

# Civil Society



10 YEARS OF THE 2% NORM

## DOES CSR WORK?

- SANJAYA BARU
- R.A. MASHELKAR
- ARUN MAIRA
- KIRAN KARNIK
- JAGDEEP CHHOKAR
- RAJIV KHANDELWAL
- MADHUKAR SHUKLA
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- B. MUTHURAMAN
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# ORIGINAL JOURNALISM

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Cover photograph by Lakshman Anand for Civil Society

### ANNUAL SPECIAL ISSUE

This special issue of Civil Society celebrates 19 years of our magazine, which was launched in 2003. Since this is a double issue for the months of February and March, we will be back in April.

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## On turning 19

To be able to go the distance is always a good feeling. Completing 19 years for us in *Civil Society* is something like that. In the best of times the publishing business calls for resolve of a high order. With the slowdown and then the pandemic that followed, the challenges have been even greater. But we have hung in and kept coming out. We have thinned down a bit by reducing pages, like everyone else, but despite the pressures we have stayed the course with the ideas with which we started out.

*Civil Society* continues to tell the stories that get overlooked. We bring you the voices of those who tend not to get heard. It remains our belief that India is a rich and diverse country and capturing this mosaic in all its intricacies should be the goal of good journalism. Oriented thus, we see great things in ordinary folk and their capacity for problem solving and getting ahead.

Journalism tends to get equated with power. We decided in the beginning that we would seek to be different. Vast masses of Indians don't have the privilege of being so predictably bracketed. In their free-falling lives are the stories that are not just interesting to tell but also a measure of India on the move.

Right from the beginning, when we launched *Civil Society* in 2003, we have used high-end mainstream skills to tell stories that wouldn't otherwise get noticed. We have used pictures, colour printing and design to be engaging. In doing so we believe that we have enhanced readability and, through it, awareness of issues that are otherwise relegated to being dull and dreary. We believe that we have been impactful in our coverage of agriculture, housing, healthcare, travel, education, urbanization, governance and a lot more. It makes us very happy when readers come back to us and say they always find something new to read in our pages.

An example of how we try to make a difference and change the narrative are our interviews with Abhijit Prabhudessai and Ravi Chopra. The former in Goa on the coast and the latter in the mountains in Uttarakhand. Both provide rare insights into the environmental crisis that is befalling India. It is important to let people speak and be heard without interruption. We remain committed to investing time in such conversations. Our magazine has a rich haul of interviews.

Our anniversary issue takes a stab at understanding corporate social responsibility. We believe that the time has come to critically look at what companies are doing because the private sector has an important role to play in taking the country forward. Are companies ducking their bigger and more consequential responsibilities in the guise of doing CSR? Read this issue and more on this theme in the coming months to find out.

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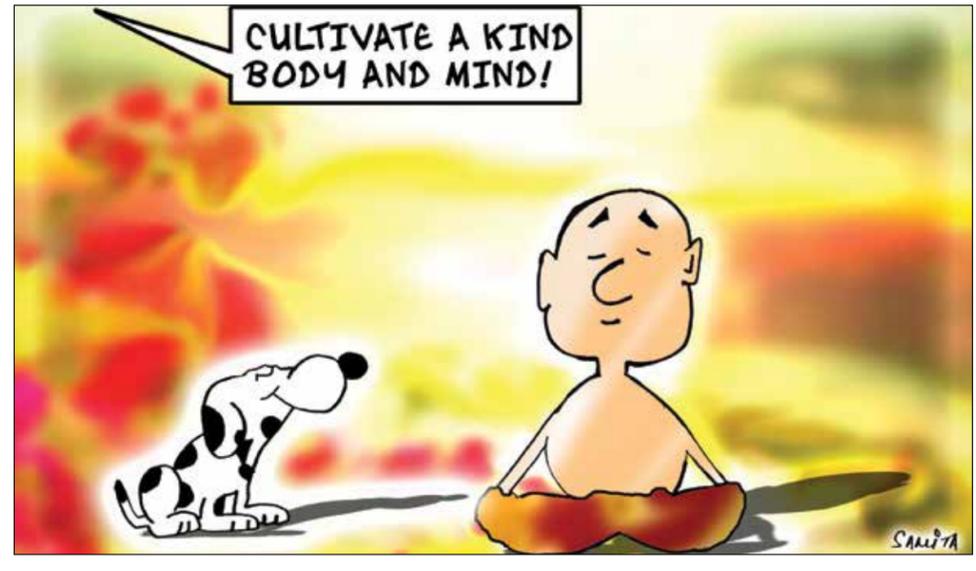
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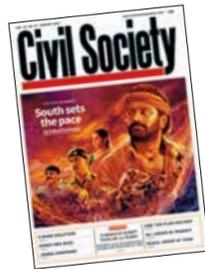
## IN THE LIGHT

SAMITA RATHOR

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## LETTERS



### Starring south

Thanks for your cover story, 'South sets the pace', by Saibal Chatterjee. It was good to read a round-up of the year's cinematic successes. But one was looking for a more insightful piece on why cinema from the south has captivated Hindi-speaking audiences in north and central India.

*P. Venkatesh*

Southern cinema has done well because it delves into very local stories and adapts them with great skill and panache.

*Shweta Sinha*

### Sinking hills

I read your valuable interview with Ravi Chopra online. On Joshimath, I'm told that there is an 'overground' 'development' issue as well as an underground seismic issue for any breakdown of soil and environmental ecology to take place. Our own 'young

fold' Himalayas — our pride, our possession — will need to 'unfold' in geological time. I think a flattening out has begun. Couple that with our unregulated building of reinforced concrete residential structures across states that share the fragile Himalayan ecology.

All over, from Darjeeling to Dehradun, Namdapha to Nainital, ugly heavy steel-and-cement pillars are plunged into the fragile soil systems of sub-Himalayan and Himalayan India. It's been happening over 50 years! No regulation, yes. But what about no concern by greedy local landholders and builders? Finally, they will learn a lesson. Thanks to Joshimath.

*Amit Kumar Bose*

### Media heroes

Your story, 'Hyperlocal reporters win village panchayat elections', was a wonderful read. In the midst of a social media storm, I missed Aadiwasi Janjaguti's efforts. This is a brilliant example of encouraging decentralization and community-level governance. Now here is an example to cite while arguing for this cause.

*Geetika Kaura*

### Village uplift

PRADAN's work, as cited in your report, 'Bengal village sees boost in incomes from better farming', is an excellent example of combining a well-thought-out strategy with effective implementation. It is a bottom-up plan to improve the economic condition of people in

our villages. PRADAN'S work should be used as a model by others who work, or plan to work, in this area.

*Walter Vieira*

### Forest stay

Sheema and Jhampan's homestay on the outskirts of the Kanha Tiger Reserve is the place to go to again, and people to spend time with, again. It's definitely not for those who want a loud, action-filled stay. Sheema and Jhampan are wonderful hosts who made my stay extra special.

*Gaurav Khosla*

### Job angst

I read Kiran Karnik's column, 'What stole my job?', in your December 2022 issue. This situation is the result of the ever-increasing use of automation and AI in every sector which is replacing manpower, rendering people jobless. In so far as India is concerned, the penchant for a secure government job adds to the problem. Instead of going out and facing the world to compete, most youngsters hanker for a government job to be secure.

The government is under no obligation to provide jobs. Its duty is to provide an environment to create wealth, industry and consequently jobs in the private sector which it is doing. The repeated PLI schemes in various sectors are creating huge job opportunities which the youth must take advantage of.

*Sumeer Sharma*

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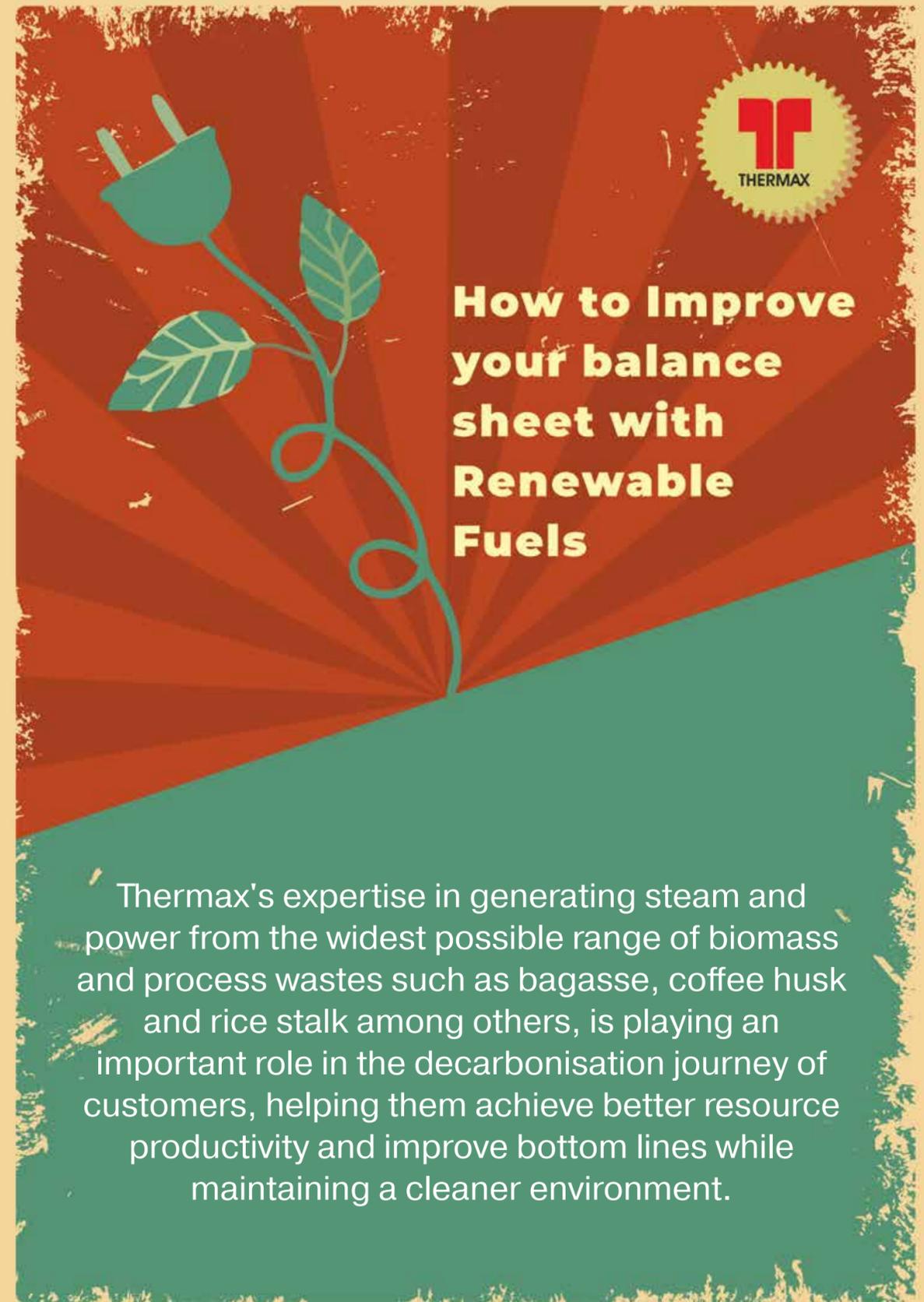
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## Abhijit Prabhudessai on a growing environmental crisis

Photo: Civil Society/Umesh Anand



Abhijit Prabhudessai: 'The government completely disregards the well-being of the people'

# 'Big projects won't last if Goa's ecological balance is destroyed'

Civil Society News

Candolim (Goa)

THE green and lovely state of Goa with its sandy beaches and forests might soon become a shadow of its former self if no curbs are placed on real estate projects. Everywhere construction is in full swing. Apartments, bungalows, hotels, highways are all coming up at breakneck speed with no thought, or so it would appear, given to groundwater, green cover or coastal zones.

Environmentalists have for long been warning that this kind of development is unsustainable. Moreover, it is destroying a way of life built on ecological sensitivity, community ties and livelihoods in farming and fishing. Instead of giving priority to people's concerns and their traditional livelihoods, the government is allowing the state to be taken over by the wealthy from all over.

There is no study yet of the kind of ecological damage being done and the displacement of local people taking place. But there are local voices that capture the Goan angst.

Abhijit Prabhudessai, social activist at Federation of Rainbow Warriors, has been fighting court battles and been part of people's protests to

prevent Goa from being taken over by real estate companies and commercial interests.

"Basically, what you are seeing are large entities being permitted to take away the land and resources of local communities. That's where the fight is," he said in an interview to *Civil Society*.

**Q: During the last Assembly election, land was an issue. What has happened post-election?**

Unfortunately, we have a government that completely disregards the well-being of the people of Goa. The policies that have taken us to this point are being aggressively pursued. Across the board, whether it is legislative actions, development programmes or even the judiciary, people's wishes and the necessity of leaving a sustainable world for our children are being disregarded.

**Q: You had taken up conversion of orchard land, settlement land and construction on hillsides. Where do these issues stand right now?**

Development projects in Goa are sanctioned through regional plans which is basically demarcation of zones across Goa of permissible land uses. In ecologically sensitive zones like orchards, paddy fields, slopes,

forests and so on, development activities are not permitted if they are contrary to agriculture or forestry.

But once lands are demarcated and shown as settlement zones, irrespective of present land use, they can become tourism projects or commercial projects. Similarly, the regional plan is supposed to demarcate a number of things which it does not. Like groundwater resources, community lands, prime tenanted agricultural lands. These are often shown as settlement zones in regional plans.

The land use struggle started in 2005 when the first regional plan was put forward by (Babush) Monserrate when he was minister of Town and Country Planning (TCP). It showed huge areas in settlement zones and led to a people's protest by the Goa Bachao Abhiyan. The regional plan had to be scrapped.

But the 2021 regional plan has gone through the same procedure. People are asking for a sustainable plan while the government goes ahead and shows crores worth of land in settlement zones. So, the struggle challenging the regional plan is going on in the courts. On affidavits the government has said it will look at projects very closely and not permit large projects. But on the ground, we see huge projects being passed across the state — projects on groundwater recharge areas, on slopes, in forests. Half the forests here are not identified and protected.

We are seeing massive projects on the Kadamba Plateau which should be conserved and, of course, in Bardez and in Salcette. This is leading to protests on the ground which are not reported and therefore not in the public eye. These protests are by local communities who feel responsible for protecting and defending the environment. It is closely linked to their own survival.

Such development is resulting in the destruction of our environment, displacement of our people and loss of culture caused by the local economy being destroyed. Basically, what you are seeing are large entities being permitted to take away the land and resources of local communities. That's where the fight is. It's an economic struggle. The government is unresponsive.

**Q: What is its ecological impact?**

The State Action Plan for Climate Change prepared by the government of Goa frighteningly shows 50 percent of the state's land is under severe threat from floods and sea-level rise in the next few decades. It also says the regional plan must be reconsidered in view of these flood-prone areas and to protect the land and people.

Water is a serious issue. We are, on one hand, saying Karnataka is taking away our water and therefore we need to fight. A free-flowing river is a principle we should follow. The Mhadei wildlife sanctuary and the tiger reserve are not recognized. Both are under severe threat if our water is diverted. But, at the same time, we are looking at the reckless destruction of our own water resources and that is inexcusable.

Goa was always self-sufficient in water. The water in Goa is in the laterite zone which is in the hills. It permeates through springs and emerges as surface water. What we see now is the concretization of plateaux and the destruction of hill slopes and groundwater recharge areas. If you concretize the hill, you destroy its water springs.

There is the issue of forests which are not identified and therefore not protected. But the government is not willing to even respond to scores of letters with scientific studies. Eco-sensitive areas in the Western Ghats have to be protected but they say they don't want to because there is scarce land for development. The entire way the government looks at it is that forests, water resources and agriculture are not development. That's where the government needs to correct itself.

They are not able to unfold the regional plan and execute it because of opposition from people. People are fighting in gram sabhas and panchayats. The powers of the panchayats and gram sabhas are being taken away circular after circular, amendment after amendment. People are fighting back, but they keep losing battles and irreversible change and loss are taking place.

**Q: Are most projects real estate ones?**

Mostly real estate projects in different forms. Large agricultural land is divided into plots and sold to individual owners to build upon. Or developers build several apartments, bungalows and gated communities. Then there are large tourism projects which are worrisome since they are mostly in coastal areas. Sand dunes are protected in low-lying fields. These are actually flood protection infrastructure. If we lose flood retention areas then you will have floods across those particular areas.

We have real estate projects on hills and slopes which threaten us with environmental disaster in terms of water, soil erosion and vulnerability to landslides. When you lose a large patch in the midst of a microscopic ecological system then the impact on everything else is something we have not assessed. It's very clear from the disappearance of biodiversity that we are in trouble.

**Q: Has any study been done of the loss of Goa's forest cover, biodiversity or coastal areas?**

The situation is that the scientific community is completely under the control of the government. It is, therefore, not in a position to do the work it needs to do. For example, the Mopa airport project or any large project where the government or a large real estate owner is involved — you will not see the scientific community coming forth to provide facts and science. We understand even circulars have been passed that they should not divulge facts to the public.

The national water policy says that all water recharge areas must be conserved. But in Goa groundwater recharge areas have not been

**'We have real estate projects on hills and slopes which threaten us with environmental disaster in terms of water, soil erosion and vulnerability to landslides.'**

mapped at all. If the aquifers and recharge areas were mapped none of these developments would have been allowed. Science is being crushed and subverted to allow all this. Then you have huge interests like in mining, real estate, tourism, industrial estates, and the infrastructure to support all of this.

This infrastructure is not at all studied. But we have seen with our own eyes its impact. If you build a small road in a forested area in the village, the first monsoon year you will see scores of reptiles and animals dead. In a few years the number will be less and in another few years there will be none. You actually end up killing everything that needs to cross the road. Large animals are found dead by the side of the road. All of this has a snowballing effect.

**Q: Is it because the government sees only tourism and not agriculture, forests and fishing as livelihood generators?**

The first step is for the government to accept and acknowledge the existence of these economies. The GDP doesn't show it. If you grow your own food or share it or barter it the government doesn't consider that to be an economic activity. The huge *khazan* lands are all sustainable farming systems. Some 400 or 600 families live off that paddy the whole year. These are economic activities that sustain life in Goa. And, yes, a self-sufficient village has to be the way forward.

At liberation Goa had a population of 600,000 which sustained itself on local resources. Large tourism projects will not sustain the moment you start losing the ecological balance. And agriculture, fishery, and forestry give more employment than anything else.

Our water bodies, lakes, rivers and *nallas* are by policy being concretized. Contractors spend crores to build concrete walls replacing

Continued on page 10

Continued from page 9

an existing laterite structure already there in mud. Instead, you can employ thousands of people to use the existing material and restore it. Pay them handsomely and you will save more than half the money you are at present spending.

But these proposals are not what the government would go for because there is an existing system of contractors who make big profits which fund political parties. This is, though, one way we can change the system.

**Q: Will the recent proposal to dam the Mhadei hasten the decline of Goa's ecology?**

Absolutely. I think it's important this be stopped because once the diversion takes place, it will be difficult to reverse the process. The Mhadei sustains three wildlife sanctuaries. The loss of even a small amount of water would have severe implications in summer when there is lack of surface water for flagship species like the tiger. It also has implications for local communities living on farming and fisheries. The rich stock of fish is due to freshwater from the Mhadei mingling with salty water from the Mandovi river. It will reduce our fish catch.

It's interesting that Karnataka says Mhadei diversion is for drinking water. On the ground they say the water will go to sugarcane farmers in Hubli-Dharwad. The Sagarmala programme shows, and part of it is already existing, steel plants in the same region which will consume 12 times the amount of water being diverted.

I would assume this water will not go to sugarcane farmers but to the steel and power plants which are consumers of the coal against which we are fighting in Goa. Of course, the government will never speak the truth. For every dam they say it's for drinking water, for farmers but it actually goes to industries and five-star hotels.

**Q: So, you would say there are multiple assaults on Goa's ecology?**

Rivers are under assault in several ways. The nationalization of rivers was a big setback because now the Inland Waterways of India is going to do its best to promote shipping which is what it is required by law to do.

Then you have the Ports Authority Act which allows MPT (Mormugao Port Trust) to plan for rivers; the Sagarmala programme which says 136 million tonnes of coal is going to be transported through Goa. After MPT takes over all the neighbouring fishing areas it can handle only 51 million tonnes. The remaining 86 million tonnes will be transported through Goa's rivers. There is assault from tourism, casinos, iron ore industries and the barges. Rivers have been decimated by iron ore mining. Fisheries were in abundance but have been reduced to perhaps 10 percent of what they were.

**Q: Is there any assessment of the displacement that has been taking place in Goa as a result of these projects?**

No. No study has been done. A group based in Delhi called Land Conflict Watch was trying to collect data. But no study has been done of displacement taking place, of displacement that has been prevented by people's protests and the displacement that is planned. We are not being able to find resources to do these studies.

**Q: When conversion of land from orchard to settlement takes place, technically, in terms of the law, is this meant for housing for local people and not for real estate projects?**

It's a very interesting question. Eventually the construction licence is granted by the panchayat. Under the Panchayati Raj Act, the panchayat is only given the function of rural housing. There is no other construction which it would be allowed to permit under the law.

