in their hearts, Kathputli performers begin shifting to camp

Ajit Krishna
New Delhi

RAVI Bhatt, a *dhol* player, stands tearfully inside his partially demolished home in Kathputli slum. He has agreed to shift but it's a heartrending decision. "Raheja *sahib* said after two years you will be back here in a permanent flat. Trusting in God, I allowed my house to be demolished. My parents lived and died here. I was born here," he says in sorrow.

For 50 years the Kathputli slum has been the world's biggest settlement of traditional performers. Its fetid lanes and bylanes contained a wonder world of musicians (*bhopas*), magicians (*masihats*), singers (*langas*), actors (*behroopias*), acrobats (*nats*) and puppeteers (*kathputli*).

The settlement is slowly being demolished to make way for multistoried apartment blocks where each Kathputli family will get a small flat. In the interim, they have to move to a transit camp where conditions aren't exactly ideal.

In 2009, the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) drew up an 'in situ rehabilitation scheme' for the first time, ostensibly to provide better housing and services to the residents of Kathputli. It got into a partnership agreement with Raheja Builders under which 35 percent of the 5.2 acres on which the slum stands will be given to the builder.

In exchange, Raheja would construct apartment blocks with water, electricity and toilets. Each Kathputli resident would get a flat of 30.2 square metres consisting of two rooms, a toilet and verandah. While their apartments were being built, the residents would live in the transit camp for two years.

But the DDA's plan got stuck. For the past three years, out of 3,600 residents only 527 agreed to move by 19 December 2016.

DDA began pressuring residents to shift in December. Earth mover machines appeared on the fringes of the slum, causing panic and fear among residents. The police turned up. Activists converged, urging residents to resist. People were confused. Everybody wants a better life but should they trust the government?

DDA's recent report card now says around 1,301 families are shifting.

Around 1,400 families, all members of the Bhoole Bisre Kalakar Cooperative Industrial Production Society Ltd are tired of living under the constant stress of losing their homes. A few have left for the transit camp. Earlier Dilip Bhatt, the popular *pradhan* of the slum, would talk about how they needed larger

spaces to live in so that they could preserve their 12 art forms. "But I can't get the moon. Now, I just hope and pray that every resident of Kathputli finally gets a home," he says.

At the entrance there are families loading their possessions into trucks. People stand around in groups, discussing their plight. A little farther on, the police and para forces equipped with automatic rifles and batons ask you to watch out as workers wearing helmets tear down a house with large hammers.

In a narrow alley a DDA official and a policeman are trying to find a house. The alley leads to an open space where hundreds of residents gather and listen to social activists who tell them the DDA is cheating them. "We don't oppose rehabilitation but we have to ensure that it is done in a fair way," says one activist.

Across the street is the DDA camp with a hoarding providing information on two words of utmost importance to every resident: agreement and survey. A nodal officer sits inside, hunched over paperwork.

AGREEMENT AND SURVEY

In the last survey carried out by the DDA, 2,641 families were deemed entitled to a flat. Residents contest this figure. "There are around 3,600 families living here," says Bhatt. To arrive at the truth, the DDA agreed to do a spot survey. Residents who have been excluded can now bring relevant documents to the DDA camp and get included.

That doesn't impress Bhatt. He points out that in 2014 when they approached the High Court about the mismatch between the DDA list and the actual number of residents, a similar survey was done.

"More than 1,200 people applied but they received a letter from the DDA saying that only 44 applicants were eligible. So how can we trust their spot survey?" says Bhatt. They want the DDA to carry out a fresh survey and share the findings with residents so that they can cross-check if anyone has been left out.

"When we restarted our survey, many people whose names had been left out approached us. There were adults living with their parents on the first floor. Anyone who approaches us with valid documents is added to the list," assures Shabnam Kundra, nodal officer. "We are committed to providing flats to all those who have been living here since 31 December 2011."



A public meeting in Kathputli. People are bewildered and worried about the future

But residents fear that only one flat will be allotted for one house even if theirs was a joint family living in a two-storied house. The nodal officer says that's a lie being spread to misguide residents. "We are allotting separate flats to families living on two separate floors," says Kundra. The activists retort, why did the DDA then only survey people living on the ground floor?

The DDA has pushed back the cut-off date from 31 December 2011 to 31 January 2015. It is also accepting applications from people with documents dated after 2011 under the Pradhan Mantri Niwas Yojna which guarantees a house to all. But the people ask if they will get a flat in Kathputli or elsewhere. The agreement, it seems, will just state that they will get a place to stay. Under the tripartite agreement, each flat will cost ₹1,12,000. Every family will have to pay ₹30,000 for five years for maintenance and administration of the apartment block to the residents welfare association (RWA).

Kathputli residents are mostly illiterate or not very well-lettered. They can't understand the agreement, although the terms and conditions are in Hindi. This remains their topmost concern, voiced at public meetings. They have been told that the agreement is not valid because it has not been registered in court.

"Will the government cheat?" says Kundra angrily. "A deputy director-level officer is signing the document. The NGOs have personal motives. They don't want the residents of Kathputli to be



Ravi Bhatt, a dhol player, stands outside his partially demolished home with his child

educated or live in a clean environment." Pratashi, the *pradhan* of Bhaat samaj, supports the officer. The notary is approved by the Delhi government and recognised by the court, she says.

"If their intentions are good then why have they changed the language of the agreement three times?" retorts an activist. "Why can't the DDA just come up with a single final draft?"

CHAOS AND PANIC

The NGOs and activist groups say that the DDA is forcing people to leave. The DDA denies this. "We don't need to force people. We have their consent," says Kundra. Residents, who had come to the DDA camp to get their papers verified, agreed.

Prakash Bhatt, a *dhol* player, and Mohammad Alami, a daily labourer, who were packing their belongings, said they decided to move on their own. Alami, who has two children in Classes 2 and 4, said he just wanted his children to grow up in a better environment.

PICTURES BY AJIT KRISHNA



A worker from DDA knocking down a home



The transit camp. People don't have individual taps or toilets

The NGOs and activist groups say the DDA is forcing people to leave. The DDA says it has their consent.

But at a public meeting other residents said the DDA was forcing them to leave. "DDA officials told me, whether you give your consent or not, we will demolish your house as it's marked with P," said Seema, a resident.

The DDA adds to the chaos and panic by marking homes with P and L, the most feared letters in the slum. "P means present," said Shankar. "No, it means *parcha* and L means locked," said another resident. People are afraid that if they leave home for work the DDA officials will mark their homes with a mysterious P or L.

"P means pending, that the matter needs to be discussed further. L means locked. When we did an earlier survey some houses were locked. So we wanted them to come and show us their documents. DS means the family has shifted and we can demolish the house," clarifies Kundra.

However, a video by a social activist doing the rounds shows people saying DDA officials are demolishing their homes without consent. A man

from the Gujarati Samaj claimed that DDA officials demolished his brother's house when he had gone to attend a funeral.

But DDA officials say that the people who are shifting to the transit camp are themselves demolishing their homes because they don't want their empty home to be misused. A notice issued by the DDA to people at the transit camp states that for renewing the agreement, people have to give video evidence that their house has been demolished or get it done.

THE TRANSIT CAMP

The transit camp is located at Anand Parbat, about 1.7 km from Kathputli colony. Around 327 families shifted here three years ago, believing they would move to a modern apartment after two years. Each family has been allotted a small cabin.

"We have already spent three years living here. Now we are told we will have to spend another two years. The DDA should have been strict and insisted on shifting all of us together. Now this place too

has disintegrated. Back in our colony we had individual water connections and a toilet. Here we have to access water from a common source and use public toilets," said one woman in despair.

Mohammad Ishraf came to the transit camp to assess things for himself. He was disappointed. "Some places here already look like a slum. If all of us shift, the place will degenerate. Besides, the cabin has just one window. There is no cross ventilation and no space to cook."

Hari Nat, a puppeteer and singer, who also came here three years ago, says his livelihood has been severely affected. "Not all our customers have our phone numbers. Most of the time people who wanted to hire us would come to Kathputli since it was well-known for its artists," said Hari. "Much of our lives still revolve around Kathputli. Our children go to school from there. We have to change two e-rickshaws to get to the old colony, adding to our expenses."

But not all are complaining. With his family of seven, Raju, a daily labourer, moved to the transit camp. He says his children have more open space here and that has done them good. Mohan, a former *pradhan*, said the transit camp is cleaner and has drinking water. But his travel costs have increased while his earnings have dropped by 25 percent. "To gain some, you have to lose some," he says philosophically.

The people of Kathputli have never lived in flats but in houses. Venkatesh, who runs a shop in Kathputli, has a family of six and lived in a two-storied house. How will he run a shop and live with his family in one small cabin, he asks. ■



BILAL BAHADUR

The Tosa Maidan Bachav Front welcomed the announcement but said the community must be involved

Tosa Maidan to be tourist attraction

Jehangir Rashid
Srinagar

TOSA Maidan, a huge meadow in central Kashmir's Budgam district, is set to make its mark on the tourism map of the state. The J&K government has announced the setting up of a separate development authority for it.

Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and her alliance partner, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), took this decision while also giving the go-ahead for creation of similar development authorities for Nobra, Basohli-Bani and Shopian-Peer ki Gali. With the creation of four more development authorities, the number of such authorities in the state has risen to 24.

Tosa Maidan Bachav Front (TBF), which was at the forefront of the movement to shift the army firing range from the meadow, welcomed the announcement. It said the move would benefit people only when their right to life is ensured in the meadow and its vicinity.

More than 60 people have lost their lives due to the presence of the army firing range in the Tosa Maidan area. These people died after fiddling with unexploded shells and ammunition in the area. During the chief ministership of Omar Abdullah the army decided to shift the firing range from Tosa Maidan. The TBF had agitated for the firing range to be shifted.

Dr Shaikh Ghulam Rasool, founder and chief

patron of TBF, said he was grateful to the state government for this move but emphasised it was incomplete. "The Community Driven Adventure and Rural Tourism (CDART) initiative by the government can be fruitful only when the basic right to life is ensured. The underlying question is, who is tourism for when the people and environment are vulnerable to threat and damage? Ensuring the right to life is most important. Everything else, including development, then follows," said the TBF founder.

Dr Shaikh said that history stands witness to the fact that all that tourism development authorities have brought about is unprecedented destruction to the environment, ecology, flora and fauna. He said that health resorts like Pahalgam, Gulmarg and Sonamarg are examples of poorly planned tourism. The government must ensure that Tosa Maidan is saved from such vandalism.

"Before any further 'development authorities' are established and finalised, the government must revisit its past strategies. An Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) needs to be carried out. It should uncover all the elements of environmental vandalism and the officials responsible must be brought to book," he said.

He also pointed out that since many people had lost their lives due to the army firing range it was imperative that their kith and kin be compensated. He said that the justice delivery system needs to be improved and compensation be given to the affected

so that some confidence in the government's move is restored.

Nazir Ahmed Lone, Programme Coordinator of TBF, said that they had put up a list of demands to the state government. They included the setting up of an independent development authority. But some demands were yet to be conceded.

"It is important that the present government provides adequate compensation to widows, the disabled and the community at large. The development authority will be mere eye-wash if compensation is ignored," said Lone.

Molvi Maqbool, General Secretary of the TBF, said that women and tribals need to be given proper representation in the Tosa Maidan Development Authority (TDA). He said that the officials being appointed to the newly formed TDA

should declare all their assets.

"The preservation of the ecology and environment should be treated as a priority. Proactive disclosure under Section 4 of the state's RTI Act should apply to the tourism department, including fund allocation and policy decisions. Officials who are upright and honest should be appointed to the development authority for Tosa Maidan," said Maqbool.

The managing body of TBF comprising some sarpanches and other locals warned the state government and the tourism department of dire consequences if any move was ever made to disrupt the community-driven tourism model for Tosa Maidan and surrounding villages.

"Together we all have formed TBF not only to remove the firing range from Tosa Maidan, but to protect the ecology and environment and let the community have all control over policies and operations in Tosa Maidan. We will not allow government officials to dictate terms to us since we have suffered a lot in the past," said the managing body members of TBF.

People here also point out that successive state governments have failed to upgrade the tourist infrastructure, resulting in less inflow of tourists to J&K. These people say that those at the top are taking steps that are irrelevant to promotion of tourism.

"Establishment of new development authorities is a step in this direction. Although more than half-a-dozen development authorities now exist in the state, when it comes to performance all of them are a big zero. The existing tourist infrastructure is below par in most areas. Little effort is being made to improve it," said members of TBF.

