

# Civil Society



## CINEMA'S ROCKSTARS

Northeast is going places

Rima Das on location

### HIV DOWN, BUT STIGMA?

Pages 8-9.....

### GOA VILLAGE DIGS IN

Pages 10-11.....

### TEFF THE SUPERFOOD

Pages 14-15.....

### INTERVIEW

### 'PEOPLE AND THE STATE MUST TALK'

R. BALASUBRAMANIAM ON WHY SCHEMES DON'T ALWAYS DELIVER

Pages 6-8

### SOAP FROM DONKEY MILK

Pages 24-25.....

### POVERTY OF THE RICH

Page 26.....

### BHOPAL IS SPLENDID

Pages 29-30.....

# Our Sustainable Initiatives in 2018



**Akshaya Patra**

Provides mid-day meals to children of low income households, discouraging truancy

**35** Government Schools

**5000** Meals daily



**Healthy India Happy India**

Health camps conducted for to spread awareness about health and hygiene for underprivileged school children at government schools

**28,000** students in **144** Government schools

Kitchen garden training to more than **1000** students

**1,700** spectacles distributed for free



**Conservation & Sustainability**

In partnership with SEBC (Society for Environment and Biodiversity Conservation), Himalaya has helped to reinforce the livelihood of local communities by preserving the flora in the Western Ghats, a UNESCO World heritage site

Tree Planting Program with over **700,000** trees planted till date



**Kisaan Mitra**

Focuses on the economic empowerment and financial security of small and marginalized farmers

Organized training programs for farmers

Eliminate dependencies on middlemen



**Muskaan**

A Himalaya Lip Care Initiative, provides free corrective surgeries for cleft lip and palate in underprivileged children

**500+** Corrective Surgeries

**INR 2** from the sale of each Himalaya Lip Care product goes towards Muskaan

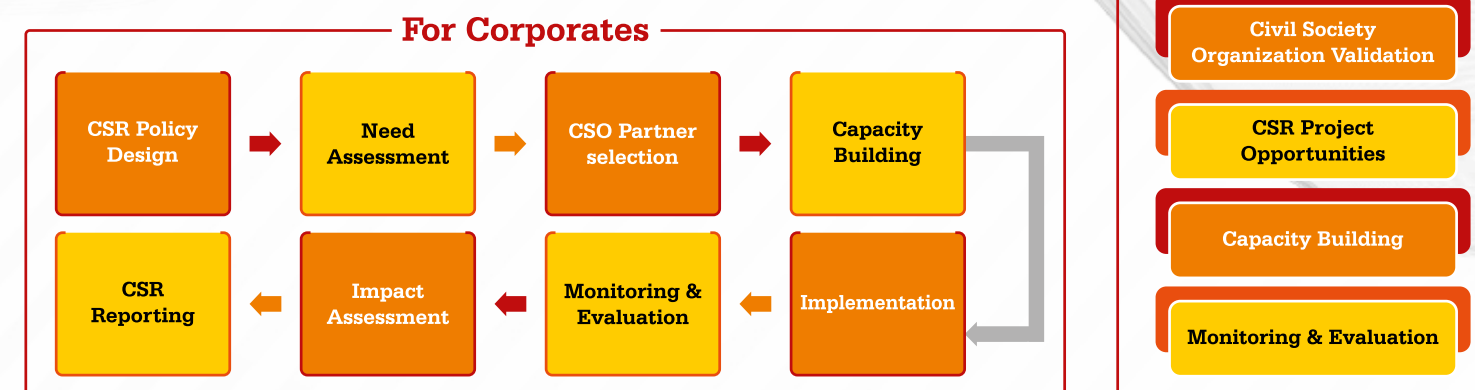
# FICCI CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY SOLUTIONS



FICCI – SEDF set up in 1995 offers need-based Corporate Social Responsibility solutions to Corporates working in different business domains as well as a platform inviting social development projects for viable collaborations for social development. By offering validated and empaneled social development initiatives as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) solutions to Corporates, FICCI – SEDF provides Corporates end to end planning and implementation of initiatives designed to cater to holistic development.



FICCI-SEDF offers the following Services:



## SOME OF THE PROJECTS IMPLEMENTED BY FICCI SEDF

<p>FICCI -CASTROL ROAD SAFETY PROJECT, MAHARASHTRA</p>	<p>FICCI - ABBOTT VILLAGE ODF PROJECT, GUJARAT</p>	<p>FICCI BTMU-SCHOOL SANITATION PROJECT, ANDHRA PRADESH</p>	<p>FICCI RELIANCE SLUM-SANITATION PROJECT, MAHARASHTRA</p>	<p>FICCI INDIA INFOLINE FOUNDATION FINANCIAL LITERACY STUDY, JHARKHAND</p>	<p>FICCI PAUL MERCHANT SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM, GUJARAT</p>
--	--	---	--	--	--

To take forward this dialogue, please feel free to contact us at:

FICCI SEDF, Federation House, 1 Tansen Marg, New Delhi – 110001  
 Tel: 011-23357243, 23753118 (D), 23738760-70 | Fax: +91-11-23320714, 23721504  
 Write to us at: sedf@ficci.com | Visit us at: www.ficci-sedf.org

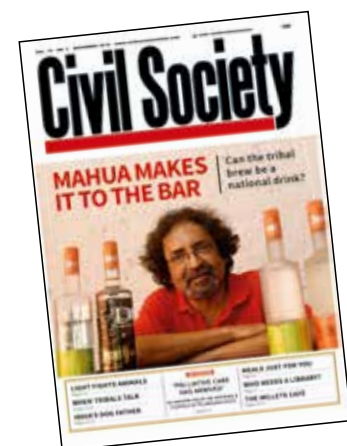
Follow us on twitter@FICCI\_Sedf

IN THE LIGHT

SAMITA RATHOR



LETTERS



Mahua cheer

Thanks for the cover story, 'Mahua makes it to the bar.' It is a truly inspiring story of a wonderful venture by Desmond Nazareth of Goa. After years of hard work, he has set up a distillery that produces liquor derived from the mahua plant. It is an enthralling story.

Eddie

Keep it up, Desmond. We are proud of you and your series of achievements down the decades. Mahua is the Mount Everest of them all.

Malcolm & Mariani Nazareth

Thanks so much, Derek Almeida and Civil Society magazine for the in-depth coverage of this 'black swan' event in the world of international alcoholic beverages. It is very important to us that the tribal people

of Central India benefit from our venture. Thanks for highlighting some of those aspects as well!

Desmond Nazareth

Dog saviour

With reference to your story, 'India's Dog Father,' I would like to say that VOSD has done some amazing work. We need more angels like Rakesh Shukla. It would really help if the government, too, pitches in a bit with strict laws on animal abuse, abandonment and cruelty with hefty fines and imprisonment. Rakesh Shukla is truly a great human being.

Hema Natrajan

Wow! Inspiring. Hats off to India's Dog Father!

Rahul N. Ram

Tech and teachers

I read Subir Roy's story, 'Government schoolteachers get tech-savvy with a little help.' This is a wonderful initiative and the right strategy. Thus far the government and NGOs used to teach computer education only to schoolchildren. But it is more important to teach schoolteachers because they can then teach so many students on a consistent basis. Every year teachers must also attend a refresher course to upgrade their skills.

Shikha Sen

Subir Roy's piece is an excellent and extensive coverage of our CSR workshop for schoolteachers.

Abeer Chakravarty

Library focus

Thanks for publishing Sanjaya Baru's 'Who needs a library?' This article deserves to be read widely.

Subbiah Arunachalam

We need a national library movement that will promote the pursuit of knowledge. Youngsters should read more books and spend less time on social media. Also, there is scope to modernise our libraries and make them 'cool' and attractive places.

Prasanna V.

Jackfruit restaurant

I read Shree Padre's piece, 'Shiji and Shaji open a jackfruit restaurant.' It is a novel idea and the first of its kind. I am from Kolkata. I prefer raw jackfruit. I have never tried ripe fruit due to its strong smell. If I get the opportunity to visit Kerala again, I shall definitely eat at Shiji and Shaji's restaurant. I wish them all success.

Anjali Sikder

Thinking music

Rahul Ram's piece, 'Lyrics, scales and a modern sense of Indian-ness,' in your Hall of Fame issue was very good. I was already a great admirer of Indian Ocean. I have now become a 'bhakt'. Seriously, Rahul Ram, a great article.

Indrajit Dasgupta

Letters should be sent to response@civilsocietyonline.com



**SUBSCRIBE NOW!**  
BECAUSE EVERYONE IS SOMEONE

1 year ₹1000  
Print + Digital

2 years ₹1800  
Print + Digital

3 years ₹2800  
Print + Digital

1 year ₹700  
Only Digital

Name: .....

Address: .....

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

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

E-mail:.....

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



COVER STORY

CINEMA'S ROCKSTARS

Directors from India's Northeast have made waves with low-budget films that have been acclaimed for their unique stories, cinematic appeal and for being grounded in local reality.

18

Jobs, innovations for disabled ..... 12

Fulfil a wish and win a blessing ..... 16

'Development is our target' ..... 22-24

Schools must teach social values ..... 27

Kolkata's dirty air ..... 28

P.T. Nair says goodbye to Kolkata ..... 30-31

Why Bhagat Singh is immortal ..... 32

The tigers' shrinking kingdom ..... 33

Ayurveda: Soothing psoriasis ..... 34

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



The NE picture

MUCH has been said about developing the states in the Northeast of the country and large amounts of money have been shovelled in their direction over the years. Yet in multiple ways they remain neglected. Meaningful development should go beyond project finance and political ambitions. States in the Northeast remain poorly understood — to the extent that people from there suffer indignities. The most ugly examples of this is mindless violence sometimes unleashed in other states on people from the Northeast. It has been particularly bad in Delhi and the National Capital Region but it has also happened in Karnataka and, that too, in a cosmopolitan city like Bengaluru.

Cussed and centralised government decision-making is also a form of violence with the difference that it emanates from official files. The line between development and destruction is a fine one and experience shows that it is easily and repeatedly transgressed. The Northeast's mosaic of complex cultures, traditions and geographical realities are tough to fathom from a distance. As are the aspirations of people who seek to "mainstream" themselves but remain cut off.

There is no single and easy way of bridging these divides, but cinema offers great opportunities. Sensitively made films leave a lasting impression. They leave an impression on a variety of people and have global impact. The filmmakers we have featured in our cover story are creative people who have told stories in small but meaningful ways. They have all received critical acclaim, making their presence felt at the National Awards. But, more important, they have raised the bar for connecting with the Northeast. They help us see the region from up close and beyond stereotypes. It is necessary to get really close because you will never know what you will discover. As films they have the potential of touching many minds and hearts. It is also interesting that the filmmakers have worked with very limited resources. They have had to go back to the basics and they have successfully turned a handicap into their strength. They are the rockstars of new Indian cinema.

Through our interview with Dr Balasubramaniam we seek to better understand the dynamics of working at the level of villages. He is rich in experience, having involved himself for long in bringing governments and communities closer in different circumstances through dialogue. Dr Balasubramaniam has important insights on how change agents in the voluntary sector can pace themselves and be effective.

We love donkeys and so this issue has yet another donkey story. An innovative business in using donkey milk to make soap seeks to change the lowly status of the beast of burden. Donkey owners now find new value in their animals. There is a bit of a gender issue here because it is the female donkey which has really benefitted, but one supposes over time the male donkey will also get a better deal. The enterprise is, however, yet another example of how new business ideas can transform our world.

**Publisher**  
Umesh Anand

**Editor**  
Rita Anand

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

**Photography**  
Shrey Gupta

**Layout & Design**  
Virender Chauhan

**Cartoonist**  
Samita Rathor

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

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

Postal Registration No. DL(S)-17/3255/2018-20.  
Registered to post without pre-payment U(SE)-10/2018-20 at Lodi Road HPO New Delhi - 110003 Registered with the Registrar of Newspapers of India under RNI No.: DELENG/2003/11607  
Total no of pages: 36

Advisory Board

- ARUNA ROY
- NASSER MUNJEE
- ARUN MAIRA
- DARSHAN SHANKAR
- HARIVANSH
- JUG SURAIYA
- UPENDRA KAUL
- VIR CHOPRA

Get your copy of Civil Society

Have Civil Society delivered to you or your friends. Write to us for current and back issues at response@civilsocietyonline.com.

Also track us online, register and get newsletters

www.civilsocietyonline.com



# ‘We need a dialogue between communities and the State’

## Dr R. Balasubramaniam on why schemes and policies don't always deliver at the grassroots

Civil Society News  
New Delhi

DEVELOPMENT is about demand and delivery. If people know what to ask for, governments will learn to respond. In the face of stark inequalities, however, a balance is difficult to achieve. In the asymmetry that prevails, people lack awareness and access while governments exercise excessive authority and lose touch with reality.

Voluntary organisations can play an important role in making things work. But what strategies should they employ? How should they pace themselves? What are the realistic expectations they can have?

Dr R. Balasubramaniam, founder and chairperson of GRAAM (Grassroots Research and Advocacy Movement), has valuable experience in making interventions and building dialogue.

A physician, he has spent more than 30 years in the service of marginalised people especially among tribal communities in the H.D. Kote district of Karnataka. At the age of 19 he founded the Swami Vivekananda Youth Movement which carries out several charitable and development initiatives.

GRAAM's canvas is immense and includes projects in health, education and livelihoods. More recently, the NGO was involved in framing Karnataka's skill development policy.

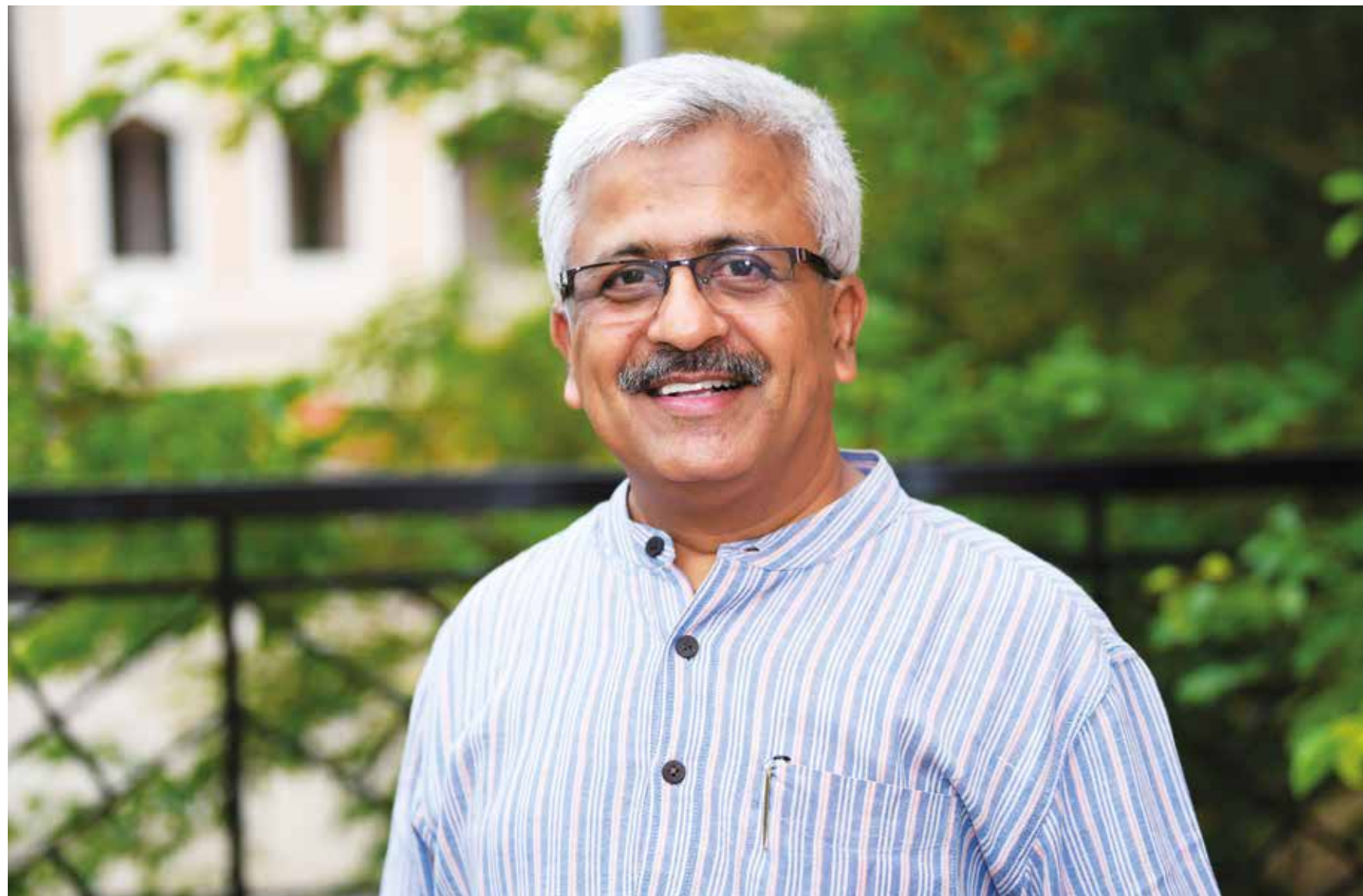
GRAAM facilitates dialogue with communities before designing projects. It works with government and companies.

Dr Balasubramaniam has outlined his views in two recent books. *Voices from the Grassroots* is about the aspirations of villagers regarding development. An earlier volume, *i, the Citizen*, urges people to become active citizens and work with the system so that our noisy democracy can evolve.

