

Civil Society



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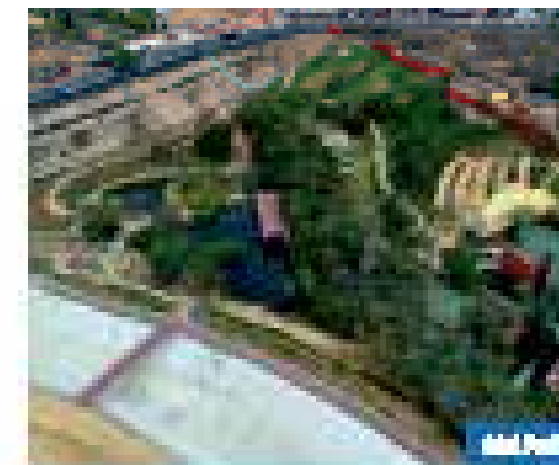
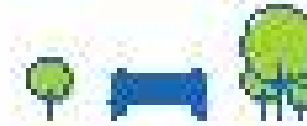


Dabholi River Project
A Commitment to People, Environment & Life



HIGHLIGHTS OF PROJECT

- Riverlength - 47.5 Km
- Capacity of STP - 100 MGD
- No of Checkdams - 100 Nos
- Treated Water Volume - 10 Hekara
- Walkway/Cycle Track - 20 Km
- Plantation - 1,00,000 Nos



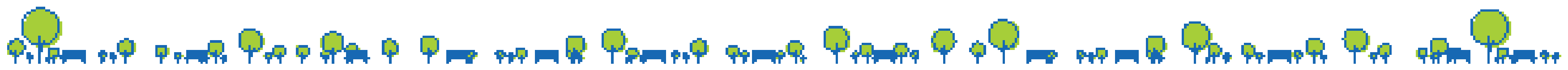
DABHOLI RIVER REHABILITATION PROJECT IMPROVES LIFE OF JAPUR'S CITIZENS

Dabholi River Rehabilitation Project - Japur, managed by Tata Projects Ltd has transformed a 47.5 km long cesspool into a beautiful river through treatment of 170 MGD of polluted water. This project encompasses a green belt which includes about 17000 trees with river banks and 100000 plants in these different parts. As a matter of fact, the citizens of Japur have started using the facilities & space for various activities such as yoga, walking and jogging.



THE SCOPE OF WORK

- Green corridor along the river
- Fencing, Irrigation, Treatment and STP area
- Improving surrounding facilities in Japur
- Improving surrounding in the area surrounding the river
- Water management along the river
- Develop recreation activities facility



IN THE LIGHT

SAMITA RATHOR



LETTERS



Sound of music

Thanks for your cover story, 'Bold new music.' We are grateful to Mo Joshi and Uday Kapur, founders of Azadi Records, for giving voice to the freedom of expression through music. They will always be known for bringing about this revolutionary change in music in the years to come. Giving a chance to unheard voices, giving them an identity and making people hear good and true music is wonderful. May you both stay blessed and soar higher.

Dr Anita Sharma

When I first heard Prabh Deep, I remember doing a double take. I was simply struck by the depth of his lyrics, his social conscience and the music. After reading your cover story, I went on to listen to Ahmer Javed, Seedhe Maut and all the other incredible performers. What stood out most for me were their raw lyrics

which voiced their internal conflict with social and political norms. Azadi Records is providing a democratic platform for multifarious voices across the nation.

Vallavi Shukla

I hadn't heard of Azadi Records till I read about them in your magazine. Never had I viewed music as an expression of identity by people with turbulent backgrounds with a story to tell. Azadi Records is breaking traditional norms and creating a platform for musicians to express themselves freely. I still have much of their music to listen to and I'm looking forward to it.

Shivin Dass

Rising numbers

The interview with Poonam Muttreja, 'People have done better than the government in family planning,' was very relevant. Her remark that women have no agency in family planning is absolutely true. That's why it's important for the government and for NGOs to undertake mass awareness campaigns sensitizing men. Catchy songs, films, street theatre are all great ideas.

Suhasini Mishra

The best contraceptive is education. States with high population growth should learn from Kerala which never had to propagate family planning to reduce family size. They provided health facilities and the chance to get

an education to everyone.

Moloyshree

Water saviour

Shree Padre's detailed report, 'Zilla man, students revive check dams.' Dharanendra Kumar's made wonderful reading. It highlighted what can be achieved at the grassroots with very little expenditure.

Murlidhar

Shree Padre, as usual, has written a relevant story. Water is so very important. What I liked most about Dharanendra Kumar's check dam mission was that it attracted people's participation, a sure sign of success.

Vinay Gopal

Shelter home

I liked your photo feature on AAP's shelter home for migrant labour in the Yamuna Sports Complex. It told us in brief all that we wanted to know. I liked the fact that the home was set up with some thought. It looks clean and its inmates seem satisfied.

Shaila

The place looks really very well arranged. The migrant workers also seem disciplined.

Narender Kumar

Congratulations to Aam Aadmi Party for setting up such a neat shelter home for migrant workers. Every person is treated with dignity by AAP. Delhi may be a small state but it is a role model for some bigger 'politically significant' states in the cow belt.

Manisha Malhotra

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Mail to: The Publisher, Civil Society, A-16, (West Side), 1st Floor, South Extension - 2, New Delhi - 110049.
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Civil Society
READ US. WE READ YOU.

Keeping on going

THE coronavirus pandemic is a great story. As journalists we have our work cut out for us. But how do you hold your nerve and produce a financially fragile magazine when oil futures dip below zero, people die in tens of thousands and the world around you seems to be generally collapsing?

Well we stayed calm and kept going and we are very proud to be able to bring you the May issue of *Civil Society* right on time. The April issue was brought out ahead of time to beat the virus, but then came the lockdown and distribution of the print version was hit. So we put out a PDF version — as we will also do with the May issue.

Of course, we expect the planet to survive and both the April and May issues to be finally distributed in their printed form after lockdowns and containments come to an end. But till then read us online.

The pandemic is a good reason for India to reassess its healthcare system. Our cover story therefore is on shining examples of what the country's healthcare system should aspire to be so that it is inclusive and affordable.

Even as the government's hospitals fail to deliver and the private sector ones get too commercial to serve the people who need them the most, many non-profit rural hospitals provide the kind of healthcare services that are not just affordable and accessible but in terms of quality put urban facilities to shame.

At *Civil Society* magazine we have been tracking such hospitals and the doctors who run them. In this month's cover we showcase some of the stories we think are relevant to these times. We also highlight policy issues, which need to be addressed. Small, sustainable hospitals with committed doctors take healthcare where it needs to go.

The virus comes to us with the message that we have to reform ourselves and rethink our priorities. The tens of thousands of migrant workers who filled TV screens and in a sense walked right into our comfortable homes should always remind us of what remains to be done for fellow Indians. Growth can't just be a GDP number.

Migration from rural to urban (and the many intricate weaves in that equation) should be better understood. To take us deeper into the migration question we spoke to Chinmay Tumbhe who teaches at the Indian Institute of Management in Ahmedabad. Tumbhe's advice for the short term is to provide migrant workers with social security with the 'one ration card, one nation' idea being implemented. But a quick fix won't do. It is important to think in the longer term by getting states to work together for the welfare of their workers and finding ways to make employers more responsible for the people they hire.

Much of the work in fighting the coronavirus has been done in the states and also in the districts. There are many examples from all over. We bring you two from Punjab where district officials have shone in their efforts.



COVER STORY

THE DOCTORS OUT THERE

As the corona virus strikes, it's time to think of bringing together India's vast medical talent and recognizing the role played by small hospitals and committed doctors in remote rural places.

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The magazine does not undertake to respond to unsolicited contributions sent to the editor for publication.

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Printed and published by Umesh Anand on behalf of Rita Anand, owner of the title, from A-53 D, First Floor, Panchsheel Vihar, Malviya Nagar, New Delhi - 110017.
Printed at Samrat Offset Pvt. Ltd., B-88, Okhla Phase II, New Delhi - 110020

Postal Registration No. DL(S)-17/3255/2018-20.
Registered to post without pre-payment U(SE)-10/2018-20 at Lodi Road HPO New Delhi - 110003
RNI No.: DELENG/2003/11607
Total no of pages: 32

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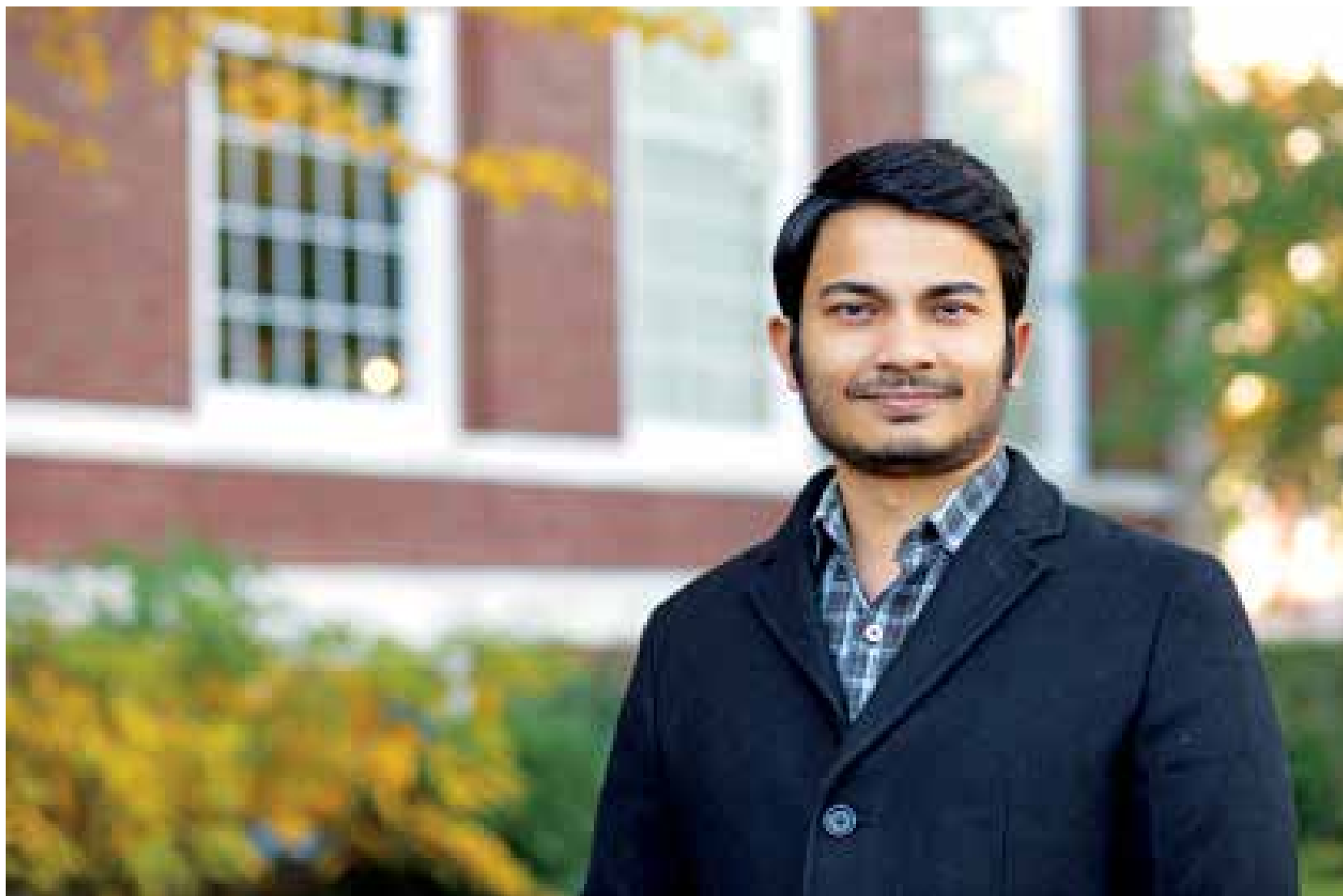
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Chinmay Tumble: 'This is an opportunity to fast-forward the one nation, one ration card scheme.'

'Inter-state migration council is the need of the hour'

Chinmay Tumble on a looming labour crisis

Civil Society
New Delhi

MIGRANT workers have been at the core of the Indian economy. People from villages work in cities and industrial hubs to send money back to their families. It is a complex equation between urban and rural, which has received little public attention until the coronavirus pandemic and subsequent lockdown resulted in tens of thousands of migrants falling out of jobs and making desperate efforts to get back home.

Chinmay Tumble, who teaches at IIM Ahmedabad, has for long studied migration in India closely. He has also been a member of the Working Group on Migration set up by the Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation. *Civil Society* spoke to him on the many complexities in migration and

how the role of such workers can be formalized.

Migrant workers have left cities in droves due to the lockdown. What do you see as the likely impact on the economy in general and cities in particular?

I think once the lockdown is lifted you will see two responses. First, those who wanted to go home but couldn't, will go back. They are desperate to return to their villages. Two, because of this mass exodus, you will have a shortage of labour in a variety of sectors including manufacturing. The shortage will be across industrial hubs, cities and urban agglomerations. That means you will see some wage spikes because of the shortage of labour.

