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Civil Society

FILMS IN THE CLOUDS

Dharamshala rallies to keep its festival going

Ritu Sarin and Tenzing Sonam, organisers of the festival

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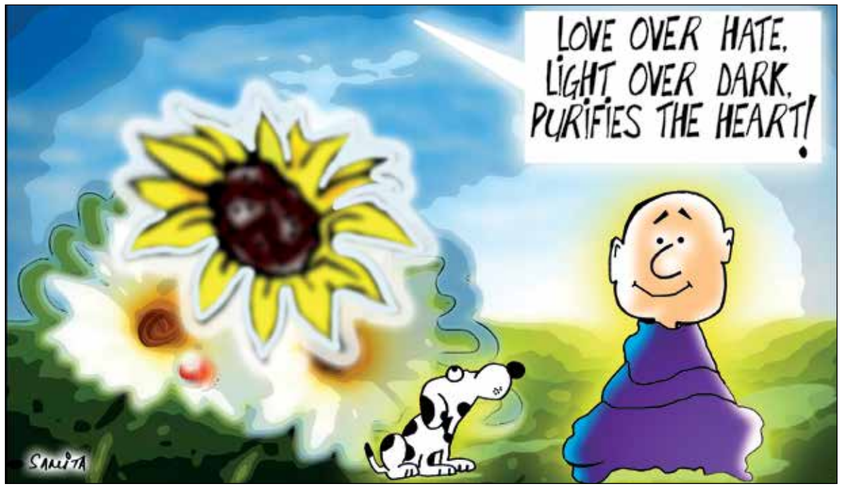
IN THE LIGHT

SAMITA RATHOR



LETTERS

Water search

I read your cover story, 'A million wells for Bengaluru'. Shree Padre has written a comprehensive, timely and socially responsible article on water harvesting and conservation from different locations. The article is very positive and affirms that ordinary people can find solutions to vexed problems through collective action.

Anitha Kumari P.

Your cover story was an exhaustive and excellent piece on rainwater harvesting. The efforts of Biome Environmental Solutions to harvest and propagate rainwater harvesting are exemplary. The residents of Rainbow Drive colony in Bengaluru are truly blessed.

Bhagyalakshmi Bhide

A very good initiative. People need to conserve potable water and prevent it from getting mixed with sewage water. All houses should have a separate sump for rainwater. Such ideas should be included while designing a home.

Shyamala Reddy

S. Vishwanath and his team at Biome deserve all praise for their outstanding work in rainwater harvesting and for helping residents of Rainbow Drive by creating recharge wells.

Dr K.S.R. Murthy

A very interesting read. Every urban area needs to understand rainwater harvesting and conservation.

Mahendra Rajaram

I found it interesting that rainwater harvesting is becoming a professional business activity. This will lead to more innovation and efficiency and, hopefully, encourage middle class residents to hire the services of small enterprises engaged in harvesting rain. In this way a new water sector will be added to the Indian economy.

Sadanand Hegde

Mind healers

Subir Roy's story, 'A home and inner peace for those on the street', describes the wonderful work being done at Iswar Sankalpa by Sarbani Das Roy. God will help the people who help these distressed persons. I will be happy to support these activities.

Rajat Pal

People suffering from mental illness can lead a normal life if they take proper medication. However, the integration of affected persons into society is a bigger social issue which Iswar Sankalpa is doing wonderfully well. I would suggest introducing this topic in school textbooks from Class 8 onwards. Only then will the stigma associated with mental illness be dispelled.

Rajeev Ranjan

Eco wise

Apropos your interview with Chandra Bhushan, founder of iFOREST, 'Environment needs tech, innovation', I absolutely agree with his statement that without engagement with industry you cannot improve the environment in India and that environment issues can't be solved by government alone. I would further add that this statement stands true for the improvement of environment across the world.

Dr Ketna Atul Matkar

India is facing a tremendous environmental crisis and we need many more organisations run by young people to provide leadership to urban environment movements.

Ashish Chakravarty

Holy trees

Apropos your story, 'A million trees for Guruji', I like the idea of planting so many trees to celebrate Guru Nanak Devji's 550th birth anniversary. I wish EcoSikh all success. I would like to understand the method of forestry they are using.

Murtaza

Letters should be sent to response@civilsocietyonline.com

COVER STORY

FILMS IN THE CLOUDS

Spirited local support made the Dharamshala International Film Festival possible this year despite the lack of sponsors. There was a crop of interesting films and the customary acting class. 18

COVER PHOTOGRAPH: SHREY GUPTA

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Civil Society
READ US. WE READ YOU.

Dharamshala matters

You might ask why we chose to go to Dharamshala to cover a film festival and that too as our cover story. Well, it is our experience in this magazine that the interesting things we discover invariably happen to be at a good distance from the big cities. The problem is that they don't get reported on and talked about. When it comes to film festivals and literary festivals, they have become the monopoly of a few. Corporate funding completes the circle of influence that decides what we will see and hear and read. It is not just elitist, but boring as well and disrespectful of the wonderful diversity that exists in India. The film festival at Dharamshala is one such small and intrepid effort which deserves a place on our cultural map. In fact this year it might just not have been held for want of sponsorships. Spirited local organisations and individuals didn't let it die. We hope our story will encourage the organisers to keep going and those among our readers who enjoy a trip into the mountains to turn up in Dharamshala next year.

There is much concern these days about the lack of jobs in the Indian economy and it is true that there isn't enough employment for a growing number of young people. An economic slowdown brings long-term problems. But what can we do till the bigger solutions fall into place? If an example of successful action is needed one should turn to Meera Shenoy and Youth4Jobs, the organisation she founded seven years ago. She and her team manage to put 10 disabled young people into jobs every day. Over seven years 18,500 have found employment. How has this been made possible and that too with disabled young people from economically weak families in rural areas?

Meera has got many things right. She and her team are driven by passion and perpetually in mission mode. They are also unabashedly market oriented with the result that they succeed in bringing potential employers and disabled young people together. The training given to disabled young people is intense and practical so that meaningful transformations are made. Someone learning to use computers and acquiring life skills begins to immediately feel empowered. Much more becomes possible after that. Finally, skills imparted are customised to suit the jobs available. Employment programmes work well when driven by demand. Meera has also shown that it won't do to duck challenges. She has chosen to work with disabled young people in villages. It doesn't get tougher than that.

A national report on India's justice system is out and we have an interview with Shireen Vakil and Valay Singh, who anchored the process in the Tata Trusts. Several other organisations came together for the first time to make the report possible. We now have baseline information on the access to justice in all the states of the country. It is a sorry picture that emerges, which was already evident, but now the numbers are available. Will it lead to improvements and how soon, is now the question.

SHREY GUPTA

Shireen Vakil and Valay Singh: The objective of the report is to create a public demand for better justice

'The justice system isn't working. Even the best state gets 60/100'

Nationwide report provides first complete picture

Civil Society News
New Delhi

THE strength of a democracy can be measured by the working of its justice system. If cases are piling up in the courts, innocents are languishing in jails and the police are serving political masters, it is evident that all is not well.

For repairs to begin, however, credible baseline information is needed. Putting it together is a complex task. It has to be sourced from government and also placed in context. Academic rigour and evangelical zeal are both needed.

The India Justice Report 2019 produced by the Tata Trusts recently is a significant step in this direction. It is the first comprehensive and bottom-up report on the working of India's justice system across 29 states.

What emerges is a disturbing picture. The best performers among the states are nowhere near their own declared goals let alone international standards. Infrastructure and human resources are much below required levels.

The report has been put together over 20 months of persistent work. Some information has been in the public domain. But a lot needed to be ferreted out. Innumerable right to information (RTI) applications were filed.

Several voluntary organisations have been working on different aspects of the justice system. The Tata Trusts has brought them together for this report, making it a rare and valuable collaborative effort.

On a polluted and depressing November morning in Delhi, *Civil Society* spoke to Shireen Vakil and Valay Singh at the sedate offices of the Tata Trusts at the R.K. Khanna Stadium.

How did you manage to put together all this information?
Shireen Vakil: The Tata Trusts have supported pieces of research over the years. We have had long-term partners who knew about each other but were in their own zones. Those who knew about prisons didn't necessarily know about the judiciary. What we have done is to bring it all together.

So it was a learning experience for them?
SV: I hope so. We weren't experts. All the others had been working on it for decades. They know their areas, but we were deciding everything together and I constantly had to push them to look at other areas. Valay played a big part in managing this.

There is a lot of rigour in this report. It must have taken you a long time?
SV: It took us about 20 months.
Valay Singh: The rigour was the main thing because we didn't want to do anything without academic rigour. We didn't want to produce a report for the sake of producing one.
SV: We had to make sure that the data was absolutely thorough. That was checked, double checked and triple checked.
VS: The process was like this — we had a series of meetings where we formed sub-groups, then thematic sub-groups. We used to sit as a committee which used to vet the findings of the sub-groups. So we first came up with pillar-wise indicators, then we made them uniform by dividing them into six themes of workload, budget, diversity, infrastructure and so on. These emerged from the discussions we had in the committee. Once that was decided, we got a data agency on board because we realised it is a humongous task and we can't do it in-house. We got How India Lives on board and they went through all the government sources, trawled the data. We used that data set which was then cleaned up and put into a statistical model with our coordination and guidance.
SV: We had the inputs from experts who have been working in this field. We had four or five organisations which had expertise and had already brought out reports. Maja Daruwalla, who was the chief editor of the report, was also the director of the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative. For the methodology we had several professors like Amitabh Kundu come in. Then there was Yamini Iyer of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS).

There was a lot of deliberation to make sure that we were doing it as well as we could. For instance, should we give more weightage to one indicator over the other? Those sorts of discussions were important. We also tried to translate the information in a way that wasn't too academic. We wanted the information to be accessible to ordinary people.

Our perspective was to bring this discussion to civil society, to politicians and the citizen because justice affects all of us.

The fact that 68 percent of people in prisons are undertrials means that most people should not be there. Obviously that means that there is overcrowding. Someone picked up from the corner of the street or in a village is just taken in. They have no idea what their rights are. They are terrified and more often than not they are from Adivasi, Dalit or even Muslim communities.

As information goes, how much was this easily forthcoming?
VS: I would say that a lot of this information is available online. But it is not evenly available, it is not updated and there are holes and inconsistencies in data that we have to live with. We could not assess some of the things we would have liked to assess because that information was not available. For example, it was difficult to truly assess across the justice system what is the share of women, or what is the share of SC/ST people or what is the share of religious groups.

It's difficult because?
It's difficult because the data is not there. Therefore we would file an RTI. But I would say, our report has about 40 to 60 percent of publicly available data.

It's not that this data is blocked or shrouded in secrecy?
SV: It is not timely and it is not put together. Information is not available on religious lines or for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (SC/ST). It was available pre-2015 and then they stopped publishing it.

You chose certain indicators like infrastructure, human resources, budget, workload, diversity while you were doing this. Where did you have the biggest problem?
I think it is pretty equal. One of the things is vacancies in human resources. We saw over an average of 20 percent vacancies across the four pillars of judiciary, police, legal aid and prison staff. Prisons have a very large number of vacancies. Within human resources, diversity is an issue. The fact that on average only seven percent of the police officers are women and just two states, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra, make it to double digits — 12 or 13 percent.

There might be many policewomen, but they aren't officers, they are constables.
SV: Yes, exactly. Similarly, you'll have many women in lower courts but not very many in higher courts.

So this is a problem across the board?
SV: Exactly. It is the vacancies plus the diversity. The vacancies are for the sanctioned posts. But you may need even more. You may say you are sanctioning 100 policemen per station but actually you need 200. So human resource is a big issue and the second is the infrastructure. It is very poor. I mean, even in courts problems range from leaky roofs to tiny or no toilets. In fact, 100 out of 600 courts do not have a women's toilet. Not for the petitioners, not for the lawyers or the judges.

> **'Human resource is a big issue and the second is infrastructure. It is very poor. Even in courts problems range from leaky roofs to tiny or no toilets. In fact, 100 out of 600 courts do not have a women's toilet.'**

Budgets are also a big issue. There are no budgets. During our panel discussions there was a huge conversation about budgets and how sometimes they are underspent. You have to plan properly and the spending will follow.

You have pointed out in your report that the judiciary gets the least amount of money and it also doesn't spend that much money. It doesn't know how to budget its funding.
SV: Yes. The judiciary, which was present at our launch, said that they just put in a 10 percent increase every year. They are not sitting and making a proper plan and a budget. That's the case for several sectors. They don't have the training and they don't have the capacity to plan properly.

There is also a skilling crisis. You have pointed out that just six to seven percent of the police force is actually trained.
SV: What we were looking at was the capacity of the system to deliver. We found that no state meets even 60 percent of its own targets. Forget being world class or anything. These are the states' own benchmarks. For example, the Bihar government says they are going to give 38 percent quota to women in the police, but it's actually at only 13 percent. So, they are not meeting their own targets. Even on their own indicators, the best they are doing is 5.9 percent. Justice (Madan) Lokur pointed out that though Maharashtra comes first, it doesn't come first in any of the pillars. So its average is the best.

Has there been any attempt in the worst performing states at modernisation?
VS: In the intention to improve rankings, you'll see that some of the bottom states come in the top 10.

We have looked at five-year data across 23 indicators. It's not that they are not trying, it's just that they are not doing enough. West Bengal and UP come on top when it comes to intentions and trying.

How did you evaluate the intent to improve?
VS: There are 23 hard indicators for which we analysed five years of data. So in five years, by how much did states try to reduce lower court vacancies, by how much did they reduce constable vacancies? It's hard data.

Is there a subtext to the information?
VS: I would say that the subtext is this: All of the system isn't working. Even the best state is only reaching 60 out of 100. The other thing is that on a general basis southern states are doing better. But these are things that we don't have concrete scientific evidence to say. It can be gleaned from this report that the states with high socio-economic numbers are the states with better justice indicators — they are also better with ease of business and so on.

We will have to look more closely, meet more people and deconstruct it at the state level. Right now we just want to place the issue of the capacity of the justice system. Everyone talks about quality of justice. We wanted to locate quality in the quantitative framework.

Prisons are a very dark area. Your report points out how a staffing shortage leads to overcrowding. You may have empty jails, but you can't put people in there because you don't have the staff to administer them. It's a clear case of how staff shortages are directly affecting the system.
SV: Absolutely. Vijay Raman from TISS' Prayas who has been working on the prisons project had written an article in the paper about prisons and people's needs. There are places where prisoners are given the duties of prison staff because there aren't enough staff. There are cases of undertrials doing their work, which is not good at all.

I remember when the Tata Trusts first began looking at this portfolio it was called criminal justice. I actually changed it to 'access to justice'. Sixty-eight percent of people under trial might not have even done anything. They are in prison because of the police's wrong behaviour — not filing FIRs, etc. They also don't get access to legal representation.

Continued on page 8

Continued from page 7

Your report shows legal aid is patchy.
SV: Very patchy. There is a lot of waiting in courts. There's also the fact that sometimes people don't even show up in court because the police escorts to take them are not there.

Among paralegals, there are a lot of women but they are not trained. You have a critical problem there.
VS: It's become tokenistic sometimes, the legal aid system. People are enrolled as paralegals but what are they actually doing? There is only one legal aid institution per 1,600 villages in UP whereas government regulation says that there should be a reasonable institution per five or six villages.

So you want this data to be accessible to journalists, and people and NGOs as well?
SV: Of course, we hope that it will provide NGOs working in this space a tool for advocacy and for their work and for their sharing. Which is why we've kept the data completely open. If they want to look at the data in their states and districts, if they want to present the data, they should be able to use it. It isn't that the information wasn't there, but accessing it was a problem.

We had the contacts and the reach. Otherwise, if someone just wants to go and find out, it's very difficult. We've done it for people to use, and hopefully the government as well. If they want to monitor and see how to increase and improve they can use the data we've collected.

Do you see your role as providing this data and stopping there or do you see your role as getting into advocacy with decision-makers?
SV: Of course. If we weren't this would have just been a research document. That's not the idea. Our work actually begins now. This is the important thing, we've already had meetings with NITI Aayog. We'll do it with and through our partners. Someone in Rajasthan was keen. We would facilitate that and have some one-on-one meetings with the respective ministries. The idea is that we will do this periodically. We will update the data every two years and keep that conversation going.