**You have strived to bring communities and government together. Your Arogyashreni project to improve primary health centres (PHCs) in Mysore district built bridges between people and government. What was the learning from that experience?**

Arogyashreni was about rural communities using technology to assess and rank the performance of PHCs in Mysore district. My greatest learning was that our rural communities are willing to participate in monitoring the government's service delivery institutions. Surprisingly, the government too, especially at higher levels, was keen to listen to citizens' voices and see the people as customers.

What I also painfully understood is that our



Dr R. Balasubramaniam: 'We need to give the State a different perspective on people, poverty and entitlements'

government still has the mindset of being a provider, a patronising institution which expects citizens to be benign 'subjects' and be thankful that they are getting services. We are still a long way from getting citizens engaged as empowered participants in such programmes. The State, too, needs to evolve and start seeing people as active citizens.

We, in the civil society space, need to give the State a different perspective on people, poverty and entitlements. As NGOs we also need to understand that social accountability will remain a myth if we are unwilling to facilitate the participation of citizens and empower them with information which will reduce the power asymmetry between them and the government. What is required is a dialogue between communities and the State.

I have evolved into being an honest broker facilitating this delicate partnership without being a threat to either. I have also understood that this journey is going to be long and sometimes frustrating.

**You have tried to get marginalised communities basic amenities like water, health facilities and education. How did doing this change your perceptions of development from the community's perspective? How receptive have you found local government agencies and village level functionaries?**

Getting the government to deliver services was what I did, successfully, in the initial days of my life in the development sector. I quickly realised that mere delivery of these 'missing' services is important

but not truly sustainable or good enough in addressing the root cause of the problem. Delivering services is the easy part. Being a provider does not need much sensitivity. All it needs is intent, expertise and the resources.

It is only when you become a facilitator and start empowering communities to explore solutions from within that you realise how difficult it is. Initially, I found communities equally resistant. They have got so used to receiving services, especially in today's world of doles and charity, that they resist doing the hard work of thinking through their problems and building their own capacities to find solutions. At village level, development is now

need to start by giving people complete information on why they exist, what is their role and how they operate.

Once you provide information, you also give communities leverage. This builds the 'power within' them. When you collectivise them, you give them 'power with' and the agency to handle the externalities. Gradually, with increasing success, people learn that they can build 'power over' the people in the system — whether it is the bank manager, the local politician or the bureaucrat. And then the 'power to' bring about social change will emerge.

I see this playing out in real life too. But then we need to understand that all this is hard work. It takes a generation and needs a good facilitating civil society partner who neither manipulates the community nor exploits it for personal gain.

**Corruption, whether it is in the public distribution system (PDS) or healthcare in government hospitals, prevents people from gaining access to basic services. From your experience, how can involving citizens prevent this kind of corruption?**

Building social accountability frameworks into existing government programmes and schemes is a realistic approach. Whether it is the Vigilance Committees at the ration shop level or the social audits in the MGNREGS, we need to keep going at it.

Simple interventions like training communities to understand what goes into building a village road

**‘Development in villages is now so beneficiary driven and politicised that building human capital is going to be that much harder. But I have also found some bureaucrats and panchayat members keen to change this.’**

helped us build strong teams of young people who became real-time monitors when roads were being built in their villages. Using IVRS (Interactive Voice Response) technology to oversee and monitor PHC services in the Arogyashreni project ensured better health outcomes for local communities.

Having served as a Special Investigator in the Karnataka Lokayukta during the tenure of Justice Santosh Hegde, I am inclined to believe that it is more rewarding to educate and impress on people to stay honest rather than spend energies in fighting corruption.

We can only make a difference if we are able to build a critical mass of people who refuse to participate in collusive corruption. Strong laws can serve as deterrence only when they are effective and when the complainant is protected and reassured that action will happen.

When you see high-profile corrupt politicians and businessmen getting away scot-free and many RTI activists and whistleblowers getting killed, you tend to become sceptical. And this is when you realise that societal stigmatisation of the corrupt is a good first step. How many of us will refuse to invite the local MLA to our functions if we know that he is corrupt? How many of us are ready to boycott meetings called by corrupt bureaucrats and publicly name and shame them? If we can develop this

strength by being scrupulously honest, then the fight against corruption will show results.

**There is often a dearth of information at village level — of government schemes and policies and how to access these. What do you think the government should do to improve its social marketing?**

I think using technology is a good first step. We need to build on the cell phone movement and use smartphones to become 'governance smart'. We need to build portals in local languages that put up all information of government schemes, rules, barriers, citizens availing of benefits, and enabling laws like RTI and Karnataka's Sakala which guarantees services to citizens. We need to use block chain technology to provide as much information as possible in a usable format. We need to begin having 'open budgets' that citizens can understand. When governments provide all this information as an obligation and not as a right, things will change enormously.

**There is no platform for grievance redressal. Take Aadhaar, for instance, which is leaving vulnerable people out of the system. Or the LPG scheme, which is a success, but now people find refills too expensive. Or badly built toilets. What are the ways in which government-citizen interaction can be built so that schemes are better implemented and local development takes place?**

Engaging people when you plan these schemes is so critical. It is experts in Delhi or other capital cities

in the states who provide the analysis for schemes. Most of them have little understanding of ground realities. We need to get the voices of citizens into the conversation. Not a monologue but genuine dialogues. Politicians and experts need to be willing to engage in town hall meetings and debates and invest stakeholders with the responsibility of implementing and monitoring government initiatives.

We also need a system that responds to the demands made by such engagements otherwise people will feel used and slowly disengage. There has to be genuine respect and concern for native intelligence and community wisdom. Only when we democratise development and remove it from the monopoly of the government and NGOs will sustainable, people-centric human development happen.

**Elections, as you point out, are a major source of corruption. Voters are bribed by candidates, a malaise that has been spreading to other states. You ran a campaign, 'no note for vote'. What was its outcome?**

It was a mixed bag. We had people who refused to accept such bribes (a small percentage). Several people told me that they would accept such gifts

Continued on page 8

## 'We need a dialogue between communities and the State'

Continued from page 7

from all the politicians but still vote for whoever they considered good. One former chief minister told me in confidence that 'paying voters was no longer a definitive assurance of winning, but not paying was surely a recipe for losing.'

I learnt this too in the campaign. Corrupting voters in several places was no longer seen as a criminal activity. Many considered it an essential ingredient to fight elections. Voters too have started seeing such bribes as their entitlement. But we cannot stop fighting this cancer.

**You say citizen-government interaction is critical for our democracy. Why? We have elections. We have political representatives. There is the sarpanch in villages, towns and cities have councillors, there are MLAs, MPs. Does consistent interaction lead to better outcomes?**

What we have today is a democracy that is loud, unhealthy and limited to the 'representative form'. While this is a good beginning, it is not enough. We need to move towards a functional, participatory form of democracy — where citizens go beyond voting to engaging with elected representatives, post-elections.

We have tried several experiments with mixed results. One mechanism was to use our community radio to get citizens to engage anonymously with elected representatives and government officials to demand services, address civic grievances and complain about inaction or inefficiency. We saw results. Radio provided exposure to the politicians but subtly ensured accountability too. It also gave citizens a sense of empowerment as they voiced their frustrations and demands. When they saw action — whether it was their local ration shop or metalling of a road or action against an errant teacher — they felt a sense of accomplishment.

And let us not lose faith in the goodness of people, whether it is politicians, the bureaucracy or citizens. It is by appealing to their innate goodness that we can bring about change.

**Having worked extensively in rural areas, how do you see the current farmers' agitation? What are the messages that you get from it?**

I see it as a wake-up call. Our planners and political leaders have been offering only lip sympathy and band-aid solutions to the agrarian crisis for far too long. We talk about the Swaminathan Commission report only when our farmers agitate.

But the agrarian crisis has several layers of complexity. Our rural economies are seen merely as markets at the bottom of the pyramid and farmers as consumers of goods and services. Successive governments perceive villagers as mere recipients of dole and not as empowered participants in creating wealth.

The current agitation is an expression of anguish by farmers. The unrest is an opportunity to think about how we can build sustainable and consistent incomes for our farming communities. We need to create a model of rural transformation. ■



Dr V. Sam Prasad: 'Children are most affected by shortages of medicines for HIV'

# HIV rate down... but drugs and stigma?

Rwit Ghosh  
New Delhi

**D**URING a routine check-up at a government hospital, Janak decided to get himself tested for HIV. Three days later, he was diagnosed as HIV positive. Janak, who used to perform in street plays to spread awareness about HIV/AIDS, never thought that one day he himself would get the disease.

"When the doctor informed me I was infected, I felt like the ground beneath me had shifted. I was sure that my report had been switched. Or I'd been given the wrong report. My daughter was just a week old. If I had HIV, then my daughter could have HIV, my wife could have HIV, and that's all that was running through my head," Janak recalls.

Janak was lucky his family stood by him and they have remained healthy since his diagnosis. But others with HIV/AIDS aren't as fortunate. Stigma and discrimination continue to shadow infected people.

While India has the third largest HIV/AIDS epidemic in the world, it has the second biggest HIV treatment programme. The National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) was set up in 1992 and collaborations between governments and NGOs have had considerable success. According to estimates released by NACO in September 2018, there has been an 80 percent decline in estimated new HIV infections from the peak of 1995. Similarly, estimated AIDS-related deaths have declined by 71 percent since the peak of 2005. The UNAIDS 2018 report states that 2.1 million people in India live with HIV with a prevalence rate of 0.22 percent among those between 15 and 49 years old.

In the early 2000s, antiretroviral therapy (ART) was given to individuals with HIV only if their CD4 count — a type of white blood cell that attacks infections — was considered low. However, in January last year, India began treating all those infected with HIV irrespective of their CD4 count.

Another progressive development has been the reading down of Section 377 in September last year. Decriminalisation of the LGBTQ community will encourage them to get themselves tested without fear of repercussion, say health campaigners.

**THE DOWNSIDE:** Despite such statistical gains, multiple challenges remain. Concerned that HIV/AIDS is not getting the consistent attention it deserves, health campaigners were keen to speak out on World AIDS Day on December 1.

"We still face issues with low stocks of medicine in government hospitals," says Gautam Yadav, programme officer of the Humsafar Trust, an NGO in New Delhi that promotes LGBTQ rights. "At a government hospital, you might be able to get a month's supply of medicine. The next time you go, you may get medicine that will see you through just one week. Or 15 days. You never know. The medicine is out of stock, you are told. This is a nationwide problem."

"We are facing an unavailability of drugs and testing kits, so access to treatment is much less than it used to be. It could have a negative impact on the progress made so far," says Dr Kalpana Apte, secretary-general of the Family Planning Association of India (FPAI).

Ironically, India is the largest producer of ART drugs in the world, supplying them to over 160 countries. India also provides the least expensive

treatment, costing less than ₹30,000 per year. But this amount is still prohibitively expensive for many. In regions where the prevalence of HIV is high, free medicine is distributed.

According to Dr V. Sam Prasad, country programme director of AIDS Health Care Foundation India, children living with HIV are most affected by the paucity of medicine.

"Pharmaceutical companies are reluctant to produce paediatric formulations of ART medication because the need for them reduces over time," says Dr Prasad.

"They are aware that there is a defined group who needs those medicines. Investing a few billion dollars in research and development (R&D) to create drugs for 10,000-12,000 children isn't really conducive to their business."

Another issue of concern among NGOs is that funding for HIV prevention, tracking and management programmes has reduced. "There is money for ART drugs, but the preventive part is weak," says Dr Apte. "On the ground I see the prevention aspect becoming weaker."

Previously the National AIDS Control Programme (NACP) was an independent entity. Now in its fourth phase, it has been absorbed into the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, along with NACO. This, believe NGO leaders, has somewhat diluted the programme.

During its earlier phases the NACP concentrated on creating awareness and behaviour change. In its recent phase, it has changed tack to focus on decentralisation, increasing the involvement of NGOs and establishing networks of People Living with HIV (PLHIV).

Previously, it would organise community events with affected groups, with a larger focus on prevention. The NACP's targeted approach along with treatment and support events had helped to reduce the rate of transmission of HIV across the country.

There is also a resurgence in the prevalence of HIV in the states of Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland, Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. In Mizoram the virus has transited to the general population from the core group of PLHIV.

The current prevalence rate in Mizoram is 2.04 percent whereas nationally it is 0.21 percent which means that HIV is 10 times more prevalent in the

general population in Mizoram compared to the rest of the nation.

**COUNTERING STIGMA:** A more worrying concern is stigma. Although HIV has been around for more than 30 years in India, people are still very wary about helping those who have the illness, say NGO leaders.

"Two weeks ago, I came across a case where a person who was HIV positive gave an exam for a bank job and passed. He got his letter and everything was in place. After he went through their medical check-up — he had already told them he was



Dr Kalpana Apte, secretary-general of FPAI

positive — they stopped him from attending their training session," says Yadav. In September 2018, the Union government notified the HIV/AIDS (Prevention and Control) Act, which criminalises discrimination against individuals with HIV and AIDS. So, a law to prevent such injustice does exist.

In fact, the person Yadav was referring to, did attach a copy of this law along with his application. But it was ignored. Violating the law is punishable with a fine and a jail term. An ombudsman appointed by the state government can levy a fine of ₹10,000 initially on the person violating the law and ₹5,000 per day until the violator complies with the law. A violator can be imprisoned for two years or fined ₹100,000 or both.

There is general agreement among organisations that work for people affected by HIV/AIDS that stigma prevents people from seeking help, especially those from the LGBTQ community. Stigma isn't confined to government hospitals. It is a problem at

private hospitals as well.

"Doctors in private hospitals will not treat patients with HIV/AIDS even if they are willing to pay slightly more for services. They will either not see them or ill-treat them. The respect and dignity of HIV/AIDS patients is not ensured," says Dr Apte.

To counter stigma and enforce the law, FPAI has been working with the police and doctors. "In Haryana, particularly in Panchkula, we held meetings with the police commissioner and Station Head Officers (SHOs) in police stations. We need to take this understanding down to constable level so that they understand what being gay or transgender

**'Doctors in private hospitals will not treat patients with HIV/AIDS even if they are willing to pay slightly more for services. They will either not see them or ill-treat them.'**

means. We also work with healthcare providers to ensure services are not stigmatised," says Dr Apte.

NGOs have played an important role in the fight against HIV/AIDS. They were the first to take the battle down to village level, where government programmes and policies did not reach. "The NGO movement in India became more active at the grassroots because they realised that the government's machinery didn't percolate down to the last person. It halted at district-level administration. Sub-districts, blocks, villages and panchayats were largely untouched," says Dr Prasad.

On the upside, it seems likely that India will be able to achieve the 90-90-90 target of 2020 set by UNAIDS, that is, 90 percent of all Indians living with HIV will know that they are HIV positive and need to get started on ART drugs. Ninety percent of people diagnosed with HIV will have access to sustained ART therapy and 90 percent on ART therapy will have viral suppression. ■

## Samita's World

by SAMITA RATHOR





Young people lend a helping hand in the nursery



Sometimes a tractor sank into the soft soil



Mechanisation helped overcome the shortage of labour

PICTURES BY WILLIAM RODRIGUES

**The farmers' club and residents plan to take on a larger area next year. A plan to hire an agency to undertake digital mapping of land is on the cards.**

Government schemes also came to the aid of St Estevam's effort by way of subsidies. Seeds were provided free by ICAR while half the standard cost of ₹2,200 per hour had to be paid for the harvester and ₹250 per hour for tractors instead of ₹500. Finally, for ploughing, 37 paise per sq m and ₹1.5 per sq m for transplanting was paid.

The success of the first year has encouraged the farmers' club and residents to take on a larger area next year. Besides, there are also plans to hire an agency to undertake digital mapping of landownership and go back to the days of old when St Estevam was known for top-quality brinjals and lady fingers.

"Mechanisation and community farming alone can revive paddy cultivation because it brings down the cost by more than half. Besides, our youth team has gained experience and they should be able to do it on their own next year," said Rangel. ■

# Goa villagers turn to paddy to save their land

Derek Almeida  
Panaji

WHEN residents of the island village of St Estevam found that they were going to lose their land to a jetty for loading coal, and almost certainly also to builders, they decided to stop protesting and take decisive action.

Led by the young on the island, they decided that the best strategy would be to put the land to use by cultivating paddy which would provide financial returns and also make acquisition difficult.

In just one season after putting their strategy into operation, they succeeded in bringing 450,000 sq m under cultivation and harvested 65,000 kg of paddy, thereby stopping acquisition of their land.

Landowners on St Estevam had long given up farming. The gram sabha, panchayat and comunidade (an institution for community ownership of land, unique to Goa) had been discussing a revival of paddy cultivation, but there were many hurdles to contend with. Labour was hard to find and returns not high enough to justify investment.

Three factors came together to speed up community action — the coal jetty, builders who had their eye on this green island just 15 km from Panaji and filling up of *khazan* lands (low-lying areas reclaimed centuries ago through construction of sluice gates and bunds).

The Ilhas Verde Farmers' Club was set up with an 18-member executive committee. Ilhas Verde, which means green island, is the name

given to this island by the Portuguese.

The committee was aware of the practical problems associated with cultivation. "We knew that members of the village couldn't till the land," says Ashwin Varela, 21, a young member of the core committee which did most of the legwork. "But we had heard of the work undertaken by Fr George Quadros of Don Bosco at Loutolim in South Goa in mechanised farming and we decided to use him as a service provider."

