

Civil Society

INVISIBLE OFFICERS

And the good the government does



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Civil Society
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Officers with a difference



COVER STORY

GETTING DOWN TO DEVELOPMENT

Diligent officers drive the good the government does and benefit people in far-flung corners of the country. Their stories mostly go untold though they are instrumental in bringing change.

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IT shouldn't be the role of the media to cheer the government. On the contrary the government should be rigorously held to account in the hope that such scrutiny will ensure that it performs better. But are there stories in the efforts of individual officers who deliver results from within a lumbering system? Should their contribution, made of course in the line of duty, be especially applauded so that they feel appreciated and get to be seen as an inspiration to others?

It is in this spirit that *Civil Society* has chosen to do a cover story on the good the government does and commissioned Anil Swarup, a retired IAS officer of high standing whom we have known from the time he was in government, to write about invisible officers who make a significant difference to governance.

Anil has a long list of names. A few have been chosen. They have in common a passion to serve the country, leadership qualities and imagination to look beyond, where others might have just been content with doing what was required and no more.

The learning is that the government does work. If there is development in the country it comes primarily from the government even if there are shortcomings. People also turn to the government for their needs — aware that its systems are slow and porous. But it is to innumerable officers, who for most part remain invisible, that credit must go for finally ensuring delivery is possible.

In the past too we have done stories on the work of officers, especially those at the grassroots. We have tracked all kinds of efforts, innovative and mundane, and been struck by how much really gets done. Our interactions with deputy commissioners were full of learning for us.

In our opening interview, Dr Soumya Swaminathan makes important points on agriculture, nutrition and the disease burden. She now leads the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation which was founded by her father. The interview also provides insights into the foundation's work and the directions in which it will be headed.

The street dog problem is flaring up. Thus far it was only dog activists who were having their say. Now people in Delhi have come forward to question them and complain about dog bites and attacks and the impracticality of rules that compel RWAs to look after street dogs. For the first time, middle-class residents held a public meeting in Delhi to put forward a different point of view. Their exasperation follows the dog population rising and becoming unmanageable. Has a statistical threshold been crossed, is the question.

Anil Swarup

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IN THE LIGHT

SAMITA RATHOR



LETTERS



Rice value

Thanks for the interview with A.V. Balasubramanian on traditional rice varieties in India. Sustainability in agriculture is the call of the day. Gone are the days of thinking only about fertilizer doses for good yields.

Ekadashi Nandi

Dog fears

Reading your opinion, 'More kids die as the stray population grows', I was reminded of a report in late May 1985 in South Indian newspapers about the menace around Udhagamandalam created by local dogs turning feral and developing a taste for human flesh. Briefly, the report said that in three or four outlying villages in the Nilgiris, dogs had taken to the peripheral scrub jungle, hiding in it all day and coming out at dusk to hunt children and the weak, dismembering and dragging their remains back into the jungle.

The authorities organized squads to shoot the dogs. A good number were killed. It fuelled my imagination to write a short story, "The News Report". Finding that after nearly 40 years the matter has turned topical all of a sudden, I offered it to an online publisher and they very promptly published it two months ago. You can read it at www.kahaanikoncerti.in.

The 'menace' of stray dogs won't go away if we treat them as stray cats, cows, rats or for that matter any vermin. Dogs were bred over centuries from wolves to become 'man's best friend', more literally their most obedient servant. For that to happen, more than love in the form of scraps of food, they needed to believe in the benign supremacy of a human master, replacing their wolf pack leader. Someone they could express their undying loyalty and subservience to.

In the evolved modern-day neighbourhoods defined by high-rises, gated communities and a constant flow of migratory working people there are few human 'constants' left, with whom local strays can identify with to remain loyal or grounded.

As a result, behavioural atavism has taken over in a few instances and they have gone back to a primal existence where a pack comprised stability and the leader to express loyalty to, would be the most dominant among them.

Look at the sites all over India where these incidents are being reported and we will see a pattern of this insecurity emerging. The problem has been around for long. I believe it is taking on such proportions because the uniqueness of the dog as simply just not any other animal is being overlooked.

Amit K. Bose

The menace of stray dogs is the result of the apathy, mindless ego and political stubbornness of certain politicians who want to stay relevant regardless of how such rules affect the community or education. Cruelty to animals should be punishable and stopped. But when it comes to education, how can rat experiments be replaced by flowers? They don't have the same anatomy.

Why should dogs who are biting and eating our kids as prey be tolerated? The number of dog bites per day has increased everywhere. If children or adults don't get timely treatment they run the risk of dying from rabies. Then who will be responsible for that? Nothing can be done to take away dogs who are known to cause trouble as per law. I think that is insanity.

Dog lovers can just protect those dogs which live in the community without troubling anyone.

Siddharth Jain

Smart store

It's good that Ajay Jain is succeeding with Kunzum bookstore. Print books are not dead. Just see how many books are sold at Delhi's book fairs. But I am wary of curated bookstores. Bookstores like Bahrisons are in the mould of old, rambling bookstores. Or look at Piccadilly in Shankar Market. Quality stuff. Personally, that circular Janpath bookstore is my favourite. Dehradun used to have some great bookstores. The Delhi Gate area also has some interesting ones, apart from the book bazaar. Nothing like a good bookstore and the smell of used books.

Ananda

Hybrid dryers

Shree Padre's article, 'In search of the hybrid dryer to beat the monsoon', was very informative. In fact, such news must reach more farmers and homemakers.

Dr Srikanth

As an action policy piece this story is excellent. While adequate and timely water for agricultural production is critical, getting rid of water to store the produce is also critical for farmers. Thailand and other East Asian countries have championed drying technologies to improve farmers' income and marketability and even impacted nutrition. Micro-dryers are a much needed area of investment. Innovation, research and commercialization of low-cost dryers customized to various needs and climates is warranted.

Raj

City by cycle

Your piece, 'Old Delhi slowly: Cycle tour takes you to monuments', was awesome. I've been looking for something like this for years. I didn't know till I read this piece. Thank you! I'll take a tour when I am next in Delhi. It'll be better paced than a walking tour and more interactive than an ordinary bus tour. The snacks and breakfast must be the 'jewel in the crown'. I just hope it lasts till winter.

Deepak Chatterjee

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Soumya Swaminathan on nutritional literacy and more

‘A shift from monoculture is needed for better health’

Civil Society News
New Delhi

IN these times of climate change and an increasing burden of metabolic disorders, what gets grown and eaten matters more than ever before. Science can make a difference, especially so when it promotes sustainability and reaches farmers in the fields.

The M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) was launched in Chennai in 1988 with such a vision. Dr Swaminathan had been the father of the Green Revolution but with India achieving self-sufficiency in food, he foresaw the need for balance, conservation and diversity.

The foundation's work is extensive and covers coastal systems research, biodiversity, biotechnology, ecotechnology, agriculture, nutrition and health, climate change, gender and grassroots institutions and science communication.

MSSRF works across states in tribal areas and with rural women and fisherfolk. Amongst its many achievements are the numerous small farms it has helped diversify through its propagation of nutrition gardens to combat hunger. It has done extensive work in Koraput, a hunger hotspot for decades in Odisha. The foundation is also well-known for regeneration of mangrove wetlands, protection of biosphere reserves and more under its coastal research programme.

Soumya Swaminathan, Dr Swaminathan's daughter, recently began leading the foundation as chairperson. She is probably more widely recognized for her regular briefings on Covid-19 as the chief scientist at the World Health Organization (WHO). She is a paediatrician and clinical scientist known for her work on TB and HIV. Now back in Chennai, *Civil Society* spoke to her on the work of the foundation and what she sees as the road ahead.

Q: As the new chairperson of MSSRF, what would be your priorities?

I am most worried by the ongoing and future impacts of climate change on our health. Such impacts will manifest themselves through direct and indirect routes. Many of those pathways are issues that the foundation does work on. What we haven't had in the past is a direct focus on those impacts. I think it needs to be added.

One example is the impact of our diets on health. Globally, as well as in India, it is recognized that dietary risks are the number one risk factor for death and disability. Data from the Global Burden of Disease has established all the risk factors.

What is driving the huge increase in non-communicable diseases is unhealthy diets. This is where the link between agriculture and health becomes very important because for a healthy diet, you have to start with agriculture.

My father used to say nutritional maladies are related to agriculture



Soumya Swaminathan: 'Expand the basket of foods under the PDS'

and horticulture. We understand what the malady is. So, we need to find the remedy. We have to find a way of moving away from monoculture.

Q: What has been the impact of the pandemic on the health and nutritional status of the communities you work with?

There hasn't been a proper survey for me to give you proper data, though this is an important question. What we do know is that there was an impact on livelihoods. The agricultural sector was less affected. The fishing community was impacted since they could not go out fishing for several months but later it was allowed.

The children suffered greatly. Most of them were out of school for nearly two years and did not have access to online education or had patchy access to online teaching. Children found it hard to catch up. Many children in tribal areas have just dropped out of school and they are not able to catch up and clear their exams in Classes 9 and 10. So their future options are very limited. There are states like Tamil Nadu that have started schemes for remedial coaching but it's not across all states.

We have also seen that there are still issues of access to basic health and education services as well as government assistance for livelihood opportunities in tribal areas. In some cases where tribals have been displaced, they have not yet received their rights as per the Forest Rights Act and have to rely on rural employment schemes like MGNREGA.

I think the impact of climate change on coastal communities is becoming acute. They have been telling us that they go out to sea for longer and longer timespans for the same amount of catch they used to get in three or four days. They are out on the high seas for 15 days at a stretch and this is having a physical and mental impact. For the women there is the added burden of getting less catch and then spending more time to go out and sell it.

There is also the issue of marine pollution and fish catch being depleted

since fishing nets are catching juveniles. The foundation is working with fishermen, in a participatory way, to come up with a voluntary code of conduct to avoid overfishing and catching of juveniles in fishing nets.

We are going to have a programme to deal with marine pollution and develop a circular economy around it. We will also do a study to quantify the physical and mental impact of climate change on our coastal communities.

Q: The impact of climate change on our coastal communities has not been studied.

Exactly. Tamil Nadu now has a Climate Mission, and a governing council has been set up of which I am a member. We will get an opportunity to take a deeper dive into issues like bio-shields as well as marine pollution and health. We will research these issues to find solutions and mitigating measures.

Q: The foundation works with small farmers, encourages kitchen gardens and homestead farms. Is there a change in how you will approach these due to climate change and other factors?

The most important issue for me is — how can we improve the dietary diversity of small farms and their quality of produce. Surveys indicate that Indians are not getting adequate servings of fruits and vegetables for a healthy diet which means a lack of micronutrients. Protein content is also lower than it should be. It's a very cereal-based carbohydrate diet in most cases.