Road connectivity to various tourist places, including Tosa Maidan, is very poor. The tourism department will have to work very hard to make Tosa Maidan a tourist hotspot and get the TBF on board. ■

Star PDS has got glitches

Chandrakumar Chandra
Raipur

IS Chhattisgarh's progressive Public Distribution System (PDS) slipping up? Praised by activists and researchers as a model worthy of emulation, it uses modern technology with great efficiency to deliver foodgrain to the economically deprived month after month.

The central government's PDS caters to three priority groups – BPL (Below Poverty Line) families, families listed under Antyodaya who are 'the poorest of the poor', and persons eligible for old-age pension. The PDS was still at a nascent stage when Chhattisgarh became an independent state in November 2000.

The state government of Chhattisgarh put in place a system that went beyond the provisions of the central government scheme. For instance, apart from BPL families, it has included families of a slightly higher income slab who also need nutritional support. The scheme provides a subsidy that makes foodgrain available to priority groups much below market rates. The state government has also increased the subsidy provided by the centre and is distributing foodgrain at a rock-bottom price of ₹2 per kg. For families with Antyodaya cards, the price is just ₹1 per kg.

The system has been streamlined through digitisation and automation, making full use of India's strength in ICT (Information and Communications Technology). In 2008, the PDS outlets or Fair Price Shops (FPS) across the state were computerised. A unified ration card database was created; an online real-time inventory management system introduced at warehouses; and call centres and a citizen interface website established. An innovative system of SMS alerts informed people about the movement of rations from the storehouses to their ration shops.

The PDS in Chhattisgarh has been widely hailed as a model. It was selected for the Prime Minister's Award for Excellence in Public Administration. The

Supreme Court recommended replication of the Chhattisgarh model in other states.

But the state's neoteric system is facing bottlenecks in Saradih Gram Panchayat in Dabhara block of Janjgir Champa district. The land here is located on the Mahanadi river basin and is very fertile. The main crop is paddy. The community comprises mostly small and marginal farmers, largely Dalits. They are poor and thus a priority group under the PDS scheme. But they aren't happy with it.

Locals say that PDS outlets in all the three wards or mohallas in the panchayat do not receive the required supply of foodgrain. One or even two of the wards invariably receives less. The foodgrain is supplied first to one ward, then to the others. The first ward gets its full requirement but the supply runs out when it comes to the second and third wards. No one can predict which ward will be given the supply first but a section of the community from one or another ward remains bereft of its entitlement. The Gram Rojgar Sevak of MGNREGA says some 35-40 households are left out every month.

These families simply have to cope. The next time around, if their ward comes first in the order of supply, they can expect to get their rations. But the supply pattern is haphazard, so they cannot bank on it. So, individuals and entire families living in these three wards are vulnerable to hunger and under-nourishment.

It also means that families who are poor and on the margins have to spend substantial amounts from their meagre earnings to purchase rice at market rates. "The system of grain distribution is going all wrong. It is not timely and the grain is not enough," says Puniram Mali, 80, from Patrapalimohalla, his weather-beaten face downcast. Ranglal Majhi, sarpanch of Saradih panchayat, sums up the mood on the ground. "People here feel let down," he says.

Interestingly, there are several local players involved in PDS delivery. In 2004 PDS outlets were handed over to community institutions such as Self

Help Groups (SHGs), gram panchayats and Van Suraksha Samitis. It was a move towards de-privatisation aimed at improving accountability and efficiency on the ground. In Saradih, the Annapurna Mahila SHG plays a key role by receiving supplies, maintaining lists of eligible individuals/families and overseeing ration distribution. Despite this substantive involvement, they are not equipped to address the lapses that they see every month.

The shortages are a recurring thing, say SHG members. According to Ram Bai Bhujjiyan, President, Annapurna Mahila SHG, "Every month, the quantities we receive of rice, sugar and salt are far below the allocated quantities. What can we do?" Other SHG members add, "Every month is a hurdle we have to cross, stocks run out much before the demands are met. For instance, in October 2016, rice was short by 20 quintals and sugar by two quintals." This kind of shortage has become the norm, they say, frustration writ large on their faces. The supply of kerosene oil, however, has been adequate but that cannot compensate for low foodgrain availability.

Distressed by the endemic shortages, SHG members have raised the issue with the concerned block authorities at the janpad panchayat. The matter could not be addressed at this level and they were asked to approach the food security official at the district level. Perhaps the lapses in Saradih are an aberration. Or perhaps they are indicative of a larger malaise that has gone unnoticed. This could be a matter to be examined by the authorities to take corrective action. They could immediately begin with addressing the woes of the people in Saradih who are being bypassed month after month.

Chhattisgarh is a forerunner in the area of food security. It has been hailed as the first state to make the 'right to food security' a law when it enacted the Chhattisgarh Food Security and Nutrition Security Act in 2012. It needs to live up to this promise. ■

(Charkha Features)
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The social roots of 27 diseases

Bharat Dogra
Bilaspur

PHAGNI Bai lives in Littikhola, a small village at the foot of a mountain in Bilaspur district of Chhattisgarh. Phagni is a Baiga, an Adivasi community that is one of the poorest in the state. About two years ago, when she was diagnosed with tuberculosis (TB), she went for treatment to a rural hospital in Ganiyari village run by the Jan Swasthya Sahyog (JSS) in the district.

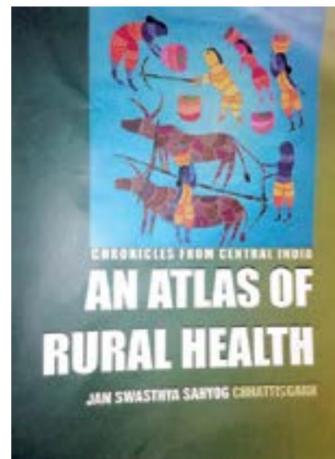
To her surprise, the doctors and hospital staff took very good care of her. She not only got good treatment but the doctors were even keen to understand her livelihood problems. Phagni's weight was a mere 26 kg. The doctors asked her in detail why she was so weak, what was her nutrition intake, why she couldn't improve her diet and how burdensome her daily work routine was. What surprised her even more was that the kind people in the hospital were even willing to visit her village to know more about the problems her family and neighbours faced.

When the doctors and hospital staff visited her village, they found out that the Baiga community in the district was passing through a critical phase. They were gradually losing control over their forests, land and other natural resources on which they had traditionally depended. Phagni's family earned a living by selling baskets. To get bamboo to make those baskets she had to walk for five hours. But there was no surety she would be able to collect bamboo. Forest officials or guards might stop her. Or whatever bamboo she had gathered could be taken away from her. With their only source of livelihood uncertain, she and her family inevitably suffered from hunger and malnutrition.

The close link between TB and poor nutrition is very clear to the doctors of the JSS hospital at Ganiyari as they have been working over the years to understand the social and economic linkages of disease. The JSS is a rural health programme started about 15 years ago by a team of brilliant and highly qualified doctors, most of them in the prime of their youth.



Doctors of the Jan Swasthya Sahyog



Reputed doctors went on field visits to understand their patients.

One of the defining features of this effort has been to link health efforts to wider initiatives for a more equal and just society. The overall coordinator of this effort, Dr Yogesh Jain, a gold medallist from Delhi's prestigious All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), says, "While we had been documenting disease patterns and distribution among the population and we had published our findings and analysis in peer reviewed journals, we also felt a need to understand more closely the socio-economic conditions and cultural environment of our patients."

So doctors and their teams started discussing these aspects in more detail with patients and their relatives. Some, like Dr Jain, started visiting the villages of these patients to get a better understanding of the socio-economic reality on the ground.

I accompanied Dr Jain on one of these visits. We carried with us the address of an Adivasi couple — both husband and wife had been treated at the JSS

hospital for leprosy. When we finally located their home, we found only their children since both parents were working in the fields despite their disease. So we went to the fields and brought them back. As we discussed their family history, several details of land loss and resettlement at a new place emerged. We realised how the disease had become serious because of denial of treatment at an early stage or wrong treatment by quacks. Dr Jain noted where they kept their medicines and how they ensured the proper dosage was taken. The children were examined. There was some indication that the children too might have contracted the disease so their parents were asked to bring them to the hospital.

We then went to see another leprosy patient who worked as a subsistence farmer. Speaking to him in detail was a lesson in understanding how difficult it is for such a patient to follow the precautions generally recommended by doctors.

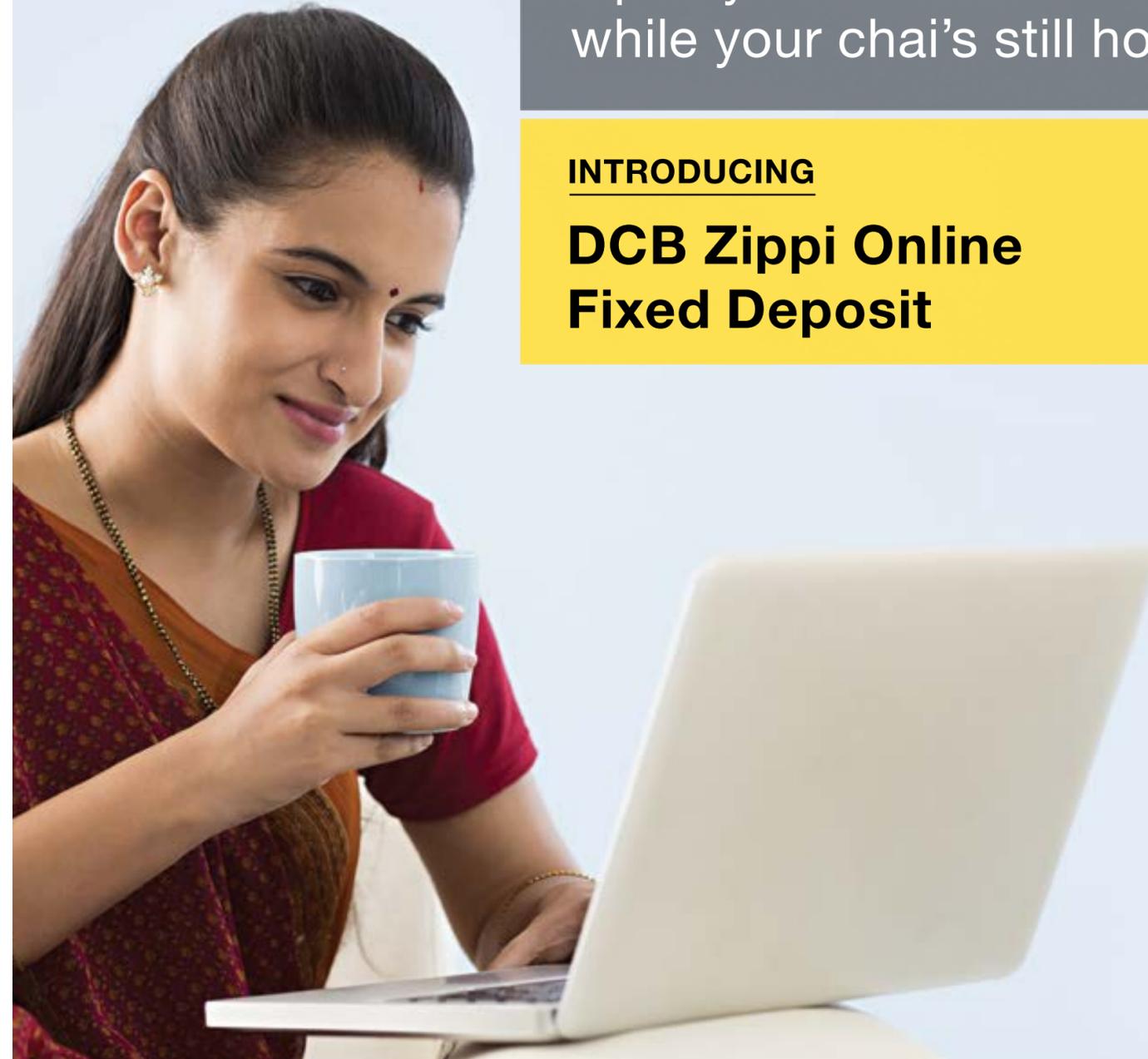
Such field visits by reputed and qualified doctors are rare but very useful as they can bring to policymakers the grassroots-level reality of diseases and their wider social linkages. It was to help in this larger objective that doctors and other members of the JSS team started documenting these wider linkages of diseases.

As a result of such careful and sustained reporting, in 2016 the JSS was able to publish an invaluable book, *An Atlas of Rural Health — Chronicles From Central India*. This book consists of detailed narratives of 27 serious diseases and health problems as well as shorter picture stories about several more health problems and their complications. A few blogs, essays and maps are also included.