It proved to be a brilliant decision because Fr George had the necessary experience and machines

to undertake seed germination, transplantation and harvesting.

"In a way, we were outsourcing the back-breaking work," admits Ansyl Gonsalves, 22, another young member of the core committee.

While the effort was guided by Nestor Rangel, an electronics engineer-turned-horticulturist, and Shailendra Alfonso, a retired merchant navy employee, the role of the parish priest, Fr Eusico Pereira, in galvanising the people was crucial to its success.

As the residents got their act together, awareness programmes were also held by the Agriculture Technical Management Agency (ATMA), affiliated to the agriculture department of the state government.

Rangel took up the task of coordinating with ATMA, the zonal agriculture officer, Old Goa, and other government agencies.

But before getting the tractors to plough the land, they first had to identify the landowners and get their permission. Along with another young member, Swizel Gonsalves, the three-member team set about the task. To their good luck, a former parish priest had obtained a survey of the village which contained plot numbers.

Since most land records are available online, they downloaded Forms I and 14 of all plots, put them on an Excel sheet and gave it to ward members of the parish council to identify the landholders.

Accordingly, landowners or heirs were divided into four categories — those willing to cultivate on their own; those willing to cultivate their land



Fr George explaining farming methods to students

**Three factors came together to speed up community action — the coal jetty, builders who eyed their land and filling up of *khazan* lands.**

period, the rain clouds disappeared and, as a result, some areas yielded empty grain shells.

What about the economics of the whole operation? "This year, we broke even," asserted Rangel, who, along with Alfonso, was a major investor in the effort to revive the land. "There are several reasons for this. Being the first time, we were not well-organised and ploughing started too late. De-weeding was an issue and our output should have been 350 gm per square metre. But we got half that amount."

through the club by paying a predetermined sum; those willing to give the club the right to cultivate without paying or expecting returns, and those unwilling to cultivate.

With the help of Fr George, the core group worked out the cost of cultivation at ₹3.5 per sq m which would include seeds, ploughing, transplantation and harvesting. According to Rangel, this is less than half the cost of using manual labour.

The response from villagers was encouraging and accordingly it was decided to undertake cultivation on 500,000 sq m in three of the six *khazan* lands.

It was an ambitious target considering that this was the first time in more than two decades that land lying fallow was being revived for cultivation. "After consultation with old-timers from the village and the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) we decided on two varieties of seeds — Jyoti for the non-saline areas and GRS-1 for the saline areas," said Rangel.

On May 9, the first tractor of the North Goa Mechanised Farming Association led by Dinesh Harmalkar started ploughing the land. "It wasn't easy," recalled Ansyl, "and there were incidents of tractors and transplanters sinking into the soft soil." Also, a large number of wild plants, boundary stones and glass bottles slowed down the process.

In the meantime, Fr George and his team went about preparing seedling trays which were kept in a nursery for about 15 to 20 days until they grew to the proper height for transplanting. After ploughing was undertaken for the second time, transplanting was started and this process was completed by the first week of August, half-way through the monsoon.

"The delay in the transplanting process was on account of Fr George's team's commitments in other villages and the fact that this was our first experiment with cultivation," explained Rangel. The rain gods also intervened, giving the village anxious moments. In September, during the grain forming



## TEACHERS REQUIRED

All Saints' College is a Day cum Residential Girls' School belonging to The Diocese of Agra, Church of North India and affiliated to the Council for Indian School Certificate Examinations up to I.S.C.-12 level invites applications for the following posts.

- Teachers in the Senior Section for classes IX to XII
 

(i) Hospitality Management	(ii) History
(iii) Economics	(iv) Legal Studies

Note: (1). N.T.T. need not apply. Only short listed candidates will be called for the interview. The applicant should have studied in a good English medium school. Candidates should be fluent in spoken and written English. Those with working experience in a reputed English medium school will be given preference.

The candidate should be specifically Post Graduate (in the subject to be taught) with B.Ed. from a recognized university. Salary and perks are matching the best in similar local residential/public schools. Free semi furnished accommodation and ordinary medicine from the college infirmary is provided. On confirmation Gratuity, G.P.F., L.T.A. is provided.

Applications should reach by courier or speed post to "The Principal, All Saints' College, Tallital, Nainital-263002 Uttarakhand", within 15 days from the date of publication.

# Jobs, innovations for disabled

Rwit Ghosh  
New Delhi

IT is all of 19 years but the NCPEDP-Mindtree Helen Keller Awards haven't lost any of their freshness in highlighting the work of individuals, companies and institutions that improve the lives of people with disabilities.

The annual ceremony is always full of enthusiasm and positive energy. This year was no different though it was tinged with sadness being the first after the passing of Javed Abidi, founder of the National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People (NCPEDP).

The chief guest this year was Dr Satyapal Singh, Union minister for human resource development (HRD). He said just one percent of people with

IT sector's contribution in employing people with disabilities. Currently, about one percent of staff in the IT sector are people with disabilities. This is higher than other sectors in India. He urged NASSCOM to innovate affordable technology for those with various disabilities. "With a little innovation every phone can become a hearing aid," he said.

This year, the awards were announced under three different categories.

## ROLE MODEL/PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

**Dawinder Singh** became bedridden at the age of 23 after a spinal cord injury. In 2002, he underwent rehabilitation. Fifteen years later, Dawinder has become a successful entrepreneur and developed an e-commerce platform for exporting gemstones

integration and assimilation into mainstream society. Brar is visually impaired herself.

## ROLE MODELS FOR INCREASING EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

**Aradhana Lal** leads Lemon Tree Hotel's Brand and Communications departments as well as its Sustainability Initiatives. Lemon Tree employs over 500 employees with disabilities. Lal co-leads recruitment of persons with disabilities and new initiatives in the disability space.

**B.S. Nagesh** is the founder-chairman of Retailer's Association of India, and the founder of the Trust for Retailers and Retail Associates of India (TRRAIN). Through TRRAIN's Pankh programme, he has created employment avenues for persons with disabilities in the retail sector.

**Yajuvendra Anil Mahajan** is founder of the Deepstambh Foundation in Jalgaon, a centre for tutoring students for competitive exams. He has trained 541 students with disabilities and of these, 42 have qualified in different competitive exams for jobs in banks, the railways, UPSC and SSC.

## ROLE MODEL COMPANIES / NGOS / INSTITUTIONS

**Dr Reddy's Foundation** works with young people, children, women and people with disabilities across 20 states in India. The foundation's GROW PwD programme focuses on youth with orthopaedic disability and speech or hearing impairment and provides them skills to get employment. Skilling centres have accessible infrastructure and trained professionals including sign language experts. **Squaremeal Foods**, headed by Raja Shekhar Reddy and Shishir Gorle, has a restaurant called Mirchi & Mime in Mumbai which employs persons with speech and hearing

disabilities. Diners communicate through hand gestures. The menu has colourful pictures and diners order by pointing to the food item they want. **The Leprosy Mission Trust India** works with people affected by leprosy. Through their vast set of programmes in 14 hospitals, two clinics, six vocational training centres and five residential care homes for the elderly they have helped young boys and girls affected by leprosy or coming from leprosy-affected families, to develop skills and find employment.

**Trent Hypermarket** is part of the Tata Group. They aim to be role models in the retail industry by not only providing employment to persons with disabilities but also developing training modules to address the needs of their disabled employees in order to help them perform their duties independently.

**WORTH Trust** focuses on providing employment to people with hearing, orthopaedic and intellectual disabilities and those affected by leprosy. They manufacture Braille kits, wheelchairs, walkers, crutches. WORTH Trust is also the world's sole assemblers of the renowned Perkins Brailers, a typewriter for those with disability. ■



Winners of the NCPEDP-Mindtree Helen Keller Awards with Arman Ali, executive director of NCPEDP

disability get to go to school. The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, reserves four percent of seats in higher education institutes for persons with disability. The central government has gone a notch higher and is providing five percent reservation for the disabled in higher education institutes like the IITs and IIMs.

Arman Ali, executive director of NCPEDP, welcomed the move. "If we provide equal opportunities and reasonable accommodation, all jobs are suitable for persons with disabilities," he said. "Yes, it is true that everybody can't do everything. But we know of autistic persons involved in software testing. Understanding the heights of achievement that persons with disabilities can reach requires a mindset change."

"It was refreshing to see a lot of new nominations come from the retail and hospitality sector. We also need to see how the NCPEDP-Mindtree Awards can reach rural areas and recognise entrepreneurs in districts and villages who promote employment of people with disabilities," added Ali.

There is also lack of data on the number of persons with disabilities. Census 2021 would be crucial in filling this gap. Ali was appreciative of the

across the world. He has also started the Spinal Cord Injury Association to identify people with spinal cord injuries and provide them wheelchairs along with counselling support.

**Moses Chowdari Gorrepati** is a Programme Manager (Training and Solutions) at EnAble India in Bengaluru. Along with his team, he builds ecosystems for digital literacy and livelihood options for persons with visual disabilities across India. Through a peer sensitisation module, he has successfully mainstreamed the employment of people with visual disabilities.

**Naveen Ravindranath** developed poor vision at the age of 10. He also has a hearing disability. Ravindranath has been a part of Dell-EMC's Issue Retrieval Cell in Bengaluru for the past two years. Well-known for his quick turnaround time, Ravindranath uses the company's in-house software portal and external applications to keep the company's IT assets up to date.

**Tiffany Brar** founded the Jyothirgamaya Foundation which trains visually disabled people in rural areas in skills so that they can get jobs. It also offers residential training courses to visually handicapped people. The foundation ensures jobs,



## 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.

**SRINIVASAN SERVICES TRUST**  
(CSR Arm of TVS Motor Company)

**TVS MOTOR COMPANY**

Post Box No. 4, Harita, Hosur, Tamil Nadu Pin: 635109

Phone: 04344-276780 Fax: 04344-276878 URL: www.tvsmotor.com

# Teff is here, will *injera* follow?

Shree Padre  
Gadag

FOUR years ago, Dr N.S. Sudhakar, a professor, returned home to Mysore from Eritrea with a packet of teff seeds in his baggage. "This is a wonder cereal," he thought. "We have to grow it in India."

Dr Sudhakar came across teff, now considered a superfood, while teaching in Eritrea. The grain is cultivated mainly in Ethiopia and Eritrea, where it originated. It is a key crop. Flat pancakes called *injera* are made from teff, providing a livelihood to around 6.5 million farmers in Ethiopia. Two-thirds of the daily protein intake of Ethiopians comes from teff.

*Injera* resembles the south Indian *dosa*, except that it is bigger and thicker.

Since Dr Sudhakar was living alone, neighbours would regularly offer him half an *injera*. Dr Sudhakar would share his half-*injera* with another colleague. "If we ate that piece of *injera* at 2 pm with some stir-fried vegetables we wouldn't feel hungry till 8 pm," he recalls. "I turned into an *injera* lover very quickly." His love for *injera* motivated him to study it more closely and he vowed to take this superfood to India.

At first, he says, he didn't really like the taste of teff. It was a bit sour. But when Dr Sudhakar, a fish processing expert, started comparing the nutritive value of foods in Eritrea, *injera* was right on top.

Each half-cup of *injera* has 127 calories, 5 gm of protein, 1 gm of fat, 25 gm of carbs, and nearly 4 gm of fibre. Like banana flour, teff is high in resistant starch, a type of fibre that may help support insulin sensitivity and increase satiety. Teff has caught global attention for being both gluten-free and a complex carbohydrate. No wonder it is now called a superfood.

Dr Sudhakar gave his seeds to some enthusiastic farmers but he didn't hear from them again. He then worked with a Kannada farm magazine to write an in-depth story on teff and inform farmers about this grain.

R.S. Patil, an organic farmer in Gadag, read his article with interest. He procured a 50-gm teff seed packet from the Central Food Technological Research Institute (CFTRI) in 2016 and finally

managed to grow teff on three acres.

Patil is probably the first farmer to grow teff in south India or perhaps in the whole of India on such a scale. Dr Sudhakar was thrilled to hear of his success. "It's a dream come true for me," he says.

For farmers, teff has an added attraction. The grain is also fodder for livestock and parts of it can be used as thatch material for huts. "The teff crop has many farmer-friendly qualities. It grows



An Eritrean woman cooks injera

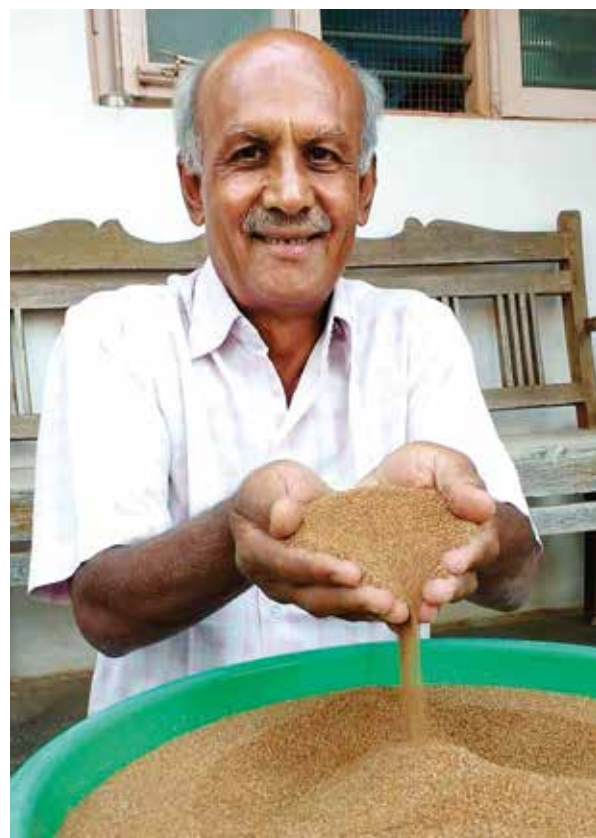


Teff being harvested on Patil's fields in Gadag

without fuss and is very drought-resistant," says Patil.

**THE INDIAN EXPERIENCE:** Patil says the seeds he got from CFTRI were too few so he opted for transplanting and raised saplings, a method that ensures high survival and a good crop. Direct sowing is actually easier for farmers because it requires less labour and expense.

Teff requires around three months to harvest.



R.S. Patil, the first farmer to grow teff

R.S. PATIL

The plants are then tied into small bundles and placed on a tarpaulin sheet. A tractor is made to run over the plants. That's how Patil separated the grain from the hay.

The biggest drawback of teff is that its grains are smaller than *ragi* or sand particles. "So cleaning teff is very labour-intensive and cumbersome. If there is rainfall during the harvest, the grains might fall on the ground and disappear. Even without rain, lodging is common," explains Patil, who has hired a



A team of women cleaning teff at Patil's farm



Dr N.S. Sudhakar

**Teff is now called a superfood. Each half-cup of *injera* has 127 calories, 5 gm of protein, 1 gm of fat, 25 gm of carbs, and nearly 4 gm of fibre.**

team of women to clean the crop.

Another problem is that some weeds look like teff. De-weeding has to be done carefully.

Teff is similar to millets which undergo a complex process of milling by machines. The problem with millets is that there aren't any small milling machines which farmers themselves could use for processing. Here, teff has an advantage. It doesn't require milling. The downside is that teff grains have to be cleaned by hand and that means employing an army of labourers.

Cleaned teff can be boiled and eaten like rice. Patil's family has been experimenting with teff and making several dishes from it — rice, *idli* and *injera*. Everyone in the family likes these preparations. Patil cooked *injera* at the Desi Santhe weekly organic bazaar in Dharwad and a few visiting dignitaries tasted it.

In Ethiopia, teff is soaked and fermented for three days. Sampada, Patil's wife, says the grain ferments faster here since the climate is warmer. "We soak it in the morning, grind it in the evening and make *idli* or *dosa* the next morning," she says. Teff can be a good alternative to wheat. All bakery products made with wheat can be made with teff.

**SCIENTISTS ON TRACK:** After hearing about Patil's success, Sahadeva Yaragoppa, deputy director of agriculture in Gadag, visited his farm. "Teff has the potential to change cropping patterns in drought-prone Gadag district if the state government is interested," he remarks. "Our millets require watering twice. Teff, I hope, can make do

with one irrigation or rain at its crucial stage of crop bearing. The seeds sprout in three days and can be harvested in about three months. We can start growing it from late monsoon to the late *kharif* season. In other words, it can be cultivated almost round the year."

Patil, an experienced farmer, says, "There are certain patches of land which hold water even during rain-scarce years. For teff, this moisture is enough."

Sahadeva's opinion is that the crop will grow nicely in sandy or well-drained red soil. "It would fare well and give better yield and grains of better colour and quality in red soil as compared to black cotton soil in which Patil has grown it," he said. Patil says teff crop will succeed wherever farmers grow onions. "The crop is ideal for organic methods. In drought situations, when farmers can't grow any other crop, teff can be grown," said Sahadeva.

Hay, a byproduct of teff, makes good fodder, which Patil has already started using. He says teff has a good rooting system and can be used to prevent soil erosion. It gives two to three ratoons too. Hay can be used for thatching earthen houses.

"There is no awareness about teff in India," points out Dr Prasanna Reddy, an agricultural scientist who used to work in CFTRI in Mysore. He did some trials with teff. "If awareness is built, more farmers would be keen to grow it." After he left, though, a year ago, further study of this crop stopped.

"Teff can be used in the same way we use *ragi*. We can make *idli*, *upma*, *dosa* and so on. The resistant

starch in teff gets converted into glucose very slowly, making it better than wheat for diabetics. Of course, cleaning the grains after harvesting is a major problem. We, too, had to do it manually. The productivity of this crop is low."