But that has never been the interpretation of the executive, legislature or judiciary. The law is good only as per its interpretation. We have seen the judiciary defending real estate very strongly even in the high court. If you raise environmental, social or economic concerns you are looked down upon even in the high court. ■

## CRISIS IN THE HIMALAYAS

# 'All good advice on Joshimath was ignored'

Civil Society News

Gurugram

THE religious town of Joshimath is sinking and making headlines. Buildings have developed cracks and people are being moved to shelters. It is not every day that a mountain reclaims a whole town, but in Joshimath's case the signs were all in evidence. It is just that they were ignored.

Prescient votaries of careful development in the fragile ecology of the Himalayas have been cautioning against the building of wide roads and hydropower dam projects. But both have been happening on a scale that mountains can't cope with. Ravi Chopra's has been one such voice over the past 34 years.

An engineer with an IIT degree, he set up the People's Science Institute in Dehradun in 1988. More recently, he was on an expert committee appointed by the Supreme Court to study the impact of hydropower dam projects in the Himalayas. He finally chose to resign from the committee in 2021 because he felt the government was impervious to scientific advice. *Civil Society* spoke to Chopra, 77, in an extended interview, excerpts of which appear below:

**Q: Why is Joshimath sinking? What is your assessment?**

My assessment is that a number of factors are causing Joshimath to sink. This phenomenon has a history and an immediate cause. If you look at the history, this is old landslide debris left behind by glaciers which has stabilized over centuries. The first major assault on this location begins after the 1962 war with China after which roads were built. An army cantonment was located here later, which is necessary.

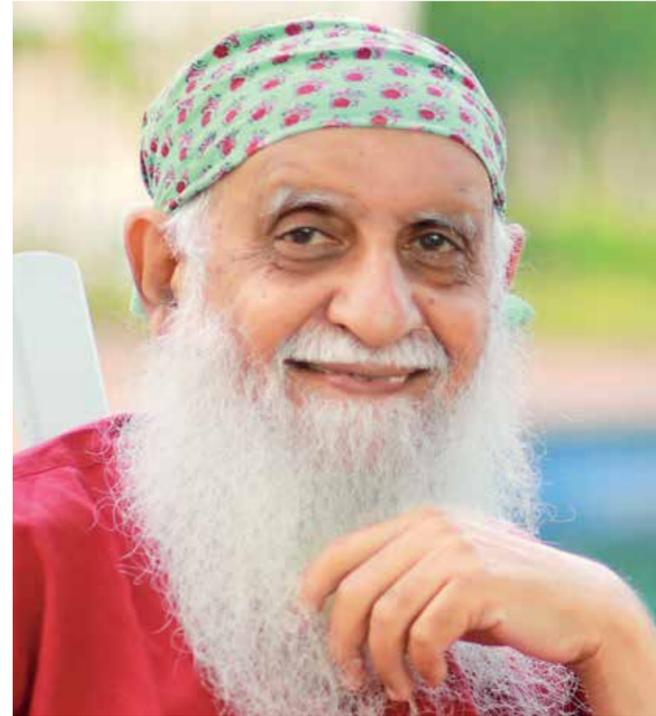
In the building of roads, however, the kind of care that was needed to be taken, it appears, has not been taken. That can also be excused. In those days there was no experience of building roads in such mountainous areas. Thereafter, cracks began to develop in different parts of the town and the UP government appointed the Mishra Committee — Mishra was the divisional commissioner at that time and Bhure Lal, the famous IAS officer, was the DM.

The committee cautioned against unplanned urbanization. It cautioned against deforestation and, most importantly, it cautioned that the toe of the hills should not be disturbed because the slope above is sensitive and prone to sliding. Now this is in 1976.

The tunnel construction goes back to 2005 or so. That's when construction of hydro projects began. I was just reading a paper, published in 2006, which talks of the development of cracks, particularly in Ravigram in Joshimath — the area most affected now.

After the state of Uttarakhand was formed, to boost tourism, infrastructure was enhanced, and the population of the town increased to around 20,000-25,000. The care that mountain towns and cities require was not given. The Mishra Committee's recommendation not to deforest was forgotten.

To make the slopes attractive to skiers in Auli, which lies above Joshimath, the slope was 'designed' and a ropeway was built. In 2009, I



Ravi Chopra: 'We need to devote deep thought on how to plan mountain cities'

think, the first signs of a major disaster occurred — the sudden leakage of water from the hillside which is traced to the tunnel boring machine of the Tapovan-Vishnugad project that seems to have punctured an aquifer.

There are reports that several of these kinds of ingresses in aquifers have occurred. So, 700-800 million litres of water was being discharged per second and the aquifer was discharging 60-70 million litres per day. At that time a report by two scientists from Garhwal University says: "This sudden enlarged descale watering of the strata has the potential of initiating ground subsidence in the region."

As a member of the Expert Committee set up by the Supreme Court in 2013, we also looked at this issue of dams being built in the higher regions of the Himalayas. The Vishnuprayag hydropower project had been destroyed at that time. We came to the conclusion that this is a paraglacial zone, that there is a lot of glacial debris left behind in this zone which during heavy rain can be mobilized and brought down with devastating effect.

We said that at roughly 2,200 m elevation, dams should not be built. Later we revised it to beyond the main central thrust. That means beyond Helang in this valley, dam construction should not take place.

Of course, the government does not listen to all this.

**Q: Then you have disasters?**

You have the 2021 disaster. It results in a lot of debris and water coming into the tunnel. The tunnel work is then suspended. But that water is sitting there. Local residents have said that there have been blasts in the tunnel thereafter.

It can be that during that blasting some new fissures opened up. The mass of water was trying to push its way forward. And ultimately it finds a route and in finding that route it weakens the soil cover above it. That is what we saw on January 2 or 3 when water leakage started appearing below the Jaypee (Vidya Mandir) campus.

I should add that the heavy release of underground water in 2009 may have also led to subsequent subsidence.

The final straw came when the Helang-Marwari bypass was to be built. The people of the town were apprehensive about the road. They thought their economy would suffer because tourists would just bypass the town.

We were not too keen on sanctioning this particular project because of

the Mishra Committee's recommendation that the toe of the hill should not be disturbed. The BRO (Border Roads Organization) was adamant about building the road.

In the course of discussions, we undertook a field visit. The BRO pointed out that their road, from Helang to Marwari, a stretch of five and a half km or so, would be constructed along a hard rock portion of the hill and not the debris portion of the hill.

So, given its importance for defence purposes, which the government put forward, we made a compromise suggestion. We said that the traffic going to Badrinath should go through Joshimath so that people's businesses are not affected but for the returning traffic this bypass can be opened up. There are traffic jams in the town during the tourist season, so returning traffic can come via this road. In which case you don't need a 10-metre tarred surface road. You need to cut (the hill slope) less.

So, we approved the Helang-Marwari bypass with the additional caveat that before any work starts there has to be a very thorough geological, geophysical and geotechnical analysis. Locals tell me there has been blasting for that road. This should have been avoided as far as possible.

This is the history, and the immediate cause of subsidence is dewatering of the tunnel, I suspect.

**Q: Is Joshimath doomed? Can it be saved?**

It is too early to say until I make a field visit and talk to senior geologists whom I can trust. I would say what appeared in October 2021 was dismissed as a localized phenomenon. Even a year later, people were thinking this is a localized phenomenon happening in one or two wards.

By December 2022, some 500 houses were in trouble. And now it appears houses through a large part of the town are damaged. The Experts Committee sent by the state said that an area of about 1.5 square km is affected. The chief secretary has informed the PMO that a strip about 350 m wide in that area has crashed. Dr Piyush Rautela, director of the Disaster Mitigation and Management Centre of Uttarakhand, says that the slide is affecting the whole town.

We have friends who live close to Auli and they are saying their houses have developed cracks. So, I suspect a large part of the town is threatened by the slide. We are fortunate that we are not in the monsoon season. We still have time to do a careful study and see how much of the town can be saved and retrieved.

**Q: Isn't there any urban planning specific to hill towns?**

There isn't. But there is a very serious need to devote deep thought on how to plan mountain cities. You look at Shimla, Mussoorie, Nainital. Buildings are precariously located. Trees are chopped down. The green cover drastically reduced. Vegetation has disappeared.

Most of these cities are unfortunately located on old debris. We have seen problems in Dharchula in the east, and in Uttarkashi district in the west. We need a completely new understanding of how to build mountain cities, based on carrying capacity studies.

**Q: Do you see many more towns and villages in this region getting similarly affected? Is there going to be a cascading effect? What has been the effect of the Char Dham road building, for instance?**

If you see the report of the high-powered committee, you will see a list of vulnerable zones that have been created as a result of the Char Dham Pariyojana. There are certain zones that may be described as being permanently affected. There will be landslides there. It will be difficult to stop that.

As I said, the kind of care that was needed to be taken was not taken. It was clear to many of us in the committee that the ministry had given a certain deadline and engineers were working according to that deadline. All caution was thrown to the wind.

**Q: Is this entire pilgrimage route now subject to landslides, subsidence, flooding and so on?**

Continued on page 12

Continued from page 11

I would say there are vulnerable zones. There are landslide zones on all the highways and government officials now recognize that. To give you an example, a little while ago, they agreed to build the last 25 km of the highway to Yamunotri on an intermediate width design. We had been arguing that the full road should be built according to that design. Now they've concluded that it is a very vulnerable stretch, and they will use the intermediate width design.

We did a preliminary calculation which included a few factors for the carrying capacity of Gangotri. We concluded that most likely the carrying capacity of Gangotri has already been reached or is about to be reached in the near future, in this decade.

The current road from Uttarkashi to Gangotri, about 100 km, has a tarred surface of about seven or eight metres and traffic is moving on it. We do not think it is necessary to expand the width of that road. But the BRO and the ministry are bent on making a 10-metre road. Now to do that you will have to do substantial cutting of the mountain slopes which, at many locations on that stretch, have a very high degree of slope. The official recommendation is that more than 35/36-degree slopes should not be cut. But on the Uttarkashi-Gangotri stretch, slopes are 50 degrees, 60 degrees and 70 degrees. But they are pushing ahead.

There are treasures on that route. If you go to the Char Dham today I can guarantee you will get a sensation when you travel on the Uttarkashi-Gangotri stretch. You will think, *Yeh elaka kitna sundar hai*. You will get this sensation because it has been declared an eco-sensitive zone and haphazard construction has been restricted.

Beyond Uttarkashi there is the town block headquarters of Batwari where the slope is sinking just like Joshimath. The river cuts past it below and from the town the earth is sliding down.

In 2010-11, the road just sank. Several shops on the side of the road cracked. These are not new things. We know where the vulnerable zones are, but we have no plans on how to handle them.

**Q: Why are people not objecting. Uttarakhand has a history of protests against ecological destruction. Is Joshimath going to be a turning point?**

If Joshimath can't be a turning point *phir toh halat bahut kharab hai*. Then only the Almighty can save us, though I'm not a believer in God. Because a number of warnings that have been given, have come true.

It is not as if there haven't been protests but the construction lobby and the dam lobby are the strongest lobbies in the country. They are not stupid. They deploy their intelligence to safeguard their business. Therefore, they have learnt ways of breaking up society into people for them and against them.

Just like the dam lobby splits society, the government too has its scientists who are worried about their jobs, if they don't toe the government line. I've seen this in the Char Dham committee.

**Q: Have any dams been cancelled?**

Three projects on the Bhagirathi were cancelled after Dr G.D. Agarwal's fast. The Wildlife Institute of India had recommended that 24 projects on the Alaknanda-Bhagirathi basin be removed. The court had asked us in 2013 to review those projects. Our recommendation was that 23 out of the 24 dams should be cancelled.

We wanted to cancel all of them but one of our members, a representative of the Central Electricity Authority, refused to sign. Since much of the damage on that stretch had already been done by the Tehri Dam and the Koteswar Dam, we agreed he could build one dam but we gave him a series of conditions. We were confident it would be hard for them to meet those conditions.

But all those 24 dams are still stuck in court. At some point in the past decade there was a meeting in the PMO where a PMO official said we will permit only seven dams to be built and no more. This was in reference to the Alaknanda- Bhagirathi basin where 70 dams were to be built. ■

# At Soppu Mela, nutritious greens to go wild over

Shree Padre  
Kasaragod

THE small venue where a two-day Soppu Mela or Green Leaves Fair was being held in Dharwad, in Karnataka, was overflowing with leaves of different colours, sizes, textures and hues. Farmers arrived from near and far with bundles of unfamiliar leaves — some with medicinal qualities and others known for their nutritional value.

The variety of edible greens that were brought to the fair surprised even the organizers, Sahaja Samruddha and Desi Angadi. Despite the small venue, and crop failure due to unseasonal rains this year, the Soppu Mela turned out to be a huge success. In two days, 13 stalls sold ₹63,000 worth of leaves and value-added products made with leaves.

“We had just eight to 10 days to organize the fair. We weren't expecting that many leafy vegetables to turn up. Yet leaves arrived from faraway places like Heggadadevanakote, Belagavi, Savadatti, Kundagola and Gokarna. A lady, Parvathamma, from a distant village brought 15 wild leaf varieties for exhibition and sale,” says Dr Prakash Bhat, a key member of Desi Angadi, a local group that's been holding an organic vegetables and organic products market in Dharwad every week.

Doctors and nutritionists often underline the importance of eating greens. Yet consumption of greens has been declining. City folk are familiar only with leaf varieties like amaranth, spinach and fenugreek. But there are innumerable varieties of uncultivated leafy vegetables in rural homesteads and in the wild which deserve space on every plate.

Madurai's Keerai Kadai shops, which exclusively sell green leafy vegetables and value-added products made from leaves, have turned out to be hugely successful. Started by two former engineers in Coimbatore three years ago, the green leaf shops have branches in the US too. The company claims that it sources produce from 1,500 farmers. It also exports greens and green leafy products to many countries.

In Kerala, Eleyariv (Knowledge of Greens), a movement started by Sajeevan Kavumgara, an activist in Thalassery, has caught on in the state. It has made many families aware about greens and encouraged them to grow such leafy varieties in their homesteads.

**GENE COLLECTIONS:** Sahaja Samruddha, joint organizer of the Soppu Mela, is an NGO based in Bengaluru and was planning to organize the fair in the city, but intermittent rains forced it to postpone the idea. Crops also got destroyed in the rain. Instead, it partnered Desi Angadi and held the fair in Dharwad, a small city and district headquarters.

In Karnataka, many farmers grow green leafy vegetables like amaranth. But a movement to develop green consciousness hasn't been initiated. Sahaja Samruddha has recently started a gene pool collection of about 30 to 40 amaranth varieties painstakingly collected from different states. The seeds of these leaves can be bought from their seeds division.

“Unfortunately, in cities like Bengaluru, greens are grown using sewage water. They look crisp and fresh but emit an odd smell and are tasteless. Also, such leafy vegetables contain traces of heavy metals from sewage and are very harmful to consumer health,” says Krishna Prasad, director of Sahaja Samruddha. In comparison, uncultivated leafy vegetables are unlikely to contain traces of hazardous substances.



Winners and judges of the green leaves cookery competition held at the Soppu Mela

There were eminent farmers too who came to the Soppu Mela with their produce. Prasada Rama Hegde, 45, who has been honoured with the National Plant Genome Saviour Community Award, apart from other awards, is from a farming family in Kanagodlu, Yallapur (near Sirsi). Hegde, who had come with 80 leaf varieties, has a vast diversity of wild leafy vegetables on his farm — most of them uncultivated and with medicinal value.

“The tradition of using leaves as both food and medicines is still prevalent in our village, but it is fast disappearing,” he says. “Our elders used such leaves. The younger generation has no knowledge and is reluctant to take the trouble of collecting greens from the wild and using them.”

Hegde also proffered advice on the use of such plants. Chutney made with kannekudi leaves increases body temperature during the monsoon months, he explained. Tambuli, a yoghurt-based *raita* made with another wild plant, helps to increase haemoglobin levels. He said in his *taluk*, Yellapur, about 25 to 30 uncultivated leaves are used for both food and medicine.

In the rural Gadag-Dharwar belt, Hakkarike Soppu, another uncultivated leaf variety, is regularly eaten fresh along with roti-based meals. A range of other varieties like pundisoppu, kiriksali, rajgir and amaranth are also stir-fried and consumed.

On the second day a green leaves cookery competition was organized. “We had 30 entries. Participants cooked traditional recipes with leaves. Prathima Pawar, an 80-year-old lady, stole the show. She made 11 different dishes and won the first prize,” says Sunanda Prakash, manager of Desi Angadi.

**NEW LEARNING** Sahaja Samruddha has vast experience in organizing crop fairs. They have held a millet festival, a tuber festival and a jackfruit festival in the past. “But Soppu Mela required new learning.

We had to carefully harvest the leaves hours before the sale, cover bundles of leaves in thin jute bags and sprinkle small amounts of water occasionally,” says Shantha Kumar C., coordinator of Sahaja Samruddha. If urban consumers had access to such nutritious uncultivated varieties, they would certainly buy them, he felt.

Sometimes leaves are mixed and stir-fried together or dunked into *sambar* or some other lentils. The underlying science is to provide essential nutrients and nutraceuticals for health.

Ninety-year-old Putteeramma of Panyadahundi in Chamarajanagar district knows of at least 100 such plants and their medicinal uses. These are abundantly available during the monsoon. In rain-fed areas, leafy vegetables are grown on bunds of irrigated fields.

Her son, Shivalingegowda, is working with the Institute for Cultural Research and Action (ICRA), an NGO in Bengaluru, which has documented Putteeramma's knowledge of Berake Soppu in a book, *Putteeramma Purana*.

“When we collect plants from our fields, we don't uproot the whole plant. We just cut the shoots for our use. This helps the plant to keep growing. During the monsoon season we cook Berake Soppu regularly. I can recognize about 50 soppu plants,” explains Shivalingegowda. Berake Soppu is mostly sold by elderly women on roadsides and not in regular vegetable markets.

“To attract more consumers we need to package greens attractively with jute sheets and highlight their medical and nutraceutical benefits,” says Krishna Prasad. Selling in cities requires facilities like daily transport and coolers, explains Krishna Prasad who advocates organizing farmers of leafy vegetables into clusters.

Sahaja Samruddha is now looking into whether Subjee Cooler, a low-cost fridge developed by Rukart, a company based in Thane, can help farmers of leafy varieties. ■

Contact: Shantha Kumar C., Sahaja Samruddha — 94487 74871



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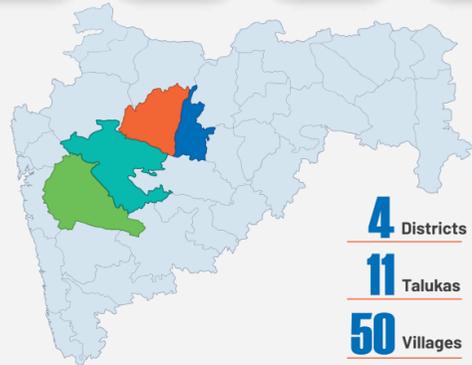
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# Learning braille is easier with instant voice feedback

**Kavita Charanji**  
New Delhi

WHEN four engineering students at the Goa campus of the Birla Institute of Technology (BITS) Pilani undertook a modest research project to make the learning of braille easier they hardly imagined that it would make them globally famous.

Some seven years later, however, their invention, now named Polly in the US, figures in a list of the best inventions of 2022 put together by *Time* magazine. In step with this stardom, their campus initiative, Project Mudra, has transformed into a trendily named start-up, Thinkerbell Labs (TL).

Polly is a wi-fi enabled device which was finally developed together with American Printing House for the Blind. Conventional braille learning requires a teacher to be present. But Polly provides braille learners with instant audio feedback and allows teachers to assign and assess homework remotely. It makes braille less daunting and more fun.

Instead of a standard metal or plastic slate used with paper, learners can write (and correct mistakes) using Polly's electronic braille slate and stylus. It is the first device of its kind.

Polly is being incorporated in the school curriculum of all 50 states of the US. Its official launch is in March this year. It will be available under the US federal quota as well as for general customers. There is already a waiting list of 1,000.

Back home in India, Polly is called Annie, which is also its name in Britain. The first Annie Smart Class in India was set up in 2018 in Rajyakrit Netrahin Madhya Vidyalaya, a blind school in Ranchi, Jharkhand.

NITI Aayog then recommended Annie to district administrations across India and, in this way, with a hop skip and jump, Annie arrived in government-run schools.

Now there are over 50 Annie Smart Class centres spread across 16 states in India. Annie overcomes the vernacular barrier too as it is available in eight Indian languages. With the

addition of six more Indian languages in the future, Annie will have yet wider reach.

Polly is named after Polly Thomson who spent 46 years as the legendary Helen Keller's companion and interpreter. Annie was the trachoma-afflicted Anne Sullivan, who was known as a brilliant teacher, interpreter and friend of Helen Keller.

"Polly and Annie, gets so much traction because they support self-learning. There is a global shortage of special educators and no self-learning technology to help students with visual impairment," says 28-year-old Aman Srivastava, co-founder of Thinkerbell Labs which is currently Bengaluru-based.