The first edition sold out in no time and the second edition has been published. Efforts are on to publish some of the reports in newspapers and magazines to spread greater awareness about the social linkages of disease. A Hindi edition of the book is planned for 2017.

The research underlines the social and economic dimensions of disease. The JSS and other groups must organise workshops on this theme. This is an important dimension of health journalism which has not received adequate attention. Some of the chapters of this atlas on rural health can be used in courses of health journalism and development journalism. ■

Readers interested in the Hindi edition of *An Atlas of Rural Health* can contact janswasthya@gmail.com



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PICTURES BY AJIT KRISHNA



Suratho Juanga takes class in Baunru village

SCHOOL IN THE SKY

Going beyond CSR, Tata Steel partners with Aspire to reach forgotten corners of Odisha

Umesh Anand
New Delhi

IT takes more than two hours to climb to Baunru village. It is on a hill, and though some paths exist, they are strewn with rocks and you have to be careful as you find your way. The slope is steep and there isn't much greenery to hold on to. There are also streams, shallow but fast, to contend with. It is important to climb steadily and not look back because otherwise you just might want to quit.

As you reach the flat top where the village begins, a small mustard field is a happy sight which signals that the trek is over. But there is nothing pretty about Baunru and its grim poverty quickly swamps the celebratory yellow of the mustard plants. It is really no more than a scratchy settlement with thatched huts and undernourished people. There is a single source of water — a small stream flowing out of the hillside.

The 20-odd families who inhabit the village, which is in Harichandanpur block of Odisha's Keonjhar district, are mostly of the Juang tribe plus a few Scheduled Caste people. For long, they have lived in obscurity, finding a place in the official records, but getting nothing more. They eke out an existence growing maize, mustard, paddy and some other crops. They also rear chickens and goats. They are not used to visitors, not even government officials who should be

calling on them regularly but can't seem to handle the tricky and taxing climb.

A year ago, however, Baunru came to miraculously acquire a school of its own. Two young men, Gadadhar Mahanta and Ashok Kumar Mahanta, turned up at the village as intrepid frontrunners for an education project run by Tata Steel. The opening of the school followed and it is housed under a thatched roof with flimsy walls. Perched on the hill like a fragile nest, it is every bit a school in the sky.

There is a single teacher who helps children of the village learn to read and write in the Juang and Odia languages and do some numbers work. The children wear uniforms — blue and white with a tie. On Independence Day last year, for the first time the Tricolour was hoisted and the national anthem sung with the whole village gathering with pride at the school.

The Baunru school is one of the links in a chain of efforts under what has come to be known as the 1,000 Schools Project by which Tata Steel ambitiously seeks to improve education standards in six blocks across three districts in Odisha where the company has facilities, the most important one being a greenfield steel plant at Kalinganagar.

Tata Steel has collaborated with Aspire, a Delhi-based NGO, which is responsible for implementing the project with a grant from the company. Earlier, Aspire was meant to provide only technical support for the project. But the Tata Steel Rural Development Society (TSRDS), the company's social arm, didn't have the capacity to implement a project of this size on its own.

Aspire has experience in structuring and implementing education projects. It knows how to set up systems and motivate communities at the village level. For Tata Steel's project, it has been shaping pedagogy, training teachers and putting in place processes. More than 500 people have been hired by Aspire. Some are professionals who come with experience and there are others who belong to Odisha's villages and towns and have been trained.

"We all know government schools don't function. Parents blame teachers for not teaching and teachers say they can't teach children who don't have a learning environment at home. Our job is to break this cycle of negativity and create a win-win situation for the parents, teachers, children and the community," says Daya Ram, who is Secretary of Aspire.

The first phase of the project has a time-frame of five years. It is hoped that as children go from Class 1 to Class 5 and make the transition to middle school, village-level aspirations will rise. The expectation is that community management of schools will improve and teachers will be motivated to perform better.

"We tell them they are capable," says Daya Ram, who at 58 is a veteran of many grassroots initiatives — going back to the Lok Jumbish programme in Rajasthan where he served as deputy director from 1993 to 1997.

It is a whole lot of positive energy that has led to Baunru, remote and inaccessible, being included in the project's footprint. Gadadhar Mahanta as Cluster Facilitator identified the village while mapping the Badapalaspal panchayat. He took along Ashok Kumar Mahanta, a Community Mobiliser. Then Ravi Kumar, the Block Coordinator, began going there.

The children of the village are now coached daily so that they can read and write a little and have some idea of what school is about. Until it opened, Baunru's children would help their parents with growing crops or looking after livestock. The parents, being unlettered and very poor, didn't see how life could be any different for them or their children. They didn't see sense in giving their children an education.

There are government-run schools Baunru's families can access in the Harichandanpur block, particularly at Nolo, a revenue village at the bottom of the hill. But sending children to school requires orientation and grounding. If children know nothing about reading and writing and feel frightened by school, they won't go. Parents who are very poor and don't have an education themselves are unlikely to send them.

Now, attitudes have begun to change. The children learn to read and write and count, but more significantly they have begun to lose their fear of school. Much of the learning is through singing songs and reciting rhymes and it's all happening in their own village, next to the huts in which they live. Their parents, on their part, have begun to see education as a way out of their poverty. There is a demand for education, which is the first step towards getting it from the government. In one year, 15 children have already been given the basics and placed in government schools.

In Tata Steel, Smita Agarwal leads the 1,000 Schools Project. She is also Head of Education in Tata Steel's department for corporate social responsibility (CSR). She explains that the project has three goals: to improve access to government schooling; reduce the learning deficit in schools; and strengthen governance by empowering parents and community groups in School Management Committees (SMCs) to demand better education.

Around 18 months of the project's five years are over when we talk to Agarwal at her office in Jajpur. It is a good time to do a reality check. How does Tata Steel see the impact of the project? Is it on course? Are the goals being achieved? How are communities responding?



Biren Bhuta, Head of CSR, Tata Steel



Daya Ram, Secretary, Aspire



Smita Agarwal, Head of Education, CSR, Tata Steel

The project has managed to put more than 9,000 children back into school. Of these, 3,500 were long absentees.

wonders. Only then can we generate the positive energy that entices children to come to school," says Agarwal.

The training has many aspects. Teachers are encouraged to introspect on their role as educators. They are encouraged to open up through discussions. Training goes beyond imparting pedagogy to also addressing attitudes and social biases. Children who need to be helped mostly belong to Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes. Teachers come from a milieu in which it is not uncommon to discriminate against them. Ensuring that teachers are even-handed and inclusive is, therefore, important.

Improving teaching in government schools is the ultimate goal of the project.

Agarwal tells us the project has performed much beyond expectations. "We have reached out to the entire geography of the project, which is 691 revenue villages and 2,478 hamlets. We have reached out to all of them. Not with equal intensity, but we have reached them."

There is a mobiliser in place for each of the 115 gram panchayats under the project. In 50 percent of the SMCs, there are at least two trained people to articulate the demands of the parents and others in the community.

The project's Learning Enrichment Programme (LEP) is running in more than 200 schools. Under the LEP, teachers trained for the project hold special classes in the morning and evening outside school hours to help children who haven't been able to learn in class.

"We have a programme for long absentees, especially for those at the cusp of the primary and secondary transition. Typically, you find a lot of children do not want to appear for the Class 5 exam. Through the LEP in 200 schools, we have reached kids who have no ability to read and write in Classes 3, 4 and 5. These children were really under-confident and would sit in class just blank. They have gained so much confidence. The classes they sit in are buzzing," says Agarwal.

In Odisha, children have to take an exam in Class 5 before they go to the secondary school, which is in another village. This is the stage at which they tend to drop out because, teaching being poor, they have learnt almost nothing at the primary level.

The LEP classes are for children who are in school but not learning. There are bridge courses, including residential ones, for children who have dropped out and have to be put back.

The project has managed to put more than 9,000 children back into school. Of these, 3,500 were long absentees.

"Those who have totally dropped out are a very tough category. They would not have gone back if we had not worked with them," says Agarwal.

It is the goal of the project to eliminate child labour in each of the six blocks by making sure every child is in school.

"We already have 250 habitations which are free of child labour," adds Daya Ram. "No child is out of school and every Tuesday SMCs do a head count. Every child aged from 0 to 18 is tracked. There is a panchayat register and a village education register."

The project has trained 180 teachers. They are mostly from villages with no teaching experience. Some are graduates and others have passed school. They are trained in some of the best teaching methods garnered from across the world. They learn to keep detailed records of each child. The classroom experience is supposed to be participatory and teachers are shown how to use interactive methods with the children working in small groups.

The project seeks to make education a celebration of talent and abilities in children. The teacher is key to setting this tone in class and through personal interaction.

"The teacher must think that every child can do wonders. Only then can we generate the positive energy that entices children to come to school," says Agarwal.



Binapani Mahanta in her classroom in Chormalda

The original idea was to have a tripartite understanding with the government as the third party, Daya Ram tells us. But the Odisha government is not part of the project as yet though officials in the districts of Keonjhar and Jajpur are supportive and appreciative.

So, the government is on board and at the same time not on board. It seems to be hesitant to admit that children are not attending school. The very basis of the project, on the other hand, is to put children back in school.

In the absence of a formal agreement it is not possible to work directly with government schools or train teachers there. Therefore, to get down to working in villages, the project depends on the invitation of the SMCs. The project's teachers work with children outside school hours. One teacher looks after 60 children in two separate sessions in the day.

The project has three approaches to helping children learn and catch up:

- The Learning Enrichment Programme or LEP under which it works with children already going to school to make up for the learning and teaching deficit in the government system. It addresses the needs of children in danger of dropping out.
- Non-residential bridge courses to help children who have dropped out of school to learn what they have missed and get enrolled again.
- Residential bridge courses for children who will never go to school if they are with their families in their villages. They get to live and study free of cost in a hostel with other children like themselves.

Even in the absence of a formal arrangement with the government, the LEP classes seem to have begun having an impact on the teachers of government schools. This is because LEP classes are held on the premises of government schools at the invitation of the SMCs. The children who attend these classes are seen to perform better in the government schools.

"In a significant number of schools we have been invited to, teachers and headmasters watch us. We find many of our teaching methods adopted by them. Sometimes we are asked to hold demo classes," says Agarwal. "The reason is our children do better in class. The feedback from the Harichandanpur block is that children from the LEP classes there stood first, second and third in Classes 3, 4 and 5."



The teacher, Pradhan Munda, works with his students

"Parents have tears in their eyes when the same child who had been written off as a failure performs well. Government teachers also begin to introspect on why they didn't succeed with the child when the project's teachers, who are younger and far less qualified, did," says Daya Ram.

CHOOSING TEACHERS

The project has been discovering individuals who turn out to be gifted teachers. Binapani Mahanta, 32, is one of them. As we watch her take an LEP class at Chormalda in the Joda block of Keonjhar district, it is apparent that she is outstanding at communicating with the children.

Binapani used to be a housewife, but now she teaches 60 children twice a day in the LEP classes. She rides her cycle or takes a bus to the government school where the classes are held.



A non-residential bridge school



Children studying in a group

Binapani is a confident woman who speaks her mind about teaching, the standards in schools, the importance of personal savings and having more than one income in a family. Asked her name in Hindi, she makes it a point to reply in English. Thereafter our conversation is in a mix of Hindi and Odia with interpreters helping out.

"From childhood I dreamt of being a teacher. It was the one thing I wanted to do in life. So this is a dream come true for me. When one of the community mobilisers told me this project had advertised for teachers, I put in my application," she says.

She is from the Other Backward Castes (OBCs) and has studied upto Class 10. Her husband is a fitter. They have an 11-year-old son and a six-year-old daughter who go to a private school in the village.

"Government schools are good but the teachers there don't teach," she says.



Detailed records are kept of each child

"So, we send our two children to a private school though it costs us more."

The transition from housewife to teacher has brought her respect in the village. She earns ₹7,000 a month, which when added to her husband's income of ₹11,000 means the family can put a little away.

"I feel very happy to be teaching children and seeing them learn to read and write. It gives me a lot of personal satisfaction," she explains.

With the job, she has seen changes in life. She has not only found her metier in being a teacher but has also pushed the borders of empowerment. She is out of the house a lot more now, having to take class twice a day. After she was selected for a teacher's job she had to go away for six days for training. It was the first time she had left her family.

"It was fun and the time flew as it does when you are among friends," she recalls. But who looked after her two children while she was on training for six



Amarish Kumar Dandsena, Yadaiah Tokala and Arvind Toppo



Girls get ready in the morning at the hostel



A School Management Committee



days? “My husband,” she replies without hesitation.

