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Civil Society

SMART URBAN PHC

How Nagpur takes healthcare to people's doors

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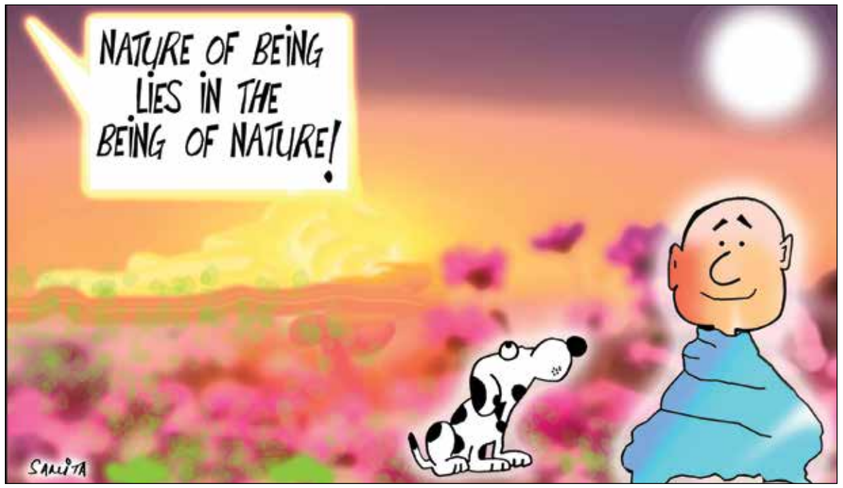
IN THE LIGHT

SAMITA RATHOR



LETTERS

BJP redux

Thanks for Sanjaya Baru's well-written cover story, 'Hindutva+welfarism.' The heading summed up the BJP's campaign which was built on development, identity and nationalism. Hype was also a big part of it. However, now that the dust has settled we hope that the Modi government will get down to addressing core issues with speed, seriousness and a *swadeshi* outlook.

Ritika

I read the article and find the analysis of the Modi government and his astonishing victory a fitting reply to those who have an issue with rising India. I believe in the next five years India will win many more victory badges and witness high growth. The opposition will be nipped in the bud.

Dr Machwe

The Modi government's initiative on piped water for all is to be welcomed. India is convulsed with drought every two years. Some parts of the country miss out on the monsoon, year after year. We need to become water-rich. Short campaign clips on rainwater harvesting, groundwater recharge, renovation of lakes and ponds, afforestation with water friendly trees and river revival will help educate and motivate people.

Srila

Election issues

I read your interview with Jagdeep Chhokar, 'A candidate's allegiance is to the ticket-giver, not voter.' These were very insightful and well-researched comments. Prof Chhokar's views are credible and a must-read for every thinking Indian. He shakes you out of your reverie.

Vishwanath Anand

This is an interesting conversation. Can a political party do well in an election merely on the basis of good strategy? I think it is the organisational strength of a political party along with good strategy and professional advice which decides how the party will fare in any election.

After a huge setback in the Lok Sabha elections, some political parties have accused the ruling BJP of unfair practices but leaders of these parties are not ready for electoral reforms. They are not ready to take steps to curb the use of black money in elections. Auditing the accounts of political parties must be compulsory but how many parties are ready for this reform?

In elections to the Lok Sabha, the BJP demonstrated its power. Leaders of the opposition parties should respond like mature politicians. If they feel that the BJP's growth must be contained, they should fight the RSS-BJP combine politically.

Narendra M. Apte

Civil Society's interview with Jagdeep Chhokar is a good pointer to reform and worth sharing.

T. S. Bhatti

Crunching waste

Your story, 'Punjab firm has waste solution,' highlighted an important invention that could help municipalities manage their waste. Currently, the biggest problem that the recycling industry faces is lack of segregation. This machine seems to address this problem to some extent. If people segregate their waste, then a very large industry dealing with waste could emerge.

Mukesh Kriplani

Sun bonus

Your story, 'Solar dryers giver farmers market clout,' is so inspiring. I saw a video clip a few months ago on solar dryers which were made by a woman entrepreneur from Aurangabad.

I hope many farmers in other states read this story and use solar dryers to augment their income.

Narendra M. Apte

Letters should be sent to response@civilsocietyonline.com

COVER STORY

SMART URBAN PHC

Primary health centres in Nagpur are being revived to cater to a broad base of patients in the rapidly growing city. The PHCs are brighter, cleaner and better equipped. 18

COVER PHOTOGRAPH: SHREY GUPTA

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Civil Society
READ US. WE READ YOU.

Doctors for all

FINDING a doctor has become increasingly difficult. Of course, there are doctors everywhere and their number is also growing. But who should one go to? Who should one trust? These are questions that confront all of us at some time or the other. If they worry well-off people, imagine how lost the poor must feel. What we have here is a national dilemma. It is caused by the absence of healthcare that is accessible, affordable, structured and competent.

Private facilities do well as businesses, creating personal wealth for doctors and entrepreneurs. But they give little to society. For a growing economy coping with inequality there is no substitute for a dependable and inclusive system in the public sector with well-defined levels of care and specialisation.

Our story from Nagpur made it to this month's cover for precisely these reasons. Reviving our primary health centres is vital to improving public healthcare. Doing so in rapidly expanding cities is even more important. All too often, even incipient improvements in health and education facilities are loudly advertised for political mileage. In Nagpur on the other hand, the municipal corporation has worked silently. A creative partnership with the Tata Trusts has delivered outstanding results. It is a model the country should be looking at closely.

The draft National Education Policy made an appearance in the first few days of the new Modi government. Obviously it had been in the making since much earlier. It is good to see a government putting school education high among its priorities. Many of the draft policy's suggestions are really above dispute and are the right way to go. Madhav Chavan of Pratham correctly points out in this month's opening interview that we need to worry about who will get the work done. Education suffers from a human resources problem. Finding the teachers and administrators will be a problem, as will be the funds.

We are always on the lookout for people who bring change in their everyday lives. These are people who mostly work far from the limelight. In this issue we bring you the Delhi Langar Seva Society started by Bicky Dhingra. It feeds thousands of people each week. At the Civil Hospital in Gurugram and the All India Institute of Medical Sciences in Delhi this service is particularly welcome because people come from far away for treatment and have almost no local support. A hot and nutritious meal is very welcome. It is also a 'model langar' because the plates are biodegradable and the food, instead of being cooked on location, which is often messy, is sourced from reliable suppliers. Nothing is left behind as litter. Most importantly, volunteers do all the work because this is their way of giving back to society.

With this issue we begin Tech Tales, a column by Kiran Karnik. He will dwell each month on the challenges of absorbing technologies in an unequal society like ours.

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‘It’s a policy worth pursuing but who is going to get it done?’

Madhav Chavan puts the draft education policy in perspective

Civil Society News
New Delhi

Madhav Chavan: ‘If you train people to do the job one step at a time then over a period, skills are built up’

A draft National Education Policy (NEP) released by the new Modi government squarely confronts the learning crisis in the country. Children going through school can hardly read and write and know little maths. The rot goes all the way to higher education with graduates being unemployable.

The draft policy emphasises early childhood education as a solution. It puts *anganwadis* in schools and proposes that all primary schools have a pre-primary section. At higher levels it recommends vocational education be part of the syllabus in schools, though it isn’t clear what is meant by it. Better training of teachers is recommended.

Much of what the draft policy contains is unexceptionable and already has wide support. As a result, it hasn’t sparked off any serious controversies except a political firefight over the three-language formula.

But to get a better understanding of the nuances of the policy, we spoke to Madhav Chavan, CEO of Pratham, who has broadly supported the policy. Pratham has been evaluating learning outcomes in schools since 2005. It brings out the ASER (Annual Status of Education) report which flags the quality of education in schools across the country. Extracts from a conversation:

What are the key reasons you have supported the draft NEP?
There are two parts to the draft policy — school education and higher education. As far as school education is concerned, I think they have taken the right approach by talking about the learning crisis and confronting the fact that we have to deal with it. They have provided good solutions including focusing on pre-school education and remedial education, keeping in mind foundational skills up to Class 5. By then, all children should be able to read and write and do basic arithmetic. I think the policy has the right approach, right focus and priorities. It’s a policy worth pursuing.

And what about higher education? Do you have an opinion of that or is it an area you are not looking at right now?
Let’s say I haven’t applied myself to it. On the school education side there is a lot of evidence of what the learning crisis is all about. On the higher education side I think we would get a mixed picture. A lot more definition and clarity are required.

The reforms in higher education aren’t as simple as they sound. What do we mean by higher education? What should its goals be? Is it going to be employment-oriented? From what I have read they have given some directions on which way to go, but the gathering of evidence in higher education or even in secondary education, which is very scant, needs to be done.

I would say we require more clarity on what the problems are and how to deal with them.

For example, the pass percentage in Class 10 is actually no indicator of anything. So what are we going to focus on? Is there a learning crisis or not? And if there is then what are we talking about? This thinking that people should be vocationally educated, is it necessary? I think that the higher education sector itself is not well defined.

So, the issue of vocational education. What is the kind of skill development you see as relevant today? How can it be seamlessly inducted into school syllabi or should we just focus on basic education?
I think skill development and vocational education are two different things. The purpose of school education — apart from gaining knowledge and getting a broader understanding of the world and so on — is the development of certain skills, like perhaps communication. Ten years from now, some jobs could be redundant. Or jobs we haven’t even thought of today could surface.

There are other issues too. For instance, how many people are going to be in salaried jobs? Today, in our economy, my understanding is that only 15 percent of our labour force has salaried jobs. The rest are self-employed, daily-wagers, on contract, and so on.

So, learning to work and survive in this economy is going to require different skill sets that have to be learnt. And those skills are more broad-based and foundational. They are not specific skills. Opportunities to learn should open many paths and not be restricted to unidirectional paths. You enter the science stream and you get stuck there. A lot of that is still happening. If I want to learn quickly about agriculture, where is the learning opportunity? What we are doing today in vocational training is skill training for entry-level jobs. Broad skill education in schools is what is missing.

And in a contemporary context…
Yeah, that’s correct.

Coming back to early childhood education, are states really focused on pre-primary education the way they should be? Primary schools and *anganwadis* will need radical transformation. Who is going to do all this?
That is primarily the problem, isn’t it? All these are government systems. The question is who will do this and how will it be done? This is not an easy or trivial matter.

Can they do it? For example, they have proposed three years of pre-school for three- to six-year-olds in *anganwadis* and two years of primary school. So, five years will be treated as one foundational stage. To move *anganwadis* inside schools is a very welcome suggestion. These are not radical, newly thought of ideas, but they will now have to be incorporated into policy.

The question is who is going to put their weight behind this because this is a matter of reorganisation. It will take some years to do and will require a lot of training in human resources — which don’t exist.

There is a whole bunch of issues concerning implementation. But if you decide to do it and the country puts its might behind it, it is possible.

The policy has emphasised urgency. It has said that if we don’t act at high speed, we are actually writing off a generation. Is there anything on your mind about how this could be put into mission mode?
They have suggested doing things in phases, in a planned manner. So let’s say there are two phases. One, the first five years — age three to eight — of the foundational stage, which is going to require planning and restructuring of the system itself.

But the goal of making sure that all children can read, write and do basic arithmetic and acquire other basic skills by 2025 is something that is achievable. It doesn’t require a whole lot of restructuring.

So for kids who are in Classes 1 to 2 you focus on the basic skills of numeracy and reading and for kids from Classes 3 to 5, you focus on certain other skills. You say this is what the schools are going to do. Then you can put this plan in mission mode in no time. That’s a doable proposition.

But doable does not mean it will get done. A lot of work will go into it because then you are changing focus from textbooks and lessons to skills. The textbook is not central. So maybe the whole textbook industry will suffer! I would recommend starting on Phase 1.

And while you are doing that, reconfigure what you have to do with the *anganwadis*.

What this means is that you will need concerted efforts. They have recommended that a National Education Commission be created, chaired by the prime minister. That kind of formula has been suggested and implemented before in the National Literacy Mission and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. You place the PM at the head of everything and you expect that there will be power to implement. If that is the case, so be it.

In every state they are saying create a State Education Commission, which means you are creating one vertical line in education which is not going to be in regular ministries and so on. This is reminiscent of the National Literacy Mission that was floated in 1988. It fell apart because of lack of funds and leadership and so on within no time.

Also, for NEP you need financial commitment for implementation. It will mean almost doubling of expenditure, they are saying. Even if you do it in phases you will have to make sure the money is available and available on time. It’s an interesting situation because the demand on government money is going to go on increasing.

> **‘Making sure that all children can read, write and do basic arithmetic and acquire other basic skills by 2025 is achievable. But doable doesn’t mean it will get done. At the primary level what you need is dedication and focus. You need good leaders.’**

Pratham has underlined learning outcomes over the years. Your last report says there has been slow progress in language and maths. According to your experience, what is the best and most effective route to take?
Well, we are working with the state governments of Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Madhya Pradesh. These are large-scale programmes. For basic reading, writing and arithmetic in Class 3, we are running a sort of remedial mode programme and extending it for Classes 1 to 2 as well.

The methodology isn’t rocket science. But you have to focus. For example, in the draft education policy they have said two hours should be devoted every day for basic reading, writing and arithmetic. You can do the rest in the other time. But for two hours focus on these subjects and say what is to be attained. Don’t teach on a blackboard, but (instead) break up the children into groups according to their levels and make it activity-based learning. These are all known methodologies. The policy brings these very skills into focus.

If this is done, success is possible. The activity-based learning (ABL) programme was supposed to do this. But it didn’t actually work because they were trying to do everything under the sun. There was no clarity of purpose.

What is also talked about is the huge shortage of teachers. Most states hire para teachers. There is a shortage of skilled teachers.
Well, that is a chicken and egg situation. We have not created skilled human resources because we did not have the skills. And because we don’t have the skills, we can’t create those skilled resources. You have to give priority to this.

At the primary level what you need is dedication, commitment and focus. You need good leaders. I don’t think a two-year degree programme is necessary to create skilled resources. No. Our thinking is if you train people to do the job, one step at a time, then over a period, skills are built up.

We have poorly skilled teachers because, though they have been trained for three years, it is unclear for what purpose. When they face multi-grade classes in classrooms, they don’t know what to do. So, learning on the job is exactly what you have to do.

If you train people on the job, to do the things you want them to do, you can create a skilled resource. Our whole idea of how to train people to perform has to change. Everything is lecture-based, chalk and talk. There is no sense of purpose.

So you don’t need the degree colleges?
I am not saying that. You have to reorient. It’s the same story in engineering. You are bringing out engineers who don’t know what to do. Mechanical engineers don’t know how to repair a machine or even identify a fault. Commerce graduates don’t know simple accounting.

That is the problem with the education system. We are giving them something which isn’t oriented towards what is practically needed — not just jobs. It’s not the institution that is at fault. It’s the approach.

What is your opinion of the three-language formula?
I’m not very well versed with it. I can only say that children can learn many languages. But if there is a political reason, there is always a history to why some people object to something. Shashi Tharoor said something interesting — nobody in the north is learning Malayalam. In all the other states are you going to ask people to learn Punjabi or Odia or Tamil? Or is the third language going to be Italian or Spanish or Sanskrit?

What we are missing out is that English-medium schools are killing everything else. All kinds of learning resources are being created for English learning. We are not paying attention to our own languages. We have ignored them. Today you can travel to a Latin American country. They have an app so you can speak in English and it will translate what you are saying into Spanish straightaway. But I can’t go to Chennai and do this. Why haven’t we developed a similar app? We are supposed to be a tech superpower.