Again, that depends on how many firms are going to be alive and in what capacity they start production. But overall, a labour shortage for a

variety of sectors from drivers to loaders to even the logistics sector will make it tougher for the economy to resume its potential.

Typically, workers go back anyways after June for the sowing season. If you see the migration calendar of India — especially of semi-permanent migration — these are people who spend nine to 10 months outside and two months back home. And those two months are typically June and July, the monsoon.

My guess is that a lot of migrants will wait it out (in their villages) till the monsoon is over because they will think things are so uncertain right now. They will eventually come back. But, in the short term, there is going to be a labour shortage.

It's going to hit the construction sector very badly. If the construction sector had kept their workers and looked after them very well they might have been persuaded to stay. A lot of construction

projects are now going to be stalled.

So, in terms of restoration of essential economic activity, which would generate money, jobs and so on, we are looking at a hiatus.

I think the coming months are going to be really bad in terms of resuming some sort of economic activity essentially because of the shortage of labour.

In villages there isn't much to do in April and May either. You will have deficient labour in cities and surplus labour in villages. Overall, it's a bad situation to be in. That's why the only safety net is a direct payout to workers as social security. Which is what the government has announced but I think it should be much more.

Given the important role migrant workers play, how can their role be better formalized?

The burden of formality is really on the employer. The majority of migrant workers are employed in small and medium industries, which obviously want to skirt rules. It's tough to impose rules top-down.

Workers would love social security of the right kind. But, from experience, workers also prefer informality because it means they can go back home anytime. Many times they prefer to work in such jobs because of the informal relationship. So there are preferences on both sides. It's not just a story of exploitation.

From a policy perspective, what we have found over the past 10 years and a myriad people in the world of migration have been advocating for in India, is to have a more universalized kind of social security. Or portability of social security programmes. That has started kicking in with the health insurance scheme that has been announced. In theory you can access it anywhere if you have a card.

The most important form of social security in India is the Public Distribution System (PDS) and that works only in your state. Until a few years ago you could access your rations only in the village where you are domiciled. If you went to another district you wouldn't be able to access the PDS.

After a lot of policy advocacy by several organizations and people working on migration the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution has been piloting portability of the ration card. The big announcement made in February, before the pandemic, was 'One nation, one ration card.'

This is a very important scheme. The core reason it hasn't been fielded is the fiscal math. The thinking is, why should the Maharashtra government pay for work being done by Bihari workers? Some compensation or basically fiscal coordination between the states is needed.

This crisis is an opportunity to fast-forward the one nation, one ration card scheme. It was slated to start in June. People are saying it will be postponed because of the pandemic. I think we should start right now. We are, in any case, giving rations to people irrespective of domiciled status, due to the crisis.

This is basic security. People can then get access in any state to subsidized food and other benefits, which can be included in the ration card.

You probably need an inter-state migration

council just like for GST there is a council to resolve inter-state issues. This is the one big idea that can emerge from this crisis. We should go into overdrive and not wait till June because then migrant workers don't need to go back and we can tide over the shortage of labour.

Do you think there is scope for a policy that would incentivize employers to formalize the informal nature of employment?

It's a tough trade-off. A lot has been written about this issue in the last 30 years. Our experience is that when we try to enforce top-down measures the outcome is the inspector raj and the labour raj. We know that an entire economy has been built around this. In theory, I would say you are right. The informal sector has to be formalized. On the ground, however, the inspector raj system imposed by the government does not work in practice and leads to all kinds of strange distortions.

I think a smarter way is to incentivize employers by giving tax concessions if a firm actually provides workers all benefits. An award-based system, rather than an inspector raj. If a guy is going to start a

coast of India. The west coast is one of the richest parts of the country. And the lower Gangetic plain is one of the poorest. Both have the same rates of out-migration even today. Both have been sending out people for more than 100 years.

But in the west coast region the remittance economy came in conjunction with better education and governance and transformed the region. So remittances are a game changer but when combined with other parameters.

Another example is Udipi, which is even today a remittance economy. Most migrants run Udipi restaurants. They go back after having worked all their lives in restaurants across India. They keep sending money so a huge part of Udipi's economy is fuelled by remittances.

You can look at Udipi and think, if so many people are leaving something must be wrong. But actually things are quite different. Udipi is not a basket case of poverty. It ranks second after Bengaluru on the human development index in Karnataka.

Upward mobility among migrants has been fairly dramatic. So the first generation of migrants got

'You will have deficient labour in cities and surplus labour in villages. Overall, it's a bad situation to be in. That's why the only safety net is a direct payout to workers as social security. Which is what has been announced but I think it should be more.'

small powerloom shed, say, in Surat, employing 15 to 20 workers, which is the standard mode over there, and he has to begin thinking about all the things he ought to be doing, there is a lot of bureaucratic cost involved in that.

Workers send remittances home. How much does this work out to and does it have an impact on the village economy?

My first work published in 2011 was on India's remittance economy. These numbers are huge in proportion to GDP. Of course, there are domestic remittances and international remittances.

In Kerala it works out to 30 percent of GDP. I have estimated that 150 to 200 of India's districts can literally be classified as remittance economies either from outside India or inside India.

I have also argued that this isn't a new phenomenon. These districts have been remittance economies for more than 100 years. So there is a culture of out-migration and remittances.

Virtually every study has shown that households which do migrate and send back remittances have very good prospects compared to those households which don't have that potential.

Are these remittances fundamentally transforming regions?

My take is that it's not just remittances but remittances plus other factors, which can be very powerful.

A standard contrast is the Gangetic plains, consisting of eastern UP and Bihar, and the west

low-level jobs. Migrants themselves invested in education both at source and destination. In Mumbai they used to have night schools and so on. That's how each generation started coming up and so today they migrate for different jobs.

It is very similar to Kerala. The migrants who used to go to the Gulf from Kerala were very different. It's not anymore just a labour class kind of story. Kerala's entire economy has been transformed in the last 30 years through remittances. Keralites don't do low-end jobs anymore and that's why over two million north Indians now migrate to Kerala to do those jobs. So remittances are fairly powerful, but only in conjunction with other factors.

How can states and cities work in synergy to smoothen migration from village to city and back? Do we have any mechanism for such coordination?

There has been some interesting inter-state coordination. One document to look at is the January 2017 Report of the Working Group on Migration of which I was a member. It had eight ministries involved and it has an appendix, which includes an MoU between Tamil Nadu and Odisha with a focus on workers in the construction sector.

Entire families migrate and children drop out of school. So the specific concern was that kids weren't entering the virtuous cycle of education because of migration. The medium of instruction in Tamil Nadu schools is also different.

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The two states entered into a partnership to register workers, provide facilities, schools, and instruction in the Odia language. Children of migrant worker families are now sitting for exams as per the school calendar. This is a creative solution inspired by non-profits. I think Telangana and Odisha have a similar agreement.

In the current crisis, the UP government is keen to know how many of its people have migrated to Gujarat for work. There aren't any up-to-date figures. This is another lacuna in the world of migration. The 2011 Census figures are all we have and those were released just six months ago.

We have been trying to collate figures. One way would be to release data on transport. We have been trying to characterize migration through simple rail traffic data like unreserved compartments, which is what migrants use to travel.

I think this is the time for an inter-state migration council. You don't even need a constitutional

'In Ratnagiri, which is an out-migration hotspot, the richer tehsils send out more migrants. To migrate you also need some capital to live.'

amendment. You just need a committee. States should know, at any given point of time, how many of their people are in other states, how many are on a roll and so on. This would be important data especially once the one nation, one ration card programme becomes operative.

I think this would be on the cards this year if the government is serious about coming out with a policy.

Do you see UP and Bihar developing due to migration?

As I said, (development comes) in conjunction with other factors. The remittances are useful at the household level but you need much more investment in the source region to activate development.

Many times migrants' associations in the city play a useful role. Dadri, for example, has village-level associations which were instrumental in getting mobile towers to the nearest village and activating development. So, is leveraging remittances to activate development happening in UP and Bihar? Less evidence. But in both states migration takes place from relatively better-off districts. In Bundelkhand there is less migration compared to eastern UP.

In Ratnagiri, which is an out-migration hotspot (on the west coast), the richer tehsils send out more migrants. To migrate you also need some capital to live in the city for 10 months. There is a class of seasonal migration for two or three months like construction workers but that is not the dominant form of work-related migration in India. ■



Samples being collected in Sangrur

Two Punjab districts find their solutions

Cheaper testing pod made locally

Raj Machhan
Chandigarh

THE way the government machinery in a state is structured, the real engine for combatting the deadly coronavirus lies at the district level. Where the deputy commissioner provides leadership, results follow. Examples of successful efforts to contain the coronavirus at the district level stretch from Rajasthan to Maharashtra and Kerala.

Officers who in normal times are known to stick to the rule book have outdone themselves by being flexible, innovative and firm while enforcing social distancing, getting tests conducted and making sure citizens have access to basic services.

In Punjab, at least two districts exemplified themselves: Sangrur and Nawanshahr (recently renamed Shaheed Bhagat Singh Nagar) with the local administrations rising to the occasion in the unprecedented battle against the coronavirus.

In Sangrur, the administration has come up with a localized solution for testing individuals. Taking inspiration from South Korea, a testing pod has been devised by a team headed by Deputy Commissioner Ghanshyam Thori. It is a portable structure, much like a phone booth in design and

size, with a front-facing polycarbonate glass sheet.

A doctor or trained medical personnel stands behind the polycarbonate sheet and swabs the nose or throat of an individual using arm-length gloves built into the booth. The pod prevents direct contact between the doctor and potential coronavirus carriers, thus enhancing the safety of the medical staff. It can easily be put up in any of the sensitive areas with minimum effort to speed up testing of the local population.

"The booth concept was first used with great success in South Korea. Here, we were basically looking for an effective, low-cost solution to address our testing needs. We narrowed down on this idea, and our innovation team customized the design to suit the Indian conditions," said Thori. The pod costs only ₹25,000 to make.

Thori says the testing pod is the result of an effective public-private partnership. "Once we finalized the design, we involved the local industries chamber to create a prototype. We were able to fabricate it and carry out the initial tests quickly," he says.

The team sourced the raw material from Baddi in Himachal Pradesh and involved a vendor from Moga to manufacture the booth. The Sangrur administration now has a total of 10 such testing

Pods installed at strategic locations, including hospitals, across the district.

The health authorities have, so far, tested a total of 300 individuals in the district because the process now followed is cumbersome. It also takes time to get the test results. The health authorities send the samples to Patiala and it takes a minimum of one day to get the results.

With the testing pods, this will change. Many more tests will be conducted quickly though the samples will still have to be sent to Patiala. Going by the South Korean experience, it takes only seven minutes for a test to be done at these booths. The small size of the booths means that they are easy to disinfect as is required for each testing facility after a test is done. Hospitals, as of now, use a room to carry out the tests.

"At present around 50 percent of the new tests are being done at these pods. In the coming days, these will be used to carry out 100 percent of the tests at various locations in the district," says Thori. The administration is hoping to ramp up the testing numbers with the availability of rapid testing kits. It is looking forward to receiving these kits from the Punjab government.

Thori says the state will be acquiring 10,000 rapid testing kits. Each kit is fashioned to carry out 100 tests, which translates into a total of one million tests across the state.

"The testing pod will be especially useful in the eventuality of a spike. I have been getting enquiries from other places as well and one such pod has already been installed at Government Multispecialty Hospital (GMSH), Chandigarh," Thori says.

The district administration of Nawanshahr has been successful in containing the spread of the virus in much the same way as has been done in Bhilwara in Rajasthan. When the number of cases seemed to be rising rapidly, the Nawanshahr administration successfully deployed an elimination strategy, which has proved a success in countries like New Zealand. From a peak of 19 cases on March 26 the number of coronavirus cases in the district has been reduced to two, with no new cases reported.

Nawanshahr's Additional Deputy Commissioner Aditya Uppal says: "We got our first case on March 19, and the numbers quickly increased to 19. This was largely on account of a single international traveller who had got in touch with a number of



Deputy Commissioner Ghanshyam Thori



Additional Deputy Commissioner Aditya Uppal

'The testing pod will be especially useful in the eventuality of a spike. I have been getting enquiries from other places as well and one such pod has already been installed at GMSH, Chandigarh.'

people." Baldev Singh, a priest from Pathlawa village in the district, had visited Germany and Italy and was detected coronavirus positive only after his death on March 19. Owing to the spike, the district was declared the first COVID-19 hotspot of Punjab.

Uppal says that the district administration quickly swung into action and carried out an aggressive contact tracing exercise. "Through contact tracing, we came to know that people from 15 villages had got in touch with him. We carried out the sampling and testing of these individuals, but we did not wait for the results. We sealed

Pathlawa village on March 19, and sealed all 15 villages in the next two days," Uppal says.

Incidentally, Bhilwara in Rajasthan too reported its first COVID-19 case on March 19. Though Uppal doesn't mention any communication between the two administrations, both districts followed similar containment strategies and were able to control the spread effectively. "Geographical containment of suspect cases is of utmost importance to tackle such a situation. If you are not able to contain the virus to the given geographical area, the situation can quickly spin out of control," he says.

Though no new cases have come in, the administration, however, has not let its guard down. As part of its strategy, it has deployed ASHA workers in rural areas and booth level officers (officials who manage a polling booth during elections) for conducting door to door surveys with a brief to check symptomatic individuals.