It's not that we're going to do the advocacy ourselves necessarily. It is just that this is a tool for advocacy. We'll do some advocacy ourselves with our partners and some we hope will spin off.

Somewhere, we never got the system talking about it. But if this is to work, how do you get the system talking about this? Who in the system can trigger it?
VS: The whole idea is to popularise the entire issue of justice. Just like health, education, sanitation and the hand washing campaign. We're trying to create a public demand for a better justice system through a ranking index.
SV: Also, the thing is, in the next six months we will be doing advocacy at the national and at the state level. We will prioritise certain states. In the next three to four months, we'll have state-level conversations with the system.

We'll be reaching out to the chief secretaries, the chief ministers, the secretaries in each of these ministries, at the state and central levels. We have a series of things planned in the next six months. ■

How Sangrur cuts red tape, takes services online

The Sewa Kendra provides public services in a time-bound manner

A farmer waits with his application

Deputy Commissioner Ghanshyam Thori

The Sewa Kendra is designed like a bank floor

Raj Machhan
Sangrur

SARABJIT Singh has come to the Sewa Kendra in Sangrur, a town in southwest Punjab, to apply for a birth certificate for his new-born grandson. "This centre is a real boon," he says with a smile. "Last month I got my gun licence renewed within 22 days and that too without any fuss."

Fifty-year-old Sarabjit owns a small piece of land in town. He says his late father bequeathed him an old double-barrel gun in the 1990s. Sarabjit says he has little use for it, but he is very particular about maintaining his father's legacy. So he faithfully renews his gun licence every three years.

"It was a real pain doing the rounds of various offices. Renewing the licence often took more than six months. I had to grease palms and put up with all kinds of touts to get it done," he said.

The Sewa Kendras are a Punjab government initiative to provide public services to citizens across the state in a time-bound manner under an e-Sewa project. These centres are digitally connected. Each request is logged online, sent to the concerned department for resolution and subsequently monitored for delivery within a dedicated time-frame decided beforehand.

Sangrur has stolen a march over the other 21 districts of Punjab. In October, the district had a pendency rate of just 0.52 percent of the total requests for services through the Sewa Kendras, which means that 99.48 percent of the applications were addressed within the stipulated time-frame.

Sangrur is the second largest district in Punjab in terms of size. A part of the Malwa region, the district is traditionally considered a backward area. It is predominantly rural and divided into sub-divisions. Sangrur town has a population of just over 100,000. Its lead over the other more developed districts is therefore significant.

The Punjab government provides 252 citizen services out of which 143 are online, and 95 are still offline. Thirteen services are related to independent entities. The services being delivered under the Punjab Transparency and Accountability Act include birth and death certificates, mutation of sales deeds, arms licences, caste certificates, and others related to animal husbandry, agriculture, *mandis,* excise and taxation, food, civil supplies and consumer affairs, forest and wildlife, welfare of freedom fighters, health and family welfare, home, housing and urban development, industries and commerce, labour, local government and so on.

Each service has a designated timeline for completion. Officials need to ensure delivery happens. For example, approval of a water connection has a timeline of seven days, whereas renewal of registration certificates for ultrasound centres has to be dealt with within 90 days. The district has 31 Sewa Kendras to cater to a population of over 1.9 million.

So what makes Sangrur a success in delivery of public services? The answer seems to lie in getting officials to deliver through an effective organisation, strict monitoring, regular reviews and fixing of accountability. The Sewa Kendra located on the deputy commissioner's office premises is organised into workstations like a bank floor dominated by tellers. Each applicant is issued a token at the reception and needs to watch small digital monitors above the designated service windows to avail of his turn. At the service counter, application formalities are discussed and, if all is in order, the person is told by when the work will get done.

In October, Sangrur district had a pendency rate of just 0.52 percent of the total requests for services through the Sewa Kendras which means 99.48 percent of applications were addressed within the stipulated time-frame.

The Sewa Kendras are staffed and run by a private company operating out of Mohali. Data generated on a daily basis is stored in a central server and monitored by a senior official in the Chief Minister's Office (CMO), who keeps a tab on the performance of all districts. The CMO has created a WhatsApp group for faster communication.

At the district level the effort is driven by the deputy commissioner. Operationally, the Sewa Kendras are handled by a district manager appointed by the private company and the additional district e-governance coordinator from the government side.

In Sangrur, the e-Sewa project is led by Deputy Commissioner Ghanshyam Thori, a data-driven officer who has a simple management mantra: "Whatever gets monitored gets done." Thori constantly supervises, reviews, and acts on the reports generated by the MIS system.

In what could be termed 'WhatsApp governance', he has a core WhatsApp group for service monitoring in the Sewa Kendras and 25 to 30 WhatsApp groups that have all concerned officials from various departments as members. Data is shared with all, and officers found lagging in request resolution get three follow-up calls from various levels. Weekly review meetings are the norm.

"I follow a simple strategy to ensure that work is done in the given time-frame. I call a 9 pm meeting. All officers found lagging are invited to this meeting every Tuesday to discuss the situation. Must say, it has been very effective. People work just to avoid the invitation," says Thori.

Sangrur Public Grievance Officer Ankur Mohindroo says, "We are essentially trying to shift the equilibrium. Officials are generally occupied with new applications on a day to day basis. But it is critical to deal with the pending ones."

The deputy commissioner cites as an example mutation of property sale deeds, which have a turnaround time of 45 days, to illustrate how pending applications can mount over a period of time. "In my first monthly meeting, officials informed us that out of 300 cases for the month, 200 had been dealt with. The remaining 100 would be taken up in the remaining 15 days. However, when I called for the yearly data, I found 3,000 cases pending. In all, there were 15,000 cases pending since 2012 when the online function began. It took me eight months to bring pendency down to its present level."

Thori was posted to Sangrur in March 2018. A management graduate from Narsee Monjee Institute of Management Studies, he worked in the private sector for three years before joining the civil services.

"Eighty percent of people come for routine services like renewal of driving licence, arms licence, birth and death certificates. Only 15 to 20 percent of matters are those where the individual would be required to meet an official. So the focus is on Sewa Kendras where we can make a difference to the general public. Secondly, we are able to monitor the service delivery carefully as the data captured at these centres is centralised and cannot be tampered with," says Thori.

Constant follow-up and communication is another tool the Deputy Commissioner has deployed effectively. He has also fixed timelines for government schemes, like release of MPLAD funds for various projects, which lie outside the ambit of Sewa Kendras. Thori's priorities for the state include increased focus on government schemes, his core areas of work including land revenue, and reducing e-Sewa pendency at the top. "Doing away with e-Sewa pendency has become competitive among districts in the state," he remarks. He does not have direct administrative control over other departments, but through Sewa Kendras he is able to hold officials accountable for non-delivery.

Sangrur has topped in the Punjab government's Har Ghar Rozgar Yojana, Mahatma Gandhi Sarbat Vikas Yojana, and the central government's Jal Shakti campaign for which it has received awards. The cash-strapped Punjab government has renewed its focus on implementation of efficient citizen service delivery channels, given the limited room for maneuver in implementing new projects.

Due to the obvious advantages, people have been flocking to the Sewa Kendras like never before. By October 18, the Kendras in Sangrur district had received 495,000 applications for online services, 601,843 offline. For services that are still offline, the Kendras help to track the status of individual files and their resolution with various departments.

The dissonance in delivery of citizen services has been a major problem for people across the country. Sangrur could show the way. ■

Vendors make a point in Delhi

Rwit Ghosh
New Delhi

STREET vendors in Delhi called off their four-day protest after municipal officials assured them that their demands would be looked into. The municipal corporations have been limiting busy shopping areas to pedestrians by keeping out cars and other motorised vehicles. The initiative is welcome, but it has resulted in the eviction of street vendors from their traditional spots on pavements without integrating them into such plans or providing them alternative zones.

Vendors are globally seen as being integral to city life. In India, the Street Vendors Act of 2014 protects them from eviction and guarantees their right to livelihood. The municipal authorities in Delhi have, however, pushed vendors out. Implementation of the Act through the setting up of effective town vending committees in Delhi has also been problematic. The committees are too many and dysfunctional.

Arbind Singh, national coordinator and a founding member of the National Street Vendors Association of India (NASVI), tells *Civil Society* that the misinterpretation of the Street Vendors Act by the Delhi government has led to the highhandedness of the municipal corporations.

Why were street vendors protesting before the Civic Centre?
Both the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) had promised that they would give street vendors designated spaces and licences during the last assembly elections. The AAP manifesto specifically mentions it.

Even before the local municipal elections they repeated their promises. Keep in mind that the Street Vendors Act, 2014, protects vendors from arbitrary eviction. In the implementation of this Act, both parties have been playing games.

I have said this before and I'll say it again that the 29 Town Vending Committees (TVCs) that the AAP government has set up are just way too many. The numerous number of TVCs simply ends up absolving the municipal commissioner of all responsibility and he is the one vested with powers under the Street Vendors Act. Across India, there are 2,000 TVCs so far.

So the municipal commissioner can turn around and say that they have nothing to do with vendors and evictions. Talking to 29 TVCs is a humongous task and then, how do you follow up? That is the first problem.

Who is heading the TVCs?
They are headed by deputy commissioners. The problem is the vision of the deputy commissioner is very different from that of the municipal commissioner. One deputy commissioner is responsible for more than one TVC. Delhi has 12 of them.

The Delhi government is supposed to set up grievance redressal committees. But they haven't done so. They have written to the High Court asking for 15 judges. They needed to set up five grievance committees, three for the municipal corporations, one for the New Delhi Municipal Corporation and one for the Delhi Cantonment Board. They just needed five names. Why ask for 15 judges and then select from them? That will never be acceptable to the judiciary. These are foolish steps that cannot be implemented on the ground.

The third issue is that they are launching a survey of street vendors in Delhi. But the responsibility of doing this survey has been given to an external agency which is a database company. Now database companies know nothing about street vendors. They won't be able to do the survey with accuracy which, in turn, means that whatever processes exist will be diluted further and cause delays which will lead to controversies and we will end up going nowhere.

SHREY GUPTA

Arbind Singh:'Neither the municipal corporations nor the state government understand the law'

> **'Street vendors come under the category of unorganised sector workers. They are the only ones who attract customers.'**

Aren't TVCs supposed to do the survey? Is NASVI represented in the TVCs?
Yes, TVCs can do the survey. They won't let NASVI be part of the TVCs but there are vendors who are part of the committees. We have a presence in only the Karol Bagh TVC. We knew they wouldn't want us in the TVCs and so we didn't push for it either.

If the TVCs can do the survey, why is an external agency being hired?
That is what is baffling us. We wrote to Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal saying that instead of giving the task of surveying vendors to us or to them, give it to an independent institution, like the School of Planning and Architecture. They can carry out the survey quickly and they understand issues facing vendors.

Is your grievance against the Delhi government or the municipal corporations?
It is against both. Primarily, the municipal corporations are responsible for us. On the other hand, when the law was being drafted it was made clear that the state government too has a role. If they have no role, the law will never be implemented. The state government is not doing anything in this case. The municipal corporations do nothing for street vendors. In fact, they harass street vendors and those incidents are increasing.

The municipal corporations have evicted vendors from market after market. Look at Karol Bagh. It is such an old market. They have evicted vendors working there for years and from Naha Patti, a market near the Jama Masjid. The inaction of the Delhi government has encouraged the municipal corporations to do whatever they want.

What do you attribute this lack of action to?
Understanding. The two don't understand the issue. Look, as a street vendor, I don't understand your administrative structure. I just want to do my work. It is my right as per the Constitution, and the Street Vendors Act also empowers me to carry on my livelihood.

Street vendors come under the category of unorganised sector workers. They are the only ones who attract customers. Waste pickers, taxi drivers and even auto rickshaw drivers are slowly finding themselves jobless. But here is a category of people who still bring in money.

In Karol Bagh, they removed a lot of vendors. Is there a dedicated space where vendors can still be accommodated?
Yes, of course, why not? It is just a matter of looking at the area.

Was NASVI consulted?
Not at all. In fact, during court proceedings, lawyers representing the municipal corporations or the Delhi government will often say that TVCs are present in that locality and they keep meeting so this matter (of street vendors being harassed and evicted) should be referred to them. If you go to the TVC, there are no meetings and they don't take

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Marina becomes a Goan fishing village's nightmare

Ashwini Kamat
Panjim

AS the clock strikes 3 am, 61-year-old Mahadev Kunkolkar begins his short walk from the village of Nauxim towards the bay of the Zuari river. On a fine day when the tide runs high, Kunkolkar doesn't have to venture too far for a good catch. Otherwise, he has to set out earlier and even sleep on his small fishing canoe at the mouth of the river to ensure his family of six doesn't starve.

Nauxim is a quintessential Goan fishing village with 50 to 60 tiny houses lined beside a 3.5-metre road overlooking the bay of the Zuari, Goa's largest river. The village is home to a small population of Gowdas, a Scheduled Tribe, whose traditional occupations have been fishing and farming for as long as they can remember.

It is in the waters adjoining this tiny village that the ₹350-crore AHOY Marina project has been proposed. If it materialises, Nauxim marina will become India's second marina after Kochi.

Kargwal Constructions acquired a stretch of 100,000 square metres (10 ha) of waterfront adjoining Nauxim on 12 October 2010 from Mormugao Port Trust (MPT) on a 30-year lease, which includes a construction period of two years. A decade earlier, MPT had invited bids for leasing its waterfront for developing two green marinas. These are primarily parking facilities for pleasure boats, yachts and small vessels. For nine years, various policy-related causes have kept these projects from materialising.

Upon completion, AHOY Marina will boast 239 berths for docking 15- to 20- foot boats, yachts and two large boats. The proposed project includes breakwaters and a jetty for small craft and for facilities such as crew accommodation, restaurant, clubhouse, training pool, service/repairs centre, fuelling yard, state-of-the-art water and solid waste treatment facilities, an electrical grid and a rainwater harvesting system.

The villagers learnt about the proposal only in September 2019 and, led by activist Rama Kankonkar, came together under the banner of "Goans Against Marina" to voice their concerns about the project which they believe could cost them their livelihood.

According to the Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) report submitted by Annamalai University's Centre for Environment, Health and Safety, 100,000 square metres of the basin and approach channel along the high tide line will have to be dredged by the Dredging Corporation of India to a depth varying between 3.2 metres and 3.5 metres for safe entry and docking of vessels in the marina. A total of 30,000 cubic metres of dredged material will then be used to reclaim 50,000 square metres (5 ha) on the land side and for constructing the breakwaters.

The director of AHOY Marina, Captain Arun Dua, says that the support of locals is crucial to the success of the marina. "A marina requires local expertise which is abundantly available in Nauxim. The people living there know the topography, the tidal waves and the weather, and live so close by. We will not only employ 150-300 local fishermen but also ensure economic growth of the entire village," he says.

According to Dua, Goa is ideally suited to host a marina because it is at the heart of the traditional maritime route for sailing. Goa has all the facilities required for a tourism-based project and a marina would attract a better quality of foreign tourist that will, in turn, benefit Goa's tourism industry.

At present, around 110 speed and pleasure boats are registered in Goa, including a high number belonging to local sports enthusiasts. This number is growing at 9.8 percent per annum but Goa has no parking and docking facilities for these vessels. Traffic volume projections at the proposed Nauxim marina place the total number of vessels at 151 (55 foreign and 96 Indian) in 2019. This is expected to touch 186 (59 foreign and 127 Indian) in 2022 and 308 (69 foreign and 239 Indian) by 2030.

Dua explains that the beach is at present eroding due to parking of fishing canoes on the narrow shoreline and that the proposed marina would provide pollution-free, all-weather parking and maintenance facilities for these canoes.


The Nauxim shore at low tide.


Mahadev Kunkolkar


Rama Kankonkar

"We want Nauxim's fishing community to access advanced technology. If their talents lie elsewhere, they will receive financial support to explore that too," he declares.


Milind Palkar


Sanjeev Joglekar

The Zuari bay boasts of over 50 species of fish including prawns, tonguefish, sardines, mackerels, mussel and oysters. These waters have been the traditional fishing ground for over 3,000 fishermen from the five villages of Nauxim, Odxel, Siridao, Bambolim and Cacra. At low tide, the entire community descends upon the shore to harvest shellfish from the riverbed by hand. The fish is then sold at nearby local markets.