LANGUAGE APP

There are multiple challenges in teaching children. They belong to an oral tradition and getting them to read and write is not easy because it involves a shift in the way they know to communicate.

Also, Odia alone as a medium will not do. There are different languages and dialects. In certain tribal areas, there is a predominance of children who speak Ho and Santhali. It has been found that with them, even after four or five months, non-tribal teachers make no headway.

The project reached out to Rohini and Nandan Nilekani’s Ek Step Foundation to create an application to solve this problem.

“The app contains 250 common words, and their equivalents in Santhali, Ho, English and Hindi. The teacher while telling a story about a mouse has to open the app, go to the animals category, get to the mouse, tap on the word and she will get the Ho/Santhali word as text and voice. She can continue with her story,” explains Agarwal.

“There is also an Odia story app that is being used in LEP classrooms. Storybooks move page by page with colourful pages, text and voice-overs. If connected to a small speaker it can work for a group of children. It is as yet a pilot but children have taken to it excitedly,” says Agarwal.



Baunru team: Gadadhar Mahanta, Ashok Kumar Mahanta and Ravi Kumar, from top

The plan is to put 50 to 60 percent of the maths and language workbooks on a digital platform. This will help the project do more activities with the children. It will also expose them to technology.

But there is no substitute for teachers and because the schools are far-flung, they have to be local people who are picked up and trained. Binapani cycles to school. The teacher at the village of Baunru, Suratho Juanga, belongs to Nolo at the bottom of the hill. He has studied upto Class 12. He stays in the village and goes home to his wife and child once a week. At Baunru he sleeps on a cot in the open and collects water in a bucket from the stream which is the single source of water for the village.

At Sabar Sahi, the teacher, Pradhan Munda, is also a local youth. He is 24 years old and has passed Class 12. Earlier, Rajshree Rana did his job for three months. She has an honours degree in psychology from a local college. She is now a mobiliser, which means she has to build support for the project’s objectives among parents, young people and others in the community. Rajshree is 25 and the money she earns from the project gives her a newfound freedom to make choices. She definitely does not want to get married like other girls in the village. She is also on Facebook.

People like these have begun to make up a growing cadre of homegrown professionals with hands-on experience in teaching, dealing with children and evangelising the need for education.

DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONALS

At another level, the project draws on the experience of well-trained and experienced professionals who have worked elsewhere in the country. Their contribution is significant.

Agarwal herself comes from the American India Foundation (AIF) where she worked on a similar but much smaller project to put the children of seasonal migrant labour back in school.

Tata Steel and AIF have had an important partnership in a project for improving maternal and infant mortality in Jharkhand. The original idea was to partner AIF in education as well.

While trying to decide what kind of project to pursue in education, Biren Bhuta, Tata Steel’s Head of CSR, talked to different NGOs. He met Daya Ram at Aspire, who told him about the work AIF was doing at Nuapada in Odisha with the children of migrant workers.

It was there that Bhuta came across Agarwal. The AIF initiative with the children of migrant workers was exactly the kind of project he had in mind. At first a partnership with AIF was attempted and then it was decided to hire Agarwal. The agreement with Aspire followed.

The AIF project was on a much smaller scale. It involved only about 250 schools in different parts of the country. Agarwal felt she wanted to attempt something much bigger.

“I said to Biren we should do it in 1,000 schools and he said, let’s do it in 1,000 schools. That was it. It so happens that the number of government schools in the six blocks we have chosen in Odisha actually add up to 996 or almost 1,000,” says Agarwal.

The project covers the Danagadi and Sukinda blocks in Jajpur district; Joda and Harichandanpur blocks in Keonjhar district; and the Koira and Kutra blocks in Sundargarh district.

“One does not really understand the challenges of improving government schools without saturating the system like we have done in Odisha,” she explains.

The project’s block supervisors have all come from Nuapada where they had worked with Agarwal.

For the key verticals of the project, there are three seasoned and well-qualified development professionals: Arvind Kumar Dandsena, Amrish Toppo and Yadaiah Tokala.

Of them, Dandsena was with Agarwal in Nuapada. He has done a master’s in social work and has a bachelor’s degree in education. He has 12 years’ experience of which he spent five teaching and the rest mobilising communities and training teachers.

Toppo is a tribal from Jharkhand. He has a master’s in philosophy from Loyola in Chennai and a post-graduate diploma in social work. He has spent two years as a teacher and eight years in the development sector. He has worked with the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme.

Yadaiah was a bonded labourer as a child, but broke free and finally qualified as an electronics engineer from Osmania University. He has experience in land reforms and child rights. He worked with the Mamidipudi Venkatarangaiya Foundation (MVF) and the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) and then Aspire.

There are others like Ravi Kumar, who is from Bihar, and is the coordinator of Harichandanpur block. Since 2006 he has worked with the MVF, Action Aid, and NCPCR’s Bal Bandhu programme.

‘DOING GOOD, BEING GOOD’

Bhuta believes that it is only the government that can provide education and healthcare on the scale needed in the country. But the private sector can play an important role in helping the government bridge gaps in development work.

“The government would do well to draw on the private sector for managerial skills, new technology and innovation. The private sector is also needed for the softer side of development such as promoting peace, developing leadership and encouraging civic values.

“We all know that not much teaching and learning happens in government schools. But without improving government schools India’s demographic dividend will be a demographic disaster,” says Bhuta.

“A lot of people have worked on different aspects independently like improving access and quality of teaching. We felt we would like to bring access, quality and governance into one programme and do it in a large number of schools in three districts of Odisha.”

Tata Steel’s CSR initiatives are in the geographies in which it operates, but aren’t specifically aligned to the company’s business interests. The management has encouraged Bhuta to find what is worth doing for its larger social impact

‘The govt would do well to draw on the private sector for managerial skills, new technology and innovation.’

instead of focussing narrowly on how it directly benefits the company. “Every company has its life song. Altruism and contributing to nation-building is the life song of the Tatas. Our CSR reflects that,” says Bhuta.

Bhuta is 42, lean, energetic and almost Quaker-like in his abstemious preferences. “At the Tatas it is all about being good and doing good,” he says.

He was a well-regarded journalist before he switched careers. In his new role he shows the same energy and restless search for ideas that good journalism thrives on.

He holds a tribal conference in Jamshedpur once a year at which tribal leaders from all over the country and of different persuasions speak their minds, no matter how radical their opinions might be.

Bhuta has made CSR refreshing and spontaneous. He has taken a lot of the window-dressing out of it.

LONG-TERM GAINS

Tata Steel has committed ₹100 crore over five to seven years for the project. Daya Ram says it is unlikely that the entire sum will be needed. In the first year about ₹2 crore was spent, in the second year ₹5 crore and in the third year about ₹8 crore will be spent.

The return on this investment will be in the long term. Gains are expected to far outweigh the

cost. They will be in the long term and may not even be quantifiable in the ways in which auditors assess a project for impact.

The more significant impacts will be in the way people’s lives change and how they perceive their own well-being and paths to prosperity. It will be in their exposure to new technologies and better ways of learning. The systems the project has put in place will promote transparency and accountability.

“We have protocols for everything and people are recognising the value of systems,” says Daya Ram.

By the time five years are over, he expects people to have greater awareness and be capable of governing themselves more effectively. Every 15 to 20 villages will have a resource centre, he says, with a library, computer, access to information and contact with local-level institutions.

He places great store by the youth of these villages who have already shown an activist spirit by coming out against child labour. He sees a combination of self-help groups (SHGs), SMCs and youth organisations carrying forward the gains of the project.

“There is a problem with complete control and complete withdrawal,” says Daya Ram. By involving and empowering people from the beginning, the 1,000 Schools Project has tried to ensure that when the time to hand over arrives, the transition will be seamless. ■



Himanshu Bindal at OneCo.Work's trendy office in the heart of New Delhi

Workplace with an edge

OneCo.Work offers more than shared space

Kavita Charanji
New Delhi

CONNAUGHT Place is abuzz as usual — cars whiz by, pedestrians gingerly negotiate the chaotic traffic, and shoppers and diners through shops and restaurants. In G block, in an office somewhat removed from this frenetic pace of living, a bunch of young people is hard at work. At first glance, the office of OneCo.Work is an open workplace like any other — row upon row of bright seats and desks, employees tapping away on their laptops, hushed conversations with an occasional meeting or training session thrown in, relieved by a stop at the little cafe.

Look closer and you find that the 70-odd people working in the main area are brought together only by their use of the common work space offered by OneCo.Work. So there are graphic designers rubbing shoulders with hard-nosed corporate types, start-ups juxtaposed with freelancers — anyone, in fact, looking for a flexible and affordable work space.

It's a co-working or shared workspace, a concept well-developed in the West and now rapidly gaining ground in India. Competition may be fierce but a fast

emerging name in the business is OneCo.Work, founded by 24-year-old entrepreneur Himanshu Bindal. The company launched in October 2015 as One Internet but has since rebranded itself as OneCo.Work.

"We started out with the idea of creating an incubation accelerator to fund start-ups," says Bindal. However, eyeing the vast potential of the co-working space idea, the company has since shifted focus. The success of the co-working model has prompted Bindal to expand operations from Connaught Place to Pitampura in West Delhi and Gurgaon while the Bengaluru and Mumbai markets are next in line.

"I started OneCo.Work because it is my passion," says Bindal. Moreover, he says, entrepreneurs and start-ups have quickly discovered that such a co-working office space enables them to do away with the day-to-day hassles of running independent offices — paying electricity and water bills, housekeeping, maintenance charges and so on. OneCo.Work gives them a much-needed breather — mentorship and networking, IT support, conference rooms, HR plus administration, legal services, membership privileges and a virtual office with a prestigious business address. This leaves them free to expand their networks and scale up their businesses in a conducive work environment.

OneCo.Work is great news for start-ups or anyone looking for office space in prime locations in Delhi and Gurgaon. Ritu Sharma, Human Resources and Accounts Manager with the London-headquartered telecom provider, Destiny Business Solutions Ltd (DBSL), has worked in OneCo.Work's office space for a year and intends to stay put for another year. "Not only is the location very good, commuting from Ghaziabad is easy and there is security and good infrastructure in place. So I have access to high-speed internet, a conference room, a locker, a desk and the cafe. For ₹9,500 plus taxes a month I can use the space also for networking. For instance, I discovered a co-worker here who is now my client," she says. "It is also advantageous to have people from other companies so that I can explore new ideas."

Ayushi Goel is a team member of Bengaluru-based online fitness app Healthifyme. She's enthused about OneCo.Work because she works alongside like-minded people and has great networking opportunities.

There are other start-ups like Letslogin and Startup Connect, co-founded by bright sparks Vimal Kumar Yadav and Saurabh Kothari who are in the office to pitch in for OneCo.Work's Gurgaon launch. Letslogin is an online platform for event jobs, freelance projects, flexible start-up jobs and contractual corporate jobs. "We have an app coming up which will make it as easy as booking a Uber cab for candidates as well as companies," says Yadav. Meanwhile, Startup Connect is a great way for start-ups, venture capitalists, job-seekers, employers, companies and entrepreneurs to connect with each other.

Yadav and Kothari work closely with OneCo.Work and there is great synergy between the two. On the cards are online theme-based events by OneCo.Work and Startup Connect that will focus on the nitty-gritties of setting up start-ups. "Such events will fuel the business development of our own start-ups and give us ownership of our work," says Kothari.

Bindal, who estimates that an average co-worker shells out around ₹13,300 a month for a dedicated seat, provides great mentorship to start-ups like these. He also ropes in well-known inspirational speakers to build the community such as the founders of famous start-ups like Yatra.com, PayU, Jugnoo.

"We have a lot of events on Fridays and Saturdays inside the office space — they could be networking events, *gyan* events. For instance, famous founders of companies like Yatra.com, PayU and Jugnoo have come in to talk about their own journeys. Or there could be speaker sessions on specific subjects like HR, time management or digital payments," says Bindal. Moreover, twice a year co-workers can pitch their ideas to in-house investors.



Smriti Sharma: 'There is a lot of connectivity and collaboration here'



Rakesh Khurana

Vimal Kumar Yadav

'I have access to high-speed internet, a conference room, a locker, a desk and the cafe. For ₹9,500 plus taxes a month I can use the space also for networking,' says Ritu Sharma of DBSL.

Bindal has what it takes to be a successful entrepreneur. An alumnus of Bradford University, SP Jain Institute of Management and the London School of Economics, he plunged headlong into the high-profile family business, Valley Iron & Steel Co. Ltd, at the age of 17. Juggling his studies and the family business, he decided to strike out on his own and start One Internet.