Uppal agrees that these are early days yet and the situation can change at any time. "We simply cannot afford to be complacent. We are responsible for the lives of thousands of people and we will do our best to protect them at all costs," he says.

The Deputy Commissioner, Vinay Bublani, said: "We have focussed on home quarantine, containment and complete lockdown. We are keeping a close watch on patients in the isolation ward. The district administration, police and health department are working round the clock to ensure things remain in control." ■

Samita's World

by SAMITA RATHOR



Study abroad but stay at home

Sidika Sehgal
New Delhi

UNIVERSITIES and schools were the first to shut down when the coronavirus began spreading rapidly across the world. Indian students studying abroad hurried home and now face a period of uncertainty. It's unlikely they will be able to return to their foreign campuses anytime soon.

Classes have gone online and universities have been prompt to make that shift. The University of New South Wales (UNSW) in Sydney, Australia, was able to start producing online material within two weeks.

"I think what will happen is that we will leapfrog to the online platform. It will be a challenge but I see no alternative. We can't simply write off 2020 as a bad year," says Amit Dasgupta, 66, a former Indian diplomat and now country director of the University of New South Wales (UNSW).

That means faculty members will have to be trained to use the digital medium optimally. Students will also have to accept this solution and attend online classes according to international time zones.

"Students realize that it's not a particular university that's denying them face-to-face education. The entire world is facing COVID-19 and face-to-face education has been taken out of the equation for everyone. So there is reluctant and grudging acceptance for online education," says Dasgupta. Despite COVID-19's devastating impacts, he sees this as a moment of opportunity for universities to develop quality online modules.

"I'm getting a lot of questions about what happens if it's remote learning in the first semester. Will colleges charge the same amount? Will they give people an option to defer a semester without having to reapply? The answer, of course, is that no one knows," said Nicholas Henderson, director and co-founder of Essai Education.

Since 2015, Essai Education has been facilitating entry of Indian students into universities in the US mostly. They also help students who want to study in the UK and Singapore.

Henderson, 36, has interacted with some parents who have indicated that their children are not keen to start their college career at home in their

bedrooms. "But I think most people would just get on with it. I don't think they would be tremendously excited about having the first semester online. Who would be but what other option is there?" he says.

If universities do shift to the digital platform for the fall semester, there will obviously be no charge for room and boarding. Students would like to pay lower tuition fees as well.

"It would be interesting to see if tuition costs go down if teaching goes online. I'd be surprised if they do. Big universities, like Harvard, have enormous endowments, nearly \$20-30 billion. But some universities need the revenue to come from students," says Henderson.

However, students say there are disciplines that don't lend themselves to online learning. Srishti Dass is a 21-year-old undergraduate student at the School of Visual Arts, New York (SVA). She is studying fine arts and specializing in painting. Dass works on large canvases. She has set up a makeshift studio at her house in Delhi but her teachers are not able to offer useful critique via video.

Facilities like a good library are also missing. Meenakshi Nair, a 22-year-old master's student at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, says, "I am resentful that I don't have access to the library and that I'm not on



"I think what will happen is that we will leapfrog to the online platform. It will be a challenge but I see no alternative. We can't simply write off 2020 as a bad year."

campus, but it's not one's fault." She is pursuing a master's degree in comparative literature. Most of the resources she needs to write her dissertation are available online but the same is not true for medieval studies, she says.

Students who are applying for the fall semester and are scheduled to travel overseas in August and September this year have hard choices to make. As of April 14, universities had made no official

announcement about the fall semester.

According to the Open Doors 2019 report by the Institute of International Education, in the 2018-19 academic session there were a little over a million international students in US universities of whom 18 percent (about 200,000) were Indian students. Their website reports that international students contributed \$45 billion to the US economy in 2018.

At the University of New South Wales, nearly 33 percent of students are non-Australians. According to Dass, the percentage is as high as 75 percent at the School of Visual Arts.

Since international students bring in revenue, universities will need to keep their interests in mind. In the American education system, students have to make a deposit of a few hundred dollars by May 1, which is a binding commitment to that university. There has to be some clarity by then.

Henderson believes that it won't be financially viable for universities to cancel a year. "If universities invest aggressively in on-campus testing and take very strict health precautions on campus, I could see that working," he said.

Indian students continue to be keen to study in foreign universities. Surprisingly, at Essai Education, none of the students have dropped out. Dasgupta reported that in 2020, they have received more applications from students to study at UNSW than they have seen over the last two or three years.

"One could argue that it's because Australia has managed to contain COVID-19 far more successfully than any other country. Another rationale is that if you remove US and Canada from the equation, the obvious choice is Australia, which is the third most preferred destination for foreign education according to the Ministry of External Affairs. Which of these reasons is the more logical one, I can't say," said Dasgupta.

The financial impact of COVID-19 will also dictate decisions. Education loans won't be easy to come by. Scholarships may not come through.

This year, Duke University has cancelled the Robertson scholarship, which is a full, merit-based scholarship, awarded to 32 students each year. It differs from scholarship to scholarship, says Henderson. Another student who won a scholarship to Tulane University in New Orleans has the option to defer by a year.

Stuti Pachisia, a 22-year-old from Kolkata, secured the Gates Fellowship to pursue a PhD in English at the University of Cambridge. She is scheduled to fly late September and has been assured that her funding will come through. "My family is hopeful right now because this is a universal problem. I'm not the only one facing this pandemic. So universities will come up with a solution that takes all of this into account," she said.

Dasgupta points out that the COVID-19 pandemic impacts education globally. "It's not just about those who are trying to go abroad. It's also domestic education. There are 350 million Indian students who are going to school or college. So are you going to live right through 2020 without educating children and denying college education? I don't think a society can afford to do that." ■

HANDWASH FROM BIOFUEL

Govt outfit makes affordable hygiene products

Shree Padre
Mandya

A tiny team working in a government outfit in Mandya is producing an amazing range of inexpensive products from biofuel. There is soap, dish washing liquid, phenyl, glass cleaner liquid and even pain relief oil. Altogether, more than 24 products are being made including biodiesel, bio-manure and neem oil under the unit's brand name, Nisarga Organic Products.

This four-member team works for the Biofuel Research, Information and Demonstration Centre (BRIDC), a Union government initiative, running for eight years at the PES College of Engineering in Mandya, Karnataka. Its primary objective is to spread awareness about biofuel and how it can be locally produced.

The outfit buys used cooking oil discarded by restaurants and small eateries and recycles it into biofuel. In the last three years, 45,000 litres of used cooking oil have been converted into biofuel.

From April to June, oil is extracted from honge beeja (*Pongamia pinnata*) and bevin beeja (neem or *Azadirachta indica*) from Mandya's seven taluks out of which Namangala taluk is the biggest producer. BRIDC pays ₹28 per kg for pongamia seeds and ₹48 per kg for neem seeds. Biodiesel is made from pongamia and pesticides for agriculture from neem.

SPOTTING OPPORTUNITY: Dr M. Prasanna Kumar, professor of geology at PES College, is the project coordinator of BRIDC in Mandya. Other staff members are Palanethra who is project assistant and Lakshmana, the technical assistant. There are also two casual labourers, Siddappa and Pradeepa. The government provides a grant of ₹10 lakh per annum for expenses. Dr Kumar works pro bono since there is no provision to pay him.

Why did BRIDC branch into manufacturing? Dr Kumar explains that after extracting biodiesel from pongamia seeds, a sort of cake is left over, consisting of glycerine and soap oil. At other BRIDC outfits it is thrown away. But Dr Kumar decided to put it to use. He approached a few companies in Pune to buy the glycerine. They were interested but transporting it turned out expensive.

Dr Kumar then experimented with the glycerine and converted it into soap. His team members and a few farmers tried it out. Their feedback was encouraging. The farmers said the soap was good for bathing their sheep and cattle and it controlled ticks.

So Dr Kumar did the rounds of local milk societies to market the soap. The farmers used it on their livestock and were happy. BRIDC now produces 70-80 cakes of soap per day, each priced at ₹10. On average, 600 to 1,000 soaps are sold every month. Mechanics also buy it because it cleans oily



Biodiesel powers farm operations



Products being made



A small marketing effort

As an incentive to small eateries, used cooking oil is bought and recycled into biofuel, instead of clogging drains.

hands better than commercial soaps. The BRIDC unit felt encouraged and began producing phenyl, glass cleaners, washing liquid, and so on.

Then, after trial and error, Dr Kumar formulated a pain relief oil by blending pongamia oil, neem oil, mustard oil, camphor and roots of a local plant called ekka (*Calotropis gigantea*). The oil is manufactured in winter "because that's the time

people suffer from joint pains," explains Dr Kumar. A 250 ml bottle costs ₹80.

Another product is bio mosquito repellent containers. Used mosquito repellent bottles are collected and filled with a mix of neem oil and camphor. "Since it's a bio product, it has no side effects and banishes mosquitoes," says Dr Kumar.

PES College's three hostels buy BRIDC products. So do local hotels. To attract the middle class, Dr Kumar set up a tent on a morning walkers' route. The strategy paid off. Price was also a selling point. BRIDC's household cleaning products aren't priced above ₹30 per litre.

Neem cake and oil are bought by farmers. A litre of neem oil is priced at ₹300 and a 100 ml bottle costs ₹30. For farmers the biggest attraction is the purity of BRIDC's neem products.

Biodiesel has local buyers. Those who run tractors, power tillers, paddy harvesting machines,

Continued on page 12

Domestic workers in limbo

Sidika Sehgal
New Delhi

A few days after the national lockdown, Neelima, a domestic worker, was told by one of the families who employ her that they would pay her only for the number of days she worked. She cooks for three other families who assured her that they would pay full salary. But she hasn't been able to go and collect it due to the lockdown. Neelima is relying on savings from her previous month's salary to see her through. Under normal circumstances, she earns ₹15,000 a month.

Domestic workers have been hard hit by the lockdown. Their condition is akin to daily wagers. They are generally paid only for the number of days they work, and they can be sacked at will. Several domestic workers, like migrant workers, say they would like to return to their villages.

The Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) and the Martha Farrell Foundation (MFF) work with domestic workers and have been speaking to them. They say non-payment of wages tops their list of concerns.

"People are ready to pay for the first 15 or 20 days but they don't want to pay the full amount," said Aditi Yajnik, assistant coordinator of SEWA which works in 17 states where they have domestic worker leaders.

While some domestic workers haven't been able to collect their salaries, others say they don't have bank accounts. They all prefer to be paid in cash. "I don't want them to transfer my salary into the account. How will I withdraw the money? I need cash," said Neelima. She lives near Tara Apartments with her husband and 15-year-old daughter. Her meagre savings will last her till mid-April.

Mary, who works in two houses in Alaknanda, has also not been able to collect her salary. She earns ₹13,000 per month. Her husband works in a textile factory and her 27-year-old son as an event manager. Both have not been paid for March. "We have enough food at home right now. But if I don't get my salary this month we might have to cut back

on some things," she said. There is rent to be paid and food to be bought.

The National Committee of Domestic Workers, a SEWA union, issued a press release asking employers to pay salaries: "It is only normal that employers rise to the occasion and agree to pay workers their wages for these days when they are obliged to remain at home." MFF activists are also reaching out to resident welfare associations and urging them to tell employers to pay their domestic workers.

The other problem is rent. Meena, 30, lives in Harijan Colony in Gurugram with her husband and two children, 10 and 13 years old. She pays ₹4,500 every month for the one room they occupy. At first

While some domestic workers haven't been able to collect their salaries, others say they don't have bank accounts. They prefer to be paid in cash.

the landlord said they didn't have to pay immediately, but he has now asked her to pay half the amount. Meena's husband works as a labourer and has not been paid for March. She works in two houses in Gurugram. Yajnik explained that in many settlements, domestic workers don't know the landlord directly. They pay a middleman who often lives in the same settlement. "Who will tell the broker? Who will check that the landlord is not collecting rent?" domestic workers told Yajnik.

With savings drying up, there is fear of where the next meal will come from. Neelima has a ration card and received 24 kg of wheat and six kg of rice free from the Delhi government's dry rations scheme. She has been sharing it with others in her colony

who don't have ration cards.

The AAP-led Delhi government has increased the amount of rations disbursed under the Public Distribution System (PDS) by one and a half times. This food is free for beneficiaries. Dry rations are also being distributed free from schools to people without ration cards after registering on a Delhi government website.

Nandita Pradhan Bhatt, director of operations at MFF, and her team have compiled information on where NGOs and the government are setting up food distribution centres and is linking domestic workers to these phone numbers. She has also been calling up NGOs working on the ground to deliver food to a particular colony.

SEWA, through their grassroots domestic worker leaders, is making a list of those who don't have ration cards. They are writing to food security officers and MLAs to get rations approved. They are also working with the Delhi government and have distributed rations to at least 2,000 domestic workers.

Domestic workers are also fearful of catching the deadly virus. They live in dense settlements where social distancing is difficult. "How do you maintain physical distance if there are six to seven people living in the same room? How do you wash your hands if there is no water supply?" said Bhatt.

They feel doubly vulnerable because they are migrant workers. Mostly they are from Bihar and West Bengal, but some are from Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh and yet others from Nepal.