The AHOY Marina director explains that it will be in the interest of business to ensure sustainability, clean waters and compliance with every environmental law and regulation.

While the jetty will be a concrete construction, the walkways will be floating structures. Protected by the breakwaters, these walkways will eventually become home to marine mosses and growth that form the diet of small fish. The breakwaters will also provide a tranquil breeding ground for fish of all sizes and species. While the fishermen will not be able to fish within the marina, they will be guaranteed a large catch throughout the year around the breakwaters, says Dua.

Another common concern voiced in Nauxim is the negative impact of the marina on its social fabric. Dua counters this by pointing out that a marina attracts high-spending nautical tourists who would bring business to Nauxim and also the rest of Goa, when they set out to explore the land.

Since September 2019, the agitators have organised public rallies, convened several meetings amongst themselves and with Chief Minister Pramod Sawant to discuss their fears.

Asked if they have received sufficient assistance from MLAs of St Andre and St Cruz constituencies of which these villages form a part, 60-year-old fisherman Milind Palkar laughs. He says, "The single road in our village was tarred 15 years ago. We don't have primary healthcare facilities, let alone a cold storage facility required for storing freshly caught fish. Rotting fish that can be converted into fertiliser goes waste. By now, we have learnt not to expect anything from politicians."

The distrust of the villagers appears to stem primarily from the non-percolation of government benefits to local people. The suspicion also exists because none of the larger hotel properties prospering in this region employs locals while tapping liberally into their scarce natural resources.

In an attempt to bring on record the valid objections to this project, the Goa State Pollution Control Board (GSPCB) scheduled a public hearing on November 2 in keeping with MoEF directions.

Sanjeev Joglekar, an environmental engineer and member-secretary of GSPCB, states, "GSPCB has to organise the public hearing, compile all the valid objections raised by locals and concerned persons, and report it to the MoEF along with the final EIA report and clarifications from the investors. Based on our submission, the expert appraisal committee of MoEF will either grant or reject the project." In that sense, the project still remains at a nascent stage.

However, Goans Against Marina immediately announced its refusal to attend the hearing. Of the three reasons cited, the first was that all the baseline studies were "invalid" as they began before May 2016, when the MoEF's Terms of Reference (ToR) came into effect. Second, the delay in approval of the newly drafted state Coastal Zone Management Plan (CZMP) was viewed as a ploy. "In the fresh CZMP, Zuari bay is laid down as a breeding zone. How can they approve a mega-project at the fag end of the old plan's tenure by delaying the finalisation of the new CZMP?" Kankonkar questions. Last, the issue of national security was cited in reference to the five-km radius map of the proposed marina.

The public hearing has been delayed indefinitely owing to the unavailability of the district magistrate, who was busy countering the threat posed by a naphtha-laden vessel stranded 800 metres away at Dona Paula, just below Raj Bhavan.

A mountain of such delays has resulted in the loss of nine years for Kargwal Constructions as well as rent paid at the rate of ₹48.50 per 10 sq m per month with an escalation of two percent and pension levy each year since 2011. The rent amount paid at the end of the 30-year lease will be ₹25.39 crore, an average of ₹84.64 lakh per annum.

The fate of both parties, the investors in the proposed AHOY Marina at Nauxim and the local fishing community, will now depend heavily on how the authorities involved mediate between the two, who continue to be at loggerheads. ■

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into account the High Court order (which safeguards vendor rights).

And the TVCs are weak?
Yes, because they are not being given authority. Look at it this way. No decision can be taken by the deputy commissioner unless it is approved by the municipal commissioner. And the municipal commissioner has been absolved of his/her responsibility.

Is there a reason for absolving them of this responsibility?
It is a romantic notion of giving power to the people. More committees mean more people but it doesn't work that way. I spoke to the adviser to the Chief Minister who works on urban planning and affairs. The municipal commissioner has authority. The idea of putting this entity in charge of the TVCs was to ensure the concerns of the vendors are heard. The municipal commissioners would be made aware of the issues vendors are facing and the vendors would be able to approach them. That was the idea.

In fact, initially, the Delhi government was thinking of having as many as 72 TVCs. Thanks to our opposition, they brought it down to 29, but even 29 is of no help.

How many TVCs should Delhi have?
Around four or five: three TVCs of the three municipal corporations, one TVC for the NDMC and one for the Delhi Cantonment Board.

How many vendors does Delhi have?
I would say about 100,000 to 125,000 according to our estimates.

And nobody has been registered?
In the past 20 years, they have not issued a single *tehbazaari* (licence to sell goods on the pavement). In fact, most Metro stations have been built on erstwhile vendor markets. They have just been evicting vendors systematically.

What would you like the municipal corporations and the Delhi government to do straightaway?
First of all, the harassment and eviction of vendors should stop. Second, until due process — the survey of vendors and proper functioning of TVCs — is completed vendors, beginning with those at the Jama Masjid and Karol Bagh markets, should be reinstated. There are already clear-cut court orders for Jama Masjid. As for Karol Bagh, UTTIPEC (Unified Traffic and Transportation Infrastructure (Planning and Enginering) Centre) guidelines already exist. ■

Samita's World *by SAMITA RATHOR*

Kids get to grow and sell veggies in Kerala schools

Shree Padre
Thodupuzha

ONE day in the week, children in Thodupuzha *taluk* in Idukki district of Kerala carry two bags to school. One, of course, contains their books. The other has freshly harvested vegetables from their homestead gardens. If you peep inside, you will be surprised.

Apart from familiar vegetables there are some unusual ones. You can see colocasia leaves, clove beans, bird's eye chillies, moringa leaves, banana stems, banana flowers, a leafy vegetable called *taludama,* tamarind leaves and more.

The produce is picked up and sold by the Kerala Agriculture Development Society (KADS), popular here for its efforts to empower farmers.

Each student's produce is marked, weighed and a price mentioned. A list is drawn up and handed over to the headmaster along with money for the produce collected. The headmaster doesn't distribute the cash to students but ensures it is credited to their bank accounts.

KADS sells the produce at a special counter on its premises. Needless to say, the fresh, organic, local vegetables supplied by schoolchildren vanish in a jiffy. Customers wait to buy and even pay a little above the market rate for some items.

The children are part of an unusual programme called Pachchakudukka which KADS launched last year in three schools on a pilot basis. *Pachcha* in Malayalam means green and *kudukka* is a terracotta piggy bank children used in the past. The programme proved very popular, despite Kerala's devastating floods.

Twenty schools within a radius of 20 km from Thodupuzha are now taking part in it. Students from around 1,000 homes bring vegetables from their homestead farms to their schools for sale at KAD's premises.

Pachchakudukka is the brainchild of Antony Kandirikkal, 58, president of KADS which has been headquartered in Thodupuzha for 18 years. Students can bring any home-grown vegetables or fruits even in very small quantities.

"Around 20 veggies that come to our Pachchakudukka counter for sale aren't available in markets elsewhere. I think even professors at Kerala Agriculture University might not be aware of them. Our programme will rekindle interest among the younger generation in our ancient culture of homestead farming," says Kandirikkal.

"In fact, homestead farming is a hidden economy. Once the programme gains momentum, we will be able to collect ₹2 lakh worth of vegetables from each school. That means ₹40 lakh from 20 schools. Just imagine what the output of 2,000 schools would be."

In Kerala, vegetable production is at its lowest during the monsoon. Despite this, students who participated earned over ₹2.75 lakh till end-October. Of course, KADS' main agenda is educative.

"This experiment can spark an interest in farming among schoolchildren, inspire them to grow their own vegetables and create awareness of the importance of safe, nutritious, locally grown foods. And we are providing a ready market," says K.M. Mathew, coordinator of the Pachchakudukka programme.

KADS goes to four schools a day and collects vegetables all five days of the week from different schools. Currently, 50 students from each school are chosen to take part in the programme. Mathew believes that the attitudes of schoolchildren towards agriculture will change over time. They will not see farming as a loser's profession.

"A big change has started," he says.

BANKING ON VEGETABLES: Last year, office-bearers of KADS were discussing strategies to increase the supply of safe and local veggies to their two stalls. Kandirikkal and Mathew visited the schools three times, to seek their participation, brief them, get a coordinator appointed, create awareness among students and then inaugurate the programme.

Although 50 students have been chosen, teachers don't turn down vegetables brought by other students. Each school has appointed a teacher coordinator who keeps in touch with the students, inspires them to stay involved and addresses their problems, if any.

KADS fixes prices for the veggies based on that day's market price. It pays a little extra also. Children bring eggs from ducks and hens. If local shops are buying an egg for ₹5.50, KADS pays the students ₹6. The final rate list is posted on the notice board. The amount deposited in the student's bank account can be drawn only at the end of the school year. The idea is to make students realise how 'small drops make an ocean'. Also, if the money is available in a lump sum, children can use it to pay for school uniforms or books.

Two products that children bring in large quantities are curry leaf and moringa leaf. Kerala's curry leaf supply comes from neighbouring Tamil Nadu. It is invariably drenched in pesticides. People are aware of this so local curry leaves are snapped up. Initially, KADS didn't know what to do with its copious amounts of moringa leaves. Now they have realised that moringa leaves can be sold for as much as ₹400 per kg if they are dried and crushed.

Two months ago, KADS opened a small Pachchakudukka counter in their marketing area. Five students from St Thomas High School, Thudanganad, the topper in vegetable supply, were invited. They were honoured on the inaugural day. Within two hours all the vegetables sold out. "Customers now time their visits. They come in the afternoon when produce from the schools arrives at the counter. Most veggies get sold on the same day. We transact around ₹5,000 to ₹6,000 worth of business every day," says a KADS staff member.

KADS had planned to send unsold vegetables to their Ernakulam branch. But they say they don't have any leftover stock. Demand exceeds supply.

St Thomas High School has been consistently coming first in supply of vegetables. Since the start of the programme the school has supplied vegetables worth ₹120,000. Next are St John's High School, Kurumannu, Sacred Heart G.S.S., Mudalakodam, and St George High School, Udumbannoor.

Maria Thomas, a Class 9 student of St Thomas, topped in vegetable supply. Every week, she would bring vegetables worth not less than ₹1,000. Last year she earned ₹28,000. "My parents gave me a separate plot two or three years ago to cultivate vegetables. I have been growing cowpea, chillies, brinjal, cabbage and carrots. My interest doubled when I took part in the Pachchakudukka programme," she says.

Maria is keen to specialise in a farm-related subject. "I am interested in studying emerging areas in farming like aquaponics and hydroponics," she says.

"Internal bonds within the family strengthen when children assist their parents in vegetable farming activities in the morning," explains Sijo Mon Joseph, teacher-coordinator of the Pachchakudukka programme at St Thomas. "They begin to understand the importance of growing food and of saving. They also develop a healthy respect for farming."

Shany John, headmistress of St Thomas, is excited about the programme. "Youth look down on farming. They prefer to migrate to the city. The most positive aspect of Pachchakudukka is that it has the potential to erase such false notions. In future, these students can make a decent living as farmers if they have land, without seeking external help. My sincere hope is that this programme is extended to the entire state."

"Students who don't know anything about farming are becoming interested in growing vegetables. They can now identify banana stem, elephant foot yam, various tubers and distinguish between banana varieties. Isn't this a big change in mindset?" asks Rajesh Thomas, the driver-cum-salesman of Pachchakudukka.

A SCHOOL BANK: As part of the Pachchakudukka programme, St George High School in Kallanickal is all set to start a 'school bank' to train children in the process of banking. The school bank keeps an account of the weekly income of students from their vegetable sales and then deposits the money into their bank accounts.

"The bank will have a staff of two — the 'maker' or manager and the 'checker' or accountant," says Philip Kutty, the coordinator. "Every month they will be swapped to ensure the maximum number of students understand banking practices."

KADS had planned to set up a 'bala chanda' or a children's market on the first day of Chingam month (August-September) which is celebrated in Kerala as farmers' day. On that day, it was decided children would carry out the entire gamut of business activities — price fixing, marketing, interaction with customers, sales and account keeping. Unfortunately, the plan fell through.

KADS plans to extend the Pachchakudukka programme to Ernakulam where they have a branch. Since Ernakulam is a city, they realise they will have to change their strategies. "We might have to teach children how to cultivate vegetables in grow bags on terraces. The quantity of vegetables we procure is not that important. Our objective is to ensure schoolchildren understand the importance of growing safe vegetables and the monetary returns and confidence they get by growing their own vegetables," says Kandirikkal.

"We need to invest ₹6 lakh for a vehicle and a driver. To make a profit we have to procure ₹10,000 worth of vegetables every day. It's okay if we lose some money. Our objective is to make vegetable farming a subject of discussion in the city."

As the monsoon has receded the time is ripe to start planting vegetables in a big way. KADS has many programmes up its sleeve. It plans to encourage growing of leafy vegetables. There are many such vegetables that are grown on homesteads. KADS intends to introduce these vegetables to schoolchildren and hold demonstration sessions to show how they can be cooked. They plan to partner Sajeevan Kavungara, a non-profit well-versed in growing local leafy vegetables.

"Pachchakudukka has received the highest community acceptance among all KADS programmes in the past two decades," says Kandirikkal proudly. "Children in farmers' homes grow up hearing their parents say every day that farming is a losing profession. We have to turn this notion on its head." ■

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PICTURES BY SHREE PADRE

A student with a bunch of a rare wild fruit

The Pachchakudukka counter at KADS which sells farm produce brought by schoolchildren

Twenty schools are now taking part in the Pachchakudukka project. Students bring vegetables from homesteads to their schools for sale at KAD's premises.

A schoolgirl proudly holds up a pomello she is contributing from her homestead garden

Find your dog partner

Sidika Sehgal
New Delhi

AT the Friendicoes shelter in Defence Colony, one abandoned dog shows up every day. That's 30 dogs a month. On average, five dogs get adopted every month. "We still have a surplus of 25 dogs," says Tandrali Kuli who heads the adoption programme at Friendicoes.

The number of abandoned dogs has gone up sharply in the past few years. When Kuli started volunteering in 2003, one or two dogs would turn up in a month.

"We have 150 dogs ready to be rehomed. Another 150 dogs can be adopted by homes who are ready to go the extra mile to train their dog, socialise their dog and so on."

Sick dogs stay in the shelter for treatment. The rest go to adoption centres. Healthy dogs, waiting to join the adoption programme, stay at the Friendicoes sanctuary in Gurugram.

People mostly want a small dog, a puppy or up to six months old, and cute-looking. But dogs do not come readymade like that, says Kuli. It is the *desi* dogs and the older dogs who have a hard time finding homes.

At the adoption centre in Chittaranjan Park, there is a four-year-old *desi* dog who is blind. Tuffy, a cocker spaniel, is 10 years old. Sam is a young golden retriever with a chronic skin infection. The centre has a mix of dogs, young and old, small and big, *desi* and pedigreed.

The adoption programme is thorough. The process involves long questionnaires, house checks, pre-adoption counselling and a detailed adoption contract. Just three passionate women, Tandrali Kuli, Pia Sharma and Shreya Agnihotri, oversee it.

Friendicoes has three adoption centres — one in Chittaranjan Park and two in Noida. Each adoption centre cannot house more than 12 to 15 dogs. All are sterilised.

"The adoption programme has become more streamlined. We've learnt from our mistakes over time," Kuli recalls. It could take years for a dog to find a home and sometimes just a few weeks.

Chances of a healthy pedigreed dog finding a home are almost 100 percent. But if a dog has an illness, it is first treated in the Defence Colony hospital and then sent to the adoption centre.

"You cannot give away a dog without understanding its temperament. You may fail but you must try," says Kuli. A dog is observed for at least two to three weeks before it is put up for adoption. Kuli has 11 dogs of her own and knows a thing or two about temperaments. Her own Rottweiler is a friendly dog but he can't stand the heat and if he's out too long, he becomes irritable and snappy.

"What is most important is the right match," says Kuli. "If there are old people in the home, a young and hyper Labrador is not the best fit. A joint family is not suitable for an anti-social dog. Someone who works eight to 10 hours a day cannot look after a German Shepherd who needs plenty of exercise."