Now rebranded as OneCo.Work, the company has a young, 15-member core team. Among them is Smriti Sharma, community manager, whose role is to ensure an environment in which co-workers can work at optimum productivity. She also organises the events and helps build the community. "There is a lot of connectivity and collaboration here," she says.

Meanwhile, CEO Rakesh Khurana prefers to keep a low profile. He is the guiding presence who says his task is to see that the "house is in order". Nevertheless, he plays a consultative role and is an important figure. "Selling is selling, whether services or products; you have to prove yourself better than the others," says the affable Khurana.

Now OneCo.Work will expand its operations in a big way. The company has taken on three additional floors in an adjoining building in Connaught Place equipped with co-working spaces, classrooms, meeting rooms, cabins, dedicated and hot desks.

Six or eight months down the line, OneCo.Work intends to create a separate venture with "someone from the fraternity," says Bindal, to take care of incubation of start-ups. "We will ask other investors to fund the start-ups but not directly provide investment to them. Our role will be to offer mentorship, guidance, support and networking," says Bindal, adding that "people will put their money on the right idea".

Bindal draws inspiration from the likes of American billionaire Adam Neumann, co-founder and CEO of WeWork, a company that rents out co-working space, often with perks, in 30 cities in 12 countries around the world. But even as Neumann has an eye on India, other major players such as global giant Regus and well-entrenched Indian companies Awfis and 91 Springboard offer fierce competition.

Bindal is unfazed. "We believe in collaboration rather than competition. I also feel that once we keep going, we will arrive at our destination," says Bindal, who nurtures an ambition to make his company the largest office space provider across the globe for entrepreneurs.

A tough call, but Bindal has his finger on the market pulse. "I believe by 2020, over 30 percent of large corporates and business houses will convert their offices into co-working spaces," he says. ■

Banana stem on path to fame

Shree Padre
Coimbatore

THE banana is not just valued for its fruit. Its stem too is becoming a popular food in Tamil Nadu. At least half-a-dozen small agro-industries have sprouted in the state that process, package and sell 'banana stem dices'. In fact, the stems are selling in tonnes.

Banana stem has always been cooked and eaten as a vegetable in villages. The outer layer of the stem is dried and used as a rope. After peeling several layers, what remains is a cylindrical white tube, a 'tube light'. This is the inner stem that is diced and cooked.

Why is the obscure stem of a banana becoming popular? The reason is that this stem is believed to have medicinal properties. It is said to dissolve kidney stones and its high fibre content prevents constipation.

Some rural markets in Kerala, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu sell 'banana tube lights' small-scale, without shredding the stem. In Chennai, you will find women sitting on the roadside selling freshly cut and diced banana stems.

Srivel Foods of Tuticorin and V.S. Natural Foods of Coimbatore have been selling one tonne of this product every day. Owned by V. Muthukumar and his brother, V. Arumugam, Srivel Foods was started six years ago. Tiny, ready-to-cook cubes of banana pseudo stems are their sole product.

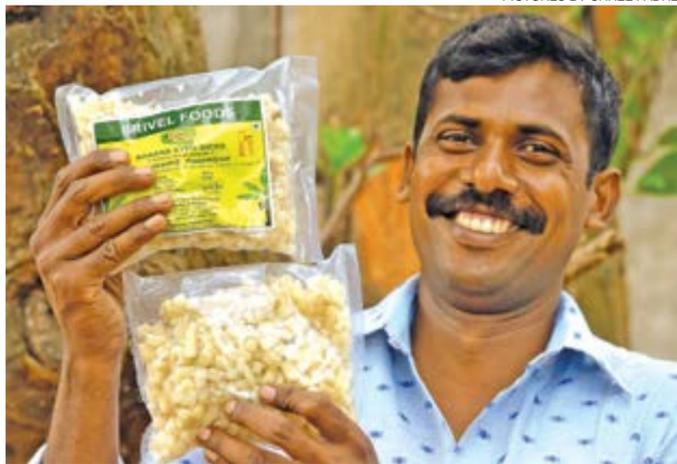
Arumugam was working in Dubai as an electrician. After a few years he wanted to return home and start his own venture. He decided that diced banana stems could be a viable enterprise. Along with his elder brother, he began a small unit. Initially, the stems were processed manually, packaged and sold to hotels and shops. At that time they sold around 200 kg per day.

Their marketing network widened and demand started growing. The brothers realised their method of manually processing banana stems was a bottleneck. It was slow and cumbersome.

The Central Institute of Agriculture Engineering (CIAE) in Coimbatore came to their help. The institute designed four machines to mechanise production of banana pseudo stems. The CIAE doesn't manufacture machines for sale. Its mandate is to develop machines for agriculture and for agro-industries. So it provides a design that can be used by several industries that make machines in Coimbatore.

"Four to five machines are required for the minimal processing of banana pseudo stems," explains Dr Ravindra Naik, Principal Scientist, CIAE. "The first machine shaves off the outer layers of the banana stem, the second cuts the pseudo stems horizontally and removes the fibre and the

PICTURES BY SHREE PADRE



V. Muthukumar with his company's diced banana stem pack



Diced banana being packed at V.S. Natural Foods

About 100 shops sell our product," says V.S. Sundaram, proprietor of V.S. Natural Foods. About 1,000 packets of 300 gm are sold every day. In addition, 500 bulk packets of 15 kg are supplied to hotels and hostels. The price is ₹20 per kg. "Poriyal and kootu are two curries generally made from diced banana stem. It is widely believed that this melts kidney stones," says Sundaram.

Since banana stems are fibrous, vegetable cutting machines can't dice them. Sundaram got five machines custom-made for his unit. They worked well and five entrepreneurs requested Sundaram for similar machines.

Accordingly, the machines were made and supplied to banana stem units in Nagarakovil, Thirunelveli, Chennai and Erode. Of course, industries that buy such machines need to have a very good volume of sales.

Another byproduct that is picking up is banana stem juice. It is also regarded as medicinal. Small vendors manually juice the stems and sell at a fixed spot. M. R. Foods, started by M. R. Natarajan, is the first producer and seller of bottled banana stem juice.

Natarajan's Ponmani Industries is well-known as a manufacturer of food processing machines in Tamil Nadu. The CIAE helped him with technology to start his juice business. A 200-ml bottle of banana stem juice is priced at ₹20.

Natarajan says reaping profits is not his motive. The banana stems are sourced from his farm. A batch of juice is kept for sale at his factory gate. Around 20-25 bottles are sold every day. Once the stock is exhausted, he produces the next batch. The bottled juice has a shelf life of 45 days.

"We started six months ago. Since then at least 20 people have told me that their kidney stones disappeared after drinking this juice. One guy had a stone measuring 7.3 mm. He was to have surgery. Because of financial constraints, he left the hospital and started drinking this juice. In a fortnight, a scan confirmed that his stone had melted. He used to drink two to three bottles of juice a day," says Natarajan happily.

However, though banana pseudo stem, a natural product, is gaining recognition as a medicinal beverage, there are certain apprehensions. Residues of chemical pesticides used in commercial banana cultivation will invariably be present in the stems. The banana stems have to be organically grown. ■

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INSIGHTS

OPINION | ANALYSIS | RESEARCH | IDEAS

Funding the Indian think tank



DELHI
DARBAR

SANJAYA BARU

A columnist pens out at regular intervals one's opinion about something or the other that one imagines to be of public interest. Having done this now for over a quarter century, I still find it interesting to see what subject grabs public imagination and what provokes a response.

I cannot forget the range of response that I received to a column written a couple of decades ago in the *Times of India* under the title, "English is an Indian Language". I was responding to Samajwadi Party leader Mulayam Singh Yadav's demand at that time that candidates appearing for examinations conducted by the Union Public Service Commission should not be permitted to write in the English language. Two decades later, his party says with great pride, that not only did his son, Akhilesh Yadav, go to an English medium school but also went abroad, to Australia, for higher studies!

In recent years the column that has attracted the most response from readers was one I had written in 2010 in *Business Standard* titled, "Indian Minds, Foreign Funds." I argued in that column that India's best-known 'think tanks' were becoming increasingly dependent for their funding on foreign benefactors. In economic policy, national security and foreign affairs, I said, India's premier think tanks and research institutions find it easier to raise funds abroad than at home, be it from a bureaucratic and feudal governmental system or from a miserly and disinterested corporate sector.

I then went on to point out that while some ministries — like external affairs, defence and

commerce — have their own government-funded think tanks, others have their favourites in the non-governmental sector. Both are required to kowtow to the extant dispensation in the respective ministries — and many of these institutions have become sinecures for retired or retiring civil servants. Indian corporates, I lamented, have never been a major source of funding for research.

What has changed in these seven years? Not much. Indian companies have loosened their purse strings. But look at who they fund? India's top 25 companies have liberally funded the Indian outfits of two Washington DC think tanks — Brookings and Carnegie. Some New Delhi-based think tanks have secured support from Indian companies, but

make for the government to follow up. One important concrete and practical suggestion made was that the government ought to fund long-term research on countries that pose a security challenge to India — China and Pakistan. Members lamented the fact that India did not have too many China and Pakistan experts, with relevant language training. Unless a body of expertise was created over a period of time and career opportunities provided for young scholars how can indigenous expertise be created? India would continue to depend on western-educated experts, even if of Indian origin.

One initiative that the government did take was to fund the Institute of Chinese Studies (ICS) and encourage serious research on various aspects of

Chinese society, economy and strategy. Pakistan receives a lot of attention in the media, but there are few Indians engaged in a systematic study of India's most troublesome neighbour. Rather than increase funding for such research, it appears the present government is reducing funding, as it has recently done with ICS. Who will bridge that financial gap?

On another front, the Modi government has taken, I believe, a correct decision on delinking the National Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (NTAGI) from its present foreign funding sources, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) and bringing this under the umbrella of government funding.

This it has done after the Swadeshi Jagran Manch (SJM) drew the government's attention to possible conflict of interest between BMGF and Big Pharma, on the one hand, and the Indian immunisation programme on the other.

However, the vital issue for researchers, be it in the field of area studies or healthcare, is not just about who funds research but if funding is available at all and on a predictable and sustainable basis. We have many good examples of excellent work coming out of programmes where long-term funding was made available. India's space and nuclear programmes stand testimony to this. Just as there are bad examples that should not be emulated, there are

Continued on page 26



While the government worries that Indian think tanks remain largely foreign-funded, it has done little to ensure there is more domestic funding.

such funding is still very limited, hard to get and based on personal contacts more than professional criteria. While the government worries that Indian think tanks remain largely foreign-funded, it has done little to ensure there is more domestic funding.

In the year 2000, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee chaired a meeting of the National Security Advisory Board (NSAB) and asked the members if they had any concrete and practical suggestions to

Continued from page 25

good examples that should be.

If government will not fund research and foreign funding is not allowed, or is viewed with suspicion and discouraged, who then will fund research? India's private sector hardly invests in research in the fields in which it is commercially engaged for it to be interested in fields of little commercial interest to it.

Nation-building requires long-term commitment to research and its funding. It should be the duty of both government and the corporate sector to fund research in a substantial manner, and ensure that there is adequate freedom for the blooming of a thousand flowers. It has often been joked that while China is a closed society with an open mind, India is an open society with a closed mind. Nothing captures this joke better than our approach to research funding. China imposes tremendous restrictions on its people, including scholars, and yet it has created an environment for learning and research that has enabled the flowering of many research institutions. India, on the other hand, stifles institutions at home and happily embraces foreign talent.

In the quarter century that I have been writing my columns I have found no change in the attitude of successive governments — of varying political persuasions — both to the issue of long-term funding of research and the kind of leadership of

It should be the duty of both government and the corporate sector to fund research in a substantial manner.

research institutions that government is willing to trust. Even when the funding issue is addressed, the leadership issue rarely is. Every ministry that funds an institution from its budget wants to control that institution. Little wonder then that India's track record in research, in the production of good PhDs has been far from encouraging.

If there is reason for some optimism on this front it is on account of the fact that a few Indian companies and individual business leaders are beginning to set aside their profits and personal wealth to fund serious research. But what they bring to the table is a pittance compared to what the country needs.

The empires of the future, Winston Churchill famously told a Harvard University audience in the 1950s, will be the empires of the mind. Knowledge is power. Yet, knowledge cannot be generated when the powerful refuse to fund its creation or seek to control the process. India has the potential to be a knowledge-based power. But it requires investment in the creation of knowledge and an environment that facilitates its creation. ■

Education in schools is also about developing life skills



BACK TO SCHOOL

DILEEP RANJEKAR

ONE of the first Bal Melas the Azim Premji Foundation organised was in March 2008 around the theme of "Metrics and Measurements." Five hundred children from 14 schools, 150 teachers from 26 schools, 50 government education functionaries, and 900 parents and community members not only enthusiastically participated but actively contributed to the event. The key objectives of the Bal Mela included (a) To help the parents and community members understand the value of education and school (b) Develop among the children the ability to appreciate the importance of communicating and interacting with the community and (c) Demonstrate how the mathematical concepts learnt in the classroom have relevance in real life.