One factor is affordability and access. Also, awareness, nutritional literacy and how to cook. The foundation has worked on nutrition-sensitive agriculture and integrating nutrition into agricultural practices. This depends on prevailing agro-climatic conditions. One has to carefully select the plants that can be grown and that is the idea behind the setting up of nutrition gardens.

In the nutrition gardens we have set up, there is a range of fruits and plants that can be grown in different agro-climatic zones and each will give you specific micro-nutrients. The gardens are labelled so you know which plants give you which nutrients. Alongside, diversification or multi-cropping, growing pulses, millets and so on is important.

During my field visits I noted that the key to mixed farming is water. In Gopalpur district of Odisha there have been many watershed development programmes and multiple check dams and so on, depending on the terrain, to find the best solution for rainwater harvesting.

It can solve the problem in a district like Koraput which gets a lot of water but doesn't save it. The poor quality of drinking water is causing water-borne diseases. Water for consumption, sanitation and health is obviously very important. Because of the lack of water, toilets are not being used although toilets have been constructed in all those villages.

We have over 1,500 community nutrition gardens now in Koraput. In two villages, people have come together and set aside plots of land where they grow a variety of green leafy vegetables and fruit trees.

The crops are for consumption and sale. So the produce is fetching farmers an income and improving their diet. Awareness was created through our community hunger fighters.

We trained men and women in nutritional concepts. They explained it all to me beautifully, the different food classes and which produce gives you what type of nutrients. I think our work showed that diet can be improved by this type of intervention.

More community-based interventions which complement government efforts in *anganwadis*, school mid-day meals and the public distribution system (PDS) would help address nutritional challenges. The PDS is basically taking care of calories. We hope to help expand the basket of foods available through the PDS.

Q: Koraput has been a hunger hotspot for decades. Would you say even without data, perhaps anecdotally, that hunger has been mitigated in Koraput though under-nutrition perhaps remains?

I think we do need to look at data available from the National Family Health Survey (NFHS). It still shows a high prevalence of under-nutrition in Koraput. So, I wouldn't say nutrition has been completely addressed though acute hunger and starvation are extremely rare now. But under-nutrition and deficiencies are caused by water and sanitation as well. Inadequate attention to these two can stymie the nutrition outcomes we would like to see.

Q: Did the state government help out?

Yes, the state government has been a partner. The Odisha Millets Mission has also been a success story. It has successively increased procurement of millets which is important for incentivizing farmers.

Women are playing a key role. In Bolangir, a woman farmer heads the Farmer Producer Organization (FPO). In fact, the FPO's board consists entirely of women. They grow millets and are linked with the Odisha Millets Mission. The women check the quality of millets at the weekly *mandi*. It's very professionally done. This year they will be doubling procurement so the tie-up with the government has been crucial. The women have also conserved a number of strains because in millets you have a lot of diversity.

In the south, mostly *ragi* is consumed whereas in the north it is *jowar* and *bajra*. You also have a number of minor millets in the Kolli hills. We have been promoting minor millets and helping farmers promote value-added products like *dosa* mix and *upma* mix made from a combination of millets.

‘I think the impact of climate change on coastal communities is acute. They go out to sea for longer timespans for the same amount of catch they used to get in three or four days.’

Tribal communities have told us that their children are no longer used to eating millets because their hostels don't cook them. It's a cultural shift. Changing diets takes time. Also, forest foods are no longer really consumed by tribal communities. The government can encourage and promote millets by including it in the PDS.

We also overlook women's time and labour required to cook and process foods. The reason we see so much processed and ready-made foods, particularly in urban environments, is because it is convenient for women.

Women told me they used to spend an hour or two pounding *ragi*. We have now provided them with millet processing machinery. They say it helps them to consume *ragi* as well as sell it.

The entire food chain is important — from cultivation to commerce to consumption to conservation.

The human angle is often overlooked in agriculture. We need to reach out to cultivators in a participatory way. Working with SHGs and FPOs is the way to go. There is also opportunity in tribal areas to grow and promote medicinal plants. Local traditional healers are still the first port of call for many villagers. But procurement of medicinal plants is becoming harder, and they have to go deeper into the forest to find them. There is a livelihood opportunity here in the cultivation of medicinal plants for own use and for commercial purposes.

Q: Is there also a need to disseminate information on weather related information to remote rural pockets so that they can cultivate homestead farms with more safety and efficiency?

Absolutely. Very local advisories on agro-met on impending storms, rain or heat days for small farmers are essential.

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We have efficiently done a Fisher Friendly Mobile Application for the fishing community with Qualcomm and INCOIS (Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Service). It is used by over 120,000 fishermen, mainly on the east coast of India. The app provides advisories on sea conditions, tells fishermen where they would find more fish and gives weather warnings. It even warns fishermen if they are approaching a turtle nesting site. The app works offline as well so it can be used even if fishermen are out at sea. It has been tremendously successful and adopted by state governments.

We have an app for agro-met advisories and a plant clinic app as well. A farmer can upload a picture of his sick plant and seek advice on whether the plant is suffering from an infection or a nutritional deficiency. We can use AI and recent technologies to deliver such information to farmers.

Q. How are you communicating complicated scientific knowhow and ideas to ordinary farmers and fisherfolk. It must be a challenge...

Indeed. So communication is happening at different levels. It is an area I would like to strengthen. One programme I have been excited about is our 'Every child a scientist' for schoolchildren. Mainly children learn biology and we give them direct exposure to labs and scientists. They can see the latest equipment and do hands-on experiments. We have been working with children from Classes 6 to 8 in schools run by the Chennai Municipal Corporation.

The feedback has been extremely positive from schoolchildren and teachers. I'm planning to scale up this programme to instil in secondary school children a love for science before they decide what they would like to do.

We also work with The Hindu Media Resource Centre to engage with journalists on complex issues of science. We will restart media colloquia and invite journalists to discuss scientific issues with scientists so that they are better informed.

We also have the Mina Swaminathan Media Fellows for the past three years in memory of my mother. It looks at gender issues. We have selected three regional media journalists who will go to our project sites and understand those stories in regional languages like Odia or Tamil or Telugu.

Another area we were strong in the past is engagement with policymakers. I personally learnt a lot about science communication during the pandemic. We saw how miscommunication proliferates. It's very important to engage with all stakeholders, from community to policymakers, to frame policies which are informed by what is coming from the grassroots. ■

RESIDENTS SEEK END TO DOG BITES, TERROR IN DELHI

Civil Society News
New Delhi

FACED with new regulations for taking care of street dogs, residents of Delhi colonies have come together to express their concern over such a responsibility being thrust upon them. They are seeking more viable solutions to multiple problems arising from the rising number of strays.

A meeting convened on May 11 at the Constitution Club drew an attendance of 400 middle-class residents and was perhaps the first time that people uncomfortable with the presence of street dogs rallied together. So far it is only dog lovers, who are well organized and vocal, who have prevailed.

The meeting was organized by Vijay Goel, a senior and redoubtable BJP leader and former MP with political roots in Delhi. No sooner had Goel announced his meeting than Maneka Gandhi, also of the BJP, booked another hall at the Constitution Club on the same date for animal activists to meet. As Goel's meeting got going, it was invaded by the activists and unruly scenes followed.

Under the new Animal Birth Control (ABC) rules, resident welfare associations or RWAs have been instructed to identify public feeding places, keep them clean and ensure that dogs are not harassed in any way. It is also their responsibility to arrange for the vaccination and sterilization of the dogs. Dogs which are aggressive can be handed over to the authorities, but even if a dog attacks someone it cannot be removed from the locality.

The RWAs find such duties unrealistic and onerous. From the costs involved to monitoring of packs of strays and arranging for their food, residents feel that they have been pushed into an impossible situation. They weren't consulted when the rules were framed. Nor do the rules take into account the rights of those residents who find dogs intimidating or just don't want them around in public spaces.

These concerns come on top of the stray dog population having visibly gone up. Residents complain of their neighbourhoods being overrun by unmanageable strays. The number of bites and attacks has also gone up. There have now been several documented cases of children being mauled to death by dogs across the country.

The original ABC rules have been around for 20 years or so after they were framed by Maneka Gandhi when she was the minister



Vijay Goel addressing residents of Delhi colonies on the stray dog problem and the urgent need for a solution

for culture in the BJP government then. They are based on the premise that if dogs are sterilized, vaccinated and fed at one location, their numbers will decrease and finally the problem of strays will be solved.

But the opposite has happened. The numbers have grown and so has the aggressive behaviour of stray dogs. Animal-man conflicts abound. Feeding dogs in public spaces is not a solution, experts have pointed out. Adoption is the answer and strict pet maintenance rules. But NGOs claiming to represent dog lovers are adamant that they

want them on the street. In most countries, dogs are not allowed to roam free. They are picked up and put in pounds where if they are not adopted within a stipulated time, they are euthanized.

Goel avers that he believes in being kind to all animals including dogs. His interest in the current issue is so that dogs are treated better and not left out on the street, but moved to shelters and adopted.

"One should not be cruel to dumb animals, but protecting people from them is also important. We can't have a situation in which

ferocious dogs have to be kept on the streets even if they have attacked people," he says.

"Everyone loves animals, not only dogs. But if biting becomes a big problem, then a solution has to be found. There are some 600,000 stray dogs in Delhi. There were 100,000 dog bites reported in the past six months by government hospitals alone in Delhi. There were 12,652 cases of dog bite that went to Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital in the past three months of February, March and April. Of these 50 percent were victims below the age of 14."

Goel says many residents of Delhi have objections to the rules made by the Animal Welfare Board and Health Ministry. A committee of RWA representatives will voice these objections and come up with suggestions, which will then be sent to the government.

Goel is seasoned in politics, but he has other sides to him. He is a passionate conservationist, is fond of photography and has an impish sense of humour. *Civil Society* met him at Gandhi Smriti of which he is now the vice-chairman.



Asked why he chose to raise the issue of stray dogs he says he could see the problem escalating around him. People aren't able to go out for walks without sticks and he himself is always careful to skirt a dog in his path.

His plan is to campaign extensively on the issue by holding street corner meetings to create local awareness. But, more importantly, he hopes to galvanize the Delhi Municipal administration into conducting a census, sterilizing dogs on a large scale and vaccinating them against rabies.

But he doesn't see it as a Delhi problem alone. He says there are millions of stray dogs across the country and once Delhi can be brought together on the issue, he hopes to be able to reach out to RWAs in other states so that a national solution can be found.

The meeting in Delhi was the salvo in this effort so that more people are emboldened to speak up and the challenges faced in neighbourhoods are taken into account while framing policy. ■



A raging fire and, below, a Navy helicopter deployed for firefighting

Tree count begins after series of ruinous forest fires in Goa

Derek Almeida
Panjim

WITH the monsoons due to arrive in June, the Forest Department of Goa is gearing up to restore 442 hectares of forest destroyed by fires in March. Although forest fires are not new to Goa, the intensity this year and the quantum of damage took the department and the state by surprise.