"We saw this gap all over the world, in the UK, India and then in the US. Current products and pedagogy required constant supervision and special educators had very high caseloads, leading to inadequate personal attention," says Srivastava.

"In India, the acute shortage of educators, combined with fragmented and ancient pedagogy, compounded this problem. Countries like the UK and US have highly trained special educators but they depend heavily on personal teaching. We tried to solve that problem through Polly," adds Srivastava.

So, while on the one hand the technology enlivens braille learning and increases its reach, it simultaneously enables special educators to find the time to focus on the more complicated aspects of early braille literacy and skill development.

It took a gruelling one and a half years for Thinkerbell to get Polly off the ground. Their new product has had to go through extensive field tests by co-partner American Printing House for the Blind. Now that Polly is set for a US launch, the Thinkerbell team has found its place under the sun.

"The *Time* recognition gives us international credibility. It gives us a moment to think how far we have come since we first started out," says Srivastava.

Thinkerbell Labs was co-founded in 2016 by



Co-founders of Thinkerbell Labs (left to right): Dilip Ramesh, Saif Shaikh, Sanskriti Dawle, Aman Srivastava



Taking Annie to a government school in Ranchi



Students using Annie



An Annie Smart Class

Srivastava, Sanskriti Dawle, Dilip Ramesh and Saif Shaikh.

But they go back to when they were students at BITS Pilani, Goa campus. It all started out as a research project at the campus. With a small grant, Srivastava and Dawle used campus facilities to build a braille alphabet song box made with a credit card-sized computer called Raspberry Pi.

Named Project Mudra initially, their first invention was essentially a very basic dicta-teacher designed to help the visually impaired learn the braille alphabet.

However, when Project Mudra received acclaim, they decided to set up a full-fledged venture that would deploy cutting-edge technology even as it gave an impetus to inclusive education.

Annie was a quantum leap from conventional braille learning. It comes packed with "gamified and interactive content, challenges and tests". A companion app called Helios allows teachers to track performance and schedule lessons so that all the students can learn at the same time.

In terms of content, Annie incorporates the Royal National Institute of Blind People's highly regarded Hands On for introductory braille reading. But, as time has gone on they have become more independent, with hands-on knowledge of Annie and their own braille learning.

There has been constant tweaking of technology to understand user needs ever since the early days of Project Mudra. When Mudra's prototype was first tested at L.V. Prasad Eye Hospital's rehabilitation centre and Devnar Blind School, Hyderabad, visually impaired students of the school were floored by its play-based learning features.

In 2017 field trials on Annie were conducted at the National Institute for the Empowerment of Persons with Visual Disabilities (NIEPVD) at Dehradun and Shree Ramana Maharishi Academy for the Blind, Bengaluru.

Consequently, the company went full steam ahead. The same year, they were able to raise investment from Indian Angel Network and Anand Mahindra.

Thinkerbell has benefited from incubation as a start-up by MassChallenge UK. The high-profile demonstration of Annie to the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge in 2016 also attracted media attention. Aided by Annie, the delighted royal couple typed their son, George's name in braille.

User research in India and UK, and participation at the View Conference, UK, followed the next year. The Thinkerbell team is in discussions with special needs institutions in the UK, Australia, and Ireland, among other countries, to promote Annie. They have also been selected for MIT Solve, a social-impact competition. ■

## Samita's World

by SAMITA RATHOR



# The stand-off in Haldwani

Rakesh Agrawal  
Haldwani

THE people of the Banbhoolpura area in Haldwani, a bustling town in Uttarakhand, feared eviction after a Nainital High Court order, published on January 1, directed the railways to remove all encroachments from 2.2 km of railway land. These people have been living on the land for decades.

Fortunately, the Supreme Court stayed the High Court order on January 3, saying people who had been living for 50 to 60 years in Banbhoolpura could not be “uprooted overnight” and some practical solution had to be found, including rehabilitation.

These people say the eviction order came as a shock. The court’s order was published in local vernacular newspapers on January 1. “I was holding *Dainik Jagran* in my hands and I saw this notice. It looked like a death warrant to me,” says 46-year-old Sarfaraj Ali, a local resident.

“The newspaper notice warned us to vacate our ‘illegally’ occupied structures within a week, otherwise they would be demolished and any cost incurred would be realized from us, the ‘encroachers.’” Ali owns a two-storeyed house built on land legally allotted to his grandfather in 1940. He displays all kinds of papers including his payment of house tax as well as his voter ID and Aadhaar card.

Residents took to the streets, holding banners, beating drums, shouting slogans and pasting posters. “We were about to lose our homes, schools, hospitals and banks, and our BJP MLA, Ajay Bhatt, was nowhere to be seen. So we stuck ‘missing’ or ‘laapata’ posters all over,” says Tikaram Pande, convener, Basti Bachao Sangarsh Samiti, a citizen action group formed to save the settlement from demolition.

Although the notice didn’t mention the words people and homes, it was clear that it sought to demolish the makeshift, dilapidated homes of 4,365 residents of Banbhoolpura.

Banbhoolpura has two Government Inter Colleges, four government schools, 11 private schools, a bank, two overhead water tanks, 10 mosques, and four temples, besides shops, built over decades, and even a Saraswati Shishu Mandir run by the RSS. There are dispensaries, bank branches, water tanks and tiny shops—all legally built over the years, emphasize residents. All these would have been demolished.

Majority of the residents are Muslims. There has never been any communal divide with Hindu residents. “We have never had a communal riot here. All of us live in fraternity and peace,” says Justice Irshad Hussain, a former judge of the Nainital High Court who lives in Haldwani.

Soon after, as the Joshimath disaster began to unfold, the Banbhoolpura residents took out a candlelight march to support those of Joshimath and to underline that their struggle was never a Hindu-Muslim issue. Since a majority of residents are Muslims, some Hindi news channels had tried to paint their protest against eviction as another Shaheen Bagh.

“We want to tell the people of Joshimath that we stand with them in their time of difficulty. We the poor are in complete solidarity with you. Our issues are the same,” said 21-year-old Jahanara, holding a candle. “In our *masjids* we say prayers for them. They are in an even more difficult situation than us. They are losing their homes.”

Kafal Tree, an online media platform on the history, culture and resources of Uttarakhand, traces the history of Haldwani’s origin and growth to the colonial period. The British developed Haldwani as a town with a *mandi* connecting the hills to the plains. Businessmen and labourers from UP were brought in to settle. They were given land on a

90-year lease. Labourers settled in Banbhoolpura, a stretch of land between Haldwani town and the Gaula river.

Since most residents were poor they built makeshift homes, using tin, plastic, haystacks, loose bricks and mud. Over the years, as households grew, and incomes improved, some homes also improved. About half the residents here claim to have land lease documents.

While the disputed land, considered encroached upon, was 29 acres, the High Court ordered the eviction in 78 acres encompassing four adjacent colonies in Banbhoolpura — Dholak Nagar, Gafoor Busti, Kidwai Nagar and Indira Nagar.

“Nobody knows how the railways changed it from 29 acres to 78 acres,” says Sharafat Khan, one of the petitioners in Supreme Court case.

“Even the High Court order isn’t clear since it has not marked the area to be cleared of encroachments,” adds Rajani Bhatt, a social activist and another resident.

The case began when one Ravishankar Joshi filed a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) in the Nainital High Court in 2013 over illegal sand



Banbhoolpura thanks the Supreme Court

mining in the Gaula river, blaming the residents of Banbhoolpura for it.

The court took suo moto cognizance of the matter and directed the railways to investigate. The railways and the state government submitted that they had found 4,365 encroachments. Officials say the encroachments are on around 2.2 km of railway territory. The land in the Lal Kuan to Kathgodam section of the North Eastern Railway, which is part of the Izzatnagar division, has been encroached upon from 80.710 to 82.900 km. Over 50,000 people’s livelihoods would have been impacted by what is being referred to as Uttarakhand’s largest expulsion of illegal encroachers.

The court directed the railway authorities to give a week’s notice to the occupants to free the land. It also said that the railways, in coordination with the district administration and, if needed, any other paramilitary forces, should ask the people to vacate the land.

Then the railways issued a public notice in the newspapers on January 1.

Although the people are relieved that for the time being their homes will not be demolished, they are fearful of what might happen in the near future.

The petitioner, Joshi, is careful not to criticize the order but will seemingly pursue the case. “Kathgodam is the terminal point of the railways. It is strategically crucial given China’s expansionist tactics. Such encroachments must be treated seriously,” he allegedly told a YouTube channel in an interview. There may be a longer battle ahead for the people. ■

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## DOES CSR WORK?

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SOURAV ROY



## COMPANIES CAN LEAD BY EXAMPLE

RITA &amp; UMESH ANAND

IT is a decade since the law on corporate social responsibility was passed in 2013. This is a good time perhaps for a reality check on what the law has achieved. Several questions can be asked.

Do the two percent of profits that must be spent on CSR have any significance at all in relation to India's huge development requirements? Are managements now more sensitive to complex national problems of inequality and poverty than they were before? Have business practices and boardroom decision-making become more inclusive?

The answers to such questions are complicated as is only to be expected. The purpose of CSR is to give back to society and engage in nation-building. Companies that get involved in meeting the needs of communities in healthcare, nutrition, education, empowerment or water conservation make a difference by the very fact of their engagement with and money spent in these spheres.

Many non-profits, both big and small, depend on corporate support for the good work they do and the causes they espouse. Partnerships lead to learning on both sides and are even more important when they involve the government.

Those companies that undertake CSR projects with the passion and stamina needed for making a serious impact have the potential of being transformational. They bring in innovations and management systems that enhance standard forms of governance and deliver results that might not have been possible earlier.

Many last-mile solutions become available when companies become catalysts for new ideas and partnerships involving non-profits and government. Not all of these are known to endure, but a difference is certainly made and the delivery system of the government too benefits from the experience.

But is this enough? Perhaps not. A much more important purpose of CSR should be for companies to change from within. The private sector has a crucial role to play in generating jobs and taking hundreds of millions out of poverty. It is the most important driver of growth. It must therefore see itself as a catalyst for opportunity and empowerment and go much beyond its search for immediate profits.

Companies must embrace the role of being reformists in all that they do and build a modern and competitive economy based not just on legally delivered equality and access, but the less graspable values of integrity and fraternity as well.

The real measure of CSR should be whether it has been able to transform the thinking within managements and change their attitudes to the consumer and the citizen. Has the formal engagement with development problems motivated decision-makers in companies, at the top and across management, to think afresh about how they do business? Do they care and share more than they did in the past? Are they giving their workers better terms of employment and addressing their aspirations?

We in this magazine see no evidence of a widespread change in orientation. Promoters with a conscience and a good heart set the bar high for themselves and the managers they employ. We know a few of them, but that is just what they are — a few. For the vast majority of managers in the corporate sector — IIT, IIM, foreign

degree holders — there is at best lip service to social concerns. For them CSR is just one of those things they have to do in between a lot else and it doesn't go beyond window dressing.

But it is a change in thinking that is truly needed. Where it is in evidence, it is wonderful to behold. Rajiv Khandelwal, a founder of the Aajeevika Bureau, has in an article in this special issue explained what the Social Compact is achieving in shopfloor reforms to treat workers with dignity and integrate them with business goals. The Social Compact is a partnership between NGOs and companies, but it is companies like Thermax and Forbes Marshall that have played leadership roles in helping it succeed. Here CSR is hugely successful and especially meaningful.

Photo: Civil Society/Lakshman Anand



Welfare of workers should be the top priority

Sanjaya Baru in his article points out that Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's Social Charter way back in 2007 spoke of giving better terms of employment to workers so that they feel secure. Dr Singh called for affirmative action to bring up weaker communities and for industry to show respect for the environment. He also emphasized the need for moderation in the remuneration given to the bosses in a company, in particular promoters.

CSR defined in this way has weight that matters. It is what companies can and should do to not only strengthen their own businesses but the private sector as a whole. The entire reforms agenda in India flounders on the issue of inequality. Corporations have a big responsibility for not just providing jobs but ensuring that employees feel secure enough to embrace reform. Inclusion is the key to greater efficiency and productivity — and the deepening of markets with greater levels of prosperity, healthcare, education and housing.

We have a comprehensive overview of CSR spending by Dr Madhukar Shukla, formerly of XLRI. He helps greatly in understanding

how companies are spending their money. The collective CSR spending by the corporate sector is sizeable even if in relation to the development needs of the country it doesn't account for much. But whatever it is, spending it purposefully is important.

The population-wide changes that India needs cry out for a scale of investment and implementation with equality of access that CSR cannot ever hope to realize for hundreds of millions of beneficiaries. It is and can only be achieved through equitable growth. It has to be the work of a reignited corporate sector on the one hand and government on the other, powered by political vision and a sense of mission.

Some degree of change happens on its own. A decade is a long time in an emerging economy where income levels are rising, social equations are being challenged and technologies are leading to empowerment. Companies are compelled to respond to new scenarios. Some of the transitions they make are reflected in CSR initiatives, but might well have taken place anyway out of a sense of survival — whether there was a law or not.

When we launched *Civil Society* 19 years ago, we chose a slogan that we felt defined our magazine and the kind of journalism we wanted to do. It was: 'Everyone is someone'. We believe it is also the principle on which a forward-looking economy and fair markets should be based. Companies have a crucial role in making this happen.

We have several interesting and insightful articles in this anniversary issue on CSR. Arun Maira, our friend and contributor of many years, has taken the somewhat extreme and grim view that the non-profit sector shouldn't settle for crumbs from the corporate world such as those dispensed under the two percent rule. Maira sees time running out and calls for systemic change.

Dr Ramesh Mashelkar, also a close friend and fellow traveller, calls for big change through innovation — more from less for more is what he recommends. He emphasizes that being good is as important as doing good. In other words, it won't do to run a lousy company and hope to get away with it by doing some CSR on the side.

Dr Kiran Karnik makes the same point, saying how a company earns is as important as what it spends on. You can't cut down forests and plant a few trees as compensation.

Santanu Mishra of the Smile Foundation emphasizes the need for partnerships of the kind he has shaped with leading companies over the years. Ratna Vishwanathan points out that the role of non-profits is invaluable in implementing CSR schemes and companies should learn to trust them more. Ratish Nanda would like to see conservation projects supported because of the spin-offs from them for cities.

A recurring concern among all our contributors is the putting of CSR funds into PM CARES and the political donations that companies make through electoral trusts. Jagdeep Chhokar's is an important voice in this context, he being a founder of the Association of Democratic Reforms (ADR). A private sector held captive by politicians in power is in no one's interests.

To get an inside view from a company, we have B. Muthuraman and Sourav Roy take us through the Tata Steel story where the Tata journey began as philanthropy more than 100 years ago and evolved with time.

The purpose of this special issue is to critically analyze CSR for all to see the directions in which it seems to be headed. Companies with good PR and advertising and the influence they wield in general tend to have the last word. They rule the narrative. As India looks for answers to the problems of inequity and lack of access, a deeper understanding is needed. ■

# GOING FROM TRUSTEESHIP TO ELECTORAL TRUSTS

The Gandhian idea of social responsibility has been distorted and is being interpreted as a corporate obligation to contribute to political parties.



SANJAYA BARU

MAHATMA Gandhi called it trusteeship. It is based on the idea that the wealthy have an obligation to society and balance in nature. Responsibilities commensurate with their rights. "I am aware that some of our companies are doing creditable work. I compliment them. But we need more such inspiring examples." With these words, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh appealed to a gathering of business leaders at the annual general meeting of the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), to "come forward in a much more substantial manner and engage extensively in activities which benefit society at large".

The prime minister's address to CII in 2007 set the stage for a major policy initiative that was defined as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Dr Singh enunciated 10 principles of corporate social responsibility, that he dubbed his Social Charter. First, he said, "have a healthy respect for your workers and invest in their welfare. In their health and their children's education, give them pension and provident fund benefits, and so on. Unless workers feel they are cared for at work, we can never evolve a national consensus in favour of much needed more flexible labour laws aimed at ensuring that our firms remain globally competitive".

Then he went on to add, "corporate social responsibility must not be defined by tax planning strategies alone. Rather, it should be defined within the framework of a corporate philosophy which factors the needs of the community and the regions in which a

corporate entity functions. This is not an imported western management notion. It is a part of our cultural heritage".

He urged the private sector to incorporate 'affirmative action' by providing employment to the less privileged, especially Scheduled Castes and Tribes and minorities, as well as to veterans from the armed forces. He then took a step further and urged business leaders to "resist excessive remuneration to promoters and senior executives and discourage conspicuous consumption. In a country with extreme poverty, industry needs to be moderate in the emoluments levels it adopts. Rising income and wealth inequalities, if not matched by a corresponding rise of incomes across the nation, can lead to social unrest".

**In his Social Charter in 2007 Manmohan Singh sought better wages for workers, moderation at the top, jobs for the less privileged, respect for the environment.**

The PM's Social Charter included regard for the environment, corporate resistance to corrupt practices, tax compliance, avoiding price fixation through cartels and oligopolistic practices and support for 'socially responsible advertising'.

When Dr Singh's Social Charter was made public, several business leaders protested, saying "the business of business is business" and not "social welfare" which, they argued, was the responsibility of government. Not surprisingly, corporate-funded media went ballistic and stern editorials were written criticizing the PM for imposing social obligations on corporates. Television channels ran discussions in which not only Dr Singh

and his government but the 'political class' as a whole was mocked for not doing their work and expecting corporates to step in and undertake social responsibility.

When the media criticism became sharp I had to step in and let some know that almost all the elements of Dr Singh's Social Charter had in fact been suggested by none other than the then director-general of CII, Tarun Das. It was Das who suggested that the PM may consider putting some of these ideas out as his own at the CII meeting. He may have been trying to ingratiate himself with Sonia Gandhi and her National Advisory Council that had been critical of corporate irresponsibility. With the Left Front being a supporter of the Singh government, the Congress party also felt the need to be seen as being left of centre. It was, therefore, also fashionable for business leaders to show empathy for the less privileged.

Whatever the motivations and concerns that made the leadership of CII agree to place these ideas before the PM and have him, in turn, issue his Social Charter for business, Dr Singh readily agreed to lend his voice and weight to them. The idea of CSR came out of this. In its very last year in office, in 2013, the UPA government introduced a law to impose a CSR tax. With effect from April 1, 2014, the Companies Act made it mandatory for companies of a certain turnover and profitability to spend two percent of their average net profit for the past three years on CSR.

It is a moot point whether or not CSR has achieved its objectives or not and, more importantly, whether companies have adhered to the letter and spirit of the policy. Many companies have done more in letter than spirit and have found ways to evade this tax while appearing to undertake CSR activity. More to the point, almost all the other elements of Dr Singh's Social Charter have been forgotten. While CII regularly reports the 'affirmative action' undertaken by the corporate sector, it is not clear to what extent the employment of SCs, STs and minorities has increased.

Indeed, in recent months there is growing concern about rising inequality and the



Sonia Gandhi and her National Advisory Council had been critical of corporate irresponsibility

deterioration in the wage/profit ratio in favour of profits. Companies have become cash-rich even as organized sector employment lags and wages remain static.

If, on the one hand, the corporate sector is reneging on CSR commitments, it is perhaps also because of a new burden being imposed on it by the Narendra Modi government in the form of what may be dubbed CPR — Corporate Political Responsibility. The Gandhian idea of 'trusteeship' and social responsibility has been distorted and is now interpreted as corporate obligation to contribute to political parties through what are called 'political trusts'.

The Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR), a non-governmental organization tracking Indian democratic practices and trends, has recently reported that as much as 72 percent of total donations made to electoral trusts, amounting to ₹352 crore, has gone to the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party in 2020-21. The Congress party received only ₹18.44 crore. Many regional parties secured marginally more than the Congress.

The difference, however, between CSR and CPR is stark. While CSR is now a legal obligation, and the corporate sector has found ways to evade and avoid it, CPR is being imposed using mafia-like tactics. Business leaders will whisper to you how a certain

**Several business leaders protested, saying 'the business of business is business'. When the media criticism became sharp I had to let some know that almost all the elements of Dr Singh's Social Charter had been suggested by none other than the then director-general of CII, Tarun Das.**

minister browbeat a CEO or a business baron to cough up money for his political party. Strong-arm tactics are in play. Political parties in power are able and willing to deploy any means to ensure that corporates contribute funds.

"You are creating an environment of fear!" The late Rahul Bajaj, among the tallest leaders of Indian business, told Home Minister Amit Shah at a business leaders' gathering. The reference was to what former Finance Minister Arun Jaitley used to refer to as 'tax terrorism', during his days in the political opposition. However, such fear has since been spread through other agencies of the state aimed at ensuring businesses cough up cash and demonstrate their CPR.

If CSR had become an important source of

funds for NGOs engaged in social development, welfare and other socially relevant and useful activities, CPR has become a source of electoral campaign finance with a quid pro quo attached. Companies that refuse to offer financial support to political parties in power are inviting trouble that ranges from tax raids to criminal investigations.

If CSR was based on the Gandhian notion of 'trusteeship', CPR sustains cronyism. Big financiers get big benefits. If CSR gave birth to thousands of NGOs across the country, CPR has empowered the dominant political party at the national and regional levels. ■

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# SPENDS HAVE BEEN RISING, BUT WHY SO SKEWED?