There were 32 stalls created entirely by the children, most of which dealt with subjects related to mathematics while three were around the language used in metrics and measurements. The visitors (parents, community members and children from other schools) got an opportunity to participate in exercises and games that were explained to them by the children in various stalls. Some illustrations — measuring height, guessing the weight of the objects, throwing objects and guessing the distances, and so on.

More important, the children got invaluable experience in planning the event, developing ideas for the stalls, managing the entry and exit of more than 1,000 people, allocating the appropriate students for the stalls, explaining the games to visitors and judging the results of the games in a fair manner. They also learnt how to productively interact with their teachers, seek ideas when needed and decide which suggestions they would take seriously. It was a wonderful opportunity for children from Classes 3 to 8 from different schools to work as teams, adapt to different views, resolve conflicts and adhere to self-committed discipline. Since then the Azim Premji Foundation has been organising Bal Melas around several themes across the 50 districts in which it is present.

In my childhood, children like me were expected to help our parents in their household work. We used to closely observe how our mother was curdling milk and tying it up in a piece of cloth to hang it overnight. The next morning it would become a solid pulp, ready to be thoroughly mixed with sugar, cardamom and saffron to make a delicious dessert called *shreekhand*. A few questions naturally came to our minds on the content of this substance — was it fat, was it protein or was it carbohydrate, and we were adequately educated



AJIT KRISHNA

Children can learn many skills from daily life

that the process eliminated everything else to leave just protein behind.

The simple experience of buying vegetables necessitated the development of several skills in us. We had to negotiate better rates (art of negotiation and knowing prevailing rates), check the integrity in weighing (knowledge of weights and balances and keen observation skills), get the correct change back (calculations — maths), strike a pleasant chord with the vendor (interpersonal skills), ensure we bought the right quality (ability to sort vegetables based on characteristics of fresh vegetables) and arrange them suitably in the bag in which we were carrying them. Potatoes, onions and cabbage at the bottom of the bag and tomatoes and bananas on the top. Most of these were learnt through actually doing them or through keen observation. And all this at the age of 10 to 12 years.

Today's children — especially in urban, well-to-do families — are singularly deprived of such experiences, not being required to or not encouraged to participate in household chores. This leads to some schools evolving special days requiring the children to dress as "earth" or "tree" or to earn some money by helping someone with work and so on. And it gets limited to only such days without pervading the day-to-day life of children in a seamless manner.

One of the common criticisms of the existing education system is that it tends to be bookish and detached from real life. Most of the education seems to be focused on mere cognitive skills revolving around rote learning of the content of subjects. Life skills such as critical thinking, ability to interpret, reflecting on thoughts and actions, communication, interpersonal skills and, above all, "learning and

relearning" to adapt to ever-changing new situations in life are hardly dealt with consciously through the education process.

If education has to prepare children to be able to cope with their future as well as that of the society they live in, education must have a reasonably clear idea of the skills and abilities that children need to be helped to develop. The future is uncertain and can hardly be predicted accurately. The nature of school would dramatically change. In fact, there could be multiple kinds of schools. Technology would witness several discontinuous and radical changes. The knowledge and cognitive abilities developed today run the risk of being obsolete in one or several major turns of events.

There are several life skills that we need to

really important and complicated ideas can be learnt only by dealing with them. They need to be taught in many ways — not just through lectures or blackboard diagrams; but through mind mapping or metaphors, meaningfully designed text books with appropriate exercises and so on. Teachers will have to be developed to present their ideas in many more ways, depending on the particular children they work with.

Children will have to be developed not only to solve existing problems but also to discover new ones. The human species is very diverse and children have exposure to people with different beliefs. We cannot hide from people who are different, nor can we go about destroying such

Important and complicated ideas can be learnt only by dealing with them. They need to be taught in many ways — not just through lectures or blackboard diagrams.

inculcate in our children to prepare them to meet their future. I mention three important ones: (a) Ability to adapt to change and cause change (b) Ability to relearn (includes openness to embracing change) and (c) Resilience to endure changed and difficult circumstances.

We find no systematic planning or strategy in schools to inculcate these abilities in our children. It is ridiculous to waste time remembering things that can be stored digitally. Mere abilities of "knowing" and "retrieving" are not important. How we learn to make sense of the huge amount of information that we are deluged with, is far more important. The

people. Developing the abilities to try to understand and collaborate with such people is critical for life. Being a responsible citizen of the classroom, school, family and the world outside is another facet of being successful in life. This needs a more abstract frame of thinking. While ethics can be easily classified as one of the values, being an ethical professional is also a life skill — since it will build respect for you. It also has an important element of "my career vs the contribution I make to the larger society". A large part of this aspect cannot be taught but has to be learnt through what you see, experience and observe. Having role models around you helps enormously.

Helping children develop life skills will be based on the following important strategies:

- Have good, researched analysis to identify the life skills that are eternally useful, anticipating the dramatic changes in future
- Life skills reflected in curriculum, pedagogy and assessment
- Building a caring, collaborative and inclusive classroom and school culture to foster such skills
- Teacher education and teacher professional development for life skill development in schools
- Involving the community and other stakeholders

If we want to realise our constitutional commitment of being a just, equitable and humane society, it will not happen merely by teaching maths, language, science and so on. It is imperative to integrate necessary life skills in the education process right from the school stage. ■

Dileep Ranjekar is CEO of the Azim Premji Foundation

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Jackfruit replacing rubber



FIELD NEWS

SHREE PADRE

MEENACHIL and Kanhirappally taluk in Kerala's Kottayam district are considered the 'rubber capital' of India. It was from here that rubber cultivation spread across Kerala and subsequently to different parts of India. Kerala went on to produce 90 percent of the country's natural rubber.

Surprisingly, in recent years, rubber is being replaced by jackfruit here. Rony Mathew, chairman of the Agriculture Products Processing and Marketing Cooperative (APPMC) in Pala, Kottayam district, says that in the past three years about 100 acres of jackfruit plantation have replaced rubber trees.

In 1954, Mathew Thomas Thakadiyel started India's first rubber tree nursery in Pala. Seven decades later, his son, Rony Mathew, has started a jackfruit nursery instead, under the auspices of the APPMC. In three years, the cooperative has sold about 25,000 jackfruit grafts.

In the first week of January this year, P.C. Chacko, a 73-year-old farmer, was honoured at a jackfruit festival held by APPMC in Pala. Last year, he cut down rubber trees on 10 acres and planted jackfruit instead. He explained that he didn't see much of a future for rubber. Jackfruit requires less labour, starts yielding fruit in three years and has an assured market. Even if a single jackfruit sells for ₹50, he will earn ₹1,50,000 from one acre after seven years, said Chacko.

Why is an industrial cash crop being replaced by a humble food crop? Let's look at price estimates. Around 2005, the price of rubber rose from ₹200 per kg to ₹240. But by 2012, prices began nose-diving and declined to ₹100 per kg. Currently, the price of rubber hovers at around ₹140 per kg. Farmers complain that this figure doesn't even meet their production cost. An estimated one-fifth of rubber estates have stopped tapping activities as owners say it is not feasible financially.

The interest in jackfruit is not a sudden development. Since two decades, a huge quantity of tender jackfruit is being sent to north India from the Pervumbavoor area. To widen their supply chain, traders began to look for jackfruit in Ernakulam district in Kerala's rubber belt. Though the traders rip off all jackfruit from trees and pay poorly, there is an assured market.

This is the reason why farmers like Jaison from

Uloor are planting jackfruit. The traders pay ₹25 per jackfruit currently and Jaison believes these prices will go up year by year.

Farmers have also been exposed to the benefits of growing jackfruit. GRAMA (Group Rural Agricultural Marketing Association), the first farmers' group that started value addition of jackfruit in 2006, is located very close to Pala. Four years ago, GRAMA took a busload of farmers on a study trip to Panruti, the jackfruit paradise of the country. For the farmers, it was their first ever exposure visit — to study jackfruit farming. The activities of GRAMA amply proved to the farmers that they could earn an income from jackfruit.

The APPMC, started three years ago, is buying



The interest in jackfruit is not a sudden development

Not only is jackfruit a food crop, it represents crop diversity and retains rainwater.

jackfruit from local farmers and processing it minimally as frozen raw jackfruit. Last year, it sold 20 tonnes of frozen jackfruit to exporters. The consignments went to the UK, the Gulf, the US and other countries populated by people from Kerala. The main reason for this demand is the low glycemic index of raw jackfruit, making it ideal for diabetics.

The cooperative has been buying raw jackfruit for ₹7-8 per kg. Last year, it bought 110 tonnes of whole fruit. Employing about 100 staff, the cooperative got the jackfruit processed in five centres. This year, it intends to buy 200 tonnes. It has also conducted six workshops on jackfruit farming.

Besides, being a food crop gives jackfruit an advantage. In Kerala, jackfruit is a staple food, consumed as a stir-fry (*chakka puluk*) especially

during the jackfruit season. At least one meal a day or two meals a week are cooked with jackfruit instead of rice and consumed with meat or fish curry.

The APPMC held its first three-day Jack Fest in Pala in January this year. On day one, 108 kg of frozen raw jackfruit flew off the shelves. The canteen, in three days, sold 1,200 *chakka puluk* dishes for lunch. Inspired by its success, the APPMC has decided to hold an annual Jack Fest.

Awareness of the health benefits of jackfruit has also spread. Locals now consider jackfruit to be a healthy food. Not only is it beneficial for diabetics, recent media reports indicate that it prevents cancer and has good dietary fibre. Locals say the older generation has fewer lifestyle diseases because they consumed jackfruit regularly.

Another major attraction for farmers is that jackfruit cultivation is less labour-intensive than rubber and doesn't require too many inputs like manure. Harvesting is the only major operation, they say.

Farmers are planting only one or two selected varieties of jackfruit so that they can begin supplying to the agro-processing industry. Everyone believes their jackfruit trees will yield fruit from the fourth year and bring them a higher income from the seventh year onwards.

Farmers also see environmental benefits in shifting from rubber to jackfruit. Not only is it a food crop, it represents crop diversity, retains rainwater and is a measure to fight global warming. The jackfruit tree is known to cool the microclimate considerably.

Thomas Kattakkayam, who has an impressive varietal collection of jackfruit, welcomes the new trend. Rubber exploits groundwater whereas jackfruit does not lower the water table. "I have cleared one acre to house my genepool of jackfruit. If the phone calls I get demanding jackfruit grafts are any indication, rubber might extend to 1,000 acres in a year or two," he says.

But the agriculture department and research institutions including agriculture universities have not woken up to the changing reality. They are not ready with information such as the right cultivars, how to do canopy management, thinning and so on.

The president of GRAMA, Joseph Lukose, warns that all varieties of jackfruit are not suited for processing. "The agriculture department has to do varietal selection to identify cultivars best suited for processing. Secondly, it has to make serious efforts to standardise value-added products."

But the changeover from an industrial cash crop to a food crop is being welcomed. S. Ushakumari, the executive director of Thanal, an organisation working for sustainable agriculture, agrees that for the economy and for agricultural sustainability this is a good trend. Except that jackfruit should not become a mono-crop like rubber. ■

LIVING

BOOKS | ECO-TOURISM | FILM | THEATRE | AYURVEDA



Munna Thakur and his mother in the *Eyes of Darkness*

Bhagalpur and after

A new film traces blindings as torture

Saibal Chatterjee
New Delhi

THIRTY-five years after the grisly Bhagalpur blindings — a case in which a group of policemen pinned down 33 undertrials in their custody and poured acid into their eyes — Delhi-based journalist-turned-filmmaker Amitabh Parashar has returned to the festering heart of darkness to probe the long-term effects of that extra-judicial outrage.

The debutant director's disturbing documentary, *The Eyes of Darkness*, draws our attention to the shocking but sparingly documented domino effect of the early 1980s blindings of alleged criminals in Bhagalpur, one of Bihar's most backward and socio-politically volatile districts — as well as elsewhere in the state.



Amitabh Parashar

Since the Bhagalpur blindings hit the national headlines and received a bafflingly strong groundswell of support among the local population, mob justice has taken barbaric forms in different parts of Bihar, testifying to a breakdown of the rule of law.