"Luckily, when the lockdown happened most of them stayed back. We told them that they are safer here and they understood," Bhatt reported.

Most domestic workers are now eager to go home because they don't know if they will be paid for April. Accommodation is a huge expense and they have their own land back home. Domestic workers have greater confidence in their village ecosystem to take care of their survival needs. "We are thinking that if the lockdown gets lifted, we'll go back. We would like to be in our homes in our own village," said Neelima who is from Bihar. ■

(All domestic worker names have been changed.)

method to convert it into biodiesel. The process proved to be more efficient. Four litres of oil were always lost while converting 50 litres of pongamia oil into biodiesel. When cooking oil was converted, the loss was two litres.

The bigger problem was, surprisingly, procuring used cooking oil. Restaurants and eateries couldn't understand why the BRIDC wanted their used cooking oil and were suspicious. Dr Kumar had to show them samples of biodiesel to convince them. He now has a WhatsApp group of places he procures discarded cooking oil from.

Once in 15 days, 'like the milk route' of dairies, he picks up drums filled with the oil and pays ₹22-25 per litre to the hotels and eateries. It's a painstaking and time-consuming task.

It was the shortage of pongamia seeds that led to a BRIDC outfit in Udupi, attached to Nitte Mahalinga Adyanthaya Memorial Institute of Technology (NMAMIT), to opt for using discarded

cooking oil.

"Since then things have moved along faster as this raw material is abundant locally and the process is faster," says Dr Ujwal, project coordinator. This too is a four-member team.

Used cooking oil is collected from two hotels in Mangaluru but buying it from many places is time-consuming. So Dr Ujwal is planning to outsource collection to an MBA student who is keen to handle the unit's supply chain. Dr Ujwal points out that Mangaluru probably has a surfeit of used cooking oil and young entrepreneurs could make biodiesel for commercial use. "We can mentor them," he offers.

Four buses of NMAMIT are running on biodiesel and a few bus owners also buy the oil from them. The BRIDC here charges ₹50 per litre for bulk sales.

But the BRIDC in Mandya has become the frontrunner in biodiesel and biofuel cakes. No other BRIDC team makes such a range of products. ■

Dr Prasanna Kumar: +91 98445 74374; peslpk63@gmail.com

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The neonatal ICU at the Makunda Hospital

DOCTORS OUT THERE

Why small, remote hospitals matter and should get more attention

Civil Society News
New Delhi

IN 1992 a young couple, both doctors, travelled from Madurai in Tamil Nadu to a remote corner of Assam to check out the Makunda Christian Leprosy and General Hospital. They had been told that the hospital needed to be revived, having become defunct 10 years earlier after the missionaries running it were asked to leave India.

Vijay Anand Ismavel had a master's in surgery and Ann, his wife, was an MBBS physician. With qualifications like theirs, getting jobs or setting up a practice was easy. There was really no great need to leave Madurai. Both of them, however, had other expectations from their profession. They wanted to take their medical skills to the people who needed them the most — the farther away and the larger the number the better.

When they turned up at the Makunda Hospital they found it was just the kind of challenge they were looking for. It was in a decrepit state, located on grounds over hundreds of acres and it had a vast catchment of under-served poor rural people.

The Emmanuel Hospital Association (EHA) was ready to support the revival of the Makunda Hospital provided it could find someone who would make a long-term commitment to transforming it into a modern facility. It meant living and working there for as long as it would take.

No two worlds could have been more apart than Madurai and Bazaricherra, a neglected corner of Karimganj district, where the Makunda Hospital was

located. But Vijay and Ann, then in their 20s, were excited about making the transition. They told the EHA that they were ready to commit the next 30 years of their lives to the remaking of the Makunda Hospital.

Now in the 28th year of that commitment, the Makunda Hospital offers a range of services with a degree of quality, rigour and affordability that many big-city hospitals might find difficult to match. Its records for 2018-19 show it received 100,000 outpatients and 17,000 others who were given admission. It conducted 6,000 deliveries and 3,000 major surgeries.

As India staggers under the challenges of dealing with a brutal coronavirus pandemic, the shortcomings in its healthcare infrastructure now show up more starkly than ever. The millions of migrant workers who filled TV screens recently, as they tried to flee cities, really have nowhere to go for treatment, especially once they are back in their villages.

Perhaps this is a particularly appropriate time to learn from the experience of successful small hospitals like the Makunda Hospital in the not-for-profit sector. Many innovative models for public healthcare can be found among such spirited institutions. They not only fill gaps in the healthcare system, saving lives and improving health indicators, they also show how standards can be kept high without unreasonably raising costs or extracting profits. Through the zealous efforts of people who work in them, these hospitals also take the medical profession back to its original moorings of dedication and selflessness.

The EHA has in its fold 21 hospitals like the Makunda Hospital in remote parts of India. Much beyond the EHA, Christian mission hospitals, both Protestant and Catholic, are said to account for 60,000 beds, once again in places

where they are much needed.

Similarly, there are the Ramakrishna Mission hospitals that work within communities and provide affordable care. There are also some 400 well-qualified rural surgeons who have chosen to open hospices in remote parts of the country, performing general surgeries at low cost. A great example of the Rural Surgeons' Movement is the Rural Medicare Centre at Saidulajab in the periphery of south Delhi. Dr JK Banerjee and his wife began it in a tin shed and today, having blossomed into a hospital with modest charges, it receives throngs of patients. Dr Banerjee is no more, but several competent physicians and surgeons try to keep his dream alive. Such medical skills might otherwise have been unreachable for the poor patients with small incomes who go there.

There is also Doctors for You (DFY), a team of physicians, which swings into action when there are emergencies. In addition to their rapid-response services, these doctors have also set up a 30-bed hospital, to be expanded to 200 beds, in Bihar. And in Bilaspur you would find the Jana Swasthya Sahyog.

The list of such efforts is a long one. Each effort is impactful in its own way. In *Civil Society* magazine, as journalists, we have done stories on them over the years, getting to know the doctors and understand what their hospitals do. But nationally, in terms of policy and government outreach, not enough is done to use them to enliven and strengthen the national healthcare system.

PARTNERSHIPS: "Creative partnerships are the way forward and the government must learn to draw on talent and experience in the non-profit sector as well as the best of the private sector to create healthcare infrastructure in smaller cities and villages apart from strengthening hospitals in the big urban centres," says Dr Ravikant, 40, founder of DFY. (He prefers to be known only by his first name.)

Dr Ravikant, who is currently camping in Muzaffarpur in Bihar to set up a cancer hospital with government support, calls for a reset in values and priorities among medical professionals and in the healthcare system as a whole. He emphasizes the role of public health specialists. There should be incentives, he says, for taking degrees in public health and it should be a mandatory qualification for doctors in administrative roles.

DFY has engaged with government hospitals in several states and tried to improve their processes and standards. Motivating government doctors has been part of this effort. But institutionalized steps are needed for such engagements to have a lasting impact. DFY teams are compelled to gingerly nudge government doctors and other staff in the direction of improvements. It doesn't take long for them to slump back into their old ways. The coronavirus pandemic has underlined the need for governments to act decisively on improving systems and raising standards in their facilities.

"There should be lateral entry into the government healthcare system," says Dr Ravikant. "We should also consider having a cadre called the Indian Public Healthcare Service along the lines of the Indian Administrative Service where talented young doctors can join and strengthen the government system."

"We need to decentralize healthcare and go to the smaller cities and towns. Kerala has done well during the current pandemic because it has a healthcare system that goes all the way down to the grassroots. You need people to survey, test, quarantine and so on," he explains.

But Kerala is an outlier. Generally, the government systems in most states are not as responsive. From primary health centres to district hospitals and specialty facilities, linkages are either weak or don't exist. General hospitals run by the government are, with some exceptions, in a shambles. Private hospitals are too commercial.



The Makunda Hospital premises are neat and clean



Dr Vijay Anand Ismavel and Dr Ann

Small rural non-profit hospitals provide high quality service, save lives and improve health indicators. They need to be included in policymaking.

THREE PHASES: The non-profit sector, on the other hand, shows what can be achieved at ground level and in remote locations. To return to the Makunda Hospital example, when Vijay and Ann started out in 1993, a year after their first visit, they drew up a strategic plan, which consisted of three phases of 10 years each.

They have ensured that the Makunda Hospital is sustainable, earning what it spends except for one or two percent of its revenue that comes from donors. In fact, the hospital spends ₹3 crore of its own earnings by way of charity, which essentially means treating poor patients free.

The hospital has motivated staff and a succession plan is under way with replacements for the Ismavels (Vijay is 56 and Anne 53) already in position. In addition to the services the hospital provides at its original location, it has a branch in Tripura and outreach in its own radius, thereby reaching people where they live and creating healthcare awareness.

Vijay and Ann have also set up a school attended by 1,200 students from the same catchment that their poor patients come from. Health and education have gone together and brought awareness and empowerment to people who now not only have a hospital they can rely on but also know what better health is about.

While the government struggles to get good doctors to rural areas and small cities, the Makunda Hospital succeeds in attracting talent ready to work for modest salaries.

"There is a disproportionate number of healthcare workers in urban and richer parts of the country. Although work in the more remote parts is not so glamorous or rewarding from the material point of view, it is certainly more challenging and fulfilling. This needs to be told to young medical professionals,

so that some of them would consider working in such places at least as part of their career and do so joyfully and not as a burden," says Dr Vijay Ismavel.

He emphasizes partnership with the government as being essential for any large-scale impact. "Most hospitals are capable of local impact on their own but partnership with the government allows regional impact. It is important to engage, for thought-sharing and understanding each other's constraints and closing gaps based on each other's strengths," he says.

But problems exist with policies and laws, which do not take into account the needs of people and hospitals in remote rural areas.

"The challenges and constraints in rural areas are different. Healthcare indices can be quickly improved with the minimum of investment. Hospitals in such places should get incentives as well as relaxations and exemptions from stringent requirements — not to lower quality but to be realistic," explains Dr Ismavel.

POLICY HURDLES: For all the great work they do, small and remote hospitals are not adequately consulted during discussions on framing national healthcare policies. Large hospitals, whether owned by the government or private corporations, on the other hand, have little problem being heard and defining policy. They hog regulatory space. This is unfortunate because they have little interest in rural areas.

"Government facilities in many grassroots areas are not good and may vary a lot from state to state and corporate interest is poor in such areas as there's not much money to be made. It is the non-profit hospitals that are important for closing the gap between those who can and those who can't access quality affordable healthcare," says Dr Ismavel.

The rules relating to blood banking are an example of the hurdles small

Dr Joseph recalls that when he came to the Duncan Hospital after getting his MBBS he operated on a woman patient with a perforated bowel. He would not have got that opportunity elsewhere as a young doctor.

hospitals face. Hospitals need ready access to blood during emergencies, but only a registered blood bank can draw blood from a donor.

To get a licence for setting up a blood bank a hospital has to have on its staff a pathologist or an MBBS medical officer with at least one year of experience in a blood bank. It is difficult to get either in a remote rural location. The Makunda Hospital has had to settle for being a 'blood storage centre' but if it runs out of blood and needs it during an emergency, the hospital has to get it from a blood bank 50 km away.

Says Dr Ismavel: "Hospitals requiring large amounts of blood in remote rural areas should be allowed to have a blood bank with trained doctors and good standards but with relaxation of stringent rules — maybe a doctor who has worked for a month in a reputed blood bank and with the hospital having excellent protocols and practices in place — which can be inspected and approved."

Another example of a policy hurdle is that under the Assam Clinical Establishments Act, to conduct deliveries the Makunda Hospital was required to have a full-time obstetrician, paediatrician, physician and anaesthesiologist. Since it didn't have this level of staffing for each delivery, the hospital received a closure notice.

"We requested time and now have all these consultants. However, if the hospital had been forcibly closed at that time, thousands of patients from a large and remote rural area with limited options would have been severely affected," recalls Dr Ismavel.

SURPRISE DECISIONS: Collaborations with governments can be fraught with uncertainties. In Hyderabad, Dr Evita Fernandez, a gynaecologist who runs the Fernandez Hospital, took up the training of 30 nurses from five states under the National Midwifery Educators' Programme. An understanding was signed with the University of Lancashire to bring in five



Post a surgery at the Duncan Hospital: It's a lot of team work



Dr Blessy Sucharita with Dr Prabhu Joseph

international midwifery educators.

The programme was successfully underway when the Telangana government withdrew its support because the National Health Mission director in the state changed and the new incumbent didn't think the programme was necessary.

Similarly abandoned was a programme for setting up palliative care centres for cancer patients in the districts of Telangana. It was supported with funds from the Union government and six centres were set up through an interesting partnership between the state government and voluntary organizations in India and abroad. All six centres have been closed.

"It is not easy to work with the government when a single officer can take a decision which is impossible to reverse. It is a lot of effort wasted. We shifted training of nurses to the Fernandez Hospital, but the idea was to conduct the training in a large government hospital. We have also been left paying a rent of



A consultation at the Duncan Hospital

DOCTORS' SALARIES: The business model of a hospital defines the medical standards that a patient can hope for. When profit is the motive, medical standards tend to take a hit. In insidious ways a work culture develops in which making money becomes all-important. It is a slippery slope.