It is ironical that developed regions get a larger share of CSR while the poorer ones continue to be neglected. The trends show that the focus is more on compliance.



**MADHUKAR SHUKLA**

THE making of corporate social responsibility mandatory in 2013 marks a major milestone in the history of Indian business. This was a logical step following the introduction of the Voluntary Guidelines for Responsible Business (2009 and 2011) and the requirements of Business Responsibility Reporting by the top 100 companies (2012) issued by the government earlier.

While historically many Indian businesses have had a tradition of philanthropy and charity, this regulation made it mandatory for companies (above the stipulated criteria of net worth, turnover or net profits) to spend two percent of net profits on CSR activities. The guidelines also identified the list of sectors for CSR activities, stipulated the formation of CSR policy and a CSR committee by the companies, and the requirement of regular reporting. Through amendments, notifications and circulars, the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) also brought in both greater compliance and flexibility to the regulation.

After a decade, it is worth taking stock of the outcomes of the new regulation. The data from the CSR Portal and CSR Exchange Portal, maintained by the MCA, provides some interesting trends and insights.

On the positive side, there is much to showcase the impact in terms of numbers. Between 2014-15 and 2020-21, the number of companies with a CSR programme increased from about 16,500 to close to 23,000. CSR spending also increased two and a half times from about ₹10,000 crore to almost ₹25,000 crore. Across these years, a whopping ₹1.27

lakh crore flowed into CSR initiatives, and funded about 180,000 social development projects in different sectors. In fact, CSR spending now constitutes up to 28 percent of India's philanthropic giving.

While this increasing acceptance of CSR as a part of doing business is a welcome change, the numbers also show that the impact of CSR, both sector- and region-wise, is still skewed.

For instance, out of the ₹1.27 lakh crore CSR funding over the years, almost 54 percent was spent on just three sectors (out of the 29 listed on the CSR Portal), viz., education, healthcare and rural development projects. In a way, this focus seems to be appropriate too, since these three are critical sectors for socio-economic development and need due attention. After all, two-thirds of India lives in villages, and an educated and healthy community is the prerequisite for building a developed and prosperous society.

However, this inordinate focus on just three sectors also results in neglect of other areas of development. For example, over the years, only about five percent of CSR funds was spent on projects related to 'Poverty, Eradicating Hunger, Malnutrition', and just about 3.5 percent of funds spent went to support 'Livelihood Enhancement Projects'. Social problems such as gender equality, women's empowerment, socio-economic inequality, conservation of natural resources, senior citizens, orphans and the like received even less CSR support.

One of the reasons companies find education, healthcare and rural development attractive for CSR funding is because these are 'mature' sectors. The issues related to these sectors are relatively well-defined. The solutions to address them are known and can often be solved through standardized time-bound interventions.

Projects related to these sectors also mostly revolve around infrastructure development (developing school infrastructure, watershed projects, mobile medical units) and service delivery (training of paramedics, financial solutions, agri-inputs), which are familiar domains for companies. In comparison, social

problems related to women's empowerment, gender, inequality and natural resources, etc., are complex issues. They are multi-layered and often embedded in local socio-cultural context. Solving them requires more nuanced and contextual understanding and specialized skill-sets which are rarely in the domain of corporate functioning.

Region-wise too, CSR expenditure shows similar lopsidedness. Just five states (Maharashtra, Karnataka, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh) account for 33 percent of the cumulative CSR expenditure. In comparison, between 2014-15 and 2020-21, the eight northeastern states (Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura, and Sikkim) received only 1.4 percent of CSR spending. Similarly, just 12.6 percent of CSR funds was spent in less developed eastern states (Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha and West Bengal), even though they house one-fourth of the country's population.

Similar trends characterized CSR spending in the Aspirational Districts. In 2018, NITI Aayog had identified 112 districts which were least developed, and required special attention for localized development. However, in the three years since, these districts account for barely 1.65 percent of the cumulative CSR spending. Even this meagre CSR expenditure in these districts shows similar sectoral and regional/location bias: the same three sectors (education, healthcare and rural development) accounted for 74 percent of the CSR spending, and 41 percent of the CSR investments went to just four districts — Dahod (Gujarat), Haridwar (Uttarakhand), Singrauli (Madhya Pradesh) and Visakhapatnam (Andhra Pradesh).

It is ironical that more developed regions seem to attract a larger share of CSR spending, while the regions which require more development support continue to remain neglected. Companies seem to prefer to work in regions which are reasonably developed, have a supporting infrastructure and where CSR projects can be implemented without much hindrance.



Companies find education, healthcare and rural development attractive for CSR funding because these are 'mature' sectors in which the issues are relatively well-defined

The above trends also highlight the fact that despite the positive numbers, the focus of CSR initiatives is still more on compliance with the law rather than on following the spirit of the law. The purpose of the CSR provisions was to nudge the companies to integrate societal concerns as a part of doing business, and to come up with innovative ideas and management systems to solve critical problems in local and other needy areas in the country. While the needle has moved in that direction, as the data shows, there are still vast gaps which need to be addressed.

So what can companies do to increase the effectiveness and reach of their CSR initiatives?

First, one needs to appreciate and accept that planning and executing social development projects is not a part of corporate expertise. While those companies which have been practising CSR for long have developed some in-house competence to manage social projects, for most companies this is an entirely new and unfamiliar area.

Secondly, companies need to be open to, and nurture, partnerships with those agencies (NGOs, social sector organizations) which have the required social sector experience and competency-set. Given their knowledge of and long presence in the target area, relationship and trust with the local communities, and experience in planning and executing development projects, NGOs are natural allies of CSR projects. In fact, many companies do execute their CSR projects through NGOs. MCA data also shows that about 60 percent of CSR spending is done through NGOs.

The existing nature of the relationship between the companies and the NGOs, however, mostly fails to leverage the rich experience, competence and resources which NGOs bring to the table. In the corporate mindset, the role of NGOs is limited to their being 'implementation' partners (some even refer to them as 'vendors'). Many NGOs, however, have also been working in those very

**Companies mostly fail to leverage the rich experience of NGOs which have been working on those same social issues CSR neglects.**

regions and on those very social issues which are currently neglected in the CSR initiatives. To extend the CSR efforts in those neglected regions and sectors, companies would need to treat the NGOs as equal stakeholders in the CSR projects and involve them from the project identification and planning stage.

This shift to stakeholder perspective would also require three major changes in the way companies look at the CSR projects.

One, many of the neglected issues (e.g., gender equality, conservation of natural resources, socio-economic inequalities) are deep-rooted and require a long timeline to be

addressed. Unlike projects which require putting up infrastructure or improving service delivery, they are also not amenable to year-by-year measures of progress. Supporting such projects would require changes in both funding cycle as well as in the metrics of progress.

Two, it is natural for companies to opt for large and well-established NGO partners since they have a credible track record, robust organizational systems and processes, capacity to execute projects on a large scale, and can monitor and report the impact. In fact, size and capacity to handle large-scale projects is often a criterion for the selection of the NGO partner.

However, many social issues (e.g., special education, senior citizen welfare, art and culture, promoting sports) which are listed by the MCA are critical but not so widespread. They are mostly catered to by smaller NGOs with specialized skills. Addressing such issues would need a change in the partner selection criteria by the companies.

Lastly, partnership as equal stakeholders is a relationship of mutual learning and there is much that the companies and NGOs can learn from each other. Just as companies can learn to integrate social concerns, empathy and sensitivity in their working from the NGOs, the latter can also benefit from the efficient managerial systems and processes of companies. It is by building on each other's complementary areas of strength that CSR initiatives can become more effective and innovative. ■

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# DON'T SETTLE FOR CORPORATE CRUMBS, CHANGE THE SYSTEM

The world is in crisis. Capitalism is in crisis. Non-profits too are in crisis and need a paradigm shift. Large movements, not more CSR, are required to save the planet.



ARUN MAIRA

FIFTEEN years ago, Umesh and Rita Anand asked me to write a book explaining 'civil society' to leaders of business enterprises. I did not know then what 'civil society' is really. I knew the ambition of its leaders is to make the world better for everyone, especially those being left behind by the capitalist-state juggernaut. I had worked for 40 years in leadership roles in the business world and as a consultant to business leaders in the US and India. So, I wrote *Transforming Capitalism: Business Leadership to Improve the World for Everyone*, about what business leaders could do to make the world better for everyone, which the Anands kindly published.

The condition of humanity and the environment has deteriorated further since then. Systemic failures of governance are evident: the climate crisis, the financial crisis in 2008, the inability of governments to respond equitably to the Covid-19 crisis, global economic stagnation and inflation, the collapse of geo-political governance with the war in Ukraine, and the impotency of institutions of global governance including the United Nations and the World Trade Organization (WTO).

As the *Titanic* sails to imminent disaster, civil society feels trapped in cabins below the deck. Its leaders bang against the floors of the stately cabins for powers above to change the ship's course. To calm them, scraps of food are given from surpluses above. Like India's CSR law requiring corporations to spend two percent of their profits on socially responsible work.

The world is in crisis. Capitalism is in crisis. Civil society is in crisis too.

Since I wrote *Transforming Capitalism* I have become engaged with many leaders of civil society. Leaders of NGOs sometimes think they are the leaders of civil society. Civil society is much broader in its scope. It includes diverse movements of change: labour unions, community associations, environmental protection movements and the like, and networks amongst them.

As a Member of the Planning Commission responsible for corporate affairs, I saw the divide in civil society. Many supported the law to impose the two percent CSR levy while some opposed it. Those who opposed it had been leading a movement, along with corporate statesmen, for corporations to report their performance holistically to society, and not only their financial performance to shareholders which corporate laws require. Their voluntary movement had almost got government support, when a business lobby, supported by many NGOs, proposed the two percent CSR law instead.

According to neo-liberal ideology "the business of business must be only business". Therefore, business leaders must not take on responsibilities for 'externalities', such as the condition of society and the environment. A two percent levy on profits was easier for businesses to accept than the alternative of being held to account for how they made their profits. It was small change for appeasement of their sins. They could continue to demand more freedom from environmental regulations and labour laws for their ease of doing business and making profits.

**FOUR CATEGORIES** Leaders of civil society and not-for-profit organizations fall into four categories: Protesters, who raise alarm about the condition of the planet and people, and protest that the powers who set the course of the ship, and make the rules, are unjust. Providers, who deliver relief at the 'last mile', reaching out to people in need whenever there is a crisis, and to the many the state is not reaching even when the economy is growing.

Enablers, who enable communities to "manage their commons", take better care of their environment, and harness their resources to improve community health and education services, and enhance their livelihoods.

Knowledge creators, who understand the need for a paradigm shift, and research ideas emerging from communities which show how a new model of change — community-led and embedded in the local environment — is the way to change the course of the *Titanic* and solve the systemic problems that present theories of governance and economic management cannot. Knowledge with insight has great power to catalyze paradigm shifts.

**FINANCIAL SUPPORT** All four types of civil society organizations need resources to sustain themselves, and all need an environment that enables civil society's "ease of doing business".

Financial support from others is the essence of the business model of providers, who are basically a channel passing on resources from corporations and governments to the people.

Enablers, who are catalysts of change in communities, enabling communities to harness their own resources more effectively, need less outside support. They do need some support from donors also interested in helping the local communities to build their own capacities, rather than keeping them as beneficiaries of their charity.

Knowledge creators do not need financial support for providing relief on the ground. However, they do need some support to pay for their research activities. Philanthropists, corporations, and governments who provide them support would be concerned, understandably, that the research does not undermine their own power. Therefore, knowledge creators searching for ways to change the course of the *Titanic* must be careful not to be coopted as lobbyists for their funds' providers.

Protesters against the Establishment naturally have a hard time getting resources from institutions in power. It is also disingenuous of them to expect that governments, who are expected to ensure



The Indian farmers' movement brought together diverse farmers' groups along with many women's organizations and environmental associations

stability of the economic and social system, should make it easier for them to do business.

When the two percent CSR law was mooted as an alternative to the national guidelines for reporting business responsibility, civil society was split. Providers supported the law because it would provide a mandated source of funds for their work.

Enablers did not object: they need some financial support too. Most protesters were happy: they thought the law was a "socialist" way of redistributing corporate profits, even though the amounts were very small. If they had taken a systemic view, they would have realized that the law did not change the fundamental narrative of business responsibility, and the *Titanic* has sailed on. Now they are protesting with even greater alarm that time is running out.

**NATIONAL INTEREST** Confusion about the purpose of the enterprises is a challenge for business leaders who want to improve the world for everyone. When they take a road not taken by the herd they are pulled back by the market.

J.R.D. Tata, who was chairman of the Tata group for 50 years until the economic reforms of the 1990s, through India's independence movement and the difficult years thereafter when India was building its own industrial capabilities, said that whenever he had a difficult decision to make, he would ask first what would be good for India, and then what would be good for Tatas. Whenever the

decision was in the interests of India, it would turn out to be good for Tatas too in the long run, he said. The slogan of Tata Steel, the flagship company of the group, was, "We also make steel."

When India joined the global capitalist caravan with the 'liberalization' of its own economy, the CEO of Tata Steel was asked by an analyst in New York at a quarterly analyst review, "When will Tata Steel stop being a socialist enterprise and become a genuine capitalist one?"

Business corporations cannot be 'trustees' of society and its environmental resources until their legal purpose is redefined. When Larry Fink, CEO of BlackRock, the world's largest investment firm, asked all firms BlackRock invests in to adopt ESG principles, stock markets reacted and reminded him that the purpose of business corporations is the production of financial returns for investors.

'Civil society' organizations must remain tuned to their core values and be clear about the purpose of their existence. The commonly adopted nomenclature, 'NGO', does not explain their purpose. It says what they are not: Not government. Corporations are also not government.

Therefore, to distinguish themselves from corporations, NGOs must be legally 'not-for-profit' organizations. They are not for profit and non-governmental organizations which only says what they are not. This does not explain what they are and their purpose.

The fundamental purpose of civil society

organizations is to change the course of the *Titanic* and improve the well-being of the people trapped 'below deck' by the prevalent paradigm of economic and societal governance. Labour unions do this too. So do movements of change with no legal status as 'organizations', like the Indian farmers' movement which brought together diverse farmers' groups along with many women's organizations and environmental associations.

NGOs must learn to collaborate with others. They compete amongst themselves and other civil society 'organizations' too for more financial resources for their work. They want to scale up their organizations to serve greater numbers of beneficiaries. Whereas the real change the world needs is for the people 'below' — who are considered less 'developed' and mostly in the global South — to become the drivers of improvements in their own lives. They must also have greater power for fixing the rules of economic games, which large countries and capitalist corporations have monopolized.

Civil society organizations must rethink the fundamental purpose of their existence: it is not to provide relief, but to change the system. More 'CSR' will not change the world. Large movements of change are required to save the planet and make global governance fair for all citizens. Paradigms are changed by catalysts of movements, not by builders of organizations. ■

Arun Maira is the author of *Transforming Systems: Why the World Needs a New Ethical Toolkit*

# UPGRADE SHOPFLOORS, GIVE WORKERS MORE THAN A JOB

Managements in the Pune belt formed the Social Compact to ensure labour standards. A workforce of one million across 150 companies will be reached.



RAJIV KHANDELWAL

WHEN the pandemic led to a nationwide lockdown, leaving millions of workers in the unorganized sector stranded in cities, several business leaders were compelled to introspect on how fairly and lawfully their workforces were being treated.

Moved by the extreme conditions of debt, homelessness and unemployment into which workers had been pushed, there was a call, especially from the industries in the Pune belt, to voluntarily abide by labour standards and outcomes across their ecosystems.

Workers were visibly in dire straits and suffering, but it wouldn't do to stop at the immediate relief given during the extreme crisis that the pandemic had brought with it. Systemic solutions were needed to give workers not just better terms of employment, but also to meet their aspirations and integrate them with goals of businesses. Bottom lines couldn't any longer be defined by profitability alone, but required recognition of social justice to make long-term sense.

Thus was born the Social Compact, a voluntary coming together of industries, for which the Aajeevika Bureau and the Centre for Social Justice together with Dasra have been partnering over 60 companies and their supply chains across the country to achieve greater equity in workplaces.

"The question we asked ourselves was, 'What do we allow our cities to become? That of extreme privilege and extreme poverty?' It felt completely wrong. We also thought that before we point a finger elsewhere, why don't we, as corporations, do something concrete by

making life more equitable, dignified and humane for our own labour force — be it temporaries or on contract," said Meher Pudumjee of Thermax, one of the companies that drove the idea of the Social Compact.

The Social Compact aspires to cover a workforce of one million spread across the ecosystems of 150 companies in India. A beginning has been made across Pune, Mumbai and Ahmedabad. It is a growing community of practice with 300-plus diverse participants and over 60 principal and supply chain companies on the journey towards more inclusive worker practices, triggering systemic impact for over 50,000 vulnerable workers in India.

As the Social Compact unfolds across several corporate landscapes it becomes an exciting, new example of an alternative that blends responsible internal change with sensible support to communities outside. Several leading companies are turning their gaze firmly inwards — to how their workers are treated in their commercial processes and outcomes.

Dedicated teams from the Aajeevika Bureau and the Centre for Social Justice together with Dasra have been working closely with participating companies in helping them implement Social Compact standards and provide services by deploying CSR funds.

The Social Compact is a voluntary agreement by businesses to abide by labour standards and outcomes across their ecosystems. The compact enables companies to assess their workforce practices along six powerful outcome areas and offers valuable recommendations to address systemic gaps. Using this, businesses can improve resilience and profitability, and gain a competitive edge among a fast-growing cadre of Environment, Social and Governance (ESG) investors and customers. Social Compact is a tried and trusted toolkit that gives companies a head-start on the "S" of ESG by helping them ensure more consistent and equitable worker practices through improvements in business-as-usual practices.

The way to see Social Compact is not as a CSR programme — it is a core business pursuit. With an acceptance of a compact by their companies, workers can access their legally

mandated rights and entitlements. The Social Compact process begins with the adoption of a set of normative standards for dignified work, inspired by the Indian legal regime, the UN Business and Human Rights Principles, Decent Work and other internationally accepted protocols.

The standards are based on desired outcomes which include living wages for all workers, safety at workplaces and at sites, health and social security cover, grievance redressal mechanisms, gender parity in women's work and compensation, linkage of all workers with entitlements like Aadhaar, medical insurance and PF/ESIC. The Social Compact also resolves to enable all workers to participate in the future of work through upskilling and growth opportunities.

The Social Compact journey seeks the adoption of dignified and fair working conditions for workers not only within the companies themselves, but also among their supplier ecosystems. The journey begins with a baseline for each company which documents and identifies the gaps in their labour governance systems and practices. These baselines are carried out through a management questionnaire and focus group discussions with workers, both inside the company gates as well as at the worksites of vendors within their supply chains, but always with a focus on the informal workers, who are temporarily employed with the companies themselves or with their labour suppliers/contractors as well as with smaller units in their supply chains.

While the prime movers in Pune started their internal Social Compact journeys, their CSR helped in expanding the Social Compact idea to benefit a much larger universe of workers in their catchment. Using CSR funds, Workers' Facilitation Centres (WFCs) have been established in Chakan and Pimpri-Chinchwad industrial areas. WFCs serve as a hub for linkages and services for thousands of informal workers in these clusters. WFC teams undertake registration of workers, help workers link to social security schemes, offer legal counselling and aid to workers, facilitate



During the lockdown workers were in visible distress. It wouldn't do to stop at immediate relief. Systemic change was needed

ESIC advice and claims, and help with health referrals, and so on. WFCs have also started to organize skilling and employability interventions to bring the benefits of higher wages and more stable jobs to younger workers.

Through CSR, the brand name of the company lends credibility and the WFC opens access to workers of other companies. The WFC makes it possible to cover highly invisible and marginalized workers engaged in the deep supply chains of larger industries. Thanks to this initiative, several companies like Bajaj Auto, Tata AutoComp and others like them have also aligned their CSR to serving the broader worker community in these industrial areas.

A key milestone of the Social Compact has been to bring companies and NGOs into a co-solutioning relationship. By penetrating through layers of management, a strong trust-based connection has been created. There is now an opportunity to take this camaraderie and common language to CSR engagements as well. As both sides continue to understand the world and point of view of the other, the gap between them reduces.

While the Social Compact turns the gaze of social responsibility inwards, through its core request to integrate worker well-being into business as usual it also offers the opportunity

for CSR to support the movement by funding the much-needed solutions that would benefit the larger worker communities. With an alignment of objectives at an overarching level, there is not only a nudge into giving more strategic space, but also to make routine interactions less tense.

While CSR may focus on the environment and communities, the Social Compact fills in

**The Social Compact seeks the adoption of dignified and fair working conditions not only within the companies but also in their supplier ecosystems.**

the missing link of creating an emphasis on those that contribute to the business — the workers inside the factory gates, and within supply chains. It is through the coordinated tandem of business responsibility and social action that true sustainability can be ensured.

There is much that divides the very diverse

community of civil society organizations. One theme that unifies many is the experience and perception of how CSR is damaging, rather than serving, the quest for sustainable and equitable development.