Are there issues you would have liked to see in the NEP and you can’t find them?
I think there is enough in the policy to do many things right. ■

NEWS
SPOTLIGHT

MODEL LANGAR: ECO-FRIENDLY, HEALTHY, RUN BY VOLUNTEERS

Sidika Sehgal
New Delhi

PICTURES BY SHREY GUPTA

Women and children eating their meal outside AIIMS

Gurvinder Singh "Bicky" Dhingra, founder of DLSS


The langar begins with a prayer to express gratitude


The nutritious meal — dal, roti, halwa and biscuits

DLSS volunteers at the Civil Hospital, Gurgaon

REACHING THE NEEDY

At the langar *seva* outside AIIMS, Ritika, a volunteer for over four years, explained why DLSS holds the langar *seva* outside hospitals. She contrasted her experience of going to hospitals to care for sick family members with those of people who come from villages and small towns to the National Capital Region (NCR) for medical treatment. While she had the comfort of waiting in the cafeteria of a private hospital, they did not enjoy the same privileges. Some came with just enough resources to pay for the medical treatment of their relatives.

The langar *seva* outside AIIMS is meant to cater to such patients and their caregivers. Rajesh Kumar Chaudhary has been a patient at AIIMS for the past two years. His right leg is paralysed. He eats regularly at the langar *seva* held outside the hospital. Pooja and her mother, Resham Devi, are here because Pooja's father has a brain tumour. "We couldn't eat breakfast today because we were waiting in a queue to meet the doctor. This is our first meal of the day."

In the past four years, DLSS has expanded and is serving its langar at five locations, four of which are outside hospitals — AIIMS, the Nizamuddin Railway Station, the Civil Hospital in Gurgaon, the ESI Model Hospital in Basaidarpur and Dr Bhim Rao Ambedkar Hospital in Noida.

Those who line up for the langar have worry on their faces. Many have to rush back to meet the doctor and try to jump the queue, but DLSS volunteers maintain discipline to make sure that the experience is comfortable for all those who come to eat, especially women. At the Civil Hospital in Gurgaon, Mahi Pandey has brought her six-month-old daughter, Ichha, to the hospital. Her daughter has had fever for seven days and has not been eating well. But nobody in the hospital has a moment to show some kindness. At the langar *seva*, she is treated with dignity.

The DLSS feeds everyone without discrimination — men, women and children, the young and the old, people with disability and the able-bodied. Each langar *seva* by DLSS unites people across class, caste, gender and age. Children and people with disability are seated on a rug and served separately.

The idea of the langar is not unique to Sikhism. It was adopted from Sufi practices of communal meals in *dargahs*. The word itself is derived from the Persian word for a public eating place attached to a Sufi shrine. The langar traditionally begins with an *ardas*, a prayer to give thanks. But the langar has long transcended religion. The volunteers associated with DLSS hold different religious beliefs and are united by their cause of serving the less fortunate. Worldwide, organisations like the UK-based Khalsa Aid provide langar in times of natural calamities and the Sikh tradition has become a universal humanitarian one. It is no surprise then that the word 'langar' was added to the Oxford English Dictionary in 2008.


Pooja and her mother, Resham Devi


Rajesh Kumar Chaudhary, a patient at AIIMS

WHOLESOME MEAL

The meal provided is wholesome. It consists of four *rotis, dal, kada prasad* (a sweet made with whole wheat flour) and water.

While a lot of charity organisations serve rice, DLSS serves *rotis* not only because *rotis* are traditionally served at the langar in gurudwaras but also because wheat is an integral part of the staple diet of north Indians.

The *rotis* are sourced from a *roti*-maker in Gurugram who had developed a *roti*-making machine indigenously and has been running the plant since 2008. The unit manufactures 270,000 *rotis* a day, and they are constantly developing the product to make their *rotis* healthier and tastier.

The catering division of the food chain, Evergreen Sweets, provides the *dal* and *kada prasad*. Along with this, a packet of biscuits is given. Dhingra explained that many patients spend the night outside the hospital and the packet of biscuits can serve as a handy snack in case they can't afford to have a meal.

The langar *seva* goes on until the food is finished, usually about an hour, and people are welcome to come for a second helping. The area is cleaned before the langar and once again after it's over to clear any plates people might have left behind. "*Khana khane ke baad, kooda koodedan mein dalein*," announces a volunteer every few minutes. The disposable plates and bowls used are made from organic matter such as sugarcane pulp and are 100 percent biodegradable.

The ecologically sound practices and the organised manner in which DLSS holds its langar have not developed overnight. A lot of thought has gone into each detail and in arriving at this model. Dhingra was able to do this because he chose to shut a successful business to devote himself to the cause.

The DLSS and its volunteers are far from being complacent. They understand that selfless *seva* is not possible without a plan. Meticulous duty lists are made before each langar, assigning each volunteer a defined role.

In March 2019, at the Fourth Foundation Day of DLSS, Hardeep Singh Puri, Union minister of state, lauded their efforts. Dhingra plans bigger things for DLSS. He wants to take the langar to cities across the country. After four years of running DLSS, he feels even more strongly about the need to tackle hunger. ■

Teaching parents to play

Kavita Charanji
New Delhi

SHREY GUPTA

Sesame muppets Elmo and Grover welcome participants to the Play Every Day conference

More play time makes children smarter. That's what a project by Sesame Workshop and Lego Foundation called Play Every Day, implemented in low-resource communities in India, Mexico and South Africa, indicates. When parents and teachers helped children between three and six years old to play, the children not only had fun, they became more creative.

To disseminate their findings, Sesame Workshop India and the Lego Foundation hosted a Play Conference in Delhi recently. NGOs, corporates, foundations, academics and government representatives shared ideas on play-friendly programmes and the challenges they confront in getting children to play more.

Parents and teachers don't always understand the importance of play, for instance. It is difficult to motivate them to introduce new forms of learning.

"The parents felt it was just fun and non-serious. But after we started engaging with them and they saw the benefits of play, the transformation was amazing," says Sonali Khan, managing director of Sesame Workshop India.

Play Every Day was launched in 2016. The programme went through three phases of research, testing and refinement in communities. Finally, the 12-week programme began between September and December 2018. In India, Play Every Day reached 2,500 families with three- to six-year-olds across nine low-resource communities in Delhi. With the help of trained facilitators and NGOs, Sesame Workshop India organised play workshops with parents and children, play fairs, street plays, rallies and other community events.

"In India, the message we sent out was that play was linked to children's language development, maths, number concepts and social values that would make them good citizens," says Ira Joshi, vice-president, education & research, Sesame Workshop India.

Through hands-on activities, facilitators showed parents that their children didn't need expensive toys to become sharp learners. Locally available material like recycled cardboard boxes, plastic bottles, cups and everyday household objects would do just as well. A popular game was Number Tower where children counted cardboard boxes and, in the process, learnt addition and subtraction. The recycled material was also transformed into more exciting toys like cars and playhouses.

"Creative thinking is very important. In school we are taught that there is only one right answer, for example, that an object is a box or a car. But the idea that it could be something else is a big part of skill sets," says Khan.

Sesame also introduced textless storybooks with images that allowed mothers to craft their own stories. "The books gave a great deal of encouragement and a sense of agency to mothers," says Khan.

Word games were popular too. One effective strategy was to involve children in the daily chores of their mothers. By just hanging out laundry, children sorted, counted clothes and played other games with their mothers.

> **Sesame introduced textless storybooks with images that allowed mothers to craft their stories.**

"All the women initially complained that they had no time to incorporate play into their busy routines. But they were very happy with our strategy because it enabled them to keep an eye on their children. The kids became quick learners and the mothers found their chores lightened," says Nikhita Bhatia, content specialist at Sesame Workshop India.

A multi-country research evaluation of Play Every Day by an external evaluator showed that India fared well on several counts. For instance, according to reports by those who looked after the children, frequency of play increased by 23 percent in India, three percent in Mexico and 15 percent in South Africa.

The caregivers revealed increased confidence as "play mentors" for their children through quality play time with an increase of eight percent in India, 11 percent in Mexico and 18 percent in South Africa.

They were also more confident of using recycled materials like plastic bottles, cans and cardboard rolls as play objects. Likewise, Indian children showed an increase in creative thinking on how to use household items for play.

Khan and Diego Adame, director, Learning Through Play in Early Childhood, Lego Foundation, released the *Global Book of Play.* Meant for early childhood development providers and experts, the book showcased their learnings from India, Mexico and South Africa.

"The emphasis on children from 0-6 years is missing worldwide. We know that the best return on investment is for governments to focus on early childhood education but that doesn't happen. Governments agree but they don't commit their money to this group," said Adame.

In a keynote address, Dr Mythili Bector, officer on special duty, primary school education, Directorate of Education, Delhi, talked about the Delhi government's initiatives in pre-primary education. A grant of Rs 1 lakh has been allotted to schools for teaching-learning material like musical instruments, CD players, origami sheets, puppets and activity books, to name just a few. Each nursery class, she said, has a classroom library. While teacher motivation was a challenge sometimes, she said the "Happiness Curriculum" has been introduced from nursery to Class 8 to help children become self-aware, creative and happier.

There was also a panel discussion on varied models of incorporating play in Early Childhood Development (ECD) programmes. Dr Swati Popat Vats, president of the Podar Education Network and president of the Early Childhood Association India, cited the example of the Podar Jumbo Kids pre-primary schools that are based on the philosophy of 'Kiducation.' This is essentially education from the child's perspective with play as its core philosophy.

Dr Naveen Thomas, co-founder of Headstreams, talked about the organisation's Tackle Caravan programme which encourages trained youth facilitators and children to play together in the local community. The youth serve as role models for the children, he pointed out.

Dr Sudeshna Chatterjee, board member, International Play Association, stressed the importance of play in disaster and crisis situations.

The issue was topical since the new draft education policy emphasises early childhood education. ■

People bond over water

Shree Padre
Kasaragod

IN Dhanvanthari Nagar, 14 houses have worked out an exemplary water system, worthy of emulation. They source water from one bore well and use it with care. Every family gets an equal amount of water at a nominal price. This system of sharing and caring has built cordial relations within the community. And they are all very proud of their water management system.

Dhanvanthari Nagar is in the suburbs of Kasaragod. Before the monsoon broke, there was drought in Kerala. But these families faced no water shortage. They got their quota of 1,000 litres every day for 15 minutes through their pipeline in their compounds.

Dr U. Maheshwari, a retired professor, recalls vividly how the idea of sharing water started. The late Ravikumar, his neighbour, had started digging a bore well in his compound. When neighbours saw the drilling truck arrive, they rushed to his house. They pleaded with Ravikumar not to dig a bore well for himself. "Let us dig a common bore well nearby and share the water equitably," they suggested.

Ravikumar agreed. That's how the Dhanvanthari Nagar Development Society (DDS) was formed to share water in 1997. The families living here jointly bought two cents of land for the bore well and constructed a pump house.

SHREE PADRE

C.N. Shastry with his tank in which he stores piped water

"All of us were worried that if each one of us started digging a separate bore well, a water competition would begin and affect cordial relations," says Dr Maheshwari.

Out of 14 families, 10 have open wells. But this year, just two bore wells yielded water till the end of summer. The rest had dried up.

All the houses are connected via a pipeline to the bore well. Each pipeline has a gate valve near every house. Residents open the valve at a stipulated time and fill up their water tanks.

The DDS has a governing committee to oversee water management. Every year they elect a president, a secretary and a treasurer. Each house is represented by two members. A general body meeting is held once a year. Rules have been framed and are displayed in the pump house.

The 14 houses are divided into four sections. There is a fixed time table for water supply. The first resident on the pipeline's journey fills water by opening the valve for 15 minutes and then intimates the next house. After all the residents have received water, the pump is switched off. "We really don't measure the water. There may be slight variations in water pressure too because the houses are at different elevations," says C.N. Shastry, a retired professional.

Adjustments are made if there is a power cut. If a family is on holiday, they can ask one of their neighbours to fill up their tank while they are away. But they can't get more water to make up for the days they were not at home. "If one of us goes out to attend a family function we request our neighbours to help," says Shastry. But households can get more water if they are celebrating an occasion or holding a function.

There are two categories of bore well water users — those who use the water throughout the year and those who access it for six months. Some families have an open well. They draw water from December to May. Initially, there was a three-month category but that was subsequently cancelled.

Residents of this colony are a well-educated group. They comprise professors, lecturers, bank managers, advocates and senior professionals. When Dhanvanthari Nagar was established, only five or six families lived here. That number increased to 14.

Dhanvanthari Nagar is situated on a lateritic hill top near Uliyathadka, a small town. Houses in the colony are built in a haphazard way and sizes of plots vary from nine cents to 36 cents. Each house in the vicinity has a bore well. A few families with open wells have a bore well too, just in case their open well turns dry.

Residents bought land from a single landowner. He assessed each buyer's background carefully before selling, says Shastry. "Although we became neighbours by chance, some of us knew each other for many years. For example, four of us worked in the same college," says Dr Radhakrishna N. Bellur, a professor.

Surprisingly, the colony doesn't have a residents welfare association (RWA). The DDS is their only grouping. They have extended their pump house and added a meeting room where social events are held.

The initial group of residents pooled ₹5,000 each to set up the infrastructure of their water system: land, bore well, pump house, pipeline, and so on. The families who arrived later paid a higher fee, decided by the committee. Currently, each family pays just ₹50 as maintenance fee.

The first settler here was Dr Kamalaksha K., secretary of the DDS and a retired principal. "From the start we consciously opted for traditional open wells and not bore wells. We realised that the bore well culture would result in competition between neighbours and end up in excessive use of water."

So far things are running smoothly. "The biggest advantage is that our relations are cordial and you can see it reflected in our pleasant smiles. Water isn't a cause of friction," says Dr Kamalaksha K.

There could be some trouble brewing, though. "The system has worked satisfactorily so far," says Ganesh Prasad P., a government officer, with a sigh of relief. "But, of late, the daily routine of directing water to the tanks of some members at a particular time seems inconvenient for them. We don't know how long things will continue to work smoothly."

Most residents travel for work. Water is released in the morning or evening. If a family misses their turn, they have to wait until water has been distributed to the other families or for a lean period in between.

Recently, some new residents wanted to join the water sharing system but the DDS turned down their request because they aren't sure how much water they can spare. Six more families have now settled in the vicinity and they have dug four bore wells.

A member of the DDS too has dug a bore well in his compound. Other members point out that "there was an unwritten understanding that we shouldn't dig independent bore wells". But the member says he is very elderly and can't stick to a fixed water time table.

A few families who live here are tenants. They would probably be disinterested in water conservation activities. Old-time residents are also apprehensive of an areca nut garden that has come up in the vicinity. It might pump up a considerable quantity of water, they fear.

Dr Bellur, Dr Kamalaksha K. and Shastry have also carried out water recharging measures in their respective compounds. This has helped them too. Unfortunately, this example of *in situ* groundwater recharge is not being emulated by other families.

Such a system of bore well sharing is unusual. It could be replicated across the state. Residents are deriving many indirect benefits from it.

"If we had dug a separate bore well, we would have ended up spending ₹1 lakh each and there would have been no guarantee of a dedicated supply. Now we know the quantity of water we get is limited, so we use minimum water," says Dr Bellur.

Individual bore wells would have dried open wells in the colony a long time ago. Sharing and caring for water has helped residents retain a reasonably high water table at a time when groundwater is depleting all over the state.

Recharging groundwater, tapping rainwater and starting a storage-cum-recharge system would ensure Dhanvanthari Nagar's water security for eons. ■

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‘We are building a very young team of global changemakers’

Rwit Ghosh
New Delhi

Yashveer Singh: ‘Most social entrepreneurs started their initiatives while they were teenagers’

IN the 30 years since it was founded, Ashoka: Innovators for the Public has come to be known for some of the leading social entrepreneurs it has supported. There has been Anil Agarwal of CSE, Kailash Satyarthi of the Bachpan Bachao Andolan, Anshu Gupta of Goonj and even Arvind Kejriwal when he ran an NGO called Parivartan. These and innumerable other innovators might never have succeeded without Ashoka identifying them and providing support.