Government hospitals aren't into chasing profits, but they tend to get mired in corruption, lack motivated doctors and generally deliver poor care though there are exceptions and a state like Kerala shows what the government sector can achieve.

Non-profit hospitals that discipline themselves and become sustainable from their own revenues seem to strike the right balance. They are neat and clean and stick to the essentials. No fancy rooms and marble floors.

What doctors earn is key to achieving this balance. At Makunda and other EHA hospitals, an MBBS physician gets around ₹32,000 and an MD ₹46,000 when starting out with annual increments to follow.

Even after 28 years at the Makunda Hospital, Dr Ismavel gets just a little over ₹1.25 lakh and Ann gets around ₹95,000. At the Duncan Hospital, at Raxaul in Bihar, also part of the EHA, Dr Prabhu Joseph, 42, a spinal surgeon who also serves as the superintendent, gets ₹71,000 and his wife, Blessy, 41, a paediatrician gets ₹58,000. Such salaries are enough to live comfortably and even have some savings in rural locations though they are nowhere near what commercial hospitals pay in big cities.

Both the hospitals are sustainable and the jobs they offer are stable. The Duncan Hospital's annual income is ₹21 crore out of which it does ₹1 crore of charity. The Makunda Hospital earns around ₹20 crore annually and does ₹3 crore of charity.

Doctors are able to dedicate themselves to medicine. The experience they get is both satisfying and great for their careers. Dr Joseph recalls that when he came to the Duncan Hospital after getting his MBBS degree in Belgaum, he operated on a woman patient with a perforated bowel. He wouldn't have got that opportunity elsewhere. Additionally, he found role models in doctors like Santosh Mathew and his wife, Saira, who had in their younger days similarly chosen to serve in rural areas.

Both Dr Joseph and Dr Ismavel, as well as their wives, have gone on to acquire postgraduate degrees at the Christian Medical College in Vellore after working at these rural hospitals. Their experience has made these degrees more meaningful.

"Normally young doctors are goaded by their families to immediately go in for postgraduate degrees. After that they begin chasing a living. It is much better to first work a few years, particularly in a rural area," explains Dr Ismavel.

"After a few years here, I specialized in paediatric surgery at the Christian Medical College in Vellore. When I returned, I was the only paediatric surgeon in the southern half of the northeastern states. In Chennai at that time if there were 60 paediatric surgeons and I would have been the 61st," he says, emphasizing that the real opportunities for doctors as well as the need for their skills exist outside the big cities.

During the coronavirus pandemic small hospitals like Duncan and Makunda are standing by to handle a possible overflow of cases. But will the pandemic lead to a better role for them in the country's healthcare system? More important, will young doctors be incentivized to find in these hospitals the inspiration to view their profession differently? ■



Dr Ravikant of Doctors for You

₹3 lakh a month for a building where the nurses were accommodated," says Dr Fernandez.

Dr Fernandez says non-profit and mission hospitals have an important role to play in primary and secondary care. She feels the government should institutionalize them and support them with subsidies for electricity, water and equipment. They should have access to concessional finance.

Dr Fernandez has added two hospitals to the original Fernandez Hospital, which her parents set up. All three are in the private sector but are run with a social heart.

"Our doctors don't live in mansions but they get comfortable salaries. They aren't given any incentives," she says.

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Gunsberg is the new flavour Natural ginger beverage catches on quickly

Raj Machhan
Chandigarh

IN a market dominated by international beverage majors, here is a homegrown brand of natural ginger ale and ginger beer that puts forth a serious claim of 'superior quality'.

Gunsberg, a brand of non-alcoholic beverages manufactured in Chandigarh, uses natural ingredients in its formulation. It can be consumed as a mixer and as a standalone soft drink — just sip it as a natural beverage, without the side effects of any preservatives.

The drink is a combination of ginger juice and cane sugar with a sprinkling of fresh apple and lemon juice in carbonated water. The end result is a drink that is a blend of traditional Indian flavours with a twist.

The beverage is the brainchild of two Chandigarh-based entrepreneurs, Sarthak Aggarwal and Abhishek Bajaj, both 38 years old and born and brought up in Chandigarh.

"My mother used to make ginger ale," says Aggarwal. "She had her own recipe. It was pure and tasted great. I looked around and found that there was no such drink available in the market. Most of the beverages used artificial ingredients."

In Bajaj he found a partner willing to give concrete shape to the idea. The two had a lot in common. Both came from premier schools — Bajaj studied at Lawrence School, Sanawar and Aggarwal went to St John's, Chandigarh. Later both joined AIESEC, an organization that develops youth leadership, where they forged a friendship.

They invested ₹30 lakh each as seed capital and began working on the formulation of the drink with the help of a chemist and a food scientist. After 150 tasting sessions, they finalized their product. "We wanted to create something unique. Every aspect of the beverage, the name, packaging and taste had to be new," says Aggarwal. 'Fiery and fresh' is how Bajaj describes the taste.

In September 2018, they launched the Gunsberg brand after finalizing the end product with the help of a food consultant. "Both of us did not have any background in beverages. I was running an IT company and Abhishek manages a chain of restaurants in Chandigarh. So we started very small, and took it up very slowly."

The two started production from a plant in Mohali. "We began operations in start-up mode and formed a core team," says Aggarwal. The venture at present employs 25 people with plans to aggressively expand the team.



Sarthak Aggarwal and Abhishek Bajaj, founders of Gunsberg

At present, the company juices around 300 kg of ginger per day. It sources the ginger from farmers and does away with middlemen.

They picked up the tricks of the trade as they went along. "When we started we thought the product would have just a very niche market. We visualized people combining it with other drinks or

as an alternative to the popular Schweppes ginger ale," said Aggarwal. But they were in for a surprise.

"As we went along, we realized the market was actually much bigger and that people were looking for healthier, low-sugar, premium beverages as alternatives to cold drinks," said Bajaj.

Gunsberg uses natural ingredients and the cane base and is made without preservatives. It is pasteurized for longevity and has inverted sugar to make it sweeter. Natural ginger ale can be used as a health drink as ginger is known to fight infection, is anti-inflammatory, lowers cholesterol levels, improves digestion and increases immunity.

Aggarwal says that the market for the drink is demographically agnostic. "The growing middle class in India and increasing health consciousness among millennials combined with increasing preference for Indian brands makes it a huge market."

So far, the market for ginger ale lies majorly in urban areas, comprising health-conscious, upwardly mobile consumers with a high level of awareness. "Earlier, such drinks were considered exotic but now awareness levels have increased. People travel more. We get more traction in the bigger cities but even in smaller tier 2 cities, people take to the drink after they taste it for the first time. People want quality products," said Aggarwal.

An average ginger ale consumer is between 25 and 65 years of age. "But it is safe for children too. It's a healthy drink and can be had by anybody," adds Bajaj.

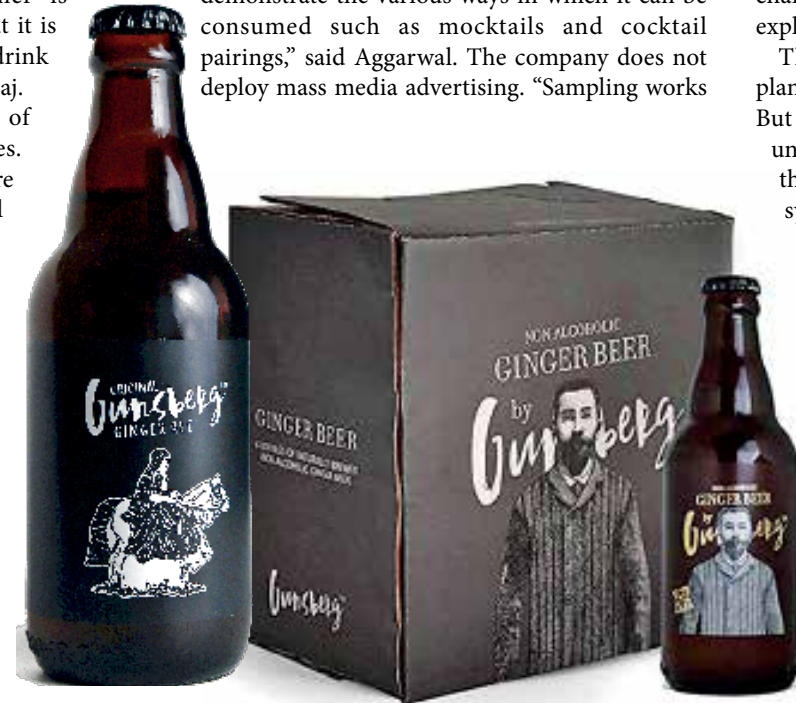
Indian tastes differ from those of people in more developed countries. "Our palate is sweeter. Our drinks are sweeter than what is made in global markets. But since Indians too are becoming more health-conscious, tastes are changing as well," said Aggarwal. Gunsberg has an Indian flavour, but with a twist as it strives to strike a balance between the two.

Gunsberg has strong farmer linkages as the company sources ginger from Sirmour district in Himachal Pradesh. "The quality of ginger in the hills is very, very good. We are one of the few ginger ale companies that use genuine ginger in our drinks, so it's important for us to get high-quality raw material," says Bajaj.

At present, the company juices around 300 kg of ginger per day. It sources the ginger directly from farmers, thus doing away with middlemen. Sirmour district in Himachal is a major ginger producing area of India. "Procurement will only grow in the coming years and we are looking at forging strong partnerships with the farmers," said Aggarwal.

What is special about ginger from Sirmour? "It is of good quality, absolutely farm-fresh, organically grown, has larger chunks, and it has that fiery taste that suits our drinks," said Bajaj.

Gunsberg is now available in 400 outlets across the north, with a major presence in Chandigarh, Punjab and Haryana. "Now we are present in Delhi too. We have around 50 outlets in Delhi, 50 in Gurgaon and a few in Noida," said Bajaj.



The average ginger drink consumer is between 25 and 65

The company is on a fast-growth track and plans to increase its presence to 2,000 outlets across the country by the end of the year. "Gujarat is a logistically important state for us. We plan to have a major presence in the south because of the year-round demand in those states," said Aggarwal.

Gunsberg relies on organizing sampling events at new outlets in various places to market the drink. "We go to different cities, do a lot of sampling, demonstrate the various ways in which it can be consumed such as mocktails and cocktail pairings," said Aggarwal. The company does not deploy mass media advertising. "Sampling works

best for us. It is cost-efficient and most effective. We are confident about the quality of our product and we know people will take to it once they taste it." The creators have taken care to choose attractive glass bottle packaging, which adds to the appeal.

The name Gunsberg is European in essence. It comes from Gunsberg, a Swiss town located on the Swiss-German border. "It is a small but very beautiful place and I thought it captured the characteristics of the beverage we had in mind," explained Aggarwal.

The company manufactures the drinks at its plant, Libation Crafts Private Limited, in Mohali. But why did they choose Punjab to set up their unit? "Mohali is an extension of Chandigarh and this area has now come of age as a business ecosystem. In terms of logistics, its proximity to Himachal is an advantage for sourcing quality ginger. Good quality water is our other major requirement and we get plenty of that here," said Aggarwal. Do they get any incentives from the government? "The role of the government is only at policy level. We have to do the rest on our own," said Aggarwal.

The company plans to introduce three more flavours in the next 12 months. "We want to position ourselves as a high-quality non-alcoholic beverage, which is a healthy alternative for all," said Aggarwal.

They don't plan to tap the export market as of now. "We have queries from abroad, but currently we would like to tap the Indian market. The time and era we are living in are just right to venture into new areas and experiment," said Aggarwal.

The Chandigarh-based entrepreneurs find motivation in contributing towards putting the city on the business map. The city does not have very many big brands based here. "The business environment in Chandigarh has now matured to a level which is encouraging for entrepreneurs. We are doing this, and there are other people doing different things. We want Gunsberg to be known as a Chandigarh brand," Aggarwal said.

Five years from now, the two visualize Gunsberg as one of the leading premium beverages companies in India, associated with high-quality raw material. The company has adopted innovation as a credo and plans to come up with products with high market potential. ■

WHERE ARE WE BEING READ?

Civil Society is going places...

Kutch, Porbandar, Chamoli, Bhavnagar, Ahwa, Tiswadi, Amritsar, Sabarkantha, Valsad, Sirsa, Hamirpur, Aizwal, Kinnaur, Dhanbad, Dumka, Palamu, Chamarajanagar, Haveri, Madikeri, Malappuram, Jhabua, Amravati, Kolhapur, Osmanabad, Bishnupur, Dimapur, Rajsamand, Mokokchung, Mayurbhanj, Bathinda, Fatehgarh Sahib, Barmer, Hoshiarpur, Jhalawar, Auraiya, Farrukhabad, Lakhimpur Kheri, Pratapgarh, Burdwan, Murshidabad, Pauri Garhwal, Cuddalore, Ireland, Sivaganga, Kancheepuram, Varanasi, Bellare, Erode, Ramanathapuram, Kanyakumari, Lohit, Perambalur, Pudukkottai, Shahdol, Goa, Tiruvannamalai, New York, Nalgonda, Domalguda, Bhutan, Tezu, London, Thailand....