Numerous studies are documenting the problems inherent in corporate giving of a short-term, regimented and predefined nature that focuses stubbornly on numbers and impact but fails to address the more structural problems of development and equity. Many NGOs will report dealing with CSR departments that lack professional or experienced leadership or are guided by over-zealous committees and boards who are too remote and unfamiliar with realities.

For all its projection as a socially meaningful response, CSR remains largely driven by compliance. CSR does not really help businesses address issues within their own ecosystems. In a world where purpose is becoming a central concern, CSR for many companies remains confined to a branding exercise. Many CSR watchers are urging companies to not just sponsor social good, but also put it in practice internally. The demand is for companies to apply the highest standards of ecological and workforce practice, consumer protection and transparent governance. ■

Rajiv Khandelwal is co-founder of the Aajeevika Bureau

# CHECK OUT A NON-PROFIT AND THEN ALLOW IT TO FUNCTION

Companies can be overbearing in seeking accountability for how their funding is spent, but it is trust that is key to ending inequity and serving the public good.



RATNA VISHWANATHAN

IT has been extensively documented that companies which exhibit socially responsible behaviour tend to be more successful than companies with an eye solely on profitability. A study published in the *Harvard Business Review* showed that they provide noticeably higher returns to shareholders. They also earn customer loyalty and, in the long term, brand value and goodwill that extends over generations.

So, it can be safely stated that it is beneficial for companies to consider their commitments to positive behaviour and accountable leadership when formulating their business strategies and policies. It makes sense for them to engage with the social realities within which they operate. It serves them well to adopt the principles of transparency, equity and justice as well as environmental balance, particularly so at a time when the planet is burdened with the weight of our over consumption and depletion of resources

Building a social brand is not always an outcome of voluntary action or the pressure of public opinion. Often, and in the face of the growing awareness today of responsible consumption, there are regulations which mandate companies to perform responsibly. The Securities Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has, for instance, included Business Responsibility Reporting (BRR) for companies on the National Stock Exchange. The BRR report requires all listed companies to provide voluntary disclosures on their environmental, social and corporate governance performance. This includes information about their

operations in relation to corporate governance, human rights, labour, products and services, societal initiatives, impact investments and more.

SEBI expects BRR to strengthen the credibility of the disclosures made by listed companies and ensure that all stakeholders have access to meaningful information about activities, policies and procedures. Such efforts made at a regulatory level are aimed at holding to account companies and their managements. They compel companies to keep taking a close look at themselves.

The 2013 amendment to the Companies Act adds another level of compliance for managements. It makes Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) mandatory. Eight Asian economies have government policies requiring companies to engage in CSR but only two

**Non-profits connect with communities and are the last-mile agencies for social impact intervention. They are trusted and understand nuances at the local level.**

countries — Nepal and India — have mandated levels of CSR giving. Being one of the first countries in the world to mandate CSR through legislation should ideally be a good thing. But the giving spirit which needs to underlie philanthropy cannot be forced simply by a mandate. The forging of partnerships to create public good needs to be infused with trust and the spirit of co-creation. If it ends up being a box that gets ticked to comply with existing and often inconsistent and changing regulation, it becomes a self-defeating exercise.

Corporations today have formally appointed CSR managers, sustainability chiefs and, of course, CSR Committees at the level of top

management. But to move the needle from compliance to actual performance, there is a need for ground-level engagement and project implementation. This brings in the need for 'boots on ground'. Corporations need to partner with not-for-profit entities working with communities because they invariably lack the bandwidth to engage at that level.

Non-profit organizations are critical as enablers for corporate entities to connect with communities and be the last mile agencies for social impact interventions. Non-profits bring domain knowledge, community engagement and an understanding of local nuances to the table and, most importantly, are trusted by the communities they work with.

But this seemingly natural partnership between non-profits and companies is an uneasy one with an underlying lack of understanding and trust. A common thread that runs through discussions about grants and donations is the level of control that the giving agency exerts on the recipient of these funds. Donors and funders often want line-item-wise details of how funds will be spent and in the event of any funds being left over at the end of the year under a particular head, they cannot be moved to other heads of expenditure without the specific approval of the donor. This does not behave diligence but rather illustrates the trust deficit rife in the realm of philanthropic giving.

There is a history to this suspicion. With more than 3.8 million registered charities in this country, there are those that have in the past misused or siphoned off funds received from donors. But rotten apples are not specific to the not-for-profit sector and to paint everyone with the same brush is probably not warranted. Philanthropy has to be in spirit.

The expectations companies have of non-profits in terms of compliance to processes and procedures are often difficult to meet as smaller organizations allocate priority and resources to programme delivery. They are often cash strapped and do not have the bandwidth for extensive and complicated reporting and compliance processes. On their part, not-for-profit organizations harbour



A legal literacy camp in Nuh in Haryana: Companies need non-profits at ground level to deliver results

distrust of corporate intentions, although they need to be supported by CSR funding to carry out their work. This trust deficit between partners often leads to conflict and misunderstanding which weakens outcomes and impinges on impact.

Since this is a relationship that aims to strengthen social impact and build the capacity of those less privileged, there is a need to address this trust deficit. The spirit of giving has to translate into trust. There are a number of very small organizations who do excellent work at the grassroots. In today's environment with regulation not allowing for sub-grants, the environment encourages direct giving to smaller non-profits. This poses a challenge in that small entities do not have the wherewithal or bandwidth to comply with complex grant reporting requirements and are slowly drying up due to the paucity of funds.

It is these small entities that played a significant role in supporting communities and families during the unprecedented tragedy in the wake of the COVID pandemic. Ironically, The Doing Good Index 2022 shows that during the pandemic 95 percent of not-for-profit entities directly supported communities but 61 percent reported a decrease in donors (*India Development Review*, September 2022, "Building Trust in the Social Sector").

As part of programme design, donors/funders can build in components that strengthen systems and processes. There is a

need to build the capacity of smaller, ground-level non-profits as part of the social responsibility mandate of companies. Micromanaging non-profits or being patronizing towards them does not build long-term partnerships and eventually there is fatigue on both sides.

Oversight by funders is definitely warranted. But it can be exercised in a nuanced and mutually respectful way. Once it is agreed in

**The organization on the ground is best suited to prioritize activities. Defining micro-level activities takes away flexibility and agility needed to deliver efficiently.**

principle that a funder will support the activities of a particular charity, a one-time and stringent due diligence of the organization should set the tone. But, after that, trust needs to be vested in the implementing agency. The larger strategy should be signed off and once done flexibility needs to rest with the delivering agency on the appropriate use of funds within the larger parameters agreed to rather than micromanaging every last line item.

The organization on the ground is best suited to prioritize activities. Defining micro-level activities takes away the flexibility and agility an organization needs to deliver efficiently. Having a shoe box full of receipts approach is helpful to no one and is highly transactional in nature. On the other hand, in a country like ours, religious giving rarely warrants questions as the giver does so in good faith.

Change is coming in, but gradually. Companies are beginning to accept non-profits as dependable force multipliers of their CSR activities. Non-profits on their part have been increasingly stepping up their accountability by transparently disclosing financial data in the public domain.

Perhaps technology can be leveraged to create more transparency in presenting non-profits and their capabilities to corporate partners. An accelerator which gives visibility to smaller organizations and the work they do after a due diligence process will make fund inflows easier. It will give a much-needed platform for smaller organizations and a level of comfort to donor agencies as there would be a first level of vetting already in place. In an ecosystem that has diverse players and one where each has a defined role there is a need to create mutually supportive frameworks to build and deliver on the much larger agenda of social impact. Building trust is key in the larger interest of addressing inequity. And it is public good finally that has to be served. ■

Ratna Vishwanathan is CEO of Reach To Teach.

# READY FOR CSR 2.0? FIVE IDEAS FOR SHIFTING GEAR

Government should be a willing partner rather than a regulator. Trust companies with what is close to their heart and what they are good at.



R.A. MASHELKAR

CORPORATIONS have an impact and touch lives in different ways when they use corporate social responsibility or CSR as a tool for social transformation. What was once goodhearted charity is now a more complex and sophisticated engagement with the development process in the country.

Though a scientist and not a businessman or a manager, I have been fortunate to have a ringside view among decision-makers in the corporate world. It has allowed me to see from up close how companies can make a difference.

I was chairman of the CSR committee of Reliance Industries, which has the largest CSR spend in India. I also chaired the CSR committees of Tata Motors and Godrej Agrovet, besides being a member of the CSR committee of Thermax. I have been a member of the Advisory Board of the Swades Foundation.

All these entities have had a social impact in multiple ways. They have gone beyond their business activities to improve lives. They have also integrated CSR in corporate strategy and thereby created shared value. As a member of the board of Hindustan Unilever for close to a decade I saw how the Shakti project created livelihood opportunities for rural women. It was done by familiarizing them with HUL's products while also training them on basic principles of distribution management. This network exponentially increased HUL's reach in rural India.

My interest in CSR is also tinged by my own rise out of poverty and the difference a scholarship given to me as young boy made to

my life. It has been a wondrous experience for me at a personal level to now sit on the boards of companies and help shape the good that they can do with the many capacities they have. Based on my learnings, I have a few suggestions for CSR in the future.

First, India is changing rapidly. Innovation is all about doing things differently to make a significant difference. We must be continuously improving upon the existing regulation, strengthening implementation, facilitating compliance and, finally and most importantly, strengthening the entire CSR ecosystem to foster innovation and create major impact. If we allow for this continuous innovation, then a robust evidence-based, disclosure-led, trust-driven compliance regime for CSR will emerge, which will not only be best practice but next practice.

Second, in order to make truly transformative social impact, three things must go together, namely, corporate social responsibility, corporate social innovation and social entrepreneurship. They can all synergistically reinforce one another.

The investments companies make through CSR are not only physical and financial but also empathetic. This includes involved responsible business practices, direct or indirect social contribution, project implementation and public-private partnerships, finally followed by impact assessment.

Corporate social innovation refers to changes in business models and practices, achieving a triple bottom line, practising a circular economy and promoting intrapreneurship.

Social entrepreneurship combines profit generation with social value creation, getting support from impact investors and creating an enabling ecosystem for solutions.

The synergy of all these together will help India move forward rapidly in its socio-economic transformation.

Third, India's challenge is not so much a budget deficit but a trust deficit. The government should be a willing partner rather than a regulator in CSR projects. Trusting companies with their CSR governance potential as also the project execution potential

and allowing them to make a choice about what is close to their heart, what they are good at contributing to, and so on is very important.

The government needs to specially create innovative policy changes that can create a major impact. For example, allowing companies to carry forward funds through an escrow account encourages alternative funding models such as impact investing, which has been long overdue. This will promote collective action with speed, scale and sustainability.

Fourth, CSR funds are rather limited for an individual company. So, the principle of 'more from less for more' is important. In other words, leverage small resources with big ideas to create an impact on more and more beneficiaries. This was the tagline that we used in every project at Tata Motors when I chaired the CSR committee. When a formal framework was developed at Tata Motors to measure the social return on capital, high ratios of benefit to cost were achieved by leveraging partners (for example NGOs), using innovative processes and having the right touch points.

Civil Society magazine had carried a cover story on Anjani Mashelkar Inclusive Innovation Awardees (March 2022 issue). Practically all of them had developed non-invasive, user-friendly, high-tech yet affordable diagnostics. The challenge for them was the lack of funding from proof of concept to prototyping and market validation. Normal venture capital was not available nor were commercial loans affordable. This 'valley of death' funding was made available to Rahul Rastogi who created a portable pocket-size ECG monitor. Today his 'Sanket' is exported to a dozen countries!

The point is that CSR funds should be used in those areas where there are no other viable mechanisms of funding available, where small help can make a big difference.

Fifth, the current CSR model is all about 'doing well and doing good'. This means after one has done 'well' by amassing wealth, one turns to doing 'good', by setting up charitable trusts or foundations or by doing it in compliance with the legislation. This is CSR 1.0. We need to move to CSR 2.0.



Bandicoot, a robotic machine, cleans sewer manholes

In my K.R. Narayanan Memorial Oration in Canberra in 2019, I talked about CSR 2.0. That meant 'doing well by doing good', meaning doing good itself should become a business. This could mean, for instance, despite income inequality, creating access equality by providing to the populace affordable high-quality goods and services.

This would mean providing affordable excellence to society: for example, high-quality medicines at affordable cost, providing green energy affordably, and so on.

That also means that, for instance, one cannot destroy forests or exploit mines and do some business that does good to society or write out some cheques for some good cause. It means it is all about balancing ecology, environment, economics, equity and ethics from end-to-end in all businesses. CSR 2.0 is all about doing good as well as being good.

It all begins and ends with businesses and business leaders being socially driven. There is no substitute for the idea of trusteeship. On a personal note, March 30, 2000, was a very special day. On that day the Padma Bhushan was bestowed on both me, a former Tata scholar, and Ratan Tata, head of the house of Tatas. By whom? President K.R. Narayanan, another former Tata scholar. It showed the transformative prowess of what is now known as Corporate Social Responsibility.

Let me explain why I call it transformative. President Narayanan was born in a small village in Kerala; I was born in a small village in Goa. He walked several kilometres to get to school, much like I walked barefoot to a municipal school. He sometimes stood outside

the class and took notes because his family couldn't afford his tuition fees. Due to extreme poverty, my widowed mother could not afford notebooks or shoes, and I recall studying under streetlights. President Narayanan took his brother's help to copy notebooks and books and return them, and I remember sitting on a footpath, borrowing books from a kind bookstall owner, quickly reading them and returning them.

**Funds are limited so the principle of more from less for more is important. Leverage small resources with big ideas to create an impact on more and more beneficiaries.**

For both of us, the turning point of our academic lives was common. Both of us were Tata scholars. Speaking for myself, I would have had to leave my studies despite standing 11th among 1,35,000 students in Maharashtra in the matriculation exam in 1960. But it was the Sir Dorab Tata scholarship of Rs 60 per month for six years that helped me study. A similar opportunity came the way of President Narayanan when he got the J.N. Tata endowment scholarship, which helped him pursue his studies abroad.

The scholarships for President Narayanan and me were a direct result of the sense of corporate trusteeship that the Tatas have always demonstrated. Perhaps it is not widely known that the world's first-ever charitable trust was set up by Jamshed Tata in 1892, long before the Andrew Carnegie Trust (1901), the Rockefeller Foundation (1913), the Lord Lever Hulme Trust (1925) and the Ford Foundation (1936). The establishment of the trust was driven by the Tatas' belief in giving back to the people what came from the people.

Looking way back in history, the practice of doing good for society by the privileged goes back to the days of Guru Nanak Dev who propagated the guiding principle of 'Kirt Kar, Naam Jap, Vandd Chhak' which means working and sharing your earnings with others. The Sikh religion propagated the idea of donating one-tenth of income to charity which is referred to as daswandh.

Merchants of the Hindu faith also donated to the poor and got temples and night shelters built for them. Islam too has a law called zakat, which states that a certain percentage of earnings must be shared in the form of donations for the poor. In the pre-colonial era, religion was the driving force behind CSR.

The meaning of such philanthropy has changed over the years. Later models included trusteeship, public sector initiatives, National Voluntary Guidelines and, now, mandatory CSR. But at the heart of social responsibility is the inalienable reality that businesses are a part of society. ■

*Dr Raghunath Anant Mashelkar is an influential thought leader who is globally recognized and honoured for his contributions to science and technology.*

# PARTNERSHIP AND STRATEGIC GIVING ARE WHAT WORK BEST

Smile Foundation has successfully teamed up with an array of companies to invest in healthcare, education, skilling with results to show over 20 years now.



SANTANU MISHRA

IN the initial days of the Smile Foundation, we were convinced that there had to be a working model and processes to ensure good governance and a sustainable social return on investment. India's development sector in those days didn't have any dependable funding mechanism. Taking the cue from the business model of 'venture capital', an innovative model called 'Social Venture Philanthropy' was adopted. It was meant to empower genuine grassroots initiatives (small NGOs and voluntary efforts) by inculcating accountability, sustainability, communication, and leadership. In addition, this model promised to multiply the social outcome by combining the strengths of grassroots initiatives and Smile Foundation.

We sought to achieve high-impact development with the efficiency of the corporate world. The selfless passion of social entrepreneurs and exemplary community connect at the grassroots were adopted as the hallmarks of Smile Foundation. Initially as an experiment, and later as a strategic market need.

In the absence of a formal financing mechanism for social enterprises in India, Smile Foundation developed an understanding of how the corporate sector functioned. Over the years, a bridge was established — linking the needs of development initiatives with the business needs of the company. And it started showing results.

It makes business and economic sense for organizations to form partnerships and achieve the joint agenda of social development in an area of their choice. No business can thrive in a society that is not making progress as a whole.

When we conceived Smile Foundation at the dawn of the new millennium, we had two credos. First, making the corporate sector the organization's sources of funding so that this would make Smile Foundation professionally driven and outcome-oriented. (The founders with backgrounds in corporate might have triggered this inclination.) Secondly, with globalization and information technology spreading fast, we thought that the trend of companies becoming socially relevant would come to India sooner.

India became the first country in 2013 to legally mandate Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Beginning from Mahatma Gandhi's trusteeship model and prompted by their family traditions, many wealthy families from the pre-Independence era actively took part in philanthropic activities to give back generously to society. This was the earliest form of CSR in India where the wealthy not just donated money to the poor and needy but also set up many educational and health institutions for the benefit of society. Globally, the term CSR was coined in 1953 by American economist Howard Bowen in Social Responsibilities of the Businessman.

**GLOBALIZATION** Revisiting the 1990s, one would observe that increasing globalization became instrumental in expanding the scope and adoption of CSR. This phenomenon also laid the foundation for the evolution of CSR, as a trend.

Firstly, businesses started thinking of doing good in a more strategic and planned manner. Secondly, partnering with civil society organizations and combining their skills and the resources of companies also gained momentum. And lastly, companies around the world started to think about how CSR could make "business sense".

Not long ago, the economic crisis of 2008 was palpable everywhere, including India. Many felt that it was avoidable but for aggressive profiteering. Business success started to be seen with proven responsibilities towards society/communities, customers and employees.

The next decade too was in a way a great

social awakening or social repurposing for the business world. As the United Nations General Assembly established the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015, it started becoming a reference point for the "blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all".

Today, the perception somehow is that companies are missing out if they aren't participating in CSR. It has become an integral part of doing business, and is increasingly affecting consumer choice to a large extent. CSR programmes are increasingly being devised around the UN's 17 SDGs, ranging from quality education to climate action.

CSR is here to stay. As technology leads to increased transparency and scrutiny of corporations, the incentive to be socially responsible will continue to grow. Balancing profit and purpose will increasingly become the aspiration of the business world. As will tying social responsibility with the core values and purpose of the business.

**PARTNERSHIPS** Our partnership with global telecommunications major Ericsson goes back to 2015. As a technology leader, their commitment to solve social problems through technology has driven their CSR philosophy from the beginning. We have successfully executed interventions in education, vocational education and skill development, and healthcare where Ericsson has helped us achieve results through transformative digital solutions, from introducing ICT in classrooms in the remotest areas, to making Covid-19 testing possible during the pandemic on a much larger scale.

Herbalife has been our partner-in-change for over 12 years. Going by the brand's core value of providing healthy nutrition, thousands of children studying in our education centres spread over India have benefitted from the programme that evolved over three phases.

Businesses become successful by solving problems and providing practical solutions to customers. Interestingly, the readiness to identify and solve social problems is finding a place in corporate philosophy.



Development organizations create an impact by solving local problems

From my own experience, I would say that development organizations exist and create impact with the sole purpose of playing a role in solving social problems. In the process, they gather expertise and competency. This finds a strategic need for coherence between non-profits and companies in the realm of social responsibilities.

**NUTRITION PROJECT** It will take a collective resonance between the corporate sector, civil society organizations, governments and the general public to create an encouraging environment for bringing sustainable change.

We concluded a nutrition project in the Banaskantha district in Gujarat in partnership with the PepsiCo Foundation, focused on the latter's strategic focus area. The project became a successful case study in reducing the incidence of anaemia in adolescent girls in the district by promoting locally available sources of dietary nutrition, and was then handed over to the state government. A similar project focused on maternal and child nutrition is now being implemented in Sangrur district of Punjab. The association with PepsiCo began during the Chennai floods of 2015 and has grown meaningfully over the years.

SBI Cards goes by its CSR mission: "to be a significant contributor in India's growth story, by undertaking innovative, technology driven and impactful programmes with

underprivileged communities." The partnership flourished into creating access and widening the scope of primary health services innovatively through telemedicine, and creating model health centres in Nuh district in collaboration with the government of Haryana. Many companies also see value in investing in the communities that are at the core of their businesses. Our decade-old partnership with a

**The perception is that companies are missing out if they are not participating in CSR. It has become an integral part of doing business.**

global manufacturing leader has centred around creating industry-ready engineers where they provide scholarships, internships and industry exposure to less-privileged youth of the country studying engineering in government colleges.

We have also partnered with Berger Paints' iTrain On Wheels Programme, an upskilling initiative aimed at honing the skills of painters by training them in contemporary techniques

and enhancing their employability opportunities.