But what about change in small and impactful ways in the course of our daily lives? In 2005, Ashoka decided to launch “Everyone a Changemaker” (EACH), a programme with the underlying philosophy that each citizen has it in them to change the world. The main focus was youth. EACH identified 150 young changemakers over the years.

Ashoka now plans to take EACH worldwide and create a network of very youthful changemakers between 12 and 19, who can perhaps become world leaders and drivers of social change globally.

Civil Society spoke to Yashveer Singh, Global Executive Director of the Ashoka Young Changemakers programme, about going global with EACH and their experience in India.

Can you explain Ashoka’s Everyone a Changemaker (EACH) programme in India?
When we started thinking about EACH, 15 years ago, we talked to leaders within our organisation. One of the things that came up was that we couldn’t confidently say that the problems of the world had reduced. However, the problems and their nature had changed. That really made us wonder what we needed to do to support social entrepreneurs who can help us live in a world where solutions outweigh the problems. That was the genesis of the idea of EACH.

We also realised that we needed to go back and find out what made social entrepreneurs tick. Two things stood out — one, that most of them started their initiatives while they were teenagers. Roughly 83 percent were below the age of 20 at the time. Look at Kailash Satyarthi. At the age of 11 he launched an initiative to address the problem of caste.

Secondly, we wanted to identify the qualities they banked on. What emerged was that social entrepreneurs built skills and a mindset — skills of cognitive empathy, teamwork, creative problem solving and collaborative leadership. These were skills that they learnt because they launched something. Right now, skills like these aren’t taught in a very formal way in school. There is no framework for it.

The reason why world-class social entrepreneurs are engaged in world-class change is because at a very young age they have been exposed to a global mindset. Secondly, they developed certain skills. For example, can you make someone an engineer if they haven’t done maths in school? It’s not possible. To become an engineer, you need analytical skills. Those skills only come over a period of time, more so in your growing years. That gave us the insight that if we want to reduce the problems in the world, we need to see how the mindset of a social entrepreneur could be taken to others.

> ‘Imagine a world where a child’s education included learning how to create change, be empathetic and compassionate. That would be a completely different world in which we would not be dependent on a few.’

Imagine a world where every child’s education included learning how to create change, be empathetic and compassionate. That would be a completely different world in which we would not be dependent on a few individuals committed to large-scale change. We support the best social entrepreneurs. We need a world where everyone can contribute. That is the only way to deal with the many problems that surface on a daily basis. That was the thinking behind EACH.

Will you be changing the EACH programme to take it global?
There have been various evolutions around EACH. The first step was asking if we can work with social entrepreneurs to build EACH. We attempted to do so for a few years. One learning from that experience was that because these social entrepreneurs are so committed to the causes they care about, they only think in that direction. The next step was to involve universities because they play a larger role in social change. What we hadn’t done was put young people in the forefront.

One of the most effective ways to build EACH is to target the younger generation. If we can inspire them to become changemakers, they would ensure that their generation, between 12 and 19, would also become changemakers and creative problem-solvers. We have attempted this in the past by working with schools. We are putting young people in the forefront and saying, “You tell us how it can be done.”

For example, I grew up in Rajasthan. Virender Sehwag had just entered the cricket fraternity and suddenly become a sensation. The boy from Najafgarh had become part of the Indian national team and he was scoring. What it did in the Rajasthan-Haryana belt was this — in schools, cricket kits were being bought and infrastructure to play the game was being built. People started believing that a local boy could make it to the national team.

Young people are influenced by their peers. If we need to make being a changemaker aspirational we have to identify the most inspiring changemakers in their teens. They can be role models for other young people.

We are launching a community of young changemakers who can be at the core of ideating and building a framework to influence every young person in India to become a changemaker. That means they would launch social media campaigns, influence school networks and work with Ashoka and their existing social entrepreneur network. Young changemakers will be at the centre of it all.

What are the projects that changemakers have taken up in India and how have they fared?
I don’t think we can call the work that comes out of the EACH programme projects. Projects target one section of society. EACH is less of a project and more about creating a culture shift for change. It is a continuous movement.

There are different elements and roles for people. Social entrepreneurs showed us how to create change at the highest level. Working with schools we learnt how to get things done at school level. We are putting young people at the forefront and the whole conversation is changing. So we now have an EACH team consisting of a young person, a school leader, a social entrepreneur and a business entrepreneur.

Our social entrepreneurs have no age limit. In the initiative that we are launching in July we are working with teenagers from across India between the ages of 12 and 19.

Take, for example, Garvita from Bengaluru. She became part of our network at the age of 15, four years ago. She identified a simple problem and found a solution. Garvita used to go out to eat with her parents. She noticed that every time they went to a restaurant, the servers would fill their glasses to the brim regardless of whether they wanted water or not. Most of the time no one would drink the entire glass of water. By the end of the meal, one-third or two-thirds of water in a glass would be wasted. According to a recent newspaper report, in the next 20 to 30 years, 40 percent of the population won’t have access to clean drinking water. That is a very big problem.

Garvita came up with the idea of a glass with a half-full mark. She started campaigning at restaurants, training their staff to use these glasses. Garvita requested them to initially fill these glasses till the half-way mark and, if people wanted more, they could fill them up. Today, almost 1,000 restaurants across south India have adopted the use of half-mark glasses.

> ‘If we need to make being a changemaker aspirational, we have to identify inspiring changemakers in their teens.’

When Garvita first got in touch with the Ashoka Foundation, she said, “I might be able to address one problem, but there are so many problems on a day to day basis.” She helped introduce a campaign called Lead Young in 35 schools in Bengaluru. The premise was simple. At assembly every morning, a story from the Ashoka network is shared. It is either read out or performed once a week or once a month. It has inspired hundreds of schoolchildren and they have approached us, saying they want to be changemakers too.

On July 13, 12 teenagers will be coming from across India to share their ideas and initiatives. We keep expanding this tribe of young people. So, we would call this a movement. You can’t predict in which direction the work of these youngsters will go but whatever happens, will happen for the better. That’s how we’re taking EACH forward.

Why is EACH going global?
The reason EACH needs to be global is because one of the ways our society is being segregated is “them versus us”. Yes, it will inspire young people. But I do believe, in order to thrive, a global outlook is required. How are young people supposed to have such an outlook if they aren’t exposed to a global network?

One of the things that we are doing is taking these teenagers who are changemakers and integrating them into a global community. You will have young changemakers from the US, Brazil, Indonesia, Europe and Africa all coming together. Ashoka will link them through technology or, in some cases, bring them physically together.

Imagine a 15-year-old from India meeting a 15-year-old from Indonesia and realising that their countries face similar problems. At the end of the day, what unites us is humanity and the intent to do good. The kind of leaders we will see emerging out of this pool will have a global and humane outlook. This is why it is important to integrate teenagers into a global network rather than just a local network, a local community and just doing well for India. Of course they have to. They are the ones who are going to lead India. But they also need to lead globally because we are now competing in a global market.

What are the resources that you provide to your young changemakers?
The biggest problem young changemakers face, and they will tell you themselves, is ageism. The outlook that exists is, go to school, to college, settle into a job and then consider change.

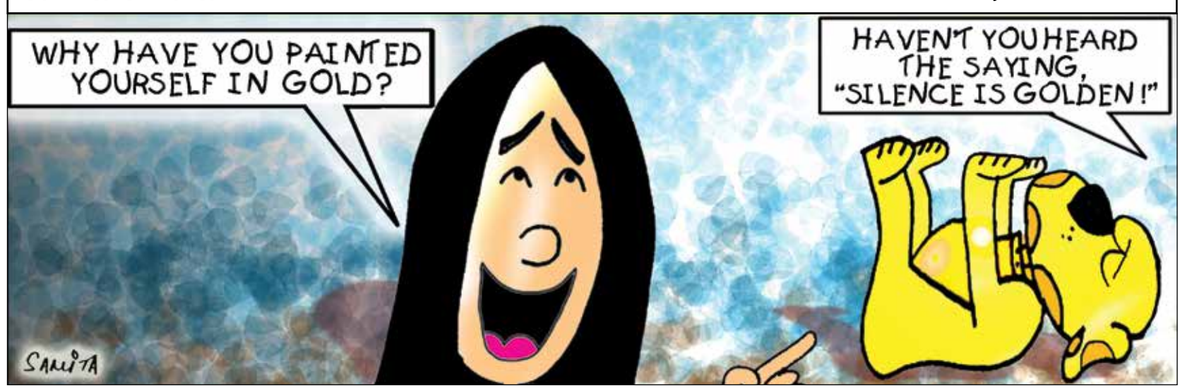
At Ashoka, we are helping them believe in themselves. That is one kind of cultural shift that we are trying to break.

Secondly, when different changemakers come together they find support in the peers they meet through us. They also need skills to take their ideas forward. Neither schools nor parents are teaching them these skills.

We have the best business entrepreneurs mentor them. We are trying to create an organic platform where they will get emotional support from our community, networking support from Ashoka and a belief that there is someone who believes in them and their ideas. ■

Samita’s World

by SAMITA RATHOR



Soak pits work in Gorakhpur

Sandeep A. Chavan
Gorakhpur

ONE day Dharmendra, a field worker with Project Prayaas, a Tata Trusts initiative, spotted Babulal, a local resident, emptying waste water from a pit in front of his house in a village in Pipraich block of Gorakhpur district in eastern Uttar Pradesh. The pit was full of foul-smelling water with mosquitoes rampantly breeding in it.

Obviously, Babulal wasn't happy emptying his pit. But he had to. The pit was full of dirty water coming out from his house. He had to empty it manually before it overflowed.

What he needed was a soak pit or a Swachh Sokhta Gaddha. Dharmendra offered to help but how was he to go about doing it?

Pipraich block is in the Terai region, close to the Nepal border. It is infamous for repeated epidemics of diseases including encephalitis and malaria. Nearly every other year, children die of Acute Encephalitis Syndrome (AES), a deadly disease.

A key factor for the spread of encephalitis is the poor state of hygiene and sanitation in Gorakhpur district. Project Prayaas is implementing community-based health promotion strategies in Pipraich block and Uska Bazaar in Siddharth Nagar district.

Under the Swachh Bharat Mission people are either thinking about making toilets or have already constructed them. But the drainage system is a picture of neglect. There is either no drainage system or drains are blocked. The topography of the area encourages mosquito breeding sites.

The Prayaas team carried out a social mapping exercise with villagers and identified all the blocked surface drainage channels and waterlogging spots around hamlets and households. These visual maps were reviewed by the community and a dialogue was started to identify simple solutions like soak pits.

Soak pits are not an innovation. But they are not popular and their value is underrated. People were under the impression that such pits were expensive and could only be constructed with government schemes.

The Prayaas team decided to construct a soak pit near a village school with low-cost technology so that villagers could see for themselves that making a soak pit was easy and inexpensive.

The team received technical guidance from Col (Dr) M.P. Cariappa, a public health specialist and an adviser with the Tata Trusts.

Cariappa broke down the method of making a soak pit into four simple steps called Triple Four. First, dig an unlined pit four feet deep, four feet long and four feet wide. Second, fill it with brick rubble and not stones. Brick rubble absorbs water easily, unlike new bricks. Third, the surface of the pit is to be covered with an old mosquito net or a mesh to keep out leaves and debris. The surface margins of the pit must be lined with brick pieces to give the boundary a neat appearance. Finally, the outlet of the hand pump roundel (or from wherever wastewater is draining off according to the natural gradient) is connected to this soak pit at one end.

A village soak pit in Pipraich block of Gorakhpur district

'Soak pit technology is a key component in reducing vector-borne diseases like dengue and malaria. This is a forgotten age-old practice.'

A similar soak pit named the Swachh Sokhta Gaddha was made in a village school compound, draining wastewater from a public hand pump so that children and passers-by could observe its benefits.

Dharmendra explained to Babulal how an inexpensive soak pit, using locally available material, could be easily constructed. Babulal would only have to pay for brick rubble and it would take just a couple of hours to make, using ordinary implements. Once Babulal made his soak pit, other villagers saw it and asked for technical guidance to make similar soak pits for their homes.

Apart from technical inputs, the Prayaas team did not contribute anything to construct these pits. Individual families financed their own pits or accessed funds from the gram pradhan. Pits around public facilities were fully funded with panchayati raj funds up to ₹3,000 per pit. Around ₹600 was spent on labour and a small sum on brick rubble if it needed to be bought. If brick rubble was available, the cost of the soak pit was minimal.

There is provision under MGNREGA for construction of soak wells or *pucca* soak pits. Different villages have come up with different models.

It is to be noted that the Prayaas soak pit is not intended for sewage or for large quantities of sullage or rainwater. It is essentially for domestic drainage requirement and for low-usage public hand pumps.

Maintenance of these soak pits is quite simple. Lallan Prasad, the block coordinator of Team Prayaas, explained: "Every month, the brick rubble should be removed and dried for a day. Leaves and debris inside the pit should be emptied."

"During the monsoon, it is best to just leave the pit as it is and do the cleaning and drying after the rains are over on any sunny day," said Cariappa.

The gram pradhan takes on the responsibility of maintaining soak pits in public spaces. Most villages have youth groups who clean up this facility. One gram pradhan said he paid labour charges from government funds to maintain soak pits in public areas.

Another option would be to pay maintenance-related labour charges through the Village Health and Sanitation Committee funds or MGNREGA funds by putting up a labour cost.

"Soak pit technology is a key component in reducing vector-borne diseases like dengue and malaria. Actually, this is an age-old practice that people seem to have forgotten," explained Indrajeet Kumar, Project Officer of Project Prayaas in Gorakhpur.

Team Prayaas has also engaged with the National Vector Borne Disease Control Programme team at the block and district level. The objective is to play a catalytic role in implementing vector control strategies through the public health system with community participation. The strategy includes source reduction, use of protective measures such as medicated bed nets, larvicidal measures and so on, to bring down the incidence of vector-borne diseases drastically. ■

Sandeep A. Chavan is a programme officer for health initiatives with the Tata Trusts. He works in eastern Uttar Pradesh with the Prayaas team.

PICTURES BY SHREY GUPTA

Dr Renuka Yawalkar comforts Babybai at the Futala primary health centre

Smart urban PHC

How Nagpur takes healthcare to people's doors

Umesh Anand
Nagpur

IT is a morning like any other at the primary health centre at Futala. A large number of patients have turned up. They occupy steel chairs in the waiting area. A flat-screen TV on the wall keeps them entertained. Nurses in uniform are on duty. A peon, lean and distinctive in his crisp white *topi*, flits around on constant vigil. A laboratory attendant collects blood samples. Stocktaking is underway in the pharmacy. Machines that are part of a cold chain for vaccines are being checked out.

In her room, Dr Renuka Yawalkar, medical mask in place, comforts an elderly patient. Babybai Wasantrao Chalwankar is 70 and has been coming to Dr Yawalkar for four years. Her complaints are invariably minor ones — cough and cold, fever, headache, joint pains. Medicines help, but what really works is the companionable conversation with the doctor.

"She indulges me like a daughter would and puts up with my nonsense. She is always willing to listen," says Babybai of Dr Yawalkar when we get talking later. "Sometimes I'm irritable and short-tempered, but she doesn't mind."

Futala is a slum in Nagpur. It is congested and squalid and notorious in the way slums tend to be. Babybai has lived here since the time there were a few houses and a pond and the area was nowhere close to being the urban sprawl that now exists. Her husband is a barber who works from the pavement. Her three sons have done better for themselves. Two are barbers like their father but they have got off the pavement and have a saloon each on rent. The third son is an attendant in a petrol station.

