

Civil Society

HINDUTVA + WELFARISM

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analyses the
BJP victory
and the decline
of the Congress



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IN THE LIGHT

SAMITA RATHOR



LETTERS



Campco saga

I read your cover story, 'Quiet success for Campco,' with great interest. I am from a farmer's family. We grow cocoa as an intercrop on an areca nut farm. Back in the 1980s our main buyer was Cadbury India. They refused to buy our beans at a time when the areca nut market was also not very profitable. It was then that Varanashi Subraya Bhat took the initiative to buy wet cocoa beans and process them. This later took Campco into chocolate production. It was a huge risk as Cadbury chocolates dominated the market. Undeterred, Campco chocolates slowly started picking up. Campco is now a big chocolate manufacturer managed by farmers themselves and we are so glad.

Dr K.G. Bhat

This is a very good story about the success of a farmers' cooperative. I hope Campco becomes a household

name in the years to come.

Narendra M. Apte

College ratings

This is with reference to your interview with Dr Harivansh Chaturvedi, 'The higher education market has gone wild'. It was a very candid and honest interview on the current state of higher education in the country. Education reform is the need of the hour. Let's do it before we miss the bandwagon.

Himanshi Tiwari

I agree with Dr Chaturvedi. In my opinion the selection criteria for academics needs overall change. The benchmark should be keenness to

teach and not just grades and degrees earned. Many times people remark, "Since he did not get a job elsewhere, he became a teacher." Selection rules must weed out those who don't enjoy teaching. Such teachers have taken away the very soul of creative learning and hence higher education has gone wild.

Vasant Ganesh Machwe

City forests

Your story, 'Urban forests: Grow one in just three years', talks about an interesting initiative. It is an excellent idea. But why doesn't Afforest become an NGO? It will help them get more funds and they can do more for the environment and society. And

how do you get land if a company wants to plant trees on land owned by the government? How do you network governments in Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Haryana?

Vinod Pande

Tapping rain

Apropos your story, 'Tibetans put back village's water in Karnataka'. Roof rainwater harvesting and recharging bore wells is the need of the hour in Uttara Kannada district of Karnataka. In the coming years we hope to raise money and solve the water problems of many more villages.

Lhagpa Tsering

Uttara Kannada district, where Doeguling Tibetan Refugee Settlement is situated, has very low rainfall. Due to reduction of annual rainfall, bore wells for drinking water are drying up one after the other. People won't be able to live here if timely proactive action is not taken. Reimagining Doeguling, an NGO, has come up with the idea of tapping rainwater, a resource that people have ignored despite the drinking water crisis. With the help of Tibet Fund, another NGO, they have successfully implemented a pilot rainwater harvesting project at Rato Monastery which recharged their old bore well. After this initiative, Tibet Fund funded similar rainwater harvesting projects at the Gelug International Foundation, Sakya Monastery, Old and Infirm Home and three camps in the settlement. We are thankful to the Tibet Fund and our sponsors in India.

Karma Yangdup

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Politics and beyond

IN this magazine we prefer to keep ourselves out of politics. Of course, as journalists, there would be no question of a political agenda on our part. But it is with stories that go beyond politics that we like to engage. Often, such stories tell us more about political realities than the cut and thrust of politics itself.

An election is a good time to see how all the concerns and aspirations add up. Narendra Modi's appeal to voters, particularly the poor, doesn't surprise us. He has been seen as a doer who has delivered real benefits to people. But the huge size of the mandate and the seemingly untrammelled power that goes with it sends out a message that needs to be better understood. The verdict is as much about Modi as the comprehensive rejection of the opposition. Flawed as our democracy might well be (see our interview with Jagdeep Chhokar of Association for Democratic Reforms) the mandate given to Modi comes at the end of a full five-year term. He has been judged on performance. To offer a perspective on the results, we asked Sanjaya Baru, our columnist and a keen political observer, to write the cover story this month.

In yet another example of how farmers are successfully dealing with their problems, we have a story from Maharashtra on solar dryers being used to dehydrate and package vegetables and get a better price for them in markets beyond Nashik. Getting a good price for their perishable produce is a problem farmers face nationally. When there is oversupply farmers are at the mercy of the market and, at times, even find it cheaper to let their vegetables rot in their fields. A farmer producer organisation near Nashik has been alerting its members about a glut and helping them dehydrate vegetables like bitter gourd so as to be able to reach a new range of customers. The solar dryer makes it easily possible and there is a strong case for making dryers cheaper so that farmers can afford them.

Environmental disputes indicate how poorly regulation is working. Yet another example comes from Goa where a new airport has been cleared but a commendable public effort has revealed that the environment impact assessment (EIA) report had overlooked the need for cutting thousands of trees and jeopardizing forest cover and innumerable water bodies. It took the intervention of the Supreme Court to have the EIA annulled. A new EIA is in the making, but where does that leave the airport? With some transparency on the part of the promoters and the state government, the delay could easily have been avoided. There could also have been better scrutiny of the EIA in the Union Ministry of Environment. Pushing projects through by stealth no longer works. If regulators fail to do their duty, people step in as has happened in this case. The Rainbow Warriors in Goa deserve special praise.

In these stressed out political times, it is great to have a show like *Aisi Taisi Democracy* so that we get a chance to laugh at ourselves. The success of this wonderful stand-up satire, which spares no one, is a welcome aside to the recent elections.

Shankh Anand



COVER STORY

MODI'S MASSIVE VICTORY

The unprecedented mandate given to Narendra Modi cuts across income groups. But it is especially significant for the poor who trust him to provide development and improve their lives.

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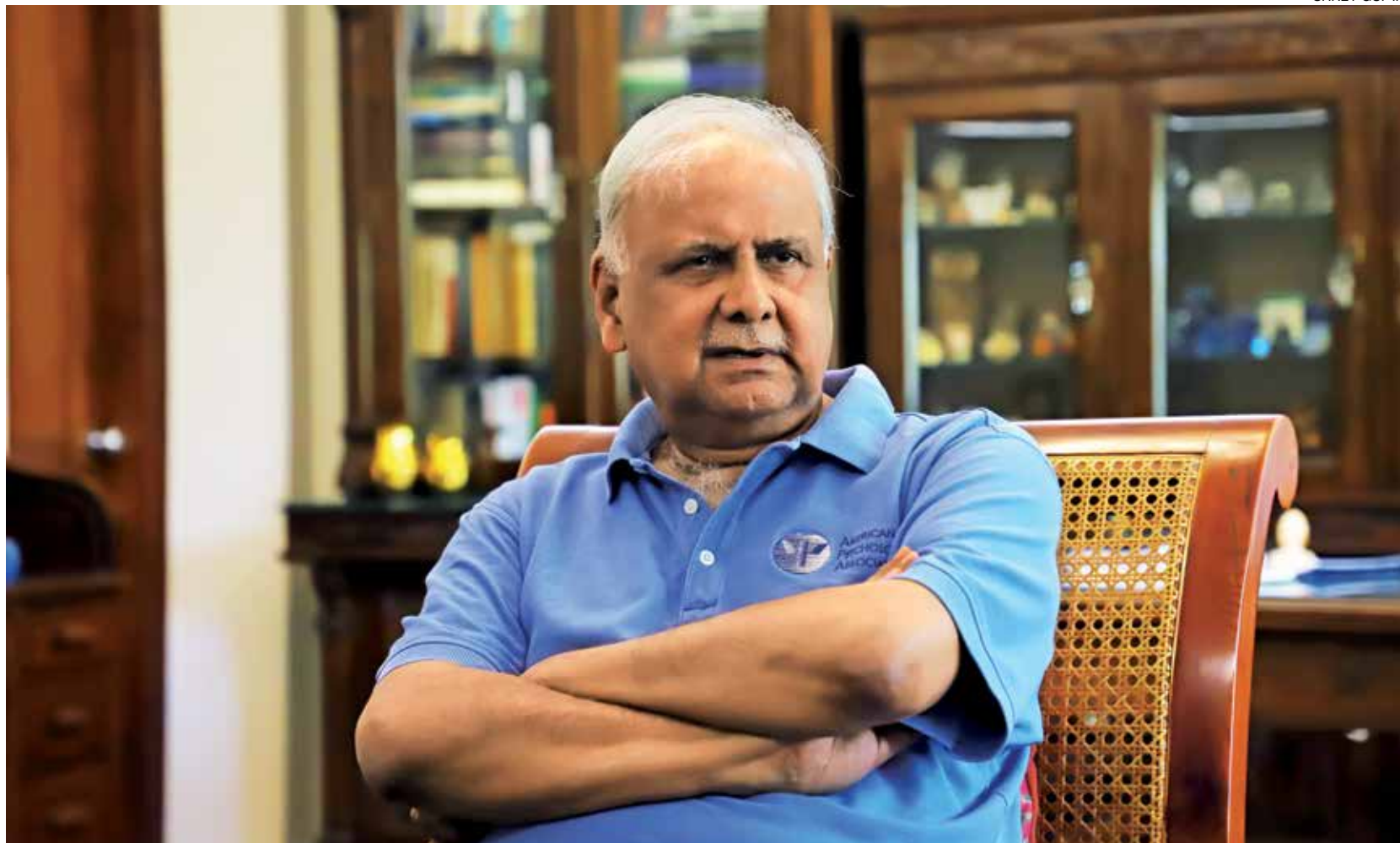
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SHREY GUPTA



Jagdeep Chhokar: 'Political parties are very clear they want to keep their financial mechanisms under wraps'

'A candidate's allegiance is not to the voter, but the ticket-giver'

Jagdeep Chhokar on holding parties to account

Civil Society News
New Delhi

THE past two decades have witnessed growing concern over diminishing fair play in elections and lack of transparency in the functioning of political parties. The end of another general election is a good time to review how much progress has been made. Has the role of money power been curbed? Are there fewer criminals getting elected? Do parties tell us enough about their funding and internal processes?

To have some idea of where the country has reached, *Civil Society* spoke to Jagdeep Chhokar, a founder-member of the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR). In citizens' initiatives, ADR has had a pole position. Its surveys and inquiries have done much to expose what is not working in the general interest. It has been a sponsor of forward-looking ideas.

His activism apart, Chhokar is a former professor of the Indian Institute of Management in Ahmedabad. He is insightful and goes into

considerable detail but not without a sense of humour. Excerpts from a lengthy interview at Chhokar's home in New Delhi:

There seems to be a mismatch between people's expectations from political parties and what they are willing to offer. What are your observations?

In our surveys of 270,000 people with 500 respondents in each constituency, the topmost issue on the minds of voters is the lack of employment and job opportunities. The next four issues are related to agriculture — non-availability of credit, low prices for agricultural produce despite the MSP (Minimum Support Price), the subsidy on fertilisers, the unavailability of seeds and power. Next is health, primary health, quality of hospitals, and education. We had given respondents a list of 31 issues. So these are the top 10 on the voter's mind, albeit with a restricted sample.

What political parties are offering is national security, terrorism, caste, religion, *nyay*, full statehood, etc. The tragedy is the media picks up only those issues which political parties and politicians

highlight. They think these are vote-catching issues. Whether they are linked to the voter's needs, desires, aspirations, are of no consequence.

There is a complete disconnect between what the voter is looking for and what the aspiring politician is offering. This disconnect is extremely serious. It leads to erosion in our democracy.

There is another disconnect. The elected representative does not owe his primary allegiance to the voter. He or she is first grateful to the ticket-giver for giving the ticket otherwise people would not have been able to vote for him or her.

How come politicians drift to such an extent?

If you have a person listed from Hyderabad air dropped to Moradabad, how do you expect this person to know what the people of Moradabad are looking for?

The ticket-giver should want the most votes?

Should. The ticket-giver wants the maximum bang for the buck which is not necessarily in the form of voters' concerns. Voters also have no choice. This

question comes up very often when people say, how do criminals get elected? All right, so political parties should not give them tickets but they still do and people vote for them. Don't people see?

The ticket-giver should also be keen to identify the real problems and have people do something about them in the hope of constantly getting elected. So why is this ticket-giver so off the mark?

They should. But that's not easy to do nor commonly done. The ticket-giver can't know the pulse of the entire nation because of India's size, diversity and so on. Also, ticket-givers are not focused on the electorate but on the candidates. They look for winnable candidates. Their primary consideration is 'winability'. What this elusive 'winability' consists of is anybody's guess. In some cases, it is large amounts of money or massive muscle power — which may mean 15 criminal cases against the person — or it is caste and community arithmetic. Or a combination of all these.

Maybe solutions to people's problems are complex and politicians would need to be rather evolved to come up with them so they take recourse to emotive issues?

I don't think so. Our politicians are very evolved. To my mind there is no social problem which is intractable if you have your heart and mind in the right place. Our politicians, unfortunately, have stopped thinking about people's problems.

They are in this quagmire of winning and losing. You contest an election, you invest a certain amount of money, and you see if you can win. If you do, then first you have to recoup what you have spent. Then you have to repay your debts. And then you have to start accumulating money for the next election. If you lose, you begin counting your losses and you start from scratch. So political parties have become like corporate houses looking for a higher and higher return on investment. Governance is incidental.

Has the election become an economy by itself?

I wouldn't call it that. I would say it has become a charade because our elections have no connection to democracy. Every five years we fool ourselves. Like Diwali or the Kumbh Mela, we have a *mela*. People spend a lot of money, wear new clothes, shout slogans, and then it's business as usual. It's just an event. It has no relationship with the way society is governed.

I mean, elections should have an impact on how a democracy runs provided there are discussions in legislative assemblies and in Parliament. When did we last have a reasonable discussion? Decisions are made outside Parliament and then rubber stamped in Parliament. That is not democracy. It is an oligarchy by political parties.

But people do exercise their right to vote.

I ask people, where does governance come from? Universally I am told, we elect the government. Ten or 15 years ago I started doing this exercise. I talked to people across the board — children, youth, Rotary Club members, everybody would say this. I felt very gratified. To my naïve mind it meant that democracy has got ingrained in the Indian psyche.

Then I dug a little deeper. I asked, when you go into a polling booth will you vote for who or what the government should be? After some discussion,

they say, we vote for a candidate.

Then I ask, where does the candidate come from? They say the candidate is the person to whom the party gives a ticket. Someone talks of independent candidates. I tell them the number of independent candidates getting elected has been progressively declining. You cannot become a candidate unless you get a ticket from a political party.

So what choice does a voter have? Political parties choose five or six candidates. The choice of the voter is pre-constrained by the choices made by a set of political parties. Does the so-called elected representative then have a choice in supporting or opposing a particular bill? His or her choice is completely controlled by the political party.

Where does the government come from? It comes from political parties. Are political parties democratic? If they are not, and they form the government, do we have a democracy? In a TV interview I said, *hamara loktantra khokhla hain*. People told me I am running down democracy. I said the pillars of our democracy are hollow.

Do you see this changing?

That's a million-dollar question. The only way we can begin to restore democracy is if political parties

'What choice does a voter have? Political parties choose five or six candidates. The choice of the voter is pre-constrained by the choices made by a set of political parties.'

can be forced to become democratic in their internal functioning. And I deliberately use the word 'forced' because they will not do it on their own.

I have support from no less an institution than the Supreme Court. In its NOTA judgment the judges wrote that as more and more people use NOTA, political parties will be compelled to put up better candidates. I often tell people that the Supreme Court uses its words very carefully. They did not write that political parties will be 'encouraged' to put up better candidates, or 'motivated' to put up better candidates but that they will be 'compelled'.

Who can compel them to be more democratic?

There are three elements in society that can have an impact if they work together by accident. They will not ever work together by design. These are — civil society, the media and the judiciary.

For most democracies is this a process that happens, willy-nilly, over time?

What is a democracy? We say we are a democracy because every five years we hold elections and we claim to have peaceful changes of government. *Arre bhai*, China also has elections, so do Russia and Singapore. Merely holding elections and changing governments is not democracy.

Democracy is when every citizen has a sense that he or she has a say in how society is governed. We don't really have that. It is that *ehsaas*, that feeling, that I have a say in the way my country is run. That is democracy.