Civil Society



Healthy
India,
Happy
India

Spreading Happiness and Wellbeing

Over the years, Himalaya has actively promoted the health and well-being of individuals across all age groups. Our campaign 'Healthy India, Happy India' focuses on healthcare by conducting comprehensive health camps in rural, semi-urban, and remote areas.

Our recent camp in Maschling village, East Khasi Hills, in association with SYNJUK (Ka Synjuk Ki Hima Ariling Rish Union Maschling Welfare Society), gave the local community access to specialized healthcare services such as Dental, Ophthalmology, Gynecology, Pediatrics, Orthopedics, and General screening. Awareness sessions were conducted on health and hygiene, and free medicines were distributed during the camp. Through this initiative, we reached out to over 1000 individuals.

Similar camps have also been conducted in Rajasthan and in more than 370 schools in Meghalaya.

INSIGHTS

OPINION | ANALYSIS | RESEARCH | IDEAS

Strong leader, weak State



THE COVID-19 pandemic has brought to the fore a paradox at the heart of the present political conjuncture in India. On the one hand, we have the most powerful and popular Prime Minister in office who is now known to an overwhelming majority of the country's citizens. On the other hand, the State and government over which he presides are nowhere near being able to deliver on the expectations he has generated. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh used to often say, "promise less, deliver more". Prime Minister Narendra Modi has willy-nilly pursued the opposite motto: "promise more, deliver less."

The social, political and economic consequences of this paradox first became visible after the demonetization of the rupee. It is once again on display as the state and civil society grapple with the COVID-19 pandemic. I have always maintained in my writings that demonetization was a political intervention that had economic consequences. Its primary objective was not to unearth black money. It was an instrument used by a prime minister sitting in distant New Delhi to enter the life of every single citizen in the remotest parts of the country.

After Indira Gandhi no other prime minister had become a household name across the length and breadth of India. Modi's victory in May 2014, with a little over 30 percent of the popular vote, was as much a negative vote against the Sonia Congress and its second avatar - UPA-2 - as it was for a leader of promise which Modi projected himself to be. That Modi had not yet established his brand and credentials would have become obvious to him when the BJP lost the assembly elections in Delhi and Bihar. Demonetization came in the run-up to the elections to the Uttar Pradesh assembly.

The common man silently supported the PM's decision by patiently standing in queue to exchange old notes for new. The disruption to their life did not alienate voters. There were very few protests against demonetization. However, what the following weeks revealed were the shortcomings of the government — the delay in getting new notes out, the faulty ATMs, the disruption of the farm and

small enterprises economy. The economy took a huge hit because the Indian state was not able enough to deliver on the hope and promise generated by a Strong Leader.

With the COVID-19 pandemic too we see this contradiction playing out. Public response to the one-day "Janata curfew" and the lockdown has been generally positive. Even the millions who walked miles to get to distant homes did so peacefully. As with demonetization, no violence, no display of anger, hunger and frustration. They heard the Strong Leader. They knew there was a global problem. They knew the pandemic would threaten their lives and livelihoods. Yet, they walked quietly home. They had no complaints against the Strong

incapacity has been compounded by the economic slowdown, which in turn has contributed to a further reduction in government revenues. No Strong Leader can deliver on his big promises if the state treasury is weak and running low on cash.

As for the limitations of the public health and public sector healthcare system, one does not have to say much. For years the Indian state has neglected both. Even in the best of times the government is unable to handle the healthcare challenges of society — ranging from the care of the new-born child to that of the ailing elderly. Viral attacks come and go, and most of us manage. Thanks to our weather, natural immunity and so on, we survive disease and a virus. But when a pandemic of this magnitude hits the world, the inherent limitations of the public system in India present themselves as a constraint on the promise of the Big Leader. He knows that. And so he urges us to clap and light lamps for the few who still work in the healthcare system.

By describing the Indian state as 'weak' I am not for a moment denying the ability of the security forces to get tough when they want to. We have seen a lot of that toughness in the last few months. The weakness of the state — Gunnar Myrdal referred to the weakness describing the Indian state as 'soft' — lies in its inability to deliver in areas where it should. Certainly, education and health are two such areas where the state has failed to deliver.



The urban middle class is solidly with the Big Leader

Leader. But they had no faith either in the capacity and capability of a weak State, that has rarely been able to deliver what they need. The limited capacity of the state to address the challenges posed by the pandemic stands in contrast to the hopes of an aspirational India generated by and invested in the Strong Leader.

The limitations in the capacity and capability of the state in dealing with the many consequences of the pandemic are imposed by several constraints. First and foremost is the constraint imposed by limited fiscal capacity of both the central and state governments. Second, the constraints imposed by the limited capacity of the public health and public sector healthcare system. Third, the inadequacy of human resources in almost all agencies of the state dealing with a national lockdown.

The Indian state has been fiscally constrained for a long time now. The challenge posed by a low direct taxes-GDP ratio has been compounded by the problems of transition from the erstwhile indirect taxes regime to a new goods and services tax system. A pre-existing problem of fiscal

The paradox of the popularity of a Strong Leader presiding over a Weak State may not be a paradox at all if we assume that the electorate's one-third who voted for Modi are not as worried about these constraints as the two-thirds who may not have voted for him and are the ones walking home in search of food and care. The pandemic and the lockdown have brought to the fore issues of class. The urban middle class is solidly with the Big Leader. They are the ones who clap and light lamps, and watch *Ramayana* on TV over breakfast and dinner. But the Strong Leader needs and wants the continued support of the poorer millions, and they in turn want a more fiscally empowered state to fund a more caring and efficient public health and healthcare system.

Finding the financial and human resources that can enhance state capacity and capability so that government can deliver to the poor on the promise of the Strong Leader is the big challenge facing the government. How Narendra Modi manages to square the circle in the face of this challenge will define his prime ministership. ■

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The new workplaces



TECH TALES

KIRAN KARNIK

A description of our present situation could well be “so near and yet so far”. Locked-in and in quasi-quarantine, we are unable to meet even those friends and colleagues who live close-by. COVID-19 has forced us to be home-bound and to shun close contact with anyone outside the household. Strangely, though, as we remain confined, the precise opposite of the opening phrase is also true: “So far and yet so near.” Friends and colleagues — some from our distant past — living in other countries or faraway places are re-establishing contact through the wonders of technology.

Work-from-home (WFH) has become a necessary norm for many millions. With social distancing and practically a curfew (for all but essential workers), organizations have had to re-work their processes and try to keep things going through WFH. Obviously, this is feasible only for those functions that do not require physical presence (as, for example, shop floor workers in a manufacturing plant). For those in WFH mode, there is need to access information and connect with colleagues, customers and suppliers. This requires connectivity and, most often, access to the organization's data servers or computers. Modern technology provides this through reliable and — where required — high-bandwidth links.

Work inevitably involves meetings and discussions. Since these are no longer possible in person, the only way is to do this electronically. In theory, a call over the phone may meet the need, and a conference call — with multiple participants — makes a larger meeting possible. However, this often feels inadequate. Video-conferencing (v-c) provides the answer, fulfilling the need to see the other participants. Many platforms now make possible such video-conferencing using a lap-top computer, or just a smartphone. Not only can you have multiple participants, but one can see all of them simultaneously. Unbelievably, this is free: you only pay (to your telecom service provider) for the data that is used.

In these days of a near-global lockdown, the popularity of these v-c services has exploded. Little wonder that while most businesses are down, these

v-c platforms are doing well. When last checked, the market valuation of Zoom Communications — one of the popular platforms — had zoomed to \$38 billion! Apart from work meetings, these v-c platforms are now being widely used for connecting with friends and family. The technology is not new, but with time on their hands, more are now convening such groups for a chat, or even for virtual parties.

Like WFH, another functionally important application of various e-services is online learning. With schools and colleges closed, many institutions are now scheduling regular classes for students through various online apps. The foundations for this were laid many years ago with organizations offering online courses, coaching and tuition. Some have made a lucrative business of it (for example,

Photo: Civil Society/Umesh Anand



First, commuting to office may well be once a week instead of once a day. Second, there will be greater flexibility in working hours. Third, part-time work may increasingly be the norm.

Byjus in India), while others provide free courses.

Online ordering of food and goods has been around for long, but has now attained special value when one does not have the alternative of going out. Many may miss the touch and feel of items, or the pleasure of bargaining with the vegetable vendor, but certainly welcome the escape from pollution, from the hassle and time factors of commuting, or of looking for a parking slot.

While the lockdown is a temporary measure, the use of WFH and online functionalities, now experienced more widely and deeply than before, are likely to bring about some permanent changes. While there are some downsides, organizations and individuals will begin to see the many advantages

too. Three decades ago, the Indian IT industry created a new business model through off-shoring: doing work in India for organizations in Europe and the US. This established the basic concept of working from a distance, making use of communication technology. WFH is only a continuation. However, if it does take root, it holds the promise — and threat — of creating important changes in how we work and live.

First, commuting to office may well be once a week instead of once a day. Second, there will be greater flexibility in working hours. Third, by choice or otherwise, part-time work may increasingly be the norm and the so-called gig economy may be here sooner than we thought. Fourth, all this may draw more women into the workforce, enabling them to take up a paid job, even as they grapple with a myriad of household tasks that make them superwomen. This will have societal impact in terms of gender and inter-generational relations, as also for inclusivity. As many studies have shown, getting the many house-bound women into the paid workforce will give a big boost to India's economic growth. Fifth, WFH can be the trigger to decentralize and move a lot of work to smaller towns and even rural areas, taking work to people instead of vice versa. Last, and vitally, all this requires a robust communication infrastructure: reliable, secure and constantly upgraded to keep up with the best. Hopefully, need and demand will catalyze this.

The enablement of part-time work due to WFH has multiple implications, some good and others worrisome. One likely consequence is a change in employment terms, with companies treating a lot of their workers as “independent contractors”: the employment mode used for drivers of taxi aggregators and delivery agents of food/goods delivery companies. This would mean no job or income guarantee, and no social security. Already, a vast majority of even full-time workers in the informal or unorganized sector face these challenges. It is essential that the State provide guaranteed healthcare,

children's education, unemployment allowance or minimum income and pension on a universal basis. If necessary, databases of Aadhaar, socio-economic census, MGNREGA, mobile phone subscription and bank accounts can be accessed (with due regard for data privacy) to target specific individuals or groups and transfer money directly to their accounts.

Whether with regard to WFH or other things, technology throws up new problems, but also provides solutions, in a constant upward spiral. E-proximity in an age of social distancing! ■

Kiran Karnik is an independent strategy and public policy analyst. His recent books include *eVolution: Decoding India's Disruptive Tech Story* (2018) and *Crooked Minds: Creating an Innovative Society* (2016).

COVID-19 and democracy



ELECTION TRACKER

JAGDEEP CHHOKAR

IT is not easy to get down to writing when the country, indeed the world, faces an uncertain future due to the coronavirus pandemic. But this is perhaps a good time to try and explore the impact of the coronavirus on democracy.

It is well known that crises bring out the best and worst in people. So it is with societies. The coronavirus pandemic is arguably the worst crisis the nation faces since Partition in 1947 when India became independent. The vast number of people walking on highways is a grim reminder of that. How a society performs during a crisis is determined by how it is governed.

The principles governing independent India were laid down in the Constitution by the Constituent Assembly in 1949. Two very significant speeches were made in the Constituent Assembly, one by B.R. Ambedkar on November 25 and the other by Rajendra Prasad on November 26. Both displayed great insight on how India might be governed in times to come.

Rajendra Prasad was president of the Constituent Assembly and then elected the first president of the newly formed republic. Here is an excerpt from his closing speech, pertaining to governance, that he made on November 26, 1949, just before the resolution, “That the Constitution as settled by the Assembly be passed”, was put to vote.

“Whatever the Constitution may or may not provide, the welfare of the country will depend upon the way in which the country is administered. That will depend upon the men who administer it. It is a trite saying that a country can have only the Government it deserves ... If the people who are elected are capable and men of character and integrity, they would be able to make the best even of a defective Constitution. If they are lacking in these, the Constitution cannot help the country. After all, a Constitution, like a machine, is a lifeless thing. It acquires life because of the men who control it and operate it, and India needs today nothing more than a set of honest men who will have the interest of the country before them ... It requires men of strong character, men of vision, men who will not sacrifice the interests of the

country at large for the sake of smaller groups and areas and who will rise over the prejudices which are born of these differences. We can only hope that the country will throw up such men in abundance ... I have no doubt that when the country needs men of character, they will be coming up and the masses will throw them up.”

Rajendra Prasad makes another sagacious observation about India and Indians:

“We have a tendency to blame others for everything that goes wrong and not to introspect and try to see if we have any share in it or not. It is very much easier to scan one's own actions and motives if one is inclined to do so than to appraise correctly the actions and motives of others. I shall only hope that all those whose good fortune it may be to work this Constitution in future will remember that it was a unique victory which we achieved by the unique method taught to us by the Father of the



Citizens are more likely to tolerate or support authoritarian measures during security crises

Nation, and it is up to us to preserve and protect the independence that we have won and to make it really bear fruit for the man in the street.”

If we look at the current state of the country, while it is undergoing an epidemic, we might gain some insight into what is going on, why, and what is likely to happen in future.