Hers is a family that has been moving up — not exactly middle class, but on its way there. The sons and their wives and children go to private clinics. Babybai and her husband prefer to come to this health centre run by the municipality. Being senior citizens, the couple isn't charged for consultation or medicines. It is not as though those who have to pay are charged much. At just ₹10 per visit, the health centre is as good as free for everyone.

The Futala facility is one of 26 urban Primary Health Centres (PHCs) that the Nagpur Municipal Corporation (NMC) has set out to revive with the support of the Tata Trusts. It is happening under the National Urban Health Mission (NUHM). In the past year, 17 PHCs have been upgraded in multiple ways. They have been repainted and given standard interiors. New furniture has been installed. The doctor's room has been air-conditioned. With minimal changes in structure, the PHCs have undergone a transformation.

Each PHC has been given computers and is networked. A patient's record — symptoms, doctor's advice, medicines prescribed and test results — are digitally stored. Some laboratory tests are done at the health centre itself. For the tests it can't handle, samples are collected and sent to a central laboratory, which provides the results online.

A patient's records are readily available on the doctor's computer and are referred to on each visit. Once the 26 PHCs are all upgraded, information will be shared across them. A patient will then be able to consult a doctor in a PHC in any part of Nagpur. Ultimately, it is hoped these records will also be accessible in government hospitals, which would be particularly useful during emergencies or when providing specialised treatment.

Information technology has speeded up change. The use of computers was at first resisted, but is now welcomed because it really does make work easier. Doctors and the other staff who use computers tend to feel more accomplished in a contemporary way. Dr Sarita Kamdar, the municipality's health officer in charge of the PHCs, has begun holding her weekly meeting with the doctors through video-conferencing. It is a big thing for her and everyone else at the PHCs.

With computers have come transparency and better processes. A patient registers at the reception where a photograph is taken on a webcam and a slip is issued. There is a sense of formality. A system is in place. In the past, PHC staff would be lackadaisical, but now they have an incentive to shape up and keep pace with a new sense of purpose.

Cleanliness and upkeep have made a huge difference to the ambience of the PHCs. The Tata Trusts sought professional advice on interiors and layout to provide a uniform facelift so that all the PHCs look alike. Earlier, they were dank and lacking in hygiene. Hooligans would rule over many of them, including the now shining one at Futala, and misuse the premises.

Brightening up the PHCs and improving their infrastructure has had some immediate and significant benefits. For instance, the doctors feel motivated to spend more time on the job seeing patients. Earlier they would spend literally just as much time as needed to mark their presence. But now, with air-conditioning and a friendly environment, they arrive at 8 am and stay until 4 pm. It is a sea change from what used to happen.

Improvements have also resulted in greater expectations by patients. In a short while they have gotten used to higher standards. There is a demand for services, which in turn compels doctors, nurses and others to keep their end up. The number of patients visiting the PHCs has risen sharply. Patients say the services and ambience are now on a par with private clinics and the charges are much less.

"I have been coming here for many years and have seen the changes that have taken place. My husband and I pay nothing because we are senior citizens," says Babybai. "But others also hardly have to pay anything for such good services."

Shankar Wankhede, 68, and Damlu Pehalwan, 67, are vocal admirers of the transformation at Futala and proudly say they collaborated to bring it about when Dr Yawalkar reached out to the community for support.

"Several nearby private clinics have had to close down after the improvements at this centre. Patients prefer to come here," says Wankhede. "This lady doctor is so good and gives so much attention to patients that people in other localities have also started coming here to consult her. It is not just her, everyone working in this health centre treats patients like they are their own family."

Wankhede remembers a time when the health centre was in a mess. "For many years, the local boys used to drink and hang out here. Fights would take place. Doctors would put in a token appearance and make excuses of having to attend meetings elsewhere," he says.

Different interventions have been done. Better medical practices were of course essential but by themselves these would not have been enough. It was equally important to create confidence in the minds of patients and change the public profile of a government facility. Innovations were called for.

Upgrading the infrastructure and improving interior design was one way of making the health centres inviting and more like private clinics. It led to an image change, which took the centres from being dismal and neglected to looking good.

A second and more interesting move was to reach out to the hospitality industry. The Tata Trusts roped in the Taj's hotel management institute at Aurangabad to impart soft skills to doctors, nurses and attendants. They needed to learn to be welcoming and attentive in the style of hotel staff. If patients could be treated like guests they would be more inclined to come to a government-run primary health centre. It was also motivational for long-ignored staff at the PHCs to go through such training. It took them beyond their humdrum lives and provided them the opportunity to define themselves differently as service providers.

RAPIDLY GROWING CITY: Nagpur's population is officially 2.5 million, which makes it a small city, but it is growing rapidly and it is estimated that it already has about 3.5 million people though that may not be the official number.

Most of the growth is happening in the unorganised sector with migrants living in slums. With the shift to the city, they have begun their journey into the middle class. They have rising incomes and aspirations. Meeting their health needs is a complex challenge. It involves figuring out what they suffer from and then providing facilities that are accessible, affordable and efficient. People pay big chunks of their earnings to go to private health facilities because the government's health centres are not good enough.

The waiting area with patients and a peon on duty

Child health and nutrition are tracked

The central laboratory where PHCs send samples for testing

"Families end up spending up to 10 percent of their income on health," says Ram Joshi, additional commissioner of the municipal corporation. "By improving the PHCs the idea is to provide reliable healthcare at an affordable cost."

He points out that in addition to the PHCs, the corporation has three hospitals. There are also two medical colleges and a specialised cancer facility. A branch of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) has also opened in Nagpur.

But the PHC is the first building block of a larger healthcare system. It has a vital role to play because it exists in the midst of the community and serves as both a sentinel and a service provider. If run efficiently, it reduces the number of patients going to hospitals with minor ailments. Hospitals can then concentrate on serious cases.

As urban populations rise, dependable primary-level care becomes more

Dr Mrinal S. Dhurjad at the Somalwada PHC which is yet to be refurbished

important. Lifestyle diseases like hypertension and diabetes have become widespread and affect people in slums and upscale areas of a city alike. The PHC is part of a systemic solution, which can pick up these trends and address them before they go out of hand.

People go to private clinics and hospitals because they can buy easy access and they think they are getting quality treatment. If a government facility like a PHC provides both, at a cheaper price, patients benefit of course but a larger and more stable system also falls into place.

For instance, Babybai in Futala knows for sure that she does not have diabetes or hypertension. She knows because she is regularly checked at the primary health centre. She can also tell you that her husband is a borderline diabetic and is hypertensive. She has never had malaria and he has had malaria. Their personal health records exist.

A PHC picks up trends. It refers patients who need specialised treatment to hospitals. Embedded as it is within the community, a PHC will know if there is a sudden increase in the number of cases of cholera, dysentery, malaria or jaundice. It can alert the sanitation department. It tracks infant and maternal mortality, facilitates institutional births and flags cases of malnutrition. Typically it has 11 people in different roles. There is one doctor. In addition, Ashas, who are field health workers, go deep into the community. There are also ANMs or Auxilliary Nurse Midwives.

"My health centre serves about 44,000 people. Our outreach takes us to pregnant women, children and adolescents. We take the weight and height of children. ANMs and Ashas collect such information and put it in the computer here. Information regarding every patient is recorded. ANMs go regularly, according to a fixed timetable. I make visits for supervision," says Dr Yawalkar.

"Births don't happen here but we send mothers to hospitals and we monitor them before and after delivery. I visit homes when I go to our outreach stations. In all we have 22 stations in a month. We get a large amount of data on patients who are high-risk, hypertensive, diabetic, suffering from malnutrition. We also get patients with chronic diseases like tuberculosis and leprosy," says Dr Yawalkar.

"At my centre most patients come with

The spruced-up PHC in Babulkheda

A PHC picks up trends. It refers patients who need specialised treatment to hospitals. It will note a sudden increase in cases of cholera, dysentery, malaria...

complaints of cold, cough, fever, hypertension and diabetes, diarrhoea and gastroenteritis. There are cases of infected wounds and STDs. We have TB patients whom we treat. But this centre is only for primary care. The man who came a little while ago couldn't open his mouth. It could be cancer, but we can't make the diagnosis. So I referred him to a hospital for an assessment and only after that can we tell the patient what the problem is," explains Dr Yawalkar.

Doctors have a leadership role to play in making a primary health centre effective. They set the bar for others to aspire to. The three doctors at the Futala, Babulkheda and Somalwada PHCs are self-motivated women with good qualifications. They are in government service by choice.

Dr Yawalkar, 45, is a pediatrician by training who gave up private practice. She says: "I get professional satisfaction from working in the public healthcare system. This is where I want to be."

At Babulkheda, Dr Swati Gupta, 36, is a gynaecologist who applied for the job because she felt it would give her more time with her children. A gynaecologist is on call at all hours. The PHC job requires her to be there till 4 pm.

But in the year or so that she has been here what Dr Gupta perhaps values more is the exposure to a wide variety of cases and the acknowledgement she often gets in the street.

"I went to buy bananas from a local fruit-seller and he immediately recognised me as the doctor from the health centre. It feels good. It doesn't happen in private practice," says Dr Gupta.

PHCs have a patient feedback system

The Babulkheda centre under Dr Gupta has done well. The number of patients visiting it has gone up from 50 to 60 a day to more than 100. In April 2018, the centre received 520 new patients. In March this year, the figure rose to 1,309.

At the Somalwada PHC, Dr Mrinal S. Dhurjad, 37, is waiting for the infrastructure improvements. This PHC is in the third phase of the upgrade and is an example of how bad the infrastructure at the PHCs used to be. It is cramped and dingy and in urgent need of a coat of paint. It is not computerised beyond registering a patient and providing a slip. Patients do come, around 600 a month, but the lack of facilities is telling.

Dr Dhurjad is a gynaecologist. She has been in government service for the past three years. She says: "Doctors should be dedicated to public health." But another reason for her being here is also that she can manage home and her job better in this role. Her husband is an orthopaedic surgeon and runs a small hospital of his own. One of them needs to have time for the children. "It is the female who always compromises," she says.

Such choices seem to work well for the PHCs. Qualified and public-spirited physicians opt to work in the public health system both because of personal reasons and the satisfaction they get from their roles. These doctors do much to energise the PHCs. It's a win-win situation.

"The main challenge is motivation of the staff," says Dr Kamdar. "In government service they don't want to give much time." Earlier, PHC doctors had only loose contracts under the NUHM. The doctors chosen now are more committed. They get a salary of ₹45,000 and a better working environment.

Dr Kamdar has been in charge of the PHCs since February. But she has been a government doctor for the past 22 years. She is cheerful and brims with the joy of work. At the three centres we visit, she has an easy camaraderie with the doctors. She also believes in the larger significance of the well-functioning PHCs.

"Primary health centres are the most important thing in delivering healthcare to people at the grassroots," she says. "They are people-friendly and everything is under one roof. We are reaching out to the masses instead of waiting for them to come to us."

"Lifestyle diseases cut across all strata of society. The primary health centre helps us know what is happening and deal with it at an early stage," she says."Patients with diabetes and hypertension can be tracked."

Dr Kamdar stresses that "many, many good things have come from the association with the Tata Trusts". Earlier there were 50 dispensaries in Nagpur. They were nowhere on the scale of the current PHCs. Dispensaries did not have ANMs and Ashas. There was no registration for immunisation and ante-natal care.

There is scope, she says, to bring in NGOs to educate communities on diet and exercise. There is also the need to train PHC doctors to deal with metabolic disorders. It is important that they know their boundaries — when to prescribe medication and when to refer cases to specialty institutions.

TATA TRUSTS' ROLE: "We are champions of public health in primary care," says H.S.D. Srinivas, who heads health initiatives at the Tata Trusts. "If we can meet the 60 percent requirement that is there on the ground then we don't need to clog big hospitals. By detecting and managing chronic diseases within the community we delay the progression of these diseases."

The request to look at Nagpur came from Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis' office. But other reasons for choosing Nagpur were a somewhat proactive local administration and the tag of a Smart City, under a national programme for upgrading urban infrastructure using technology.

"We wanted to visualise what could be the public health scenario in a smart city. Would it ease the delivery of care? We had done a lot in rural areas and it was time to look at the urban poor," explains Srinivas.

As a result, Nagpur is the first city to upgrade its primary health centres under the guidelines of the NUHM. The Nagpur model that has emerged is one of a kind with the Tata Trusts working with the existing government system and its staff.

The trusts have brought in technology by way of an IT platform, better design and management practices, upgraded soft skills and made small investments in water coolers and air conditioners.

Ownership has remained with the municipal authorities and a governing council consisting of local administration officials and a representative of the trusts has overseen the project and collectively taken all decisions.

The process began in 2017 with the Tata Trusts doing a survey to have an assessment. It was found that the average footfall in the primary health centres was just eight to 20 patients a day although private practitioners nearby were doing well.

The Tata Trusts team in Nagpur is geared for action and an incessant search for solutions at the local level

H.S.D. Srinivas

Dr Sarita Kamdar

Ram Joshi

"A lot of chronic disease patients were flooding the two medical colleges in Nagpur and those who could afford it were going to private guys," recalls Srinivas.

But the survey also revealed that if a doctor was present in a health centre people would be ready to go to it. The problem was that the doctors would turn up for just a couple of hours and lacked commitment.

"We thought a better ambience would make a difference. We took eight centres and created a prototype. The city administration was very supportive and pitched in with whatever funds they had for civil works and we added an airconditioner, a water-cooler and some signage," says Srinivas.

In the past two years, capacity-building has been done in all 26 primary health centres. Technology and infrastructure improvements have taken place in 17. A better ambience has meant that doctors stay from 8 am to 4 pm as they should. Training by the Taj's hotel management institute has made the staff of health centres friendlier. And as a result, the number of patients showing up for treatment has risen dramatically.

For a Smart City, the Tata Trusts felt there should be a seamless transfer of data and patient experience. Doctors and nurses had to adapt to technology in addition to their clinical responsibilities.

The linking of the laboratory at each centre with a central laboratory, where tests are done and the results sent back online, came from a system the Tata Trusts had created in Hyderabad. It has made a major difference. Patients no longer have to go to private laboratories for their tests and then come back with reports. It now all happens in a loop, which includes the doctor.

Strengthening a government system without taking it over requires trust and patience. Much of the credit for the success of what has been achieved in Nagpur should go to the Tata Trusts' young team based in Nagpur.

Faceless and unassuming, this team, led by Amar Ramadas Nawakar, 36, has worked its way gently around innumerable problems from one day to the next. In an open-plan office in the building of the municipality, Nawakar shares a large table with Tikesh G. Bisen, Shruti Ande and Rejesh Bose K. It is a team geared for action and the incessant search for solutions at the local level. Any learning from the Nagpur model should include the need for such an efficient interface. ■

Hygiene technicians, not just cleaners

Diversey promotes equality and respect

Rwit Ghosh
New Delhi

PICTURES BY SHREY GUPTA

Himanshu Jain: 'I actually guarantee employment to all the people we train'

'We have purposely chosen the description 'hygiene technician'. My message to them is, in many ways you are greater than doctors. They take care of you when you get sick. You prevent people from getting sick.'

Diversey is a global company whose business is indoor cleaning and hygiene. In thousands of establishments across India, it supplies the chemicals and equipment needed to get the job done. Typical customers are big — like four- or five-star hotels, shopping malls, hospitals and restaurant chains such as McDonald's and KFC.

Working with a client also means training the client's staff to be scientific about cleanliness. A whole transformation gets underway with multiple checks to know what's working and what isn't. Diversey's people will turn up in the laundry of a hotel with a whiteness meter. Cleanliness is measured with gizmos used by microbiologists. Litmus strips will reveal whether there is fat or starch on plates. The temperature of the dish washing machine will be checked to know if the crockery in general is being sanitised.