We should not look at countries or societies as democracies or flawed democracies. Instead, there

should be something like a degree of democratisation. Some countries are higher, some lower. Countries higher up on the scale have a serious element of democratisation in the functioning of their politics.

Democracy can evolve too over a period of time. Is that a fair assumption?

One can say that. There is no formula. I also believe that each society has to find its own path. When I go abroad people ask me about Indian democracy and I reply that it's a question of the glass being half-full or half-empty.

I have been telling you the ills of our democracy but let me tell you three things.

One, if you compare the state of democracy in India to all its neighbours in South Asia — Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, China, Pakistan, Afghanistan — we are miles ahead.

Secondly, from the pool of countries that got independence from colonial rule in the 1940s and 1950s there is no other country, in my view, which has had an uninterrupted run of democracy except for a two-year blip from 1975-77. We have not had a coup, an army takeover, civil war... so we are doing well as a democracy.

And third, a personal reason. The fact that an organisation like ADR has continued to exist for almost 20 years is a tribute to Indian democracy. In many other countries an organisation like ours would be finished because every single political party dislikes us. But we still exist.

In the 20 years you have been around, one of your concerns has been money power during elections. It doesn't seem to have gotten any less.

On the contrary, it has increased. Obviously, we are not doing the right thing. The answer lies in internal democracy in the functioning of political parties and financial transparency.

Why hasn't that been possible?

Political parties are very clear that they want to keep their financing mechanisms under wraps. After the Right to Information (RTI) Act came, we put in an RTI to the CBDT (Central Board of Direct Tax) for copies of the tax returns of political parties. Obviously, they were denied. We placed 19 appeals in the Central Information Commission (CIC) and they were all heard together. In the final hearing 10 senior advocates representing various political parties came. Two of them had reportedly been flown in from Chennai, their determination to protect their copies of IT returns was so intense. Mercifully, the CIC said it should be given. So we got copies of their IT returns.

Then we discovered that political parties declare thousands of crores of income every year but pay zero tax. We thought this a great find. But further investigations revealed that the IT Act has a special

Continued on page 8

Continued from page 7

section called 13A which gives 100 percent exemption from income tax to political parties.

We were stuck. Then we read a proviso to that Act. It said: "Provided a political party maintains its accounts and gives a statement of donations over ₹20,000 each to the Election Commission of India."

We went to the EC and asked for a copy of these lists. We then had, for every political party, a list of all the donations of ₹20,000 each for a particular year. We summed those up and looked at the total income declared in their IT returns. We were surprised to find that donations over ₹20,000 came to just 25 to 30 percent of their total income. Nobody knew where 70 to 75 percent of their income came from.

We then sent RTI applications asking the political parties where this 70-75 percent comes from. They said, we are not covered by the RTI Act. We went back to the CIC. We said, you gave us permission to get IT returns, political parties should be covered by the RTI Act. The CIC said, this is not reason enough, you have to give us more data.

We spent two years filing RTI applications to various government offices to collect information indicating how much public money is being spent on political parties. We went to the Directorate of Estates and we asked how many government buildings are allotted to political parties and how much rent is being charged. We found that ₹450 a month was being charged as rent for a Lutyens bungalow.

We then went to some real estate companies and asked what the market rate of these bungalows was. We took the lowest figure of not below ₹5 lakh per month because the bungalows were of two acres. If you subtract ₹450 from ₹5 lakh, you will know how much public money per month is being foregone.

The political party may declare an income of ₹1,000 crore. Normally, it should pay ₹300 crore as tax. So we filed around 2,000 RTI applications and found such data. And at the end of two years we presented all this to the CIC.

The CIC, in a full bench decision, declared that the six national political parties from whom we had collected data were public authorities under the RTI Act, that they should appoint their own public information officers (PIOs) in four weeks, and respond to requests for information in six weeks.

None of the six political parties appointed anybody. They refused to accept RTI applications. We went back to the CIC and complained of non-compliance. The CIC sent notices to the six parties — BJP, Congress, NCP, BSP, CPI and CPI(M).

No response. Then the CIC sent showcause notices. No response for two years. Finally, the CIC said its order had not been challenged anywhere in any court of law for two years. Therefore, its order was final, legal and correct. Secondly, it didn't have the wherewithal to get its own order implemented. Hence, complainants could go anywhere they wanted. So we are now in the Supreme Court. The Union of India has filed an affidavit saying political parties should not be under the RTI Act.

Has any party voluntarily opted for transparency?
No, sir.

What about AAP? Do they have a PIO?

No. The point being, all political parties are without this. ■

Delhi govt's enterprise syllabus livens up classrooms

PICTURES BY SHREY GUPTA



Girls in a class on entrepreneurship

Kavita Charanjii
New Delhi

DURING a 40-minute class, girls in Class 10 at the Sarvodaya Kanya Vidyalaya, a government school, listen intently to terminologies taught in management courses. They soak in terms like optimisation of resources, team spirit, critical thinking, empathy and a whole lot more.

The class is interactive and lively and spiked with stories, exercises and discussions. The girls stand on their benches to build 'towers' with school bags, books, pens, geometry boxes and water bottles. They talk about fear, learn about mindfulness and the value of collaboration. No dreary textbooks, no soporific topics.

This is the new Entrepreneurship Mindset Curriculum (EMC), introduced as a pilot from April 1 to May 10 by the Delhi government's Directorate of Education in 24 government schools.

From July, the EMC will be formally introduced. It will be taught in 1,022 government schools to 700,000 students in Classes 10-12. The new curriculum has no parallels across the world either in content or scale.

The idea of such a curriculum was conceived by Manish Sisodia, Delhi's deputy chief minister. He has repeatedly emphasised that schoolchildren, who are always under pressure to strive for better marks, should be encouraged to explore their inner potential. They must imbibe entrepreneurial qualities like leadership and communication skills and aspire to become job givers rather than mere job seekers.

Girls in Class 10 C in the Sarvodaya Kanya Vidyalaya talk about fear. "We should face our fears

headlong and not run from them," says Arti Singh.

Riya Kumari enjoys the mindfulness exercises. Her ambition is to join the Indian Police Service where she wants to share with others the importance of teamwork and mindfulness. "In the mindfulness exercise I taught the children that thoughts may come and go like clouds when they close their eyes. But they should focus on the present moment. The idea is to help children relax and feel less stressed," says Anju Chhabra, a teacher of English who is filling in for another teacher.

Says Sushila Singh, a Class 12 student, "Earlier we used to settle down to studies straightaway. Now we have 40 minutes to enjoy ourselves by learning about teamwork, mindfulness and a whole lot of other things."

The children have different ambitions. One still aspires for a government job. Another wants to become a yoga teacher. A third is keen to become a fashion designer.

The EMC syllabus was developed by the faculty of the State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT), Delhi, in partnership with schoolteachers, NGOs, institutions and individual volunteers.

Dr Sapna Yadav, a senior lecturer at SCERT who anchors the 15-member core team, explained the thinking behind the curriculum. "The aim is to build 11 entrepreneurial mindsets like mindfulness, confidence, collaboration, critical thinking, bouncing back from failure, identifying opportunities, and analysis. All children need these mindsets so that their professional journey is smoother once they finish school. This applies across the board whether children opt for jobs, start-ups or expand family businesses," she says.

Yadav is enthusiastic about EMC. The curriculum,

she feels, will help young minds become sharp and innovative. In one class, she says, a child explained positivity by drawing parallels with a sieve. It throws out negative qualities and retains positive qualities. Another child likened himself to a bowl that allowed him to control his anger and not let it spill over.

Mekin Maheshwari, founder of Udhyan Learning Foundation, a non-profit in Bengaluru, is part of the core team that framed the curriculum along with Archita Sisodia, a team member from Udhyan. She has camped in Delhi over the past few months.

"We all know that unemployment is rampant and jobs that educational institutions are preparing students for might not even exist five years down the line. So from an early age, schoolchildren have to develop an independent personality. They should be able to spot an opportunity and practise what the EMC is teaching them in school," says Sisodia.

Stories, experiential activities and mindfulness exercises are fundamental to the curriculum. The children read inspirational real-life stories — Dr Verghese Kurien, architect of the 'White Revolution' and the brain behind Amul; E. Sreedharan, who built the Metro in Delhi; Krishna Yadav, a street vendor-turned-entrepreneur who has set up a successful pickle business with around 2,000 employees; Binny Bansal and Sachin Bansal, Flipkart's founders; and visually impaired Srikant Bolla who after repeated rejections by educational institutions in India joined the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and went on to found a start-up called Bollant Industries that has an eco-friendly product line and employs over 150 disabled individuals.

Practical experience forms an important part of the curriculum. The Delhi government has announced that seed money of ₹1,000 will be given to students of Classes 11-12 to run real businesses once the curriculum takes off. The idea is to encourage students to apply what they learn in their EMC classes. The Delhi government will budget around Rs 40-50 crore for this scheme from the next financial year.

A major attraction for students is that they don't have to 'pass' the EMC class. There are no exams or tests. Instead, teachers and mentor teachers monitor the entrepreneurial mindset of the students. Each of the EMC teachers, who are drawn from various disciplines, goes through a day's training by the SCERT faculty.

At Sarvodaya Kanya Vidyalaya nine teachers have been trained so far. EMC has great spin-offs for teachers too, says Dr Renu Bhatia, principal of the school. She concedes that they do have a huge syllabus to navigate but she has observed that the

EMC has helped teachers become more creative and less stressed.

"The children enjoy the new curriculum greatly. Their cheer rubs off on their teachers. The environment for academics has received a boost in our school," says Pratibha Rani, a teacher of political science in Class 10 C and coordinator of the EMC in Sarvodaya Kanya Vidyalaya.



Teachers were trained on how to teach the syllabus

The idea is to build in children 11 entrepreneurial mindsets like mindfulness, confidence, collaboration, critical thinking and coping with failure. There are no exams.



Archita Sisodia, a team member from Udhyan

But there are challenges. Teachers could be sent off for CBSE evaluation or election duties. Absenteeism is also a problem. "We have motivated teachers who believe completely in EMC and do a great job. But there is a fair degree of resistance as well because teachers are overloaded," admits Sisodia. "Since we started the curriculum, we have

observed that an arts teacher is able to implement the curriculum better than a science or maths teacher. This is because science and maths teachers are under a lot of pressure. These are difficult subjects for most students and they have to complete the syllabus on time."

The EMC team also found that older teachers resisted teaching the EMC. Younger teachers tended to be more open-minded. "We try to understand the teacher's mindset and learn from our feedback," says Sisodia.

Whether schools will take to teaching the EMC with panache will depend on the commitment of the Directorate of Education, facilitators, the content team and schoolteachers. Among the contributors to the project are Tarak Goradia, coach of the Youth Leadership Programme, non-profits such as Udhyan Learning Foundation, Alohoma Education Foundation, Dhriti, Pravah, Pratham Foundation and Kshamtalaya Foundation.

Each organisation contributes to the programme. Udhyan, for example, "focuses on grassroots entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial skill with a hope to maximise human potential," says Maheshwari in a blog on Udhyan's website.

"Our top eight sectors created 1.35 lakh jobs in 2015, while about 1.25 crore Indians turned 18," said Maheshwari, who earlier worked with Flipkart as its Chief People Officer. With GDP growth becoming more capital-led rather than labour-led, the future looks bleak for current jobs. But the emergence of e-commerce and taxi services means that there is a lot of space for creating a chain of small entrepreneurs who provide basic services.

Creating entrepreneurial mindsets means inculcating qualities like creating things with your hands, experimenting, networking and collaborating. These are ignored by the rigidity of our education system.

Udhyan, which was founded in January 2017, runs the Udhyan Shiksha Programme in schools, colleges and with other non-profits in urban and rural Bengaluru and elsewhere in Karnataka and Haryana. The aim is to help youth develop an entrepreneurial mindset through experiential learning and hands-on experience to start and run real businesses for which they are provided ₹10,000 as project money. The Udhyan Vyapaar Programme mentors small businesses so that they can scale up and be successful.

Udhyan's philosophy was in alignment with Manish Sisodia's vision. When the Delhi government put out a call for applications for the development of the curriculum, Maheshwari and many other NGOs and individuals applied. Finally, Udhyan was selected along with several others. The EMC is ready to take off in Delhi government schools and the team of experts that will guide its fortunes couldn't get any better. ■



Girija receiving the Asia Lifetime Achievement Award in Seoul

NBJK completes 50 with Asia award

Bharat Dogra
Hazaribagh

ON April 24, Girija, a leading social activist in Jharkhand, received the Asia Philanthropic Lifetime Achievement Award in Seoul in South Korea on behalf of the Nav Bharat Jagriti Kendra (NBJK), a voluntary organisation in Hazaribagh which works in Jharkhand and, to a lesser extent, in Bihar.

The NBJK traces its origins to the Jayaprakash Narayan or JP movement of 1974. "When we dreamed up plans for social work inspired by our mentor, JP, we were studying engineering in Bihar. We never thought that this journey would be such a long one, so full of challenges," remarked Satish, who has worked closely with Girija all these years.

The recognition has come at an eventful time. This year, the NBJK turns 50 years old and is preparing to celebrate its golden jubilee. It works on a range of issues: health, livelihood, disability, mental health and even waste management.

The first few years were extremely difficult for Girija and Satish, then idealistic youth. Although JP backed them and even persuaded the Bhoodan committee to donate 22 acres, the two faced many problems. The land was rocky and uneven, and it took a long time to make it cultivable and habitable.

Girija and Satish donated a substantial part of their college scholarships and later earnings from their first jobs as engineers with the Bokaro Steel Plant to meet the costs of their new organisation. The difficulties increased when the JP-led movement peaked and Emergency was clamped. Satish was arrested for his involvement in the JP movement. Both of them lost their jobs. However, once the Emergency was lifted, they got back their jobs. They left after five years to devote themselves fully to the work of the NBJK and setting up of Lok Samitis.

It was JP who gave a call for the setting up of Lok Samitis or people's organisations to take forward justice and peace-based work and check irregularities and corruption. Girija and Satish were at the forefront of this movement. Even today, Girija is the national president of the Lok Samitis.

A noteworthy aspect of their initiatives has been the ability to keep a project going even after its formal period of work was over and financial support and staff had been withdrawn. The NBJK has also been able to build a network of voluntary organisations. Some small organisations and

NBJK began with JP's movement when its founders were in Bokaro Steel working as engineers. It takes up a range of issues.

activists emerged thanks to the support provided by the NBJK in the initial, difficult, phase.

An important contribution of the NBJK has been in mental health. In the past 15 years its efforts, along with its sister organisations, have brought relief to thousands of mental health patients and their families in Jharkhand and Bihar. It has taken essential information on remedial action and treatment to many remote villages in Jharkhand and Bihar. More people started coming forward for the treatment of mental health problems. The seriousness of the problems faced by people with mental illness and epilepsy got highlighted and caught the attention of policymakers at state level.

People too stopped relying on superstition.

However, the difficulty of taking patients to faraway hospitals remained. To overcome this problem, special camps were organised by the NBJK and collaborating organisations. The large number of people who came to these camps indicated the need for mental health treatment in villages. Community-based rehabilitation was emphasised. People felt a huge sense of relief when, instead of taking suffering family members to distant hospitals, they could see improvement in their condition as a result of community-based efforts.

In the areas where the NBJK works, the number of persons with disabilities (PWDs) is high. Unfortunately, PWDs are neglected due to social apathy and stigma leading to denial of basic facilities and rights. Access to benefits is possible only with certification. But certification for disability existed only for 30 percent of PWDs in the work area of the NBJK and its sister organisations in Jharkhand and Bihar. As a result of their efforts, certification has increased to around 65 percent.

The ability to provide quality care at the appropriate time, at an early age, has helped in the recovery of several disability-affected children. Providing physiotherapy to children with a club foot or speech and oral therapy to hearing impaired children in their remote villages helped them and their parents hugely. The initiative became a success because it was linked to Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in villages.