"Caste and political rivalry, personal enmity and misguided vigilantism lie at the root of the continuing horror," says Parashar, a Bhagalpur native who was a schoolboy in the district when the local police resorted to blindings as their first line of defence in the fight against crime.

The police showed the way and citizens quickly adopted blindings as a tool of punishment for the pettiest of crimes and acts of intransigence. In a case that occurred as recently as 2016, a 10-year-old girl from

Lakhisarai had to pay with an eye for the 'crime' of stealing green peas from a farm.

"I have footage related to this sickeningly repulsive incident but chose not to include it in the film," says the filmmaker. However, in *The Eyes of Darkness*, we do see Ranjit Sada of Supaul district, who was blinded by his employer when he demanded that he be paid his wages.

The story of Mohammad Shahid of Balchanda village in Araria district, among others, finds mention in the film. The ageing man had acid poured into his right eye by villagers over a minor dispute in late 2014. For him, it was a case of history repeating itself. Shahid had been subjected to similar treatment 22 years ago, when he lost his left eye.

Says Parashar: "I was returning from school one day. I saw a man crying for help. He had holes in his eyes with blood oozing out of them. He was one of the 33 Bhagalpur blinding victims. That grisly sight has haunted me ever since."

The Bhagalpur outrage seems to have seared itself irrevocably into the soul of Bihar. "This January alone, at least three new incidents of forcible

Continued on page 30



Amitabh Parashar with Munna Thakur and his mother

blinding have been reported from Bihar, including one in which an angry trainee teacher pierced a student's eye with a cane," says Parashar, who researched and filmed *The Eyes of Darkness* over three years.

The film owes its genesis to a "personal trip" that Parashar made to Forbesganj in 2013. "I stayed in Aurahi Hingna, the village of famed litterateur Phanishwar Nath Renu," he says. "I was there to meet the late writer's family. I came to know of two villagers who had lost their eyesight in a mob attack. The victims were Munna Thakur and his friend, Kanhaiya Thakur."

The Eyes of Darkness is principally the story of Munna Thakur, a one-time criminal who decided to come clean, surrendered to the police and spent nearly four years in jail. While focusing on one hapless victim's struggle for justice, the film also probes the larger phenomenon of villagers frequently taking the law into their own hands and getting away with it.

"As I delved deeper into Munna's plight, I realised that he was by no means the only one to have fallen prey to an irate mob and lost his eyes, that there were numerous similar cases that had occurred over the years," says Parashar. Not a month passes, he says, without a blinding taking place somewhere in Bihar.

Munna Thakur earned the ire of members of a higher caste when he had the temerity to field his wife, Indu Kumari, in the village *sarpanch* election. The husband of her rival, Ranjana Devi, demanded that Munna withdraw his wife from the contest. He refused.

Ranjana's infuriated husband and his associates decided to teach Munna a lesson. On December 23, 2012, three days after his wife lost the election, a



A still from the film

'This January alone, at least three new incidents of forcible blinding have been reported from Bihar.'

gang of assailants waylaid Munna and injected acid into his eyes with a syringe.

Life has been a massive struggle ever since for Munna, his wife, two sons and aged mother. The compensation promised by the state and central governments hasn't materialised and the perpetrators of the attack on him are not only roaming free but are also continually threatening his family.

From what we witness in the film, Munna is under pressure to leave the village. His mother is brutally attacked for refusing to withdraw the case. And his son is scared to go to school because among

his teachers is one of the men who assaulted Munna.

Munna's battle for justice receives active support from Ram Kumar Mishra, a lawyer and activist who runs a free legal aid outfit in Bhagalpur. The lawyer is hard-pressed to convince Munna that justice will eventually be done. Patience is the key, he keeps telling the man, more in hope than with conviction.

In one sequence that Parashar's camera captures, the audience gets a sense of how desperately lawless this landscape is. An upright police officer arrives in the village in his official vehicle to arrest the *sarpanch's* husband and an accomplice. But he has to beat a hasty retreat in the face of protests by village women who rally around the *sarpanch*.

"It's not that mob justice is uncommon in other parts of India," says Parashar, "but nowhere is blinding used as a method to punish suspected criminals and settle personal scores on the scale and with the impunity that it is in Bihar."

It is obviously the lure of instant justice that drives these atrocities, he says. With the law enforcement agencies abdicating their responsibility to ensure due process of law, the powerful are free to bypass the complexities of lodging complaints and waiting for investigations to take their course.

As Patna-based social scientist Shaibal Gupta, who figures in the film (and puts the phenomenon in perspective), says, the State supports these acts by keeping quiet and not doing anything.

Talking about Munna's case after a meeting with the victim arranged by Mishra, he adds: He has been punished for defying the unwritten social code: how dare a lower caste man put up a candidate in an election! The blindings, he suggests, are an extension of many divides: rich-poor, powerful-oppressed, higher caste-lower caste...

The blindings do not get the kind of play that they merit in the media because, Gupta points out, the media is controlled by the powerful and it isn't in their interest to highlight the social fault lines from which they derive their clout.

The film hinges on Munna's agony. At one point, the sheer hopelessness of his lot gets to him. He hopes that his son will avenge him one day. But his fury and frustration ebb thanks to Mishra and Gupta's assurances, and he looks at life with greater equability. He resolves to educate his son so that he can lead a better life and work his way out of the unending cycle of violence.

The Eyes of Darkness offers a glimmer of hope in Munna's transformation, but the film's optimism is tempered with the stark awareness that this is an area of darkness that cannot be willed away. Here, justice is not only blind; it is elusive too. ■

The world's wondrous heritage

Civil Society News
Bengaluru

AN international photography exhibition, held recently in Bengaluru, displayed a stunning collection of UNESCO World Heritage Sites in 30 countries. Three tourism boards — the Mauritius Tourist Promotion Authority, the Scandinavian Tourist Board and the Visit Indonesia Tourist Office — collaborated and contributed to the exhibition.

Around 120 pictures were displayed. They were shot by a diverse group of people which included amateur photographers, software engineers, hobby photographers and travel enthusiasts. The idea wasn't really to compete but to create awareness of the world's myriad marvels.

The photographs were segmented into three categories — Cultural (Heritage) Sites, Natural Sites and Looking Beyond India.

Three dramatic prize-winning pictures occupied centrestage at the entrance to the Chitrakala Parishath art gallery. They were: "The trulli of Alberobello in Italy" by Aswini Neetan, "Cultural Landscape of Sintra in Portugal" by Anita Mysore, "Cave Art" of the rock shelters of Bhimbetka in Madhya Pradesh by Sonal Maheshwari, and "Spiralling up Hagia Sophia in Istanbul" by Anu Nadimpalli.

Pictures displayed in the Cultural (Heritage) Sites section were of the beautiful ruins at Hampi, the exquisite Great Living Chola Temples of Thanjavur, the imposing hill forts of Rajasthan, the rock-cut splendours of Bhimbetka, the stunning Archaeological Park in Champaner-Pavagadh, the Buddhist monuments at Sanchi and the wondrous Taj Mahal.

Other pictures ingeniously captured the play of geometry and light — "Astronomical Dance of Shadows" by Mamatha Srivathsa and "Sacred Geometry Ram Yantra, Jantar Mantar, Jaipur" by Sonal Maheshwari.

The Natural Sites section included breathtaking photos of the scenic charm of the Plitvice Lakes National Park in Croatia and the spectacular fjords carved by glaciers in Norway. This section also featured the awesome landscape of the Western Ghats, its exotic flora and fauna and the lush Subak paddy fields of Bali.

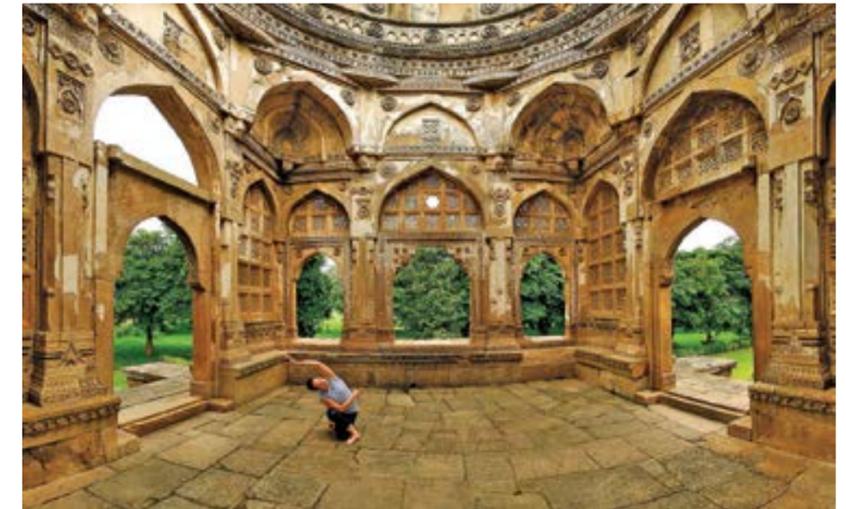
The section had a photograph of a group of galloping giraffes titled "Traffic Jam in Serengeti, Ndutu Plains, Tanzania". There were pictures of the "Rhino in Kaziranga" and the "Great Hornbill in Flight" by CR Satynarayana, of elephants grazing in Periyar Tiger Reserve by NP Jayan and of the dragons of Komodo National Park in Indonesia. There were also rare pictures of endangered species of birds like the Malabar Thrush and the venomous Malabar Pit Viper, captured by Uday Hegde.

The Looking Beyond India section featured the sculptural gems of Angkor Wat, the Red Square in Melaka, the frescoes of Sigiriya and other incredible temples of Sri Lanka.

Also included were photos of the Historic Centre in Macao, archaeological sites in Rome, Cambodia, Petra, Denmark, Sweden, and the canals of Venice and Amsterdam.

Mamatha Srivathsa's lens captured the grandeur and beauty of La Grand Place in Brussels. There were pictures of castles, palaces and cathedrals in the Scandinavian countries. Also included were a picture of Malbork Castle in Poland, the world's largest brick Gothic castle, and "Inside out" by BN Poornima, a photo depicting a view of the leaning tower of Pisa from within.

The exhibition was curated by Susheela Nair, a travel writer, photographer and director of Essen Communications. ■



The entrance porch of the Jama Masjid in Champaner-Pavagadh captured by Rahul Gajjar



The trulli of Alberobello, in Italy by Aswini Neetan



The cultural landscape of Sintra in Portugal, by Anita Mysore

RANDOM SHELF HELP

A quick selection from the many books that turn up for review



Performing Shakespeare in India
Edited: Shormishtha Panja, Bhabli Moitra Saraf, SAGE, ₹750

Shakespeare in India is a study of the myriad ways William Shakespeare has dug roots in India's culture and society. The book consists of a series of research papers which explore how the bard's plays have been creatively reinterpreted by dozens of theatre, the film industry and grassroots troupes. Shakespeare was introduced as textbook reading during the colonial era to help children learn English and eventually find low-rung jobs in the administration. But Shakespeare transcended that role. Indians fell in love with his literature and took to theatre, interpreting the bard's works as they deemed fit. It is ethnic adaptations that have caught people's fancy and not purist versions of



Out of War, Voices of Surrendered Maoists
Swati Sengupta
Speaking Tiger, ₹350

Swati Sengupta travelled to Odisha, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand to find out what happens to Maoists who surrender to the State. She spoke to boys, women and men, all ex-Maoists. What sort of a life do they lead now? Each ex-Maoist has a different story to tell. It is to Sengupta's credit that she doesn't interrupt their narratives with opinion. She looks at the dilemma facing ex-Maoists with a cool eye and a lucid pen. So the stories that emerge are like firsthand accounts. Each person she interviews explains in



India on the Western Screen
Ananda Mitra
SAGE, ₹595

Anand Mitra, a professor of communication at Wake Forest University in North Carolina in the US, analyses the image of India in the West. He restricts himself to how India is depicted onscreen — in movies, on satellite television and on the computer screen, that is, on the internet. The author sifts through films made between 2001-2014, from Amitabh Bachchan in *The Great Gatsby*, to *Life of Pi*, *Slumdog Millionaire* and *My Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*. He concludes that representation has changed so India is no longer painted as the land of jungles, snake charmers and a strange religion. But the way Indians are depicted in cinema has not changed. Indians continue to be stereotyped on the big screen. Mitra goes through Western TV programmes too. Indians in TV soaps are now placed within the cultural space of the West. But there's no great

Shakespeare's plays. Of special note is Habib Tanvir and his adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with Bastar tribals and Manipuri playwright Ratan Thiyam's powerful adaptation of *Macbeth* in Meitei. Hindi film director Vishal Bhardwaj has repeatedly turned to Shakespeare for inspiration and a catchy script — in *Maqbool*, *Haider* and *Omkara*.