Interested families or individuals have to fill out a questionnaire and answer questions about what kind of dog they want. If there is a suitable dog, Sharma conducts a home visit to meet the entire family and ensure that everyone is on board. Many times, the house visit is unsuccessful. If the family already owns a dog, the house visit is also an opportunity to observe how well that dog is looked after.

In some cases, the size of the house also matters.

PICTURES BY SHREY GUPTA

Tandrali Kuli (right) pats a homeless dachshund at the Friendicoes shelter

A Saint Bernard cannot live in a two-bedroom house. It needs more space. "Of course commitment is important, but you have to be practical about what you're taking on," says Kuli.

Kuli and Sharma counsel families before and after adoption. They discuss what the dog will eat, how much exercise the dog might need, who will be their vet and how they can condition the dog to be alone. If families who have adopted dogs from them are moving cities or countries, they also help them find the right travel options for their dogs.

At the Friendicoes shelter, the dogs are fed bread and milk in the morning, and chicken and rice in the evening. They look for families which can feed their dogs a nutritious diet.

Older dogs with medical problems and behaviour issues have few takers. But some people are truly dedicated. A moody and unpredictable pitbull at Friendicoes was put into a training facility. The family that adopted him would go there once a week to be present for his training before they finally took him home.

Very rarely do adoptions fail, probably one or two out of a hundred. A young *desi* was adopted by three girls who were living together. They struggled with training the dog to be alone. Unable to look after her, they gave her back. The dog has now been adopted by a loving family. "My aim is to not just rehome the dog, but to successfully rehome the dog. There is a difference," says Kuli.

About seven years ago, two *desi* pups, a brother and sister, were left outside Kuli's home. The male found a home easily, but the female, Melody, was shy and introverted. "People take the dog who comes to them wagging their tail. The shy, scared dogs don't seem to connect with anyone." Melody was adopted, but she was back at Friendicoes after a failed adoption. She was three and a half years old then.

She was special to Kuli, who kept pushing for her adoption on social media and at adoption camps. At an adoption camp at Puppychino, a dog-friendly café in Shahpur Jat, a girl asked Kuli which of the dogs had the least chance of finding a home. After spending some time with Melody, she adopted her. Melody was seven years old at that time.

Melody is a different dog now. She plays with other dogs, splashes in the mud and refuses to come back home from her walk. "Hers was an adoption we never thought would happen," says Kuli.

Over the years, Kuli has made many friends. Some people are really special, she says. Two Saint Bernards were found on the highway in Karnal, partially paralysed and unable to walk. A young girl whose family has a farmhouse took them in. She has also made a swimming pool for them because water therapy will help the dogs.

Social media has been an important tool for Friendicoes to propagate adoption. On Instagram, they post regularly about dogs waiting to be adopted. "We make sure that we are completely transparent with people," says Agnihotri. If the dog isn't friendly with other dogs, or if it isn't child-friendly, it's all there.

Friendicoes has also collaborated with Heads Up for Tails, a pet store chain. A 'meet and greet' is held at their Khan Market store on Tuesdays and at their Chattarpur store on Saturdays. Many dogs have gotten adopted from there.

In 2015, when Friendicoes was in a huge financial crisis, they ran a crowd funding campaign and raised ₹40 lakh in less than 48 hours through just Indian donors. The campaign was extended and within a month, ₹1.1 crore was raised.

The money got them through their crisis, but it is still a very hand-to-mouth existence. At eight centres, nearly 1,500 animals are under their care. Ideally, they should have a staff of 700 to 800, but they only have 180 people. "Our expenses are skyrocketing," says Kuli. The annual running cost is about ₹20 crore.

Still, they carry on with great enthusiasm. In a small room in their Defence Colony office, Pahua, a nine-year-old dachshund, has joined the conversation. Side by side, medical files of each and every dog are being meticulously organised.

Their hard work pays off. This year, Olive, a young *desi,* got adopted by an Indian couple based in Toronto. It cost them to fly her overseas but they were so keen to have her that they happily bore the expense. ■

COVER

Watching films in the clouds

Dharamshala rallies to keep its festival going

Saibal Chatterjee
Dharamshala

IN the run-up to its eighth edition, the Dharamshala International Film Festival (DIFF) ran into a roadblock. The expected funds weren't forthcoming: not unusual for an independent cinema showcase that is uncompromising in its vision, pretty much like the films it celebrates. The response that the prospect of cancellation prompted was, however, anything but usual.

DIFF 2019 nearly did not happen. In September, with sources of funding drying up, festival directors Ritu Sarin and Tenzing Sonam, a filmmaking couple who envisaged the annual event as a gift of gratitude to the people of the hill town they have lived in for over two decades, felt they had reached the end of the road and that it would be impossible to pull off their labour of love one more time.

Two months on, DIFF 2019 was rolled out without a hitch thanks to the unstinted support and encouragement that the duo and a team of dedicated festival volunteers received from their long-time well-wishers — individuals and organisations based in Dharamshala and the rest of the country. Solidarity of like-minded people played a key role in pulling the film festival from the brink.

With its complement of acclaimed narrative features, documentaries and short films, DIFF 2019 offered a wide palette of cinematic riches over four days of screenings. The programme, in keeping with the core spirit of the festival, was dominated by deeply personal non-fiction films and path-breaking reality-inspired tales from globally feted directors.

Filmmakers whose latest works were screened in Dharamshala this year ranged from Portugal's celebrated Pedro Costa (*Vitalina Varela*) to first-timers like Palestine's Bassam Jarbawi (*Screwdriver*) and Peru's Melina León (*Song Without a Name*). Among other feature-length dramas in the DIFF 2019 line-up were the Macedonian film *God Exists, Her Name is Petrunya*, a feminist religious satire helmed by Teona Strugar Mitevska, and Iranian director Ali Jaberansari's sophomore effort, *Tehran: City of Love*.

French New Wave pioneer Agnes Varda's final film, *Varda by Agnes*, a documentary offering insights into her formidable oeuvre through excerpts from her films, was one of the highlights of the festival. Varda passed away in March 2019 at the age of 90 soon after completing this introspective cinematic essay.

DIFF also laid out a wonderful spread of documentaries — from the devastating *For Sama,* a Syrian filmmaker's letter to her daughter born amid the battle of Aleppo to Kazuhiro Soda's *Inland Sea*, an elegiac black and white exploration of a declining Japanese village located near the Seto Island Sea.

CINEMA UNPLUGGED: Adil Hussain, an actor who has worked in Hindi commercial productions as well as low-budget independent films in many Indian languages besides high-profile international movies, says: "DIFF is India's best film festival for the simple reason that its emphasis is not on the stars but on cinema. Had it focused on individuals rather than on the films that it programmes, its purpose would have been defeated." Supporters of DIFF have never had reason for worry on that count.

Visitors to the festival enjoy a break in the sun

Monks strike a pose at the festival

Kesang Thakur, a DIFF fellow


Kislay, director of Aise Hee

In the catalogue of the inaugural edition of DIFF in 2012, the festival directors had written: "Among the many reasons that impelled us to finally try and make this dream (of staging a film festival in Dharamshala) a reality, two stand out: we wanted to give something back to the place we had made our home; and we wanted to create a truly international event that all communities that live in Dharamshala could participate in and be proud of." This year's edition left nobody in any doubt that this is an event worth fighting for.

Funds certainly weren't aplenty, but the unwavering commitment that had propelled DIFF's previous seven editions were on full display. The budgetary cutbacks that were visible in certain areas of the festival did not take the sheen off the quality of the cinema that was on view from November 7 to 10. Some of the films were, as always, handpicked by Sarin and Sonam. Others came (a first for DIFF) via submissions made on FilmFreeway. Both selections reflected a level of critical discernment that lends the festival its unique character.

DIFF returned, after a three-year hiatus, to the Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts (TIPA), where it had all begun in 2012. The main auditorium, now a sturdy structure with full-fledged film projection facilities, was a completely transformed space. The grounds of TIPA also had a portable movie theatre courtesy Picture Time, a company that puts up mobile digital screens at short notice. A smaller auditorium on the premises screened DIFF's programme of short and children's films and received a heartening response from the audience.

Nowhere were the footfalls more apparent than in the acting masterclass conducted by Adil Hussain. It was a Sunday. The interaction was set to take place in TIPA's smallest auditorium. But so overwhelming was the demand for seats that the masterclass had to be shifted to the spacious terrace. It was a 'sold out' show.

This was the second such DIFF event in three years featuring Hussain. In 2017, the actor was in Dharamshala with two of his films — debutant Shubhashish Bhutiani's *Mukti Bhawan* and Iram Haq's Norwegian drama *What Will People Say.* There is something about DIFF that enthuses anyone who makes the trip to the capital of the Tibetan diaspora to keep coming back for more.

Hussain attended DIFF in 2014 as well. That was the year of Partho Sen-Gupta's *Sunrise*, an Indo-French co-production that had the actor in the role of a father grieving the abduction of his daughter and looking for her many years later. Has he seen any changes in DIFF? "It has improved," he replies. "It is better organised now."

PICTURES BY SHREY GUPTA

Ritu Sarin and Tenzing Sonam mingle with attendees

The film festival was dominated by deeply personal non-fiction films and path-breaking reality-inspired tales from globally feted directors.

The DIFF organisers weren't the only ones happy with the way things turned out this year. "People stepped up and offered to help to keep DIFF running," said Sarin who, with Sonam, has been travelling around the world with their second narrative feature, *The Sweet Requiem,* since its world premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival in September 2018. "This year, the public participation in the festival has been greater than in the past."

At the end of DIFF 2019, this is what Sarin had to say in a Facebook post: "This was a memorable edition. We had record audiences who packed all three venues, engaged in thoughtful Q&As with the directors and generally had a great time…" Talk of thriving when the chips appear to be down.

Until last year, a part of DIFF's funding came from the Himachal Pradesh government departments of tourism, and language, arts and culture. This year was different. "It was a crunch situation and we had no option but to take a call on whether we could continue with the festival," said Sarin. Once the show began — Prateek Vats' *Eeb Allay Ooo!* was the opening film of DIFF 2019 — the creases were gone for good.

On the first two days, the weather was fickle and a lot of rain was dumped on Dharamshala. On November 9, the festival woke up to a gloriously sunny day. The final day was no different. It was as if the weather gods were in complete sync with the mood on the ground as DIFF unspooled its slate of memorable films.

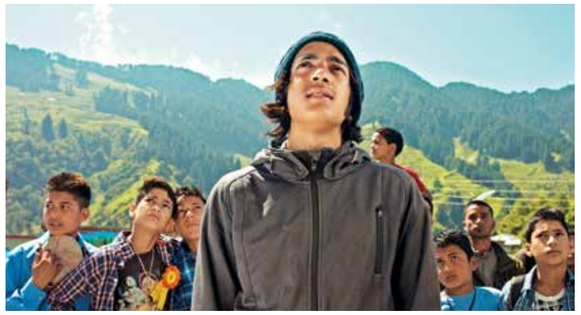
Asked which of the films in his selection he particularly liked, Sonam said: "My favourites are *Tehran: City of Love,* a triptych of stories of the sort of characters we rarely see in Iranian cinema, and (Portuguese director) Pedro Costa's masterly *Vitalina Varela*."

OPENING FILM: *Eeb Allay Ooo!*, which arrived in Dharamshala after its world premiere in the Pingyao International Film Festival and a subsequent screening in the Jio MAMI Mumbai Film Festival, transported the audience to New Delhi's Raisina Hill and its surrounding VIP zone where a migrant, Anjani (Shardul Bhardwaj), is hired on contract by the government to rid the offices and homes of the high and mighty of marauding macaques.

The young man, a replacement for langurs whose employment for the purpose of scaring away monkeys has been stymied by animal rights concerns, is required to mimic the aggressive simian breed. Inevitably, his personal dignity is quickly compromised and degradation sets in. The biting satire at the heart of *Eeb Allay Ooo!*, which is at once deadpan and acerbic, emerges from a free blend of fiction and truthful cinema.

DIFF's opening films over the past years — Hansal Mehta's *Shahid* (2012),

COVER



Khanaur is about a carpenter's son who wants to step out into the wider world

A migrant gets a government job in Delhi to chase away monkeys in Eeb Allay Ooo!

Aise Hee is about a widow who decides to live for herself, finally

A still from Vitalina Varela, a film directed by celebrated Portugese director Pedro Costa

Ritesh Batra's *The Lunchbox* (2013), Rajat Kapoor's *Aankhon Dekhi* (2014), Kanu Behl's *Titli* (2015), Raam Reddy's *Thithi* (2016), Shubhashish Bhutiani's *Mukti Bhawan* (2017) and Dar Gai's *Namdev Bhau: In Search of Silence* (2018) — tell a story in themselves. They, and all the other films that have played here, vindicate the festival's steadfast commitment not only to showcasing high quality independent cinema but also to promoting up-and-coming filmmaking talent around the country and the world.

Let us cast our minds back to what the two festival directors had written in DIFF's first catalogue in 2012: "The digital revolution that is shaking the traditional cinema industry has also sparked an explosion in independent filmmaking… These films have to be shown somewhere — and all filmmakers, at heart, dream of their work being projected onto large screens before captive audiences."

"In India, which has never had a distinct art-house culture, it is rare for independent films to appear in commercial movie halls. Thus, film festivals are the only viable options… Yes, film festivals like DIFF will not only live on but even multiply. Sparked by the bold vision of new filmmakers, they will increasingly become oases of communal sharing and an open exchange of ideas. That, at least, is our hope!"

Hope still lingers. Confidence has taken a bit of a beating. But Sarin and Sonam are filmmakers who know how difficult the game is for those who operate outside the pale of the commercial movie industry. They are also artists and independent cinema activists driven by extraordinary tenacity and a sense of purpose, attributes that stand them in good stead as the driving forces behind DIFF.

Fourteen years separate their first narrative feature, *Dreaming Lhasa* (2005), and their second, *The Sweet Requiem* (2018), but they have kept chipping away not only for themselves, but also for all filmmakers of their ilk toiling away in different parts of India to stay in circulation.

Besides *The Sweet Requiem*, which was in the DIFF 2018 line-up, Sarin and Sonam's feature-length documentary *When Hari Got Married* screened in the first edition of DIFF alongside Umesh Vinayak Kulkarni's Marathi film *Deool,* Ashim Ahluwalia's premiered-in-Cannes title *Miss Lovely,* Dibakar Banerjee's political thriller *Shanghai* and Rajan Khosa's children's film *Gattu*.

SUSTAINED QUALITY: In its first year, DIFF also showcased Korean director Hong Sang-soo's *Hahaha* and Japanese maverick Takashi Miike's *Hara Kiri: Death of a Samurai,* besides acclaimed documentaries such as Wim Wenders' *Pina,* Asif Kapadia's *Senna* and Patricio Guzman's *Nostalgia for the Light*. It was as formidable a kick-off as any that a new festival could have bargained for.

DIFF has sustained itself as a platform for Indian indies: Ritesh Batra's *The Lunchbox,* Chaitanya Tamhane's *Court,* Geetu Mohandas' *Liar's Dice*, Gurvinder Singh's *Chauthi Koot*, Ruchika Oberoi's *Island City,* Neeraj Ghaywan's *Masaan,* Vetri Maaran's *Visaaranai*, Rima Das' *Village Rockstars*, Amit V. Masurkar's *Newton* and Aijaz Khan's *Hamid,* among numerous others.

Consider the documentaries that DIFF has programmed in the past — Anand Patwardhan's *Jai Bhim Comrade*, Joshua Oppenheimer's *The Art of Killing* and *The Look of Silence* and Amit Virmani's *Menstrual Man* — and you know exactly why the festival draws film lovers to the mountains.

Returning to the 2019 fare, first-time director Kislay's drama *Aise Hee* (*Just Like That*), former Bir resident Gurvinder Singh's *Khanaur* (*Bitter Chestnut*) a hybrid of the real and the staged, and American director Jesse Alk's debut documentary feature *Pariah Dog*, a remarkably insightful and entertaining look at a handful of individuals who have devoted their lives to the care of street dogs in the city of Kolkata, were among the talking points.

Well-known actor Adil Hussain's class in acting attracted so many people, it had to be shifted to an open air venue

Filmmakers in Himachal Pradesh, where cinema is still a fledgling entity, have also begun to show signs of being enthused by the exposure that they have gained.