The biggest focus of the NBJK's health programme in recent times has been on eye care. The rate of blindness is high in India, more so in the areas where the NBJK works. Eye problems and cataract cases remain unattended to in remote villages of Jharkhand and Bihar.

The NBJK organised camps in remote villages to detect eye ailments and cataract cases and then facilitated treatment at very low cost in its eye hospitals. Children have been the biggest beneficiaries. For cataract patients, the NBJK arranges free transport to the eye hospital and back. Due to such arrangements, cataract treatment in its work area has increased significantly.

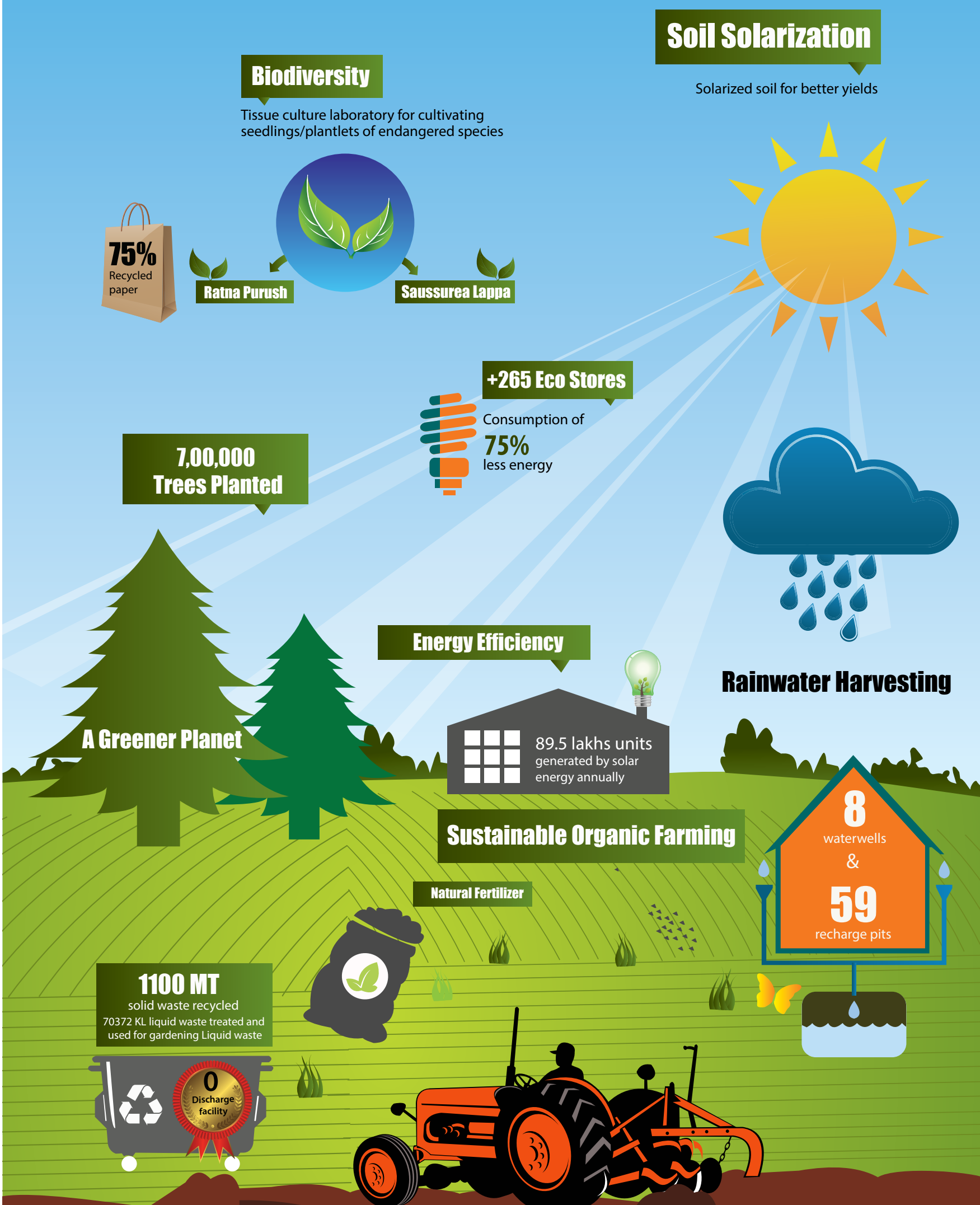
According to Anand, a coordinator at the NBJK, statistics with the organisation show that before its intervention, the surgery rate in these areas was around 1,250 per 100,000. It has now increased to 7,000 per 100,000, which is even higher than the national average of around 5,000. People (including children) with extremely poor eyesight were literally living in the dark. Just providing proper spectacles brought light into their lives, remarks Anand.

The NBJK started the Loknayak Jayaprakash Eye Hospital in 2005 at Bahera village in Chouparan block, Hazaribagh district. In April 2008, a second (and smaller) unit was started at Dumka in the Santhal Parganas region. Both are well-equipped hospitals with 120 beds (100 in Chouparan, 20 in Dumka), providing free and subsidised services to the very needy from rural areas.

The NBJK has implemented many livelihood promotion initiatives. In Khunti, on the basis of a watershed approach, first efforts were made to ensure staple food availability or food security all through the year. Then attempts were made to increase cash income by promoting vegetable cultivation, pig or goat rearing or poultry. Finally, making use of nearby forest areas, lac cultivation and other non-timber forest produce based initiatives were started. ■



Mission
'Save The Earth'



Rainbow Warriors in Goa get new airport EIA annulled

Derek Almeida
Panaji

A spirited effort by the Federation of Rainbow Warriors (FRW) has revealed that trees in tens of thousands, wetlands, water sources and forests will be affected by the building of a new airport at Mopa in the northern taluka of Pernem in Goa.

These details of environment damage were not revealed when the project was proposed and the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) too overlooked them.

The FRW and Hanuman Laxman Aroskar, a resident of Mopa, filed petitions before the Supreme Court to quash the environmental clearance granted to the project on several grounds.

One major reason was the silence over the number of trees that would have to be felled. FRW's own survey showed the existence of 54,676 trees.

"We are against the project because of the environmental damage it will cause. It is bad for Goa and it will destroy tourism. We wanted the environment clearance given to the project revoked and land returned to the farmers," says Abijit Prabhudessai, general secretary and founder-member of FRW.

The Supreme Court asked the Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC) which had earlier cleared the project to review it and re-examine the environmental clearance.

On March 29, the EAC quashed the environmental clearance, prompting the Supreme Court to remark, "We express serious displeasure with the manner in which the EIA report made attempts to gloss over the existence of trees. The EIA report prevaricated by recording that the area required for the proposed airport has only a few trees, mostly bushes. To realise later that the project involved the felling of 54,676 trees is indicative of the cavalier approach to the issue."

Of the total number of trees, 59 percent have a girth of 30 to 50 cm, 36 percent girths of 50 to 100 cm and the remaining girths exceeding 100 cm.

"The EAC, as an expert body, abdicated its role and function by taking into account circumstances which are extraneous to the exercise of its power and failed to notice facets of the environment that were crucial to its decision-making," the court said.

What became apparent during the hearing was that the state government and the project's proposer, GMR Goa International Airport Ltd, failed to mention or deliberately omitted mentioning the presence of wetlands, water sources, water bodies, biospheres, mountains and forests within an aerial distance of 15 km though it was required in Form 1.

The Supreme Court directed the EAC to revisit the recommendations made by it for grant of the environmental clearance and on April 23 the EAC issued a fresh clearance with several conditions which were not present in the original clearance issued on October 28, 2015.

A perusal of both clearances exposes the extent to which crucial information was not revealed. GMR finally disclosed to the EAC that there were seven



Abijit Prabhudessai at a green expanse which will be destroyed by the new airport



An activist measures the girth of one of the trees which would be felled

reserved forests and six proposed reserved forests in Goa and 29 proposed reserved forests in Maharashtra which are within 15 km of the planned airport. Besides, five rivers and two wetlands fall within the area.

Under the new terms of the environmental clearance, GMR will have to plant 550,000 saplings and monitor their survival rate in a time-bound manner. Since 250,000 saplings will be grown at the

village level, GMR will have to ensure that native species or fruit-bearing trees are provided so that locals can derive economic benefits.

What was earlier ignored but brought on board was the fact that 10 environmentally sensitive areas in Maharashtra were within 10 km of the project boundary, with the nearest one being 4.1 km away. All this sensitive information would have been buried if the Federation of Rainbow Warriors had



Prabhudessai and his team carried out a rapid survey



Shepherds with their flock move through these pastures

not intervened.

Does that mean they are happy with the outcome? Far from it. Prabhudessai has a background in aviation, having worked as chief electrical engineer at Dubai airport for several years. He was also part of the project management team which shot down the proposal to build a second airport in Dubai.

"There is something known as the sponge effect," he explained, "if the first airport is successful, it automatically draws traffic from every other airport in the vicinity. The same is going to happen in Goa and the chances of the new airport failing are high because Dabolim will continue to be cheaper since the Navy manages the runway and ATC for free." This view is supported by civil aviation officials.

"Once the Mopa airport is made operational, efforts will be made to choke the Dabolim airport and restrict its growth," said Prabhudessai.

The proposed airport is located at the northern end of the state and although it is 35 km from

Panaji, the South Goa beaches are over 70 km away and the ones at Agonda and Palolem are nearly 100 km from Mopa.

The state government had initiated the process for building a new airport in 1997 and since then several studies were commissioned. Initially, it was decided that the Dabolim airport would be closed once the new one was inaugurated, but an agitation in south Goa changed that and today the position is that both airports will co-exist.

The new airport will be constructed over 2,271 acres and will have a runway of 3.75 km which will be wide enough to accommodate the A380 aircraft. When all four phases are constructed it will require six million litres of water per day and generate 18.2 tonnes of solid waste per day.

So how did Federation of Rainbow Warriors get involved in the Mopa airport issue?

For Prabhudessai and like-minded individuals in Margao, the first brush with activism came in 2009 when the government started acquiring large chunks of farmland around Margao. Tribals who were dependent on the land rose in protest and in response Prabhudessai and his friends launched Goenchea Xetkarancho Ekvott (GXE). At a public meeting held at Lohia Maidan in Margao, Sandeep Khambli from Mopa met them and GXE got on board to fight acquisition of land at Mopa. In 2014, the federation was formed to continue the fight against the proposed airport.

Not everyone agrees with their view on the new proposed airport. The year-on-year increase in passenger traffic at Dabolim Airport is the chief reason for building a large airport. In 2012, the airport handled 3.5 million passengers. This rose to 6.4 million in 2016 and continues to increase.

Francisco de Braganca, doyen of the travel trade in Goa, says it is important to look ahead and work out things.

"Dabolim alone will not be able to handle the traffic into Goa in the future. We need to plan for the next 25 years and not have a parochial view and divide Goa between north and south Goa. We must look at Goa as one destination. All over the world, new and modern airports are far out from the city, some being about 70 to 90 km away which is the distance of Mopa from south Goa. Distance is not an issue with expressways being built from north to south Goa," he says. ■

Samita's World

by SAMITA RATHOR





Weaving has been revived in Jamalhata



Girls from nearby villages prepping for a game of football



Children, seven to 11 years old, learn language and craft at Baal Ghar Kislay

SANJIV KUMAR HAS TAKEN THE BEST NGOs TO SIWAN

Love your village? Here is how you can partner to give back

Subir Roy
Patna

RIAZ Ahmed is a master weaver in Jamalhata village in Bihar's Siwan district. His life revolves around his workshop-cum-home, contained in a shell-like structure of bare brick walls and unpaved floors. He has 11 handlooms with six working on an order from Parivartan, an NGO.

Until a few years ago, weaving had virtually stopped in this village of weavers, part of the industry that produced the well-known Siwan twill *chaadar* or bedcover. The 150 people who then made a living out of weaving, done on 40 looms, either migrated to work in the weaving industry in Mumbai and Ludhiana or took to hawking.

Then came Sanjiv Kumar, 54, the scion of a local *zamindar* family, who set up Parivartan in his village, Narendrapur, to bring all-round development to his own village and 36 surrounding ones as well.

He revived this near-defunct weaving tradition. Ahmed recalls how "he came to the village in 2013 and talked about a revival. He encouraged us to restart, though we did not believe it could happen. Then he sent us yarn, the raw material, and undertook to buy back the product. Thus a few of us got started". Today there are hundreds of looms working in the village.

Siwan in Bihar is one of the most backward

districts in India with the highest level of inward remittance among districts from workers who have gone elsewhere to earn a living.

Sanjiv Kumar's decision to set up Parivartan here stems from his belief that "India can grow only if its villages grow".

Parivartan attempts many kinds of change. It helps children learn, women find their voice and take themselves forward, and farmers get the best out of their mostly very small holdings. The handloom project is part of the attempt to revive local traditions and equip people with skills to earn a decent living. Children's development also focuses on sports, theatre and music.

Parivartan is able to do all this not out of the spoils of *zamindari* which was abolished shortly after Independence (Sanjiv Kumar was not even born then) but from what comes to the Takshila Educational Society that holds the franchise for four schools under the Delhi Public School (DPS) system — in Patna, Pune, Ludhiana and Coimbatore.

Parivartan could offer to buy back the produce of the looms because Sanjiv Kumar decreed that all the children in his schools would wear *khadi* uniforms made of the cloth that begins its journey in Jamalhata village. When some parents complained that the fall of the uniforms was not good, Kumar's reply was that school is not the place to display fall. Parivartan's campus has a weaving studio and a stitching unit. At the weaving studio, several women from nearby villages work on handlooms. Next

door is the stitching unit where 96 women and four men work in two shifts, making school uniforms.

As for what drives Kumar in trying to give back something to society, the clue perhaps lies in both his parents being card carrying members of the Communist Party of India (CPI). Another value he has imbibed is being a firm nonbeliever. So, he went in for a registered marriage and not a traditional religious ritual.

HOW IT BEGAN: A galaxy of the best NGOs in India has helped the Takshila Educational Society set up a range of activities for Parivartan.

The education initiative by Parivartan, in the midst of a depressing rural landscape, is astonishingly modern with emphasis on English, science and maths.

Madhav Chauhan of Pratham set up courses for electricians, food and beverage and housekeeping staff and beauticians and ran them for five years. These ended as Siwan's ability to absorb them became saturated.

Similarly, Kumar met Rajeshwar Mishra, who became a mentor and guided Parivartan on education. Then E.K. Shaji, head of Jodo Gyan, which focuses on primary level maths for children, became involved. Alok Arunam, an IIT graduate, secured the Young India Fellowship from Ashoka University, and set up with Dr Mishra, the education vertical that encompassed the library, science programme and computer centre.



Sanjiv Kumar (middle)



Outside the Parivartan campus

Sanjana Kapoor, daughter of Shashi Kapoor who runs Junoontheatre that takes theatre to small town India, works with Kumar's DPS and Parivartan. "We have been working closely with her in all my four schools. Through Junoontheatre she is taking theatre to children and bringing together theatre and cognitive development," he says.

There was a tie-up with the Jagriti Mahila Samakhya of Muzaffarpur to run Parivartan's Mahila Samakhya programme for women's empowerment. They ran it for two years. Then there was a tie-up with Magic Bus Foundation for the community sports initiative.

Siwan might have all the hallmarks of a backward district but Parivartan's campus belongs to another world. It is spread over eight acres and low, aesthetically-designed buildings sit amidst open spaces dotted with artefacts. The campus has been designed by Vikram Lal, an award-winning architect who has designed several landmark buildings among which is the Akshardham Temple in New Delhi.

Its most distinctive feature which you see as you enter is a set of larger-than-life terracotta statues of gods, goddesses, the odd demon, and animals — all done in the south Indian Aiyandar style of temple architecture.

Explaining the campus layout, Kumar says, "I was always fond of architecture." The entrance prepares you for an entity that combines the modern with aesthetics and values distilled from the past.

SCIENCE, ENGLISH: The education initiative by Parivartan consists of two parts. Groups of children visiting the campus to learn while they play and, secondly, facilitators taking material to nearby schools to teach there.