CFTRI, he says, had distributed about 50 kg of teff to scores of farmers for raising seeds. It was the early bird in identifying teff. But with the exception of a farmer in Andhra Pradesh, no one provided any feedback. The viability of teff starts decreasing after one year, according to Dr Reddy.

**SECOND OPINION:** Patil's experience of growing teff corresponds with Nayaz's, a farmer who works on Deejay Farms at Penugonda in Andhra Pradesh. He grew the crop in both the *rabi* and *kharif* seasons last year, procuring seeds from CFTRI.

"Ours is a pretty dry area with 300 to 400 mm rain," he says. "Instead of direct sowing, we resorted to transplanting which gave us better results. One major advantage is that teff doesn't require much attention. We have used only organic manure like cow dung. No pest or diseases attacked the crop."

But when he took teff to sell in the market he couldn't find buyers. No one had heard of it. Subsequently, he sold it in millet festivals and to a millet restaurant called Kaulige Millet Corner in Bengaluru. Disappointed, he has grown teff only on a small area this time.

Patil's advice to farmers is to grow teff for their own consumption. "This will be good for their health instead of consuming food with pesticide residues. The crop requires little attention and it will gain in popularity. Organically grown teff should have good export potential. The government could extend financial support to farmers to grow, process and export teff," he says.

**NUTRITIVE VALUE:** There are two kinds of teff in Eritrea and Ethiopia, brown and white. While the brown variety costs ₹150 per kg, the white is priced at ₹200. It is a staple which people eat every day.

"Eritreans are very hardworking," recalls Dr Sudhakar, "Joining the army is mandatory in their country. People are very well-built. They are guerilla war experts. Their ability to construct roads in difficult hilly regions is unmatched. No other nation can match their physique and energy. This energy they derive from teff."

"Lifestyle diseases like diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease are much less there. People who are over 70 look much younger. Teff has 10 percent of dietary fibre. Those who eat teff don't get heart disease or diseases of the digestive tract."

Keenly interested in nutrition, Dr Sudhakar believes teff could play a role in combating malnutrition among pregnant mothers and children. "It is gluten-free, has important nutrients and minerals that are only available in meat. Fermenting makes it an important cereal."

But farmers will grow teff only if they get a good price. In the international market, teff is priced at \$5-6 for a kg. Patil has a stock of clean grains and flour for those who are interested.

Studies on teff's nutritive value and its suitability as a crop in India could be done. It might turn out to be another life-saver crop for poor farmers in drought-prone areas. ■

Contact: Dr N.S. Sudhakar - 94488 12408; sudhi\_sudhakarans@yahoo.co.in; R.S. Patil - 94480 07354; ecobuyorsell@gmail.com



# Fulfil a wish and win a blessing

**Kavita Charanji**  
New Delhi

SIXTY-seven-year-old Rukmani, a widow, was the picture of misery when she first entered the gates of Mann Ka Tilak old age home at Maidan Garhi near Saket. Her distraught cries filled the air as she pleaded with her son, Ram Prasad, to take her home. But Ram Prasad was helpless. Although Rukmani had three sons and two daughters, he was the only one willing to look after her. One son had usurped her house. The others welcomed her only when she received her meagre pension. Ram Prasad and his mother lived with a relative but when that became difficult, he had no choice but to leave her at the old age home.

It took time for Rukmani Amma, as she is now called, to overcome the trauma of abandonment. But with care and affection she settled down and struck up friendships with four other women in the home.

"I like the food and general environment. All the women here are my friends," Rukmani Amma, who is a little hard of hearing, now says. Once a month she goes with Ram Prasad to collect her pension. She treats Mohammad Junaid, programme coordinator, and Kedar Shah, caretaker of the home, as her sons. "They have found a mother in me," she says with a smile.

Mann Ka Tilak, a private charitable old age home, was set up by Wishes & Blessings, an NGO, on April 25, 2018. "The home is for destitute women who need love, respect and dignity in the last stages of their lives," says Dr Geetanjali Chopra, founder-president. "Wishes & Blessings gets its name from our objective, which is to get the privileged to help others fulfil their wishes and receive blessings in return."

The NGO links donors with beneficiaries. "We started by working with visually impaired children and soon our family grew to include orphanages,



Rukmani (second from left) plays snakes and ladders with her friends



Rita Peter going for a walk



Geetanjali Chopra

old age homes and shelters for the homeless. At present, we work across age, gender, economic and social barriers and address nine pressing issues including education, food, health and happiness," says Chopra.

But managing an old age home is not easy. "The women have to deal with shock and heartbreak. To have their own children leave them in an old age home is the most heart-wrenching thing that could happen to them," says Chopra.

Mann Ka Tilak tries to make its residents comfortable. Mornings begin with *bhajans*. The meals are nutritious. There are timings for rest and medical facilities are provided. Each resident is first given a 'trunk of love' which has inside it a towel, a set of clothes, toiletries and other basics. The women play ludo, watch TV or play with Shah's two children. They are great storytellers and share personal anecdotes of their families and lives.

Rita Peter is happy to talk about her past life, even if she embellishes her story along the way. Her late husband, she says, used to work as a driver for an embassy in Delhi until he died of a heart ailment in 2005. She used to work as a nanny for families in countries like Jordan and Saudi Arabia.

Peter came to the home because, she says, she wanted to live independently. Her family of four sons and one daughter had no time for her. She doesn't want to go home now. "My family does call me but I left home to come here. My heart is not there," she says. Peter complains about her poor hearing and the fact that her family doesn't take her to church on Sundays. They only visit her after they have been to church, she says.

The need for old age homes like Mann Ka Tilak is acute, says Chopra. According to conservative estimates, only 750 old age homes exist in India whereas there is a need for 15,000 homes. More than 50 percent of elders testify to abuse, be it physical or emotional like lack of food, love or sheer neglect, says Chopra. Women, especially, need old age homes because they find it very difficult to fend for themselves. But old men require shelter too and the NGO's next project is an old age home for men, followed gradually by a string of old age homes across the country.

A PhD in international politics from Jawaharlal Nehru University, Chopra looked all set for a career in academics. She had written a book on international peace-keeping and developed expertise in non-traditional security issues, human rights and humanitarian law. For five years she was a fellow at the Centre for Policy Research, a respected think-tank.

In fact, Chopra was caught up in a whirlwind of international conferences and invitations to speak at universities. But something was amiss, she felt. "There was no happiness or satisfaction in all that I did. I guess my heart lay elsewhere," she says.

It was her encounter with visually disabled children that put her on the path to social work. As a 10-year-old she used to go with her grandfather to a school for the visually disabled at Sadiq Nagar to celebrate her birthday.

During one such visit, a tiny girl asked her, "Didi, when is my birthday?" That simple question sparked her quest to make life happier for the children.

A Holi party she organised for visually impaired children some years ago encouraged her further to follow her heart. "These children had never seen colour before but there was unadulterated joy all around. I had never felt better in my life and told myself that this is what I wanted to do," reminisces Chopra.

Four years later, Wishes & Blessings has projects in orphanages, shelters for the homeless and old age homes as well. A new programme the NGO has started is called Bespoke. It customises short-term projects for vulnerable people. Donors can request projects that they want to fund. ■

PICTURES BY SHREY GUPTA



## Harvesting water. Harnessing futures.

In a perfect world, children lead happy, carefree childhoods. They spend their days learning in school, while their free time is spent at play with friends. However, for the children of Nuh in Haryana, this is but a distant dream. The culprit - a severe shortage of potable water.

While most of us cannot even begin to imagine how crippling this can be; the residents of Nuh suffer the consequences every day. Over-salinated water and a lack of safe and assured water supply has created a trail of chronic issues that impact the health and well being of school children. This lack of potable water has affected the attendance rate at schools, with children going back home to refill their water bottles. More often than not, they never make it back to school.

DCB Bank stepped in to support an innovative plan using rooftop rainwater harvesting and bio-sand filters in three schools, which resulted in a number of positive changes. Access to drinking water has led to a decrease in absenteeism from schools. Mid-day meals are also cooked using this water, ensuring the children are healthier and happier.

With the capacity to harvest 3,00,000 litres of potable water a year, Nuh now looks to a hopeful future. One where children are free to learn and lead a normal, happy and healthy childhood.

### DCB Bank Rooftop Rainwater Harvesting Project:

- Set up at 3 schools in Nuh, Haryana
- Four 25,000 litre tanks harvest 3,00,000 litres of rainwater a year
- Innovative, electricity-free bio-sand filter eliminates contaminants
- Nuh's children now have access to clean potable water, daily
- Over 1,000 futures positively impacted



For more information, suggestions and feedback please email [dcb-social@dcbbank.com](mailto:dcb-social@dcbbank.com)

Get Social with us!



### DCB 24-Hour Customer Care

Call Toll Free: 1800 209 5363 ■ 1800 123 5363

Email: [customer-care@dcbbank.com](mailto:customer-care@dcbbank.com)

Web: [www.dcbbank.com](http://www.dcbbank.com)

# DCB BANK

Directors from India's northeastern states have gone back to basics to make impactful films with memorable stories that give their region a voice

# CINEMA'S ROCKSTARS

Saibal Chatterjee  
New Delhi/Panaji

OVER the past five to six years, Indian cinema has been increasingly enriched by narrative features and documentaries coming out of Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Sikkim and Mizoram. It is still only a trickle, but it is a trickle that is slowly but steadily gathering momentum.

It is never easy being an uncompromisingly independent filmmaker anywhere in India. But nowhere is it more difficult than in the Northeast. Several of the states there have no filmmaking facilities or movie screens. What they do have, however, are unique cultures, great stories and distinctive voices.

Several exciting new directors are driving this spurt in filmmaking activity that has not only attracted the attention of festival curators worldwide but

has also been crowned with accolades and awards at the national and international levels. Among them are Manipur's Haobam Paban Kumar, Meghalaya's Pradip Kurbah, Wanphrang Diengdoh and Dominic Sangma, Arunachal Pradesh's Sange Dorjee Thongdok, Nagaland's Tiakumzuk Aier, Sikkim's Tribeny Rai and Assam's Bhaskar Hazarika and Jaicheng Jai Dohutia. While a few of these award-winning practitioners have formal training from the Satyajit Ray Film and Television Institute (SRFTI) in Kolkata, the others are entirely self-taught.

What binds these filmmakers together isn't just the geographical location that they belong to, but also the fact that they have all inevitably come up the hard way. They still have to fight fierce battles to get their projects off the ground.

"Raising money for independent films in languages that have small markets is very tough," says Thongdok, who has made two feted indigenous feature films in his native Sherdukpen, a dialect that does not have a written script. No wonder these filmmakers cherish the openings that they have got and lose no opportunity to make the most of them. A bunch of them were at this year's NFDC Film Bazaar in Goa held over November 20-24, to explore co-production avenues, seek tips from mentors and discuss distribution deals with the aim of building on the foundation that has been created.

Hazarika's second film, *Aamis* (Ravening), has won the 2018 Film Bazaar Recommends' Facebook Award, while Guwahati-based debutant Jadab Mahanta's *Rukuni Koina* (The Holy Bride) won the Film Bazaar Work-in-



Rima Das

**The success of Rima Das' film on a village girl's dreams of starting a band has put the spotlight on life in the Northeast.**



*Village Rockstars* captures the ups and downs of rural life in Assam



*Bulbul Can Sing* is Rima Das' most recent film

Progress Post-Production Award, which entitles the film to free digital intermediate in Prasad Labs and trailer promotions worth \$3,000 in 300 movie halls across India.

Hazarika's film, a radical psychological drama woven around the theme of cannibalism, is ready for distribution and will now benefit from free publicity on Facebook. The director has described *Aamis* as "a love story that begins in brightness but ends in darkness". Hazarika is looking for a mid-2019 theatrical release.

**SKILL AND TECHNIQUE:** Of course, in the current scenario, Rima Das is the first name that springs to mind when talk veers round to the emerging



*Onaatah*, directed by Pradip Kurbah, explores the trauma of rape



*Loktak Lairembee*, directed by Haobam Paban Kumar, is about a fisherman who lives with the threat of being evicted from his fragile hut on a river

filmmakers from the Northeast. With *Village Rockstars*, she has established herself in the forefront of the new flagbearers of independent cinema in India. The first Assamese film in 29 years (Jahnu Barua's *Halodhia Choraye Baodhan Khai* won in 1988) to bag the National Award for Best Feature, *Village Rockstars* is also the first-ever film from the Northeast to be officially chosen to represent the world's largest movie-producing nation at the Oscar Academy Awards.

The critical success of the independent film — it has been produced, written, directed, shot and edited by Das — has turned the spotlight back on a part of the country that, for about a decade, seemed to have dropped off the national cinema radar. *Village Rockstars*, an insightful, refreshingly intimate and deeply affecting portrait of an impoverished 10-year-old village girl who dreams of buying a guitar and forming a band, has definitely changed the way the rest of India perceives cinema from the Northeast.

The seeds of *Village Rockstars* were sown when Das was shooting her debut film, *Antardrishti* (Man with the Binoculars) in her village in Assam. "I saw this amazing group of children at a local musical gathering who were playing with fake instruments," she recalls. "This sparked an idea and I approached them and suggested that we make a film together. They responded with enthusiasm and *Village Rockstars* materialised." But it wasn't as easy as it sounds: the film took "150 days of shooting over a period of four years".



Pradip Kurbah

**The Northeast has unique cultures and great stories that make up for the lack of filmmaking facilities.**



Haobam Paban Kumar

**What binds filmmakers from this region together is that they have come up the hard way.**

*Village Rockstars* eschews the tropes of conventional Indian movie melodrama and instead opts for a low-key tone to capture the ups and downs of rural life in Assam that is forever at the mercy of the elements. But it isn't just natural calamities that Dhunu (the film's heroine played by village girl Bhanita Das) has to contend with. She also has to negotiate societal pressures on account of her gender.

Rima Das has followed *Village Rockstars* up with *Bulbul Can Sing*, another film set in her neck of the woods. Like *Village Rockstars*, *Bulbul Can Sing*, about an adolescent girl up against rural orthodoxies as she tries to express her innermost yearnings, premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival before winning the Golden Gateway award at the MAMI Mumbai Film Festival. This was Das' second MAMI triumph in succession. *Village Rockstars* had bagged the same trophy in 2017. Manipuri debutant Haobam Paban Kumar's *Loktak Lairembee* (Lady of the Lake) won the Golden Gateway in 2016. So, for three years running, the Northeast has had an unprecedented stranglehold on the Mumbai Film Festival's top prize.

But did Rima Das and *Village Rockstars* emerge from nowhere at all? While it is true that she and other filmmakers of her ilk in the Northeast haven't received any formal backing from government outfits or production banners, a handful of filmmakers from the region had been chipping away at the stumbling blocks for a few years before Das burst on the scene in 2017. Given the manner in

which Das made her film singlehandedly in her own village with a cast of local children and other non-actors, one might be inclined to infer that she gave shape to her vision in a vacuum. She did not. Apart from being influenced by world cinema masterpieces that she saw while waiting for acting and modelling assignments to come her way in Mumbai, she probably also drew inspiration from the independent films that were being made in the Northeast earlier in the decade.



Sange Dorjee Thongdok

She would definitely have seen — or at least heard of — Thongdok's *Crossing Bridges*, Arunachal's first indigenous production, which was screened at the 2013 Mumbai Film Festival. One of the first films in the current cycle of critically acclaimed Northeastern features, *Crossing Bridges*, which narrates the semi-autobiographical story of a retrenched web designer who returns to his birthplace after an eight-year gap and reconnects with his own people and culture, is now available on Amazon Prime.

For his first film, Thongdok had to dig into his own savings. "I simply decided to make a film and not worry about the results," says the Delhi University and SRFTI alumnus. That leap required enormous gumption. Arunachal Pradesh had virtually no cinema history or screens at that point. Nor did the state have any actors. *Sonam*, a Monpa-language film, was made in 2006, but the director was Assamese, Ahsan Muzid. *Crossing Bridges* was the first indigenous film from Arunachal Pradesh. Things have begun to change since. "A couple of screens have come up in Itanagar in the past year," reveals Thongdok.

Mumbai-based JAR Pictures came on board for his second film, *River Song*, also in Sherdukpen, a dialect spoken by a few thousand people of West Kameng district. Thongdok was in the Co-Production Market of the NFDC Film Bazaar with a video pitch for his third film, *Lonak* — The Dark Year. "*Lonak*," he reveals, "will be in a more commercial space. I will make the film in Hindi because I want to reach a wider audience. It will be set wholly in Arunachal Pradesh. I believe cinema can transcend boundaries of culture and language with ease."

In a scene in *Crossing Bridges*, the protagonist, now a teacher in a village school, reads a passage about Holi from a Hindi textbook. He tells his students that Arunachal Pradesh, too, has a similar festival called Kro Chekor. One girl asks why this fact isn't mentioned in the book. The teacher replies: "Because the outside world does not know us." It is exactly this lack of knowledge that Thongdok wants to put an end to.

Coming from a part of the world that until about a decade ago had no telephones or electricity, his sense of urgency is understandable. "If we do not tell our own stories, who will?" This is why, adds the writer-director, "it is important to live with your own people to tell their stories." There is, of course, no dearth of stories there.

*Crossing Bridges* was filmed in and around Thongdok's native village, Shergaon. "The film is inspired by my own experiences," he says. "The return to my village was quite a journey of rediscovery. I took note of everything that I felt and saw after being away for a long time."