Aise Hee, set in Allahabad, homes in on a recently widowed septuagenarian who defies societal norms by deciding to live for herself for a change. She stops going to the temple, visits a shopping mall to have ice-cream, strolls along the river bank, befriends a beauty parlour girl and seeks the help of a Muslim tailor to teach her embroidery.

Not surprisingly, her 'rebellion' isn't appreciated by the neighbours, who keep reminding the family how respectable her deceased husband was, and the family of her son, a reporter who works on contract for All India Radio. The film unfolds in a city in flux in more ways than one but when it matters it embraces changes that bring out the worst in its people.

Khanaur, too, is about change, but the 'story' plays out in Bir and Barot in Himachal Pradesh, where a 17-year-old café employee caught between the region's traditional occupations — the boy is a carpenter's son who doubles as a cowherd when needed — and the growing desire to venture forth into the wider world. It is a film in which the actors play themselves, including the café owner Monisha Mukundan.

THE HIMACHAL STORY: Significantly, it isn't just filmmakers in the traditional production centres who have benefitted from the amplification that DIFF provides to fresh cinematic voices. Filmmakers in Himachal Pradesh, where cinema is still a fledgling entity, have also begun to show signs of being enthused by the exposure that they have gained since DIFF showcased local director Sanjeev Kumar's *Dile Ch Vasya Koi,* the story of a young man who works in a slate mine high in the mountains, in its first year itself. In 2016, the same filmmaker was back at DIFF with *Mane De Phere* (Circles of the Mind).

The DIFF Fellows programme, launched in 2014 to promote filmmaking talent in the Himalayan regions of India, has already begun to bear fruit. It has yielded at least two filmmakers from Himachal Pradesh who are working on their first feature films — Rahat Mahajan and Siddharth Chauhan.

Mahajan was a DIFF fellow in 2018 and a native of Nurpur, the year the festival selected only filmmakers from Himachal Pradesh for the programme. A former Vishal Bhardwaj assistant, he spearheaded the visual promotions of films like *Kaminey, Ishqiya* and *Udaan* and has several short films to his credit.

Chauhan, who was a DIFF fellow a year earlier and had a short film (*Pashi*) in the festival last year, lives and works in Shimla. The 29-year-old filmmaker is currently shooting his first feature, *Amar Colony,* in his hometown. Two key impulses inform Chauhan's approach: one is to create opportunities for locals and his friends in Shimla; the other is to ensure that his films go beyond the superficial and engage the audience in a way that enriches them.

Manali-based social anthropologist and aspiring filmmaker Kesang Thakur, who was a DIFF fellow last year, is in the midst of making a documentary co-directed by her Italian husband — "he is a trained filmmaker," she says. What is the film about? It is, she says, "about me trying to understand Lahaul Valley".

Saeed Akhtar Mirza

"The first time I came to the festival, I was studying," she says. "The films I watched opened my eyes to the potential of cinema as a vehicle of communication." Thakur's research work is focussed on the lives of people of the trans-Himalayan region and she hopes to use the medium of cinema to document the stories she is in the process of gathering.

Is there anything that she feels that DIFF still lacks? Says Thakur: "I would like greater participation by local people. Many residents of Dharamshala do not know whether they can access this space. That needs to change."

Sarin, on her part, believes that "we need to involve more people and widen the base". Community outreach has been an important DIFF activity. As part of its plan to take cinema around, DIFF holds community screenings in and around Dharamshala, besides inviting local college and school students to be part of the festival. For the 2019 edition, invitations were extended to 250 students from ten local institutions.

CHILDREN'S FILMS: With curator Monica Wahi coming on board, DIFF began to screen children's films in 2015. It increased the festival's outreach among school children, many of whom have been regularly attending DIFF. "The same children have been watching these films for five years," says the Mumbai-based Wahi. "I can, therefore, challenge more than I would at other festivals."

Vinod Kamble's *Kastoori,* the story of a Dalit boy who cleans toilets, buries the unclaimed dead and performs post-mortems to fund his education, is a measure of the extent the children's films curator can go in Dharamshala. The protagonist of *Kastoori* is taunted by his schoolmates for the stench that clings to him, causing him to launch a search for *kastoori* (musk) in the company of a friend (who is a butcher's son) to mask the smell that makes him an object of ridicule.

Kastoori isn't a children's film in the strictest sense of the term. Its selection by Wahi points to the confidence she has in her audience as well as to the need for cinema to raise disturbing questions and bring children face to face with the harsh reality of the caste system. This is precisely what separates DIFF from other film festivals in India: it does not shy away from letting children process difficult themes. ■

Hiring the disabled

Youth4Jobs has a winning model

Civil Society News
New Delhi

EVERYONE is worried about the lack of jobs in the Indian economy. Where will a growing number of young people find employment? How will they be skilled?

But even as experts look for answers, 10 disabled young people, trained and groomed, are being placed in companies every day through an effort that recently won the 2019 MIT Innovative Inclusion Challenge award for Asia.

In the past seven years, Youth4Jobs, founded by former journalist Meera Shenoy, has put 18,500 young people in jobs where they have done well and brought value to the companies.

Better still, these young people all come from rural India where in their villages they were written off as being incapable of productive work. The jobs have not just transformed their lives but led to a rapid rise in family incomes. In many cases, social equations have been rewritten. At a personal level, parents have been able to breathe easy.

So what do Shenoy, a spirited 57, and her team get right with finding employment for the disabled which the rest of the country can't seem to manage to do for perfectly healthy young people who have an education and much more going for them?

Youth4Jobs identifies disabled young people in villages, provides them intense training for two months at residential centres and persuades companies to take them in. Shenoy has built this edifice brick by brick, going from one success to the next.

It is not just employers, but families, too, that need to be persuaded about disabled young people being capable of learning and holding their own. A lot of the time low morale and lack of self-confidence come in the way. A disabled young person in a village languishes at the bottom rung of everything.

Shenoy has been in mission mode since the time she founded Youth4Jobs. "I am passionate about what I am doing and, as the leader, that is the example I want to set for the rest of my team. Together we care deeply for the young people we take in. And the transformation we see in two months is like a miracle before our eyes," she says

After her life as a business journalist, she had helped the Andhra Pradesh government shape and implement a skilling programme for the young and then provided consultancy to the World Bank.

But with Youth4Jobs she wanted to do something completely different. Finding employment for disabled young people in rural areas was the kind of challenge Shenoy felt was worth taking up.

Meera Shenoy:"Unless the business opportunity is clear to an organisation, it will never be an equal opportunity employer"

Shenoy has been in mission mode since the time she founded Youth4Jobs. 'I am passionate about what I am doing and that is the example I want to set.'

"People opt for the urban areas because they want the low-hanging fruit. But I felt the bigger problem was in rural India," Shenoy explains. "The majority of disabled people are in the villages. Also, it takes a lot to get people in rural areas to admit to disabilities. They have little hope of finding employment or their young people being able to live normal lives."

There are, as per census figures, 70 million disabled people in the country. The number could actually be much higher. Of them about 0.5 percent are employed in some way or the other. Young people in villages are the least employable and cut off from opportunities.

Shenoy set out to show that they could be made employable. She also wanted companies to see the opportunity in hiring disabled people in formal jobs. The company needed to see true value in them as employees and not just hire them out of a sense of charity.

Every young man or woman who got a job became an ambassador for the idea. Similarly, beginning with Google, every company where they successfully worked became an example for others to emulate.

"Unless the business opportunity is clear to an organisation, it will never be an equal opportunity employer," says Shenoy.

"The biggest stumbling block is mindset. To create a ripple effect for a change in mindset takes time. The process is slow. But the beautiful thing is the process has begun," she says.

"We call ourselves an organisation which is either helping companies to begin the journey in hiring people with disabilities or strengthening the existing journey," Shenoy says about Youth4Jobs' role.

"Many companies have hired one or two people with disabilities without the processes being in place because they were mandated to. There are companies that have not begun at all, some are sitting on the fence, some have made a beginning and there are those that have taken it up seriously because they see the business advantage."

Traditionally, the IT sector hired people with disabilities. But these have been the bright ones with an education and knowledge of English. But their number was small.

The real hiring and training needed to happen in the rural areas where more than 60 percent of India lives.

Now hiring takes place across sectors — in retail, hotels, coffee shops and small-scale units. Youth4Jobs has a large footprint. It began in the south, but to live up to its goals of reaching the poor and larger numbers it has had to go to states such as Bihar and Odisha. It is present in the northern states and in the northeast as well.

'A disabled young man with a job returning home in his uniform experiences a change in status. Often the landlord's son doesn't have a job, but a disabled boy from a poorer home does.'

After seven years, there is much to show by way of results. Shenoy remembers in the early days people in villages would not believe that youth with disabilities could be trained and employed. It was also not easy to get families to disclose disabilities.

"Parents thought we were fly-by-night operators. Some would come to our training centres to check us out. At first we had no track record. But every young person who got a job was proof of what we were achieving. A disabled young man with a job returning home in his uniform experiences a change in status. Often the landlord's son doesn't have a job, but a disabled boy from a poorer home does," says Shenoy.

Of the 18,500 trained and employed through Youth4Jobs, 30 percent are girls. The number keeps falling because of states like Rajasthan where girls aren't sent out.

Between 60 and 65 percent of the people trained get jobs in the organised sector. About 15 percent, having learned computers and English, want to go in for higher education. And another 15 percent or so insist on trying for government jobs.

After training there are young people who want to relocate to bigger cities. There are also those who are either less aspirational or have severe disabilities and prefer to stay nearer home. For them opportunities are found in local markets in small-scale sector units.

Computer skills are part of training

A class in session

How difficult is it to train the young people who come to Youth4Jobs? Shenoy says more than 30 percent have been from lower castes. Their social status plus the disability means that they are invariably lacking in self-confidence.

The training over two months involves basic literacy, life skills, use of computers, financial literacy and learning how to communicate. Giving them self-confidence is crucial to preparing them for employment. Sometimes the training is customised for the job opportunities that are available.

"We look at what the jobs in the market are and give them orientation for what is available. Sometimes they receive on-the-job training before they are absorbed," says Shenoy.

Youth4Jobs doesn't turn anyone away. But they have been mostly working with young people who have locomotive problems, are speech and hearing impaired and have low vision. There are also those with cerebral palsy and learning disabilities.

The impact of a disabled person finding employment is difficult to assess. Much of it has to do with family. Every parent worries what will happen to a child with disabilities. Employment puts those fears to rest. Invariably, disabled young people tend to be caring about their families, particularly their parents. They also look after their normal younger siblings by paying for their education.

The outcomes are complex as is the process of taking disabled people out of poverty and making them productive and aspirational individuals. ■

Toilet has sensors to stay clean

Rwit Ghosh
Faridabad

PICTURES BY SHREY GUPTA

Mayank Midha at his factory

MOST public toilets stink but not GARV toilets. Small and portable, these loos are equipped with biosensors which sniff out odour and alert the maintenance staff. Micro controllers figure out if the user has flushed. If not, it activates the flush.

GARV was started in 2014 by Mayank Midha and his wife, Megha. At that time, Midha used to work in a company which made transceiver station enclosures for telecom companies on contract. Some of these enclosures were left over once the contract was over. "They looked very similar to portable toilets. I thought, why can't we have public toilets that are portable and can be placed anywhere?" reminisces Midha.

The Swachh Bharat mission was, fortuitously, launched at that time. According to the 2013 Census, 17.4 percent of India's population lives in urban slums and there is a huge unmet demand for clean toilets. The decision to go ahead and start a sanitation company, he says, was a no-brainer.

The couple put in their own money, bootstrapping with a small fund of ₹10 lakh. But breaking into the sanitation industry with a new product wasn't easy. There weren't many people interested in a toilet that looked and acted different. "People like toilets the way they are," explains Midha.

So far, GARV has made and deployed 794 toilets. Their main clients are NGOs and CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) projects. Government agencies are now keen on GARV toilets and the company recently signed an MoU with the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC).

Government schools, too, are clients. A neat row of GARV toilets stand in the premises of a South Delhi municipal corporation school in Tughlakabad extension. "These are a lifesaver. The extra toilets reduce the stress on the two toilets inside the school," said a teacher.

GARV toilets have many pluses. The toilets run on solar power and come installed with bio-digesters. Recently, they have begun installing a decentralised sewage system that converts sewage into charcoal.

Unlike toilets which are made of cement and ceramic, GARV toilets are made of stainless steel. The benefits are two-fold. They can be easily produced in a factory. Second, they need less water to clean and don't require chemical cleaning agents.

GARV can track real-time data through biosensors installed inside toilets. The sensors can figure out if the toilet is damaged or malfunctioning, if a door needs repair or if water is running out.

GARV toilets lined up at a government school in Delhi

The sensors can also monitor usage and therefore, identify behaviour patterns, like the number of people who flush or wash their hands after using the toilet. The data that GARV receives can be passed on to NGOs the company works with to educate communities on proper hygiene and toilet behaviour. In future the company hopes to track the presence of vector-borne diseases through biosensors.

Operational and maintenance costs, as compared to conventional public toilets, are also lower, he says. "On average, an NGO like Samagra (which works on sanitation) would spend between ₹3,000 and ₹4,000 per toilet, per month." Toilets clog frequently and require lengthy and messy repairs which not only exacerbate costs but make the toilet inoperable for the duration of repairs.

Stainless steel, on the other hand, points out Midha, is highly durable. The sanitary pan and the flushing system are integrated into one structure. The toilets have an auto-cleaning system that uses micro controllers. After 10 to 15 people have used the toilet, it cleans itself. A piping system is laid on three sides of the bathroom and the micro controllers are able to detect if the toilets haven't been flushed, thereby activating the flush. There are also biosensors that detect malodour in the toilets.

Since the toilets are modular they can be installed easily. The only requirement is light excavation work. The toilets are small and compact, and require just 12.25 feet of space in width and a height of seven feet. Many of the toilets that GARV has installed are in densely populated areas where space is the main constraint.

"If, for example, in a slum there is space for only one toilet, we can install it," says Midha. "We fit toilets wherever there is a requirement."

The sewage systems of GARV toilets are self-sustaining which is important as demand for their toilets comes from places that are not connected to sewage systems. GARV toilet complexes are equipped with a bio-digester which breaks down all the waste, using bacteria, and discharges treated water which can be used for horticulture or in the toilet itself.

The company initially made their toilets entirely with stainless steel but soon realised that the material was expensive. "A lot of CSR and NGO projects that we were pitching to asked us to bring our costs down," says Midha. So they developed a less expensive toilet by making the exterior of galvanised steel while the interior continues to be of stainless steel.

The most basic model starts at ₹1.7 lakh and comes with a solar panel and bio-digester and can go up to ₹4.25 lakh for toilets that include auto-cleaning and track toilet usage data.

The toilets sold over the past four years have come with a maintenance contract from the technology. The technology needs to be looked at once in a year. The daily maintenenace was done by the customers. The annual maintenance cost works out to nine to 10 percent of the total cost of the toilet facility.

GARV now has tweaked this model and decided to take land on lease for the toilets from the appropriate authority. It will maintain the entire facilitiy including the technology and earn by charging for usage. The user fee will cover the cost of maintaining and operating the toilets. For a month's usage a family of four would spend about ₹250 to 300. ■

Politics of consensus

DELHI DARBAR

SANJAYA BARU

IN his authoritative treatise on the Indian Constitution, *The Indian Constitution: Cornerstone of a Nation,* Granville Austin made the interesting point that the entire process of the drafting of the Constitution was marked by two features distinctive to an Indian style of politics — consensus and accommodation. Austin clarified that 'accommodation' was not to be confused with 'compromise'. The principle of decision-making by consensus rather than majority vote, Austin suggested, was India's contribution to modern politics and democratic governance.

Similarly, the principle of accommodation was not just one of seeking a compromise but was based on the ability to reconcile and harmonise. Compromise is 50:50, black plus white in equal proportion. Accommodation was neither this nor that but a 'third way', defined in varying shades of grey.

It is this notion of 'third way' that Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao developed in his famous presidential address to the Tirupati session of the All India Congress Committee (AICC) in 1992 and linked it to the Buddha's concept of the Middle Path.