When we visit Baal Ghar Angan, the pre-primary initiative for children aged three to six at the campus, facilitators are working with children brought together from *anganwadi* centres. The activities are designed to develop their motor and cognitive skills as this is the age at which children learn the most. The room has a colourful play school look with posters designed on the spot to

PICTURES BY ANKIT DATTA



Computer classes in full swing



The stitching unit makes school uniforms



There is emphasis on science and maths

Ideas in science are shared in a hands-on manner. Children between 11 and 13 learn English using digital platforms.



Setika Singh with children at the campus

illustrate simple concepts from numbers to manners. The mathematics content has come from Jodo Gyan and the language content from Pratham.

There is a separate initiative for the seven to 11 age group, coming under Baal Ghar Kislai. A group of children in this age group from nearby schools is led at the campus by Priyanka Kumari, a facilitator who has been here since 2014. They are taught concepts relating to language and craft through play. There is a wall magazine with children's writing. One group is building shapes through plastic sticks, another group plays with beads, counting them.

What impact is Parivartan having on the children? Priyanka says children who were inarticulate earlier have opened up after coming to the campus for some time. Yet another initiative, Jharokha, for children between 11 and 13 years, has an English learning centre which uses digital platforms. Ideas on science are shared in a hands-on manner at the campus' Vigyan Shala.

A key part of the education initiative is the teaching of science in schools. We visit the Upgraded Middle School at Sanjalpur where a science class is being taken by Vigyan Shala facilitator Sudhir Singh. He shows how the impact

of pressure changes (falls) when it is distributed over a larger area. A single pin pricks a balloon but when the same balloon is pressed over a bed of multiple pins it stands its own.

Later we spot him explaining to a group of children around him how a rainbow is created. A mirror lies at the bottom of a tub of water, with sunlight falling on it, reflecting a rainbow on a wall opposite. Everyday items which the children are familiar with are used to explain phenomena that they are also familiar with and in the process a scientific principle is made clear. Alok Kumar Singh, who is taking us around, explains how not just the children but the teacher also has evolved since he first came in.

The same link-up of teaching with play, stories and everyday things is prevalent in the library class that librarian Nishu Kumari of Parivartan is taking at Khembhatkan Primary School with Class 5 students. She tells them stories which engage them as a precursor to a visit to the Parivartan library where they will find all the books with those stories she narrates and more. The class has about 15 children, nearly all girls, with a single row of boys making up the last row not interested at all in what the teacher is saying. Why predominantly girls? The

answer is that parents often send their boys to private schools and girls to government schools like this one.

Baal Ghar Angan also works out of *anganwadi* centres. We visit one operating out of a rented room in a private house, packed with under-five children and nursing mothers at the periphery (some in *hijabs*), being told a story by a facilitator which they repeat. The spread of private education is all-pervasive. The outer wall of the *anganwadi* centre bears a poster of a private school.

There is no particular religion in the prayers the 36 staff members of Parivartan, including the housekeeping staff, recite when they gather near the campus Sabhaghar in a circle every morning before beginning the day's work.

The prayers are adopted from *Aswath*, the first title brought out under the Takshila Value Series publications. It is an inspirational collection of poems, songs, *shlokas* and prayers that have been compiled from diverse sources. The prayers and poems recited have no religious implications but a strong link to self-improvement. Apart from the prayer, Bihar Geet and the national anthem are also sung by the staff before beginning their workday.

Setika Singh, the executive director of Takshila Foundation, has had a hand in the idea behind this prayer meeting. She is Kumar's daughter and he emphasises that he maintains a clear distinction — no family member in the running of DPS but only in the non-profit initiatives like Parivartan.

Kumar affirms that his money comes from the four DPS schools he runs. The total capital investment in Parivartan so far has been ₹15 crore. Revenue expenditure cumulatively from 2011-12 to 2018-19 has been ₹7 crore to 8 crore. In 2011-12 it was ₹30 lakh. Now, in 2018-19, it is in the region of ₹1.5 crore. The target is to keep it at that.

His most farsighted act has been to create a corpus for each non-revenue generating entity. "We have secured the future of Parivartan by creating a ₹25-crore corpus, which at 6 percent return per annum will be enough to meet the expenses of Parivartan."

Kumar has been greatly influenced by the book, *Built to Last*, which he keeps referring to. It researched 50 companies that have been at the top for 75 years. The common DNA of these companies was people and not profits first and they always wanted to leave a legacy. "I want to leave Takshila as a legacy," he says. ■



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 dcbsocial@dcbbank.com



Scan this QR code to watch how the children of Nuh have benefitted from this initiative.

DCB BANK

POOR PUT FAITH IN POWERFUL MODI

With Developmental Hindutva BJP becomes India's natural and national party of governance

SANJAYA BARU

THE common perception about Narendra Modi's first term as Prime Minister is that he was first elected in 2014 on a platform of development and has since been re-elected, in 2019, on the platform of Hindutva nationalism. On the contrary, Modi's consistent political platform is best described as Developmental Hindutva. He has been able to widen the political support base for the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) core ideology of Hindutva by focussing on the tried and tested mainstream Indian political narrative of "growth with social welfare" (Indira Gandhi), "growth with social justice" (Janata Party) and "growth with a human face" (Narasimha Rao - Manmohan Singh).

The verdict of May 2019 is, therefore, best described as a vote for Narendra Modi's brand of Hindutva with its emphasis on social and economic development and nationalism. The difference is that Modi personalised that experience by entering a poor household's kitchen, by installing a toilet nearby and letting the poor know he is battling the rich on their behalf.

The verdict of 2019 marks a tectonic shift in Indian politics taking forward a trend that began almost two decades ago with the decline of the Indian National Congress and its gradual replacement by the BJP as India's natural and national party of governance. The BJP is no longer a fringe party grabbing the political centre. That was and remains the position of the various Communist parties even when the undivided Communist Party of India (CPI) was the largest single national opposition party in the Lok Sabha of 1952 to 1967. Even as the original CPI tried to move to the political centre, under the leadership of S.A. Dange, the CPM and CPI(ML) broke away taking the bulk of the Left to the sidelines of national politics, leaving the centre to be occupied by the Congress and its many splinters.

As the Congress's hold over the centre weakened and the Left remained regionally and politically confined, that centre space of Indian politics was then occupied by a clutch of caste-based and regionally confined political parties. Through the 1980s and 1990s the BJP, a fringe 'right-wing' party at the time, challenged both the Congress and the caste-based parties, while aligning with various regional parties (Telugu Desam, the Tamil parties, Akalis, Trinamool Congress, Biju Janata Dal, Shiv Sena and so on). The BJP's first priority was to replace the Congress as a national party. Second, it had to decimate the caste-based parties (Lalu Prasad Yadav, Mulayam Singh, Mayawati, Ajit Singh, and so on). This is precisely what it managed to achieve over the past decade.

Entering the campaign for 2019 the BJP had to move on the third and final front of challenging 'regional' parties, once its allies. It has succeeded in that effort in West Bengal, made a dent in Telangana and Odisha, but has so far failed in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. Going forward, the BJP will seek to gain ground both in Odisha and Telangana where the existing regional parties in power are excessively dependent on the personality of the incumbent leader. Kerala may remain outside the BJP's reach, like Punjab, for some time to come.

This political evolution and expansion of the BJP has been made possible by its platform of Developmental Hindutva, with development defined not just as economic growth, but in terms of a variety of social policies that have made the government the source of livelihood security and betterment for many citizens. Note the fact that Modi has adopted most of the ideas of social development that came out of Sonia Gandhi's National Advisory Council (NAC) and introduced new ones of his own like Ayushman Bharat that give the State a larger role in civil society.

In pursuing this model of paternalistic development, where the State rather than the market once again becomes the source of livelihood security, Prime Minister Modi has reverted to the pre-neo-liberal model of government-supported development. In many ways this is in keeping with a trend around the world where the State has returned to play a larger role in economic development.



Mass appeal: Teeming crowds at a Modi election rally

From Donald Trump's America to Xi Jinping's China and across Europe, citizens are expecting more from the State than they did during the era of neo-liberalism.

Those who imagined that Modi's 'right-wing nationalism' would also mean 'right-wing' free market economics have been disappointed. Modi, like Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump, is a believer in the power and the role of the State. Hence his commitment to paternalistic development. Modi brings gas stoves into your home. He brings electricity to your village. He builds toilets for you. He is the provider. The *mai-baap* of a 21st century *sarkar*.

With economic growth slowing down globally and world trade, too, governments around the world are being expected by their voters to do more. State capitalism is making a comeback as markets fail to provide answers to structural changes brought about by demographic shifts, technological change and geopolitical rivalries. In the era of geo-economics the government is

expected to steer the economy. Modi has won the trust of the Indian voter as a reliable captain who can steer the ship of the Indian economy and polity through uncertain waters. What then are Prime Minister Modi's priorities as he begins his second term?

PRIORITY 1: THE ECONOMY

In an assessment published last week the Paris-based Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) — the rich countries' club — saw national income growth in India in 2019-20 to be around 7.5 per cent. "This growth will come from higher domestic demand due to improved financial conditions, fiscal and quasi-fiscal stimulus, including new income support measures for rural farmers, and recent structural reforms. Lower oil prices and

the recent appreciation of the rupee will reduce pressures on inflation and the current account." Underscoring the fact that India would still be among the G20's fastest growing economies, the OECD observed, "Investment growth will accelerate as capacity utilisation rises, interest rates decline, and geopolitical tensions and political uncertainty are expected to wane."

Not everyone would share this optimism. Not only is the global economic environment expected to become more challenging as the United States- China trade war continues, but even the geopolitical environment around India may get destabilised if the US injects more instability into West Asia. Clearly, Prime Minister Modi's Priority Number One will remain macro-economic management. The fiscal assumptions and forecasts made in the interim budget, presented by interim finance minister Piyush Goyal this February, must hold. Given the sweeping mandate received, Modi can afford to go slow on some of his fiscally demanding promises. It is quite normal for governments in democracies

State capitalism is making a comeback as markets fail to provide answers. Modi has won the trust of the Indian voter as a reliable captain who can steer the ship of the Indian economy and polity through uncertain waters.

to turn fiscally conservative after an election, ensuring that the political business cycle gets turned down.

Rather than boost growth through public spending, the government should aggressively pursue ease of doing business, reversing the highly arbitrary functioning of various regulatory agencies, including the Securities and Exchange Board of India. The Indian private sector requires a more sympathetic hearing from the second Modi government. At least one reason why Rahul Gandhi appeared larger than his real self over the past year has been because of the support he has been getting from small, medium and even big business who have been unhappy with various measures of the Modi government. It was politically sensible for Modi not to be seen worrying too much about their concerns at a time when his electoral prospects depended on wooing the poor and the middle class. But now that he is firmly in saddle, he should pay more attention to them.

An early initiative could be in increasing the pace of the Make in India programme in defence manufacturing. India's first industrial era, in the 1930s, was based on the growth of agro-processing industries like cotton textiles and sugar. Its second industrial era, in the 1950s, was based on the growth of public sector capital goods industries. The third industrial era of the 1980s and 1990s was based on the growth of consumer durables, including automobiles. The share of manufacturing in national income has stagnated over the past decade and a half at around 16 per cent. Both the Manmohan Singh government and the first Modi government tried their best to increase the pace of manufacturing growth but have largely failed. Given the flattening out of demand for consumer durables it is possible that many of the existing industrial sectors may face slow growth till demand picks up in the next cycle. What can be attempted in the interim is a rapid escalation of investment in defence manufacturing.

There is industrial growth to be attained by boosting the income of farmers and the lower middle class whose desire for manufactured goods, ranging from farm equipment to household gadgets, remains unsatiated, indeed unaddressed.



ANKIT DATTA

The BJP took on former ally Mamata Banerjee in West Bengal



Women cheer Modi in West Bengal

Modi brings gas stoves into your home. He brings electricity to your village. He builds toilets for you. He is the provider. The *mai-baap* of a 21st century *sarkar*.

Management guru C.K. Prahalad asked businessmen to seek 'fortune at the bottom of the pyramid'. The financial media continues to focus on declining demand for automobiles. There may be a bigger market for a range of less sophisticated manufactured products.

PRIORITY 2: SOCIALLY INCLUSIVE POLITICS

The verdict of 2019 has meant that the BJP has replaced the Congress as the natural and national party of government. However, for it to govern as such the Modi government must take visible measures to win the confidence of the Muslim community. This is not about minority appeasement. This is about credibly reinforcing the message of *sabka saath, sabka vikas*. Prime Minister Modi's post-victory tweet that said, "Together we will build a strong and inclusive India", is, therefore, of great value and importance. His government and party must get the message loud and clear. The BJP must end its obsession with individual food habits and social choices.

PRIORITY 3: EDUCATION AND HEALTH

An important plank of the 2019 campaign was Modi's healthcare initiative. He must remain focused on healthcare for all as a national objective. The government must address the concern that its policies are neither helping the needy poor nor supporting healthcare providers. A socially and regionally broad-based national public health and healthcare programme is still waiting to be implemented.

If there is one area in which India truly lags behind all the highly performing economies of East Asia, including China, it is education. A report on education reform is waiting to be unveiled. In his first term, Modi allowed his party's ideologues to mess around with education and educational institutions. This has not served the national interest. In his second term, the PM must focus on bringing India's educational system up to speed with the needs of the 21st century.



SHREY GUPTA

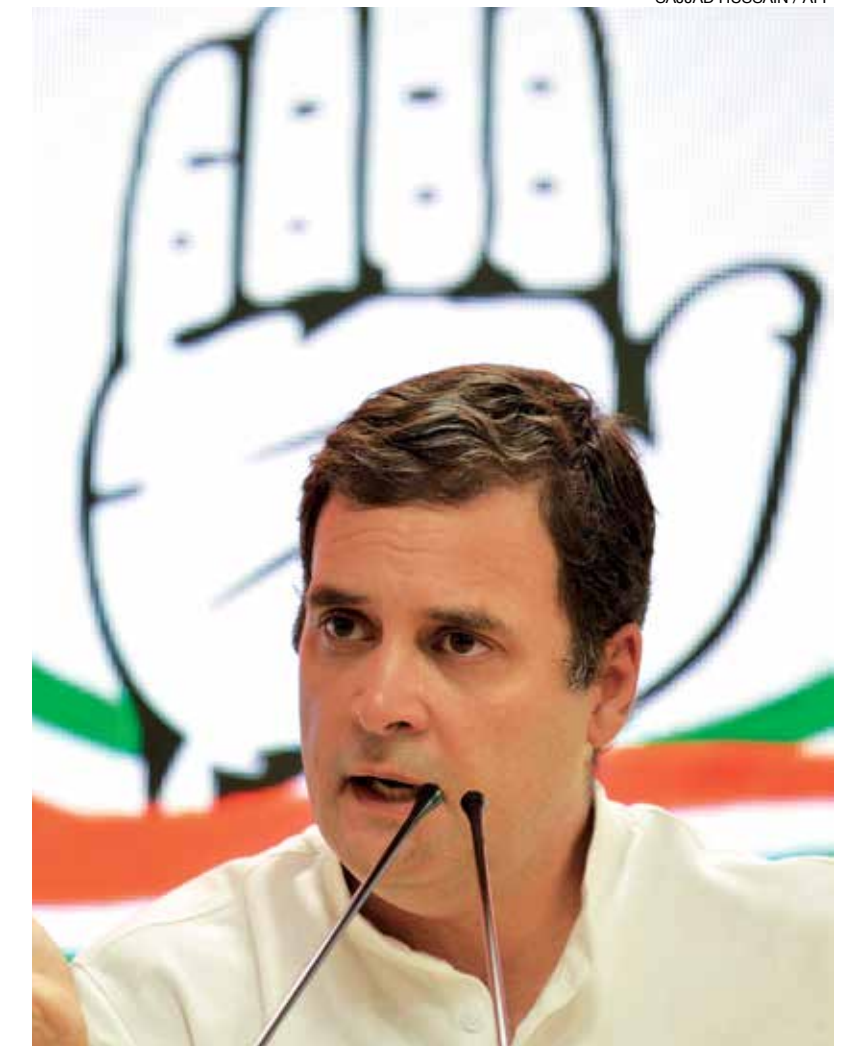
Amit Shah, the hardworking master strategist

Note the fact that Modi has adopted most of the ideas of social development that came out of Sonia Gandhi's National Advisory Council and introduced new ones like Ayushman Bharat that give the State a larger role in civil society.