Another SRFTI graduate, Meghalaya's Dominic Sangma, a few years Thongdok's junior, has opted for an even more personal chapter from his life as the basis of his Garo-language debut film, *Ma'Ama* (Moan), an Indian-Chinese co-production that premiered in the International Competition of the Mumbai Film Festival this year. With a cast of actors drawn from his immediate family, including his father, elder brother and stepmother, the film probes the emotions of an octogenarian villager who has waited every day of the past 30 years to reunite with his dead wife.

In this languid, pensive meta-narrative filmed in two schedules over 12 days, the old man's filmmaker-son offers to document his 'search' for his lost soulmate. "Getting my father to talk about those painful memories took a lot of time. My eldest brother walked out of the shoot during the first schedule. I had to convince him to return for the next schedule," says Sangma. "I have no



Crossing Bridges was the first indigenous film from Arunachal Pradesh

**'If we do not tell our own stories, who will?' This is why, says Thongdok, 'it is important to live with your own people to tell their stories.' There is, of course, no dearth of stories there.**

memories of my mother. My imagination and the reality differed. *Ma'Ama* is my attempt to get a better sense of who she was."

**PERSONAL STORIES, FOLK TALES:** Personal, culture-specific tales define independent cinema in the Northeast. In a span of a year between 2015 and 2016, the region delivered a quartet of remarkable films: two from Assam — Hazarika's *Kothanodi* (The River of Fables, 2015) and Jaicheng Jai Dohutia's *Haanduk* (The Hidden Corner, 2016) — and one each from Manipur (Haobam Paban Kumar's *Loktak Lairembee*) and Meghalaya (Pradip Kurbah's *Onaatah*). All these films made waves at international festivals or won National Awards, confirming the advent of a new breed of Northeastern filmmakers capable of capturing boundary-pushing cinematic idioms that are at a distance from the conventional storytelling methods favoured by Assamese filmmakers not just of an earlier generation but also by contemporary directors.

Hazarika's crowd-funded debut film, *Kothanodi*, which played at festivals in Busan, London and Los Angeles, puts a grim, grisly spin on folk tales that Assamese children have grown up with for over a century. It adapts four stories that serve to reveal facets of motherhood in ways that are fantastical, macabre and disturbing. An evil stepmother plots to kill her daughter when the girl's merchant father is away, a greedy woman marries her daughter to a python in the hope of becoming richer than she already is, another woman gives birth to a vegetable and is banished from her village, and a fourth woman resolves to save her newborn from being buried alive.

Hazarika, a history graduate from St Stephen's College, Delhi, who did his master's in film and drama from the University of Reading in the UK, modifies these traditional stories, changes their happy endings and offers a dark reimagining of the impulses of women faced with mentally and emotionally unsettling situations. The horror elements in *Kothanodi* do not stem from a force outside the lives of the characters, but from within their everyday existence, a narrative strategy that completely turns on its head the notion of safety in familiarity.

Dohutia, unlike Hazarika, did not go to any film school and made *Haanduk* entirely on his own steam, but his Moran-language debut feature also represents a marked departure from conventional modes of expression. It sees insurgency through the eyes of a mother who loses her son, a young man who joined a militant outfit. The boy's bullet-ridden body arrives home. The mother performs the last rites only to be told that the body is probably not her son's.

*Haanduk* took eight years to fructify, but the film was shot in 19 days once all the money that Dohutia needed — it came from his own savings and contributions from friends and family — was in place. That film's study of the



Haanduk sees insurgency through the eyes of a mother who loses her son



Ma'Ama's cast included members of Sangma's own family



Dominic Sangma

impact of violence on a remote tribal community is marked by a deep concern for the erosion of mankind's sensitivity. At a screening of the film in New Delhi last year, Dohutia had said: "We have seen so much development in terms of science and technology, but not much in terms of humanity. We are yet to reach a point where humanity would be regarded as our biggest concern."

Leading the charge of this new Northeast cinema is Imphal-based Haobam Paban Kumar. His feature debut, *Loktak Lairembee* (Lady of the Lake), made it to the Forum section of the 2017 Berlin Film Festival, the first Manipuri feature-length entry at a major international festival since Aribam Syam Sarm's *Ishanou* was screened in Cannes in 1991. *Loktak Lairembee* is about a young fisherman who lives with the constant threat of being evicted from his hut on a floating biomass in the river. One day he finds a gun and his life changes forever — it gives him an air of confidence bordering on arrogance. Paban Kumar is an alumnus of SRFTI, an institute he went to after assisting Syam Sarma for six years. The apprenticeship under a master and the training at the Kolkata institute have shaped his craftsmanship.

Pradip Kurbah, a two-time National Award winner, carries the mantle of an 'elder' statesman in Meghalaya's independent cinema space, having already made three narrative features, one of which, *Iewduh*, is currently receiving finishing touches. The new film is set in the eponymous market in Shillong and tells everyday stories about ordinary people whose lives are intertwined with the space. "*Iewduh* has been filmed in actual locations with a mix of professional



Jaicheng Jai Dohutia

actors and real people," says Kurbah. "The principal characters are all drawn from reality."

Among the characters who people *Iewduh* is a young man who sits outside a public toilet and collects cash from users of the facility and an old man afflicted by Alzheimer's who has been abandoned in the market by his son

and daughter-in-law. The film has been funded by a leading Northeastern film distributor, Shankar Lall Goenka.

Kurbah's previous directorial venture, *Onaatah*, which explored the trauma of rape through the story of a nurse assaulted in a desolate stretch of Shillong, not only fetched Kurbah a National Award, it is now also on Netflix, the first film from the Northeast to stream on the platform. The film has been remade in Marathi under veteran Bollywood actor-director Satish Kaushik's production banner.

A Hindi version of *Onaatah* is also in the works. In the words of Kaushik: "I was blown away by the power of simplicity that the *Onaatah* director brings to bear upon a sensitive theme. I instantly felt that the film should be remade for a pan-India audience."

In Meghalaya, *Onaatah* ran for five weeks on a single screen until Salman Khan starrer *Sultan* came along and dislodged it. "I then travelled with the film for four months across the villages of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills and showed it to as many people as I could," says Kurbah, whose narrative feature debut was *RI: Homeland of Uncertainty* (2013).

**NO CINEMA HALLS:** Rima Das herself had given notice of her strikingly unassuming and highly effective filmmaking style with her very first film, *Antardrishti*. It tells the story of a retired geography teacher in a small Assam village whose life is thrown into turmoil when his musician-son gifts him a pair of binoculars.

Although the film garnered positive critical notices, it was difficult finding takers for it in the exhibition circuit. That is when Das decided to go totally independent and create a new orbit for herself.

Indeed, distribution is the key challenge facing filmmakers in the Northeast. While *Village Rockstars* benefitted commercially from its nomination to the Oscars, other films aren't so lucky. Says Mizo documentary filmmaker Napoleon R.Z. Thanga, who led a small delegation of filmmakers and actors from his state to the 49th International Film Festival of India in Goa: "There are no cinema halls in Mizoram, so we have to rely on community-based commercial screenings. This means that the filmmaker himself has to double as a distributor and take the film around personally to prevent it from being pirated."

Thongdok believes that it isn't enough for independent films to be on streaming platforms. "Only a minuscule percentage of people watch independent films online. You've got to take your film to the villages and small towns in order to reach the people it is meant for," he says.

The fact that these filmmakers aren't giving up is evident in the new projects that have been completed or are in the pipeline. Anupam Kaushik Borah, trained at the National School of Drama, has made *Bornodi Bhotiai* (In Love, By the River), set on the island of Majuli where he grew up. Musician-filmmaker Wanphrang Diengdoh's Shillong-set Khasi film *Lorni* — The Flaneur, featuring Adil Hussain in the lead role of a man who aspires to be a detective, is in post-production.

Both Dohutia and Sangma have new projects on the anvil. The two films, the former's *Hangdan* and the latter's *Bichal Sal* (Rapture), were in the Co-Production Market of the NFDC Film Bazaar earlier this month. And with Kurbah having completed his third film and Thongdok in the process of setting up his, there is much for cineastes to look forward to from the Northeast. ■



UMESH ANAND

Sourav Roy: "With the tribal communities in Jharkhand and now in Odisha, we have a deep and meaningful relationship"

## 'Development is our target' Tata Steel's Sourav Roy on going beyond CSR

Civil Society News  
Jamshedpur

IT is five years since Jamshedpur began hosting Samvaad, an event at which tribal people from India and from across the world get to talk to one another and share their stories and concerns.

A celebration of cultural identities, there is song and dance and showcasing of cuisines. Traditional attire is worn with pride and is colourfully in evidence.

Samvaad means discourse. The idea is to give tribal people a space in which to speak about themselves and be better understood. They come from different states in India and from other countries as well, reaching out to each other and the world at large with messages of hope and despair.

Samvaad is part of Tata Steel's corporate social responsibility (CSR) efforts. What value does a

steelmaker see in holding such a large and freefalling event? To find out, *Civil Society* spoke to Sourav Roy, head of CSR, at the fifth Samvaad held this November.

**Samvaad is huge. How do you pull it all together?** This year we have about 1,700 tribal men and women who have joined us here in Jamshedpur from 24 states in India and 13 countries. The scale has grown over the past five years since we started Samvaad. There were 1,400 people last year.

**It's a huge number of people.**

It is, it is. In and around our areas of operations, like Jharkhand and Odisha, we generally have a very deep connect with the Adivasi population. It is a legacy that's not just from the last three or four years.

The way Biren (Bhuta, his predecessor) and the team conceptualised it, Samvaad is an honest space

to celebrate tribalism and, at some point, what the tribal perspective on development might be.

The one thing that we've taken care of over the past several years is not to burden Samvaad beyond a point. There's a pace at which a platform like this needs to grow. We haven't found too many parallels to what we're trying to do, so there's really very little to learn from. We are happy with whatever pace it is growing at.

**With deep connections with tribal people?**

With the tribal communities in Jharkhand and now in Odisha it has been a deep and meaningful relationship. We know the tribal leaders. We've been working in these areas for a long time. We have been known for a particular ethos. It was with a fair amount of trust that we started out when it came to Samvaad.

If you go back to when we were starting this, many people didn't know what this platform was

about. Was it going to be another *mela*? Was it going to be something more than that? But they still chose to join. It helped to have this 'starting quorum', if you will.

The second thing is the work we have been doing with tribal communities. We had been working on languages. We have been running tribal language classes which are deeply embedded in communities. We have been looking at preserving tribal heritage — musical instruments and how we could make sure the lineage continues.

While this has reinforced our relationships with communities, it has exposed us to a new set of understandings that has taken us deeper into identity and culture. It has made us realise that there's something here that we should grasp.

The way these things have been done is very evolved, if I may say so. So when we do language classes, the idea is not just to go somewhere, build a room, put up a white board and run a class.

We do it when there is an ask from the community. The classes are delivered by members from within that community. All that we do is give a small honorarium. There is significant engagement with the community on developing course material. Local intellectuals get together to create courses.

The ownership from within the community has been very high and I think that significantly expanded the regional core platform that we had. It also made us realise that language and identity are a notch above political boundaries.

Somewhere we started looking at the tribal discourse across India, outside Jharkhand, outside Odisha, with the realisation that tribal kinship patterns are not guided by political boundaries. There are certain locations here where 45,000 people from a particular tribe across all states congregate on a particular day. How does that happen?

You can say that the Santhals are the largest tribe in Jharkhand by population, but you can't call them a Jharkhandi tribe. They're all over, they're in Odisha, in Bangladesh, in West Bengal....

There may also be commonalities in the problems that tribal populations face. It is very important to first shine a light on the fact that they're not alone with their problems. It is a big reason why people come to Samvaad.

For instance, a genuine problem which we're now grappling with in our Thousand Schools programme in Odisha is, how do you use a tribal language for educating children? It can't be English to Hindi and then Hindi to Ho. There has to be a direct translation. The same problem exists in north Karnataka and west Rajasthan.

So when a lot of these people come together and find they are grappling with the same problems, there is an 'Aha!' moment. That's another reason why people have been drawn to Samvaad.

We also started regional Samvaads in 2016 because we realised not everyone can come to

Jamshedpur. We started taking these one-and-a-half-day programmes to different parts of the country. We do four to six in a year. This year we did Dimapur, Madurai, Gajapati, Udaipur, Ranchi and Bhubaneswar. And a lot of people started coming there. So they started seeing value in one-and-a-half days of discussions and that's how the network expanded.

The other thing we did was that we started a tribal leaders' programme two years ago. About 180 tribal leaders from more than 20 states have taken part in a one-week leadership programme with us in Panchgani.

**What is the leadership programme trying to achieve?**

We help bright sparks who have the potential to be changemakers realise their potential. Remember, it is not our intention to make Samvaad a Tata Steel platform. To that extent we think it is important that we help a new leadership emerge.



Samvaad is a celebration of cultural identities

**'We have been running tribal language classes which are deeply embedded in communities. We have been looking at preserving tribal heritage.'**

We said, let's not put any boundary conditions on leadership. Let's look at people who may have tried something outlandish or have a fantastic idea and may have succeeded or have a fantastic idea and may have failed. There is a rigorous selection process. Every year there are about 350 to 400 applications out of which 95 to 100 are taken to Panchgani.

What we focus on is the base of the pyramid. How do you look at self-governance? How do you discipline yourself? How do you manage conflict and take decisions? We introduce them to people who have a world view or have expertise that may be useful to them. It could be on handling media and interpreting media in today's world.

**The whole event is about coming together for social change. How does this play out? People come to Samvaad and go back to their different realities.**

About a quarter or 25 percent of the people at this

Samvaad are repeat attendees. How social change comes about is the start of a conversation.

**It is five years, right? So let's say in five years there would be something you could map.**

Almost without exception, they would not have been on a platform like this where their voices are heard. So that's the first step. There's some outstanding work that's happening in tribal India. But it doesn't get the platform to express itself unless it's a political channel or it's a government-sponsored channel or a media interview. But what if you are not a celebrity or living in a metro?

At Samvaad, you come here, share your story and there are 1,000 people around you who clap. People who've joined us shared their struggles and in an amphitheatre full of people you could literally feel the empathy and the strength that they derived from that. Now the same person goes back and becomes the convener of a state-level forum on an issue.

**But you know, it functions at two or three levels. One, of course, is the bonding and the energy it multiplies but you've set out to attack a much deeper problem. The problem of social change and the tribal.**

I don't think we've set out to tackle social change as a problem. Even this year you'll notice the emphasis is on coming together, not defining what social change is. I think the emphasis of Samvaad as a platform is to maintain neutrality and discover and understand what is relevant to tribal India today.

**So to narrow it down a bit, when people come and go back to their own multiple realities, do you see them doing things differently? Asserting themselves?**

Yes. A lot of them have started organising similar events themselves. In Maharashtra, for instance, people went back and organised Samvaads there. They felt that just the power of bringing communities together helped them start the dialogue process. Similar events, similar dialogues have been set up in different places.

People go back from Samvaad with confidence and a greater capacity for doing something tangible and meaningful in social change.

There are also impacts that we haven't thought of. For instance, when a lot of NGOs were responding to the Kerala floods, the first points of contact were all our tribal leaders in Wayanad who had attended Samvaad.

**It's a CSR activity. Companies tend to want to get something tangible out of their CSR. How does it play out for Tata Steel?**

I'll answer in two parts. One is the CSR piece. The clichéd two percent regime doesn't really mean anything to us in terms of a mathematical calculation. Our model of CSR goes beyond Schedule 7. If you look at how we, as a company, approach CSR, our work in the social space, or CSR and sustainability, it is actually one of the strategic

Continued on page 24

*Continued from page 23*

objectives that the company has set out. At its core there was always board oversight on this and a mandated committee. Even now, all the conversations happen with the managing director and all of them. It's an intrinsic part of our identity as a company.

We have been a CSR implementing company for a long while. We have a very large team that works on development issues. The target that we set ourselves isn't to be the best in the CSR space but the best in the development space. It's a struggle at all times, but that's what we want to be.

With regard to Samvaad specifically, let's go back to the question of who exactly is a leader in CSR. It is something that I keep getting asked in various forums and I don't have an answer. Maybe it's best explained as four or five attributes a CSR leader should have. Spending in itself shouldn't be the criterion, right? It has to be a consistent commitment of resources because most development challenges are long-term challenges. You can't throw short-term money behind long-term challenges.

Second, what kind of talent do you value in your CSR team? Is it really run as some other function of your company or do you actually put your money where the problem is and assign the right talent.

Third would probably be your ability to allocate experimental capital to development. If you're not doing that you're not breaking boundaries, if you're not breaking boundaries then you're not a leading name in CSR or development, for that matter.

The fourth is, what is the quality of the relationship you have with your communities and is it truly a two-way street? Samvaad to me falls somewhere in the last two. It is clearly an experiment, but at the end of the day we're doing this as a company for a 110-year-old relationship we have with tribal communities.

Over the past 10 years, the world has changed at a frighteningly higher pace than in the previous 10 years. How can we truly, hand on our hearts, say that we have also continued to understand what development means for tribal communities. Samvaad really helps us understand that.

**As a large steel producer in the region for a very long time, would you say that the transformations that have happened, economic and social, all of which Samvaad tries to achieve, have been adequate?**

I personally believe that our relationship with communities is of a high order. I think we've made a fair amount of impact and created some significant change: not just through our CSR programmes but through employment. The challenge now is to transform these relationships as we transform as a company and become more efficient, more lean, new technology comes in and all of that.