In Smile Foundation's journey of around two decades, what began as a small experiment has so far led to an experience of partnering with more than 400 companies. Many of these associations have been long-term, outcome-oriented and enriching. They include Airbus, ANZ, Avery Dennison, Mitsubishi Electric, Philips, S&P Global and Target International, among others, with the partnership going back anywhere between seven and 12 years. Employee volunteering has also been a high point of the partnership with a majority of the companies.

As we regularly exchange our learnings with organizations and think-tanks across the globe, I feel that CSR and social commitment will continue to find a place in the corporate sector's strategic plans. Moreover, the top leadership will more often go with conviction and belief. There is no better way to imbue social values not only in the organizational culture but also in the way businesses are conducted.

Going forward, we might also witness innovation in the areas of 'social business' and 'impact investment' as social commitment will gradually become more proactive than reactive. ■

Santanu Mishra is co-founder and executive trustee of the Smile Foundation.

# INVESTING IN HERITAGE KEEPS THE PAST ALIVE WITH RETURNS

Conservation projects not only revive monuments, they serve to improve a city's built environment, generate enduring revenues and enhance the quality of life.



RATISH NANDA

INDIA prides herself on being an ancient culture with diverse beliefs. A rich built heritage is a reminder of this pluralism. Preserving and passing it on to future generations should be a national endeavour in which companies see an opportunity for giving back to society.

Modern conservation also goes beyond cultural dividends to create urban assets that provide benefits and returns several times the investments made in them. The restoration of Humayun's Tomb in Delhi has led to a 1,000 percent increase in visitor numbers with the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) recovering the costs incurred by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC) to implement the project in under a year. This visitor growth has now sustained for two decades — demonstrating the enduring value of heritage sites.

Today, across the country are 3,693 monuments of national importance. Another 3,000 or so monuments, considered of local importance, are protected by state governments. More recently, several municipalities in urban areas have notified heritage buildings, which number approximately another 2,000.

These numbers pale when compared with those from countries elsewhere in the world. The UK alone protects over 650,000 heritage structures. The numbers are similar in Italy, Germany, France and the US. These countries have demonstrated how their built heritage contributes significantly to the economy.

It is no secret that the approximately 9,000 'protected' heritage buildings across India — from World Heritage Sites to roadside ruins —

are almost all in urgent need of conservation. They need to be secured from encroachment and misuse and are crying out for sustainable activities that revive visitor interest in our national heritage.

This became a possibility when, in 2014, amongst permitted activities for CSR funding was added "protection of national heritage, art and culture including restoration of building and sites of historical importance and works of art; setting up public libraries; promotion and development of traditional arts and handicrafts".

In 1993, while placing Humayun's Tomb in Delhi on UNESCO's World Heritage List, the International Council of Monuments and Sites had made the designation conditional on the restoration of the 26-acre enclosed gardens. In 1997, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of India's independence, His Highness the Aga Khan made a gift that allowed the Aga Khan Trust for Culture to undertake the garden restoration of Humayun's Tomb.

Apart from generating tourism revenue, the conservation of India's built heritage can fulfil multiple government objectives such as creating livelihoods for craftsmen, instilling a sense of pride in local communities in structures that are made functional such as temple tanks and *baolis* or those that can be put to use for community needs such as for primary schools and health centres. The possibilities are immense.

Traditional philanthropy in India has focussed on developing health and education infrastructure, environmental preservation, better opportunities for women and these were also the focus areas listed as permissible activities for CSR funds at the outset.

However, since 2007, the Nizamuddin Urban Renewal Initiative, a non-profit PPP project undertaken by the AKTC in partnership with the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), ASI, Central Public Works Department and the Aga Khan Foundation has demonstrated that strategically implemented heritage conservation projects can address multiple community needs such as health, education, sanitation, vocational training, urban and

housing improvements, ecological restoration and economic opportunities.

Since the Aga Khan established the Aga Khan Trust for Culture in the 1980s, he has repeatedly stressed his belief that "cultural heritage can itself be a springing point for social and economic development, in the same way as agriculture, water resources, power supplies or transportation have traditionally been perceived. Even in settings of abject poverty, cultural legacies can become powerful catalysts for change..."

Thus the initiative in the Humayun's Tomb-Nizamuddin area of Delhi aimed to establish a model conservation effort for replicability across India. The effort has been supported by several independent trusts, foreign governments and companies. Funds for conservation have been received from Havells, IndiGo/InterGlobe Foundation, Hilti in addition to the Government of India and traditional donors such as the Tata Trusts and Ford Foundation, and international government agencies in the US, Norway, Germany and Australia.

With the support of multiple partners, over 60 monuments have been conserved. A site museum is now being built. Multiple socio-economic development programmes have been undertaken, including healthcare facilities accessed by over 700,000 individual patients. Over 3,000 young people have benefitted from vocational training. Malnutrition has been addressed. Landscaping of neighbourhood parks and similar urban improvements has been done. These have led to increased visitor numbers including several million visitors to Sunder Nursery since its opening in 2018 as well as an improved quality of life for residents of the Nizamuddin Basti.

Today, the World Heritage Site of Versailles in France attracts more visitors than the number of international tourist arrivals in India. This anomaly can be addressed if a significant number of national monuments and other heritage sites across the country are conserved over the next few decades.

As seen from the conservation of Humayun's Tomb and other monuments conserved in



Restoration of Humayun's Tomb has created an urban asset in Delhi

recent years, a majority of conservation costs go towards craftsmen's wages. It is worth noting that once conservation works are undertaken, no further investment is required for decades. Conservation efforts are also very visible and thus attractive to corporate donors. In the Indian context, conservation efforts must be coupled with socio-economic benefit programmes, environmental development and heritage awareness.

When the Government of India sought AKTC's assistance for the conservation of the built heritage, the Ministry of Culture offered a choice of 50 sites nationally. AKTC chose to work at Humayun's Tomb-Nizamuddin Basti on account of an earlier involvement with the site, its central location and the possibility of conservation efforts improving the quality of life of a large community living abutting the site. With a precedent established, corporate groups looking to support conservation efforts have plenty to choose from.

While the extent of available funding will determine the scale of a project, ease of access, grandeur, uniqueness and potential impact on the urban environment are some of the factors to be considered. In some cases conservation of historical school buildings, hospitals, courts or other public functions also results in a multiple and meaningful impact.

Conservation funds could also be aimed at reuse of historical buildings — much more energy efficient than building new ones. More recently, the ASI is more open to direct

implementation of infrastructure at historical sites — site museums, toilet facilities, parking, film screening halls are some such facilities being planned.

Following the 1990s reforms and three decades of economic liberalization, deep-rooted systems have changed. Three decades

**Apart from tourism, conservation creates livelihoods for India's craftsmen and instils pride in communities when their historic tanks and *baolis* become functional.**

later, there is hardly any sector untouched by reform and greater private involvement in steering the country towards development. Private banks, private hospitals, private universities today serve populations across the country. Similarly, private investment in building of roads, ports, airports, Metro corridors ensure our national infrastructure is setting standards for the world.

Yet, responsibility for conservation and management of our national heritage sites, public museums and even performance arts

continues to be seen as the sole responsibility of government departments staffed with scarce human resources and government funding.

CSR funding for heritage preservation holds the potential to transform India's built heritage in a manner that the Heritage Lottery funding in the UK was able to achieve. CSR funds in India are estimated to be in excess of ₹20,000 crore annually and even one percent of this going towards conservation or upgrading museums will have significant impact.

CSR funds could be utilized for engaging required multi-disciplinary teams to lead major conservation efforts, to curate and procure objects for museum collections, to provide modern exhibition design and site interpretation at both museums and sites, and upgrade our sites and museums to the most attractive in the world. Can private funds not be utilized to bring back significant Indian artefacts put up at auctions each month — as the Chinese have successfully done.

To mimic the impact of the cultural sector on creating employment, increasing revenue through tourism, instilling a sense of pride in local communities, amongst other national objectives, the government of the day needs to incentivize and prioritize private involvement in the culture sector.

India's heritage has the economic potential to contribute significantly to the country's GDP. This, however, will happen only with appropriate investments across the country. ■

Ratish Nanda is CEO, Aga Khan Trust for Culture.

# ETHICS BEGINS WHERE THE LAW ENDS FOR A BUSINESS

To use CSR funds to keep the powers-that-be happy won't do and is a sizeable risk in the long term. For business to survive, society must too.



JAGDEEP S. CHHOKAR

INDIA has had an ancient tradition of philanthropy. The tradition of constructing places of worship, and lodging for pilgrims and worshippers near places of worship and pilgrimage, and setting up educational institutions and charitable hospitals started by kings was followed up by the well-to-do and rich communities, such as the ruling classes and the elite mercantile classes like the Jains in Gujarat and Rajasthan. It might not be too much of a stretch to see such philanthropic activities as the forerunners of what came to be termed in the study of business organizations in the west as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).

The advent of the factory system following the industrial revolution was felt to have led to several social problems such as labour unrest, poverty, slums, and child and female labour. It was to deal with these industrial issues and the resulting social criticism that industrialists, arguably, started to take actions such as provision of hospitals, clinics, lunch-rooms, profit-sharing, recreational facilities, even creating and maintaining complete townships. It is difficult to pinpoint clearly if these actions were taken solely to solve industrial problems and to increase productivity or were for societal good as an outcome of humanitarianism and philanthropic urges.

Starting with the above, the concept of CSR evolved to its present state. It is interesting to note that one of the phases in this evolution has been referred to as 'Trusteeship Management', which in western literature is said to have emerged around the 1920s and

1930s. The concept of Trusteeship Management was enunciated by Mahatma Gandhi and in Indian literature the Trusteeship Management phase of CSR is identified from 1910 to about the mid-1950s.

As it is currently understood, CSR came to be in official existence with Section 135 of the Companies Act of 2013, more specifically since February 27, 2014 when the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) notified the Companies (Corporate Social Responsibility Policy) Rules, 2014, to come into force with effect from April 1, 2014. The formulation of these Rules also saw some struggle.

There was an attempt to include 'contributions to political parties' as one of the permissible activities under CSR, which was successfully resisted by civil society. The final list of permitted activities to "be included by companies in their Corporate Social Responsibility Policies" had nine items plus the mandatory catchall called "such other matters as may be prescribed".

Soon after the rules came into effect, the MCA issued a General Circular on June 18, 2014, clarifying, "The statutory provision and provisions of CSR Rules, 2014, is to ensure that while activities undertaken in pursuance of the CSR policy must be relatable to Schedule VII of the Companies Act 2013, *the entries in the said Schedule VII must be interpreted liberally so as to capture the essence of the subjects enumerated in the said Schedule.* The items enlisted in the amended Schedule VII of the Act, are *broad-based and are intended to cover a wide range of activities as illustratively mentioned in the Annexure*" (italics added, bold in the original).

Over time the activities permitted to be included in CSR policies have come to be modified and increased. The latest list of activities (accessed on January 19, 2023) consists of 12 items.

A comparison of the two lists shows, inter alia, that a majority of the changes appear to have been effected post the formation of the NDA government and thus reflect the priorities or preferences of the current political dispensation. While the deletion of "reducing

child mortality and improving maternal health" and "combating human immunodeficiency virus, acquired immune deficiency syndrome, malaria and other diseases" stands out, and the addition of Swachh Bharat Kosh, Clean Ganga fund, and PM CARES fund, among others, seem worth noting, so are contributions to "public funded universities" and other institutions of research.

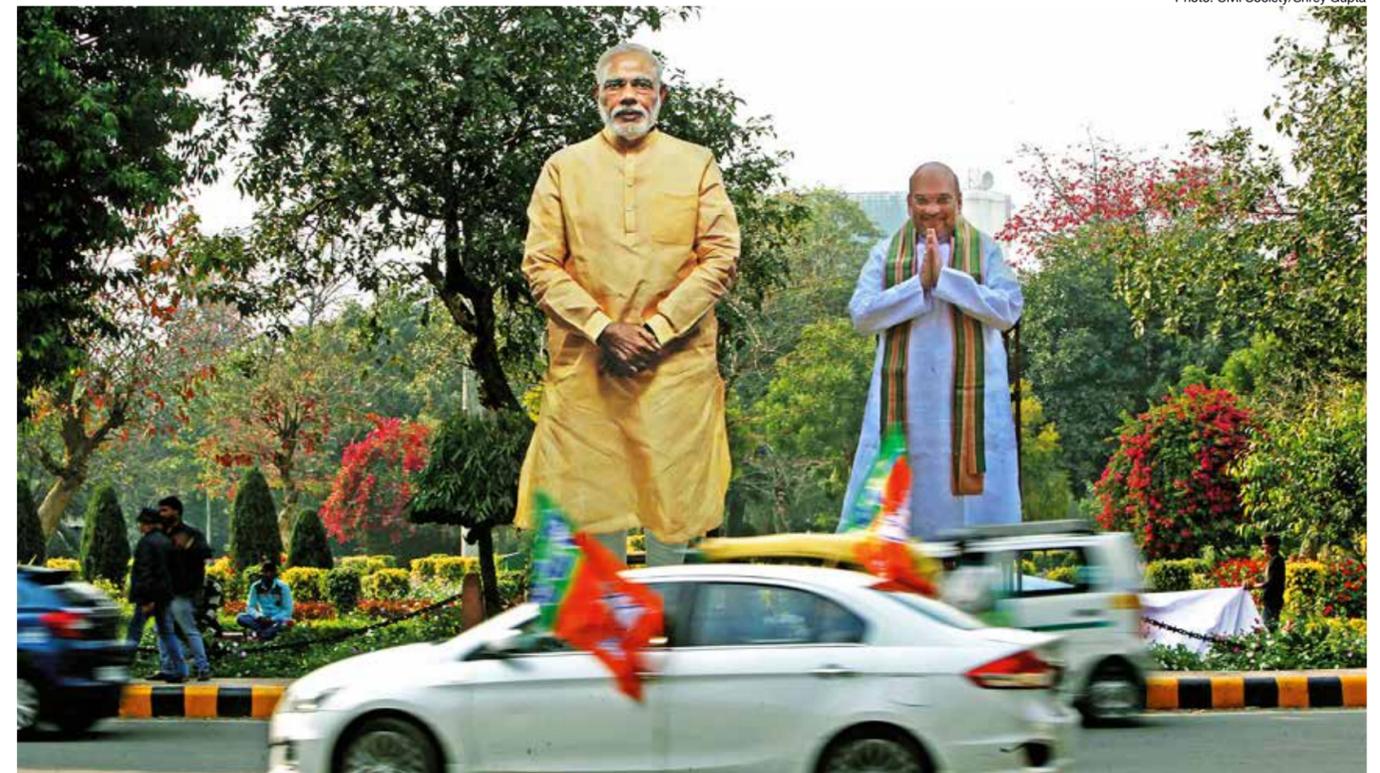
**COMMAND AND CONTROL** The fact that the government decided to implement CSR in the form of a legal requirement is perhaps an indicator that the corporate sector, or at least a significant proportion of it, was not doing enough.

A simple reading of Section 135 of the Companies Act and the Companies (Corporate Social Responsibility Policy) Rules indicates that the underlying approach is one of command and control, which is in contrast to the philosophy underlying similar actions in what might be called mature democracies such as in the European Union, the US, and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

The approach of these societies seems to be one of encouraging, motivating, and nudging companies to undertake socially responsible actions rather than of forcing them.

Is it solely because of the control orientation that has been the hallmark of the governmental bureaucracy in India for a long time, or are there some other contributory factors? Has business, and particularly big business, "earned" the right to let the government know that it knows best what to do in the overall interest of society and the country? As always, the reality is that there is more than a grain of truth in both. The government does have a control orientation but it is also a widespread feeling that business has not behaved in a socially responsible manner over time.

A large majority of business enterprises or businesspersons tend to think and work individually, to take care of their individual interest. Those who think about business as a significant sector in the national economy and society are a small minority. Even among them,



Changes in the permitted activities under CSR reflect the preferences of the current political dispensation

there are a number of groups, associations and so on, each focusing on its specific interest. There is also a tendency to think that so long as one is not violating any law, one can do what they like. This is not really conducive to effective CSR. Business has to realize that ethics begins where law ends.

**DIVERSION OF MONEY** Some of the new inclusions in the list of permitted activities, such as the Swachh Bharat Kosh and the Clean Ganga fund, are indicative of the government's intention of getting the corporate sector to finance some of the actions that the government itself has decided to undertake.

The inclusion of the PM CARES fund, with effect from May 26, 2020, seems to be in a different category. This fund has been controversial ever since it was set up during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Its website describes it as "a Public Charitable Trust".

It goes on to say that the "Prime Minister is the ex-officio Chairman of the PM CARES Fund and Minister of Defence, Minister of Home Affairs and Minister of Finance, Government of India are ex-officio Trustees of the Fund."

The Trust was given permission to collect donations from foreign sources from the day it was set up whereas the rules require an entity to have at least three balance sheets before it can apply for permission to receive donations from foreign sources under the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA). Despite this, it is claimed that it is not a government

fund but a private fund and therefore does not come under the RTI Act. Consequently, the working of this fund is not accessible to people at large. It has been reported that several large public sector companies have made significant contributions under CSR to this fund. This fund, thus, remains a mystery.

Another equally big, if not bigger, mystery, though not really related to CSR, is that of electoral bonds which was dealt with in some detail in *Civil Society's* December 2019 issue.

The latest available data shows that out of ₹9,208 crore worth of electoral bonds from 2018 to 2022, the BJP received ₹5,270 crore worth of bonds or 57 percent of the total amount received by all parties during this period. All the remaining political parties put together received 43 percent. The next biggest recipients were the Congress and the Trinamool Congress at ₹964 crore or 10 percent and ₹767 crore or eight percent, respectively.

It is worth recalling that in the case of electoral bonds, no one is supposed to know who has given how much money to which political party except the State Bank of India (SBI), the sole entity authorized to sell these bonds.

It seems to be a reasonable assumption that if the SBI knows something, it cannot keep it hidden from the government. It follows therefore that the government, and by extension, the ruling party at the centre, also know who has bought electoral bonds worth how much and which party they have been donated to.

A direct fallout of this information asymmetry is that the government (the ruling party) can choke, or at least control, the flow of funds to all opposition parties.

Business enterprises have been known to "manage" their environment through a variety of means. If Indian companies think that they can 'manage' their political environment by pumping CSR money into the PM CARES fund or to the ruling party through electoral bonds, they might be taking a sizeable risk, at least in the long term. The risk is best captured in the words of the Urdu poet, Rahat Indori, who said: "Those who are sitting on the seat of honour will not be there tomorrow; they are tenants, not the owners."

**LESSONS** So, what can corporates learn from this? CSR is neither merely complying with the law nor keeping the powers-that-be in good humour. The lesson is to internalize that business exists as a part of the larger society because it serves a specific purpose in society and is, in turn, supported by society which consists of the supplier of its inputs and consumer of its outputs. And that no part of a whole can survive at the cost of the whole. Directly put, business will not survive if society does not survive, business cannot be healthy if the society of which it is a part is not healthy. This is why CSR is not a mere legal requirement to be satisfied, nor is it just a desirable thing to do, it is essential for the survival of business. ■

Jagdeep Chhokar is a former professor, dean and director-in-charge of the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad. He is a founder-member of the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR). Views are personal.

# HOW A COMPANY EARNS IS AS IMPORTANT AS ITS CSR

Can an organization despoil the environment and yet be seen as being responsible by using a small amount of its profits for social good?



KIRAN KARNIK

CORPORATE Social Responsibility (CSR) is being overtaken in boardrooms and in top corporate management circles by the new buzz-concept: Environment, Social and Governance (ESG). Though related, the two are different, with the latter being a broader concept having a wider ambit. Both have the commonality of making for good PR and adding a few pages to the company annual report as also a few paragraphs in the chairperson's speech at the AGM. However, while ESG is seen as a "doing good" activity — possibly boosting the brand and even the market cap of a company — for a large number of businesses, CSR is now a compliance requirement.

In its early conception, CSR was something that an organization did voluntarily. It took forward the sense of responsibility that good companies felt towards their stakeholders. An early example is how the Tatas embarked on this a century ago by providing a number of benefits to their employees. They, and then a few others, broadened their altruism to include work which benefitted the local community. The change from volunteerism to a recognition of the responsibility of corporates gave rise to the idea and concept of CSR.

The formalization of CSR began with the government formulating a CSR law, requiring large and profitable companies (duly defined) to spend at least two percent of their profit (averaged over three years) on specified activities. However, there was no punishment or fine prescribed. This was an interesting new idea of enforcement via "name and shame" for

offenders who did not comply. It was felt that peer, customer and stock market pressure would automatically ensure that the target was met.

Given time, and a good communication campaign — including by those who did comply — this strategy may well have succeeded. However, pressure, and possibly impatience, led to quickly abandoning this soft touch and market-orientated approach. It has been replaced by increasingly stringent provisions which, in effect, make compliance legally necessary and impose penalties for not doing so. Basically, the carrot has been given up and replaced by a stick.