PRIORITY 4: FOREIGN POLICY

A Prime Minister's main area of policy initiative at all times remains national security and foreign policy. Even in the realm of economic policy, a PM has to work with other ministers, especially the finance and commerce ministers and the ministers responsible for infrastructure development. It is, therefore, not unusual for PMs to devote greater attention to national security and foreign affairs. Both fronts remain challenging. A stronger economic performance can help increase the space for foreign policy initiatives. Hence, the economy remains a priority even in foreign policy management. With the global economy passing through difficult times, building meaningful coalitions that enable India to remain focused on her economy remains a foreign policy priority.

In foreign policy the past is no guide to the future. India needs a more forward-looking foreign policy for the 21st century. Modi has done well to maintain a balance in India's relations with the US, China, Russia, European Union and Japan, not getting drawn into the US-China spat and strengthening strategic relations with technologically advanced nations like Germany, Japan and South Korea. This policy must continue. Closer home, sooner rather than later, Modi will have to focus on Pakistan. What India can achieve with Pakistan is a different matter. But India should at least converse with Pakistan. This remains a major



SAJJAD HUSSAIN / AFP

Rahul Gandhi: Will a Congress revival be possible under him?

gap in Modi's first term.

The Indian electorate has been exceedingly generous to Prime Minister Modi. It has given him a handsome mandate the likes of which India has not seen in normal times for close to half a century. After all, the Congress victory of 1984 was a consequence of Indira Gandhi's assassination. In 2019 Mr Modi has won an impressive victory in a normal year. He owes it to the people of India to give them five years of peace, livelihood security and hope for the future.

WHAT ABOUT THE SONIA CONGRESS?

In my book, *The Accidental Prime Minister*, I argued that the UPA victory of 2009 was an endorsement of five years of the first Manmohan Singh government (2004-09), but the Sonia Congress gave most of the credit for that victory to Sonia and Rahul Gandhi. The complete takeover of the Indian National Congress, which became the Indira Congress in 1969 and the Sonia Congress in 1999, by the Nehru-Gandhi family culminated in the overnight elevation of Priyanka Gandhi Vadra as the party's general secretary virtually on the eve of the 2019 elections.

The verdict of 2019 has finally exposed the utter bankruptcy of the Nehru-Gandhi brand. The combined number of MPs in the Lok Sabha belonging to parties that broke away from the Congress — YSR Congress, Trinamool Congress, Nationalist Congress and a few individuals who went to other parties — is almost the same as the number of Sonia Congress MPs elected this time.

Given this fact, the only way in which the erstwhile Indian National Congress can revive itself is for all the breakaway factions of the Congress to come together and form a single party under a new leader. Clearly, Rahul Gandhi cannot be that leader having failed repeatedly to deliver a victory in New Delhi. The new group will have to reinvent the Congress for the 21st century under a new, democratically elected leader. It will take at least three to four years for this process to be completed. If a new Congress, liberated from the stranglehold of those who led it to two defeats, emerges by the time of the next Lok Sabha it can hope to put up a decent fight against the BJP and at least claim the empty seat of the Leader of the Opposition in Parliament. ■

Sanjaya Baru is a writer and Distinguished Fellow, Institute for Defence Studies & Analysis in New Delhi

Farmers take on the market

Solar dryers mean better vegetable prices

Shree Padre
Nashik

IT is a story heard across India. Small farmers are left with vegetables they cannot sell when prices fall because of overproduction. Potatoes are dumped on the road in Uttar Pradesh by angry farmers and in Odisha tomatoes lie crushed and abandoned.

The situation was similar in Nashik district, a significant vegetable growing belt in Maharashtra. Tomato, bottle gourd, chilli, onion, fenugreek and more grow here. When prices crashed, small farmers wouldn't harvest their standing crop but leave it to rot in their fields. It was cheaper that way.

In recent years things have begun to change. In Ozar, 20 km from Nashik, the Shri Sant Savta Shetkari Gut (SSSSG), which is a farmer producer organisation (FPO), has found a way out of this quagmire. It spots a glut in the market and signals farmers to divert their crops into processing. The vegetables are dehydrated with solar dryers and then packed and sold to markets beyond Nashik where they fetch a better price.

The farmers have even coined slogans to promote their products, like 'Smart kitchen ki smart bhaji' and 'Avoid non-veg, try dry veg'.

The SSSSG was started in 2013 by 25 farmers. Govardhan Kulkarni, 47, is secretary and Vilas Sathbhai, 50, is president. The idea first came to Kulkarni and his friends when they were looking for ways to combat the market collapse they so frequently faced. The solution they found was to process vegetables every time prices collapsed.

The farmers then set out to understand processing techniques. Out of all the preservation methods they examined, like freezing, pulping and dehydration, they realised that only dehydration was farmer-friendly. "It is low-cost and simple. Ordinary farmers can carry out this process easily," says Kulkarni.

Taking the weather in Nashik into consideration, they opted for solar dryers and began a search for the best ones. After a few months they zeroed in on a 20 kg solar dryer made by S4S Technologies, a company in Mumbai. In 2014, the solar dryer was priced at ₹18,000. It now costs ₹35,000.

"The solar dryer company just showed us some dried samples. But we weren't taught the right methods of dehydration. So we had to learn through trial and error how different vegetables need to be cut, how long the drying process takes and so on," says Kulkarni. This learning took the FPO one and a half years and a few tonnes of vegetables got wasted during trials.

The second problem was standardisation of quality. Each farmer's product varied in quality.



A range of solar dried vegetables is sold by the Shri Sant Savta Shetkari Gut, a farmer producer organisation

When the farmers spot a glut in the market they divert their crops to processing. The vegetables are dehydrated with solar dryers and then packed and sold to markets beyond Nashik where they fetch a better price.

"The product has to be tightly packed immediately once it has been dried after bringing it to room temperature," warns Sathbhai. "Otherwise it will absorb moisture from the atmosphere and get spoiled."

Organising capital to begin their venture proved to be a headache. The farmers could get financial help from the Maharashtra Agricultural Competitiveness Project (MACP). A provision existed. But getting the subsidy meant first repaying their loans. They also had to provide guarantees to get loans from banks.

Eventually, Sathbhai and a few farmers mortgaged their land to organise the money they had to repay the banks. The farmers finally invested ₹25 lakh,

out of which ₹8 lakh was a grant (from the government).

Quite quickly, their venture has become commercially promising. Kulkarni explains: "Take bottle gourd. Its normal price is ₹10 per kg. But during a glut, it can fall to just ₹2. That means 20 kg will earn the farmer only ₹40. But if we dehydrate bottle gourd, its price rises to ₹140. Ayurvedic medicine companies buy this."

SSSSG had to do some market research to find out that there was demand for bottle gourd powder among Ayurvedic companies. Subsequently, they entered into an agreement with an Ayurvedic company to supply dried bottle gourd on a regular basis. It is also bought by people who are diabetic.

Beetroot powder is bought by those with haemoglobin deficiency.

To make one kg of sundried tomatoes, 22 kg of fresh tomatoes are required. If the price of tomato dives to ₹4 per kg you need ₹88 worth of tomato to produce a kg of dried tomato. After adding labour and other expenses, the cost of a kilo of sundried tomatoes works out to ₹180 per kg. It fetches the farmer a much higher price of ₹400 per kg.

Altogether SSSSG produces 17 types of dehydrated vegetables including ginger, garlic, carrot, *bhindi* and cluster beans. In the leafy vegetables category, *methi* and coriander are the most important.

In 2017-18, the SSSSG dried 45 tonnes of vegetables and leaves which gave them 2.5 tonnes of dehydrated products. The average price they got for one kg of dehydrated vegetable was ₹262. Their total turnover was ₹680,000, expenses came to ₹513,000 and net profit was ₹167,000. In the two previous years, they earned a total profit of ₹475,000 from five tonnes of dehydrated products.

SSSSG sells its products wholesale and retail. It has over the years taken part in over 100 exhibitions. A 100 gm packet is generally sold for ₹60 to 70. "In some exhibitions, we have earned ₹8,000 to ₹9,000 in a single day," says Kulkarni.

It is also cheaper to eat dehydrated vegetables. Kulkarni explains that a person in a day can consume about 15 gm of dehydrated vegetables which, when rehydrated, becomes 120 gm. If you consume fresh vegetables, you will pay ₹5 for 120 gm. But 15 gm of dehydrated vegetables costs only ₹3.50 and there is no wastage. The shelf life of dehydrated vegetables is six months. Improved packaging can extend shelf life.

The FPO even has a slogan to illustrate their calculations — 'Buy vegetables once, eat it for six months.'

PLANS AND HICCUPS: The initial plan was that all 25 farmers who are members of SSSSG would dehydrate vegetables at their premises. Then products would be pooled and marketed. But in this case, farmers would have to wait a few months to get returns. All members weren't on the same page on this. It also took them a while to figure out how to use solar dryers and produce dehydrated products.

Farmers here, on average, own small fields of around two to four hectares. "We keep a quarter of our land for vegetable cultivation. Drying vegetables in the sun is not new to us. But dehydration on a commercial scale and selling dehydrated vegetables for domestic use is a totally new concept for us," says Kulkarni.

Vegetables are cut before drying. Any crop generally requires three days to dry completely. Around 25 kg of fresh vegetable are required to get one kg of dried vegetable.

The SSSSG now has 50 solar dryers. Each can dry 20 kg of fresh vegetables at a time. Twenty dryers are kept on an open ground near its office. The rest are positioned on the premises of farmers whom SSSSG has trained. It buys the dehydrated products made by these farmers.

Five solar dryers are reserved for trials. If a group of farmers from a nearby area is interested, a solar dryer is given to them for three months. The dehydrated vegetables they produce are bought by



Govardhan Kulkarni with some of their dehydrated vegetables



Women drying bitter gourd with solar dryers

17 types of herbs and vegetables are being processed. The FPO has 50 solar dryers: 20 near its office and the rest on farms.

dryers is more efficient than exposing vegetables directly to the sun," says Sathbhai.

Latha Sathish Pawar is from a farming family. She took three solar dryers to experiment with drying onions. In three months, the Pawars produced about 200 kg of dried onion. About 12 to 15 kg of fresh onion are required to make one kg of dried onion. The SSSSG paid her ₹120 per kg. Pawar now plans to take a bank loan of ₹1 lakh to buy a 200-kg solar dryer.

Suresh Shinde and Ganapath Shinde have had a 200-kg solar dryer for two years. They don't use it on a regular basis. Only when prices decline drastically do they leap into action. Every year they make around two quintals of dried vegetables. "This strategy is increasing our income," they say.

Nashik district used to be completely rainfed a few decades ago. Now water from a canal is available. Sathbhai and Kulkarni were the first to start a water users association and spread awareness about water conservation. Once ample water was available, vegetable cultivation increased. But in summer, when there is a shortage of water, vegetable

SSSSG and the farmers can buy the dryer if they want to, or return it.

Farmers here have some traditional experience in vegetable dehydration especially with regard to *methi* and bitter gourd. The reason is that the price of *methi* rises from ₹2 in November to ₹10 before summer. After April, *methi* is not available at all. Traditionally, farmers used to dehydrate both vegetables for the lean season. So they are producers and consumers of these vegetables.

"Our grandmothers used to dry *methi* and brinjal to use when these were not available. Using solar



Women chopping onions for drying



A class on dehydrating vegetables in session

Govardhan Kulkarni, secretary of the FPO, says solar dryers should be as ubiquitous as tractors. A solar dryer with 10 kg capacity should cost ₹5,000. Moisture meters should cost no more than ₹5,000 to ₹10,000.

production comes to a standstill.

Sandip Dilip Bachhao, the block level technical officer of the Maharashtra Agricultural Competitiveness Project, is most impressed by the enterprising spirit of the farmers. “They didn’t know anything about solar dryers or the dehydration process. But they learnt. Now three-star and five-star hotels are buying dehydrated vegetables. The big advantage is that these vegetables come in handy during the off-season,” says Bachhao.

It’s true that the SSSSG has started getting large orders. But, currently, the farmers don’t have the manpower or capacity to cater to very high demand.

“This means there is latent demand and there is room for more farmer producer groups to get into the dehydration business,” says Bachhao.

DRYERS AND METERS: Expansion is in SSSSG’s plans, but it is held back by the high cost of solar dryers, expensive moisture meters and marketing.

“It was our organisation that helped create an identity for S4S dryers. The company sent many people to meet us and showcased our success story. Now the price of their solar dryers has increased steeply,” says Kulkarni. “So, I am afraid we won’t be able to afford them anymore. You need to invest

around ₹2,000 to dehydrate one kg of fresh vegetables in their dryer. Unless this sum is reduced to ₹500, it will be tough to dehydrate vegetables and make a profit.”

He says solar dryers should be as ubiquitous as tractors. A solar dryer with 10 kg capacity should cost ₹5,000. Moisture meters should cost no more than ₹5,000 to ₹10,000.

The SSSSG is keen to build its own low-cost solar dryers. The farmers have approached Dapoli and Rahuri Universities for help. “The universities have agreed to design inexpensive dryers for us. We can then get our dryers made by any fabricator,” says Kulkarni. Areca nut farmers along the Karnataka coastline are also thinking along similar lines.

Another technical problem, says Kulkarni, is non-availability of inexpensive moisture meters. “Consequently, we have to rely on visual judgment. In this context our women are better judges,” he says with a big smile.

Solar dryers don’t have any recurring expenditure since they don’t need fuel or electricity. One major limitation is that they won’t function during the monsoon months. In winter, solar dryers take longer to work. So SSSSG avoids dehydrating in winter.

After deducting the three monsoon months, winter and holidays, solar dryers are actually operative for only seven months. On average, 2.4 tonnes of dehydrated products are produced in about 200 to 210 days.

REACHING CONSUMERS: For Indian consumers, buying dehydrated vegetables is a new concept. How does SSSSG, a rural industry, hope to create a robust market?

Initially, the farmers managed to identify a few distribution companies that supply dehydrated products to Pune, Mumbai and to ships that travel long distances. Till recently, 80 percent of SSSSG’s products were sold to two companies on a prefixed uniform rate, leaving it with just a thin margin of profit. “The agencies got the bigger slice of cake. In March, we ended our deal with them,” says Kulkarni.

The farmers now market their products directly to consumers through the SSSSG. They say they have been preparing themselves for this eventuality by taking part in exhibitions and seminars to be better known.

“We have been able to create a niche for ourselves. We get repeat orders and that makes us happy. However, we may be compelled to reduce production till we put in place a marketing plan. No regrets, though, because we hope to get higher margins by selling directly,” says Kulkarni. He has his eye on the military’s requirement for dehydrated vegetables and hopes the government will buy directly from them.

Their biggest market is Mumbai. All kinds of buyers exist such as students who travel abroad for higher education. They take packets of dehydrated vegetables with them.

SSSSG has also trained more than 80 groups from Gujarat, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, Kashmir, and even from distant Sri Lanka and Afghanistan in dehydration. Kulkarni keeps abreast of latest developments in dehydration and shares his knowledge willingly with fellow farmers. ■

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PICTURES BY SHREY GUPTA



Pankaj and Richa Agarwal: “We have managed to create a niche for our brand”

Just Organik goes to small farmers

Kavita Charanji
New Delhi

Businesses in organic products are as much about social impact as healthy bottom lines. It means farmers, consumers and the company must all swim together.

“An organic enterprise has to benefit the company, the consumer and society,” says Pankaj Agarwal of Just Organik who procures organic produce from small farmers in Uttarakhand. “The consumer benefits from a life free of harmful chemicals. The company makes money, if not today then in the future. Third, our company has social impact.”