There is something for all in the Ayodhya verdict

At least one sociological and political reason why India's wise Constitution makers eschewed the idea of majority vote and opted for consensus and accommodation would have been the fact that Indian society and polity are marked by such diversity that even the notion of a majority is fluid. If one were to think of the Indian people in purely religious terms one could say the Hindus constitute the majority, while the Muslims, Sikhs, Jains, Christians and other denominations are all minorities. However, if one were to think of India as a sum of various linguistic groups or castes then it would be difficult to divide the population into majority-minority.

India is a land of multiple minorities. Consensus-building, therefore, becomes an important way in which majority support for a decision can be secured. In opting for consensual and accommodative decision-making the Constituent Assembly was also copying a format long practised in India's ancient assembly of governance — the panchayat. Austin called it the "art of the panchayat". The Western mind is defined by dualism — good/bad, right/wrong, white/black, while the Indian mind has the capacity to view reality through the kaleidoscopic lens of multiple colours as well as appreciate the many shades of grey.

Austin's insights on Indian Constitution making and governance immediately come to one's mind as one examines the Supreme Court verdict on the Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhoomi issue. The learned judges have advisedly avoided a 'majority-minority' split verdict. They opted for consensus and for accommodation. There is a little bit in their verdict for everyone. The Hindus get their temple. The Muslims not only get land for a new mosque but are also compensated by the rap on the knuckles administered by the judges on those who illegally demolished the mosque.

One commentator has said that the verdict compensates both communities in proportion to their share of population. The Hindus got four-fifths of the verdict in their favour, Muslims got one-fifth. Such political arithmetic comes out of a Western mindset. The Indian way of evaluating the verdict would be to say there is something in it for all. If proportions are to be counted then the fact is that for the Hindus Ayodhya is the birthplace of Lord Rama and therefore a particularly important holy place, while for Muslims the mosque was one of many such built across the length and breadth of India.

More to the point, the procedure adopted by the learned judges was also based on the Indian principle of consensus and accommodation. It appears the judges consulted community leaders and religious heads on both sides and urged them to arrive at a consensus that could be the basis of the judicial verdict. There is great wisdom in such an approach. After all, the verdict was not about legal principles nor could it have been only on 'facts'. The verdict had to be constructed on faith as well as fact. Combining the two enabled the judges to arrive at a compromise.

As political scientist Rajni Kothari observed long back, the survival of the Indian National Congress after Independence and its ability to win successive general elections well into the 1970s was based on its ability to pursue the politics of consensus. As long as the leadership of the Congress ruled on the basis of consensual politics, the party remained in power. The moment it deviated from consensus-based politics and embarked upon majority-minority vote politics, resulting in the split of 1969, its decline began. The Congress managed to retrieve ground and remain in power, alternating between majority-minority decision-making styles and consensus-based politics. This enabled the Congress to return to power in 1991 and again in 2004.

Now that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has emerged as the dominant party of power it too must understand the importance of consensus and accommodation in political management in India. The BJP runs the risk of fairly quickly dissipating its support base, as we have already seen in so many assembly elections, if it persists with its top-down majority-minority model. If the BJP had learnt the art of consensus building it would have been able to form a government in Maharashtra. Indeed, one could argue that wherever the BJP has opted for consensus-based politics, as it did in Bihar during the Lok Sabha elections, it performed better than in states where it did not.

The idea of 'unity in diversity' is not merely arithmetical in its conceptualisation. It is not about adding up. It is a philosophical and a political concept based on the recognition of the fact that even minority opinions count. And, if there are multiple minorities rather than just one minority then their unity is not merely arithmetical but has to be based on consensus and accommodation. ■

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In schools, basics still matter

TECH TALES

KIRAN KARNIK

INDIANS are known to value education. Traditionally, the learned — especially the teacher, the guru — have been much respected, even revered. In the contemporary world, parents are willing to make monetary sacrifices to ensure their children get a good education. The poor spend hardearned money to pay the relatively exorbitant fees of a "private" school rather than sending their children to a free government school, only because they feel the former provides better education.

Given this context — of demand, of respect for education and of willingness to pay — one would assume that market forces would ensure competition and lead to a quick improvement in quality. Yet, this has not happened except at the top end, where some super-expensive schools (and a few universities) are perceived as imparting higher quality education. Meanwhile, people continue to vote with their feet. Enrolment in government schools (across 20 states) fell by 13 million in the five years from 2010-11, while 17.5 million was added to private schools. As a result, the percentage of children in private schools has gone up from 2 percent in the 1980s to about 35 percent now.

Despite this change, the general quality of education in India remains dismal. While enrolment has gone up, thanks in part to Right to Education (RTE) regulations, learning outcomes have hardly improved over the years. Many studies bear evidence of this, including the extensive and respected Annual Status of Education Reports (ASER) by Pratham. For example, 25 percent of Class 8 children in rural areas could not read Class 2 texts; over half could not solve a simple three-digit by one-digit division problem.

Unfortunately, much of the competition amongst states and other education boards seems focussed not on improving quality, but on inflating marks. Little wonder that the cut-off for admission to many colleges in Delhi University has reached stratospheric levels — well above even 95 percent. Yet, employers complain about quality, with graduates — including engineering ones — being unemployable, lacking adequate discipline knowledge and poor "soft" skills (like communication).

Technology has long been seen as a solution. One pioneering effort was the ISRO-led, year-long (1975-76) Satellite Instructional TV Experiment. Educational TV programmes were broadcast — via satellite, akin to today's DTH mode — to schools in about 2,500 remote rural villages. These had a positive impact on attendance as well as educational attainment. Yet, how much of the positive effect of SITE on students can be attributed to the novelty effect is unclear, since almost none of them had ever seen TV before, and this new "magic box" must itself have been a big attractor and motivator.

Efforts to use hi-tech for education have continued. Large screens and individual tablets; "smart" classrooms; interactive, Internet-based content and content on mobile handsets; anywhere, anytime, any device access: all these have been tried. Yet, despite successful pilots and experiments, perceptible impact on a large scale is still elusive.

LAKSHMAN ANAND

There seem to be a host of intervening factors — mainly contextual, social, cultural and economic — that minimise the potential impact of technology.

Clearly, there seem to be a host of intervening factors — mainly contextual, social, cultural and also economic — that likely minimise the potential impact of technology.

On the other hand, a vast number of educational apps are available on mobile phones, with areas like language learning (mainly English) garnering huge traction. Coaching classes too — aimed at everyone, from primary schoolchildren to those preparing for IIT/IIM entrance exams to candidates for banking jobs or the IAS — extensively use technology for both, in-person teaching as also remote delivery of content. Their popularity (for example, Byju with its billion-dollar valuation) could well be evidence of their success in appropriately using technology.

Some argue that the new generation of technology — high-quality animation and effects, as also virtual or augmented reality — is better suited for education and will make a big impact. Meanwhile, technologies like data analytics and artificial intelligence are being put to good use in other facets of education. Thus, for example, a detailed analysis of Class 10 examination results can be done to identify which part of what subject seems to pose the maximum difficulty for students. Further, granular analysis can indicate which category of students (and from which schools) face the maximum difficulty. Based on this and deeper analysis, corrective action can be taken with regard to content, its presentation, supplementary aids to understand it better, more time, pedagogic methods, teacher training, and so on.

Looking ahead, technology may well solve these problems of quality and learning in an altogether different way. A chip implanted in the brain could carry within it any amount of information and knowledge. Periodic updates, delivered wirelessly, will ensure that obsolescence of knowledge is not an issue. Thus, a chip-implanted child may already have doctoral-level knowledge! Content creators will yet be needed to upload and update knowledge into the chips, but what will happen to the whole edifice of the education system? Who will decide which person becomes a doctor and who a poet? Will all humans get the same capabilities or will there be differentiation? Will this be payment-based? What about creativity and innovation? These, and dozens of other questions which arise, indicate that the issues are not technological, but societal. Doubtless, sooner than we expect, technology will make this a reality. It may, therefore, already be time to ponder the social, economic, ethical and philosophical ramifications of this.

Meanwhile, in the here and now, it is necessary to remind ourselves of our sad failure in education and work assiduously on improving learning outcomes. Technology may be a vital aid, but other dimensions too need to be worked on. In this, there is scope to learn from successes — whether from abroad, or in India itself. Amongst the latter is the outstanding work being done by the Delhi government with regard to all aspects: physical infrastructure and classroom aesthetics, courses, content, teacher training and motivation. In higher education, too, it has pioneered unique financial and governance models. It is yet too soon to assess outcomes, but the indications are very positive. Other states may well want to emulate Delhi's emphasis on SHE: safety (especially of women), health and education. ■

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My name is Bond, Electoral Bond

ELECTION TRACKER

JAGDEEP CHHOKAR

THE heading of my column is, obviously, an adaptation of a famous sentence written by Ian Fleming, creator of the iconic spy, James Bond. The same series had one more film titled *Licence to Kill*. It is a strange coincidence that while James Bond supposedly had the licence to kill the bad guys, it may well be said that India's electoral 'Bond' seems to have the licence to kill democracy!

Electoral bonds had a very auspicious beginning. The then finance minister, while introducing the Budget on February 1, 2017, introduced electoral bonds as a panacea "to cleanse the system of funding of political parties". However, the same afternoon an indication came that there might be something more than met the eye when the minister said during his customary media interaction that "these bonds will be bearer in character *to keep the donor anonymous*."

SHREY GUPTA

Electoral bonds have the potential to choke funding to opposition parties

Subsequently, when details of the Finance Bill were made available it became clear that electoral bonds were a subterfuge to make electoral and political funding completely opaque. This was proposed to be done by amending three Acts — the Representation of the People Act (RP Act), Income Tax Act, and the Reserve Bank of India Act. It took the government almost a full year to notify the scheme on January 2, 2018. On the face of it, the scheme looks harmless. But it has several stipulations, the implications of which are not obvious. A couple of examples follow.

Section 29C of the RP Act requires political parties to make annual declarations of contributions received from individuals and companies in excess of ₹20,000 each to the Election Commission of India (ECI). The amendment to this section says that the following shall be inserted, "Provided that nothing contained in this sub-section shall apply to the contributions received by way of an electoral bond." In simple terms, it means that political parties will not be required to disclose and declare any amount received by way of an electoral bond. Does this increase transparency or reduce it?

Section 13A of the Income Tax Act says "Special provision relating to incomes of political parties" which gives political parties 100 percent exemption from income tax. Only those parties are eligible for this exemption who "keep and maintain a record of such contribution and the name and address of the person who has made such contribution … in excess of ₹20,000", and submit this information to the ECI.

The operative part of the amendment to Section 13A says that "after the words 'such voluntary contribution', the words 'other than contribution by way of electoral bond' shall be inserted". The real impact of this amendment is that political parties do not need to disclose donations by electoral bonds even to the Income Tax department.

Even more damaging are the amendments to the Companies Act. Sub-sections (1) and (3) of Section 182 of this Act stipulated that (a) a company could not contribute more than "seven and a half per cent of its average net profits during the three immediately preceding financial years" to any political party; and (b) a company making donations to political parties was required to disclose "particulars of the total amount contributed and the name of the party to which such amount has been contributed" in its profit and loss account. Both these requirements have been removed by the amendment of the Companies Act with the introduction of the electoral bonds scheme. The result is that now there is no limit to how much money a company can donate to political parties, and the names of the parties do not have to be revealed.

The most damaging aspect of electoral bonds is their potential to choke funding for all opposition parties, and channel all the funding to the ruling party. This is likely to hold regardless of which party is in power.

Here is how it works. The State Bank of India (SBI) collects "Know Your Customer" (KYC) particulars of the buyers of electoral bonds. While the explanation to the Electoral Bonds Scheme says that SBI will not share this KYC information with anyone, it defies common sense that any information with SBI will not be accessible to the finance ministry. And if the ministry is aware of something, then it is accessible to the ruling party. And once the ruling party knows who has bought electoral bonds, it is no rocket science to figure out how the party in power can "persuade" or "cajole" the buyer of electoral bonds to donate these bonds to itself.

An apprehension voiced when electoral bonds were introduced was proved to be justified by data from the financial year 2017-18. Electoral bonds worth ₹222 crore were purchased in FY 2017-18. The 2017-18 annual audit report submitted by the BJP to the ECI showed that the party received ₹210 crore worth of contribution in the form of electoral bonds. This means that 95 percent of all the electoral bonds purchased in 2017-18 were donated to the ruling party.

With ₹6,128 crore donated to political parties between March 2018 and October 2019, it is clear how much money from unknown, and possibly unaccounted, sources flows into the political and electoral systems. The spike in the purchase of these bonds just before and during the 2019 Lok Sabha elections is also worth noting.

Problems with electoral bonds have been placed before the Supreme Court. The Court, in an interim order on April 12, 2019, said that "the rival contentions give rise to weighty issues which have a tremendous bearing on the sanctity of the electoral process in the country. Such weighty issues would require an in-depth hearing which cannot be concluded and the issues answered within the limited time that is available before the process of funding through the electoral bonds comes to a closure, as per the schedule noted earlier".

The "process of funding through the electoral bonds" came "to a closure" a long time ago but the Supreme Court has not taken up this issue so far. ■

Year	Electoral bonds purchased	Electoral bonds redeemed by parties
March '18	222	221
April '18	115	115
May '18	101	91
July '18	33	33
Oct '18	402	402
Nov '18	184	184
Jan '19	350	350
March '19	1,366	1,365
April '19	2,256	2,251
May '19	822	819
July '19	45	45
Oct '19	232	-

Jagdeep Chhokar is a founder-member of the Association for Democratic Reforms

The silent bystander

VILLAGE VOICES

R. BALASUBRAMANIAM

IMBUED with the desire to enhance citizen engagement and take it beyond mere voting, I launched a programme called 'Making Democracy Work' in Mysuru and Kodagu districts during the assembly elections last year. As part of this month-long campaign, a team of around 20 of us visited the homes of as many people as we could in the assembly constituencies of the two districts.

The campaign focused on getting people to constructively and actively engage in the process of electoral democracy. We asked people to get registered as voters, go out on election day and cast their vote, identify suitable candidates and vote 'smartly'. Finally, we requested them to engage with their elected representatives after the elections. We hoped to drive home the message of not being conned into selling their votes under any pretext. Neither money, nor caste, nor religion, nor gifts should influence them to vote for a candidate. This indeed calls for a shift in the attitudes of people and we were beginning to experience first-hand the challenges of getting citizens to engage.

On one occasion, we were visiting Saraswathipuram, a middle-class suburb in the city of Mysuru. We had just finished staging a street play communicating our key message and were winding up. I was speaking to a cluster of around 20 bystanders who had just witnessed our show. I urged them to actively involve themselves in the forthcoming elections. And I was wondering how we could mobilise these urban communities and goad them to act collectively on their own and in the nation's interest. While a few conversed with us, many were indifferent and displayed their apathy quite openly. Getting them to talk to us or watch the street play itself was challenging.

We soon started moving to our next location outside a popular cinema hall. As I reached the spot I noticed a few people looking down from a building into a cellar below, excited and speaking animatedly. I walked over to see what was happening. A man was sprawled on the ground. The dormant physician in me awakened and I rushed to the motionless body.

A person watching from a floor above shouted out to me not to touch him. His logic was that the man could have fallen from above and the police should likely be awaited before anyone did anything. Ignoring him, I reached for his pulse and checked his pockets to see if he had a phone or an address I could locate. As I was trying to figure out what to do, I realised that a crowd of more than 500 people had gathered within five minutes.

Each person had a theory about what could have happened, but not one moved a finger to help. All I heard were comments on what I should be doing. Angry, frustrated and upset, I asked one of our team members to phone 108 for an ambulance and another to call the local police station. Once I was reasonably assured that the ambulance was on its way, I rushed on my scooter to the local police station. Reaching there, I was relieved to learn that the police had acted promptly and were on their way to the accident site. Later, I learnt that the man had been shifted to a nearby hospital.

I was struck by the turn of events and the inherent contradictions. On the one hand, we were trying to get people to engage and participate in a process in which they could not see any immediate results. All they could hope for was change in a murky and dirty political environment. I could relate to their apathy as indeed it seemed monumental and difficult to participate in something where the returns were neither immediate nor assured nor visible.

LAKSHMAN ANAND

Was the India Against Corruptiom movement a mere aberration?