So, when Diversey decided it wanted to give back to the Indian market by way of a social contribution it felt it was best suited to propagate cleanliness. It began by collecting leftover pieces of soap from hotels and turning them back into proper cakes of soap in slums.

The company also saw an opportunity in changing the lowly status of cleaners in establishments. They play an important role in preventing disease, but aren't recognised for it. With training, they could be seen instead as hygiene technicians. The inspiration came from Japan.

Diversey was anyway training the staff of its customers. If the company could train others as well and help them find employment with self-respect, it would be a worthwhile contribution.

It has teamed up with Doctors For You (DFY), an NGO of public-spirited physicians, and over the past few years helped thousands find jobs.

Civil Society spoke to Himanshu Jain, Diversey's President, Asia-Pacific, who has been the driving force behind the training programme, to find out more.

Your CSR seems closely aligned to your business.
No one has an ambition of becoming a cleaner in their life. Normally it is the last resort or the first step for the uneducated, illiterate guy who gets into this profession. We're about touching base with them.

When I look at society, we are dirty and not clean enough. What does it need? It needs the right products, the right methods, the right tools and the right people doing it. I am supplying these four to our customers. How do I get the right people? Then I see there is so much unemployment and I see customers are struggling because they don't get the people.

I thought, why don't I create something that addresses that. It was an idea that took a long time to form and get going. We struggled for two years when we kept on spending money and got practically nothing in return. We engaged a recruitment agency to get us people who were unemployed, who were willing to be trained and take up a job. We paid the agency Rs 6,000 per person, just to get them to us. Now our current costs are much lower. We struggled for two years. The first day there would be 20 people, the next day 10, and by the third day I'd have three people sitting and listening to me and none of them was keen on joining any of our partners. I said, wait, I'm not interested in people just coming because they had been somehow forced to come on day one and then vanish.

I'm only interested in them if they are needy, because they don't have a job or because they have no means of livelihood or there is something about it that they are comfortable with. Unless they take up a job, I'm not completing my CSR.

We go to an obnoxious length. We note down all the details of the people we train. We can track every one of them across the country. We have their Aadhaar numbers, we have their ration cards, addresses, everything. What does that mean? It means that if there is a need tomorrow and you want to go and check if this guy has been trained or not, there is evidence that, yes, he has been trained and this is what happened to him.

Our idea of the skilling programme, which we call Garima, is that we provide employment to an illiterate person. Help him find a job of his own free will. Number two, we teach them the right methods of cleaning, so their drudgery reduces and they get respect for being trained already.

Normally, when a janitorial company picks up these people, they have to put them through training. But it is we who train the trainers in these companies. Now, since we train the people these companies are hiring, it is bliss. They say, "You are saving me not only money, but a lot of effort."

So you're training the trainers as well as the people who find employment through Garima?
Of course, my customer relationship continues that way. That is my customer management process. This is CSR. Where I train my trainers periodically and they train all these people who get trained. And when they get trained and examined, they get a certificate which says, hygiene technician.

We have purposefully chosen 'hygiene technician', taking inspiration from Japan. We don't want to call them cleaners or workers. There is a purpose behind it. We want to bring a certain dignity to the role. My message to them is this, 'In many ways, you are greater than doctors. Doctors take care of you when you fall sick. You prevent people from getting sick.'

You had an agency bringing in people. Now you reach out directly. How does it work?
We have collaborated extensively with Doctors For You. Why? DFY runs community programmes where they provide medical services. They found that the ecosystem that we have built works very well where if they can provide people a means of livelihood, they can provide ways of staying cleaner by working within their community. It is what I call a 'synergistic programme' which complements the other elements.

The stickiness to DFY for them increases. We can't agree more. I find this whole thing fantastic. They're a very sincere NGO. I have not seen many NGOs that are this sincere. It's one of the reasons we've stuck with them for so long. We're only growing with them. They also do another programme for us called Soap for Hope. We recycle used soap with that programme. We must have easily done 15 tonnes across the country. That is a lot of soap.

Coming back to your hygiene technicians, which is a brilliant idea. When you say these people are getting employed, give us some picture of the employment that happens.
My expectation is that hundred percent of the people we train will be employed. I actually guarantee employment to all of them.

When you guarantee, what does that mean? That you are going to employ them?
No. What it means is that they will be employed with one of the customers of our company. We have a tie-up with them. Companies like ISS (also a facility and services management company) and Sodexo are international companies that we are doing this with.

Typically we go to respected companies which don't misuse people by paying something on paper and something else otherwise. We deal only with those companies which are very straight, very compliant and progressive in their outlook.

Second thing we've done, which we struggled with in the beginning, is that we don't ask people to relocate. If your home is in Meerut, then you'll find employment in Meerut. We don't want to send someone to Mumbai and then try to figure out where to make him live.

A Diversey-certified hygiene technician

'My self-imposed objective is that the people who get the Diversey certificate get 20 percent more than the market rate.'

So the whole idea is to take the person to the site where it makes sense for him. If it doesn't make sense in that catchment area, we don't do our programme there. We have quite a few programmes around Chennai, many around Mumbai and even near Patna.

How old is your programme now?
From the concept, back from when we failed, it is five years at least. For two years we didn't succeed. You learn from your failures.

Then you connected with Doctors For You and that's how you succeeded?
Yes.

The kind of people that come to you, do they come from a zero education base?
Most of the people that come are either illiterate or with less than an eighth grade education and unable to find a job. Not all of them are young, interestingly. Quite a few women come and there is a reason behind that.

I remember a woman in Govandi who was nearly 50 years old when she came for this programme. She had lost her husband and didn't have any means of livelihood. For her it meant a job in Phoenix Mall in Kurla, Mumbai.

And in her state she might have ended up working as a maid in a house.
Absolutely. Or doing some kind of illegal activity. It's not that people like to do it, but they end up in that cycle because of their circumstances.

Here, instead, you get formal employment.
I tell you, whenever I interact with them, I come back humbled. The lady I was talking about, she was proud of being a cleaner. That is the kind of people we love to work with.

We have a programme for upgrading people, which is about to start. People who have learnt what we taught them and have the right attitude will after a couple of years be taught better skills. Some of them can be upgraded to housekeeping, others to food safety. But I am not an etiquette school. What I can do is help them by giving them technical skills. For example, a guy who we've trained knows that it is important to wash your hands. If he goes to a hotel with a food handler's certification, I am sure hotels won't say that they don't want him there.

Thankfully, after working for years in this space, we have a reputation which helps. When our trainees get certificates that say, 'Diversey trained', it carries weight. It carries enough weight to get them a job. It takes them a long way.

How many people have you trained?
So far, we've trained about 18,000 people.

So roughly 6,000 people a year. How many trainers do you have?
We have 12-13 trainers. They are supported by eight to10 mobilisers who go into the communities.

The average salary works out to be?
The minimum salary is ₹7,500. It varies according to state laws.

So ₹7,500 upwards?
Yes. What we're doing is encouraging our partners. I keep talking to their CEOs. I encourage them to pay these guys higher than the minimum wage but I have not made enough headway in that space. It is my self-imposed objective that the people who go with the Diversey certificate get about 20 percent more than the market rate. I still need to convince a few companies to do that. But I'm sure it'll happen. It is all about productivity. It is not about the number of heads you have. ■

In the company of plastic

Rwit Ghosh
Ghaziabad (UP)

SHREY GUPTA

Paras Saluja with tiles made from plastic waste

PARAS Saluja is sitting coolly in a scrapyard in Ghaziabad, unaffected by the heat or the junk. His business, Shayna EcoUnified India, converts non-biodegradable plastic waste like polybags, packets of chips, plastic bottles and bottle caps, into attractive, colourful tiles.

Saluja with his friend Sandeep Nagpal started Shayna EcoUnified India in July 2017. Till then, he had zero experience in waste management. He had been working as a distributor of pharmaceuticals. So why did he deviate and set up a social impact enterprise?

An avid mountaineer and adventure junkie, Saluja says he did the Everest Base Camp trek in 2015 and was shocked by the amount of plastic waste he saw on one side of the famous mountain. "I wanted to do something but I didn't know how," he says.

Soon after, he went off on vacation to Hanoi in Vietnam. He visited local markets and noted that at night those streets overflowed with trash but by morning they would be super clean. "How come Vietnam, a small and economically weaker country than ours, can keep its streets litter-free and we can't," thought Saluja.

Back home, he began browsing journals and newspapers, trying to figure out how he could make a difference. He came across information about the National Physical Laboratory of India (NPL). At that time, the NPL was working on technologies on plastic recycling. Saluja approached the NPL and said he was keen to work on recycling plastic waste. The NPL told him about a technology they had invented which could convert plastic into tiles.

Saluja and Nagpal bought the patent rights (on a renewal basis) from the NPL. In July 2017, the patent was transferred to their company, Shayna EcoUnified. They invested ₹1 crore and began manufacturing tiles made of high-density composite polymer in February 2018.

A range of tiles is now produced — paver tiles, floor tiles, designer tiles and tiles for dustbins and toilets. Municipal corporations have shown the most interest because this process helps them get rid of plastic waste by converting it into tiles which they can use for building pavements. The Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation is using Shayna EcoUnified's tiles to pave pavements and make walkways in parks.

The Municipal Corporation of Gurugram has also shown interest. Shayna EcoUnified has picked up small projects in Mumbai and Nashik for private companies. In Himachal Pradesh it has paved roads for a resort in Chitkul near the India-China border. It is also helping Mahindra & Mahindra reduce its ecological footprint by taking plastic waste from its factory and turning it into tiles which the company can use on its premises.

Saluja lists the many virtues of his tiles. Normal T-shaped cement tiles weigh between four to five kg whereas his company's tiles weigh just 200 to 300 gm. Cement blocks come in just one boring colour — grey. His company's tiles come in three vivacious colours — green, blue and red. Besides, Shayna EcoUnified's tiles have been certified by the NPL to have a life of around 20 years with pedestrians trampling all over them. In contrast, cement tiles last for a mere three years after which they need to be replaced completely.

A pavement being built with plastic tiles

However, most home owners are reluctant to use tiles made from plastic. They would much rather use marble or ceramic tiles. "They think that since our tiles are made from waste, they must be cheap. People don't understand that creating waste is free, but sourcing it is not," says Saluja.

In fact, buying plastic is expensive. High-density polyethylene (HDPE), like bottle caps, toys, chairs and piping, sells for roughly ₹50 per kg. Low-density polyethylene (LDPE), like plastic bags, costs ₹30-35 per kg. Polypropylene (PP) waste is charged according to its colour and weight. Black plastic trash bags are relatively cheaper.

Initially, the company used to buy plastic waste from rag-pickers but they found that the quantity rag-pickers could supply was not enough. Tying up with municipal corporations is also difficult because the garbage arrives unsegregated.

Segregating plastic is a long and expensive affair done by hand. A single person can salvage roughly 500-600 kg per day. The logistics and expenditure of a segregation operation would have raised their costs. In the end, Shayna EcoUnified collaborated with a scrapyard owner who deals only in plastic and set up their machines there.

The collected plastic is segregated according to its polymer and colour. It is then broken down and shredded into small pieces or flakes and washed with detergents and sodium bicarbonate to disinfect it. Using specialised equipment, the flakes are separated and dried with heat. The plastic flakes are then mixed with fillers like fly ash and eco-friendly chemicals. Finally, the mixture is processed by a machine which converts it into plastic wires which are further broken down into pellets. These pellets are then melted and placed in moulds to create the tiles.

The tiles made by Shayna EcoUnified come in two formats. Both are of the same size: seven inches by six inches in a dog bone shape. The load bearing capacity of both formats is different. One can take up to 20 tonnes, the other 40 tonnes. The company makes bathroom tiles and has begun talking to organisations keen to improve sanitation in government schools.

A larger plastic tile format, 24 inches by 24 inches, is also manufactured. It is suitable for making dustbins, small shelters and bathrooms. The additional benefit of these plastic tiles is that at the end of their life cycle, they can be broken down and remade.

In the past 15 months, Shayna EcoUnified has chewed through 275 tonnes of plastic waste and produced 600,000 tiles. Saluja is optimistic about his company's prospects, though they haven't been raking in profits. "We're barely able to keep up," he says, smiling. "In the next 18 months, we are 100 percent sure that we'll be making profits. We are in talks with so many companies and municipal corporations that even if we manage to strike a deal with 10 percent of them, we'll be doing very well."

Thanks to news channels and websites, Shayna EcoUnified is getting known in the right circles. Saluja and Nagpal are dedicated to their business. "A café we supplied tiles to in Ghaziabad has fallen short, so I'm going there to deliver it myself," says Saluja, pointing to the filled boot of his car.

As he drives off, one can only hope that an effort like this pays off. ■

A loyalty tax on nationalism

DELHI DARBAR

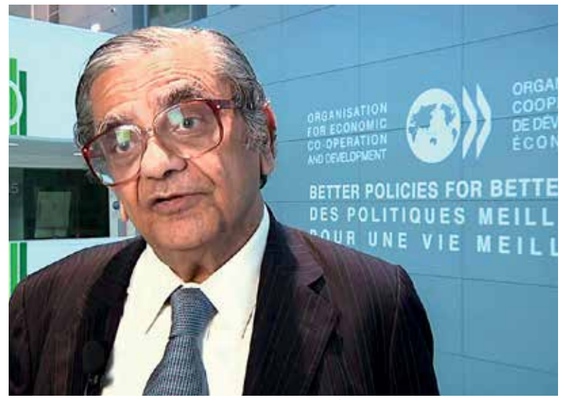
SANJAYA BARU

ONE of the amusing aspects of the debate on nationalism triggered by the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) election campaign and victory is how much it has animated the NRIs (Non-Resident Indians) of the "Never Returning Indian" kind. Even in the comfort of the cold United States east coast and the salubrious climate of California, Indian Americans have been getting hot under the collar or vicariously excited about the rising tide of nationalism in India. While NRI residents in West Asia send home their hard-earned dinars, most Indian Americans send home their advice.

Taken together, the top 15 countries from which US dollar savings get remitted back home account for an annual inflow of $70 billion as of 2018. Of this, only $11.75 billion comes from the United States. West Asian countries including Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain and Kuwait account for over $30 billion. No one from West Asia writes op-ed articles in the Indian media advising Indians how to run their country, but oh so many of our relatives in the US have so much advice for us. Well-meaning and constructive advice is always welcome and ought to be received with an open mind and gratitude. But what does one do with half-boiled critiques written more with one's western peers and publishers in mind than those who matter back home?

Economist Jagdish Bhagwati, an early advocate of talent emigration, even in days when it was still frowned upon by India's ruling elite, came up with a novel proposal. Tax outgoing talent so that India at least gets to retain some of the public money invested in their globally marketable talent. In the 1970s, when Bhagwati first made this proposal, talent out-migration was dubbed "brain drain". To alleviate the loss to the economy caused by such brain drain, suggested Bhagwati, the professional and technically qualified migrant going from a less-developed economy to a developed economy should be subject to a special tax. Since most such Indians were the offspring of policymakers in New Delhi, no such tax was ever imposed.

Taking his mid-1970s views on brain drain tax forward, Bhagwati wrote in 2004, "Enhancing these good effects (of skilled emigration) requires that countries such as India and Taiwan adopt the diaspora model, extending a warmer embrace to their nationals abroad…. However, the diaspora approach is incomplete unless the benefits are balanced by some obligations, such as the taxation of citizens living abroad… Estimates made by scholars…demonstrate that even a slight tax on Indian nationals abroad would substantially raise Indian government revenues." Are Indians abroad and their relatives at home ready to pay such a tax? It could be an important source of revenue for Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman.



Jagdish Bhagwati suggested taxing outgoing talent from India

While NRI residents in West Asia send home their hard-earned dinars, most Indian Americans send home their advice.