Just Organik was launched in 2013, by Agarwal and his wife, Richa. At that time organic products were still seen as expensive boutique products. A robust market had yet to develop. But the couple was clear from the start that they needed a “triple bottom line” on the balance sheet of their enterprise, Treta Agro Pvt Ltd, that owns the brand.

The Just Organik brand of organic foods includes pulses, millets, cereals, spices, sweeteners, oils and tea. The company is now offering consumers ready-to-eat, healthy organic foods made from superfoods.

Over the years, organic products have become mainstreamed, prices have come down and more retail stores stock them.

Just Organik sources its range of products directly or indirectly from around 3,000 farmers in Uttarakhand. The company also supports farmer producer organisations (FPOs) in a few villages. Organic produce is bought from the farmers at a

predefined premium which could range from 10 to 25 percent over what they generally get in the market. Just Organik partners local NGOs in the hill state to help the farmers get certification and training in organic farming.

“To win trust and ensure the genuineness of our products it was important for us to have complete control of the value chain that starts from the farmer and ends with the consumer,” says Agarwal.

There are other social spin offs like women’s



Women from migrant families are employed in the Delhi unit

empowerment. The company employs around 25 women from migrant families near its corporate office in Aya Nagar in Delhi to clean, process and package organic farm produce. The women are paid ₹8,000-12,000 a month. There is also an office and processing facility at Rudrapur in Uttarakhand.

“We have partnered with Jan Madhyam, an NGO which works for people with disability, to employ two young people with special needs,” says Richa,

who is director of Just Organik. Earlier, she worked with SRF Foundation, the CSR wing of SRF Ltd, a multi-business entity engaged in textiles, chemicals, packaging films and engineering plastics.

Uttarakhand has small farmers who traditionally practise organic agriculture. The hill state is seen as ‘natural organic terrain.’ While the environment is pristine, “the land is not really organic because all the micronutrients have been destroyed”, says Agarwal. “It may take over three years to restore micronutrients to the soil.” Over the years, deforestation has destroyed top soil.

The company’s star performer is Rajma Joshimath that comes from Joshimath, an area close to Badrinath. Another popular performer is Rajma Harsil, sourced from Harsil which is close to Gangotri, an important pilgrimage site. “Think of the pristine environment of the products. The air, water and soil are pure. People who start buying our rajma never go back to any other brand,” asserts Agarwal.

A pilot project between the company and the Uttarakhand government will begin this October to ensure transparency in the value chain from the farmer to the consumer. “New blockchain technologies will bring transparency to the procurement process. The farmer, transporter, aggregator and processor then become responsible for the quality as well as pricing aspects of the produce,” says Agarwal.

With the help of this technology, which will be overridden by web-based technologies, Just Organik will add an app-based facility to enable consumers to trace organic produce to the farms from where they originate, says Agarwal.

Constant product innovation also gives Just Organik an edge. New organic, vegan and gluten-free ready-to-eat meals from superfoods like ragi, millets, quinoa and amaranth, have been invented. The consumer can choose from Seven Ancient Grains, Buckwheat Pilaf or Five Lentils Melange, among others. Just Organik recently won an award for the Best Product Range in the organic category.

Just Organik products are available at large retail chains like Spencer’s, More, WHS Smith, Big Bazaar, Nature’s Basket as well as on Amazon, Flipkart and Big Basket. There are institutional buyers too, among them Fortis Hospital and the Taj Group.

The brand sells in 25 cities and aims to reach 250 cities in India. It also exports to the US, Australia, Singapore, Middle East and UK.

Just Organik’s products are certified by India Organic, EU and USDA standards. They are also recognised by Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DIPP) and Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) and meet the new Jaivik Bharat standards of the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI).

The company has an annual revenue of Rs 12 crore at present. It is scouting around for investors to take its expansion plans forward.

“There is a lot of clutter in the organic market but we have been able to create a niche for our brand. In the last five years, people have moved from the question of what is organic to who is organic,” says Agarwal. ■

On a dangerous path



BACK TO SCHOOL

DILEEP RANJEKAR

BACK in 1998, I spotted boys and girls in their school uniforms, probably from Classes 8-9, frolicking with beer in a Bengaluru pub around lunchtime. It was a regular school day and, obviously, the students had bunked school to be in the pub. More important, they were not of the permissible legal age to consume alcohol and the pub owner was blatantly violating the law. My friend, who lived in the US, began narrating stories of alcohol and substance abuse among American students. At the end of the discussion, we both dismissed this as an urban phenomenon and blamed the parents as well as the pub authorities for the profligacy of the students.

Boys are more vulnerable to substance abuse than girls. While affordability is higher for children in private schools, the problem prevails equally in public and private schools.

Exactly 20 years later, I came face to face with the reality that substance abuse is spreading its tentacles even in rural India in some states. We were listening to the experiences of a group of community workers associated with the Azim Premji Foundation in a district in north India where our foundation has presence at the grassroots. One of the community workers stumbled on a few cases of children addicted to various kinds of illicit substances. She decided to delve into the issue of substance abuse among school and college students in her vicinity. Her reports shocked and saddened us.

The most surprising finding was the extent of the problem. Almost 70 to 80 percent of students in the schools she worked in, especially from Classes 11 and 12, were found to be indulging in the consumption of some kind of illicit substance just for the heck of it. Boys are more vulnerable to substance abuse than girls, however it is not that this problem is totally absent among girls. While affordability is relatively higher for children in private schools, the problem prevails equally in both public and private schools. The starting can be very diverse — it could be something as simple as parents consuming alcohol at home to peers

consuming substances and initiating the uninitiated by challenging them to try it out. The range of substances abused is wide — *khaini*, *gutka*, cannabis, *bhang* in various forms, readymade drugs, whiteners used in furniture making, Corex and, of course, various forms of alcohol.

What is the profile of more vulnerable children? They come predominantly from families living in abject poverty or experiencing continuous quarrels between the parents or a particularly spoiled relationship with a family member. There are families where there is practically no dialogue between parents and their children. Nobody talks to them about their life in school, studies, the interesting aspects of life, and so on. Such children also come from rich families which provide handsome amounts of pocket money to their children but show no interest in their existence beyond that. The profile includes children who find academic subjects in school irrelevant and boring due to the way they are taught. Many children get humiliated and abused by teachers who even deride their parents' poor socio-economic status. Some children do it for the thrill of it, others do it because

it gives them a 'high' and makes them forget their problems for at least three or four hours.

Without doubt, drug abuse is expensive. The paper to roll the substance in, costs between ₹3 and ₹8 each time (depending on its quality). While substances like *khaini*, *gutka*, whitener, Corex and inferior grades of alcohol are at the lower end, drugs like hashish and other chemicals are very expensive, costing anything between ₹500 and ₹1,000. Many farmers in certain districts have begun regularly cultivating cannabis to sell it illicitly to channels that make huge money. Needless to say, sourcing and distributing drugs is a very organised racket and everyone involved does it for the money without caring about the lives of children or adults.

The effects of drug abuse on these children and their surroundings are obvious. Such children are disinterested in taking part in the school's routine activities such as studies, sports, recreational events and the like. They are constantly trying to run away from normal groups of children and teachers in school. Some of them frequently want to visit the rest rooms/toilets during the period in class. Drug abuse detaches children from mainstream activity, distances them from their families, and leads them

to commit petty crime to get resources — such as stealing money, fighting with their parents for extra pocket money and so on.

There are extreme cases where children have said they were willing to kill their fathers in anger for not providing money to buy substances. The families are shattered. Parents get fed up since they don't know how to respond. There is also the issue of the family's reputation (*izzat*) being ruined. In certain cases, parents are willing to hand over the child to the police or law enforcement authorities. Some parents said they were waiting for the child to die. Overall, it is utter misery for the family. The peace of the family is shattered. In certain cases, it ends with death due to acute ill health or the child committing suicide or the child landing up in a 'remand home'.

Parents, teachers, school administrators, members of society and law enforcement authorities all need to act against the menace of substance abuse in a concerted manner. It has already gained the proportions of an epidemic. In pockets, it is an emergency since there is the grave danger of generations being engulfed by this epidemic. The problem is complex and multidimensional and remedies are not easy to implement. The world at large is struggling with the drug menace.

However, some concrete actions are possible. Probably the uppermost among them is preventing the cultivation, distribution and availability of illicit substances by not only the law enforcement machinery but also by vigilant school administrations and civil society. Even in remote and comparatively smaller rural populations, it is possible to form anti-drug groups that could effectively spread awareness, identify points of distribution and create an anti-drug environment. This includes spreading awareness among parents to spot early symptoms of loneliness, and promote dialogue and engage in some coaching on how to deal with initial stage addiction — through counselling and not scolding, threatening or beating.

Many more civil society organisations / NGOs have to play an active role. Teachers must pre-empt any action that would alienate students from the learning process and develop a relationship of individual care and attention. Discussions must be held with students who are vulnerable to such abuse. Teachers need to develop the capacity to notice early symptoms. The parents and teachers relationships with the child probably exert the deepest influence on the child. In appropriate cases, reasonable threat of law must be communicated.

At a broader level, society needs to develop higher scruples on this issue. Even a criminal like Don Vito Corleone in *The Godfather* refused to deal with the drug business despite knowing the profits involved! It is a matter of our children's lives being at stake. ■

Dileep Ranjekar is CEO of the Azim Premji Foundation

A way out of poverty



VILLAGE VOICES

R. BALASUBRAMANIAM

I first met Shivakumara when I got to travel in the cab that he was driving. It was around midnight and my flight had arrived late at Bengaluru airport. I finally got a cab after an hour's wait. On the ride, I started to talk to the young man. I was curious to learn about what life had dealt him. He was a Bachelor of Business (BBM) student by day and a cab driver by night. He juggled between being the breadwinner of his family and pursuing his academic dream. Shivakumara had neither the time nor the patience to look to either the government or any NGO for support. He considered his desire for a better life and willingness to work hard for it his assets. He seemed to take life as it came and was happy that he had the opportunity to study by day and earn by night.

Earlier, I had a similar encounter with another cab driver. Imtiaz Ahmed had moved to Bengaluru from Mangalore more than 12 years ago and was working for a road laying contractor. When the professional hazard of working with bitumen caught up with his health, he decided to switch professions. Fortunately, the world had opened up to the concept of aggregator taxis. He managed to secure a loan and got himself one. He had two daughters. One of them got selected for a medical course through NEET. Imtiaz could not afford her education in a private medical college which meant she had to explore alternatives. She wanted to work in the health sector so she opted to join a nursing course but secretly desired to pursue her medical studies someday.

Imtiaz worried about mobilising resources for her, desperately hoping that her dreams would not get quashed by his economic situation. He was quietly going about saving as much as he could and he continued to encourage her to take another shot at the NEET exams the next year. His second daughter was in Class 11 and dreamed of being a software professional. Imtiaz's purpose in life was to ensure that both his daughters could get the education they dreamed of and deserved.

Compare this to another situation that left me confused and angry. The on-going air show meant disrupted schedules and several of us were waiting at the airport for our delayed flights. It was then that

I overheard three young pilots working for a struggling airline talking amongst themselves. They were discussing the impending collapse of their airline and were considering jumping ship and exploring other options. One was lamenting that another airline was offering him a mere ₹2.3 lakh while he was already drawing much more. He was willing to join if he could negotiate more paid leave or days off with just the mandatory flying hours per week. It was laughable listening to their pressure points. They talked about whether the perks of being chauffeured around, the kind of five-star hotels offered during layovers and the class of lounge being provided were incentives enough.

As I thought of these disconnected incidents, I was left wondering how it was possible for people like Shivakumara and Imtiaz to move up the socio-



Growth efforts should be driven by a sense of fairness

Are the poor of India condemned to be denied opportunities those up the social and economic ladder have access to?

economic ladder when life had so much stacked against them. Would only their hard work and enterprise be enough or do they need the ladder that society, NGOs and the government can provide? If so, what kind of support would they need? Should it be a dole, as many of our politicians are promising today, or should it be more facilitatory and ensure that their dignity remains intact?

Or, are the poor of India condemned to be denied opportunities that those up the social and economic ladder have access to? Thinking about Imtiaz and Shivakumara, I questioned whether where these pilots were in life was just the product of their own

hard work. Were they not the direct recipients of the equity that their parents and families had provided them with? Why is it always easy for wealth to beget wealth? Was it an accident of birth that Shivakumara was born where he was while these pilots were lucky to be born in families that were likely living in cities and could afford to educate them and pay for their pilot training? What if Imtiaz's daughter got to become a doctor? Would that change the way her children grew up and lived?

The real issue is not about the rich becoming richer but about creating opportunities for the poor to get out of poverty. Can we bring in an eco-system which builds the human and social capital of people in order to enable them to be productive and economically mobile? Should not the State and NGOs invest in such interventions rather than a

myriad wasteful schemes that exist now? While schemes like MUDRA, Startup India and Standup India are good beginnings, the foundation needs to be investment in building human capital and the State providing its marginalised citizens with much needed social equity.

Growth and growth efforts should be inclusive and driven by a sense of fairness and justice. If India has to reduce economic inequality it will have to radically redistribute assets, institute land reforms, and provide universal healthcare, quality education, food security and social protection to all. Education and up-skilling of the labour force are crucial in building an egalitarian

society. A more redistributive progressive tax system and transfer policy, ceilings on profits and executive incomes and the introduction of a luxury rate of value-added tax could help reduce income inequality.

Both the central and the state governments should bring in mechanisms to ensure good governance, reduce corruption, increase citizen engagement and social accountability in the delivery processes and avoid crony capitalism. The possibilities that lie in inheritance taxes and in taxing amounts received as bequests and gifts should be explored. The government should also conceive of programmes that go beyond merely helping people to cope with poverty to facilitating the poor to emerge out of poverty.

What India now needs is such a redefined social development agenda — a blueprint for social action that will eventually drive the economic engine of the country. Now that the elections are done and dusted, the government of the day has to begin this task with renewed vigour and far-sighted vision for a 'New India' to arise. ■

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MGNREGA in digital trap

NARINDER BEDI

THE Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) is failing to deliver its promises to the rural poor due to two important reasons. First, because of fraud by state governments, and second, because of the National Electronic Funds Management System (NeFMS) introduced by the central government in 2017. NeFMS transfers wages directly into the bank accounts of workers. The workers have been given no scope to challenge violations of their rights either by the state or the centre.

Young India Project (YIP), an NGO which has been working for 36 years with the rural labour of Andhra Pradesh, adopted a rights-based approach to enable labour to take up the struggle against poverty. We organised unions of rural agricultural labourers to take up land struggles, fight against bonded labour, get homes registered in the names of women, get the SC/ST Atrocities Act implemented and more. In 1986, our unions started a movement to demand legislation for the right to work of rural labour.

Our experiences convinced us that unless rural labour is informed, organised and enabled at gram panchayat level by NGOs, they cannot benefit from the rights given to them. This is because rural labour is the most divided and socially the most vulnerable section of our society and this is why they have no confidence in themselves. Therefore, they need the support of civil society organisations to enable them to benefit from rights and programmes. When MGNREGA was finally passed in 2005, we knew that unless MGNREGA workers were informed and organised at panchayat level, the scheme would fail.

In April 2006, MGNREGA was inaugurated in Anantapur district of Andhra Pradesh and in September that year we were asked to undertake the very first social audit of MGNREGA in 40 mandals of the district. Our field visits identified two major fault lines: minor and major frauds committed by officials and politicians, and that none of the rural poor knew what rights had been given to them and how to demand those rights.

Based on our report, the government of Andhra Pradesh decided that for the time being the state government would take care of fraud. Social auditing was made compulsory in every mandal every six months.

At the end of 2007, the state government held a meeting with YIP and requested us to form MGNREGA unions in the 21 mandals we had unionised. The government gave us funds for two years to train the wage seekers on the rights and entitlements granted in the Act.