But, then, how does one explain how 500 people could gather in a few minutes and engage as mere spectators? I am unable to understand their severe collective inertia. Not one person wanted to do anything about something where we could see immediate results. We could clearly verify the person's identity, inform his immediate family, shift him to a hospital, and call an ambulance or the local police. This is something that each one of us could do and get a response to our actions too.

So how does one explain this kind of non-engagement? How does one reconcile the attitude of our citizenry and their apathy to anything beyond the personal? Will the collective consciousness of the Indian masses ever awaken? Will we ever get a leader or an ideology or a cause which can get us together? How can we explain the movement against corruption and the mass mobilisation that occurred a few years ago? Was that a mere aberration or a sign of the change waiting to happen?

How does one get citizens to shoulder power and responsibility? Is it too utopian to expect our citizens to not only be partners in progress with the State, but also accept their role and responsibility within the constitutional framework of the State and its institutions? How would the State respond to an enlightened and engaged citizenry?

I have also had several people tell me that they saw citizen engagement as an anti-establishment activity. One needs to recognise that citizen engagement is not about confrontation or expressing restlessness and dissatisfaction. It is more about collaborative partnerships and dialogue. It is about inclusion, empowerment and is undoubtedly a political process. And elections provide just the right recipe for beginning such an engagement but it cannot and should not end with that.

When one considers the indifference of citizens that has existed for many decades, this increased engagement during the elections is indeed welcome news. But we need to be pragmatic and take a measured view of the state of this engagement.

The evolution of citizen engagement is the evolution of democracy itself. Citizen engagement can strengthen governance processes, deepen democracy and help in overcoming income poverty and 'voice' poverty as well as social exclusion. Citizen engagement should neither be viewed as the 'citizen against the state' nor as the 'state against the citizen', but as two complementary forces working together to ensure overall development of a community or a nation.

The State also needs to appreciate that citizen engagement, once evoked, can no longer be a mere political slogan or a tool to garner public support. Enlightened citizens will soon begin demanding good governance and participation as a matter of entitlement and the system needs to be prepared to respond suitably and sensitively. Otherwise, the outcome will be a society filled with disgruntled elements that will further marginalise the State and push it into chaos, irrelevance and confusion. ■

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When a family meets

Feisal Alkazi's play on relationships

SIDIKA SEHGAL

PICTURES BY SHREY GUPTA

The Gathered Leaves is about an upper middle class family getting together after 17 years

A family drama simply entertains but *The Gathered Leaves* is not that kind of play. An upper middle class family in Delhi's posh Sunder Nagar is getting together after 17 years. Anything can happen.

The play, directed by Feisal Alkazi and performed by his troupe, the Ruchika Theatre Group, took place on a smoggy November evening to a packed auditorium at the India International Centre in Delhi.

Gautam, one of the sons, has autism and Kaushal, the 75-year-old family patriarch, discloses that he has Alzheimer's. How do families change when they have to care for an autistic person? And how do they react to Kaushal's disclosure even as unresolved grudges and resentments simmer under the surface? The play handles many questions families grapple with in modern India.

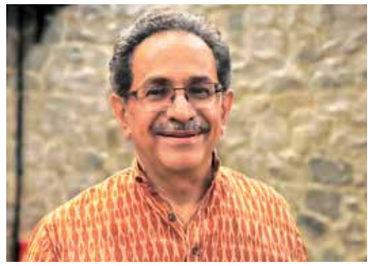
There are scenes that make you laugh and there are scenes where characters lay bare their emotions. In a moving sequence, Rajasvi, the estranged daughter who has been away for 17 years, confesses she feels lonely. She left home because she got pregnant out of wedlock, and refused to get an abortion, much against her father's wishes. Gautam, who lives in an institution, feels the same loneliness.

"For me, theatre is about 'this has happened to me, has this happened to you too?' That's the only question we should ask," remarks Alkazi. The play reflects the status of the average family. Siblings lose touch with each other, young cousins sneak around the liquor cabinet and parents neglect one child in favour of the other. It is all very real.

Autism is not treated with melodrama. It is only one of many things the family confronts. This sensitivity towards autism brought Ruchika Theatre Group and Action for Autism (AFA) together for the IIC performance. In November, AFA completed 25 years and the event was meant to commemorate it.

Merry Barua began AFA in 1994, while on a quest for better services for her son who has autism. What began as an outfit to raise awareness grew tremendously over time. AFA now works on teaching methods for autistic children in a model programme called Open Door Day School. They also train parents and professionals on assisted living for adults with autism.

"For us autism does not have to be the central theme. In fact, we would prefer plays or movies where autism is about a person in the neighbourhood. It could be a relative. It has to be something incidental. In our country, either you make a *My Name is Khan* or there are no autistic people in films at all. In reality, this is not so. It's part of our environment," said Barua.



Feisal Alkazi

'For us autism does not have to be the central theme. We would prefer plays or movies where autism is about a person in the neighbourhood.'

Many in the audience were people with autism or parents of autistic children. Ashish Dhameja, the actor who played Gautam, spent four months with AFA to understand autism. Barua was very appreciative of his performance. "What Ashish brought to his role was a depth that made it very meaningful for us. He asked a million questions because he wanted to understand why they do the things they do."

The cast delivered impressive performances. Yogesh Verma, who played Kaushal, embodied the patronising, entitled patriarch. During the play, he tells his 19-year-old grandson that he must produce a male heir. "I want you to promise me that you'll continue the family name," he says. With Yogesh, the line between the actor and the character disappears, an unmistakable indication of his talent.

The youngest actors of the cast, Manvi Nahar and Lavanya Sinha, did not disappoint. They are both in Class 12 and will be appearing for board exams next March.

Alkazi said that almost half of rehearsal time was spent reading the script closely, examining every word and discussing it. "The first reading and the first response to a script is so crucial to your understanding of what you finally have to communicate to an audience," he says.

Actors brought their own personal experiences to bear on the play. Alkazi explained that in the Stanislavski approach to theatre, the actor finds a parallel experience in their life that mirrors what the character is going through onstage. That approach worked well with *The Gathered Leaves*. Still, there can be no formulaic approach to theatre.

Continued on page 30

The cast of The Gathered Leaves takes a bow after the play

Actors brought personal experiences to bear on the play. In the Stanislavski approach to theatre, the actor finds a parallel experience that mirrors the character on stage.

"Every play has its own process. I don't have a hard and fast way of approaching a script."

Alkazi likes to creatively grapple with a script along with his actors. A week before the show, Alkazi invited Barua and her son, Neeraj, to a rehearsal. "For Yogesh, it was a revelation, that this is really what autism is. He was so aware of his presence and it just changed his playing of the father." Neeraj was rocking throughout the rehearsal, as is typical of people with autism, and Verma was very conscious of his movement. "These immersive experiences are very important for the actor to bring authenticity to what they're doing," he said.

Four years ago, when Alkazi was in London at the National Theatre's bookshop, he picked up some 12 plays. Andrew Keatley's *The Gathered Leaves* was one of them. "I immediately thought of it in an Indian context, even though it is a completely Western play." It was very authentic writing and not a word of the dialogue has been changed, except names and topical references.

The 64-year-old director likes a good challenge. He says, "If I read a script and I know how to do it, I don't. It means I've already done something similar before."

The play has also been performed in people's homes. It is a play ideal for intimate settings in which actors can gauge audience reaction.

"For the audience it was overwhelming to see Gautam's meltdown at such close quarters, or for the father to talk about his Alzheimer's. You're really in the midst of this family," remarks Alkazi.

Alkazi comes from a family of theatre practitioners. His father, Ebrahim Alkazi, was director of the National School of Drama from 1962 to 1977 and actors like Naseeruddin Shah, Om Puri and Piyush Mishra trained under him.

Alkazi, on the other hand, doesn't have formal training. He was directed by his father in many plays and sat through his father's rehearsals from a very young age.

Alkazi started the Ruchika Theatre Group in 1972, with friends from Modern School. It has been a long association. His lights director, Sunil Arora, has worked with him for 45 years. Nandini Sra, who was cast as the daughter-in-law in *The Gathered Leaves,* has been working with him since 1986.

"I've never done a play which doesn't have a strong social message," reflects Alkazi. He has a master's degree in social work and has been working as a counsellor with Sanjivini Society for Mental Health for the past 35 years. He finds his counselling work fascinating because he also witnesses a society undergoing change.

At his residence the conversation shifts from censorship to theatre's limited reach to the Mathura rape case and his most recent concern over how dating apps are changing the way we perceive ourselves and relationships. In fact, his next play, *Splendour in the Grass,* which opens on December 6, is about the intimacy between two students in their last year of school.

"My view is that any creative process in theatre has got to be collaborative if it's to have significance. Only if we are all on the same page can it mean anything to the audience." In *The Gathered Leaves,* the emotions are movingly genuine and touch the audience. The play holds up a mirror to modern Indian society and forces the audience to delve into complicated realities. ■

An oasis in a valley

Sandur is surprisingly progressive and lovely

SUSHEELA NAIR

LOCATED in the heart of Karnataka's Bellary district, Sandur, which in Kannada means 'town between hills', is defined by a valley surrounded by forested hills and the Narihalla reservoir with its twin boulders emerging out of the water. Mahatma Gandhi described Sandur as 'an oasis' when he stopped over for a few days in 1934 on the invitation of the royal family of Sandur.

Following Gandhi's travel advice to 'See Sandur in September', we embarked on a trip to Sandur that month. Thanks to the ban on illegal mining, the land continues to be rich in forests, flora, fauna and deposits of iron and manganese ore. Its population includes people who have had their roots in its soil for many, many generations and those who came as nomads, and then decided to stay.

Once upon a time, Sandur was renowned as Skandapuri in honour of the temple dedicated to Skanda, or Kumaraswamy, that still stands. In the days of yore, it was home to panthers, deer, chinkara or Indian gazelle, peacocks, amid one of Earth's oldest rock formations.

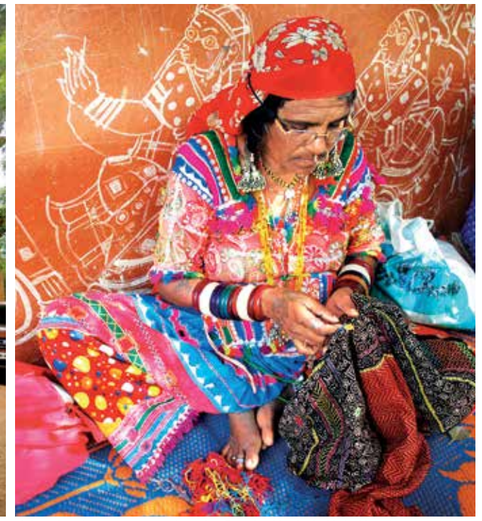
To delve deeper into Sandur's history we start our royal exploration at the Shivavilas Palace, home to the last Maharaja of Sandur, M.Y. Ghorpade, the Cambridge-educated scion of the ruling family who handed over his territory to the Government of India in 1949. It is no wonder that this heritage hotel has a homely ambience. Sprawling over 20 acres, built in the 1900s, and painstakingly restored in 1941, this palace started operation as a WelcomHeritage Hotel in 2012. A driveway lined with trees leads to the red-domed palace.

Escorted around the palace by Sameer Ahmed Taj, the resort's general manager, we felt as if we were travelling back in time. An anteroom leads to an open courtyard where a bronze statue of a lady with a lamp heralds a welcome. This was a gift from the raja of Pudukottai. The pillars, the corridors and the arches of the two floors of the palace overlook the courtyard. The palace has two floors of about 20,000 sq. ft each. The first floor is the residential section with 12 rooms and suites of which the Maharani Suite is perhaps the pick of the bunch, closely followed by the Maharaja Suite, though the deluxe rooms are all equally comfortable.

SUSHEELA NAIR

The regal Shivavilas Palace Heritage Hotel

SUSHEELA NAIR



A Lambani woman at work at the Sandur Kushala Kala Kendra

The Ghorpades, much loved by local people, opened the temple to Harijans in the 1930s and Mahatma Gandhi came to visit.

The ground floor houses the offices, dining hall, two temples, a billiards room with bar, and a 'durbar hall', a veritable museum of regalia and weaponry. The library is a treasure house of books, some over 100 years old, besides old copies of *National Geographic* magazine. Around the ground are a swimming pool, a spa and a garage with the maharaja's collection of vintage cars which includes a hunting Jeep, a Mercedes and a Dodge. The vintage edition photos and relics of the royal family, Lambani wall hanging, antique furniture, weathered cannons, elaborate embellishments on the pillars, delicate jali work all transport one back in time and render it a memorable experience. Don't miss the Sandur Thali, a platter of North Karnataka dishes, at lunch.

We began our Sandur sojourn with a visit to the more than 1200 years old Kumaraswamy temple built by the Chalukyas which is now a protected monument. It was discovered by the local rulers, the Ghorpades, on the thickly-wooded Swamimalai hill in the 15th century. Though women were allowed to worship at the Parvati and Shiva shrines adjacent to the Kumaraswamy temple, it was out of bounds for women for centuries. Initially, special tin barricades and a curtain were hung across the precinct to prevent women from taking a peek at the idol of Kumaraswamy.

According to a temple priest, the reason for this was the belief that Kumaraswamy, the son of Shiva and Parvati, had vowed never to look at a woman. In deference to Kumaraswamy's wishes, women were barred from the temple.

SUSHEELA NAIR

Vast stretches of marigold on the way to the Kumaraswamy temple

The head trustee of the Kumaraswamy temple, M.Y. Ghorpade, a former Congress finance minister of Karnataka, felt that religion should not discriminate. Thanks to his progressive outlook, the ban on the entry of women into the temple was lifted in 1996. The Ghorpades, much loved and respected by the locals, declared the temple open to Harijans as early as the 1930s. After learning of this on his visit to Sandur in 1934, Mahatma Gandhi said, "A small state in south India has opened the temple to the Harijan, the heavens have not fallen."

Also in the vicinity of the palace is the Sandur Kushala Kala Kendra (SKKK), established to revive and market traditional Lambani craft. As we walked into the premises of SKKK, we encountered a motley group of colourful, Lambani women from the neighbouring settlements engrossed in weaving magic and creating marvels out of scraps. Using thread pulled from old saris, they sewed small pieces of cloth together to create beautiful garments, linen and accessories in their traditional style of patchwork, embroidery and mirror work.

The designs, motifs and colours were inspired by images from their nomadic lifestyle and their folk traditions and rituals. Traditionally, these painstakingly created items were an essential part of the bridal trousseau. In the past, work on a trousseau began as soon as a girl was born! The centre also has units for *khadi,* sculptures in wood and stone, and craftwork in stone. SKKK owes its existence to the initiative and involvement of Sandur Manganese and Iron Ores Limited (SMIORE). ■

FACT FILE

Getting there:
Rail: Sandur is 21 km from Torangallu railway station. Hospet is a 25-minute drive from Sandur.
Air: The nearest airstrip is Vidyanagar.
Road: It is a five-hour drive to Sandur from Bengaluru.
Excursions: Visit Hampi, Anegundhi, and Daroji Bear Sanctuary, all within driving distance. One can also visit one of the mines operated by SMIORE.
Contact: shivavilaspalace@sandurgroup.com

Mapping Delhi's water heritage

NARAYANI GUPTA

Baolis
Vikramjit Singh Rooprai
Niyogi Books
₹399

VIKRAMJIT Singh Rooprai's disarmingly modest pocket book is truly a contribution to the cause of seeing *baolis* as heritage. It has a wealth of information, evocative photographs, bibliographical information and, most important, maps and drawings.

Rooprai speaks to the scholar as well as the school student. Ten of Delhi's many *baolis* are explained with details about their design, opening our eyes to the skills of the engineer and the architect of yore. They were wise, the people of those days, who lifted their hands in gratitude for the abundant Ganga, but also realised that for dense settlements in north India the river was not enough.

From the 12th to the 18th centuries they built and repaired canals, constructed elaborate stepwells which had landings on the stairs leading down, so that people could sit comfortably at different levels. The water table got recharged, and springs were topped up with the brief but abundant monsoons. In the 1950s, in the eagerness for high-rises, groundwater was enthusiastically pumped out and the city went dry. But processes can be reversed.