Chief Conservator of Forests (CCF) Saurabh Kumar told local media that identification of trees destroyed by fires is underway and similar trees will be planted to restore the forests.

A probe conducted by the department concluded that most of the fires started in cashew plantations and spread to the forests. Reading between the lines, this means that most of the fires were man-made and were probably the result of attempts to burn dry leaves on plantation floors. Given the unprecedented weather conditions this year, it is no wonder the flames spread rapidly.

The fires were first noticed on March 5 in the Mhadei Wildlife Sanctuary and by March 10 about 74 sporadic fires were burning in the forest. Until now Goa's worst experience with forest fires was probably 2019-20 when 34 fires burnt down 232 hectares of forest. The following two years saw destruction of 87 and 51 hectares, respectively. But this year 442 hectares were destroyed.



When one considers that nearly two-thirds of Goa is covered by forests, the quantum of forest area affected by fires is relatively small. The reason is that tropical rainforests don't burn down easily.

However, predictions made by climate change scientists have spooked everyone — with the general perception that the worst is yet to come. Hence, the state moved quickly to douse the fires once they started. Naval helicopters flew several sorties and poured more than 25,000 litres of water in remote and inaccessible forest areas to douse the flames.

Midway through the firefighting effort, the

government called upon volunteers and 10 to 15 of them were assigned per beat to work in shifts. This was necessitated due to the nature of the terrain which prevented the movement of firefighting machinery. North Goa Collector Mama Hage's circular said the government was looking for physically fit people because it would involve walking through the jungle, sometimes at night.

The forest department also issued an SOS calling for volunteers in Satterri and Mollem regions of the Mhadei sanctuary. Within a few hours hundreds had signed up and a massive community-based firefighting effort was

underway. Volunteers helped the forest department as fire beaters, in clearing dry vegetation, creating fire breaks and lighting counter fires.

Eleven days later, all the fires had been put out and Goa heaved a collective sigh of relief. It had been the most trying 11 days for the state and now plans are being made to ensure that such fires do not recur. If they do, the state will try to be better prepared to deal with them.

The forest and fire departments, state administration and community came together to contain the fires and ensure that only a small portion of the forest area was affected.

Goa comprises 3,702 sq km of which 2,219 sq km are covered by forests. The remainder is agricultural land and settlement zones. The forest area destroyed by fires this year is roughly 4.42 sq km. In other words, a great deal was saved.

When the fires broke out there was speculation that they had been started by vested interests to prevent parts of the Mhadei Wildlife Sanctuary from being converted into a

A forest department probe showed that fires began in cashew plantations and then spread to the forests.

tiger habitat. State Forest Minister Vishwajit Rane went on record to state that the fires were man-made. About 34 First Information Reports were lodged with the police, mostly against unknown persons, under the Indian Forest Act, 1927, the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, the Goa, Daman, and Diu Preservation of Trees Act, 1984, and relevant provisions of the Indian Penal Code.

However, activists in the state are sceptical about the government's seriousness in apprehending those who started the fires.

In the Assembly, Leader of the Opposition Yuri Alemao labelled the fires as the handiwork of the 'fire mafia' who, he claimed, were using fire to burn down green areas to later convert them into concrete jungles. Alemao called for an inquiry by a retired high court judge.

The fires caught the government on the wrong foot and it has two suspicions to dispel. First, that the forests are being set ablaze to favour the building lobby and, second, that it is working hand-in-glove with this lobby.

It is in this respect that the CCF announced a slew of measures. The department widely believes that many of the fires originated in the horticulture plantations due to indiscriminate burning of leaves and dry grass to clear the ground. The department will work in tandem with the agriculture department to propagate biowaste management outside forest areas.

'VILLAGERS BURNING FORESTS FOR LAND'

SPEAKING to *Civil Society*, Rajan Kerkar, an environmental activist who lives in the vicinity of the Mhadei Wildlife Sanctuary, explained the possible connection between villagers demanding forest rights and the recent fires.

Q: When the fires broke out you told local media that villagers whose forest rights claims are yet to be settled have been clearing forests to expand the area for horticulture. Could you elaborate?

In 1999, the Mhadei region of Sattari, owned by the Goa government, was notified as a wildlife sanctuary. However, in some of these areas, locals have been claiming rights. In land records, the names of some villagers are mentioned as encroachers, and this has made it difficult to settle claims. Even after 1999, the blind eye turned by the Forest Department encouraged encroachments. To bring these areas under cultivation, forest areas are cleared by lighting fires. Villagers who are allowed to go scot-free due to political interference have been engaged in starting forest fires.

Q: So you think that the forest fires are related to the conflict over forest rights?

In many cases, it has been clearly revealed that the forest fires were man-made and intentionally done with the motive of clearing the forest to bring more and more areas under cashew and other horticultural crops. If the government were to appoint a committee to probe the matter, impartially, through field visits, these illegalities will come to light.

Q: What is the connection between forest dwellers and the movement to declare Mhadei Wildlife Sanctuary a tiger reserve?

As per the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers Act of 2006, the Goa government should have taken



Rajan Kerkar

necessary steps to settle the forest rights claims of those who are in possession of the land when or before these areas were notified as a wildlife sanctuary. However, even this year, encroachments have been going on unnoticed, destroying wildlife, ecology and environment. The forest staff are mere spectators, unable to take any concrete steps to halt the ongoing degradation.

Most concerned states have declared forested areas as tiger reserves for maintaining water security. For an ecologically fragile state like Goa, it is the need of the hour to notify areas of Mollem National Park including forested areas of Mhadei and Mahavir Wildlife Sanctuaries as a tiger reserve, excluding all areas of agricultural and horticultural fields, if any.

If there is one crucial lesson that the state government learnt from the March fires it is that it has to look at more effective measures to put out fires since the locations are not reachable by regular firefighting machinery. Accordingly, the department will invest in shoulder-mounted leaf blowers to create fire lines and put out blazes. Additional watch towers are also in the offing.

The CCF also revealed that the department has GPS coordinates of every patch destroyed by the fires and the same species of trees will be planted so that the nature of the forest does not change.

The real story of how or why the fires started might never be known, but the forest department is evidently gearing up to prevent a similar disaster in future. ■

Pushed out of jobs, transgenders try hand at enterprise

Rules exist but they are flouted

Sarita Brara
New Delhi

TRANSMAN Anmol lost his job as a computer instructor with a private company due to discrimination, he says. Transwoman Sanam, a commerce graduate, got tired of being treated with indignity. Like many young educated transgenders, they decided to team up and start their own venture.

The two first met at Mittr Trust, an NGO founded in 2005, which works for the rights of the transgender community. In collaboration with EY Foundation and Connecting Dreams Foundation, Mittr Trust has started a project named Saksham to help young transpeople complete their education through distance learning and learn skills so that they can start their own ventures. The trust provides seed capital too.

Rules under the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019 seek to recognize the identity of transgenders and prohibit discrimination in education, employment, healthcare, holding or disposing of property, holding public or private office, and access to and use of public services and benefits.

The reality is sadly different. The integration of transgender people into society is still only on paper. Young transgenders are therefore trying to stand on their feet by employing themselves and perhaps a few others.

Anmol and Sanam have started a fast-food stall called Punchaiti Food Corner at a business complex in southwest Delhi. They have begun with a modest menu of momos, noodles, butter-toast and omelettes. Connecting Dreams Foundation has helped them buy a moveable stall and implements like an icebox, frying pans and other gadgets.

The two are now trying to get a licence and a better location in the business complex. "We are facing technical problems in getting a licence. Once that is sorted out, we will add a few more items to our menu to enable us to earn more money," says Anmol. Currently, they earn around ₹1,000 a day. "It's not only in offices that we face discrimination. Even here,

we come across untoward behaviour at times but we ignore it and refuse to be provoked. We are determined to continue with our venture and get more customers," says Sanam.

Sanam's mother has allowed them to stay in her house but remains indifferent to them. Anmol's parents, who live in Uttar Pradesh, are in denial of his transgender status.

Another transwoman, Priyanka from Assam, has started a business in blending tea leaves with different flavours. 'Connecting Mitre' is the brand name she has given her venture. "My brand is natural and organic. The flavour used is labelled on the packaging," she says. She spent nine years in tea gardens close to her home in Jorhat to learn the process of growing tea leaves and blending teas.

In Delhi, Anmol and Sanam have started a fast-food stall with a modest menu of momos, butter-toast, omelettes, noodles.

"It is not possible for me to start any venture in my home town where even my own parents are in denial of my sexuality," says Priyanka.

Priyanka stayed for a year at Garima Greh in Delhi, a shelter for transgenders with basic amenities, set up by the Ministry for Social Justice and Empowerment's SMILE or Scheme of Support for Marginalized Individuals for Livelihood and Enterprise. SMILE, launched in 2019, also provides support to transgender people for skill-building courses.

Priyanka opted for an English-speaking course. Connecting Dream Foundation mentored her in packaging, branding and marketing her tea leaves and provided her with finance to start her business.

She has decided to sell her tea blends to retailers until she can afford a space of her own. "It is going to be challenging. But I am hopeful because my tea blends were liked by



Priyanka with her tea samples

customers at a few events where I introduced my brand." The price of her flavoured organic tea ranges from ₹70 to ₹110 for a 250-gm box.

Transwoman Bela, the first to seek shelter at Garima Greh, is now the programme manager of the scheme. She sends money to her parents. But she doesn't live with them because she doesn't want her younger sisters to suffer because of her trans status. Bela earns extra money working as a model. She eventually wants to open her own production house.

Mitr Trust is currently helping 25 transgender people benefit from SMILE's Garima Greh project. "Our objective is to see that transgender persons live a life of dignity and are not forced to beg on the streets," says Rudrani Chhetri, founder of the trust.

The government provides stay and food only for a year. Chhetri says this is too short a time. "It takes months for transgenders who seek shelter in Garima Greh to emerge from the trauma and harassment they have faced for years at their homes and elsewhere. Most of them are school or college dropouts and so they need to first complete their education and we then train them in skill-based work," says Chhetri.

Mitr Trust has also been able to get placements for 58 transgender persons with companies and MNCs in Delhi and elsewhere. One of them is Rifaya, also from Assam. Trained in nail art, she found her freelancing assignments didn't pay enough. She recently got a job with Amazon in their customer care wing. Rifaya wants to start her own salon and has applied for financial help to NGOs.

Indrakshi, another transwoman, also recently got a job with Amazon. Born male, Indrakshi, who always had feminine interests,

learnt later that she was a transwoman. She did not want to continue to dress and live like a man. Skilled in dance, Indrakshi left her home in West Bengal after Class 9 to live with her sister in Gurugram. She worked as an anchor in theatre and did odd jobs in private companies to avoid being financially dependent on her family. She wanted to be a radio jockey, and tried her hand in filmmaking but lost her savings chasing this dream.