We unequivocally would love to have as many of our employees as possible from the tribal communities, but we can't keep hiring plumbers and fitters and tractor drivers. It's not going to work. That's the dilemma.

The point of Samvaad is not to create economic impact in the areas around us. It has more to do with tribal identity and culture, and to make sure that these communities have a voice in the overall policy space. ■

# Donkey's milk great for soap and more

## Start-up sets out to improve image of beast of burden

**Kavita Charanji**  
New Delhi

**W**ASIM has been earning from his donkeys for years by putting them out to work at construction sites and getting ₹300 to ₹350 a day. But now he has found that he can sell donkey milk for ₹2,000 a litre — a veritable windfall, considering that a female donkey yields 500 to 700 ml of milk a day and Wasim and his brothers together own 15 donkeys.

Organiko, a start-up, buys donkey milk to make soap which sells at ₹499 for a 100-gm cake and is supposed to possess several cosmetic and therapeutic benefits. The enterprise was founded in August 2017 and it is still early days for its branded soap. But 500 cakes have sold easily and the anticipation is that the demand will be big.

At 4.30 am team members of Organiko reach Dasna village, 11 km from Ghaziabad, to collect milk from Wasim. It is transported to their office-cum-production unit at Loni, also in Ghaziabad district, and made into Organiko branded donkey milk soap.

Organiko pays Wasim ₹2,000 on the spot for a litre of donkey's milk collected on alternate days. Collecting the milk every day would mean baby donkeys would lose out.

As a socially driven enterprise, it is important to Organiko to change the status of the donkey, an exploited and neglected beast of burden, and also provide a robust income to extremely poor nomadic communities who own donkeys.

The additional income has improved living standards for Wasim's 12-member joint family. "The children go to school. We have bought five more donkeys with our earnings. We have improved the organic feed of our animals and take better care of them. Earlier, we regarded donkeys as a burden though they did back-breaking work at construction sites. They were let loose to wander around in search of food in the colony or fields but now they



Pooja Kaul: 'We want to create stable livelihoods for donkey owners'



Donkey soap sells under the Organiko brand

are seldom out of our sight. Life is good," says Wasim with a smile.

The soap has anti-aging properties, vitamins and minerals. It moisturises and alleviates skin ailments like eczema, psoriasis and acne, and protects against bacterial infections.

The soap is wholly organic and comes in two variants, Donkey Milk Natural Ingredients and Donkey Milk Charcoal & Honey. Each cake is packaged attractively in areca nut leaves procured from a Self-Help Group (SHG) in Chennai.

"The motive behind Organiko is to create stable livelihoods for donkey owners by using their own, untapped resource of donkey's milk," says Pooja Kaul, the young founder of Organiko who is partnered by Rishabh Yash Tomar.

Both are postgraduates in social innovations and entrepreneurship from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) School of Rural Development in Tuljapur in Osmanabad district of Maharashtra.

Wasim would like Organiko to buy the milk every day. But the new venture will only buy 150 to 200 ml per donkey and that too on alternate days so

that young donkeys aren't deprived of their nutritional needs.

"If we deviate from this humane principle the donkey mothers and their babies will suffer. We do not want them to go the way of cows and buffaloes that are milked unnaturally. To get donkey owners like Wasim to understand this is an enormous challenge," says Kaul.

How did Kaul think up an idea that combines social purpose with profit? She says she has always been interested in the dairy sector. Her brother told her about a company in Switzerland that ran a donkey dairy farm and sold donkey's milk directly to consumers.

Kaul and Tomar began testing the waters. In 2016, as part of the TISS curriculum, they began a pilot project to check out the feasibility of starting a donkey dairy business in Solapur, Maharashtra.

A baseline survey of donkeys and their owners in Solapur, which is 50 km from the Tuljapur TISS campus, was undertaken. Kaul found that the donkey owners were mainly from denotified nomadic communities. Extremely poor and illiterate, they toiled, along with their donkeys, for 12 to 14 hours in Solapur's numerous brick kilns or at construction sites. They earned just ₹150 to ₹300 per day for back-breaking work.

The donkey owners were seasonally employed. "They would earn anything from ₹50,000 to ₹1 lakh for five to six months and then live on that money for the rest of the year," says Kaul.

Since they were nomads, constantly in search of work, their children's education would be

continuously disrupted. So the children would remain illiterate and end up doing the same unsecured work their parents did.

The condition of their donkeys was even worse. When their owners were jobless, the donkeys were abandoned. They were sometimes branded with a hot iron so that their owners could identify them when they got work. The orphaned donkeys, left to fend for themselves, were often bitten by stray dogs or killed in road accidents.

As a test case, Kaul and Tomar decided to buy donkey milk from 14 donkey owners and sell it in the market. To their surprise, the impoverished donkey owners refused, citing ancient taboos. Some believed that Kaul and Tomar would give them money and then practise black magic with donkey milk. Their donkeys would die as a result, they feared.

Kaul and Tomar had to reason with them. For days on end they sat down with the community and explained the benefits of selling donkey milk.

The donkey owners didn't know that their much maligned animals could be a rich resource. In the course of their research, Kaul and Tomar found that donkey milk was consumed in a big way in Europe. Closer home, in South India people drank it. At ₹50 to ₹100 for a spoonful, the young researchers realised donkey milk could sell for ₹2,000 a litre.

They found that donkey milk is closest to human breast milk in terms of nutritional value. It contains less total fat than cow's milk. Donkey milk also has anti-inflammatory qualities that could boost immunity and keep skin problems like eczema, acne and psoriasis in control. The milk is said to prevent artery hardening.

The donkey owners were shown videos and YouTube presentations to convince them. "It is all a question of communication skills," says Kaul. A non-profit called Donkey Sanctuary with its headquarters in the UK helped them with their outreach.

Once donkey owners agreed to sell milk, Kaul and Tomar faced another hitch — they didn't have

the funds to buy the milk and bring it to the market.

So they went back to their research. They discovered that some European companies in the donkey milk cosmetics business were flourishing. Their products tapped the premium segment and were picked up in a big way by consumers.

Kaul and Tomar decided to try their hand at soap-making. Kaul had already dabbled in making soap and later honed her skills at a workshop in Mumbai. By 4 am they would go off to Solapur, buy donkey's milk from the community, take it back to a rented room in Tuljapur and start making soap.

"The best part of our intervention is that donkey owners who used to abandon their donkeys after making them work for four or five months, now shelter and feed them," says Kaul. However the status of the male donkey is still unclear. Kaul says that Organiko has wider impact since entire families benefit from the project. "It is a great achievement for a social start-up," says Kaul, "even though it may take time to grow volumes."

She has received enquiries from investors who urge her to set up a donkey farm. But Kaul is keen to follow in the footsteps of Amul and create a cooperative of donkey milk farmers.

The market for Organiko soaps is picking up. Available at events and festivals like the recent Women of India National Organic Festival 2018 in Delhi, the soaps can also be bought online on the Organiko website and The Better India Shop portal in the livelihood category. Organiko now plans to launch two new products — an anti-aging face wash and a cream.

The Organiko project is mentored by the Atal Incubation Centre in Banasthali Vidyapith in Rajasthan. It is an initiative of the Atal Innovation Mission and NITI Aayog to promote a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship.

Support also comes from the Women Entrepreneurship and Empowerment (WEE) mentorship programme, an initiative of WEE Foundation and IIT Delhi. Organiko's connect with these organisations opens up a whole range of

financial, marketing and networking opportunities for them. "One needs talent and confidence to pitch new ideas," remarks Kaul.

Awards and recognition have poured in. For their pilot project, the start-up was declared the winner of Ipreneur 2017 by TISS Mumbai. This year has been even better. They were winners of Atal Incubation Centre's award, called WomenPreneur 2018. They were declared winners at Startup Conclave 2018 by E-Cell VNTI, Nagpur, and MantraPreneur by Flame University, Pune. More recently, Organiko was first runner-up at the Social Business Champ 2018 finale held as part of Social Business Day 2018 at the Infosys campus in Bengaluru. The award was presented by Dr. Muhammad Yunus of Grameen Bank fame.

So it looks like the much derided donkey will finally have its day in the sun. ■

**'Donkey owners, who used to abandon their donkeys after making them work for four or five months, now shelter and feed them,' says Kaul.**



Wasim's 15 donkeys are now well cared for

Contact: poojakaul994@gmail.com

## Poverty of the wealthy



**DELHI DARBAR**

**SANJAYA BARU**

**I**n the mid-1980s, when I was teaching at the University of Hyderabad, I invited the then finance minister of West Bengal, Dr Ashok Mitra, to deliver a lecture on centre-state financial relations. Dr Mitra had, by then, become an important spokesperson of fiscal federalism. It was also the time when the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and N.T. Rama Rao's Telugu Desam Party (TDP) were virtual allies. NTR had coined the phrase "the centre is a conceptual myth" demanding more powers for state governments.

A day before Dr Mitra's arrival in Hyderabad I received a call from the owner-editor of the *Eenadu* media group, Ramoji Rao, inviting me to dinner at his place in honour of Dr Mitra. Rao was a key supporter of NTR and had become active in national politics, mobilising support for NTR's idea of a 'National Front' against the Indian National Congress.

"I believe you are Dr Mitra's host in Hyderabad", said Rao, "do join me at my place for a dinner that I am hosting for him." I readily agreed. I was, at the time, also a columnist for Rao's English language daily, *Newstime*.

Next evening, Dr Mitra and I drove together to Rao's luxurious home in Hyderabad's Begumpet area. I was surprised to find that there were only four of us at the dinner — Dr Mitra, Rao and the TDP member of Parliament P. Upendra. Once we settled down for dinner, seated on four sides of a large table, the food began arriving. One by one some 20 different dishes filled the entire table. As a young man I was quite prepared to get a bite of every single vegetarian and non-vegetarian dish. Dr Mitra served himself two dry *chappatis*, a little *dal* and vegetables and yogurt. The startled host had to be modest too.

As we drove out, Dr Mitra asked me, "Why do the Andhra rich show off like the Punjabis? In Kolkata

no businessman would have the gumption to serve such a meal to a Communist politician."

It's a view I often heard from traditional Marwari businessmen, not just those from Kolkata but also some from Gujarat and Delhi. The old wealthy classes shied away from showing off their wealth. That was in Nehru's and Indira's India. Even today many traditional business families from the Marwari and Jain communities remain discreet in their display of wealth. The Punjabi business families of north India, the Reddys and Kammas of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana and many other newly rich communities across India have no such



The poor and the middle class are going into debt to splurge on loud weddings

**The so-called 'aspirational India' is fast becoming a 'frustrated India' because its aspirations are fast outpacing its economic capacity.**

qualms. India's new super rich have no inhibitions in displaying their wealth. The famous Ambani home, Antilla, in the heart of Mumbai, with its view of the metropolis's slums on one side and the sea on the other, is a striking example of such nonchalance.

Nothing brings out the eagerness of the rich to display wealth more than a wedding in the family. Many of these weddings are increasingly hosted abroad — from Phuket in Thailand to the south of France, from the Caribbean islands to Mauritius. But, every once in a while, a business family decides to host a wedding in India, at one of the many palaces of erstwhile feudals. The latest to do so was Mukesh Ambani who celebrated daughter Isha's wedding in mid-December.

Some analysts defend this ostentatious, if not always vulgar, display of wealth, arguing that there is no reason for the rich to feel guilty. They quote, with great elan, Comrade Deng Xiao Ping of China as having said, "To get rich is glorious." Deng, who famously said, "It doesn't matter whether the cat is black or white, as long as it catches mice," never really celebrated such wealth and its display nor is there any evidence, according to Sinologists, that he actually ever said this.

India is a nation of extreme inequality in which the media has become ubiquitous. In fact, Mukesh Ambani is directly responsible for widening social access to media with his low-cost Jio telecom that even the poor use to watch visuals of wealth on display in movies. In the India of the past, the poor were reconciled to their poverty and watched the wealthy merely with disdain or nonchalance. In this lifetime God has been kind to them. In the next maybe He would be kind to me. In today's aspirational India the poor want the trappings of wealth here and now.

Go check out how a household help, an auto-rickshaw driver, a vegetable vendor or a government clerk celebrates the wedding of his daughter. Everyone wants bright lights and loud music, greasy food and alcoholic drinks. The cost of weddings is going up. Forget the very poor, even the lower middle class is slipping into debt to host a wedding.

The so-called 'aspirational India' is fast becoming a 'frustrated India' because its aspirations are fast outpacing its economic capacity. Everyone loves his daughter, not just Mukesh Ambani. Everyone wants 'ghoda-band-baja'. Everyone wants a night of gay abandon. The Ambanis can have one with Beyonce. Film actors and actresses can have even more vulgar displays of wealth. Why should one's poverty come in the way of vulgarity?

Economists tell you that data does not show any widening of income inequality. The Gini coefficients are steady. Drive off any main road in any city centre to see the reality. The poor are there to see. The super-rich may be hiding behind walls, but every now and then they come out in their fancy cars, with firecrackers and loud music and make their presence felt. The real puzzle about India is, where is the social revolution? Where are the red flags? ■

*Sanjaya Baru is a writer based in New Delhi*

## Schools must teach social values



**BACK TO SCHOOL**

**DILEEP RANJEKAR**

**L**AST week I was in the historic city of Vijayapura (earlier Bijapur) after almost 15 years. The Azim Premji Foundation has a team of over 15 members based in the district. The neglected city of Bijapur probably has the highest density of monuments in India which include the world famous Gol Gumbaz and Ibrahim Rouza. While the old monuments were a familiar sight, the rest of the city has undergone significant changes. One conspicuous change is the emergence of new hotels; they look outwardly sophisticated but their core operations are quite primitive, which is mostly attributed to lack of high quality training of their staff.

However, it is the behaviour of their guests that is even more backward. Being at these so-called

sophisticated hotels is almost a status symbol for them. Their conduct at these places is deplorable. Loud conversations, loud talk on cell phones, ignoring how this disturbs people all around, littering tables and the floor, treating waiters with arrogance seems to be the usual practice. The head waiter appeared helpless and resigned to the situation. My colleague and I were left wondering — why are these basics of social conduct not learnt in school?

**We are forgetting the power of teachers and the power of school education in developing future responsible citizens of our society.**

Back in Hospet, in another reasonably nice and well-equipped hotel, about 80 students from a very reputed Chennai school were staying for two days. They were on an educational trip to the World Heritage Site of Hampi. At around 10 pm they assembled on the central lawn and created a ruckus — totally insensitive to the fact that many guests could be sleeping, resting in their rooms or watching TV. The noise continued until midnight and the hotel management had to enforce some discipline. When the students left for their rooms, the beautiful lawn and the fountain in its middle were littered with food leftovers and tissue paper. Even the lifts were not spared of garbage. My colleague and I again wondered why even students from reputed schools did not learn manners and understand that they should not be a social nuisance.

On the road back to Bengaluru, near Chitradurga, we were stopped by the police and our taxi driver was fined ₹100 because he was not wearing a seat belt. We had not noticed this earlier because he

found a way of tucking the belt in the socket from behind his body (without actually wearing it). After paying the fine, he continued to not wear his seat belt and had no qualms in admitting that he had never worn a seat belt while driving. Such conduct by a young driver in any country outside India would be unimaginable. His notion was that the seat belt was worn for the police and not for his own safety. Closer to Bengaluru, while passing through the last toll booth, the driver of the taxi ahead of us threw a currency note of ₹10 at the toll collector and drove off. The actual toll fee was ₹20 per vehicle. So that driver paid ₹10 less. The toll collector did not issue any receipt and benefitted by ₹10. I don't think they even considered this a malpractice or a bribe. In their opinion it was a brilliant *quid pro quo*! My colleague and I wondered, how do these people have the courage to blatantly indulge in such practices without realising the moral and ethical issues involved? Isn't this something that ought to be focused on in the early years at school?

Why is it that you don't find such basic ethical

problems, dishonest practices or indiscipline in some of the developed nations? Why is it that the parents in these nations ensure that their children wear seat belts, use children's seats, follow queues, learn social etiquette and manners early in life? Why is it that the systems in such nations don't allow corruption at the level of the common man? How do they successfully hardwire certain fundamental principles of life and society among their young ones?

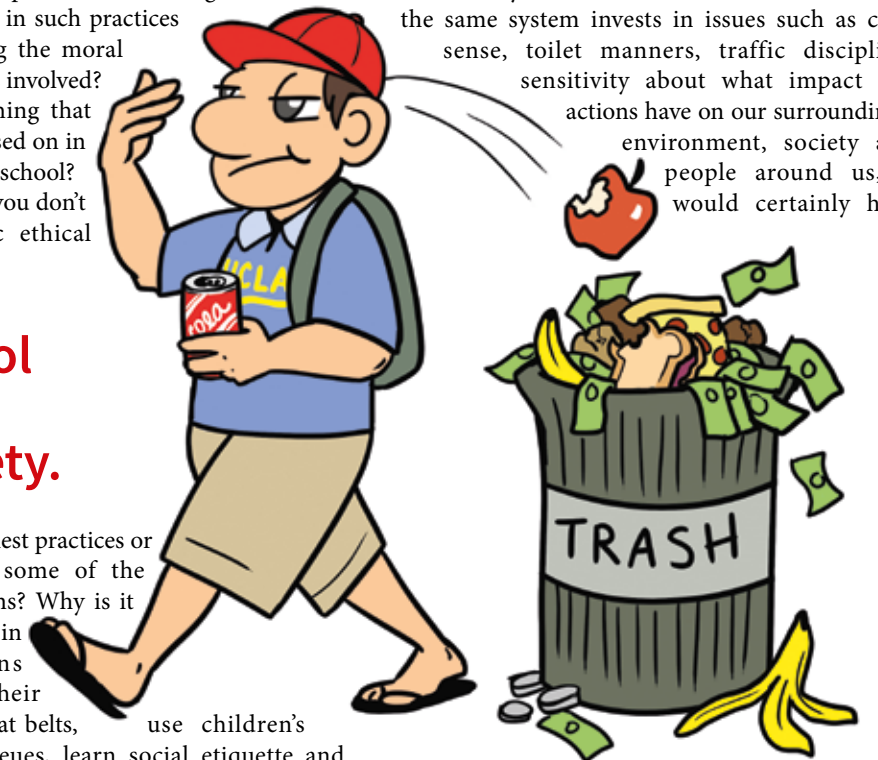
There are several reasons for these differences. The most important is parental role modelling, social influences, educating children on crucial issues and strict enforcement of discipline by the law and order machinery.