In the early 2000s Prime Minister Manmohan Singh tried to change the narrative, taking a more hopeful view of the NRI. Why think of them as the 'never returning Indian', maybe they would, at least temporarily or partially, return to contribute to nation-building. Indians abroad need not be viewed as a drain on India but as a bank on which India can draw, Singh told the audience at the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR) sometime during his first term. Emigrating Indians are not a drain on the economy to be taxed but a source of future income for the country to draw upon. Singh's suggestion would have meant that India "borrow from" rather than "tax" the talented NRI.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi too took this positive view of the Indian diaspora, staging fancy events abroad and lauding the patriotism of the NRI. How many of those who applauded Modi from Madison Square Garden to Wembley Stadium have in fact invested their time, talent and wealth in the building of a modern India? A proper study would reveal very few. But the very same Indians remain the loudest proponents of nationalism. Clearly, their nationalism is vocal and rarely gets monetised.

The NRI as a 'brain bank' from which India can borrow talent and expertise is an idea that has found some relevance in the field of information technology. However, the question is moot whether what India has been able to draw from this brain bank is anywhere near what it has been able to contribute to it annually through the outflow of talent.

One type of Indian talent abroad that is of little use to India today is the Indian social scientist in US academia — economists, political scientists and sociologists. Most of them write for their peers to ensure publication in professional journals, ensure tenured jobs and secure invitations to conferences and policy roundtables in Washington, DC. While their peers and bosses are in the US, the audience for their ideas is, more often than not, back home in India. Few Indian American social scientists, if any, get published in the *New York Times* or *Wall Street Journal* but find more space than warranted by the relevance of their ideas in the Indian media.

A new development is the importance US employers seem to attach to policy experience in India for increased professional advancement in the US. So, taking a couple of years off, coming to India on a sabbatical as an economic policymaker helps them to return to better-paid jobs in the US. From the 1960s to the 1980s Indian economists returning home from the US to take up government jobs not only did so with their entire family but moved back home permanently. In the past decade, every Indian economist who has come from the US to work for the Indian government has returned, with their bio-data boosted. Rather than use their position abroad to contribute further to India's development, they become better 'informed' critics of India, informed by their tenure in government in India. Surely, at least the income of such economists ought to be taxed! ■

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Destroy the seeds of caste

BACK TO SCHOOL

DILEEP RANJEKAR

MY first visit to government schools was some time in 1998-99, even before the Azim Premji Foundation became operational. The schools, in one of the northern states, were in a highly deplorable condition. Broken walls, missing windows, leaky roofs, absence of a proper playground and free movement of pigs within the premises of the school was the order of the day in most of the schools I visited. But what I liked was the way the school staff, including the principal or head teacher, welcomed us in each school. Mostly because the NGO whose members accompanied me was well known to the schools. Later, I realised that this welcoming was a sustained feature of most government schools. It becomes embarrassing when the head teacher invariably offers his or her chair to a guest and insists that he or she must sit.

What caught my attention in most schools was the tabulated information on the blackboard in the head teacher's room. It included the name of each teacher, date of joining, gender, qualification and 'caste'. I asked the head teacher whether it was legally binding to write such data on the blackboard. He casually responded: *"Aisa nahin hai, par pehle se likhte aaye hai"* (there is no legal requirement but we have been writing these details for a long time now). In effect, he was unable to provide any valid justification for writing the caste, including SC/ST status, along with the name and other details of each teacher.

A few years later, I was interacting with Class 4 children in a school in a very small village. They wanted me to see their notebooks. When I began looking at the notebooks, one of the children said something and shoved his notebook into my hand. Before I could react, the teacher slapped him hard. I asked the teacher the reason for slapping the child. He explained that the child was telling me not to take the other classmate's notebook since the latter was a Scheduled Caste (SC) child and hence 'untouchable'. While I did not like the teacher slapping him, I was indeed bewildered by the blatant existence of the caste system in schools. How did this child know the caste of the other child and who told him he was 'untouchable'? It must have been his parents or neighbours who put this idea into his head.

While in urban and semi-urban areas caste lines are blurring or not being recognised, in rural India the so-called 'low caste' or 'untouchable' communities are often forced to settle outside the limits of the village. As such, children from that community are easily identified with their caste. Caste equations are further reinforced through processes such as displaying charts in the school about the 'caste classification' of the children as well as of the teacher. I believe education functionaries too need such data for reasons that are not clear to me.

In some states, the system of crediting funds directly into the accounts of SC/ST schoolchildren has started. These are benefits such as funds for free books and uniforms up to Class 8. As a result, the caste identity of the child wearing a new school uniform stands out. A principal told me that when funds for uniforms and textbooks used to be received by schools, they would carry out tough negotiations with the suppliers to ensure that even children not entitled to books and uniforms also got them. While crediting the amount directly to the child's account is good governance practice, it is leading to caste-based discrimination. The probable solution is to extend such benefits to all children.

While affirmative action such as scholarships, reservations in higher education institutions and reservations in employment based on criteria may be justified, school is not the right place to give such signals of discrimination and reinforce the caste system.

School is a place where we need to remove the concept of caste and promote constitutional values of equity and socialism. It is important to avoid all visible signals and symbols that promote the caste system among young, impressionable minds. This effort must be an important part of teacher education.

Teachers must know how to get children of all communities and castes to mix. Even today, in some schools, 'lower caste' children are made to sit separately during the mid-day meal. Some schools have gone to the extent of using different plates for such children. Sports activities provide a wonderful opportunity for children to team up.

Children coming from socially and economically underprivileged homes have to face several challenges. Many struggle to get two meals a day and the mid-day meal provides great relief. The confidence of such children is, as it is, low and several positive steps need to be taken to bridge this confidence deficit. Any further discrimination through visible distinction among children only worsens the situation. It is the responsibility of the school to provide a level playing field and equity for children to develop to the best of their abilities without the shackles of caste over which they have no control. ■

SHREY GUPTA

Even today, in some schools, 'lower caste' children are made to sit separately during the mid-day meal. Some schools have gone to the extent of using different plates for such children.

Dileep Ranjekar is CEO of the Azim Premji Foundation

The devil in data

TECH TALES

KIRAN KARNIK

DATA is the new oil is a currently popular aphorism. To the extent that it connotes a resource of great value, there is some validity to the analogy. There is, though, one significant difference: one is composed of atoms and the other of bits. Giving away the first deprives you of it; but, when you "give away" data to someone else, it still remains with you. When a company exports a million tonnes of iron ore, that ore is gone from India; however, if an organisation chooses to export some of its data, the very same data can remain here too. In the shorthand world of today, it is important to not get carried away by the analogy, and recognise this difference between atoms and bits, between oil and data.

Growing digitalisation means that there is now a great deal of data about individuals, about you and me. Much of this is personal — bank account details, health records, passwords, and the like — and this important information needs to be safeguarded from wrongful access or misuse. Countries around the world are, therefore, putting in place laws for the protection of data. These laws include the extent, purpose and use of data, and the responsibility of those who collect and store it. The European General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) are amongst the most comprehensive, and serve as a model for others. In India, the government has been working on a similar law for data protection and privacy. A committee, headed by Justice B.N. Srikrishna, has prepared a draft after extensive consultations. A law based on this is expected to be tabled for parliamentary approval very soon, and is a declared priority of the new government.

A law to protect data and ensure its privacy is certainly welcome and, in fact, overdue. However, to the extent it constrains the use and sharing of data, it will have an impact on business and on customer service. Today, many companies process and analyse data to get insights about an individual's tastes, preferences, lifestyle, etc., in order to design new products or offer the most appropriate one. A bank, for example, might analyse all your transaction data and financial position to tailor-make a loan package — optimising the amount, duration and interest rate — specifically suitable for your present and future financial situation. It could also create an investment portfolio that matches your needs. Similarly, based on your past searches and other data, analytics helps companies to predict and cater to your likely interests. No surprise, then, as to how ads for hotels in Singapore pop up on your screen soon after you have searched for alternative flights to that destination. Useful service or an invasion of your privacy? You decide.

Such analytics requires great amounts of data; the larger the data-set, the more accurate the analysis. Thus, in healthcare, analysis of stored patient records helps to determine the appropriate medication for a new patient based on his/her health and genetic, demographic and other parameters. In areas like oncology, automated diagnosis and prescription (by IBM's Watson, for example) is generally as or more accurate than that by specialists. In agriculture, accurate crop yield predictions are now possible because models have been developed using historical data of various parameters and correlating them with actual yield figures. In all these cases, accuracy of prediction depends on the amount of data available.

Such models use a combination of data analytics, artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning, requiring a variety of high-end skills and sophisticated or large computing power (e.g., climate modelling or simulating a nuclear explosion require super-computers). To capitalise on the new technologies, India needs to develop its human capital and invest heavily in R&D in these fields.

This need for data links another aspect of the analogy with oil: the concept of sovereignty. It is argued that just as oil within its territory belongs to the country, so does data generated in the country. This leads to the "data localisation" principle, now adopted by some countries — especially for certain types of data — requiring that such data be stored within the country. One argument for this is law enforcement, especially in the context of money laundering and terror financing, where immediate access to financial transaction data may be required. Despite mutual assistance agreements, accessing data stored abroad is difficult and slow; locally stored data can be accessed more easily (hopefully, after due legal process).

Localisation votaries also invoke economics. Data is the vital 'raw material' for a host of AI applications. In this, given its large population and the extent of digital penetration, India is extremely well-endowed (data-rich). This is our comparative advantage in the digital economy and we need to capitalise on it by value-adding — through analytics and applications — rather than merely exporting the raw material. This protectionist paradigm, though, may not benefit Indian companies, since MNCs operating here can also access the data.

Is data localisation good or bad for India? If other countries too "localise" data, what impact will it have on India's $200 billion IT industry, which depends on free flow of data? Will it spur and boost India's nascent AI companies? Should one look at a more nuanced approach of what data must be localised only here, what may be exported but must be "mirrored" (stored) here, and what may be freely exported? These are more questions to ponder over.

There are other issues that stem from the huge amount of data being generated and stored, and the emerging capabilities of AI to take data analysis to an altogether new level. Analytics which uses data to model behaviour is being supplemented with AI to now predict behaviour. From here, it is not a big step to influencing behaviour. Further, the fact that Aadhaar provides a means to easily link multiple data about an individual is a cause of concern, since this can effectively open up the entire life of the individual to whoever collates and processes this data. With this and more, the "surveillance State" is already a near reality; as worrisome is the fact that not just the government, but corporates or other non-State players too could develop this capability.

Welcome, then, to the world of digital data — with all its goodies and its pitfalls. ■

Data is the vital 'raw material' for a host of AI applications. In this, given its large population and the extent of digital penetration, India is well-endowed.

Kiran Karnik is an independent policy and strategy analyst and a writer. His most recent book is eVolution: Decoding India's Disruptive Tech Story (2018).

Recovering lost childhood

VILLAGE VOICES

R. BALASUBRAMANIAM

A few months ago, I was taken by a friend who works with an NGO to visit a special school near Jamshedpur which they were running. She had been talking about this school for some time and was eager that I visit it to see for myself how educational opportunities could change the lives of children.

Keen to see what made this school special, I was astonished at what I saw. A special school can mean so many things to different people — it can be special for its pedagogy or infrastructure or teaching-learning methods. Or because of the children themselves. This school was special for all these reasons and much more.

At the entrance we noticed outdoor play equipment made with low-cost material and discarded car tyres. And most of it seemed to be the handiwork of the children themselves. As we stepped inside, we were greeted by simple but profoundly meaningful sketches and paintings done by the children. Each painting seemed to tell a story and they were all reflective of the emotions and hopes of the children.

India continues to grapple with child labour, poverty and trafficking

But the icing on the cake was the children themselves. They came from very difficult and challenging backgrounds and had either never been to a formal school or only for a few months in their entire lives. They were between 10 and 16 years old. I realised that this was not a school in the real sense of the word. It was a shelter home for children who had run away from their homes or from difficult circumstances. They were children whom the State had to protect and take care of as they could not yet locate their families.

I would never have gotten to know this if one of the teachers had not specifically told me. For, these children looked cheerful, happy and their eyes were sparkling with joy. Their hearts were filled with hope and excitement.They were surely not the stereotypes that I had expected and they were all eager to talk and interact with me. Each had his own special story to tell. Ramu explained in a matter of fact way that he was from Mumbai and had run away from his home as he could no longer bear to see his mother getting beaten by his drunken father every day. He had decided to teach his father a lesson and had beaten him with a *lathi* that he had found nearby. Afraid of the consequences, he travelled by several trains and reached faraway Jamshedpur.

Subash explained how he was picking rags in the street and some local government officials had whisked him away to this place. Another child had been working in a tea shop and yet another in a mechanic's garage. Despite the differing backgrounds that they came from or the languages they spoke, all of them seemed to love the bridge school that some were attending while the others were feeling settled in the regular schools to which they had been mainstreamed. None of them missed their earlier lives and seemed eager to move on in life. One child spoke of how, for the first time in his nine-year-old life, he was actually getting to eat three times a day. Another child said he loved how he could now hold on to a bat and play cricket and kick around a 'real' football.

The incidence of child labour in India has declined between 2001 and 2011, but this is mainly seen in rural areas.

While all these stories may sound similar to those of thousands of children across the country, we need to ask ourselves if we, as a society, have done enough for them. Why is it that after so many years of making primary education compulsory, seeing steady economic growth nationally and several child welfare schemes in operation, we are still grappling with issues related to child labour, poverty and trafficking? Gandhi had said that a society will be judged on how well it takes care of its marginalised and deprived sections. While governments and NGOs are doing what they can to manage this issue, why is it that we have not been able to obliterate this scourge of child labour and other deprivations that deny our children what they rightfully deserve — their childhood.

According to Census 2011, the child population in India between five and 14 years old is 259.6 million. Of these, 10.1 million (3.9 percent of the total child population) are working, either as a 'main worker' or as a 'marginal worker'. In addition, more than 42.7 million children in India are out of school. Child labour impedes children from gaining the skills and education they need to access opportunities of decent work as adults. Inequality, lack of educational opportunities, slow demographic transition, traditions and cultural expectations all contribute to the persistence of child labour in India. The International Labour Organisation's experience is that stable economic growth, respect for labour standards, decent work, universal education, social protection, and recognising the needs and rights of children together help tackle the root causes of child labour. Will India be able to ensure all this for our children and provide them with the security of growing up in a nurturing environment irrespective of their social and economic status?

While the incidence of child labour has decreased in India by 2.6 million between 2001 and 2011, what is of concern is that this decline is mainly seen in rural areas. The number of child workers has actually increased in urban areas, indicating the growing demand for child workers for menial jobs. As India continues to rapidly urbanise and our economy gets driven by the urban engine, we need to intensify our battle against child labour. Governments alone or mere legislation is not going to solve this issue. The fight now needs to be embedded in our collective consciousness. A concerted effort by every citizen can ensure that fighting child labour goes beyond mere sloganeering. As Rabbi Hillel says, "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am not for others, what am I? And if not now, when?" ■

Dr R. Balasubramaniam, founder of the Swami Vivekananda Youth Movement, Mysuru, is a development activist and author. www.drrbalu.com

SUSHEELA NAIR

Ghats along the Ganga river in Mirzapur

In the town of carpets

Mirzapur and its gifted weavers

Susheela Nair
Mirzapur

THE oldest hub of carpet weaving in India is Mirzapur in Bhadohi district of Uttar Pradesh. The Ganga flows past this town with its *ghats*, ancient temples and waterfalls. But I am here to understand the process of making intricate rugs and carpets for which Mirzapur is famous.