"I realised that my interests and hobbies wouldn't earn me any status in society. I want to graduate in commerce and study up to post-graduate level and then get a job. It was through social media I came to know that I was not the only one who felt like a woman and wanted to dress and act like one. I was still confused about my status," she says. She came to Mitr Trust in 2018 and went through a lot of

Transwoman Bela, the first to seek shelter at Garima Greh, is now the programme manager of the scheme. She sends money to her parents. But she doesn't live with the family because she doesn't want her younger sisters to suffer as a result of her trans status.

counselling. Indrakshi is now undergoing hormone therapy for transition.

The National Institute for Social Defence, which holds workshops on the rights of transgender people and sensitising society, has a number of transgender persons on its pay rolls. Pride Circle also organizes job fairs annually for the LGBT+ community with

many companies taking part. In the past four years, they have been able to find employment for 600 persons from the LGBT community.

Government schemes and non-profits are reaching out to transgender people but social awareness lags behind miserably. ■

The writer is a senior independent development journalist. Share your feedback on charkha@connect.org. Charkha Features



Sanam and Anmol

Samita's World

by SAMITA RATHOR



Making pine needle power work

Rakesh Agrawal
Dehradun

DEVAKI Devi Bora carries a heavy sack of pine needles on her back, trudging from her village, Simalta, to Tripuradevi, a neighbouring village, in Pithoragarh district nearly every other day. A small farmer, Bora says she doesn't mind at all. "The plant there will make electricity and I will earn some money," she says.

Avani Bio Energy, a power company, has installed a gasifier that converts pine needles into electricity and then feeds it to the Uttarakhand Power Corporation Limited's (UPCL) grid. Avani pays villagers ₹2 per kg for the pine needles. Bora claims she earned ₹2,200 in one and a half months, carting pine needles to the power generator.

Villages in the hills are thickly carpeted with pine trees planted abundantly by the forest department. Pine trees or *pirul* are of little use to villagers since they yield neither food nor fodder. The trees are seen as a nuisance. Slopes layered with pine needles prevent rainwater from percolating into the soil and keeping it moist. Dry pine needles cause forest fires. So Avani's solution seems the perfect one.

Avani Bio Energy is a branch of Avani, a social enterprise founded by Rajnish Jain and his wife, Rashmi Bharti. Initially it was a chapter of the Barefoot College of Tilonia, Rajasthan, well known for spreading solar energy in rural areas. Jain began by bringing solar lighting to remote hill villages. Along with Bharti they started working with artisans and farmers on livelihood programmes. Avani also started experimenting with pine needles for generating energy. In 2009 Jain set up a 10 KW plant which converts pine needles into electricity.

That initial foray won him the Spark The Rise Award in 2013. Avani Bio Energy got a grant of ₹24 lakh from Mahindra & Mahindra to set up small power plants run by entrepreneurs.

The state government took note. The UPCL was keen on a policy and offered to buy the electricity for ₹5 per unit. According to forest department data, Uttarakhand has some one million tonnes of pine needles or *pirul* lying in forests. Villagers use about 400,000 tonnes. The remainder could be used to produce 150 MW of power. It would give villagers a chance to become power producers and benefit from subsidies from the Centre. A 10 KW plant, which would cost around ₹15 lakh, attracts a

subsidy of ₹11 lakh. Plus there would be earnings by selling the electricity to the grid.

In 2018, the state government came up with a Pirul and Other Biomass policy that said 16.36 percent of the state's forests are covered by pine forests, yielding 1.5 million tonnes of pine needles apart from other biomass like farm residue and lantana. Around 40 percent of this biomass could yield about 150 MW. The policy also sought to convert pine needles into briquettes by setting up bio-oil units.

In 2017, Jain had upgraded his 10 KW plant into a 25 MW one. He entered into an agreement with the UPCL to supply electricity and provide technical support for setting up



Rajnish Jain at his plant



The Avani stove emits less smoke

such power plants ranging from 10 KW to 250 KW in villages.

The owners of such plants were to be paid ₹7.54 per KW, when connected to the grid, with an annual increment of 5 percent. The subsidy was 40 percent for a 25 KW plant, costing ₹25 lakh. Each plant was assumed to produce 1.2 lakh kilowatts of electricity annually, resulting in an income of ₹12.33 lakh.

However, since 2018 only eight such plants have been commissioned and even they aren't working to full capacity. Not one is able to earn a fraction of the targeted amount.

Jain cites two reasons for failure: technical glitches and lack of human resources. "The plant has boxes which are filled with coal powder. Every 30 minutes you need to clean them. If the person operating the plant forgets, the engine gets choked. We are now experimenting with automation," says Jain. "And most competent youths migrate in search of livelihoods and the youngsters left behind don't have the wherewithal to operate these plants efficiently."

Bhupendra Singh Negi, proprietor of a 25 KW plant in Nigradu village in Nainital district, says: "We started this plant in 2020. The biggest problem we face is that pine needles are full of dirt and muck and produce lots of tar that chokes the engine. We need as much as 300 to 500 litres of water daily to clean the engine."

"We also don't get good staff who can operate the plant. They want at least ₹400 as daily wages. As a result, this plant produces just 15 KW, instead of 25 KW, that too just for 15 days in a month. In two years I earned only ₹1,12,500 which isn't even my cost price," rues Negi.

Y.S. Bisht, project officer, Uttarakhand Renewable Energy Development Agency (UREDA), admits that not a single project is running well because of technical problems. He says they have contacted IIT Rourkee for R&D. "Before drafting the Pirul Policy, its technical and pragmatic challenges should have been evaluated before going ahead," he says.

"It was a good idea but it's not very pragmatic on the ground," says Kireet Kumar, a scientist with the GB Pant Himalayan Environment Institute in Almora.

So should the idea be abandoned? Village women resolutely say no. Such power plants are a good source of income, say women in Balta village who are running a 25 MW plant with Avani's help. Besides, they earn money collecting pine needles.

Jain has also been making briquettes and at ₹20 per kg these have been snapped up by women. A cooking stove has been designed by Avani which costs ₹1,200 but is sold at a subsidized rate of ₹400.

"It emits less smoke than wood and cooking is faster," says Champa Devi of Belaagar village, who says she can cook for four people with a kg of briquettes.

Dr R. Meenakshi Sundaram, secretary, agriculture and farmers' welfare, says the government plans to promote such bio-fuel units. ■

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The mammoth Rewa solar project brought down the price of solar power

INVISIBLE OFFICERS

And the good the government does

By Anil Swarup



IMAGINE the scene: villagers in the backward district of Kalahandi in Odisha are troubled by a water scarcity. They talk to their block development officers about it. One of them, a young woman relatively new to the civil service, thinks a perennial water body is the solution and sets off with the sarpanch and some others in search of such a natural source of supply. Negotiating forests and slippery underfoot conditions, she discovers water just five km away, but it isn't what she expected. It is a beautiful waterfall! It fires her imagination and the waterfall becomes a tourist attraction, buoying the tiny local economy. As for the water the villagers were seeking, borewells are drilled to provide it to them.

In a world apart from Kalahandi, the state government of Madhya Pradesh grapples with a wholly different development problem. It is setting out to be a solar power producer. In the prevailing equations, production of solar power is the domain of central undertakings with a state merely required to provide the land.

The Madhya Pradesh project at Rewa is expected to be no different — but a 1991-batch IAS officer believes it can. With him in charge, a transformation happens. The tariff of ₹5 per unit falls to ₹2.97 per unit. A subsidy becomes unnecessary. Multiple collaborations and power purchase agreements break new ground. Solar power in India is catapulted to a new scale.

These two diverse examples have a fairy tale quality about them. You might be incredulous and well ask if this is just happenstance or really how governance happens in the country. Wouldn't the officers involved be outliers?

For all that is wrong with the government and the criticism that is heaped on it, the fact is that it is the prime driver of development. Much of the good work it does is through invisible performers who rarely, if ever, get to take a curtain call.

But it is not as though their contribution goes unnoticed. Some time ago I had conducted a survey on Twitter. The question I asked was which of the following were carrying out their responsibilities in the best possible manner:

- Civil Service
- Judiciary
- Politicians
- Media

Of more than 3,000 participants, 65 percent voted in favour of the Civil Service, 22 percent for the Judiciary, nine percent for Politicians and five percent for the Media.

A similar survey was subsequently conducted on Twitter and LinkedIn to ascertain whether there was consistency in the findings. The question was tweaked a bit. I now asked, "With which of the following are you comparatively most satisfied or comparatively least dissatisfied in terms of carrying out the tasks expected of them?"

Of more than 1,500 respondents who participated in the Twitter poll (admittedly the sample size is a small one), the Civil Service was at the

top (39 percent) yet again. It was closely followed by the Judiciary (34 percent). Politicians were way below at 15 percent and the Media lowest at 13 percent.

In the LinkedIn survey too, the Civil Servants led with 44 percent of the votes polled, followed by the Judiciary at 22 percent. The Media were marginally ahead of Politicians (17 percent) at 18 percent.

The gap between the Civil Servants and the Judiciary had narrowed considerably but the former continued to be at the top. Politicians and the media seem to have lost all credibility.

It is apparent that elite sections of society dislike (even hate) the civil service in general and the IAS in particular. By contrast, it is evident that ordinary people do not because they see their needs being addressed in the line of duty one day to the next. Here are some examples:

THE REWA PROJECT When India committed itself to ambitious renewable energy targets before the comity of nations, many felt that it was punching far above its weight. Solar projects set up in India have mainly been on account of the creditable efforts of central public sector undertakings — the Solar Energy Corporation of India (SECI) and the National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC). In setting up solar projects, the role of the states has been limited mainly to arranging for the land.



Manu Srivastava

The same structure was conceptualized for the 750 MW solar project at Rewa in eastern Madhya Pradesh. Rewa Ultra Mega Solar Ltd (RUMSL) was set up as a 50:50 joint venture with SECI with a limited mandate to make land available.

The solar tariffs at that time were over ₹5 per unit. The Central government used to offer Viability Gap Funding (VGF) so that SECI and NTPC could procure solar energy and then, using the VGF, supply it to distribution companies (DISCOMs) of the states at ₹5 per unit. Bidding used to be on VGF, and the developer seeking the minimum VGF was awarded the project.

In this setting, Manu Srivastava, 1991-batch IAS officer, stepped in as Principal Secretary of the Renewable Energy Department in Madhya Pradesh. Part of his responsibility was to form and head RUMSL. He was not comfortable with the idea of a targeted tariff of ₹5 per unit, with VGF from the Centre, even though the solar park was to provide 'plug and play' facilities.