Awareness of social norms, expectations of behaviour in society, sensitivity towards concepts such as equality, respect for others, acceptance of socio-economic differences and the importance of following the law of the land are explained to children at a young age. Education is deeply connected to people's lives.

Even in our own National Education Policy, issues such as sensitivity, empathy and respect for others, understanding of constitutional values that ought to govern social practices and rational thinking are key pillars of education. However, our

current education system is primarily focused on cognitive learning — that too in a rote memorisation manner. We have failed to develop the above values among our children. We not only don't attempt to develop these values, we don't even assess whether such attributes are developed at the end of the learning process. The teachers are not even trained to develop these abilities among students.

We are forgetting the power of teachers and the power of school education in developing future responsible citizens of our society. My friend's grandson stopped eating chocolates and sugar for a few weeks because the teacher said sugar causes cancer. He is reluctant to travel by aeroplane because the teacher in some context said it was dangerous to travel by air. All these examples drive home the tremendous influence that teachers and the education system wield on the minds of students. If the same system invests in issues such as civic sense, toilet manners, traffic discipline, sensitivity about what impact our actions have on our surroundings, environment, society and people around us, it would certainly have



the power to lay the foundation of the very society that is envisaged by our Constitution!

India has struggled with several issues related to education such as enrolment, basic literacy, infrastructure, teacher education and inadequate quality of educational institutions that are supposed to support the education system. It has suffered due to lack of necessary financial support, inadequate teacher-pupil ratio and the absence of an overall long-term educational vision. This has taken a huge toll on the kind of individuals that the school system is adding to the social system.

As a result, the fundamental goals of education — especially of developing the values that would help us become a cultured, empathetic, law-abiding and evolved society — are continuing to be illusive. We are not honouring our constitutional commitments. We are also missing a wonderful opportunity to develop young minds that would contribute to a cultured society. ■

*Dileep Ranjekar is CEO of the Azim Premji Foundation*

# Kolkata's dirty air



**HERE  
& NOW**

**SUBIR ROY**

**L**AST month Kolkata surpassed Delhi to become the metro city with the worst air quality in the country. This is despite the fact that Delhi is far ahead of Kolkata in terms of total number of vehicles on the road. What is more, the current ambient air quality around the Victoria Memorial, set amidst the green heart of the city, is



Kolkata's air is now more polluted than Delhi's

**The principal bench of the NGT in Delhi has imposed a fine of ₹5 crore on the West Bengal government for failing to heed its directions to counter air pollution in Kolkata and Howrah.**

worse than what it was last year in the most congested and polluted parts of the city.

Macro picture apart, here is a ground-level view. A couple of small hoardings have come up recently in the part of east Kolkata where I live. On them the local municipal councillor apologises for the work of asphalt topping of roads being temporarily stopped as the hot mix plants of the Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC) have been shut indefinitely on court orders. Without this the restored road surfaces cannot be metal topped and levelled out.

The hoardings tell a half-truth. True, the National

Green Tribunal (NGT) in October stopped the operations of two hot mix plants within city limits run by the KMC. But this is after telling West Bengal's Public Works Department (PWD) and the KMC for a year to phase out the outdated and polluting hot mix technology for road work and also to shift the plants outside city limits. The PWD is now ready with alternative means of resurfacing roads that come under its supervision. But the

KMC is not yet ready and wants more time which an exasperated NGT has refused to give. Hot mix use has been stopped by Delhi since 2016 and a dozen other states now use alternative technology.

The NGT's order is in response to a plea by the city's celebrated environmental activist, Subhas Datta, requesting that plants which belch pollutants like particulate matter and oxides of sulphur and

ANKIT DATTA

Early this year the KMC decided to lay underground sewers in even narrow lanes in this relatively new neighbourhood. So these were dug up, the pipes laid, the surface re-laid with broken bricks and road rollers evened out the surface. But the last act, hard-top resurfacing, is yet to happen. First, we thought the work would be finished before the rains came, then we hoped it would happen before the Pujas and now into winter the surfaces remain uneven like country roads used by bullock carts.

The situation at another end of the city has parallels. A grand elevated 6.85-km road has been built over a hugely busy Budge Budge Trunk Road on the southwest fringe of the city at a cost of Rs 355 crore. The local people have lived with enormous hardship during the construction period in the hope of better times. But this great new elevated road cannot be used and is blocked by the traffic authorities. Why this is so is a bit of a mystery at the time of writing.

One theory goes like this. The elevated road will be a boon to those who seek to go from one end of it to another. But those living in neighbourhoods in between along the elevated road still have to rely on the old road to get by. And they will not let the elevated road be used so long as the old road at the ground level, which has had to bear the brunt of the construction, is not repaired and restored. But this work is yet to begin. So traffic continues to crawl along the broken old road, adding to pollution.

Stung by the consequences of the NGT ban on the hot mix plants, the KMC is at last waking up. It is going to ask major construction firms (L&T did the Budge Budge elevated highway job) to arrange for their own hot mix and not rely on the KMC. However, confusion persists. The KMC is talking of getting a short reprieve from the NGT to run the existing plants while they are upgraded and shifted out of the city. How the two jobs can go on simultaneously is not clear. You can build new plants out of town, then shut down the old ones for upgrading and retrofitting. But building entire new plants costs money.

Close on the heels of the road repair impasse in Kolkata, the principal bench of the NGT in Delhi has imposed a fine of ₹5 crore on the West Bengal government for failing to heed its directions to counter air pollution in the twin cities of Kolkata and Howrah. This order comes in response to an application also filed by Datta pointing to the state government not implementing a 2016 tribunal order asking it and the State Pollution Control Board (SPCB) to carry out the recommendations of an expert committee to improve air quality.

What is significant is that the principal bench of the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) in Delhi has something really harsh to say about the SPCB which "has remained blissfully silent despite the fact that it is the primary responsibility of the Board as a regulatory authority to ensure that the ambient air quality is maintained within the permissible limit". If the regulator is so inadequate, then there is little wonder that things are going from bad to worse. ■

# LIVING

BOOKS | ECO-TOURISM | FILM | THEATRE | AYURVEDA

SUSHEELA NAIR



The grand Noor-Us-Sabah Palace Heritage Hotel

## Bhopal's regal splendour

### Take a look at India's museum city

**Susheela Nair**  
Bhopal

**S**ITTING in the balcony of my room at the Noor-Us-Sabah Palace Heritage Hotel in Bhopal, I watched a magnificent sunset over a picturesque lake. Noor-Us-Sabah, which means 'light of dawn', was formerly a palace belonging to the royal family of Bhopal. At the entrance, a portrait of the *begum* who was on the throne when it was built, heralds a welcome. There is also the royal palanquin and opposite it the former princely state's insignia, which used to be carried before the royal carriage during state functions. And there is a 10-gear vehicle which members of the royal family used for hunting.

The *begum* was a descendant of the Afghan chief, Dost Mohammed Khan, who is credited with having laid the foundations of the city as it is today. Dost Mohammed was in charge of Bhopal during Mughal emperor Aurangzeb's reign and, after the latter's death in 1707, took over the region. For two centuries after his death, it was his

descendants who ruled the *nawabi* state.

Bhopal is as exceptional today as it was in the past. The Islamic influence in old Bhopal dates back to the early 15th century and to Dost Mohammed. However, the city existed before that. It is said to have been founded in the 11th century by Raja Bhoja who is also credited with creating the twin lakes. Named after its founder, Bhopal was earlier known as Bhojpal and Raja Bhoja's legacy is the huge Bhojeshwar temple, some distance from the city. Devastated by successive invaders, the city was finally rebuilt in the 18th century by Dost Mohammed.

The history of Bhopal is distinctive among the princely states in India. Its most interesting facet is that it was ruled by four consecutive *begums* over a century, unlike any other preceding or contemporary princely state of those times. These dynamic and charismatic women challenged the rules and transformed the course of history, something virtually unheard of in the early 1800s. They redefined Bhopali tradition with its combined Muslim and Maratha heritage and lived king-sized

lives, as leaders and commanders, patrons of the arts, benefactors and competent administrators, world travellers and regal hosts.

A progressive and cosmopolitan culture took root under the peaceful rule of the *begums*. The contribution of these rulers to the development of the city includes a postal system, railways and modern waterworks. Being pragmatic rulers, they negotiated and maintained good relations with the British who, in turn, treated them with respect.

Split by a pair of lakes, Bhopal is where the old and new coexist in perfect harmony. North of the lakes are mosques and crowded bazaars. South of them is modern Bhopal with upmarket malls, restaurants and museums.

One should go museum-hopping in Bhopal. The city has been hailed as the museum capital of India. Bharat Bhavan is a unique fine arts complex for performing and visual arts, designed by eminent architect Charles Correa. Bhopal also has a fun Science Museum and the Birla Museum which epitomises the rich culture of Madhya

Continued on page 30



The royal carriage



Utensils on display in the Tribal Museum

Pradesh. It has on display tools from the Neolithic age. The State Archaeological Museum houses an interesting collection of old scriptures, paintings, 12th-century bronzes, photos of the begums, statues and relics culled from different parts of the country.

The anthropological National Museum of Man (Rashtriya Manav Sangralaya), which has 30 prehistoric rock shelters with ancient paintings, is worth a wander. The authentic dwellings on display here, built and maintained by Adivasis using traditional tools and materials, reveal India's immense ethnic diversity.

But the best part is the Tribal Museum where you can see artworks hanging from trees, and leaping at you from walls, or, in one gallery, from a two-storied wooden porch in the middle. The building is as striking as the exhibits which celebrate the ways of life practised by seven major tribes in the state through their crafts. The five massive, surreal galleries showcase replica tribal houses, ritual sites and stunning artisan pieces including trees carved into elaborate wedding pillars. Another couple of galleries showcase the state's cultural diversity and the works of the tribes of Chhattisgarh.

Bhopal, being the city of lakes, is equally proud of its architectural gems, like the Taj-ul-Masjid (Crown

Masjid, a gift of Qudsia Begum. It is a stupendous work of art crowned by gold spikes atop minarets. The Gauhar Mahal, the early 19th-century royal palace with its pretty courtyards, balconies and hallways, is equally impressive.

Just north of the Lower Lake is the Moti Masjid, built in 1869 by Sikander Jahan (also known as Moti Begum). Another lesser known mosque, Masjid Dhai-seedi, is believed to be one of Bhopal's oldest, and the smallest mosque in the world. Exactly two-and-a-half steps lead up to it, hence the name.

No visit to Bhopal is complete without tasting some of the city's delicious culinary offerings like *bade-ka-kawab*, fluffy *poha* sprinkled with spicy *sev* and crispy *jalebis*. Bhopal is also famous for *gutka* and Sulaimani *chai*, a strong tea brewed with sugar syrup and a pinch of salt. The *risala* (a chicken preparation with rich gravy) and *biryanis* in the small eateries near the Chowk are delectable. ■

#### FACT FILE

**Where to stay:** Noor-U-Sabah, Jehan Numa Palace, Palace Residency

**How to reach:** Connected to Mumbai (789 km), Delhi (741 km) and Indore.

**Website:** [www.noorussabahpalace.com](http://www.noorussabahpalace.com)

**Phone:** 8109012130/8109012138

SUSHEELA NAIR

# P.T. Nair says goodbye to Kolkata after 63 years

## Barefoot historian gives back his two rooms, donates book collection

Soumitra Das  
Kolkata

THE village *yogi* never gets alms. Thus goes the oft-repeated Bengali saying. In other words, familiarity breeds contempt. And that certainly holds true for Parameswaran Thankappan Nair, better known as P.T. Nair, the well-known urban historian from a Kerala village who made Kolkata his home after he arrived here as a young man in 1955. In all these years, Nair has written 62 books on Kolkata and about 600 articles. His latest book is on Gandhi in Kolkata which will be released at the upcoming Book Fair, although he will not be present.

While he was working in the city, the media hardly took cognisance of his presence. But the moment they got wind that he was leaving the city for good on November 22, reporters and TV channels almost crowded him out of his tiny, bare, two-room home in an old house of Kansaripara in Bhowanipore. For years Nair had lived alone; of late, his wife, Seetha, a retired teacher, had been living there with him. Once his most precious possessions were his books on the city, 3,000 of which the Kolkata Municipal Corporation acquired in 1999. These are housed in the Town Hall library, although accessibility is a problem.

Nair left the city because his grandchildren wanted him to return, and he left behind 350 books with a trusted friend. These are meant to be donated to a suitable institution. His other prized possession, also left with his friend, is his trusted Remington typewriter meant for knocking out his innumerable articles and books. His two-room flat has been returned to the landlord.

When I went to meet him on the morning of November 21, his two rooms were empty, except for his typewriter and work table. Some journalists had dropped by. Wearing a *lungi* and a shirt, as he always does at home, Nair's face looked puffy and he had a stubby chin. The other sign of age is his inability to recall facts in a trice. He fumbles for words before he speaks in his heavily accented English. Even after all these years, Nair has been unable to master Bengali, although he admits he understands it well enough. A charge that is often brought against him is that his research is hampered by his lack of understanding of the vernacular. Nair retaliates, saying he is entirely dependent on unimpeachable source material — all in English.

Yet, Nair knew the ins and outs of the city in such detail that he won the praise of that pioneering Kolkata researcher, Radharaman Mitra, who in the



P.T. Nair walks down the road in Kansaripara

**Nair gathered material from catalogues of archives all over the world. His collection of books contained a complete set of *Bengal Past and Present* from 1907 up to present times, which is priceless.**

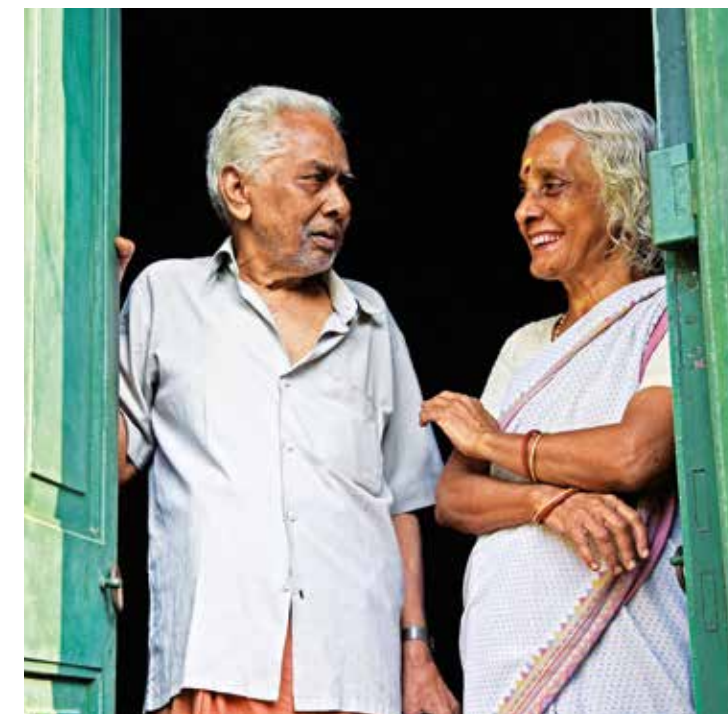
first part of his *Kolkata Darshan* mentioned a question that Nair had raised in a letter to the editor of *The Statesman*. Nair had pointed out that the Mayor's Court was always in the "white" town around Dalhousie Square. So why is a lane in north Kolkata named Old Mayor's Court? Mitra had taken for granted that it was a knowledgeable Bengali making the query. In actuality, it was a South Indian gentleman.

At 86, Nair is still fighting fit. In Kolkata, he used to go on his daily visits to the National Library. It was only a 10-minute walk from his home, he explained. When I called him a few days after he reached his village, Alwaye, near Kochi airport and railway station, he seemed to be enjoying himself with his grandchildren. Earlier, he lived in rented rooms. Now he is the master of all he surveys. "There are four acres of land here. We have coconut plantations, apart from a garden. I have to look after everything," he chuckled.

Nair explained that Alwaye was not where he was born. Kerala still being a matriarchal society, he is living at his wife's place. Historically, Alwaye is very interesting because the Portuguese set up India's first printing press here. Since the village is so close to the port, the Jews settled here too. If

there is time to spare, perhaps Nair will delve into its history, because nobody has studied it before.

Yet, P.T. Nair is only a bachelor of arts and a non-practising lawyer. Since the early '70s, when little



Nair with his wife, Seetha

material was available on Kolkata, Nair gathered material from different catalogues of archives all over the world, sometimes with the help of friends. His collection of books contained a complete set of *Bengal Past and Present* from 1907 up to present times, which is priceless. "Most of my books were collected from the Dharamtala-Wellington crossing and College Street. At Dharamtala you can still get books on a particular subject, whereas in College Street books on various subjects are available."