The enforcement of the CSR law, as a necessary item of compliance, has practically made this one more tax or surcharge on certain companies. The only difference is that the company itself spends it, with a choice of where and how it spends the specified amount. For those who want to treat this as a purely compliance item, the best way of avoiding all the hassles is the "PM CARES route": one cheque and all the requirements are met.

A more fundamental issue merits discussion: what exactly is the social responsibility of a company? As defined by law, it is to deploy a part (two percent) of the gains of business for social good. This begs a number of questions: what about the processes through which the profit is made (i.e., the company's operations)? Can the organization be irresponsible in what it does — despoil the environment, for example — and yet be seen as a "responsible" one by merely fulfilling the requirement of using a very small part of its profit for social good? The revenue of a company is 10 or 20 times its post-tax profit. The CSR requirement is, thus, to spend 0.02 percent or just 0.01 percent of its revenue (10 to 20 paise for every ₹100 of revenue) on CSR. Is it not far more important to look at how it earns that ₹100 than worry about (and sometimes whitewash it) spending 20 paise on some worthy social project?

Fortunately, other mandated requirements — like the SEBI-specified Business Responsibility and Sustainability Report, required annually from companies above a

certain size — do look at some aspects of this. However, unlike the CSR law, this has little "stick". However, key stakeholders of a company are now very conscious of broader social responsibilities in how the business is run (not merely in how a small part of the profit is deployed). Corporate customers in business-to-business transactions often demand certain requirements to be met by the supplier (ranging from minimum wages for workers to impact on the environment); consumers in B-to-C operations have become more aware and prefer brands that follow social responsibility norms; employees (and potential ones) want to be part of a company which is seen as a responsible one. In addition, the stock market increasingly reacts positively to companies with a good social work image. Often, all this results mainly in PR spends to create the right image: basically, more hot air than substance! Yet even the recognition of the need for a positive image in this area is a good start.

At the same time, there is need to acknowledge that many companies are genuinely committed to not only the legally required CSR spending, but also to ensuring that all their operations take account of broader social impacts and needs. This has been amplified by growing social awareness and sensitivity amongst corporate leaders, some of whom are personally exemplars of widely beneficial philanthropic contributions. A further positive development is the idealism and commitment of many young people to social and developmental causes. While many volunteer for such work in their spare time, as employees they automatically exert a certain pressure on their organization to move in this direction.

Civil society organizations have played an important role for many decades, even pre-dating Independence. While many focus on service delivery, some are also active in the advocacy space. This, and field reports that are in the public domain, is sometimes seen by governments (past and present, state and Centre) in a negative light. This is unfortunate, because these provide valuable feedback, often



A positive development is the idealism and commitment of many young people to social causes

superior in quality, depth and insight compared to official reports.

The advocacy of alternative policies and feedback of lacunae in various projects are an essential part of democratic functioning. It is a pity that government looks askance at these activities by NGOs. Given this, Indian companies are obviously wary about funding any advocacy work, and, under the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act, funding from foreign sources cannot be used for "political" activities (as advocacy might often be interpreted as). In sharp contrast, all governments in the past three decades have welcomed foreign funding in the corporate arena. Also, many companies, including foreign ones (MNCs) have full-fledged teams devoted to "public policy" and are very active on the advocacy front. This is, presumably, all right!

Of course, foreign donors often have — and push — their own agenda; also, a few NGOs do misuse foreign funding and indulge in activities they should not be doing. However, this is no different from similar black sheep in the corporate world — or elsewhere in our society. An overwhelming proportion of NGOs and their leaders have a deep commitment to the country and are fired by much-needed idealism. To hamstring them is, indeed, both unfair and sad. The role of NGOs amidst the COVID pandemic was lauded by the prime minister himself. Their empathy and connect with local communities is deep and strong, engendering trust: a factor that is critical for many things, including persuasion of vaccine resistors.

The active constraints on foreign funding of NGOs make it critical for companies to support them through CSR or other sources. Some argue that when the government has a programme, NGOs are not required in that field. Few now share this line of thought, as NGOs have more than proven their mettle with their ability to reach out and to fill gaps. In this context, it was surprising to see a recent missive from a government ministry seeking a

**The inclusion of the PM CARES fund has made cheque book philanthropy simple and an easy way to score brownie points with the government.**

halt to the malnutrition programme being run by an NGO. It would require a super-ostrich to deny that malnutrition exists and that rooting it out is a big task requiring all — government, business, NGO, academia, and others — to put their shoulders to the wheel.

CSR could also play another vital role: that of providing NGOs the funds to experiment with and innovate new modes of service delivery or of reaching other developmental goals. NGOs — with their knowledge of grassroots reality, context, and rapport — can do this best. Government is good at executing at scale but has little capacity for innovation, creative

solutions, or for experimentation with short feedback loops. NGOs — which can best do this — are, therefore, invaluable and complement the work of the government.

This, then, can be an important, new, and different role for CSR funding by companies: the equivalent of providing funding for innovative business start-ups or "social impact" investments. A modification in the list of permissible areas for CSR funding could open this avenue and lead to new models of service delivery or innovations in skill building and education, or in a whole host of development, livelihoods, and sustainability activities. Successful models could be adapted, contextualized, and scaled by the state or central governments.

Companies need to go beyond the legal requirements of CSR and redefine their responsibility. As corporate citizens, often with considerable and widespread impact, they need to ensure that through their activities they further the well-being of all stakeholders, including the wider community that they affect. They also need to be active players in protecting and bettering the environment. The metrics by which they judge themselves must include all these factors and be transparently available to the public. Apart from competing for market share, valuations, talent, and profits, they must also run a race on bettering themselves in a much wider sphere. That — and not just "donating" two percent of their profit — would be true corporate social responsibility. ■

Kiran Karnik is a public policy analyst and author. His most recent book is Decisive Decade: India 2030, Gazelle or Hippo.

# FROM PHILANTHROPY TO CO-CREATING CHANGE

Over 100 years Tata Steel has navigated multiple evolutions in its social and operating contexts to bring population-level outcomes.



**B. MUTHURAMAN  
& SOURAV ROY**

IT was 1996 and Tata Steel had set in motion a strategy for long-term growth with plans for a new integrated steel plant in Gopalpur, near Bherampur in Odisha. The site was selected as the most suitable coastal location after evaluating 18 different sites in coastal India. About 3,000 acres were required.

Bherampur was excellent as a site, it came with its own challenges — six villages with 638 households of 3,000 extended families with a population of about 12,000 opposed the project. They didn't want to give up their land and they were not convinced that the plant would be to their long-term benefit.

While 3,000 acres were acquired for the project because of the elaborate outreach by Tata Steel, the six villages remained unconvinced and resolute in their opposition. The Gopalpur plant finally never got built and it remains an example of how complex it is for corporations to deal with local social realities — even when acting transparently and with the best of intentions as we were in Tata Steel.

Often managements have a vision of development which is at variance with the way local people feel about their own lives and future. Insecurities over giving up land result from a long history of people being displaced by projects in villages and left abandoned to fend for themselves on the streets of cities. Displacement is harsh in the best of conditions, but it is especially so in an economy where social security is lacking. Small holdings and traditional occupations are preferred to

benefits promised in a distant future.

Bridging such divides to everyone's benefit is the challenge that managements need to learn to cope with as they pursue business goals. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) must run deep to be truly meaningful. It should be imbued with all the seriousness and stamina required to engage with communities to help them better understand corporations and their goals and vice versa for managements to integrate social realities into a grand vision. In Gopalpur, consistent with Tata Steel's ethos and philosophy regarding society, each family was mapped for its assets, education, income and so on. A comprehensive resettlement and rehabilitation package was worked out with the core principle that the income levels and quality of life of every single family would be improved.

A new township of 500 to 600 acres was developed based on proximity to the plant site. It had access to good infrastructure like roads, power and water. The compensation for land was ₹1 lakh per acre as compared to the then prevailing registered price of ₹25,000 to ₹35,000 per acre.

Each extended family was given a plot of 4,200 sq. ft and each core house was given a fully built up house of 257 sq. ft. The new township had fully built up houses, piped water supply, electrical connectivity to each plot, community centres and playgrounds.

Temples and other places of worship were shifted from the original villages. The youths of the displaced families were given technical training right from 1996 — first in Jamshedpur and then in Bherampur. Later Tata Steel established the JN Tata Technical Training Institute in Gopalpur.

Almost every single household was met and information was shared in a genuine and transparent manner. It was only because of the genuine concern for the people that Tata Steel could secure about 3,000 acres. In fact, a World Bank team that visited the site remarked that what we had built was one of the best rehab townships they had come across. Today, this township houses an engineering college and people are gainfully employed in the industries that have come up in that area both by Tata

Steel and other companies.

The plant that was to have come up at Gopalpur now exists at Kalinganagar. At the new site, Tata Steel further improved its relief and rehabilitation programme. It is one of the finest steel plants in the world. But the learning from this experience has been invaluable.

The Gopalpur episode was replete with learning, but really speaking it was just one more stage in the evolution of Tata Steel's journey that began a century ago.

Tata Steel has navigated multiple evolutions in the social and operating context in which it operates: setting up industries to push for economic self-reliance in independent India, adapting to liberalization in the 1990s, successfully riding out the information technology maelstrom at the turn of this century, aligning to new market paradigms after financial crises of 1997 and 2008 and so on.

The growth and longevity of the company, however, cannot be adequately understood without placing them in the context of its relationship with society.

In the past 30 years or so, as the social context evolved from 'social licence to operate' for businesses to a rights conscious paradigm of social capital, the company has moved from well-designed asset-heavy philanthropy creating household-level outcomes to co-creating change models with communities and other partners for population-level outcomes.

Tata Steel had established the Tata Steel Rural Development Society in 1979 as one of the earliest 'corporate foundations' to prioritize community work, while the Tribal Culture Society was set up in 1986 in recognition of the sociological and anthropological uniqueness of tribal communities in advance of a ministry being set up. It also had a team of more than 300 people working on rural and community development. The focus was on asset creation and financial assistance for communities proximate to its operations at a time when public resources for such things were scarce. This resulted in more than 75 schools being set up which remain operational even today, a multitude of scholarships, ponds which helped



Sahiyas of the MANSI project which has led to the first-ever blocks in Jharkhand achieving the SDG goals on maternal and child mortality reduction

small farmers, and more than 850,000 people being reached through health camps.

Between 2001 and 2013, rights movements became the bedrock for societal development. The states of Uttarakhand, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand were formed as a consequence of significant people's movements. The Right to Education Act, the Right to Information Act and the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act came into existence, while nationwide movements like the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and the National Health Mission were initiated.

Tata Steel recognized the rights paradigm and consolidated formal consultation mechanisms with Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities which informed its understanding, approach, and choice of work with society. And the consultations were validated in a gradual transition into a programme-based approach to impact work which was pioneering and sowed the seeds for the future.

MANSI (Maternal and Neonatal Survival Initiative) covered the entire block of Seraikela, Jharkhand, in a 10-year effort to bring down maternal and infant mortality rates, the first-ever ITI was adopted in public-private partnership mode which is sending youngsters from remote Jharkhand to Hong Kong as skilled technicians and the seeds of a structured programme to conserve and coach tribal languages was rolled out which today reaches more than 30,000 youngsters every year. And the average spend on social impact already exceeded the two percent threshold which was to be shortly mandated.

Adherence to process and expenditure norms have not been an element of constraint for Tata Steel, but it was amongst the first to recognize the need for expert social sector advice for the board of the company and set up a first of its kind advisory council for periodic consultations. The programmes initiated earlier were transformed to social change models

**Emphasis was laid on creating business managers who are sensitive to social impact and learn from communities in corporate pursuits.**

drawing on over a decade of implementation.

MANSI led to the first-ever blocks in Jharkhand achieving the SDG goals on maternal and child mortality reduction, the education programme worked across entire districts to create 2,200-plus panchayats declaring themselves child labour-free and Samvaad matured as the largest platform for dialogue on tribal identity, cutting across national boundaries. An additional element focussing on grassroots governance and individual social leadership was introduced to foster a community embedded impact narrative with many completing fellowships and leadership programmes.

And an equal emphasis was laid on creating business managers and leaders who remain sensitive to social impact and learn from communities in their corporate pursuits, shaped through more than 75 leaders undergoing social immersion programmes. It also established the Tata Steel Foundation as an institutional platform which converged the resources, mandate, and talent to take the social impact narrative to the next level. It was also recognized as the most impactful CSR programme in the country in 2021 by the Ministry of Corporate Affairs along with a multitude of recognitions for its programmes for being models of social change.

The future is a heady mix of challenges and opportunities for communities. It will be a world where the environmental, social, and economic will irreversibly converge and necessitate an interdisciplinary approach to development. It will also be a world where the not-for-profit and for-profit models will both emerge as viable alternatives for social impact work, but the balance between both will be key.

Tata Steel recognizes this interdisciplinarity and strives to keep communities at the centre of its thought process in an evolving context. It believes in scaling its current change models to reach those who are the least served and most silent, while continuing to build new models in key areas like water and climate change which bring in the best of technology and science but at a pace and in a manner which takes into account the point of view of communities. ■

*B. Muthuraman is a business leader and former MD of Tata Steel. Sourav Roy is CEO of the Tata Steel Foundation.*

## Beyond Business Scripting social change



Building  
Resilience



Health  
& Wellbeing



Education  
& Skilling

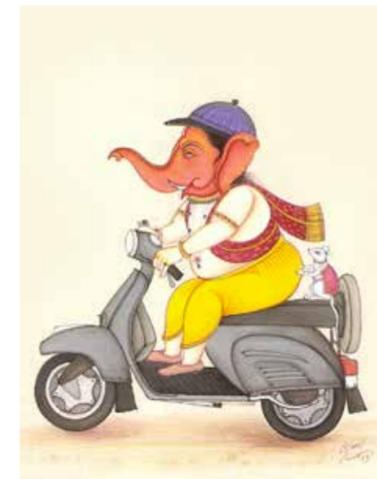


Income  
Generation

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We care equally about the community and work with them to build resilience through improved healthcare, education and women's empowerment. We run over 40 projects, through which we cover education of about 13,500 students, empowerment of 2,500 women through SHGs and well being of over 20,000 individuals through healthcare.

# GALLERY



## ARTABILITY

Art comes from within. The eyes of the soul make sense of the world. Every artist is therefore special. But what about people with disabilities? Do their limitations give them creative capacities others can't even imagine?

In a special section, *Civil Society* brings to its readers 10 artists with disabilities and their work in the belief that these are exceptional canvases unique in style, conception and skill. Some of these artists are trained and some are self-taught. All of them overcome challenges to make themselves visible.

Each year, Preeti Johar of the Family of Disabled holds an elaborately curated exhibition of such works in a heart-felt salutation to the creativity that goes into their making. The exhibition is called Beyond Limits and carries on the work of Preeti's remarkable father, Rajinder Johar, who suffered from quadriplegia after an accident and founded Family of Disabled to help people with disabilities.

*Civil Society* has been a regular at the exhibition and in this special section for our anniversary issue we invite you to share in this joy with us. If you feel like buying any of these artists' works or getting in touch with Preeti, please log in to [www.familyofdisabled.org](http://www.familyofdisabled.org)





## Master of the miniature

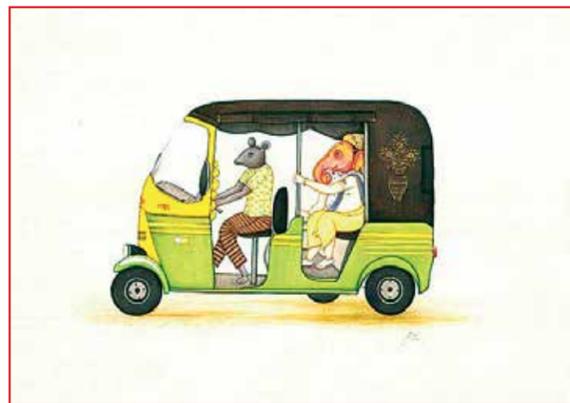
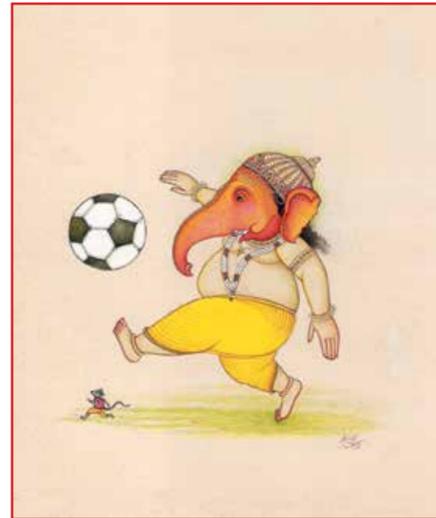
AJAY KUMAR GARG

A miniatures artist, 51-year-old Ajay Kumar Garg paints with a single-hair brush and a magnifying lens. Miniature painting is an old Indian tradition. The outstanding feature of such art is intricate brushwork and use of natural colours. Artists painted religious and spiritual themes or the royal court.

Garg's miniatures are more contemporary. His recent work depicting Lord Ganesha in current settings — in an auto-rickshaw, reading the newspaper — are very popular.

At the age of five, Garg's talent was recognized by Shri Sualal, a court artist from the Royal Court of Dholpur, in Rajasthan. At 14, he worked with well-known artist Asha Devi who introduced him to the art of miniature painting. Garg has formal training in miniature painting. He has showcased his work at several art exhibitions in Karnataka, Mumbai, the US, UK and Mexico. He has also received accolades for his skill.

Garg suffered permanent hearing impairment due to medical negligence when he was three years old. He lives in Jaipur and trains hearing impaired children and those living in orphanages.



## Scenes from the street

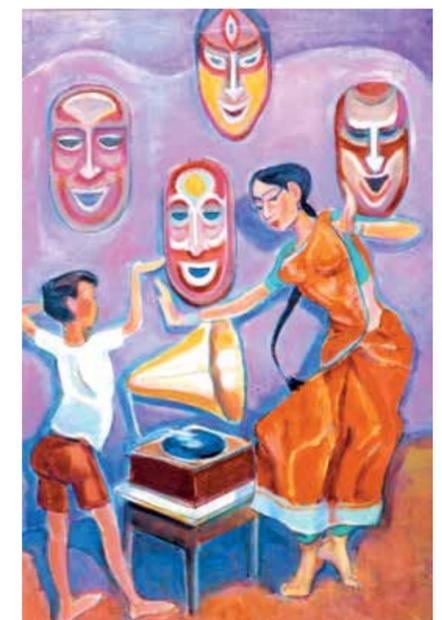
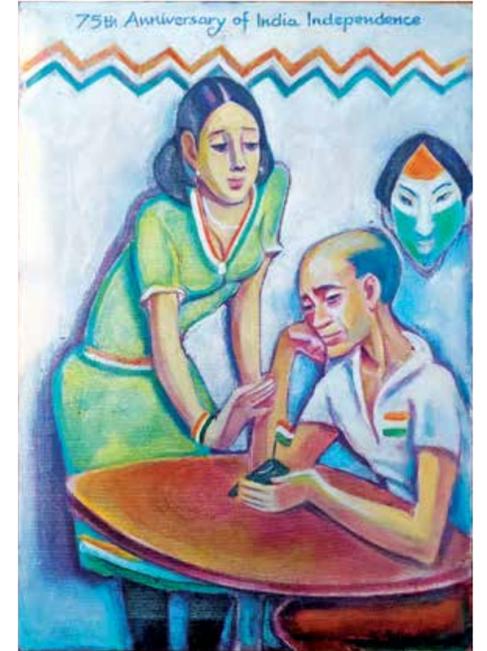
G. PRABHAKAR

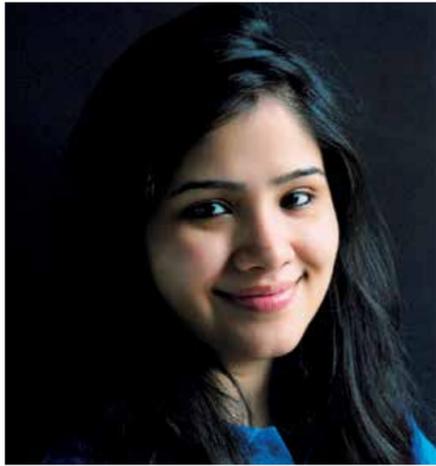
It's the routine everyday activities of people that G. Prabhakar turns into extraordinary images. His style comprises a blend of pastel colours and brush strokes that lend a fine colour-pencil illusion to his paintings.

Prabhakar's medium of art is oil paint. His paintings depict household scenes, roadside activities, human moods and expressions in the liveliest manner — a girl buying flowers, people playing chess, a vintage car. His work evokes memories of the innocent days of childhood. *Family* is inspired by his observation of local villagers and their children. Mundane everyday activities seem to find meaning and expression in his paintings. Each is filled with the activities of children, women and men in a harmony of colours in typical Indian settings.

Prabhakar's work exudes a unique flavour owing to his distinctive style. He has displayed his art in many solo exhibitions in New York and Chennai.

At 83, Prabhakar, who has a speech and hearing impairment, continues to wield his brush. He lives in Chennai. He earned a Bachelor in Fine Arts from the College of Arts and Crafts in Chennai and the Brooklyn Museum Art School, New York.