He convinced the central Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) to let RUMSL handle the Rewa project independently, implying that the bid would be conducted by RUMSL and not by SECI as was the pattern throughout the country. The MNRE agreed but put a condition that VGF would not be made available to RUMSL. The implication was that RUMSL had to achieve a tariff of ₹5 per unit or below.

Srivastava realized that he needed strong and creditable allies. He soon explored possibilities with the World Bank, which was keen on the solar sector in India. The World Bank was looped in for concessional finance and IFC for transaction advisory services. RUMSL was the first agency in the solar sector to make such a move in collaboration with multilateral organizations.

One of the challenges was to locate customers. Distribution companies in Madhya Pradesh were not in a position to take the entire power generated. Hence, customers outside the state had to be located. The first breakthrough came in the form of the Delhi Metro getting convinced with the approach of RUMSL and developing sufficient foresight and



Rumana Jafri meets tribal women in her office in Kalahandi district (above); and the Mukhipata waterfall which became a tourist attraction

For all the criticism that is heaped on the government, it is still the prime driver of development. The good work it does is often through invisible performers.

confidence to sign into the project as one of the principal procurers of power, without any certainty of the tariff to be achieved, despite it being the first project of RUMSL.

As the project moved ahead, RUMSL gathered more allies — the Power Grid Corporation of India (PGCIL) for linking with the national grid, MPTransco for the development of internal transmission and Indian Renewable Energy Development Agency (IREDA) for developing an innovative payment security mechanism, as also Trilegal for legal services, PwC for managerial advice and Sgurr for engineering inputs. This broad team developed into Team Rewa.

The efforts of Team Rewa were justly rewarded. While the aim was to get a tariff of ₹4.50 per unit, the bidding went on incessantly for 36 hours and closed at an astonishing ₹2.97 per unit as the first-year tariff! This was lower than the cost of power from coal — the first solar project in India to have achieved this feat. More importantly, the project established the principle that low rates can be achieved without depending on subsidy by careful project structuring, robust project preparation and detailed contracting. It is the only project in the country to supply energy to an institutional customer — the Delhi Metro.

The project started injecting power into the national grid on July 6, 2018. This is the first solar project in India to inject directly into the national grid. The Rewa project got the World Bank President's award. Rewa has been adopted as a case study at Harvard and at the Singapore Management University.

COVID IN MUMBAI Mumbai has often been in the news for all the wrong reasons. When Covid-19 arrived in the country, Mumbai was not spared. In fact, the virus was relentless, creating havoc in the metropolis. It spread like wildfire during the last week of April 2020. The slums of Mumbai, especially Dharavi, Govandi and Deonar, were impacted. On account of limited testing facilities and short supply of beds in the city of Mumbai, there were a number of deaths. Some bodies were even found on the streets and road dividers.

One of the biggest slums of Asia, Dharavi, with a population of 800,000, was visibly out of control. There were only around 3,700 Covid-19 beds available in the city and approximately 1,500 people were reporting positive every day. Mumbai had become the hotspot of the country. There was panic all around and a sizeable number of residents of Mumbai were fleeing to safer places. Sheer helplessness provided ready fodder for the national media as well. All this resulted in tremendous pressure on the state government.

It was in this set of circumstances that Iqbal Singh Chahal took over as municipal commissioner of Mumbai. On the very next day after taking charge on May 8, 2020, he walked into a Covid-19 ICU of a hospital to take stock of the ground reality. It was followed by a long walk in the containment zones of Dharavi to understand the actual situation prevailing in these slums. He was clear in his mind that there were only four pillars on which the foundation of the Covid-19 fight stood — disciplined and focussed testing, a large fleet of ambulances, an immediate increase in the number of Covid-19 hospital beds and substantial increase in the availability of trained para-medical and doctors in Mumbai.

The focus had to be on testing, tracing, tracking, quarantine and treatment. Between May 8 and August 1, 2020, a massive increase in health infrastructure was ensured under Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai (MCGM). The number of Covid-19 beds was increased from 29,282 to 88,953. The total number of ICU beds was also increased from 480 to 1,755 during the same period. Similarly, there was a manifold increase in ventilator beds and ambulances.

Consequent to a myriad of efforts, recoveries went beyond 80 percent and the death rate that was initially eight percent in the month of April came down to almost half within a month and finally down to 1.8 percent.

MCGM rose to the occasion in the fight against Covid-19. Through well-planned, path-breaking and effective initiatives, the corporation, under the inspired leadership of Chahal, managed to take care of the crisis substantially in Mumbai.

WATERFALL BOUNTY Madanpur Rampur is one of the 13 blocks of Kalahandi district in Odisha and is located 65 km from the district headquarters at Bhawanipatna. The block has a predominantly tribal population. It has many remote inaccessible areas and scattered

habitation with sparse population in many villages. The lack of proper roads, bridges, mobile network and basic infrastructure, along with the presence of left-wing extremism, presents enormous challenges for implementation of various schemes and developmental plans. Many a time, the traditional beliefs of tribal people make it difficult to usher in change and implement new ideas. Consequently, the block has poor social, health and educational indicators. There is rampant migration to other districts.

During an interaction with block-level officers, the residents of Gandpadar village of Manikera gram panchayat raised the issue of water scarcity. The only possible solution suggested was sourcing water from some nearby perennial stream.

Rumana Jafri, the Block Development Officer (BDO) at Rampur, together with the sarpanch of the Manikera panchayat and four others, set out to look for feasible solutions. After walking for more than five km through dense forest and on slippery trails, they came across a treasure, a waterfall that had remained hidden from the world for so long. It was at Mukhipata, close to Sulesuru village, but had remained unknown to the villagers and was apparently an unexplored area.

The water-related problem was solved through borewells. But in the waterfall Jafri visualized a whole new opportunity. The block administration decided to present the beauty of the Mukhipata waterfall before the world and develop it as a tourist spot.

A Mukhipata committee was constituted. The road leading to the waterfall was repaired. An entry fee per person and a parking fee were charged. Small shops selling water and essential food items were opened. Village locals were encouraged to sell tea and meals at subsidized rates to tourists. The spot was promoted through social media.

The results were immediately visible and within a short span of time Mukhipata started receiving a lot of visitors. These visitors in turn promoted it on social media. The shopkeepers earned a decent living and the entry fee collected was used to maintain cleanliness and to develop Mukhipata. In less than a month, the Mukhipata waterfall became one of the most visited places in Kalahandi district.

The dream of turning it into a tourist spot had been fulfilled. But the intention to strengthen livelihood activities around Mukhipata waterfall was yet to be realized. Hence, the idea of a rural *haat* near Mukhipata was conceived. This would be open every Saturday and Sunday as these two days witnessed the maximum number of visitors.

The focus of the rural *haat* was to generate livelihood activities, revive the dying indigenous arts and crafts of the area and promote forest products that were available in plenty in Madanpur Rampur block. The new mission to create a rural *haat* at Mukhipata took off. Villages like Jamguda, Jambahali, Dangapata for bamboo crafts, Mohangiri for Dhokra art and Madanpur for terracotta products were identified. A nodal officer was assigned for each such village. Individual artisans and women of self-help groups (SHGs) who produced crafts from wool, wood, paper and waste materials were also encouraged to sell their products at this *haat*.

Food stalls preparing local cuisine were given priority. Villagers and artisans were motivated to make products which they used to but had stopped making due to failure to find a market for them. The toughest



Iqbal Singh Chahal rose to the occasion in the fight against Covid-19 in Mumbai



Ashish Singh (below) transformed Indore into India's cleanest city

part was to make the villagers believe that the products would sell this time round at the *haat*. This was done through multiple visits to the villages and interacting with them personally.

More than 500 families benefitted within a couple of months from the rural *haat* and many more are coming into the fold. Trainers were arranged to help the artisans reach new levels of innovation and efforts were made to cover other villages which were left out in the first phase of identification.



ECO-TOURISM MODEL Vikas Kumar Ujjwal had taken over as the Divisional Forest Officer (DFO), Lohardaga, in March 2017. While on tour, he was shocked and disturbed to see hundreds of poor villagers removing firewood illegally from a nearby forest. Ujjwal was told that as locals didn't have anything else to do, they were taking timber to sell in the local market to make a living. Two issues needed to be addressed: checking illicit felling and providing these people sustainable employment.

It was felt that all the effort would be insignificant and futile without a sustainable activity that could address both forest management and bringing about sizeable socio-economic impact.

The idea of Namodag eco-tourism emerged out of this necessity. This eco-tourism model was based on Joint Forest Management Committee (JFMC) members managing every activity from entry to exit of tourists. A nominal fee was charged from every tourist and in lieu of that, members of the Van Samiti provided facilities which included parking, cleaning, trekking, guides, sheds for sitting, and so on.

Many shops and stalls have come up in the nearby area. The banning of plastic plates increased the demand for sal plates from the villages. Support from the district administration and engagement of local villagers ensured direct livelihood benefit to at least 25 people on a regular basis. There was increased patrolling by the forest department based on inputs from JFMC members to nab those still involved in the illegal timber trade. This compelled such people to shift to other activities.

Started in 2017, the registered count of tourists visiting has crossed 250,000 — generating enough resources for remuneration to those engaged and to build a corpus for infrastructure enhancement. On peak days the number of visitors reaches 10,000. The popularity of this place has generated enough buzz to attract tourists from nearby states and even other countries.

The new activity in this area has resulted in an 80 to 90 percent reduction in illicit felling due to rejuvenated JFMCs. Gradually, forest density has shown tremendous improvement.

There have been signs of the return of wildlife such as sloth bears, deer, porcupines, foxes and avifauna. Better waste management has ensured responsible tourism. Increased reporting of offences by villagers has not only resulted in checking forest encroachment but also effective enforcement of forest laws. The Salgi JFMC was awarded as the best JFMC in the division in 2017-18 for its incredible work. An area that was once degraded has been regreened and is visible in satellite imagery.

MP TOURISM The tourism scenario in Madhya Pradesh in the summer of 2004 was dismal. Despite its amazing bouquet of tourist destinations and cultural offerings it was nowhere in the front league of tourism in the country. The tourism corporation, mandated with the task of developing tourism, was in a state of despondency. Yet, a beginning had to be made.

Ashwani Lohani, an IRSME (Indian Railway Service of Mechanical Engineers) officer, took over as managing director of the Madhya Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation (MPTDC) in 2004. He started by cleaning up and improving upkeep at the corporation's headquarters and then all other establishments and inculcating a sense of pride in the staff who became the real heroes of the revival effort.

The task was accomplished in three stints. The longest stint began in June 2006 with the agenda of shifting to the swanky Paryatan Bhawan that got almost completed during Lohani's first tenure but remained unoccupied perhaps because it was too suave for a *sarkari* corporation.