On September 22, 2009, the principal secretary met 600 of our MGNREGA union members in Anantapur and decided to adopt YIP's method of work. The subsequent principal secretary passed a

Government Order and created APNA (Andhra Pradesh NGO Alliance), a government-NGO partnership in which the NGOs were given the responsibility of giving rights training and organising Gram Panchayat Samakhyas (GPSs) of MGNREGA workers in every panchayat. And the GPS became a local worker's force which could demand and protect their rights.

By 2014, APNA was covering 425 mandals out of 625 in the state. There was less fraud, and if it did happen, the GPS organised protests. Andhra Pradesh was judged the best MGNREGA state in the country.

In October 2016, NIRD (National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj) conducted an evaluation of APNA and considered it a pioneering effort by Andhra Pradesh. The NIRD was critical about the performance of a few NGOs in the mandals. It strongly recommended that the APNA model be revamped for better results and also be vested with the authority to monitor the



implementation of Acts and welfare programmes in the state.

This is the way MGNREGA should have been implemented by all the states, by creating a partnership between NGOs and the government. But state governments will not allow the creation of organisations of workers in each panchayat because then they cannot commit fraud with MGNREGA funds.

In 2016, even Andhra Pradesh decided to terminate APNA in spite of the NIRD's positive evaluation report.

On October 6, 2017, the *Deccan Chronicle* published an article stating that the centre was investigating misappropriation of ₹146 crore of MGNREGA funds. This was exactly a year after Andhra Pradesh discontinued APNA. Funds intended for rural labour can easily be abused because the workers can't expose the fraud.

THE NeFMS HURDLE: Why did the centre not insist that if the states create organisations of workers in each village strong enough to protect their rights then the centre would transfer funds

through the states? Instead, the centre decided to transfer wages of MGNREGA workers directly into their accounts through NeFMS.

But the rights given by MGNREGA involve more than just transfer of wages. The Act gives eight rights and four entitlements. If any of them is not honoured, then who should the workers hold accountable? NeFMS claims to transfer wages twice a month. But if that does not happen, from whom should the workers demand their wages? These are not abstract questions.

We now present the data generated by our four-month study conducted from December 2018 to March 31, 2019. This study was conducted in six mandals of Anantapur, a drought-prone district. Our study revealed that in Roddam (SC Colony), Madakshira (Bullasamudram), Penukonda (Guntur), Penukonda (Settipalli), Somandepalli (Pandiparthi), Gorantla (Mallipalli), Gorantla (Narsimpalli), and ODC (Venkatapuram), job card holders either received no work, or those who did get work have payments pending. In Madakshira, payments were pending since 2016-17.

Rural labour has refused to work on MGNREGA sites until their dues are paid. In fact, 2018-19 was declared a drought year which meant that each MGNREGA family should have been given 50 extra days of work. Instead, they received on average merely 50 days of work. Each family should have earned ₹20,500 more.

We discussed this problem with the bureaucracy from village to state level. They were clueless. When the centre transfers wages directly into the workers' accounts, bypassing local officials, they cannot help. We have been writing to the Commissioner of Rural Development (CRD), who is head of MGNREGA in Andhra Pradesh. His Joint

CRD, in his reply, said that since the centre is transferring wages directly into the accounts, the state government has no control over the matter. He said the centre had cleared wages only up to December 6, 2018, which means already another four months of wages are yet to be transferred.

The workers don't know what to do. They are losing wages by refusing to work unless their back wages are cleared. If this continues workers will lose confidence in MGNREGA and withdraw, as 500 families have done in Bullasamudram Gram Panchayat of Madakshira mandal. They are SC families and they have lost faith in MGNREGA. This will happen to more and more MGNREGA workers. It is sad, for we struggled for 20 years to get the right to work legislated.

MGNREGA workers are not commodities to be handled electronically. They are human beings who have been given rights. We must enable them to exercise those rights. The introduction of NeFMS has created more problems. If no corrective action is taken by the centre, MGNREGA will fail and the centre and the states will be held responsible. ■

(With inputs from Ganesh Iyer and Manisha Krishnapurkar)

LIVING

BOOKS | ECO-TOURISM | FILM | THEATRE | AYURVEDA



Rahul Ram, Sanjay Rajoura and Varun Grover

Aisi Taisi races against reality Packed houses have a good laugh at democracy

Saibal Chatterjee
New Delhi

THE big challenge before India's standup comedians, as Varun Grover says in a promotional video for *Aisi Taisi Democracy* (ATD), is the fast-shrinking gap between satire and reality. "Satire is in direct competition with reality these days," the Hindi film lyricist quips. "*Hum do hafta soch ke koi joke likhte hain, pata chalta hai kal shaam ko ho gaya* (We take two weeks to think up a joke, the next thing we know is that it actually happened last evening)," he adds.

It is a challenge all right, but it is a fact that politics and its practitioners in this country are increasingly becoming the butt of jokes, probably making life easier in a sense for satirists. The tribe has been thriving over the past decade, appropriating to a

great extent the art of the cartoonist.

The standup comics have also moved into the space vacated by Hindi popular cinema, which has, by and large, not only stopped poking fun at politicians, but has also gone to the other extreme — lionizing them for real and imagined achievements.

Rahul Ram of iconic rock band Indian Ocean, who is an integral part of the three-member *Aisi Taisi* act, says: "It is probably the state of the country that explains the popularity of *Aisi Taisi Democracy's* Azaadi Tour." Every seat at every show was taken as the trio travelled across the country throwing jibes, through sharp-tongued punchlines and no-holds-barred musical interludes, at the way India is being run.

On its Twitter page, ATD is described as "standup comedy, music and stories of our complicated and

very funny country". Audiences across the nation have warmed to the act, turning it into a surprise phenomenon of sorts. It is a case of laughter acting as a salve for collective frustration in a time when a climate of fear reigns supreme. Out there running amok are vicious trolls, murderous lynch mobs and politicians making capital out of people's prejudices.

When the same standup stars did political satire in their UPA-era incarnation, nobody applauded them for courage. Today, every act of this nature is described as "brave". Something has obviously changed in India.

However, Ram, whose songs punctuate the acerbic verbal volleys of Sanjay Rajoura and Grover and provide a lively musical spine to what might otherwise have been a monotonous diatribe aimed against India's political rot, points out that in their

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line of fire isn't just "the last five years" — represented by the many strange acts of omission and commission of the Narendra Modi government — but "the ongoing loot and plunder of the country". He adds: "It is only a coincidence that ATD took off in May 2014 (the month that Modi was voted into power)."

Rajoura and Grover have been doing standup political satire for over a decade. They gravitated towards each other in an organic way and ATD in the form that we now know it was born. It was Rajoura's idea to add music to lyrics written by them. "Initially," reveals Ram, "the duo wanted a younger singer to be a part of their act. Sanjay



Rajoura and Grover have been doing standup satire for a decade and as they gravitated towards each other ATD as we know it was born.

remembered a conversation that he had had with me several years earlier and suggested my name. I jumped at the offer."

Before the Azaadi Tour hit the road, there was a long lull for *Aisi Taisi Democracy*. Grover was exceedingly busy writing the second season of the Netflix series, *Sacred Games*. "He had no time to breathe," says Ram. So, the trio did only a handful of shows in Mumbai in the past year and a half — one in March 2018, two more in August 2018. But since the Azaadi Tour took off, the group has been on a roll.

The election season has obviously helped. It gave

Ram the reason to tweak a Laxmikant-Pyarelal composition from the 1967 Sunil Dutt-Nutan starrer, *Milan*, into the corrosive "*Chunaav ka mahina, hai mach gaya shor, phir aaya hai time to choose who will screw us more*." The number, which spares nobody, continues thus: "*Mamataji, Maya, Pawar sabka hai sapna PM ki kursi pe naam ho apna/Sonia, Mulayam ka bhi toh hai sapna PM ki kursi pe munna ho apna*." He brings the house down every time he croons the number.

Rajoura, who is of the view that the 'romanticism' of the idea of India should change, brings raw and cynical anger to the ATD act, Grover injects an element of disdain and derision into the show, and Ram goes hell for leather through his parodies of popular Hindi songs with lyrics (penned by Rajoura and Grover) that reflect the language of the street, direct and hard-hitting.

The Gaiyya (cow) song, an original Ram composition for ATD, which goes "*agale janam mein mujhe gaiyya hi keejo* (may I be born as a cow in my next life)" — even uses cuss words to enhance the biting satire on the declining value of human life in the new atmosphere of hate and intolerance that has gripped the nation.

"The Indian tradition," says Ram, "has always been to use popular folk tunes to transmit ideas and thoughts. It is easier to make your point if you use familiar tropes. ATD is continuing that tradition by weaving satirical lyrics into Hindi film songs that enjoy instant recall."

The success of *Aisi Taisi Democracy* is a marvel in the age of *The Avengers* and of a spate of Bollywood films eager to bend over backwards and kowtow to the ruling establishment. The Azaadi Tour, which began on the Ides of March in Ahmedabad, has drawn packed houses wherever it has pitched its tent, with tickets selling out well in advance.

The *Aisi Taisi Democracy* — Azaadi Tour ended in the GD Birla Sabhagar in Kolkata on May 18, a day before the eastern metropolis voted in the 2019 general election. The Kolkata show was added on persistent demand from fans of ATD in the city. Says Ram: "We had a couple of shows there earlier, but the response was rather poor. So we thought they probably wanted Bengali content. But now something has changed."

Days ahead of the show, the ATD Twitter handle announced as much: "Initially we were not sure if we would sell enough in Kolkata and now there are only 20 seats left with a week to go..."

One of Ram's performances has even resonated across the border and brought forth a healthy response from a Pakistani band. Playing on an RD Burman composition from *Padosan* ("*Mere saamne waali khidki mein ek chand ka tukda rehta hai*"), he sings: "*Mere saamne waali sarhad pe kehte hai ke dushman rehta hai/Jab gaur se dekha usko toh mere jaisa lagta hai* (It is said an enemy lives across the border, but on closer look he looks exactly like me)."

From the pungent to pacifist, from the vitriolic to the sardonic, ATD employs different tonalities to put its jokes and punches across. It never fails to hit home. Admittedly, life has never been tougher in this country. Ironically, standup comics have never had a better time. Their alliance with music has only added to the power of their voices even though politics isn't laughing matter anymore in this country. ■



The Pratapgad Fort high on a hill



A view of the Krishna river from the Panchgani- Mahabaleshwar road



Chhatrapati Shivaji on horseback, sword held high

Take a tour of history and have strawberries

Susheela Nair
Mahabaleshwar

A striking statue of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj astride a horse with sword held high welcomed us as we entered the verdant hill resort of Mahabaleshwar. The history of Mahabaleshwar can be traced to the days of Shivaji, who visited a sacred spot here in 1653 which symbolised the source of the Krishna river. It was in an ancient temple of Goddess Bhavani in Pratapgad that Shivaji's mother, Jeejabai, gifted him a sword and wished him success in tackling the formidable tasks that lay ahead.

History records that the daring duo first visited old Mahabaleshwar to offer their prayers at Krishnabai or Panchganga (five streams) Mandir, an ancient temple where there is a sculpture of a cow suckling a calf. The five rivers, Krishna, Venna, Koyna, Savitri and Gayatri, are said to originate here. Close by, in a forest clearing, is the Mahabaleshwar Mandir, an equally ancient temple of Mahabali from which the hill station derived its name. From this naturally occurring Shivalinga flows a perennial spring whose clear waters have curative powers.

This is strawberry country. There are delicious red ones everywhere. But first it was history on our plate. We began our hilly sojourn with the Pratapgad fort built by Shivaji in 1656 on craggy cliffs. It is famous in historical chronicles since the fate of the Maratha Empire took a crucial turn here. The great Maratha warrior had to scale the treacherous slopes of these hills and fortify himself against raiding invaders behind the ramparts of the Pratapgad fort. We saw a tomb reminiscent of Shivaji's exploits and his treacherous encounter with Sardar Afzal Khan of Bijapur. ■

We did not venture to climb the 450 steps leading to the top of the towers as the climb looked daunting. There are four observation towers at the top, located at strategic corners from where one can see the three neighbouring districts of Raigad, Satara and Ratnagiri.

The British explored the region in 1824. But it was Sir John Malcolm, the then Governor of Bombay, who discovered Mahabaleshwar in 1828 and transformed it into a great hill retreat, originally known as Malcolm Peth. The bazaar main street is still known by this name. In 1929, the British formally acquired this territory and used it as a retreat for wounded and ailing soldiers. Subsequently, roads were laid and the resort developed quickly with the construction of bungalows, churches and a club, as well as a polo ground and race course. Mahabaleshwar, once the summer capital of the Bombay Presidency, is now Maharashtra's most popular hill resort.

Nestling in the Sahyadri range, Mahabaleshwar has a luxuriant cover of foliage. Its protruding promontories offer magnificent views of the precipitous edges of the Sahyadris and the valleys below. On days when the sun shines bright and clear, one can even see the sea on the distant horizon. Streams originating from springs at the heads of ravines form waterfalls in the monsoon. Here rises the Krishna, one of southern India's greatest

and most sacred rivers. Thirty designated sightseeing spots offer dramatic scenery. With its pleasant walks and panoramic lookouts, there's something to explore every minute of your holiday.

We visited favoured spots such as Arthur's Seat, Connaught Peak, Kate's Point, Lodwick Point and Lamington Ride which evoked memories of the historical escapades of the legendary Maratha warrior and the adventures of the British. Our ponywala shepherded us through Lady Wellington Gallop, Malcolm Ride, Bridle Path and Mahabaleshwar's highest spot, Wilson Point, which offers a stunning view of sunrises. Relics of the British presence linger in the names of various 'points', 'rides' and 'paths' as well as in several buildings. Faded traces of the British Raj are discernible in several 19th-century lodges and colonial homes dotted around the hill retreat.

The best view is from Arthur's Seat, 12 km from Mahabaleshwar, which looks out over a sheer drop of 600 m to the Konkan coastal strip. One can peer into the distance and see hill forts and observation towers at Raigad and Torna. It is so called as one Arthur used to sit and gaze at the river Savitri where his wife and daughter lost their lives in a boat disaster. We watched the wind lift a hurled twig high into the air.

Streams emanating from springs at the heads of the ravines hurtle down as waterfalls in the wet season. The Dhobi waterfalls and Lingamala

waterfalls are the most prominent among them. Lake Venna, with its pleasant tree-lined banks ringed with popular walks and pony trails, is the ideal place for an outing for holidaymakers. One can indulge in boating and fishing here. We also visited Morajee Castle where Mahatma Gandhi stayed when he visited Mahabaleshwar in 1945, the B.D. Petit Library near the bus stand, and the colonial-style bungalows.

After visiting all the prominent points, we went on a shopping spree to the vibrant bazaar, which abounds in ice-cream parlours and *chikki* outlets. The bazaar is also lined with shops peddling ware like leather goods, bags, tribal trinkets, carved walking sticks and belts.

But don't miss the strawberries, the red fruit is ubiquitous. A drive along the Panchgani-Mahabaleshwar road is a veritable 'Strawberry Fields Forever' ride. These luscious strawberries, converted into jams, syrups, crushes, jellies, marmalades, fudge and ice-cream, are truly yummy. A trip to Mahabaleshwar is not complete without the customary stop at a Mapro kiosk to have your fill of some mouth-watering strawberry milkshake topped with ice-cream. ■

FACT FILE

Best season: June to September, November to January

How to reach: Air: Nearest airport is at Pune (120 km).

Rail: Convenient railhead is Pune (120 km).

Road: Connected by road to major cities.

Where to stay: MTDC's Holiday Resort

Tel: 02168-260318

What to buy: Leather goods, bags, tribal trinkets, carved walking sticks, belts; and jams, syrups, crushes, jellies, marmalades

Tracking 5 years of protests

By Usha Rai

BATTLING for India, A Citizen's Reader, edited by writers Githa Hariharan and Salim Yusufji, is very timely. It looks back at the series of protests that took place under BJP rule between 2014 and 2018. A wide-ranging anthology, it consists of reports penned by well-known writers and activists of various struggles in India.