The genesis of carpet making in Mirzapur can be traced to the Mughal emperor, Akbar, in the 16th century. A caravan of Persian carpet weavers, it is said, on its way to the Mughal court was waylaid and injured by dacoits on the Grand Trunk Road. The weavers were rescued and given shelter by local villagers. The master weaver of the group decided to settle down here and share his skills with his benefactors. That is how the renowned carpet industry of Mirzapur took root.

Relaxing in the 200-year-old Obeetee bungalow, I thought of the artisans of Bhadohi district who have watched their parents weave and then become apprentices themselves. Many generations of artisans blossomed into gifted weavers over the past five centuries.

The decision to introduce the artistry of Indian rug-makers to the world in 1920 was taken here by Oakley, Bowden and Taylor, the founders of Obeetee. A visit to the Obeetee factory, one of India's largest makers of handmade rugs, with almost 100 years of history, was indeed an incredible learning experience.

My study sojourn started with a visit to the design department, the backbone of the rug-creating process. The artisans have traversed a long way from the *'nakshas'* (master plates) used in the past. It was a delight to watch the designers blend fresh perspectives and traditional craft with state-of-the-art design technology and create authentic designs and visual masterpieces. From there we moved to the advance dyeing plant where pieces with distinctive and vibrant colours are re-created for different fabrics. There is also a colour bank that has in stock over 4,000 colour-fast shades of wool.

From the factories, different types of wool are dried and carpet designs are sent out with their '*nakshas*'. We stopped at a village when we heard the click-clack of looms. We saw men sitting behind frames on which a net-like backing had been stretched tight, punching wool through the net in a process resembling embroidery that is called 'tufting'. When the tufting is complete, it is stuck on a packing of cloth with its edges tucked in.

Equally interesting were the exclusive women's units. We gazed in admiration at women carpet-makers moving in a systematic manner, knotting each warp to weft with measured fluidity under the supervision of Obeetee inspectors. A single Bhadohi carpet can boast up to 425 knots per square inch — the penultimate figure in premium carpets.

Then the carpets return to the factory to be

Continued on page 30

SUSHEELA NAIR

Village women being trained in weaving rugs

SUSHEELA NAIR

A typical Indian hand-knotted carpet

SUSHEELA NAIR

Different yarns are used

The biggest carpet created by Obeetee weavers measures 452 sq m and has billions of intricate knots. It adorns Rashtrapati Bhavan.

washed and dried. Washing is the next stage which transforms the carpet into a stunning work of art. It is the washing cycle which establishes the final texture of the piece and infuses the carpet with vibrancy and a soft lustre. All carpets are tested before being shipped to some of the biggest clients in the world.

Obeetee ensures that its environmental footprints are as light as possible. During our factory visit we took a peek at the factory's state-of-the-art effluent treatment plant which is committed to releasing no hazardous water into the environment. The water consumed in the manufacturing facilities is treated to the highest standards before disposal and used sustainably.

WOMEN WEAVERS: To ensure that the art of carpet weaving continues, Obeetee believes in women's empowerment and leads a training programme for women weavers. "We believe that women should have access to equal opportunities. We teach time-honoured weaving skills to empower women and give them a viable long-term employment opportunity. A stipend is also provided to motivate them. Today more than 1,091 women have participated in our weaving programme and 655 are professional weavers with Obeetee, weaving rugs. Creches have been opened to support working mothers," explained Angelique Dhama, chief marketing officer of Obeetee.

"We have partnered with Sulabh International and built toilets in the villages, especially for elderly women and schools. Through 'Project Mala' the company provides quality education services to schoolchildren besides medical check-ups, school supplies and food. There has not been a single instance of employing child labour," added Dhama.

SUSHEELA NAIR

The Obeetee bungalow is a heritage structure

Obeetee provides work to over 25,000 independent artisans and has 1,000 permanent employees. The company has one foot ensconced nostalgically in India's heritage crafts while the other is directed in the pursuit of cutting-edge designs. As part of the 'Proud to be Indian' campaign which translates India's vivid design vocabulary into a modern context, Obeetee has collaborated with India's best creative talents like Tarun Tahiliani and the visionary duo of Abraham & Thakore to take its endeavours to greater heights.

An interesting highlight of Obeetee is the trail traceability of its rugs. Tap their keyboard and you can see each carpet's digital fingerprint. You can track its loom owner (only the details of his or family), design, dyes, depot and buyer. Each customer can scan a QR code embedded in the tapestry of the carpet and read about its weavers. It will give details of collection and personal details of the weaver and also establish that it was not woven by child labour. This kind of personal touch brings together the end user and the weaver.

The biggest carpet created by Obeetee weavers measures 452 sq m and has billions of intricate knots. It adorns Rashtrapati Bhavan.

So the next time you see a carpet made by Obeetee in a five-star hotel, think of the skilful hands, the attention to detail and the devotion to craft that has gone into it. ■

FACT FILE

Mirzapur is connected by rail and road. The nearest airport is Varanasi. Economy hotels are available in Mirzapur.

The poet of hope

Kaifi Azmi's poetry still strikes a chord

Saibal Chatterjee
New Delhi

IN today's climate, it is important to remember people who used their art as an instrument of social change: it was with these words that actor and activist Shabana Azmi prefaced her tribute to the life and work of her late father, acclaimed Urdu poet and film lyricist Kaifi Azmi, at the Stein Auditorium at India Habitat Centre in New Delhi, on June 10. The occasion was the launch of an English-Hindi bilingual anthology of 50 poems "selected, introduced, edited and co-translated" by Sudeep Sen as part of a year-long celebration of the centenary of the poet's birth.

"This series of events," said Shabana, "isn't aimed only at celebrating Kaifi Azmi, but also at highlighting the spirit that his poetry and thoughts represented." In an essay on his own poetry, the towering Urdu man of letters had written: "When was I born? I can't remember. When will I die? I don't know. All I can say with any certainty about myself is that I was born in an enslaved Hindustan, grew old in a free Hindustan, and will die in a socialist Hindustan."

Not only does the dream of an egalitarian India remain unrealised, it has only receded with growing inequality in recent decades. How did the poet feel at the turn of events during his lifetime? Shabana replied: "Kaifi Azmi was ever an optimist. He never lost hope. That was his strength. He believed that if an artist loses hope, it is society that loses."

But Kaifi Azmi definitely wasn't given to pipe dreams, as his poem *Aadat* (Habit), a part of the just-launched anthology, clearly reveals. "I want illumination, I want moonlight, I want life… the illumination of love, the moonlight of friendship, the life that leads to the gallows," he pleads even though he is acutely aware that "there is no illumination, nor moonlight, nor life/Life is but a dark night…"

The book, Kaifi Azmi — *Poems/Nazms, New & Selected Translations,* published by Bloomsbury, has contributions by four other translators, one of whom, filmmaker Sumantra Ghosal, was on the stage alongside Shabana, Sen and academic Anisur Rahman, who moderated a panel after the three discussants read a few of the iconic poems included in the anthology — *Aurat* (Woman), *Ek Bosa* (One Kiss), *Ek Lamha* (One Moment) and *Makaan* (Building) — in Urdu and English. The other translators who have contributed to the book are Husain Mir Ali, Baidar Bakht and Pritish Nandy.

Rahman, former professor and head of the English department at Jamia Millia Islamia and a senior adviser to the Rekhta Foundation, referred to the book as a veritable Kaifi Azmi reader. "It introduces you to his whole world as a poet and an activist. Kaifi *saab* wasn't just a poet of love, but of much larger human predicaments. This book traverses the entire gamut."

Azmi was born in Mijwan village of Azamgarh district in eastern Uttar Pradesh on January 14, 1919 — the exact date of his birth, Shabana recounted, was not known until his friend and legendary documentary filmmaker Sukhdev intervened and settled on January 14. The centennial show has been on the road since early January this year with the aim of furthering the legacy of Azmi's politically and socially charged poetry that addressed the plight of the dispossessed and the mounting dangers of communalism, among other challenges that have faced the nation since its creation.

SHREY GUPTA

Left to right: Anisur Rahman, Shabana Azmi, Sudeep Sen and Sumantra Ghosal

Among events that have been organised since then are *Raag Shayari*, a musical tribute to Kaifi Azmi featuring Zakir Hussain, Javed Akhtar, Shankar Mahadevan and Shabana Azmi (Tata Theatre, NCPA, January 13) and *Kaifi Aur Main*, a theatrical presentation based on *Yaad Ki Rahguzar*, the memoirs of the poet's wife, Shaukat Azmi (presented at IIT Delhi and Kala Mandir, Kolkata), segments in the literary fests in Jaipur and Hyderabad and a Pen Festival dedicated to Kaifi Azmi at Nehru Centre, Worli, Mumbai. Two more anthologies of his poetry have been planned. One, *Kaifiyat* by Rakshanda Jalil (Penguin Random House), is already out; the other, *The Past on my Shoulders* by Husain Mir Ali (Westland) is due for release.

Azmi was a radical, progressive poet who could be profoundly lyrical and romantic with the same conviction. He was a protest poet and a lover, a keen observer of society and a human being with deep empathy for the marginalised, a master wordsmith and an activist who could turn out delectable but direct lines that were both wrenching and uplifting.

These apparent dichotomies weren't ever in conflict within him — they flowed into and out of each other, creating a consonance so complete that one could only marvel at the enormous breadth of his ideological vision and creative canvas. "He wasn't a man of the world," said Shabana. "He had no attachment to worldly possessions, but he prized two things more than anything else — his Communist Party card and his Mont Blanc pens, not a very Communist liking."

One of the contributors whose work is featured in the new book, New York City-based Husain Mir Ali, writes in his note on the translations: "Kaifi and his comrades worked tirelessly, first for independence from colonial rule, and then later for an egalitarian and non-sectarian society, but his dream remains a work in progress. His poem *Inteshar* (Anarchy) ends with a demand: *koi toh sood chukaye, koi toh zimma le, uss inquilaab ka jo aaj tak udhaar sa hai* (Sudeep Sen's translation: if only one paid the interest, if only one took responsibility/for that revolution, which even now seems as a debt)… For Kaifi, the revolution is a debt that is still owed to him."

In the lead-up to the readings and panel discussion on June 10, Sen, an English-language poet of repute, admitted that the two-year-long translation project has changed him as a person. "I immersed myself completely not only into the poetry of Kaifi *saab* but also into the history of the progressive writers' movement. The depth, range and latitude that I discovered in the process was astounding," he said.

Azmi's fierce opposition to religious divisiveness was always at the heart of his poetry. In *Saanp* (Snake), translated here by Husain Mir Ali, he wrote: "The day Hindus and Muslims start thinking of themselves as human beings/That is the day this wretched creature will die", the reference being to "This snake, that stands on my path, its hood raised".

The auditorium was filled to the rafters well ahead of the start time of seven on a Monday evening. Many could not get in and there were frayed tempers at the entry gates. Shabana was understandably taken aback a tad by the phenomenal show of enthusiasm. "It is really encouraging to see such a packed house for an evening dedicated to Urdu poetry," she said at the outset, setting the tone for the rest of the programme.

The audience, which hung on to each line that she subsequently read in Urdu followed by the English renditions by Sen and Ghosal, frequently burst into spontaneous applause. The audience stayed on for the screening of *Kaifinama*, a documentary by Ghosal woven primarily around an interview done with Azmi in the late 1990s.

It was obvious that the relevance of Kaifi Azmi, who breathed his last on May 10, 2002, hasn't diminished one bit although the nation that he and his political co-travellers dreamed of has not quite taken shape. Hope, after all, was the leitmotif of his creative output. ■

Shades of reality

By Sidika Sehgal

The editors of *Side Effects of Living*, Jhilmil Breckenridge and Namarita Kathait, met at a poetry event in Delhi. They talked to each other about their struggles with mental health and the need to break the silence around it. Talking is therapeutic. But nobody speaks openly of depression or schizophrenia or of being bipolar. The reason is the stigma surrounding mental health. Of course, India also has a shortage of mental health professionals. There are just three psychiatrists for one million people and seven for a population of 10 million.

Breckenridge and Kathait started the Bhor Foundation to eradicate this stigma and create a space where people could talk freely. Both had years of experience in mental health advocacy and women's rights. Their first project was to put together an anthology of stories on mental health. The idea was to help sufferers realise they were not alone. The duo was unsure if people would write or if their collection of narratives would even find a publisher.

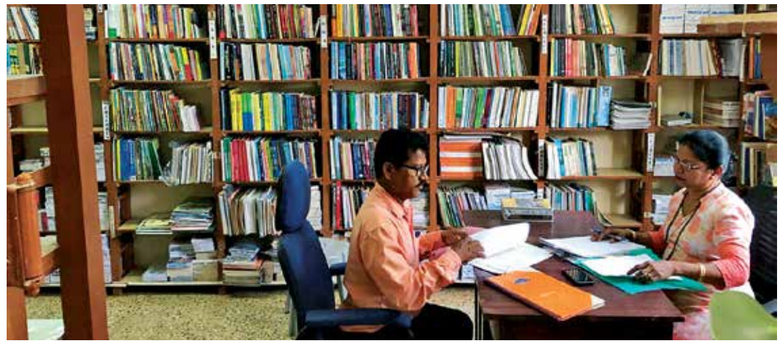
Side Effects of Living; An Anthology of Voices on Mental Health; Editors: Jhilmil Breckenridge & Namarita Kathait Speaking Tiger & Women Unlimited ₹299

Surprisingly, they were flooded with submissions. The net result is this anthology of 40 very personal stories, including illustrations and poetry. The book is driven by the central belief that "there are different shades of the mind". The anthology celebrates individual stories. It underlines the reality that there isn't a single definition of 'normal'.

Breckenridge and Kathait make no attempt to sanitise the stories. The narratives are raw and unsparing. Jayashree Kalathil's narrative is a straightforward account of her struggle with mental health. She writes of her fight against the standard template of sanity society has drawn up for everyone.

Sagar Singh has contributed deeply private poems penned in moments of distress. Sonaksha Iyenger has chosen to express herself visually through a series of illustrations. Namarita Kathait writes a moving account of caring for her schizophrenic mother. Anil Chauhan, who has bipolar disorder, writes of how running helped him control episodes of depression. These are deeply personal stories that detach the shame commonly associated with mental health.

Side Effects of Living represents those who go unrepresented in books and films — not by speaking for them, but by giving them the space to speak. It lends validity to each experience and gives one the sense of not being alone. This is a book that makes you nod in agreement. If we acknowledge that our sense of self is constructed through language, then the book succeeds in giving us a language and a vocabulary to understand the inner workings of the mind. ■



The Other India Bookstore

The other bookstore

Arti Das
Mapusa

THE Other India Bookstore (OIB) at Mapusa in Goa is unlike any other bookshop. Lined with books from the floor till the ceiling, it houses unheard of books. This well-curated bookstore is the brainchild of Claude and Norma Alvares, a very reputed environment activist couple in Goa. It was started in 1986 with the intention of selling books from the global South — Asia, Africa and Latin America — and to develop India's intellectual culture, rather than blindly follow the West.

"The book trade was dominated by publishers from the West and only their books were available in our bookstores. We resented this domination and set up OIB to market books on social issues published in our part of the world. That is how OIB was born," says Norma.

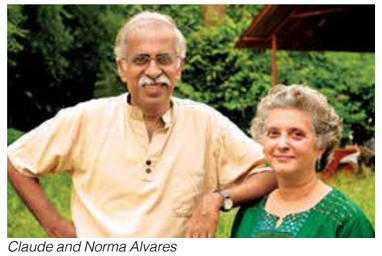
Their initial publications included *The Other Face of Cancer* by Dr Manu Kothari and Lopa Mehta and *One Straw Revolution* by Masanobu Fukuoka. The books they publish are not just for casual reading, but are food for thought and socially relevant. Many titles on organic farming, environment, health, wildlife, education and development politics are published. This is only natural, given their involvement in environmental activism. Claude and Norma spearhead the Goa Foundation and have fought many landmark legal battles to preserve the landscape of Goa.