Nair emphasises that the National Library has a treasure trove of material on the city as well as a 300-volume Union Catalogue of the American Library of Congress and a 100-volume British Museum catalogue. And so "you needn't go anywhere". He collected documents on Job Charnock from Fort St George in Chennai which dispelled myths about the man who reportedly founded the city.

Nair was born in 1933 at Manjapra in Ernakulam district near Kalady where Adi Sankaracharya was born. In school, the focus was on Sanskrit, although he was taught English and his mother tongue as well. After arriving in Kolkata, he began working as a typist. He used to live

with friends near Deshapriya Park and after working for some time as a stenographer in Dalhousie Square, he landed a job with the Anthropological Survey of India. Later, he devoted his time entirely to research, while his wife taught in a school.

Nair recalls his early days. "From the day I came to Calcutta I started taking an interest in the city. Whenever I saw a building or a monument, I started collecting material, including in-depth information from other sources," he says. He used to take the tram from Kalighat to reach his office and look around the city. He feels neither Dalhousie Square nor the city, which has no doubt expanded, has changed much. At one point of time, he worked for *Engineering Times*, depending entirely on common sense because he had no technical knowledge.

Although Nair believes that all heritage buildings must be preserved and strengthened, those which have no heritage status could be demolished. He is in favour of development. He stresses that if the owner of a beautiful building cannot afford repairs, either the state government or the Corporation should look after it for such buildings cannot be built again. ■



## Why Bhagat Singh is immortal

By [Murad Ali Baig](#)

EVERYONE knows that Bhagat Singh was one of the most celebrated martyrs of India's freedom movement but very few know that he also made a major contribution to the ideas that drove it. In his very short life he wrote extensively in Hindi, English, Urdu and Punjabi on a wide range of socially relevant subjects. He was just 23 years old when he was hanged by the British in March 1931 for shooting and killing a British police officer. This shooting and other daring revolutionary activities like throwing bombs and leaflets into the Delhi Legislative Assembly along with his radical writings made him much more than just a martyr. He became one of the most iconic personalities of India's freedom struggle.

Irfan Habib, who has edited this compilation of his main writings, is an eminent historian whose preface and introduction underline the impact of Bhagat Singh's short life. Habib writes, "Bhagat Singh was committed to Inquilab or revolution... but it was not merely a political revolution. He also wanted a social revolution to break the old discriminatory practices." Habib says, "...Bhagat Singh is probably the only one after Mahatma Gandhi who evokes such unbounded awe and

respect...perhaps because his appeal as a martyr cuts across political ideologies."

Bhagat Singh was born into a prominent Sikh family. They disapproved of a local Sikh school's support of the British and sent him to a school in Lahore run by the Arya Samaj. Bhagat Singh, however, did not believe in any religion and was an unwavering atheist. It is a pity that some Sikh organisations are trying to portray him with a beard and turban. Almost all his photographs show him as clean-shaven and sometimes wearing a hat.

He was a voracious reader who found time to pen a huge number of articles on subjects like universal brotherhood, religion, untouchability, atheism, revolution, anarchy, British oppression, and so on. He said, "There is no place for justice in British imperialism. They do not want to give even breathing space to the slaves and instead want to suppress them. Only sacrifice can save us from this suppression. The eyes of Indian and British members of the assembly will have to be opened."

Later he writes, "If you do not want to join because revolution will lead to anarchy and bloodshed then you are a weakling and coward. If

there is chaos, let it be. It will at least bring us freedom. The weak will disappear and the strong will unite. They will love each other leading to universal brotherhood."

On untouchability he writes, "The killer of Ravan and Bali gave proof of his universal brotherhood by eating the used *ber* of a (untouchable) Bhil woman. Krishna, the man who made his cousins fight, and who quelled injustice from the world, gave proof of his belief in this doctrine by eating the dry rice of Sudhama."

Many of his comments are relevant even today. "We Indians, what are we doing? A branch of a *peepal* tree is cut and religious feelings of Hindus are injured. We ought to attach more importance to man than animals, yet here in India, they break each other's heads in the name of 'sacred' animals."

The little book will be an eye-opener for most Indian readers even though I wish the publishers had not used some hard-to-read italicisation to highlight Bhagat Singh's writings. A reader cannot, however, help marvelling that such a young man had such profound thoughts and accomplished so much in his short life. The word martyr is bandied about much too loosely today but Bhagat Singh was truly a martyr. ■



*Inquilab Bhagat Singh on Religion and Revolution*  
Edited: S. Irfan Habib; Yoda Press, SAGE and Select  
₹295



Best aero sports photo: 'Air Surveyors', a picture of hot air ballooning in Cappadocia, Turkey, by Dheeraj Rajpal M.



Best aqua sports photo: A scuba diver with a school of Giant Trevallies in Sipadan, Malaysia, by Dheeraj M. Nanda



Best terrestrial sports photo: 'The Splash', a picture of Kambla, a rural sport in Mangalore, by Dr Akhter Husain

the rapids in Nepal, jet skiing in the backwaters of the Thirumurthy Dam near Udumalpet in Tamil Nadu and stunning pictures of marine flora and

## The tigers' shrinking kingdom

By [Usha Raj](#)

PROJECT Tiger, launched in 1973, had many successes and some failures, says Raghu Chundawat in his latest book, *The Rise and Fall of the Emerald Tigers*. And one could not agree more. Based on 10 years of research, from 1996 to 2006, in central India's Panna Tiger Reserve by radio collaring seven tigers, five females and two males, he weaves an intimate and fascinating account of the Panna tigers.

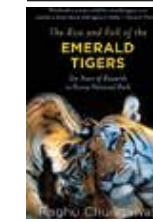
A total of 41 tigers (nine females, five males and 27 cubs) were identified and studied by Chundawat and his team in addition to five cubs monitored until they were adults. In fact, it seems as though the team's endless forays into the jungle and their watch over the tigers and their prey kept poachers at bay.

The extensive support provided by P.K. Chowdhury, director of Panna Tiger Reserve, ended when a new management took charge. Facilities given, like tracking the tigers on elephants, were withdrawn and research inside the park was stopped. There was a spurt in poaching and tigers dispersing outside the protected area could not be monitored. Tiger mortality increased. A tigress found dead with two cattle carcasses was probably poisoned.

When Panna's tiger population was on the decline no one would believe it. Then, in 2008, their extinction made headlines — sending shock waves. This was the second tiger reserve, after Sariska, where the animal had died out.

Had we not learnt any lessons from Sariska? Alerts on the swift dwindling of tigers were re-sent. Fortunately, the pressure built up by wildlife champions led to a change of guard at Panna and the reintroduction of tigers, three females, in 2009 followed by four more later. The tiger population bounced back but the recovery was not scientifically documented, says Chundawat.

It is time for a critical review, for new approaches that incorporate more inclusive conservation models, says the author, a renowned conservation biologist. In the coming decades the success of India's conservation will depend on how well tigers thrive outside protected areas. The loss of distribution range signals extinction. Today, tigers survive in just



*The Rise and Fall of the Emerald Tigers*; Dr. Raghu Chundawat  
Speaking Tiger  
₹899

seven percent of their former range. Threats to Panna continue. Interlinking of the Ken and Betwa rivers and the building of a dam on the Ken will shrink the Panna Tiger Reserve, and push out wildlife. Other protected areas face similar threats.

Chundawat pleads for a bigger landscape and scientific, long-term research to support harmonious growth of the tiger population. There was relief, and some elation, when the 2014 census showed 2,226 tigers. But this is less than the 2,500 tigers India had in the early 1970s when Project Tiger was launched. Though tiger numbers stayed intact for almost half a century, should they not have doubled? Numbers have been fluctuating. In 2008, the tiger population was down to a dismal 1,411 and the 2011 census showed 1,706 tigers. The status of tigers is worrying in most reserves, barring Corbett, Nagarhole-Bandipur and the central Indian highlands around Kanha, says Chundawat.

The noted scientist's angst is understandable, but it is the innumerable stories of the Panna tigers that

By the end of 2001 there was evidence of seven resident tigresses, including three new ones. By early 2002 the tiger population in the area reached its peak — 28 tigers in about 400 km. In 2003-04, a significant number of tigers were lost to poaching. In 2006, a female tigress and her first litter were poisoned. The crash of the tiger population was faster than its recovery.

Resident tigresses had a reproductive span of 11 years, from ages three to 14. The short gestation period of around 100 days makes it a resilient species which is why Chundawat laments, "We have failed tigers by not providing for basic ecological needs and a secure environment in many protected areas."

Tigers are largely peaceful and infanticide happens only when a male takes over a territory. If there are cubs from the previous male, destroying them encourages the female to come into oestrus and mating follows. If a male can settle down for four to five years he can sire more offspring from multiple females than a female can produce in her normal reproductive life of eight to 10 years.

In Panna, tigers were found mating throughout the year, the tigresses mating with more than one male during the oestrus cycle. Repeated and prolonged copulation is needed for conceiving.

Tigresses are extremely protective of their cubs. They don't even go hunting until they are eight to 10 days old. Chundawat recounts the story of a sloth bear chased away after it stumbled on a cave that had three-week-old cubs. That same night the mother moved the cubs to another location nearby.

Cubs become confident of their surroundings when they are five or six months old. Teaching them to hunt could begin with a mother capturing a *sambar* fawn

and leaving it alive for her cubs to play with. As they grow older, they are introduced to bigger prey. The research team saw a tigress catch and give a wild boar to her cubs who took hours to kill it while the mother watched from a distance. Another tigress was seen teaching six- and seven-month-old cubs to climb a tree. On a more serious note, the researchers also found the females' survival rate in Panna was lower than that of the males.

This book is a must-read for all those truly interested in saving our tigers. The section on the need to revamp tiger conservation and how to handle the several small satellite populations near protected areas provides new insights. ■



**In the coming decades the success of India's conservation will depend on how well tigers thrive outside protected areas.**

make interesting reading. Baavan or 52 in Hindi, so named because her eyebrow markings resembled the numerals five and two, is the tigress that the team radio-collared three times over nine years from 1997. She occupied the best habitat in Chapner and Bhadar, contributed 20 tigers to Panna through her cubs and their progeny, and also to the team's understanding of tiger ecology. Her first three female cubs, born in April 1996, were also radio-collared as was the dominant male, Madla, who fought and drove out another male. By end-1999, the researchers knew there were four adult females and two males in Panna, making the tiger density three to four per 100 km.



**AYURVEDA  
ADVISORY**  
Dr SRIKANTH

## Soothing psoriasis

PSORIASIS is a chronic, non-contagious skin disease characterised by dry skin and raised, rough, red areas on the skin covered with fine silvery scales. These lesions of dry scaly papules and plaques may vary from pin-head to palm size.

The conventional system of medicine perceives psoriasis as an autoimmune disorder of the skin which results in excessive production of skin cells.

Different types of psoriasis may coexist in an individual but the skin lesions all share the same hallmarks — redness, thickening and scaling. Psoriatic lesions are typically distributed symmetrically on the scalp, elbow, knees, the lumbo-sacral area and in the folds of the body — almost in the same places on the right and left sides of the body.

Psoriasis can affect people of all ages. However, it is generally noticed that adults are more vulnerable to this condition. Individuals with a family history of psoriasis are at an increased risk. Peak age groups include 15 to 40 and 50 to 60 years.

**CAUSES:** According to the conventional system of medicine, genetic factors play an important role in the aetiology of the disease. If one parent has psoriasis, the chances of developing it is seven percent. If both have it, the likelihood of getting it goes up to 41 percent.

Another cause cited for psoriasis is the response

of the immune system.

The incidence of this disease is more among people of fair skin. It is rarely observed in dark-skinned individuals.

Seasonal changes play a role in psoriasis outbreaks. Extra sunlight in summer decreases the symptoms of psoriasis while winter's cold and dry air aggravate it.

Local and systemic trauma, emotional stress, upper respiratory tract infections, drugs like beta blockers, lithium and chloroquine, withdrawal of systemic steroids may also trigger the disease.

According to Ayurvedic texts, intake of contrasting food items like fish and milk or radish with jaggery as well as repeated suppression of natural urges like vomiting, sleep, thirst and so on are the chief causes of psoriasis.

Physical exercise in very hot weather or after consuming a heavy meal, drinking cold water immediately after being exposed to scorching sun, intake of uncooked food and eating without the onset of appetite are also cited as causative factors.

In general, excessive consumption of fresh grains, curd, fish, salty and sour foods, black gram, radish, pastries, sesame seeds, milk and jaggery can trigger psoriasis. Sleeping too much during the day is another causative factor.

During treatment all these triggers have to be avoided.

**HOME REMEDIES:** Drink about half a cup of bitter gourd juice on an empty stomach in the morning regularly for about five to six months.

- Apply fresh aloe vera gel on the affected parts twice daily.

- Fresh sandalwood paste mixed with an equal quantity of turmeric paste and a little milk cream applied locally on the lesions will help in relieving itching.

- Psoriasis can be triggered by stress. Meditation

may help reduce stress-related psoriasis flare-ups.

**TREATMENT:** Any one of the following combinations will help in providing symptomatic relief:

- Panchatikta ghrita (any renowned pharmacy): 1-0-1 teaspoonful on an empty stomach followed by half a cup of lukewarm water. Kaishora guggulu (Dhootpapeshwar / Baidyanath) 2-2-2; Manjishtha tablets (Himalaya) 2-0-2.

- For external application use aloe vera gel or Cakramarda Taila from any renowned pharmacy.

- Guggulu tiktaka madhu snuhi rasayana (Nagarjuna Herbals) 1-0-1 teaspoonful on an empty stomach; Guduchi tablet (Himalaya) 2-0-2 and Talekt capsules (Himalaya) 2-2-2. For external application use 777 oil / Psorolin ointment (Dr JRK's Research).

- Atrisor capsules (Atrimed) 2-0-2, Psora capsules (AyuLabs) 2-0-2 and Althea cream / lotion (Himalaya) for external application.

- Atrisor shampoo (Atrimed) is useful in treating scalp psoriasis.

**DOS AND DON'TS: Do consume:** Old rice, red rice, barley, green gram, bitter vegetables and meat of wild animals are considered wholesome. Drink warm water.

**DON'T CONSUME:** Sour, salty, spicy items in excess, curd, milk, jaggery, meat of marshy animals, sesame seeds, black gram and alcoholic drinks. Excessive intake of radish and garlic are not conducive. Avoid refrigerated food and drinks.

Leech therapy / Takradhaara procedures may be necessary for chronic and severe cases of psoriasis. For this, consult an Ayurvedic physician. ■

*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*

# Helping People Get Things Done



Tillers

Portable Water Pumps



F300

FJ500



Petrol

WB15X

WS20X

WB30X

WV30D

Diesel

Brush Cutters

Lawn Mowers

Portable Generators



UMK 425T-U2NT

UMK 435T-UENT

UMK 435T-U2NT



HRJ 196

HRJ-216



EP1000

Portable Generators

General Purpose Engines



EX 2400S

EU30is

EU70is



GX25

GX80

GX160

GX200

## PRODUCTS

### Rakshak for girls

VYOMINI sells biodegradable sanitary napkins called Rakshak. Made from cotton fabric, banana pulp and bamboo pulp, the napkins are free of chlorine, bleach or added fragrance. The napkins are inexpensive and marketed to girls from low-income families. Four sizes are available. There is a special pack of six napkins for only ₹20

Founded by Prachi Kaushik, a social entrepreneur who graduated from Delhi University, Vyomini describes itself as a social organisation. The NGO carries out campaigns and workshops in rural areas to spread awareness of menstrual health and hygiene.

Vyomini is currently holding such workshops in government schools for girls in Haryana. Vyomini also installs vending machines in schools so that girls can get sanitary pads free. The vending machines and napkins are subsidised by the state government. An incinerator is also set up so that sanitary napkins don't turn up in landfill sites.

Vyomini goes to construction sites to talk to women labourers and sell Rakshak sanitary napkins to them. They are working in 12 states. Their slogan is, Think Holistic. ■



**Contact:** Vyomini, H.N. 40 Sultanpur Majra, Opposite Diamond Park, New Delhi-110086 Phone: 9716255564, 8178522714 Email: info@vyomini.org Website: www.vyomini.org

### Honda Siel Power Products Ltd.

REGD. OFFICE: 409, DLF Tower B, Jasola Commercial Complex, South Delhi- 110025

Head Office & Works: Plot No. 5, Sector 41 (kasna), Greater Noida Industrial Development Area. Distt. Gautam Budh Nagar (U.P.)

Tel.: 0120-2341050-58, Fax: 0120-2341078-79, SMS GENSET to 54242

CIN: L40103DL2004PLC203950 | Email: ho.mktg@hspp.com | Web: www.hondasielpower.com

### Customer Care Number

**1800-11-2323**

(Toll Free)

**TATA STEEL**



# BRINGING TOMORROW. TODAY.

## Reducing infant mortality

Tata Steel provides maternal and child healthcare through Project MANSI (Maternal and Newborn Survival Initiative). It mobilises health volunteers in Jharkhand and Odisha. This has reduced Infant Mortality Rate by 64.5% over a period of 5 years. Beginning with just 167 pilot villages, MANSI has been scaled up to include 1,700 villages, now covering a population of over 13,50,000.



MATERNAL & CHILD HEALTHCARE

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