On the one hand are those who are Battling for India. This group consists of Dalits, Adivasis, farmers, workers, minority communities, writers and artists, who are resisting oppression and intolerance.

They are pitted against the Battling India Parivar or the right-wing. It has its own police and seeks to regulate what we think, write, sing, eat and wear, how we pray or whom we love. The members of this group, write the editors, are mostly Hindus, upper caste, ideally male and heterosexual. Their friends are rich barons, major company owners and godmen.

There is a series of profiles of those who are battling for India. Like Alivelamma, a 35-year-old widow whose husband, a farmer, committed suicide in 2013. His groundnut crop was not giving returns, debt was mounting and moneylenders were chasing him. She now works as a tenant farmer and takes care of her son who is studying in an Industrial Training Institute (ITI). Then there is Huchangi, son of a *devadasi*, forced to live outside the village like other *devadasis*, in houses measuring just 10 square feet. They are landless. The women survive by begging during the day and doing sex work at night.

There are also chapters on Rohith Vemula, the Dalit student driven to suicide and Chandrasekhar Azad and his Bhim Army which is fighting for the rights of Dalits. This *Citizen's Reader* tells you the story of Sukalo Rajkishor and Leelabati, about Adivasis displaced by big dams, water sources polluted, and mining in the Niyamgiri Hills of Odisha which favours multinationals and drives forest dwellers from their homes. Also included is Salima's story. Her husband, Jaffruddin, was killed in a fake encounter. She was threatened and her house raided. Her son, Salim, was killed by cow vigilantes.

The book is a throwback to all the controversies which have dogged the era of BJP rule. Since 2014, backed by the RSS, the BJP has tried to homogenise Indian diversity. The people have hit back. In 2015 writers returned their awards in protest. Protests also broke out on campuses, among Dalits, Adivasis, minorities, women and farmers.

The Sanatan Sanstha, a right-wing organisation, was charge-sheeted for killing Govind Pansare, a lawyer, trade unionist and communist leader in Kolhapur, in February 2015. In August, M.M. Kalburgi, a leading writer and scholar, was shot by two strangers in his home in Dharwad. In September, Hindi writer Uday Prakash returned his Sahitya Akademi award because he said free speech was being endangered by the BJP. Five Kannada

writers returned their awards in protest against delay in investigation of the murder of Kalburgi. On October 6, writer and author Nayantara Sahgal returned her Akademi award "in memory of the Indians who have been murdered, in support of all Indians who uphold the right to dissent and of all dissenters who now live in fear and uncertainty". Then other national awards like the Padma Shri were returned. The film fraternity followed suit. A hundred intellectuals wrote to the president and constitutional experts to speak up.



Battling for India
A Citizen's Reader
Githa Hariharan &
Salim Yusufji
Speaking Tiger
₹399

There are essays by Shanta Gokhale, K. Satchidanandan, N. Pushpamala, Githa Hariharan, Nayantara Sahgal, Shashi Deshpande, Ghanshyam Shah,

In an interview to NewsClick, Magsaysay awardee Bezwada Wilson asks who will clean the 12 crore new toilets built under the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan. The lack of technology adaptation will result in perpetual oppression of this particular caste of people. The Supreme Court in its judgment against manual scavenging in 2014 had asked the government to collect the number of fatalities and give ₹10 lakh as compensation. In the two years after the Safai Karamchari Andolan began collecting data there were 1,370 deaths of those cleaning sewer lines. The numbers are probably higher as many of those who died were contract workers or casual workers. The Swachh Bharat Abhiyan led to more septic tanks because there is no underground drainage system, Wilson points out.

The section, Citizens Against All Odds, highlights 'Violence against minorities: the new normal.' It tracks the Karwan-e-Mohabbat journey in 2017

SHREY GUPTA



A protest by farmers from Tamil Nadu in New Delhi

Lawrence Liang, Nikhil Wagle, Somok Roy, P. Sainath and Harsh Mander. Several articles used in the book were published in *Indian Cultural Forum*. Gokhale quotes from Mahasweta Devi's speech at the Frankfurt Book Fair in 2012 in which she describes Indian culture as "a tapestry of many weaves, many threads. Somewhere the cloth frays. Somewhere the threads tear. But still it holds". It will continue to hold as it has for centuries if only those who speak in the name of religion and culture would allow it, says Gokhale.

Part Two of the book is on the 'nucleus of struggle'. It analyses the death of Vemula, structural discrimination in higher education and how Dalits denied access to writing culture tried to retain it through memory of individual experience and, collectively, as social memory. Memory acts as a protective layer. Prabir Purkayastha writes about 'Gau Raksha and the War Against India's Poor'.

across India, listening to victims of civil and State-sponsored violence and providing legal guidance and support.

There are stories of the half-widows of Kashmir still looking for husbands who have disappeared and there is no closure to their mourning. There is a conversation with Nandini Sundar, a professor of social anthropology in Delhi University, who filed a writ petition on the burning of hundreds of homes, rape and murder of Adivasis by police and security forces in Tadmetla and other villages of Chhattisgarh in 2011.

The book chronicles the 'growing anger and the growing resistance', drawing from websites like PARI and NewsClick. The long marches of farmers and trade unions to Mumbai and Delhi took place during this period. This is a must-read book for those who want to understand the underbelly of our democracy. ■



New kind of litfest with crafts and rap

Diya Katyal
Santiniketan

AN alternative litfest has taken root in Santiniketan. It is intimate and offbeat and happens alongside a popular 10-day crafts mela.

Over the years, litfests have become bigger and grander with celeb writers rubbing shoulders with the chatterati while ordinary folk look on. Juxtapose that with this new litfest, called the Nabanna Earth Weekend (NEW), and its philosophy of togetherness. "We conceived of a weekend festival of arts and ideas around Holi, a community festival which celebrates renewal, colour and camaraderie. NEW is a non-profit festival open to all, with sessions in English and Bengali," explained Anjum Katyal, curator.

Writers, film directors, and musicians came from Kolkata by train. Among them were Chandras Choudhury, Sudeep Chakravarti and Sandip Roy. The former head of Prasar Bharati, Jawhar Sircar, delivered the inaugural talk. The litfest ended with 'Posto-Rap' by maverick filmmaker Qaushiq Mukherjee or 'Q'.

NEW coincides with Nabanna, an annual folk and crafts fair which has become one of the most popular cultural events in Santiniketan in the past 14 years.

An initiative of the Suresh Amiya Memorial Trust (SAMT), over 200 artisans take part in the crafts mela. "The idea is to create a space where artisans and weavers can interact with buyers minus middlemen," said Shanta Ghosh, managing trustee. There are craft demonstrations, cultural programmes, workshops and welfare activities. Adding to its punch now is NEW in which environment, sustainability and crafts are a major focus.

Indeed, the setting of the litfest against the backdrop of a rural crafts mela added to the pleasure character. Choudhury commented on "the pleasure

of walking out of the hall straight into a setting of beautiful handicrafts, handloom and Bengali music". A vast array of crafts was on offer — rugs, saris, jewellery and local delicacies.

Chakravarti remarked that the folksy decor made the litfest feel like a cultural rather than a corporate event. The auditorium exuded rustic charm with *sola* (pith) birds and mobiles dangling from the ceiling.

The choice of Santiniketan, founded by Rabindranath Tagore, was apt and attractive. "It is an iconic heritage, a cultural and creative hub for artists, thinkers, writers, and scholars," said Katyal.

Even chugging on the Santiniketan Express was fun. Participants chatted with one another while a stream of vendors kept up a steady supply of snacks. The aroma of freshly mixed *jhal muri* was heady.

"Sometimes, as litfests get bigger, it's good to go to something more intimate, where you can actually meet and talk to the writers and the audience. I felt that this would be a litfest that would be more conducive to real conversations. Even journeying all together on this train has its own feeling of camaraderie," said author and journalist Sandip Roy.

"The idea of a Santiniketan litfest was too tempting to refuse," said Q, who describes himself as a 'disruptive artist'. For novelist Kunal Basu a key draw was Santiniketan, which he described as one of his perennially favourite destinations.

The festival was inaugurated by Sircar, who delivered the Sadhan Dutta Memorial Lecture on Raja Rammohan Roy as 'India's First Public Intellectual'. "A public intellectual is someone of

stature who is willing to come out of his comfort zone and champion an issue despite bitter unpopularity in the spirit of reform. Rammohan carved out the first public discourse space in India," said Sircar.

In the next session, 'Writing India Today', Chakravarti and Choudhury discussed their books, past and present, and what went into writing them with Sudev P. Basu of Visva-Bharati University.

Choudhury quit his day job to write his first novel, *Arzee the Dwarf*. "When I left my job I had time to myself. I would see movies in the middle of the day. I discovered this parallel world where people go to escape their real lives for a few hours. In Mumbai it's very hard to find a space of complete darkness, but here was a pitch-dark world lit with just one ray of light. It was a world of not only the movie but also the social space. I wanted to explore that." Chakravarti's recent biography, *The Bengalis*, evoked much interest from an audience full of questions. Choudhury also read from his forthcoming book about a local Chinese restaurant in Mumbai.

The day ended with two popular musicians and filmmakers, Anindya Chatterjee and Q, discussing 'Altu Faltu: Natun Diner Bangla' with Nilanjan Bandyopadhyay of Visva-Bharati. It was a lively exchange filled with sarcasm and slang about the growing street-smart feel to today's Bangla language.

Day two began on a slightly apocalyptic note with the session, 'Recentre and Reroute: Rethinking development in terms of indigenous values' in which Bulu Imam, environmental activist, cheerfully predicted the demise of the human race to a stoic G.M. Kapur of INTACH who co-presented the session.

This was followed by 'Kolkata's Sacred Spaces: A multi-faith heritage' in which Jael Silliman spoke with Roy about the city's history of diversity. "There were Jews, Armenians, Chinese, Parsis, Bengalis and Marwaris all living and thriving and contributing to the pulse of the city and it's sad to see some of these communities dwindling," said Silliman.

Novelist Kunal Basu spoke about his creative process to Ananya Dutta Gupta of Visva-Bharati, in the session titled 'Ambidexterity: On writing in Bengali and English'.

Two days of diverse discussion and discourse came to an end with Q's quirky performance of 'Posto-Rap'.

"It's not every litfest that spends an hour getting down and dirty with Bengali slang. And I loved how we could segue from a very high-minded discussion on Rabindranath Tagore as a public intellectual to Posto Bengali rap peppered with choice expletives," said Roy.

"My best moment was watching the former head of Prasar Bharati listening to Q rapping in his colourful Bangla about six inches away and two young stage hands watching and nodding along, absolutely fascinated. Everyone connected. That's what litfests should be about." ■

Diya Katyal is a freelance writer from Kolkata



Q does his number



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How to keep cool

HHEATSTROKE is a condition in which a person's body temperature increases dramatically because of prolonged exposure to very high temperatures usually in combination with dehydration. It leads to failure of the body's temperature control system. This is a very common occurrence in India during summer.

Some people are more vulnerable to heat stroke. This includes infants, athletes, the elderly, those who work in the sun and individuals left in rooms without adequate ventilation.

The main sign of heat stroke is extremely high body temperature, mental delirium, seizures, confusion, irritability, agitation, slurred speech or altered behaviour. Other common symptoms include flushed skin, dizziness, nausea, throbbing headache, rapid breathing and increased heart rate. Occasionally, there can be loss of consciousness.

PREVENTION

Some simple steps can prevent heat stroke:

- ✓ Keep hydrated. Drink plenty of fluid every 15 to 30 minutes — water, fruit juices, *thandai*, tender coconut water or barley water.
- ✓ Avoid aerated drinks and drinks with caffeine and alcohol. Wear comfortable loose, light-coloured clothing, preferably made of cotton. Apply sunscreen liberally before you venture out — use a broad-spectrum sunscreen with an SPF of at least 15. Remember to cover your head with a scarf or a hat and wear sunglasses. Using an

umbrella is a good option.

✓ Avoid strenuous physical activity in the sun. And try not to go out when the sun is at its peak, between 11 am and 4 pm. Venture out in the late evening or early morning.

Do not leave children or pets locked in a parked car or a poorly ventilated house. This can be fatal.

A quick cold shower can beat the heat. A coconut oil scalp massage helps normalise body temperature. Consuming Rose Gulkand — 10 to 20 gm, twice daily — is cooling. Add green vegetables and fresh juicy fruits in your diet. The practice of Sheetal Pranayam (breathing technique) helps cool the body and mind.

HOME REMEDIES: To reduce heat stroke symptoms, apply a thin paste of sandalwood powder and rose water on the forehead and chest for 20 to 30 minutes (or until it dries). The dried paste can be wiped off later with a wet towel. Applying onion juice or paste behind the ears and on the chest helps bring down body temperature.

Fennel seeds (*saunf*) are cooling. Soak a fistful overnight in a cup of water, strain and drink the water in the morning. Soak 10 to 12 raisins overnight in water/milk and consume along with the water/milk in the morning.

Soak 100 gm of green gram (*moong*) overnight. Grind with sufficient water, strain, add jaggery to taste. Drink this refreshing drink often during the day. Alternatively, boil a cup of dried green gram with three cups of water. Strain the liquid and consume it as often as possible.

Roast one or two chopped medium sized onions in an open pan and add a quarter- or half-teaspoonful of cumin seed powder and half-teaspoonful of sugar. Consuming this mixture twice/thrice daily is another popular home remedy for heat stroke.

Fresh amla juice, raw mango juice (*aam panna*), fresh coriander and mint juice,

buttermilk, wood-apple (*bael*) juice are some popular, must-have drinks in summer.

TREATMENT: If you suspect that someone has had a heat stroke, immediately move the person to an air-conditioned room or a cool, shady area and remove any unnecessary clothing. Fan air over the person while wetting his or her skin with water. Ice packs, a cold water shower or even a towel dipped in cold water is first-aid for heatstroke.

Herbs like *amalaki* (*amla*), *ushira* (*khus khus roots*), *chandana* (sandalwood), *narikela* (coconut), etc., play a key role in balancing body temperature. Take 10 to 20 ml of fresh *amla* juice, adding 5-10 gm sugar candy powder (*mishri*), for nausea/vomiting due to heatstroke. Or 5-10 gm *amla* powder with water can also be taken.

Soak coarsely powdered *khus khus* roots (10 gm) overnight in 100 ml of water. Strain and drink in the morning.

Glucose water and ORS liquid may be suggested in cases of dehydration.

Prepare a decoction of Shadangapaneeya (ready-to-use decoction powder available in Ayurveda pharmacies/raw herb stores). This helps alleviate thirst and fever during heat stroke.

The following Ayurvedic formulations are good for management of heat stroke:

- ✓ Sarasaparilla (SN Pandit/BV Pandit) or Sheeta Sudha (Dhootpapeshwar) — 20 ml syrup in half cup of water/cold milk, 3-4 times daily.
- ✓ Chandanasava (Kottakkal) — 20 ml with equal water, twice daily after meals.

If there are any complications such as respiratory distress, brain involvement, or kidney or liver damage, then conditions should be medically managed. For dehydration, hospital management with intravenous fluids may be necessary. ■

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

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PENCILS made from recycled newspaper are as good as pencils made from wood. Sturdy and smooth, these are an eco-friendly option for children as they begin their school term with new stationery. Many, many trees lose their lives to pencils. Be non-violent and kind to Mother Nature and buy recycled pencils.

GoGraameen sells such pencils for the same cost as regular ones. Around 30-40 companies in India produce recycled pencils but 95 percent export them and bypass the domestic market. "The problem is lack of awareness and resistance to change," remarks Rajesh Singh, an engineer who founded GoGraameen and began marketing recycled pencils, adding other green products to his portfolio.

The business has recently been taken over by Harsh Soliya and Karuna Gaekwad, both IT engineers and environmentalists.



They plan to redo the site and are adding biodegradable pencils with seeds of fruits and vegetables. Once the pencil is reduced to a stub, children can have fun planting it and watching their old pencil transform into a fruit or vegetable. ■

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