The first major issue was recovering outstanding food cost dues from a

majority of unit managers including MPTDC's flagship Hotel Palash. Waiving of undue and unjust recoveries led to a wave of enthusiasm in the corporation. Simultaneously, a drive for improving probity in public life by focusing on the eradication of corruption, drinking on duty and sexual harassment was also started.

A unique step was organising 'Transparency Conferences' that focused on corruption in the MPTDC in an open forum attended by all stakeholders. The first such conference, organized in Hotel Palash in Bhopal, had phenomenal impact and future conferences helped in maintaining the momentum. A line was clearly drawn.

Empowerment of officials was an exercise that was exhaustively carried out in Lohani's first tenure. Powers were delegated extensively to field-level officials.

Next on the agenda was to create the world's first broad gauge rail coach restaurant at Hotel Lake View Ashok in Bhopal — a dream project. A condemned second-class coach was purchased from the Nishatpura workshop in Bhopal and converted into a classy restaurant amidst an old-style railway station with its platform, magazine shop and a *paan* shop.

Christened Shan-e-Bhopal, this unique creation soon occupied pride of place in the city of lakes. The rail coach restaurant was conferred the National Tourism Award in 2008 in the category of 'the most innovative tourism project of India'.

One major responsibility was branding of the state as a tourist destination. A new logo and the 'Hindustan Ka Dil' campaign on TV, radio and in the print media accorded tremendous visibility.

Lohani remained focused on rapid growth. New properties like the regional office at Indore, new hotels at Burhanpur, Dodi, Khajuraho and Mandsaur, new resorts at Pachmarhi, a new *dhaba* at Bhimbetka were all glowing examples of the new work culture at the MPTDC, a culture that stood for excellence in aesthetics, quality and service, while at the same time keeping a steady eye on operating ratios.

At Bargi, Delawadi, Halali, Kerwa and Tawa, the almost-dead irrigation rest houses were transformed into swanky resorts. Simultaneously, water sports were activated in a big way. While the lake in Bhopal was turned into the most popular entertainment spot of the city with power boats, water scooters and a cruise, prominent water bodies in way-off places were also given cruises, power and pedal boats, and entertainment centres. The setting up of Baaz, a centre for adventure sports on the outskirts of Bhopal, and a similar establishment at Pachmarhi gave a major push to adventure tourism.

CLEANING INDORE Indore was known as an industrial town in Madhya Pradesh but shot into prominence after it was declared the cleanest city in the country in 2017. It has continued to be awarded and recognized as India's cleanest city every year thereafter. What brought about a transformation that has continued to sustain for so many years?

It was not easy to start. A number of challenges were faced in setting up a system in the city. To overcome these challenges, Ashish Singh, a young municipal commissioner, and his team decided to transform the city through strategic planning and municipal waste management. Infrastructure needed to be strengthened.

Information, education and communication (IEC) were required to change public behaviour. The first step, therefore, was to create awareness



Vikas Kumar Ujjwal (centre, holding up a broomstick) introduced eco-tourism in Lohardaga



Ashwani Lohani turned around tourism in Madhya Pradesh

amongst the people and the community through pamphlets, loudspeakers, rallies, meetings and public participation. People were made aware of the need to segregate wet and dry waste, its benefits and consequences on human health and environment.

Door-to-door collection and transportation services were designed in such a way that citizens got such services on all 365 days in a year irrespective of national holidays, festivals or Sundays. Accordingly, a ward-wise deployment plan of sanitation workers, drivers and

utilization of vehicles was prepared.

For better segregation, three bins are used in each house. Door-to-door collection of waste is being done in all 85 wards of the city using partitioned vehicles. There are three separate collection compartments for wet, dry and domestic hazardous waste in each tipper. The wet waste from semi-bulk generators of 25 kg to 100 kg of waste is collected through the dedicated Bulk Collection System. The wet waste is transported by tippers to one of 10 transfer stations. At the garbage transfer station (GTS), the tippers unload the wet waste into dedicated compactors which compress and load the wet waste on hook loaders. The details of all the incoming waste collection vehicles are logged at the GTS.

Aadhaar-based biometric attendance of all workers is taken every day. All vehicles are monitored by a GPS-enabled tracking system. Any route deviation is penalized and multiple instances of deviation are ground for termination.

Sweeping of roads less than 18 metres wide is done manually by sanitation workers. Wider roads are cleaned by 10 ultra-modern mechanized road-sweeping machines. In all, 400 km of roads are mechanically swept between 10 pm and 6 am. Groups of workers are deployed to wash the city's squares, footpaths and monuments with pressure jet machines.

The Indore Municipal Corporation (IMC) took over an existing underperforming Centralized Organic Waste Processing Unit. It completely overhauled the plant and repaired all machinery. The compost plant works to its full capacity of 600 metric tonnes of wet waste per day.

The IMC established decentralised aerobic pit composting units in 414 gardens to treat lawn cuttings, leaves and tree branches. It also took the initiative to produce and utilize bio CNG produced from processing of municipal solid waste. ■

Anil Swarup is a distinguished former IAS officer

Mobilizing civil society



DELHI
DARBAR

SANJAYA BARU

CIVIL society groups have always been engaged in mainstream politics in one way or another, albeit at its margins. Rarely have such groups been credited with making a difference to the outcome of elections to state legislatures. In the erstwhile united state of Andhra Pradesh I was witness over the years to the activism of civil society groups, popularly referred to as non-government organisations (NGOs) and to their eventual frustration in not being able to make a difference on an electoral platform. Mainstream political parties either ignored them or regarded them as hostile entities to unite and work against.

The recently concluded elections to the Karnataka state legislature have a different story to tell. Many commentators have pointed to the role played by at least two civil society groups, *Eddelu Karnataka* (Wake Up Karnataka) and *Bahutva Karnataka* (Pluralistic Karnataka). One commentator put it pithily stating, "Among the main reasons for the Congress party's victory in Karnataka, was the boost it got from the social work of civil society organisations such as *Eddelu Karnataka* (Wake Up Karnataka) and *Bahutva Karnataka* (Pluralistic Karnataka)."

Eddelu Karnataka prepared a 25-page booklet titled 'Four Years of BJP's Rule: Disillusionment Due to Dead Promises'. For many social and political activists this became an important guide book giving them talking points in the campaign against BJP misrule. *Eddelu Karnataka* also organized dozens of conferences and discussions across the state and produced as many as 80 videos highlighting the failures of the Bommai government.

The other group, *Bahutva Karnataka*, refrained from making any party-specific suggestions to the audiences it addressed but vigorously campaigned against the state government for its failures on many fronts. It

prepared what has been called 'a report card' on the Bommai government, analysing its performance across 15 areas, including agriculture, environment, labour, religious minorities, rural development, women's rights, healthcare, and nutrition. In most of these sectors, the group claimed, "the BJP government has performed abysmally and we ensured that the reports were shared widely and received continuous media attention."

The political awareness work of these groups was aided by the data generated by *Eedina* (Today) which, incidentally, conducted the most accurate pre-election survey that showed



Eddelu Karnataka organized discussions and conferences

At least two activist groups had a role in the Congress' victory. They highlighted the government's failures with campaigns.

a clear Congress victory. More importantly, the *Eedina* survey showed the importance of economic and social factors in determining the electoral outcome, indicating that religion and caste are likely to be of marginal importance.

Taken together, the selfless activism of these civil society groups shaped the electoral outcome in Karnataka. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) too mobilized what may be called 'civil society groups' in the form of various

religious groups as well as the RSS to campaign on behalf of its candidates. If the latter focused on communal and sectarian grievances, the former focused on social and economic grievances. In the end, the voter showed that she was more concerned about livelihood issues than questions of faith and religious allegiance.

While political parties have their activists and campaigners who take party political propaganda to the voter, civil society groups can have a potentially greater impact if they are seen as selfless entities interested in societal benefit rather than a party political benefit. In other words, opposition politicians campaigning against the ruling party of the day may be viewed by the ordinary voter as self-serving, seeking power, while civil society groups are viewed as focusing on wider social benefit rather than party political gain.

The BJP has long argued that the RSS was one such organization that was not interested in political power but focused on national development and social improvement. This narrative was rarely questioned during the seven years of the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government (1998-2004) mainly because Prime Minister Vajpayee maintained a certain distance from the RSS. In fact, he had an adversarial relationship with the then RSS chief, Sudarshan, and often distanced himself

from their views on policy.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on the other hand, removed this distance and quite happily allowed the RSS to play a direct role in the government. Several members of the Modi cabinet owe their ministerial positions to the RSS. In fact, several diplomats and senior officials also owe their positions to the RSS leadership. This direct interference of the RSS in BJP governments reduced its influence as a civil society organization.

The only mainstream political party that has in the past effectively used the social influence of civil society groups to extend its political influence has been the Communist party. It is this Communist party model that the Congress party used effectively during the tenure of the United Progressive Alliance government when

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The pain of one



LOOKING AHEAD

KIRAN KARNIK

THERE is a new affliction across much of the world, especially in the West. Unlike Covid or other viruses, it is not infectious, with symptoms that are not as immediately obvious; it creeps in insidiously, has been endemic for quite some time, and there is no vaccination yet available. It is not self-limiting and — unlike other viral infections — does not get better with time. Though not really new, it is beginning to draw attention — even make occasional headlines — only recently. This “disease” is loneliness, only now being recognized as a health hazard.

Its severity is indicated (possibly exaggerated) by statements like that from the US Surgeon General, Vivek Murthy, who recently said that loneliness is as dangerous as smoking; it also significantly raises the risk of heart disease and stroke. The UK has created a Ministry of Loneliness, in recognition of the seriousness of the problem. The “power of one” is being overtaken by the loneliness, the pains, of being (al)one.

Many assume that this is an affliction limited to the developed West, that in the East — including India — our tradition of strong family bonding, within an ecosystem of community relationships, protects us from such isolation and loneliness. Our culture and values, it is argued, are a vaccine which ensures that we do not suffer this problem. It is true that multi-generational joint families are yet common (even the norm), despite the changing patterns of living and of migration. While migration, primarily for economic opportunities, has long been prevalent, anecdotal data indicates that it is more widespread and extensive than before, and leading to a break-up of the joint family.

The effect of in-country migration is resulting in two contrary impacts. On the one hand, as young people move out of their parental home — either for work in another location, or marriage (women, to their spouse's home; men, for independent living) — parents are left to live by themselves. On the other hand, when both husband and wife are working, parents are invited to live with them to run the household, and often to be baby-sitters. In the former case, loneliness is

inevitable; in the latter, despite being a joint-family household, loneliness results from everyone else (children and grandchildren, especially if the latter are school-going) being too busy. If “parents” is singular, with one of them having passed on, loneliness is even more severe.