India is full of missed opportunities — the chance to write novels that bring such public works to life and make our *baolis* a stunning tourist attraction, the chance to see how they can be revived to rehydrate our cities and make *baolis* the wonderful public places they once were, connecting land and sky, a gathering point refreshed by nature with adjoining temples or mosques and madrasas, where poets declaimed, where in the quiet morning hours women gathered to fill their pitchers and where children raced up and down the steps.

Rajon ki Baoli inside the Mehrauli Archaeological Park in Delhi

In today's India, where the signature landscape of grey and red stone, quiet yet moving water surfaces and drooping trees, is disappearing, where water has become part of 'infrastructure', temperatures are regulated by air-conditioning, discussions and declamation have been imprisoned in auditoria, and children have forgotten how to play, it is imperative to revive lost landscapes.

For a year or two before the 2010 Commonwealth Games the Delhi government managed to convince us that it was going to revive the Delhi canals, and make the city 'the Venice of the East'. Instead, it covered the canals and turned them into car parks.

Within months, a nightmare destroy-and-rebuild project will be unleashed on Rajpath, substituting multi-storied buildings for government employees where there are water channels and avenues of *jamun* trees.

Cruel jokes seem to be part of official decisions. So it is not with a great sense of hope that I suggest that we use skills and imagination to revive the *baolis* in our north and west Indian cities. Rani ki Vav, not just the Queen's Stepwell but the queen of stepwells, has received homage and recognition. But the more modest ones can be integrated wonderfully into present urbanscapes.

Stepwells are inverted monuments. The Archaeological Survey of India leaves monuments above the ground starkly empty, and generally with only the minimal information communicated. *Baolis,* by neglect or ignorance, are equally empty, except that they hold out the perennial temptation to serve as litter bins. The Indian habit of leaving plastic garbage bins untouched and throwing litter in untended corners of monuments is a baffling pattern of behaviour which needs to be studied.

This book should be compulsory reading for thoughtful *Dilliwallahs* and for our schoolchildren. Rooprai, with youth on his side, with his enthusiasm and zest for investigation, may just have begun a much-needed conservation movement. ■

Workplace harassment

CIVIL SOCIETY REVIEW

WE know that women have the right to a safe workplace under the law. But what do we really know about the law itself? Very little. This slim book, *Prevention of Sexual Harassment at the Workplace,* is a step-by-step guide on such harassment, how to address it and the processes involved. It simplifies the legal jargon of the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act (SHW) 2013, to elucidate what it really means.

The book is divided into five parts. The first section is a visual A to Z of workplace sexual harassment. For example – B is for body language that is workplace-inappropriate, L is for the legislative timeline of the Act, T is for timeline for redressal and so forth. The SHW act is defined in 26 simple visuals.

Prevention of Sexual Harassment at the Workplace
Contributor: Martha Farrell Foundation
Hachette
₹299

Subsequent sections outline the responsibilities of an organisation in constituting a policy, communicating that policy to employees and forming an Internal Complaints Committee (ICC) to ensure that the policy is being enforced. ICC members must be carefully selected and trained. This should be the company's mandate.

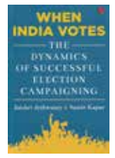
Another section explains the redressal mechanism in detail. First of all, a formal complaint needs to be registered. It will then be investigated, witnesses will be examined, and evidence will be evaluated before any disciplinary action can be taken.

A section of frequently asked questions breaks it down further. What are the consequences for organisations that don't take necessary measures? What if the complaint is against the head of the organisation? Where can a domestic worker file her complaint? This is essential information for all, given how little is known about the legal procedure.

The book also contains case studies and landmark judgments in cases of sexual harassment. It is a handy and accessible guide for employers, employees and everyone in the formal and informal workforce. ■

No limits to poll-time messaging

CIVIL SOCIETY REVIEW



When India Votes
The dynamics of successful election campaigning
Jaishri Jethwaney & Samir Kapur
Rupa Publications
₹295

WHEN India Votes is about the use of media by political parties when they campaign for elections. Reaching out to some 800 million voters, the largest electorate in the world, is a mindboggling feat and political parties use every means, fair or foul, to get their message across.

The authors trace the trajectory of the media and political campaigns since the early days. They also focus on the 2014 general election, 'the mother of all elections' which, say the authors, has changed election campaigning in this country forever.

Why is media so critical to politics? In the first chapter the authors spell it out: the media has reach, connects with people, sets the agenda and therefore wields clout. The growth of the media from its humdrum Doordarshan days to a multiplicity of noisy TV channels, newspapers, radio, social media, the smartphone and feet-on-the-ground grassroots groups is also analysed. All these take the party's agenda to the people and provide a forum for discussion.

The downside of the media is that it isn't always objective. The role of the media is to act as a watchdog and educate people on issues of concern. Beset as it is by paid news, fake news, biased news and wrong news, the media doesn't always live up to its role in a democracy, say the authors in their second chapter.

The media, which tells every government agency what it should and shouldn't do, never tells itself what to do. Self-regulation hasn't worked. But the Press Council of India has issued guidelines. In the pipeline is the suggestion that paid news should be declared an electoral malpractice.

Next, the authors reflect on who political parties and the media try to reach out to. In India the biggest chunk comprises the youth and first-time voters in the cow belt. So the language most used is Hindi.

Another segment which emerged from the shadows in the 2014 election is the upper and middle class who comprised 47 percent of the electorate. Some 52 percent voted for the BJP. A small percentage comprises the intellectual and literati set which political parties do try to woo. This is the new 'social bloc'.

Why does this segment vote for the BJP? The authors quote an analyst who says it is due to middle-class disenchantment with liberalisation and globalisation. A large percentage of the middle class are public employees or beneficiaries of state subsidies — hence they compete for state patronage. But whether middle class enthusiasm for Narendra Modi is due to economic angst needs closer analysis. Of course, rural voters at 60 percent continue to matter hugely.

Chapter 5 traces the history of political campaigns from door-to-door outreach to the posters and slogans used. Incidentally, the Jana Sangh thought up the catchiest ones early on. The entry of film stars, the use of professional advertising agencies and so on, is also tracked.

The next chapter is on Brand Modi and all the ingredients that went into making it. Backed by respected industrialists, Modi's promise to the people was an economic and aspirational one — governance, roads, electricity, women's safety, industry and education, with Gujarat as the model. His relentless campaign across media reached 12 crore first-time voters.

The last chapter maps India's changing political landscape: the entry of professional publicists and campaigners, governments in constant election mode, deteriorating standards of public discourse, religious polarisation and media polarisation. These are the new realities. ■

Small and big stories of women's rights

CIVIL SOCIETY REVIEW

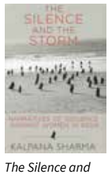
KALPANA Sharma, the author of *The Silence and the Storm,* is admired for her insightful reporting of people living on the margins of India's unequal society. Her book is a sympathetic and angry narrative of the many forms of violence women in India continue to face. Apart from physical assault, the lives of women are destroyed by development projects.

The government has put in place many laws, some stringent, thanks to relentless lobbying by women's groups. The state also campaigns persistently for women's rights. It would be churlish to deny this. And yet in 40 years the cold reality is that not much has changed, writes Sharma whose book spans the period 1985-2018.

So, as we journey down the decades with Sharma as narrator, we get at the same time a worm's eye view and a broad sweep of why some things don't change. We see violence through the prism of persistent patriarchy, unyielding social structures, a lousy criminal justice system and a gender-hostile development model.

In the first two chapters, Sharma deals with cases of rape and sexual assault. Stringent and progressive rape laws still don't yield justice because social attitudes continue to be hostile to rape victims. Of course, a lot depends on who the victim is. The case of a Dalit or Adivasi woman is less likely to catch media attention. The crime is sometimes made into a communal issue as in the Kathua rape case. Criminal law processes continue to be tough for women to go through.

However, most crimes against women are committed inside the home. The chapter, The Silence of the Tomb, reflects on why laws against domestic violence and dowry haven't lessened the number of such cases. Around 35 percent of women between 15 and 47 suffer physical abuse within their homes and very few report it. Their complaints are just not taken seriously by their own families. Even well-educated middle class women are sent back to their abusive husbands until they die trying to prove they weren't lying.



The Silence and the Storm
Narratives of violence against women in India
Kalpana Sharma
₹599
Aleph

For children things are worse. Here the government is the culprit. Rampant sexual abuse of children takes place in so-called shelter homes meant for the safety of small hapless children by staff employed by the government.

In Waiting until Dark, one of the best chapters, Sharma describes a different kind of violence. Again, by the State. Women in urban slums live without proper housing, water or sewerage systems. They suffer untold physical hardship. Public toilets are just cesspools of filth. Yet women have to use them.

It is in the city that open defecation can be completely eliminated and the lives of women hugely improved. There are stories of great courage in this chapter.

Sharma also revisits the tragic history of women's health from forced sterilisation during the Emergency era to the more recent deaths of tribal women in Chhattisgarh after botched-up tubectomies. Truly not much has changed.

Indian women still suffer from high maternal mortality rates, anaemia and malnutrition, and sly clinical trials are done on them. Hospitals are poorly staffed and primary health centres in a ramshackle state. There is also a chapter on women living in conflict zones and the sameness of their situation whether they are in Kashmir or the northeast.

The last two chapters are on the spry fight by college girls against strict and archaic hostel timings. For the boys, of course, there are no such rules. The Pinjra Tod movement, which started in Delhi, has sister movements on other campuses.

The author writes sympathetically on the recent Me Too Movement and asks a pertinent question: what is the justice women who are victims of sexual harassment really seek? The book is, on the whole, readable and informative and has a sharp perspective. It is also a useful book for those keen to understand women's issues in India. ■

AYURVEDA ADVISORY
Dr SRIKANTH

Breathe easy

SEVERAL reasons can lead to bronchial asthma. Currently, outdoor air pollution has become a major health hazard in many Indian cities. Both short- and long-term exposure to such high levels of air pollution can lead to reduced lung function, recurrent respiratory infections and aggravated asthma.

The effect of air pollution on our lungs depends on the type and mix of pollutants, their concentration and how much gets into our lungs. Initially, it may cause an irritating cough and perhaps a burning sensation in the eyes. If not addressed early, symptoms may get exacerbated and lead to breathing difficulty or bronchial asthma.

GENERAL TIPS: Avoid direct exposure to air pollution, especially on days when the Air Quality Index (AQI) shows an increased accumulation of air pollutants.

Consume a healthy, balanced diet to strengthen your immunity. Eat warm, home-cooked food instead of eating out. Incorporate herbs like turmeric, pepper, ginger and home spices in your cooking.

Keep yourself hydrated by drinking more water. Ideally, drink warm water and avoid refrigerated water. Consume fresh vegetables and fruit juices.

Add a little pepper/ginger and some basil (tulsi) leaves to your regular cup of tea.

Eat fresh fruits rich in Vitamin C like sweet lime (*mosambi*), oranges and *amalaki* (Indian gooseberry).

Avoid consuming curds/banana/ice-cream and any heavy to digest food after sunset. Eat dinner at least two to three hours before bedtime and have a light dinner of hot soups and easily digestible food.

Try to avoid deep-fried food stuff / processed food / excessively sour food.

Practise simple breathing exercises such as *pranayama, kapalbhati* and *jal neti* to combat the ill-effects of pollution.

Avoid outdoor exercises. Spend the early morning and evening indoors.

PREVENTION: One of the simplest and most practical remedies is to apply a little cow's ghee in each nostril every day in the morning before venturing out of the house and at bedtime. This helps restrict the entry of pollutants into the lower respiratory tract.

- Surgical and comfort masks don't provide adequate respiratory protection. Use the right mask to protect yourself from polluted air.
- Place some indoor plants like aloe vera, bamboo, palms or money plants inside your home. Air purifiers can be installed.
- Chewing about 10-12 leaves of basil (*tulsi*) daily helps to keep all respiratory problems at bay. Neem and *guduchi* (giloy) leaves also help to improve immunity.
- Turmeric and honey: Take half a teaspoonful of turmeric powder and mix it with an equal quantity of honey. Have this before going to bed. This combination is a time-tested solution for building strength and immunity. An alternative is half a teaspoonful of turmeric mixed in 150 ml of hot/warm milk in the morning.
- Ginger, basil and honey: Half a tablespoonful of juice extracted from basil leaves mixed with an equal quantity of honey and 10 drops of fresh ginger juice can be consumed, preferably on an empty stomach, in the morning. A pinch of fine powder of *pippali* (Indian long pepper) will enhance the potency of this mixture.
- Ghee: It contains omega 3 fatty acids that support our immune system. Ghee is also a rich source of antioxidants. Including about three to four teaspoonfuls of cow's ghee in the diet is sure to boost immunity.

TREATMENT: Inhalation of steam can help decongest nasal congestion or phlegm accumulation in the chest. Plain steam inhalation is helpful. It helps to keep the nasal passages clear and may help to reduce breathlessness. You can add a few drops of eucalyptus oil.

Crush one or two betel leaves and 8-10 basil leaves and boil in about 150 ml of water for five minutes. Strain and add a teaspoonful of honey. This freshly prepared decoction may be taken once or twice daily for instant relief from breathlessness/chest congestion.

One teaspoonful of Sitopaladi churna (from any reputed pharmacy) mixed with a sufficient quantity of honey (in case of productive cough) or ghee (in case of dry/irritating cough) can be taken twice/thrice daily. Ideally, take a small part of this mixture repeatedly as and when there is a bout of coughing.

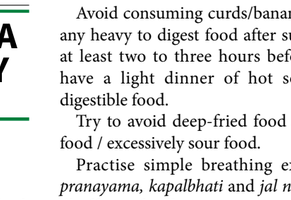
One teaspoonful of Taleesapatradi churna (from any reputed pharmacy) can also be taken with honey repeatedly when there is productive cough/congestion. In addition, 15 ml of Kanakasava or Vasarishta (Kottakkal/ Baidyanath) with equal quantity of warm water or Vasaka 2 tablets (Himalaya) can be taken thrice daily after food for faster relief from breathlessness.

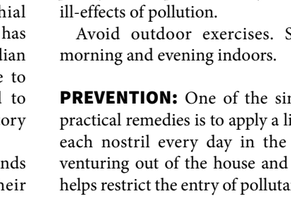
Bresol tablet (2-2-2) or syrup (2-2-2 tsp) (Himalaya) helps relieve nasal and bronchial congestion. Bresol NS nasal drops are useful for nasal congestion. ■

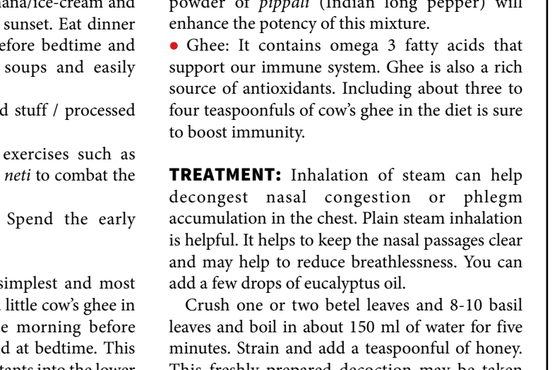
Dr Srikanth is a postgraduate in Ayurveda and has been a consulting physician for the past 19 years. He is currently National Manager, Scientific Services, at The Himalaya Drug Company

PRODUCTS

Magic threads







ATIQA is a collective of Afghan women who have found a semblance of home in Delhi after escaping the turmoil in their country. The women, however, found they needed to earn a living. Lawyers at the Ara Trust's Migration and Asylum Project (MAP), India's only refugee law centre, run by women, noted the dexterity with which Afghan women did embroidery. They helped them form Atiqa which means 'antique' in Persian. MAP also got them funding and linked them to Dastkar, a non-profit that works with traditional artisans, so that the women would understand the style preferences of Indian consumers.

The Atiqa collective does intricate and colourful Afghan embroidery on saris and scarves. They work on linen, *khadi* and *matka* silk. There are four types of embroidery they specialise in — Gulatlaz, Kasheda Dozi, Bati Dozi and, lastly, Khammam, which is usually reserved for heirloom pieces like bridal wear. Atiqa debuted at Dastkar's Basant Mela in early 2019 and their saris and scarves caught the attention of shoppers. Saris cost between ₹6,000 and ₹12,000 while scarves are priced from ₹2,500 to ₹4,000.

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