The book also examines Shakespeare's influence on India's art and literature, the diaspora's experience of Shakespeare, and the interface of Shakespeare with Indian literary giants like Tagore and Kalidas.

Shakespeare is a household name in middle-class India. The bard's influence extends way beyond the classroom. Yet, thus far, nobody had cared to understand how and why. The book is an unusual piece of research and especially important for students of literature and sociology. ■

painstaking detail why he or she joined the Maoists, their lives in the jungle, why they surrendered and their lives today. Despite the government's generous rehab package, the ex-Maoists still have cases registered against them and, ironically, need the police to protect them from their former comrades.

The media too describes them as 'prized catch' and 'dreaded Maoist'. So the luxury of an ordinary anonymous life continues to elude them. Yet there is no hopelessness. Read about Suman Maity from a village in Lalgurh who joined the Maoists at the age of 13. He goes to school now from his new home — the police headquarters in Lalgurh. There is Jagori Baske who became a Maoist at 16 and surrendered, mostly so that her son could lead a better life. Sengupta's profiles are all worth reading. ■

change happening here either. A slow trend is emerging, though. Commercials aimed at Indian Americans depict a more sympathetic and realistic image of Indians. The author hasn't included an analysis of *Quantico* in which Priyanka Chopra played a stellar role.

It is the internet, social media and satellite TV that are altering the image of India. Hiring services from India, for example, Indian tutors teaching maths to children in the US online, has a very positive impact. So does outsourcing. NDTV, Zee, the Times Group and India Today et al, depict contemporary urban India and second-generation Indian Americans rely on them to form their impressions of the country.

In fact, India's image is of utmost concern to the diaspora. But India has yet to tell its own story and establish a firm identity. For centuries countries that were colonised could not tell their story because the colonising country owned that narrative. India was shown as exotic, beastly, poor and so on by the British. The colonial image continues to linger. ■

The lost migrant

NANDITA Haksar's recent book, *The Exodus is Not Over: Migrations from the Ruptured Homelands of Northeast India*, features first generation youngsters from the Northeast who migrate to Delhi, Bengaluru, Goa and other places in search of work. Mostly, they find jobs as low-rung workers in retail, the hospitality industry or call centres.

Haksar relates the stories of Tangkhul Naga migrant workers from Ukhrul district of Manipur. She writes that it has taken enormous courage for Ngalatim Hongray, her brother, Yaokhalek Hongray, and Livingstone Shazia as well as RS Mayori to tell their stories: the humiliation and racism that they endure and the utter lack of worker rights. Haksar writes with passion and the book is engrossing.



The Exodus is not over; Migration from the Ruptured Homelands of Northeast India; Nandita Haksar; Speaking Tiger ₹350

Here is an extract:

Pamreiyo, or Ayo, as he was called, said he would help Livingstone find a job. The two men set off by bus and arrived at Brigade Road, the heart of Bengaluru's commercial centre and busiest shopping area. They literally went from restaurant to restaurant asking whether there were any vacancies. Everyone said they had none and the men returned disappointed. Livingstone was getting more and more anxious; money was running out and there was no job in sight.

After three or four days of searching, which meant walking for hours and knocking at doors, he found a job in a restaurant called Raaga's Raiin (sic) Tree off Brigade Road. The interview was in the basement and not in the restaurant. They were not asked to sit. The two men stood next to each other and when the manager asked Livingstone a question, Ayo, who was fluent in English, answered. Livingstone got the job with a salary of ₹2,200. It was his first job in Bengaluru, a city of 8.5 million people.

On the first day he went to work by bus. Once he was inside the restaurant, he suddenly felt absolutely alone; he had no idea what he was expected to do. He soon found out that his job was to wipe plates and cutlery. Livingstone stood by the cashier and wiped plate after plate after plate.

He would come in for work before the breakfast buffet and make sure that everything was nice and clean before the guests started arriving. And soon the plates would start coming up for wiping. He was not allowed to sit; he had to stand and wipe, wipe and wipe.

Barely had the buffet breakfast finished, when the lunch had to be readied and once again the wiping started. After lunch when the plates were all washed and wiped, he got time off. Finally, he could sit down and rest in the basement. There was no place to lie down.



Youth from the Northeast face humiliation, racism and lack of worker rights

On his second day he found that the captain was a Kuki who was nice but could do little to help Livingstone. The cashier was a Goan and since he stood next to him, they could talk. The Goan turned out to be friendly and even taught him a little English. Livingstone learnt the names of the different kinds of plates and the cutlery; he learnt the difference between a dinner plate and a saucer, a teaspoon and a tablespoon.

Livingstone had picked up English in Ukhrul by reading whatever he could get his hands on, usually old newspapers such as the *Sangai Express*. As a result he could read even if he did not always understand the meaning of the words. At home he tried asking Ramtawon and Ayo the meaning of some words but they made fun of him. He knew they did it without malice but he felt belittled so he relied on his Goan teacher.

He had taken a bus to work on the first day, but then he discovered that there were shared autorickshaws. He would take the rickshaw in the morning but in the evening he would walk back, a distance of around four or five kilometres.

When Livingstone received his first salary, he gave it all to Ramtawon to pay for his share of rent and food. She gave him ₹200 for his expenses. The major expense was cigarettes, but he solved the problem by picking up butts from the restaurant and smoking them.

The working conditions were unbearable and Livingstone decided to quit. He was working from nine in the morning till nine in the night with two



Nandita Haksar

Livingstone got the job with a salary of ₹2,200. It was his first job in Bengaluru, a city of 8.5 million people.

short breaks. He was not allowed to sit. It was very tiring and his legs ached from standing for nine hours. When the pain was too much to bear he would manage to get a little relief by sitting on his haunches for a minute or two when no one was looking, or by going to the toilet; but the manager would tell him not to take too much time.

Livingstone had discovered that there was a rivalry between the kitchen staff and the serving staff. The chef would refuse to give him an extra onion or tomato to make the lunch more palatable. He found the *sambhar* too sour and

coconut in curry was something he was still not used to. He opted to eat when he got home at night, but that meant he had no food throughout the day.

When he informed the manager that he wanted to leave, he was told that he would have to wait till the end of the month to get his salary.

The night before his last day at Raaga Raiin Tree, Livingstone met with an accident. He was walking home at night when a bike hit him hard from behind and he fell. All he remembered was that he had taken two lightbulbs from the restaurant for his room and when he was hit, he was trying to save them. He woke up in a hospital.

When he opened his eyes, he remembered people asking him who he was. At the time he had no mobile or any identity papers; there was no way anyone could have found his identity. When he tried to speak, the words did not come out coherently, although he could understand what they were asking him. With great difficulty, he gave them the only number he knew: the mobile of his father's sister's son in Ukhrul. Livingstone heard them say he had given them only nine digits.

Even though he had managed to give his cousin's mobile number, he knew that his cousin did not have Ramtawon's number. His cousin would have to walk to his parents' home, which was quite far. Besides he would not dare go out at that time of the night. It just was not safe. But his words made no sense to the doctors looking down at him. Even if they had understood, would they have understood the reality of Ukhrul?

Livingstone slowly recovered consciousness. He realized he was in a Catholic hospital. He was able to give the name of his employers, but by then the restaurant had closed for the night. He wanted to go home. Then he noticed that the man whose bike had hit him was still there. He apologised and offered to take him home in an auto. When they reached, he gave him ₹3,000.

The next day Livingstone stayed at home and went to work the following day to collect his salary. They cut one day's wages and gave him the rest. But Livingstone was feeling lucky because he had 'earned' from his accident. He thought he deserved to rest for a few days before setting out to find another job.

It was then that a fellow Tangkhul called Ashang came to Ramtawon's house. He too was searching for a job and they decided to look for one together. Ashang had been studying in a Bible school and knew English fairly well. ■



**AYURVEDA
ADVISORY**
Dr SRIKANTH

Hairfall has its roots

I am a 50-year-old woman and my hair has been falling consistently since the past one year. I have tried sundry hair oils, shampoos and hair packs but none of these have had any effect. Combing my hair has become a distressful experience. Please tell me what to do.
Renuka Puri

WHY HAIR FALLS: There's no single cause for loss of hair. Triggers range from various medical conditions to stress and lifestyle factors, like what you eat and how you handle your hair.

Your genes play a role. Heredity usually affects the age at which you begin to lose hair, the rate of hair loss and the extent of baldness.

Anxiety, trauma, hormonal imbalances could be to blame. It would be a good idea to rule out a thyroid problem or an autoimmune disease.

Crash diets, hair dryers, bad brushes, hair dyes, straightening irons and curling could also be causing you to lose hair.

Some hairfall is natural so don't worry if you find a few strands of hair in your hairbrush or on your clothes — most people shed about 50-100 strands every day, which is considered normal.

Our scalp is home to about 100,000 strands of hair — each having its own life cycle. A hair follicle produces a single hair that grows at the rate of half an inch per month. It hangs in there for two to six years, then stops for about a month. When the next cycle starts, that hair falls out giving way to a new one.

WHAT YOU CAN DO: Ayurvedic treatment usually varies from individual to individual based on their body constitution as well as their environment

and underlying causes. However the following is considered to be helpful in arresting hairfall and promoting hair growth generally.

Nutrition: In Ayurveda diet is important and we would suggest supplementing your food with the following: Narikela — coconut pulp/milk; Vatada- badam — almond; Kajutaki — cashew nut; Godhuma — sprouted wheat or wheat bran oil.

Hair oil: Regular oiling of your hair is helpful. Apply the oil at night and wash with a mild shampoo the next morning, twice a week.

In loss of hair associated with itchy scalp/dandruff try Chemparuthyadi Keratilaam manufactured by Arya Vaidya Sala, Kottakkal or Arya Vaidya Pharmacy, Coimbatore.

In alopecia, which is excessive hairfall and dandruff, try Malatyadi keratilaam manufactured by Arya Vaidya Sala, Kottakkal.

For split hair, hair loss and premature graying, try Kayyuniyadi Kera tailam manufactured by Arya Vaidya Sala, Kottakkal and Nagarjuna Herbals.

If you are averse to applying oil to your scalp, Hairzone solution and anti-hairloss cream made by Himalaya may be applied and left overnight.

Medication: Based on the diagnosis of an individual, an Ayurvedic physician may suggest some of the following internal medicines as part of therapy for a period of three to six months or till symptoms improve:

A combination of Amalaki and Shatavari tablets manufactured by Himalaya — One tablet each, twice daily, before meals.

Chyavanprasha or Narasimha rasayana made by the Arya Vaidya Sala, Kottakkal and Nagarjuna — one teaspoon, twice daily before meals.

Bhringrajrasava or Khadirarishta from Arya Vaidya Sala, Kottakkal, and Nagarjuna — four teaspoons with equal water, twice daily after meals.

Trichup capsules (manufactured by VASU Healthcare, Vadodara) — two capsules, twice daily, after meals.

If your problem persists, it is important to visit a physician who will need to look for underlying causes. ■

Dr Srikanth is a postgraduate in Ayurveda and has been a consulting physician for the past 17 years. He is currently National Manager Scientific Services at The Himalaya Drug Company.

PRODUCTS

Vetiver's cool stuff

USHEERA Industries produces soaps, mats, window blinds, incense sticks, images, hats, slippers, fans, oils, a sherbet and more, all made from vetiver, (*Chrysopogon zizanioides*), a fragrant grass that grows in India.

Vetiver, also known as *khus*, is well-known for its cooling effect. Window blinds made of vetiver keep rooms cool in the heat and dust of north India's fierce summer. Vetiver oil is used in traditional medicine.



Started in 1992 by Mattathil Devasia Mathew, Usheera Industries is unusual in many ways. Mathew is from a very poor family. Attracted by vetiver's fragrance, he and his wife, Emma, invested in a stitching machine and a few tools and began making hats and slippers. His team has since expanded to 125 people, mostly women from low income families and people with disabilities. Some have even started their own vetiver manu-

facturing units.

Usheera now produces some 500 products from vetiver.

Try their fragrant soaps — a blend of vetiver with turmeric, aloe vera and sandalwood. The soaps are beautifully packed in another natural raw material — areca nut leaf sheath. Also popular are incense sticks made with vetiver and citronella. The fragrance helps to keep mosquitoes away. Vetiver hats shade your face from the sun and keep your head cool. ■

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SHAPING THE FUTURE

Healthcare - the key to a sustainable future

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government agencies to implement healthcare programmes of Central and State Governments, including the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM). In 2014, nearly 3.50 lakh people benefited from primary healthcare services in areas of operation.



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