In the middle class, the empty nest syndrome is widely prevalent. While some parents are invited to spend long periods with their sons/daughters, the working couple has little time for them. If they are abroad, the cultural mores of an alien land and the lack of a social network make solitude even more pronounced. As a result, emotionally-dependent, though financially-independent, elders feel isolated. In



One can be lonely even in a crowd

In-country migration is resulting in young people leaving home and parents being left behind. The family as a bulwark is gone.

the case of the poor and those from the lower middle class, their financial situation amplifies the angst of neglect.

The joint family was seen as a bulwark against such isolation. Its apparent demise — though it is making a comeback in a new avatar (with the home being that of the children, rather than of their parents) — has been welcomed by some, since it is seen as a stifling and patriarchal construct. To the extent that nuclear families provide agency to women, they are welcome. Yet, there is need to balance this with the plight of elders, often left to fend for themselves and suffer loneliness.

The joint family, though, is not necessarily a safeguard: as many know, one can be lonely even in a crowd. Elders are now often seen as a

burden: as a result, within joint families too, their physical, emotional, social and financial needs (including for medication and healthcare) are neglected. Worse, they are subject to mental and physical violence. In these respects, the plight of elder single women is worse. Modern life, with its hectic pace, work and social demands, and migration (domestic and international), combined with material wants (and so, financial needs) has exacerbated what has long been a subterranean problem. Clearly, loneliness is as much a problem amongst the poor as the rich; in India, as much as in the West.

Figures from the government indicate that as many as 18 percent of elders live alone or with their spouse (2021 data). Another telling statistic (from a study by Helpage India) is that even amongst those living with families, 35.7 percent are waiting for people to call them (a sure sign of loneliness). More worrisome is that amongst those living in age-care homes, 57 percent of males and 48 percent of women were suffering from moderate to severe depression. A national survey by Helpage India in 2022 says that though a majority (82 percent) of elders are living with their families, 59 percent want their family members to spend more time with them. This shows that even while staying with family, a majority of the elderly feel lonely. The same study found that 43.1 percent of elders feel they are neglected by younger generations and feel left out.

As in many other cases, technology creates both problems and solutions: devices (TV, laptops, and especially mobile phones) tend to alienate and individualize. It is quite common to see members of a household speaking on a phone, sending mails, or watching video on a personal device, rather than talking to one other. Elders, far less familiar with technology, are often unable to do most of this. On the other hand, TV is a boon for many elders, helping to pass time lost in a world of fantasy, sports or news. Those more familiar with tech are able to make video calls — seeing and speaking with friends and family anywhere on earth — or use other facets of tech.

Yet, at the end of the day, humans are social animals: we need to interact with other humans. Forming groups of elders, fostering inter-generational interaction, and focusing on staying active (“active aging”) may help. Similar approaches may be beneficial for younger people too. These could be feasible antidotes to the growing scourge of loneliness. ■

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

Riverfronts kill rivers



LIVING RIVERS

VENKATESH DUTTA

RECENTLY, over 2,000 citizens participated in a unique protest along the banks of the Mula-Mutha river in Pune by hugging trees — just like the 1973 Chipko movement to save trees in the Garhwal Himalayas.

Here, the protest was aimed at opposing the Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC)'s ambitious riverfront development project along the Mula-Mutha, which involves the removal of more than 3,000 trees from an 11-km stretch of the river. In addition to causing damage to the riverine vegetation along the river, the project, which aims to address ‘flooding’ and make the river more ‘accessible’ to people, may not achieve its intended goals.

The project has serious drawbacks. It proposes to construct embankments along the river, which will cause significant harm to the riverine ecosystem. The embankments will not aid in flood control. In reality, this will decrease the river's water-carrying capacity, making nearby areas more susceptible to flooding.

Pune is situated at the confluence of the Mula and Mutha rivers that originate in the Sahyadri ranges. These two rivers converge to form the Mula-Mutha, which further joins the Bhima. Additionally, the Pawana and Indrayani, which are tributaries of the Bhima, flow through the northwestern outskirts of Pune. The combined length of these three rivers as they flow through the PMC area is roughly 44 km.

The riverfront development project in Pune aims to develop the 44-km stretch of all three rivers — 22 km of the Mula, 10 km of the Mutha, and 11 km of the Mula-Mutha -- at an estimated cost of ₹5,500 crore. The project is divided into many phases, with the first phase of work currently underway along the approximately 11-km stretch of the Mula-Mutha. In the past, uncoordinated piecemeal development of riverbanks and unthoughtful channelization of the Mutha have spoiled Pune's rivers.

The Mula, Mutha and Mula-Mutha collectively have over 300 species of plants, including several species of grasses, herbs, shrubs, climbers, free-floating aquatic plants, and others found along the riverbanks, and in the riverbed. The river is a mosaic of habitats

— the rocky bed provides unique habitation, including several small river islands, pools, small rapids, aquatic vegetation, and grassed muddy banks. The 11-km stretch of the Mula-Mutha, which is currently under development, is also a part of the Salim Ali Biodiversity Park and a proposed bird sanctuary. The riverfront development project's impact could have far-reaching consequences on the local ecosystem and the wildlife that depends on it.

Many riverfront development projects have come up in India — the problem is that these projects lend cosmetic treatment to rivers with incomplete sewerage networks and inadequate sewage treatment. Riverfront developments have not prevented sewage from entering the river; in fact, they have escalated the city's water and wastewater crises. Multiple sewer lines have been laid along or underneath the riverfronts. The result is that these river stretches have become ‘glorified sewer canals’. The riverfront also comes with diaphragm walls and embankments on both sides of the

The phrase ‘urban river’ is being used to disconnect a river from its upstream and downstream, but a river is a river.

river. This reduces the carrying capacity of the river. So there is flooding during excessive rainfall due to the reduced width of the river channel and multiple flow obstructions. The Gomti riverfront in Lucknow is a classic example of how natural riverbanks can be ruined with concrete structures with failed sewage interceptor systems — the fact is that untreated sewage is discharged into the river, resulting in severe degradation of water quality. The oxygen in the river is almost nil at several places and fish cannot survive in such toxic water.

The phrase ‘urban river’ is being used to disconnect a river from its upstream and downstream continuum. This urban-centric approach of river management is trying to give river space an elite look, with more build-landscape and concrete river banks along the urban stretches of a river. A river is a river — while its catchments may get urbanized, its terrace may remain well-vegetated and unorderd. It is definitely not an urban river. In urban areas, our municipal agencies have connected sewer lines to natural drains that

empty into our rivers. The approach should focus on three aspects — first we have to clean our rivers and make them pollution-free. This requires a serious re-thinking of the city's wastewater and solid wastes. The city's sewerage network should be complete in all respects — existing nullahs and piped outfalls that connect to the river have to be tapped and channelled to the sewage treatment plants. Solid waste dumping around the river banks has to be stopped with a zero-tolerance policy. Second, we need to improve the aesthetics around *ghats*; we can develop biodiversity parks and gardens — not the concrete public realms. Third, we should integrate all heritage structures around the riverbanks and enhance the composite character of the river without destroying the natural riverbanks.

It is very difficult to maintain the large built landscape due to high operation and energy expenditure. After spending so much money, the municipal corporation or the land development agency starts looking for all possible options to generate finances. The structure can never be maintained by entry fees and rentals. Plus, the riverfront restricts the local community's access to rivers and their public spaces.

Achieving a clean and unpolluted river in urban areas is not possible without a proper sewerage network and well-functioning sewage treatment plants. The Sabarmati riverfront development project attempted to execute interceptor sewers and sewage diversion networks, but these efforts have largely failed due to faulty design and malfunctioning sewage treatment plants. According to a report from the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) presented to the Lok Sabha in February this year, the Sabarmati is the second most polluted river in the country. Therefore, it is imperative to ensure that sewage treatment plants are properly installed and functional to achieve the vision of a clean and unpolluted river in urban areas such as the Sabarmati and Gomti.

The message is clear. Do not try to destroy the riverbanks and floodplain-terrace with concrete structures — first clean all the sewage generated in the city and use this reclaimed water. Maintain the circularity with caution and care — water should be used, reused and returned to nature. The natural areas around rivers should remain natural. Riparian stretches along the rivers should be protected at all cost. These areas are ecologically fragile, and restoration work should enrich their natural endowments. ■

Venkatesh Dutta is a Gomti River Waterkeeper and a professor of environmental sciences at Ambedkar University, Lucknow

Not an exclusive heaven



**AHIMSA
MUSINGS**

RAJNI BAKSHI

ONE morning, at a school assembly, the principal urged students and teachers to make their school a 'heaven on earth'. A bit later, the same morning, two boys from Class 3 were brought before the principal because they had got into a quarrel that resulted in fisticuffs.

Asked to explain themselves, one of the little boys spoke up with passion. Pointing to the other child, he said: "Ma'am, if this school is to be a heaven on earth, then what is he doing here?"

Professor Krishna Kumar narrated this story to a hall full of school students and teachers gathered to reflect on the "Idea of Democracy". It was significant that the professor did not tell us the specific issue that started the boys' fight. Prof. Kumar's purpose was to draw us away from distractions — such as the precise nature or cause of our differences with others. He related the story to highlight a foundational truth: "Democracy cannot be an exclusive heaven."

It is equally true that any meaningful form of democracy depends on nonviolence. For nonviolence is not merely desisting from physical or verbal violence. At a more basic level nonviolence is acceptance of those who are different from us — or whom we simply do not like.

The challenge lies in enough citizens being convinced about this and then working out ways to nurture nonviolence as a lived practice. Some of us have spent a great deal of time reflecting upon and studying these challenges in scholarly or activist circles. But now there is a sense of urgency regarding engaging young people in the exploration of nonviolence and democracy as workable, practicable ideals.

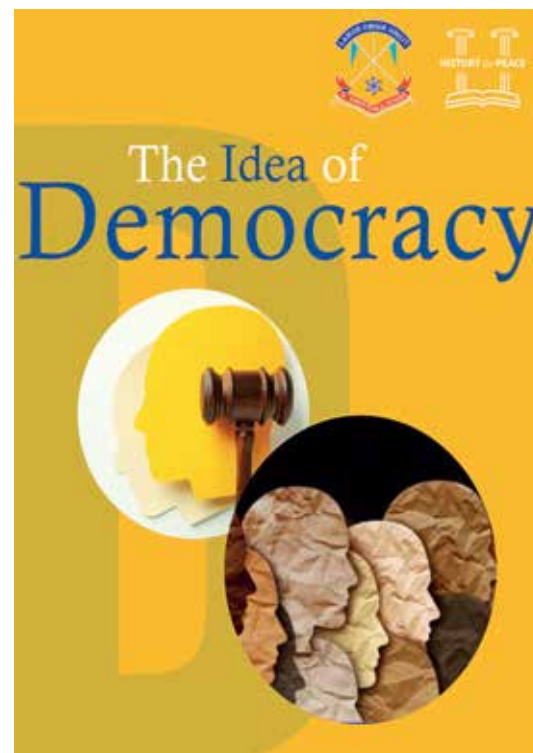
The Idea of Democracy Conference at Sant Kabir School in Chandigarh, in the first week of May, was a part of this larger process. This is an extension of the History for Peace initiative of The Seagull Foundation for the Arts which has been flourishing for over a decade. History for Peace is much more than an annual conference in Kolkata, which attracts schoolteachers and scholars from nations across South Asia.