These books are a source of information and knowledge for those "who are fed up of the dominant system and are looking for alternatives," says Norma. The bookstore's readers include teachers, students, researchers, professors, librarians and other booksellers. They have a unique collection of books on Goa, which is a crowd-puller among visitors to the state.

Claude, director of the Goa Foundation and author of *Fish Curry Rice*, a report on Goa's ecology and lifestyle, says, "The manuscript must have original ideas and not be a replica of views already held by others. The book must be published anywhere within the global South – this is important as it also makes the book affordable."

Running OIB and its publishing arm, Other India Press, which was set up in 1990, is an ardent task in the era of e-books and social media. However, the couple says that it is the uniqueness that keeps the venture afloat. They are confident of the titles they publish and sell. "We don't keep potboilers or trashy stuff or school textbooks just so that we can make money."

They also stock a lot of material published by NGOs and social activists — pamphlets and monographs — which one may not find in a regular bookshop. "Such publications are often better than academic titles, as they provide up-to-date facts and figures which are useful to those interested in these subjects," says Norma. Contemporary topics like organic farming, home schooling, and health have an endless market, she says.



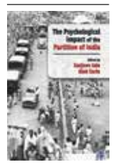
Claude and Norma Alvares

For ethical reasons, books are priced at minimal rates. Their cheapest book is just Rs 20. "Many of our books have gone into several reprints but we never raised prices except if paper costs went up," explains Norma. Their objective is also to increase access to literature on alternative ways of living. Turning in a profit is not their priority.

The bookstore keeps its head above water because it is self-sustainable. Creating an empire or a franchise was never the goal. Being small has helped them survive. Norma says other bookstores that have followed this model have survived too. This does not mean that they are unaffected by factors like social media or e-commerce and the like.

"Self-publishing has become possible and social media is a great way to advertise your works. So we might as well call it a day, knowing with satisfaction that we did serve a purpose," remarks Claude while mentioning bookstores like Altermedia in Thrissur, Earthcare in Kolkata and Banyan Tree in Indore, which are engaged in similar work. ■

Partition in the mind



The Psychological Impact of the Partition of India Edited by Sanjeev Jain & Alok Sarin SAGE ₹850

THE medical discipline of psychiatry in India is going through a phase of introspection and widening its horizons. *The Psychological Impact of the Partition of India* reflects this change. Edited by Sanjeev Jain, a professor of psychiatry at the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences, and Alok Sarin, clinical psychiatrist at the Sitaram Bhartia Institute of Science and Research, the book consists of research papers that bring together psychiatry, history, literature and sociology to understand this cataclysmic event.

Why is it important to look back at the horrific brutality that marred the birth of India and Pakistan? Psychiatry has so far not looked deeply at the transformations that take place in society and their effect on mental health. Yes, farmer suicides and drug addiction have been studied. But not the Partition of 1947.

This phase was unprecedented in its scale of violence, in the displacement it caused and the simmering anger it left behind. Nearly 5.5 million Hindus and Sikhs and 5.8 million Muslims were displaced and became refugees. They lost their identity and became rootless. More than a million people died.

Reopening this wound is also important because recent scientific research indicates that there is an intergenerational transmission of trauma.

In their opening chapter Jain and Sarin say that the Holocaust in Europe was dissected, and attempts were made to understand the trauma, displacement and prejudice victims faced, so that it would never, ever happen again. This analysis created "humanistic schools of psychotherapy, a greater acceptance of diversity and ensured that medical services developed universal and global principles of practice and ethics", they write. But in India the aftermath of Partition was followed by stunned silence.

Today when we face a resurgence of identity politics, of the creation of the 'other' and a less humane society, "it is perhaps a sign of psychological malfunction", write the two editors.

Psychiatry was slow to react in those days. The discipline was still at an infant stage. The science of psychiatry in India also followed a different route from the West because of the politics of colonialism and because the 'native' mind to Western psychiatrists was seen as 'different' and 'inferior'.

In their paper, "The partitioning of madness", Anirudh Kala and Alok Sarin trace what happened to people left behind in mental hospitals. They were prisoners in custodial care. Riffling through research at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, the authors say Saadat Hasan Manto's famed story, *Toba Tek Singh,* isn't fiction but fact. Mental prisoners were exchanged. They had no choice. Some were suddenly declared 'fit' and released. The Punjabis were sent to Amritsar, the rest to Ranchi and many perished, like Toba Tek Singh, in no man's land. Out of 20 mental hospitals, just three went to West Pakistan.

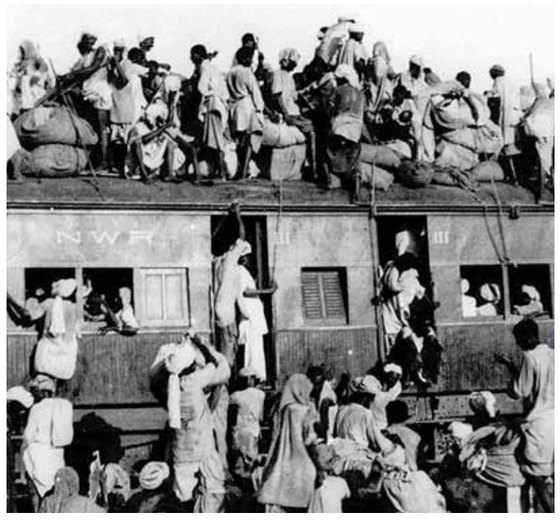
Sanjeev Jain, in "Balm and Salve", recounts how health services dissolved into absolute chaos as cholera and infectious diseases, along with communalism, gripped refugee camps.

Moushumi Basu's paper, "Partitioning of minds and legitimization of differences", is a sociological study. She sees the Muzaffarpur riots of September 2013 as a sort of replay of Partition violence. Basu makes the pertinent point that Partition isn't just about territory. Partition begins in the mind with the subtle idea that the other community is different. This thought then seeps into other spaces, negating notions of equality and non-discrimination. It leads to physical symbols of division, like a wall to keep Dalits from grazing land, or ghettoisation. There is an undercurrent of violence to these divisions.

It falls on the State to dissolve imaginary divisions, create togetherness between communities and underline shared interests and spaces.

The role of the State here is dubious, writes Basu. She looks at State intervention in Darfur, Yugoslavia, immigration in Europe and the Maoist insurgency in India. The sinister use of psychiatrists by the State is routine. She cites the example of two psychiatrists who became the main ideologues of Serbian nationalism and built up mass hysteria. Other examples are narco analysis, brain mapping, the CIA's mental torture methods, drawing up 'profiles' of terror suspects and so on.

Hina Nandrajog in "Refugees of the Partition of India" explores how refugees coped with trauma and loss of identity through the prism of Partition literature. Strategies they used, she writes, included silence, victimhood, martyrdom, nostalgia, retaliatory violence and romanticism. Chaman Nahal's *Azadi*, Intezar Husain's *Basti,* Yashpal's *Jhoota Sach*, Joginder Paul's *Sleepwalkers,* Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* as well as Bhisham Sahni and Bapsi Sidhwa together provide a chilling portrait – of the hazardous journey refugees undertook, their utter bewilderment, the lack of any State support, discrimination, the long wait for a home, how family ties ruptured and how the character of cities changed.



Saadat Hasan Manto's famed story, *Toba Tek Singh,* isn't fiction but fact. Mental prisoners were exchanged. Punjabis were sent to Amritsar, the rest to Ranchi.

It was girls and women who were the victims of the most gruesome and bestial acts during Partition. Ayesha Kidwai in her chapter, "Are we women not citizens?", investigates the role of Mridula Sarabhai and Inis Kidwai along with social workers in the recovery of women who were abducted during this period. They were ill-prepared for a task that required immense support from State agencies, mental health specialists and from all sections of society.

Women were kidnapped, raped and kept as slaves not only by ordinary and angry Hindus and Muslims but by high-ranking officers and the police. Patriarchy suffused all State agencies and even the justice system.

The traumatised women didn't want to return — they feared they would not be accepted by their families. Neither Sarabhai nor her team had the skills to put them at ease or counsel them. Sarabhai said honestly that the women were "not in the right frame of mind and the wishes of the women should not be given undue weight. Their statements are false." The few who were reassured that their families would accept them wanted to go home straightaway. Kidwai defends Sarabhai's role, which has been criticised by feminists. She writes that Sarabhai and Inis, in fact, cast the first stone against the patriarchal State.

The other research papers are also analytical and telling. Sukashi Kamra writes on the language of violence used during the Partition period. A chapter by Anjana Sharma and Gopa Sabharwal on Mahatma Gandhi traces his life, the grief he felt during those days and his plea for a return to sanity. The word 'madness' occurs over and over again to describe the terrible months of Partition when India went berserk. ■

AYURVEDA ADVISORY
Dr SRIKANTH

Tackling rash

WHEN the sun shines mercilessly, your skin takes a beating especially if you spend time outdoors. Skin rashes are quite common during the hot summer season. Perhaps almost everyone has suffered a rash at some point in their lives at this time.

Rashes have several causes – excessive sweating due to high humidity and temperature, over-exposure to the sun in summer, use of jacuzzi/ sauna/steam room, wearing tight garments and non-breathable fabrics and so on. Occasionally, some medications and poor digestion may also lead to rashes.

Some individuals have a tendency to get rashes in areas with skin folds in summer. People who are obese or those who sweat more are more prone to rashes. Medically, these rashes are known as 'intertrigo' and may appear in skin folds that rub together and trap moisture like the armpits, beneath the breasts, the genital area, between the toes, inner thigh, groin and back of the knee. These red/brown rashes can be extremely uncomfortable and itchy.

SYMPTOMS: Initially the rash appears as reddened skin, often in skin creases or areas of tight clothing where there is decreased air circulation.

These seasonal rashes can be prevented by avoiding hot, humid conditions, wearing loose clothes, and using air-conditioning or fans.

Some individuals may experience a lot of itchiness while others may have no symptoms at all. The first step in treating heat rash is to wash the affected area with a gentle soap. Then rinse the area thoroughly with water and gently pat dry with a soft towel.

PREVENTION: The best way to prevent heat rash is to avoid sweating by staying in a cooler environment and limiting physical activity.

Take cool showers or baths as often as possible. A cold compress gives quick relief. Use a soft towel to pat your skin dry after a shower or bath.

Resting in an air-conditioned room (below 25°C) is therapeutic. If no air-conditioning is available at home, select a cooler place under a fan or near a cooler. Wear light, cotton, absorbent fabrics that ventilate your skin. Tops with short sleeves and shorts are helpful. Stay hydrated. Drink plenty of water because it helps keep your body temperature cooler. Medical care may be necessary if the rash does not resolve with home remedies.

Apply coconut oil, preferably unprocessed virgin coconut oil, all over your body or just on the itchy areas to get instant relief. Specific massage oils like Ksheerabala taila, Chandanadi taila, Eladi taila and Manjishtadi taila may be used for better, quicker results. Avoid eating spicy and deep-fried food or stale food.

HOME REMEDIES

Baking soda, about one-quarter of a cup, added to a warm bath, soothes itchy skin.

Multani mitti (Fuller's earth) has proven medicinal properties and helps to reduce inflammation and irritation. Put a tablespoon of Fuller's earth in a bowl and add sufficient rose water to make a fine paste. Apply a thin layer on the rashes. Wash off with lukewarm water when the paste dries.

Aloe vera pulp has antiseptic and antibacterial properties and is a hydrating agent for skin rashes. Cut a small portion from an aloe vera plant, separate the pulp and apply it directly on the affected skin once or twice a day to soothe itchy, irritated skin.

Coriander is an effective remedy for rashes and skin irritation mainly due to its anti-irritant, anti-inflammatory and antiseptic properties. Apply a thin layer of coriander leaves' paste on the affected area once or twice a day. Symptoms will subside.

Neem is very useful in treating rashes. Boil about 15-20 neem leaves in 250 ml of water. Strain the solution and allow to cool. Place a cotton ball soaked in the solution on the affected area for at least 10 minutes. This helps to cure the rash.

Sandalwood helps prevent skin eruptions. Mix a tablespoon of sandalwood powder with coconut water and apply a thin layer of this paste on the rash. Wash off when it dries.

MEDICATION: Cutis (Vasu Healthcare) / Himalaya's baby powder — both are effective in providing relief and preventing rashes. Apply in sufficient quantity on the affected area.

Apply sufficient quantity of Himalaya's soothing calamine baby lotion to the rash for instant relief from itching.

Local application of Himalaya's Antiseptic cream/ Shatadouta ghrita ointment (Kottakkal) on the affected area helps to heal the rash.

The following oral medication will help in reducing the sensation of itching and burning.

Sarasaparilla juice concentrate (BV Pundit/ SN Pandit Pharmacy) — 3 tablespoons in 1 cup of cold water/ milk, twice daily.

Gulkand (Sandu Pharmaceuticals) — 2 teaspoons twice/thrice daily.

Sheetasudha (Dhootapapeshwar Ltd) — 25 ml mixed in 200 ml water – twice/thrice daily.

Sarivadyasava (2 teaspoonfuls) + Usheerasava (2 teaspoonfuls) (Baidyanath Ayurved Bhavan / Kottakkal Arya Vaidyasala / Vaidyaratnam Oushadhasala) — mixed with four teaspoonfuls water, twice daily after meals.

If the irritation persists, consult your physician to rule out any underlying serious causes. ■

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

PRODUCTS

Mighty flowers

PHOOL offers luxury incense sticks with the power of flowers. Light one and the fragrance of a thousand flowers suffuses the room. Phool adds a touch of organic bliss to your yoga routine or your worship of the almighty.

After all, there is might in flowers. Indian rose calms the mind, citronella takes away pain, daffodil helps you sleep and patchouli heals stress. Phool incense sticks are natural and free of charcoal. Flowers strewn by temples and mosques along the Ganga are gathered by Phool. The wasted flowers are converted by 79 marginalised women into incense sticks and cones, and divinely packed.

There are surprises inside — a lovely wooden slide for your incense stick, a cute stand for your incense cone and a profile of the lady who made it.

Phool is part of HelpUsGreen, a social enterprise founded by Ankit Agarwal with his friend, Karan Rastogi, in 2015. The idea struck Agarwal while sitting on the *ghats* of the Ganga in Kanpur, watching the river flow, laden with wasted flowers. He wondered how he could spare the Ganga this load of pesticide-laced flowers.

Agarwal works with a team of research scientists. Apart from incense sticks, HelpUsGreen makes compost from flowers and flora foam, an alternative to styro foam. It is also pioneering biodegrading packaging and bio leather. In 2018, HelpUsGreen received the UN Climate Action Award. ■

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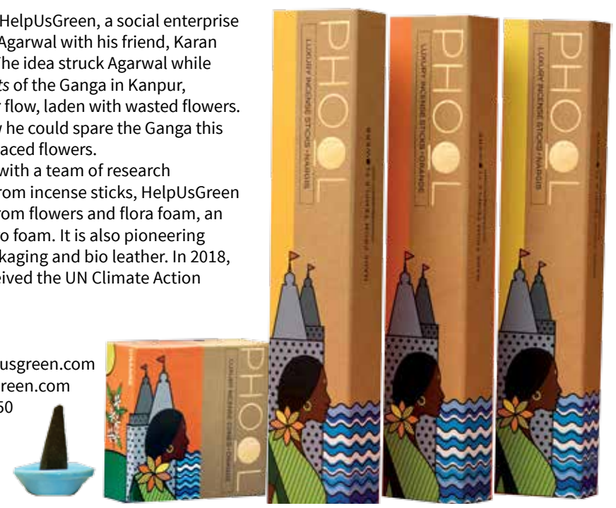

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