The other important observation is from Ambedkar, who was chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Constituent Assembly and is often referred to as the architect of the Indian Constitution. Ambedkar's speech was very wide-ranging but here is something he said that has a bearing on governance:

“There is nothing wrong in being grateful to great men who have rendered life-long services to the country. But there are limits to gratefulness. As has been well said by the Irish Patriot, Daniel O'Connell, no man can be grateful at the cost of his honour, no woman can be grateful at the cost of her chastity and no nation can be grateful at the cost of its

liberty. This caution is far more necessary in the case of India than in the case of any other country. For in India, Bhakti, or what may be called the path of devotion or hero-worship, plays a part in its politics unequalled in magnitude by the part it plays in the politics of any other country in the world. Bhakti in religion may be a road to salvation of the soul. But in politics, Bhakti or hero-worship is a sure road to degradation and to eventual dictatorship.”

This observation is also helpful in understanding the current goings-on in the country.

Now we come specifically to corona and democracy. Two professors of governance at Harvard University, Steven Livitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, have studied the possible impact of crises on democracy. In their book, *How Democracies Die* (2018), they say that “The combination of a would-be authoritarian and a major crisis, can, therefore, be deadly for democracy.”

They support their statement with some arguments. One is: “Citizens are also more likely to tolerate — and even support — authoritarian measures during security crises, especially when they fear for their own safety.” They continue, “Even democratically elected presidents can easily concentrate power and threaten civil liberties during war.” They conclude the discussion with:

“For demagogues hemmed in by constitutional constraints, a crisis represents an opportunity to begin to dismantle the inconvenient and sometimes threatening checks and balances that come with democratic politics. Crises allow autocrats to expand their room to maneuver and protect themselves from perceived enemies.”

What do the above observations tell us about COVID-19 and democracy? The coronavirus outbreak was initially thought of as a major public health crisis. Over time the realization came that it will also have a significant impact on the global economy. So, in addition to health and economic crises, the coronavirus epidemic will also have a major, perhaps defining, impact on how democracy works.

While Indian democracy will most certainly be impacted, the effect of COVID-19 will not be confined to democracy in India. The working of democracy across the world is unlikely to remain the way it is. Perhaps it is premature to speculate on the direction of change but what can be said with reasonable confidence is that democracy, as we have known it so far, may well become unrecognizable. ■

Jagdeep S. Chhokar is a former Professor, Dean, and Director in-charge of Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad (IIM-A), and a founder-member of the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR). Views are personal.

The virus unites us



VILLAGE VOICES

R. BALASUBRAMANIAM

A lot has changed in the past month. The COVID-19 crisis has thrown up challenges on the public health front and on the personal front for each one of us. We are not only doing our bit in handling this problem but we are also coping with the disarray in our lives.

Little more than a month ago I had the opportunity to visit a small two-acre plot cultivated by Bommi, an indigenous Kadukuruba tribal woman, in a remote part of Mysuru district. She proudly showed me the high-yielding ragi (millet) that she had cultivated this year. This was the first time that anybody in her area had grown this variety. She explained to me that the harvest expected in the coming month would be three times what she used to get from the traditional ragi she cultivated earlier. She excitedly told me that she would share the seeds from her crop with her neighbours and make sure that they also benefited from her experiment. Bommi was looking forward to all her friends and relatives helping her with harvesting and threshing the crop.

Neither Bommi nor I nor anybody else could have imagined that a month can be a long time in our lives. Today, she is finding it difficult to mobilize her community to help her save her crop. The crisis has thrown life out of gear not just for her but for millions of people around the world. Not only does Bommi have to worry about the virus and finding soap and fetching water to keep washing her hands, social distancing has meant having no one to help her harvest her crop.

While the crisis has exposed the vulnerability of governments, of health systems, global bodies and of each one of us, it has also brought out the indomitable spirit of humans, the leadership of the heads of some nations, the collective resolve of the scientific community, the softer side of the business world and the goodness in each of our hearts. Though our health systems have not been prepared for such a pandemic, the courage and spirit of our frontline health workers, security agencies and volunteers are exemplary.

From social distancing to changing the way we

greet each other, to altering personal habits and behaviour, to recognizing the importance of professions that we took for granted, things are not the same anymore. This crisis has defined a new normal for all of us. And it is impressive to see how each one of us is adapting and coping with the manifold demands imposed on us.

For the privileged few, this may be the time to catch up on one's reading, try new online courses or just spend quality time with the family. For the young, it may be the time to discover new online games and catch up with their favourite shows on Netflix or Amazon. For a few others, boredom and isolation can tax their mental health. For several IT employees, it may mean the invasion of their offices into their homes. Whether we call it work from home or working at home, things are no longer the same anymore.



Lunch being served to migrant workers

around, she worries about how she will feed her family this coming year with harvesting not likely to happen on time. Direct bank transfers are a godsend but then people like her are worried as the bank is not open for her to withdraw cash. The manager and the clerk used to travel each day from the nearest town but are not able to do so now.

While digital transactions and online purchases have become a way of life for urbanites, people like Bommi operate in a world where physical proximity is the norm for both social and economic sustenance. She prays that none of her family members falls sick as there is no way of reaching the hospital 20 km away. Lack of public transport has exposed how vulnerable our poor, with no private means of transportation, are.

While the country's economy and the plight of migrant workers are being debated on television, what is not spoken about is how important the little money that these workers send back to their families in the villages is. People like Bommi can today talk of agriculture only because of the money that their children send back from distant cities. While our public agencies are responding to the crisis, we need to ensure that the needs of both our urban and rural areas are addressed. Geographic disadvantages will now be more visible as India learns to manage the public health challenge of her rural hinterland. We also need to keep in mind that only when our farmers continue to do what they have been doing will the rest of India have food to eat.

This is also the time for us to understand how deeply intertwined and interdependent our lives have become. The more we practise social isolation, the more we recognize the need and importance of several people who have quietly kept society moving forward — whether it is our daily newspaper boy, or the milkman, or the domestic help, the barber down the street or the security personnel outside our apartments, or the farmers toiling in the sun every day — each one is critical and we now need to ensure that we show our togetherness with them all.

The coronavirus does not differentiate between rich and poor, the urbanite or the rural dweller, the doctor or patient, the merchant and the working class, the employer and employee, the several castes that India has, or the public sector and the private sector...then why should we human beings do so? Let us resolve to use this opportunity to dissolve all barriers of separation and unite — not just to fight the virus but all the other inequities that we have created for ourselves. ■

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

The more we practise social isolation, the more we recognize the importance and need of several people who have quietly kept society moving forward.

But for people like Bommi, this new normal is making demands that few of us can relate to or comprehend. The only petty shop that was close to her home has now run out of stock as the local grocer is no longer able to travel to Mysuru city to get fresh stocks. While nature has been kind and Bommi is able to pick several 'greens' in the fields

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READ US. WE READ YOU.

The rebellious singer

Shut Up Sona tells the story of a singer with a cause

SAIBAL CHATTERJEE

SONGSTRESS Sona Mohapatra is a defiant outlier. Hindi film music may have helped her gain fame but she does not sway to Bollywood's tunes. The singer has forged her own unique identity. "I feel blessed for the opportunities I've had to sing film songs, but there is so much more that I do," she says.

The "so much more that she does" forms the basis of a new documentary film, *Shut Up Sona*, which puts Mohapatra's approach to music, and to her role as an entertainer seeking to drive change in an ossified industry, in perspective, bringing out the uncompromising spirit that informs both her craft and its modes of delivery.

The 86-minute documentary, directed by cinematographer-filmmaker Deepti Gupta, examines Mohapatra as a gifted singer and a tough-as-nails woman who pulls no punches when it comes to speaking up for gender equality in a business where male entitlement is firmly entrenched.

Says Mohapatra: "I have always been inspired by artists from around the world and across the ages who have gone beyond the scope of just entertainment. Having a voice and a personality has helped me stand out." She says this in response to a question about the multiple fronts on which she has been fighting bruising battles, especially in recent years.

As a singer, Mohapatra explores India's diverse musical heritage and picks out gems from the vast treasure trove for reinterpretation. As a woman, she fights for female artistes to be treated on a par with the male crooners. On social media, she takes misogynists head-on. And, of course, as a concert performer, she goes out into the world in full 'combat' gear, using her music to convey larger concerns.

"All of these are rolled into one," says Mohapatra. Gupta's film, produced by the singer herself, provides just the sort of rounded portrait that the feisty entertainer deserves. "In Mumbai, they constantly tell me I do not fit in. There are the A-listers and the B-listers. It's some kind of caste system that is going on. I am not above this, but I'm



Above and below: Scenes from *Shut Up Sona*



not part of the game either," she says.

The confrontational and the contemplative coalesce in *Shut Up Sona* as it probes the flashpoints that bring Mohapatra into direct conflict with those that aren't comfortable with a woman who holds many an ace up her sleeves. She says: "I love connecting with my audiences in many different ways. I see myself as a social commentator. Social media has played a very important role in my ability to eliminate the middlemen and communicate directly with the people."

Shut Up Sona, studded with rousing musical performances, is a treat for the ears. At the same time the provocative conversations at its heart are hugely stimulating. They touch upon subjects that range from patriarchy and gender discrimination to the nuances of roots music and the power of song to challenge religious and social bigotry.

In Rajasthan, an expert on Mirabai's musical

oeuvre tells Mohapatra how patriarchy and feudalism have conspired over the centuries to keep the spotlight on her devotional songs at the expense of her protest poetry that spoke of female desire and sexuality. At the Nizamuddin dargah in Delhi, she is told that a woman isn't allowed to sing there, but when she does begin singing nonetheless the *qawwalis* join in. *Shut Up Sona* abounds in such moments where Mohapatra gently but unapologetically upends tradition.

The film follows Mohapatra as she crisscrosses the country, performing live for young audiences in college festivals and other events. Wherever she goes, she strikes up a lively rapport with people around her, an attribute that enables the vocalist to stay on top of her game.

Shut Up Sona premiered at the MAMI Mumbai Film Festival last year before travelling to festivals in Rotterdam and Goteburg in early 2020. It was also due to participate in other major festivals like Hot Docs Toronto and the Sheffield Doc/Fest, which have been scuttled by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Great music pulses through the documentary. "None of the music in the film is from Hindi movies," she reminds you. But *Shut Up Sona* does have a fleeting scene in which some women recognize her as the singer of *Ambarsariya*, the smash hit from the Hindi slacker comedy, *Fukrey*. "Hindi film music has given me the means to reach out to millions of people," she admits.

Mohapatra is, however, quick to point out that *Ambarsariya* is "a folk song." "I give credit to the

source it has come from although I may have reinvented it and given it a whole new audience."

Plain talk comes easy to Mohapatra. In the film, we see her calling out IIT Mumbai's Mood Indigo Festival for giving no space to female performers. In an angry missive sent to the organizers, she calls the event "a training ground for the worst kind of boys' club". She also takes on an obscure Sufi outfit that accuses her of injecting "obscurity" into an Amir Khusro rendition.

Mohapatra initiated the film because she felt she "was at a point in her career and her life where she needed to do more than just be a singer". She says: "I have multiple interests. I love to travel, I love history, I love connecting with my audience in different ways." She and Gupta have been friends for a decade and a half. "I admire the way in which she sees India," says Mohapatra. "And she has a deep love for roots music."

Mohapatra rues the fact that India does not even have a music industry. "It is only a subset of the film industry. We should be worried that music does not

'I carry more than 3,000 songs within me. It is a culture so rich. There isn't just folk; there's also classical music, qawwalis, ghazals.'

have an existence of its own, it only helps promote films." But none of the music in *Shut Up Sona*, she points out, is film music.

"I carry more than 3,000 songs within me," says Mohapatra. "It is a culture so rich. There isn't just folk; there's also classical music, *qawwalis*, *ghazals*, *nazms*. Every state of India has at least five dialects, each with music of its own. This country is so crazily diverse that you can't have only flavour that feeds us."

Some of that depth and range of India's varied musical heritage is reflected in *Shut Up Sona*, where it not only serves the purpose of defining who Mohapatra is, but also transports the audience into a zone where its timeless resonance becomes palpable.

"I have always believed that it is important for artistes to convey something more through their music than just nature poetry. It has to reflect what you believe in," she says. Initially, Mohapatra reveals, the idea was to do a 'journey' film. It was music composer Ram Sampath, her life partner and frequent professional collaborator, who suggested an alternative approach.

Says Mohapatra: "Deepti and I talked about our abiding interest in roots music, in Mirabai, Kabir and Amir Khusro, as we travelled. Ram told me that I should consider bringing my life into the film. Your life, he said, has so much conflict, you are an artiste who constantly engages with issues and fights and yet enjoys herself." In *Shut Up Sona*, the one thing that Mohapatra doesn't do is shut up. Just as well. ■

Cars, cows and rickshaws

CIVIL SOCIETY REVIEWS

HOW far has green activism by Delhi's middle class benefited the city? It hasn't resolved a single problem and it has also marginalized the urban poor. That's the thesis of this volume by Amita Baviskar, professor of sociology at the Institute of Economic Growth in New Delhi. Her opinion, and it's a convincing one, is that 'bourgeois environmentalists' have made Delhi unfair and unlivable. Strong words.