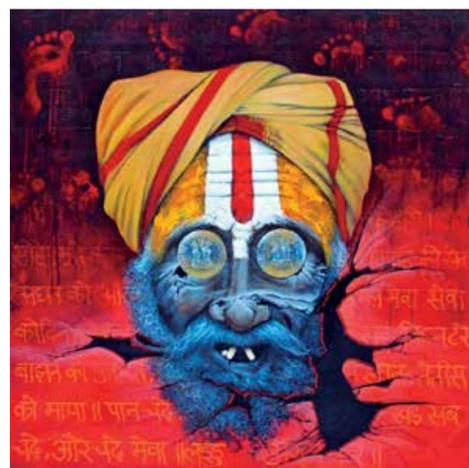
## Money and all it can buy

DEEPALI SHARMA

Deepali Sharma's canvases are a riot of vivid colours and quirky faces. One painting depicts an aggressive male face symptomatic of the times we live in, another a benign elderly holy man with crooked teeth, and a third a *sadhu* blowing a conch shell immersed in water with pretty fish floating past.

Sharma is a 33-year-old artist who lives in Jaipur. She was born with deafness. At the age of 19, she underwent cochlear implant surgery, which improved her hearing and speech ability. She has a Bachelor of Visual Arts (Painting) from the International College for Girls, and a Master of Visual Arts (Painting) with a silver medal from IIS University. She underwent another cochlear implant surgery in the other ear to aid listening, making it much easier for her to communicate.

Sharma has been a part of solo and group shows across India and internationally. Her work, *Money Money*, which was on display at the Beyond Limits exhibition by Family of Disabled (FOD), shows human greed for materialistic pleasures and all that money can buy.



## Colours that catch the eye

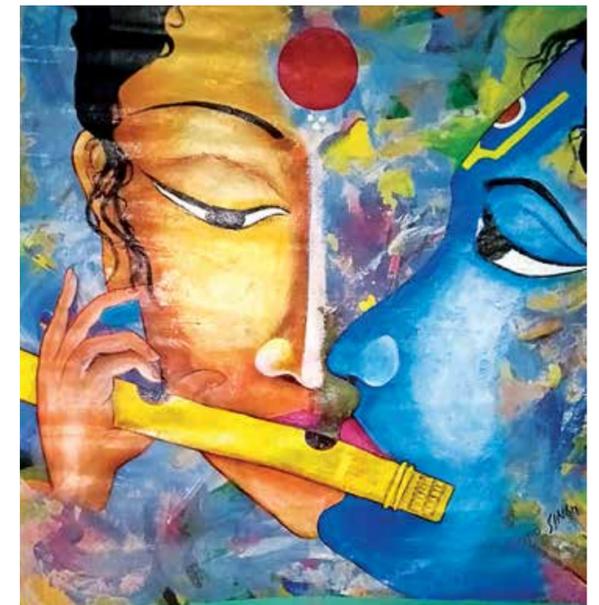
ARVEEND BUDH SINGH

Arveend Budh Singh is a self-taught artist who uses a mix of mediums like oil paint, acrylic and watercolour, and different painting techniques. He paints beautiful images on religious themes and social issues using rich colours to catch the eye. Budh Singh's paintings are known for their grandeur and artistic excellence.

He has, on his own, mastered the language of painting. He is well-known for his beautiful images of Lord Ganesha in different sizes but he also uses his art to address social issues such as the plight of women in a patriarchal society. He depicts these issues in a subtle, yet powerful manner. His art is not overbearing but quietly persuasive.

His contemporary work, *Dhara-2*, shows a young woman with shackles yearning to break free. The painting is acrylic on canvas. His paintings use vibrant colours and detailed brush strokes to create life-like yet abstract images.

Budh Singh lives in New Delhi, where he teaches at the Okhla Centre Special School for children with special needs and exhibits works. Afflicted with polio, he has had a love for painting from a very early age.





## Sign language imitates life

B. MANASI

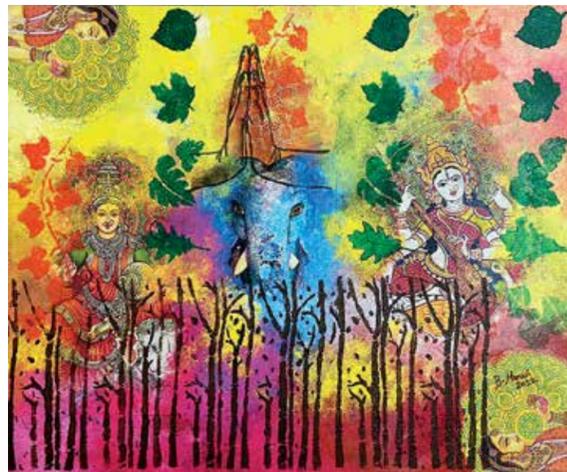
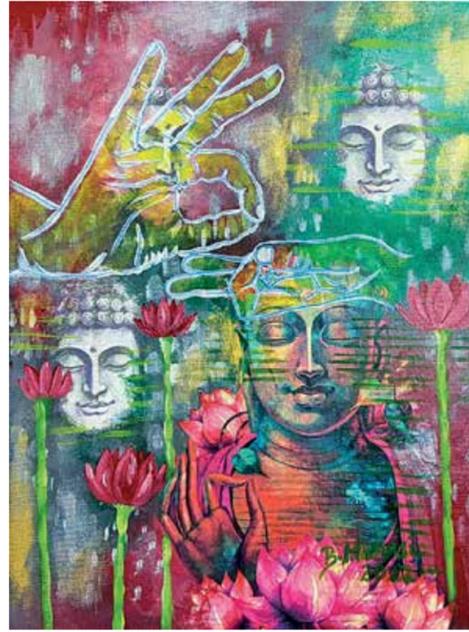
Manasi Bhallamudi's paintings are suffused with the twin themes of religion and spirituality. A Chennai-based painter, she uses acrylic, watercolour, pen, paper and charcoal. Her work, *Sarnam*, is about Buddhism advising people to choose peace over chaos.

Her *Signs in Life* series shows how sign language imitates real life. Her art is focused on representing disability but also shows her growing spiritual inclination.

She uses her knowledge of colour mixing and composition techniques effectively.

Manasi, 31, has speech and hearing impairment. She has a Bachelor in Visual Arts from Stella Maris College, Chennai, and a postgraduate diploma in painting from Chitra Kala Parishad College of Fine Arts, Bengaluru.

She has sold more than 50 paintings and showcased her work at Chitra Sante in Bengaluru. She has also participated in the annual Beyond Limits exhibition in New Delhi.



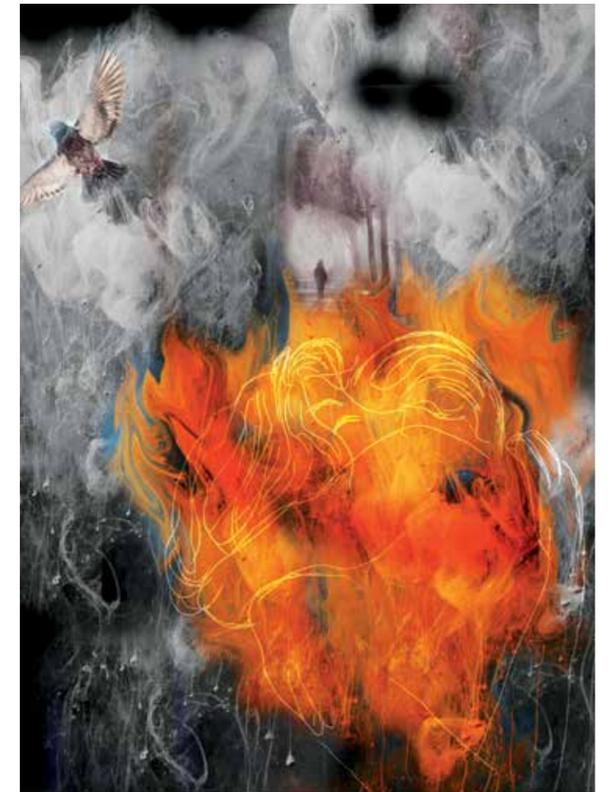
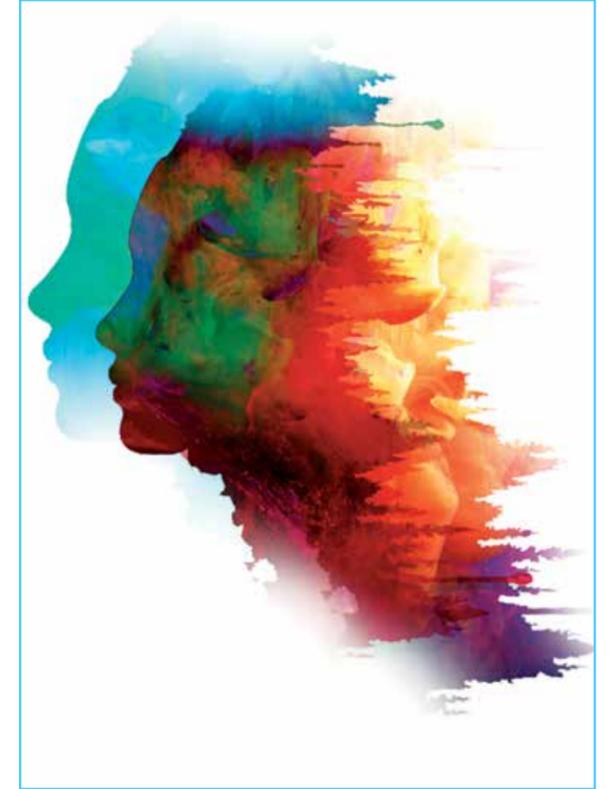
## A dive into the metaphysical

MANDEEP SINGH MANU

A teacher of computer science in Amritsar, 41-year-old Mandeep Singh Manu's work focuses on metaphysical and mystical elements. As a child he got interested in computer graphics and began practising it in a playful way. His family was surprised that a boy who could not draw a single line could make pictures that conveyed insight and depth. His grandfather then bought him a computer which set Manu on his art journey.

He creates digital art on religious and spiritual themes and explores the idea of love. Manu's digital art works include *Love-I* and *Love-II*, both of which have been displayed at the Beyond Limits exhibition. One of Manu's works was featured in the exhibition held during the Olympics in Beijing.

Manu, who has cerebral palsy, has a postgraduate diploma in multimedia from the Punjab Technical University and a degree in history from IGNOU. He says he has always been interested in digital art and computers. He has exhibited his work at the National Exhibition organized by Lalit Kala Akademi and held workshops in digital art. Manu says it is virtual reality which gave him a career.





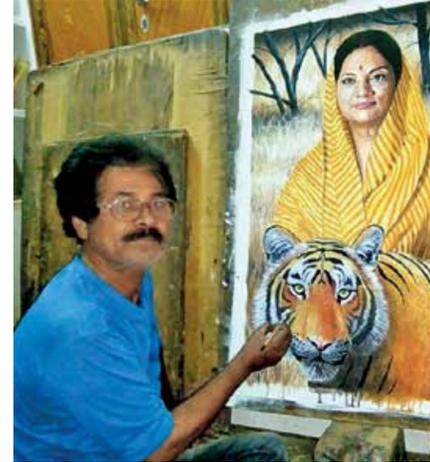
## Nature in its beautiful hues

PRANAV AGGARWAL

Pranav Aggarwal is just 10 years old and the youngest artist around. He paints cheerful and vibrant pictures with nature as his theme. Leaves, flowers, meadows and butterflies catch his fancy and fuel his inspiration.

His paintings radiate positivity and are full of life. The artist from Gurugram finds the use of brushes boring and instead uses his fingers, a painting knife, and items he finds around him. He works with acrylic in bright tones.

Aggarwal was diagnosed with Down's syndrome when he was seven days old. He was introduced to watercolour and acrylic when he was six. He has already held two solo exhibitions and participated in a number of international and national shows. His work, *Titli*, was recently bought by Shree Yash Art Gallery in New Delhi.



## Many shades of wildlife

IMAMUDDIN FAYAZ  
UD DIN QUAZI

One of India's most talented and sought-after wildlife artists, Imamuddin Fayaz Ud Din Quazi started his career painting signboards in Rajasthan. His paintings are detailed, intricate and textured. They look like photographs.

Quazi paints realistic scenes of India's wonderful wildlife and beautiful forests. Most of his paintings feature animals. He is best known for his paintings depicting tigers in forests and grasslands as well as gentle animals like the deer. Quazi also does detailed miniatures and life-like paintings. Each stroke of his brush is visible in his paintings. He uses poster paint on silk.

Quazi, 58, studied at the Ranthambore School of Art. He has showcased his work in multiple exhibitions in various parts of the country. He has a speech and hearing impairment and lives in Sawai Madhopur, Rajasthan.



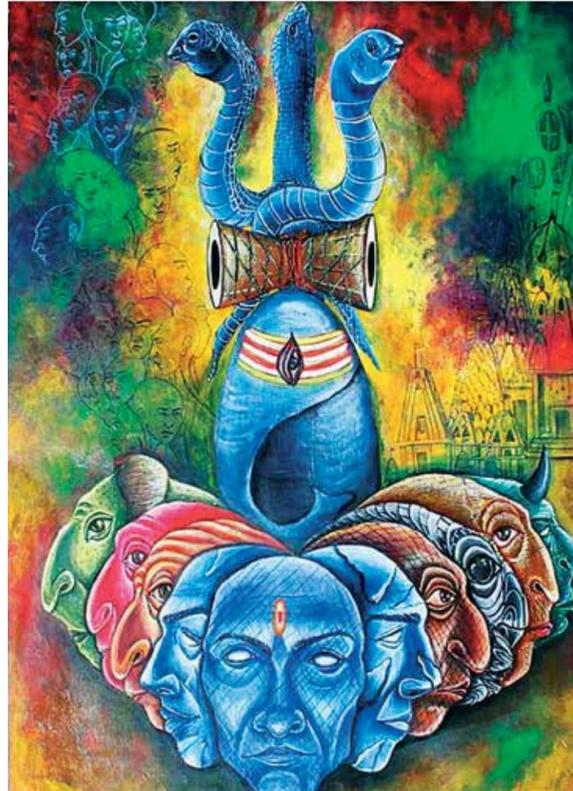


## Questioning social norms

NIYAZ HUSSAIN

Niyaz Hussain uses ink on paper as his main medium, specifically ball-point pens. His artworks are layered and nuanced. Detailing is his strength. His work questions conservative trends and societal structures. *Rider* is a satire on society and politics. Hussain has also created a 15-foot-tall painting. He cites Salvador Dali and Madhubani art as his inspiration. Hussain sells three or four paintings each year, with his first sale taking place in 2011. He is an award-winning artist with over 500 paintings and installations.

Hussain, 31, has a Bachelor in Fine Arts (Painting) from Jamia Millia Islamia. He had polio in both legs at the age of two, which made his family move from Uttar Pradesh to Delhi for better healthcare. Hussain runs the Maqaam Foundation which works to provide education and introduce slum children to art.



## A classical, serene style

SHREEKANT DUBEY

After his right arm was amputated above the elbow, Shreekant Dubey trained himself to paint with his left hand. His is a classical style of painting consisting of clean, uniform images with an ethereal quality. Dubey's use of high-contrast earthy colours makes his subjects stand out strongly.

He uses shapes in unique ways. His art is usually on religious themes but with a modern and classic quality. His images are extremely serene. His work depicts simple moods of everyday life. Dubey uses different mediums like oil paints, watercolour and acrylic with ease.

Dubey, 53, is a teacher in New Delhi. He has a Master in Fine Arts from Kanpur University. He has displayed his art at many national and international exhibitions, including the Lalit Kala Akademi's International Kala Mela and Family of Disabled's Beyond Limits exhibition.



The Artability section is supported by DCB BANK

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### JAZZY KETTLES

IF YOU ARE fond of tea then a kettle painted in vivid colours is an artefact you'd likely cherish. More so if those colours are in the style of a Pattachitra painting. Apendra Swain and Chittaranjan Swain craft not just kettles but bowls and trays in Pattachitra, all made of aluminium. They were at Dastkar's Diwali *mela* for the first time and looking forward to selling their wares after a hiatus due to the pandemic.

The Swains are from Raghurajpur, a heritage crafts village of 150 households in Puri district of Odisha. Before COVID, tourists would arrive in busloads after their pilgrimage to the famed Jagannath Temple in Puri. The village has all facilities, says Chittaranjan. Every child goes to school. And the village is awash with objects painted in the Pattachitra style.

The Swains were also selling lovely Pattachitra paintings on canvas. They explained the painstaking work that Pattachitra entails and hoped they would be blessed with customers.

**Contact:** Chittaranjan and Apendra Swain – 9938620662, 7978276463



### DELIGHTFUL SIP

MANIPUR'S SYLVAN VILLAGES have within their folds a wealth of biodiversity which is slowly vanishing from its landscape and fading from memory. How to save it all? Elizabeth Yamben thought of an idea: convert it into teas. A former investment banker who'd worked in London and Singapore, she put in her savings to start a small business in 2017 called Dweller with the tagline 'for the simple joys', employing local women.

The infusions are unusual and rejuvenating. There is a tea made from spiced hog plum, an indigenous fruit good for fatigue and bloating, and Nong-mang-kha ginger green which helps combat cough and cold. Another bestseller is green tea with lotus leaf and Fruity Roselle Olive, an uplifting infusion which you can drink hot or cold.

Yamben works with a cheerful team of 21 women. Headquartered in Imphal, they source their plants from surrounding villages and 10 percent of profits is ploughed back into conserving indigenous plants.

**Contact:** Dweller Tea, Uripok Yamben Leikai, Imphal – 795001, Manipur  
 Phone: 8730003033 Website: [www.dwellerteas.com](http://www.dwellerteas.com)



### GLOWING LAMPS



LIGHT UP YOUR home this festive season with a range of lamps designed by Insha-e-Noor Producer Company, a crafts-based women's enterprise from Basti Hazrat Nizamuddin in New Delhi. There are lamps with intricate Sanjhi work, lamps with embroidery, and crochet thread lamps in different colours which will add a touch of class to your home.

Also available are delicate doilies in crochet, pretty trays with Sanjhi work, beeswax candle and tealight holders and attractive boxes to gift dry fruits. Insha-e-Noor comprises 100 women who have mastered five intricate craft forms and now produce a range of quality handicrafts. The group is supported by the Aga Khan Development Network under its Nizamuddin Urban Renewal Initiative.

**Contact:** 9205308098, 8130414700, email: [insha.e.noor@gmail.com](mailto:insha.e.noor@gmail.com)





## RUSTIC WOOL

India's rich tradition in wool is fading from memory. For centuries pastoral communities sheared wool from sheep and sold it to spinners, creating a seamless cottage industry of dyers and weavers. Today, India spends ₹2,000 crore annually importing wool while local wool goes waste. No effort has been made to modernize local wool.

Desi Oon, an initiative by Rangсутra and the Centre for Pastoralism, is trying to reverse this decline. It brings together India's best crafts organizations — Khamir in Gujarat, Avani from Uttarakhand, Aana-Jaana in Himachal Pradesh and others to revive the entire supply chain of traditional wool.

You can buy beautiful warm jackets, durries, coats, blankets from Desi Oon.



**Contact:** Rangсутra Crafts India, 1st Floor, Champa Gali, 317/276, Saidulajab, Saket, New Delhi-110030  
Phone: 011 2649 4145 Website: www.rangсутra.com

## FRAGRANT OILS

Seema Khurana churns out almond oil from a small crusher as shoppers look on curiously. Her stall is choc-a-bloc with bottles of various sizes, shapes and hues all containing a range of different oils.

A doctorate in botany, Khurana runs Adri Naturals, a micro-enterprise that specializes in oils. She has an oil for every skin ailment whether it is acne, dry skin, hair fall or eczema. Herbs, nuts, seeds, berries and leaves are all mashed and mixed to produce pure oils.

"I have carrier oils, aromatic oils and essential oils," she says. There is rose, sandalwood, fenugreek, sesame, coconut, tea tree and more. She has oils for you, oils for your kitchen and oils for *puja*. If you are looking for oils, pure and safe, then Adri Naturals is your destination.

**Contact:** Akshay Khurana, 7838582223;  
Email: hello@adrinaturals.in Website: www.adrinaturals.in



## COOL UZBEK CLOTH

The blend of colours strikes the eye as one passes a stall at Dastkar's Handloom Fair, which is displaying fabrics from Uzbekistan. Kanishk Bhardwaj, a designer from Gurugram, and his enterprise, Har Yarn.V, are helping Uzbek refugees living in Delhi modernize their traditional skills.

Bhardwaj says he came across a few Uzbek families during the annual Surajkund Fair in Haryana and decided to help them. The Uzbeks were carrying with them some of their traditional Ikat designs.

They weave on a small loom, just 15 to 16 inches wide, so the narrow fabric, made in panels, is stitched together. The cloth produced is in silk and cotton. Blouses and dresses are made with the fabric but it's also selling for upholstery. The fabrics are a riot of colours, cool and contemporary.

**Contact:** Kanishk Bhardwaj-  
9873395233;  
Email: haryanvi@gmail.com;  
info@haryanvi.com  
Twitter: official\_har.yarn.v



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