The first part of her book, 'Remaking landscapes and lives,' focuses on the exploitative relationship between the State and the urban poor. Historically, the labouring classes have been invisible to Delhi's rulers. They built the city, but the British ignored them as well as the natives. When India gained independence, Delhi's power elite turned a blind eye to the plight of the city's builders. They weren't included in master plans or housing schemes or in basic services.

Planners, and subsequently the middle class, wanted a city that was clean, green and 'world class'. But Delhi's labouring class subverted such plans by building their homes anyway, on vacant land they could find, whether it was the banks of the Yamuna or a low-lying plot. They worked as domestic help, daily wagers, chowkidars, street vendors, rickshaw-pullers and so on. There was demand for their labour, but no recognition of their rights.

Baviskar recounts the saga of evictions that followed, beginning with the Emergency, when slums from the Walled City were banished to east Delhi, then a swampy outpost. She ends with the Commonwealth Games when large-scale eviction relegated slums to the outskirts of the city on stretches of land with no services.

Apart from NGOs, nobody objected. The Asian Games and the Commonwealth Games, promoted as public spectacles, were seen as national activities, she writes. Opposing them, on any ground, was deemed anti-national. Yet, it was the labouring class which built Delhi's flyovers, roads, stadiums and its smart Metro, its world-class infrastructure.

In the second part of her book, 'Contesting the Commons,' Baviskar turns her attention to middle-class activism for the environment which caused impoverishment and misery to the urban poor. It was MC Mehta, the famed environmentalist-lawyer, who led this battle for a clean and green Delhi through the courts. Justice Kuldeep Singh, the 'green judge', was sympathetic and a line-up of PILs on such causes followed.

Mehta's PIL against dust pollution led to the closure of mining activities on the outskirts of the city. The one against polluting industries forced hundreds of factories to shut down or migrate to other states. The rising prices of real estate were an incentive for some factory owners, writes Baviskar. According to the Delhi Janwadi Adhikar Manch, some 250,000 workers lost their jobs and received

no compensation because 90 percent weren't permanent employees.

Strangely, no survey was done on how much each industry polluted. The accusation was based on what they produced and not on actual emissions and pollutants.

The focus of most green activism was on streets, the Ridge and the Yamuna. Baviskar's chapter, 'Cows, cars and cycle rickshaws' is almost humorous. The middle-class aspiration for orderly streets and traffic was sabotaged by cows and buffaloes which belong to the Gujjars, traditional inhabitants of the city, who live in some of Delhi's 276 urban villages. Their pastures and fields were acquired by the state to accommodate the expanding city. All attempts to relocate their dairies have come to naught.

The municipal corporation even launched a cash-for-catch scheme: catch a cow and win Rs 2,000. Only seven cows were caught. Cycle rickshaws, an ecofriendly mode of transport, were hounded by the police and the municipal corporation. Baviskar recounts how the Yamuna became a contested site, eyed by real estate. Slums were evicted — they were causing all the pollution in the river according to activists. The Games Village sprang up on the land they vacated, a massive temple and much else.

Baviskar is kinder to environmentalists protecting the Ridge and to some extent to those fighting to protect Mangar Bani, the only sacred forest struggling to survive in the National Capital Region in the Aravallis between Gurgaon and Faridabad.

Has pollution gone away? As Baviskar points out, the middle class needs to shine a light on itself. Air pollution is caused by cars, driven by the rich and middle class.

Pollution in the Yamuna is mostly sewage, flushed nonchalantly into the river by the same class. Mangar Bani is threatened by real estate sharks who build fancy condominiums for the rich and middle class. The Ridge isn't seen as a natural forest because the middle class sees it as a place for relaxation, a mere park.

The question is, why do the urban poor have no voice although they are a vote bank? To some extent, Baviskar answers this question. The urban poor are seen as migrants despite living in the city for decades. They lack strong organizations who could speak for them. Their concerns are seen as personal and not public, unlike green activism.

Baviskar's book is comprehensive and readable. But several NGOs have also done good research-based activism and we need many more of them. Hopefully, things are changing on the ground. No eviction has taken place in recent years by the Delhi government which has been providing services to slums.

Regularization of slum settlements was an election issue taken up even by the BJP. The visibility of migrant labour during this recent lockdown may lead to a change in the mindset of green crusaders. And the Yamuna looks cleaner with industries shut. ■



Uncivil City: Ecology, Equity and the Commons in Delhi / Amita Baviskar
SAGE / ₹1,195



**AYURVEDA
ADVISORY**
Dr SRIKANTH

Build your immunity

THE primary purpose of Ayurveda is to maintain one's health so that the incidence and severity of illness are considerably reduced. This unique principle is fast catching the attention of healthcare providers globally under the tag of 'preventive medicine'. It requires discipline, physical and mental, to be able to adapt to everyday threats from the environment we live in. This ability to manage regular as well as newer threats is unique to each individual and depends on one's immune system.

It is a well-known fact that a flawlessly functioning immune system is important to safeguard ourselves from the external and internal infections we are constantly exposed to. Ayurveda recognizes the importance of mental and spiritual well-being as well as physical well-being in building a robust immune system.

There are several factors which can lead to one's immunity going out of whack.

Right on top of the list are recurrent digestive disturbances. Keeping one's digestion in balance is important for immunity. A healthy gut is of utmost importance.

Next is excessive physical exercise. Exercise is great, but too much of it doesn't work to your benefit. It puts the immune system under pressure. Anything excessive is not good for you. It includes smoking, alcohol and mental stress.

Sleep timings are important. There is no real substitute for sleeping at night. If you mess with your sleep timings you end up messing with your immune system. The body's resilience comes

from good sleep.

A robust immune system, on the other hand, comes first of all from your genes. You could be born with sound immunity.

In case you don't have such favourable genes, lifestyle will matter more than anything else. It is important to have a healthy and clean body and a happy, optimistic mind.

Seek to have a disciplined daily routine. Be particular about a well-balanced, nutritious diet consumed in a mindful manner in a peaceful atmosphere at appropriate time and in the right quantity. Consume 'rasayana' herbs which are rich in antioxidants.

IMMUNITY BOOSTING FOODS

- Freshly cooked food. Avoid refrigerating and reheating foodstuff.
- Spices: turmeric, black pepper, ginger, garlic while cooking.
- Cow's ghee: include two or three teaspoons as part of your daily diet.
- Curd: Consumption of freshly prepared curd, neither sweet nor sour. But not after sunset.
- Buttermilk may be consumed instead.
- Fruits: Fresh seasonal fruits, grown locally. Exotic varieties are not necessarily better.
- Dry fruits: Almonds, cashew nuts, raisins, dried figs are beneficial.
- Boiled and cooled water in sufficient quantity. Dehydration makes you susceptible to many disorders, hence adequate water intake is important. Excessive intake of water is not advised for an otherwise healthy person just as less intake is also not advised.

IMMUNITY ENHANCERS:

The following herbs consumed alone or in combination are known to enhance immunity. These can be included in your diet, based on susceptibility.

- Amalaki (amla, Indian gooseberry) – can be

taken daily by healthy individuals to maintain their health.

- Guduchi (giloy, tinospora) – helps to avoid recurrent infections.
- Yashtimadhu (mulethi, licorice) – a gastro protective, it helps healing of recurrent gastric ulcers.
- Shatavari (asparagus) – a potent antioxidant, improves immunity, in addition to having specific benefits for women.
- Ashvagandha (Indian ginseng) – an anti-stress herb, helps to enhance physical strength.
- Tulsi (basil) – helpful for those prone to recurrent respiratory infections.
- Haridra (haldi, turmeric) – reduces allergy and inflammation, helpful for those with allergic tendencies.

All the above herbs are available as tablets by reputed pharmacies (Himalaya, Organic India).

Other potent immunomodulators include: Haridra khanda (Baidyanath, Pentacare) – 1 teaspoonful in warm milk, twice daily, preferably on an empty stomach just before the onset of the season will keep respiratory infections at bay.

Septilin (Himalaya) or Extrammune (Charak) along with Bresol (Himalaya) – 2 tablets twice/thrice daily are helpful in avoiding recurrent respiratory infections.

Chyavanaprasha (any reputed pharmacy) – Kesari kalp (Baidyanath) and Swamala compound (Dhothpapeshwar) are modified versions that are readily available. One teaspoonful, twice daily, followed with a cup of warm cow's milk helps prevent respiratory ailments.

Immusante (Himalaya) and Nirocil (Solumiks) – for immunity support particularly in preventing impending viral infections and, of course, aiding faster recovery. ■

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

Himalayan bounty

THE INHERE Aajivika Utthan Samiti (IAUS), an NGO in Almora district of Uttarakhand, runs a successful non-profit, Himalayan Fresh, which supports and promotes agricultural produce grown by women farmers on their terraced farms. The difficult terrain makes it tough for farmers to reach urban markets.



Himalayan Fresh doesn't impose new crops on farmers but helps them to improve agricultural practices and boost yields. Surplus produce is picked up by Himalayan Fresh for processing, packaging and marketing. The objective is to empower women farmers, transform agriculture into a viable livelihood and bring economic security to small farmers in the hills.

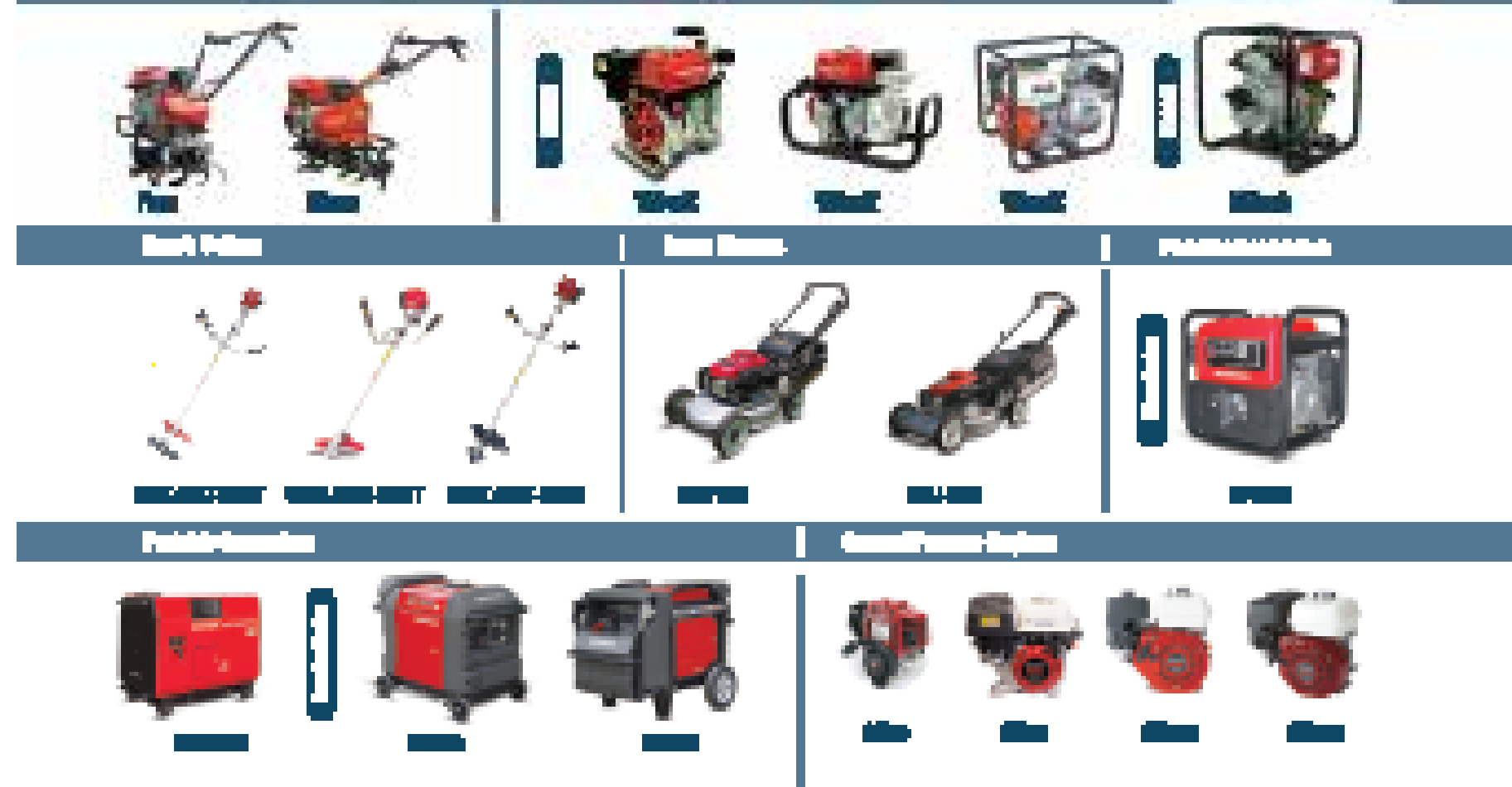
Himalayan Fresh works with 2,000 farmers. They are certified as organic.

Himalayan Fresh offers consumers a range of natural and fresh foods. They sell pickles, jams, concentrates, pastes and chutneys, spices, pulses and cereals along with herbs and teas. The teas on offer include tulsi-arjun, jamun-lemongrass, brahmi-saunf and more, which soothe health conditions like diabetes, chronic cold and digestive issues. ■

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