Over the years it has become an intense process of engagement with students and teachers — about the path to peace and

obstacles on the way.

Hence a series of Idea of Democracy conferences hosted by schools willing to support such critical reflection. The premise of these gatherings is that we must first acknowledge the darkness that is upon us.

The brochure of the conference in Chandigarh was explicit: "Erosion of civil liberties, suppression of political opposition and dissent, weakening of independent media, manipulation of electoral processes, and the concentration of power in the hands of a few... the optimism and the triumph of democracy



There is a sense of urgency regarding engaging the young in the exploration of non-violence and peace as ideals.

that the world witnessed at the dawn of the 21st century has rapidly diminished."

The conference addressed these concerns through a combination of lectures by scholars and interactive workshops conducted by those who have experience in working with schoolchildren on issues of democracy and social justice.

Predictably, discussions flowed more smoothly when they were more generically about social justice. The moment specific political parties, particularly the BJP, were

mentioned, sharp divisions were immediately visible.

Perhaps this is why Prof. Kumar chose to make his point through a small, effective story that mentioned no specific issues. Prof. Kumar is a noted educationist and former director of the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT). He is well known for developing a pedagogy that aims to mitigate aggression and violence.

This is not to suggest that specific facts should be avoided. After all, the keynote address of the conference at Sant Kabir School was given by Prof. Zoya Hasan, who presented a brief history of the events and processes that have brought us to the point where democracy is threatened by majoritarian rule and public culture.

Today, when an 'idea of democracy' discussion is taken into an elite school the key challenge lies in both acknowledging the material facts and yet also getting beyond them to focus on the moral values that are conducive to the well-being of all. Namely, that which the school principal alluded to when she dreamed of making her school a 'heaven on earth'.

For instance, information and analysis which indicates that India is becoming more and more majoritarian was challenged by some of the teachers. Such analysis does violence to their feelings as patriotic Indians.

At this point, if those moderating the discussion give priority to settling disputes about the facts, they might lose the opportunity to find common ground on basic values. If, however, they begin with deeper reflection and sharing regarding the core values then disagreements over the extent to which those values are being violated in the material world might be more constructively explored or processed.

Of course, the reality is that there are those who appear to simply reject the 'other'. The little boy in the story told by Krishna Kumar represents something in all of us. There are moments when we find someone so offensive, so intolerable that we simply do not want to inhabit the same space as them — be it in a home, an office or a nation.

If we treat fraternity, *bandhutva*, as the starting point or precondition for democracy, we may be doomed. But if we see democracy as the difficult, even maddening, struggle to keep recalibrating our own emotions in order to overcome, or learn to live with, the 'why is he here' feelings, then an entire universe of possibility opens up. ■

The History for Peace project's 2023 conference from August 3-5 in Kolkata, is on the theme "The Idea of Justice" (www.historyforpeace.org). Rajni Bakshi is the founder of YouTube channel Ahimsa Conversations

Why money isn't spent

BHARAT DOGRA

THE role of Parliamentary Standing Committees in India is proving to be increasingly important in drawing attention to the extent to which funds allocated for important schemes meant for the poor and weaker sections are properly utilized.

In India, most discussions on allocations take place during the presentation of the Union Budget in February. After this, the follow-up of how the allocated funds have been actually spent is really quite weak as confirmed government data is difficult to get until very late. Even the following year's budget papers give only the revised estimates for the previous year and not the actual spend.

In such conditions, the presentation of the latest available data on actual spending in the reports of the Parliamentary Committees attached to various ministries can be very helpful in drawing attention to the actual utilization of funds. In addition, members of these committees question ministry officials if there has been poor utilization and so a rare forum is provided for getting to know and understand the official position. Last, but perhaps most important, committees frequently tell the ministry officials to improve utilization if this is found to be unreasonably low, or if there are other problems, and this can lead to belated correctional efforts.

This important role becomes clear if we look at some significant data presented in recent reports of Parliamentary Committees regarding weaker sections.

Consider first the report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee relating to the Department of Social Justice and Empowerment (DSJE): the 46th report, 2022-23. This report tells us that the original budget

allocation during 2022-23 for the DSJE amounted to ₹11,922 crore but the actual spend upto February 15, 2023 (i.e. for ten and a half months out of the 12 months of financial year 2022-23) amounted to just ₹3,488 crore or a meagre 29 percent of the original allocation. Such low spending till such a late date of the financial year, that too in a ministry where spending directly concerns the needs of some of the poorest persons in the country, was found to be very shocking when first revealed in this report.

This becomes even more evident when we look at various programmes of this department. The allocation of ₹70 crore for the self-employment programme of those engaged earlier in manual scavenging was reduced to an actual spend of only ₹5 crore during the first nine months. A sum of ₹500 crore was allocated for pre-matric scholarships for the Scheduled Castes (SC), but the actual spend during the first nine months on this was just ₹56 lakh or merely 0.1 percent of the original allocation.

The allocation for strengthening arrangements for protecting civil rights and preventing atrocities was ₹600 crore but spend was reduced to ₹75 crore during the first nine months. The programme for the economic empowerment of nomadic and denotified tribes was allotted ₹28 crore but spend was only ₹2 crore during the first nine months.

The Ministry of Minority Affairs was covered by this Parliamentary Committee in its 47th report. Here the original budget allocation for the ministry was ₹5,020 crore while spend upto February 13, 2023 (or 10 and a half months) was just ₹668 crore or a meagre 13 percent of the original budget. It is seldom seen that in 10 and a half months out of 12 months only 13 percent of funds are spent. There is no credible explanation for this.

Next, consider the report of the Parliamentary Committee for the Ministry of Labour and Employment (41st report). In it the fund utilization data for the first 10 and a half months of financial year 2022-23 shows that several important welfare schemes of the ministry were lagging far behind expectations due to poor utilization of funds. This data is available upto February 13, 2023 (or for the first 10 and a half months of the financial year).

For the Labour Welfare Scheme the Budget Estimate (BE) or original allocation in 2022-23 was ₹120 crore but the actual expenditure up to February 13 was only ₹36 crore.

For the National Data Base of Unorganized Sector Workers, the BE for 2022-23 was ₹500 crore but only ₹120 crore was utilized.

In the case of an important social security scheme called Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Man Dhan Yojana, ₹350 crore was allocated but the actual expenditure in the first 10 and a half months was only ₹93 crore.

A sum of just ₹10 crore was allocated for Rehabilitation of Bonded Labour but the spending for the first 10 and a half months was lower still at ₹4.8 crore.

For the National Pension Scheme for Self-Employed Persons and Shopkeepers a sum of ₹50 crore was allocated but a token sum of just ₹2 lakh was spent.

This shows that due to under-utilization several important schemes for the working class have been adversely affected.

Drawing attention to such low utilization helps to make a strong case for remedial action, particularly when Parliamentary Committees also involve ministry representatives in a discussion on low utilization and, in the process, secure some commitments for improving utilization. ■

Bharat Dogra is Honorary Convener, Campaign to Save Earth Now. His recent books include 'Man over Machine' and 'A Day in 2071'.

Mobilizing civil society

Continued from page 21

Congress party president Sonia Gandhi created the National Advisory Council (NAC), giving representation to important voices from among civil society groups. However, with time, the effectiveness of this strategy got reduced and, in fact, backfired when many accused the NAC of interfering in the functioning of the Manmohan Singh government.

The experience of the RSS and NAC suggests that to be effective, civil society groups should maintain a critical distance from political parties in power, continuing to voice the

interests of the community at large and not getting identified with any political party. While *Eddelu Karnataka* and *Bahutva Karnataka* can take legitimate pride from their positive contribution to the electoral outcome in Karnataka, their future effectiveness and credibility will depend on their remaining the sentinels of civil society rather than in becoming the handmaidens of people in power.

At least one reason why civil society groups have become politically more active and relevant has been the collapse of party organizations. Few political parties have an effective party organization. The moment a party wins an election, its key leaders vie for

ministerial positions and consider organizational positions as worth nothing. In the past, in cadre-based parties, like the Communist parties, party leaders enjoyed more credibility and power than their ministers in government. With time that too has changed. Today Communist party chief ministers call the shots, not party general secretaries.

It is this weakness of party political organizations that has opened the space for civil society groups and in Karnataka they have played an important role in shaping the electoral outcome. ■

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Photo: Civil Society/Lembi Kh



The two-bit dessert

A little something to round off a meal

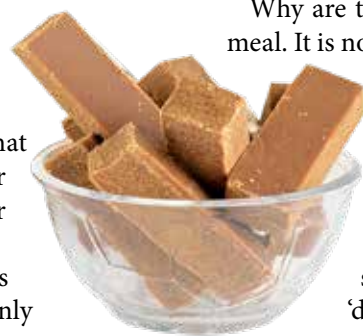
CIVIL SOCIETY REVIEWS

NO meal is ever complete without something sweet to round it off. But what should it be? On a leisurely day, after a sumptuous repast and plenty of time to spare, the spirit is weak and the longing for dessert could lead to all kinds of excess from *gulab jamuns* to ice-cream to chocolate cake or whatever.

Such indulgence regularly would, however, be insane. For their own good, no one should be soaking up so many calories and that too after a full meal. The sugar alone would be disastrous. There are also reality checks that come with working days. There could well be the inclination, but never the time or for that matter the opportunity.

So, how should an office lunch end with the greater satisfaction of something sweet but not so overpowering that you fall into a post-prandial slumber? Is there that little something that can possibly be packed into your tiffin? What is it that you can nibble once dinner is over at home and it is already close to bedtime?

Realizing that these are serious and troubling questions that affect most of us, we decided to look around, as only



Civil Society Reviews can, for healthy but tasty alternatives to sugary closures. We realized we would have to find worthy substitutes for standard decadent favourites. They would have to be good but memorable too. Above all, they would have to be satisfying in just a couple of pieces. We were in search of the two-bit dessert.

COCONUT CANDY High on our list is Coconut Candy from Farm Made Foods. This is an easy one because we had been having it for some time at home. It comes in 200-gm packs of 12 bars. Each bar is about one and a half inches long and square with a width of about a quarter of an inch.

Why are these dimensions important? A single bar is perfect after a meal. It is not too much and not too little. If you happen to be overcome with greed, another bar will not be too much and will do no harm either. But so tasty is this confectionery that you must exercise self-restraint. It is a good idea to stop with the first bar. Don't yield to temptation.

This is traditional coconut candy made from pure gram flour, pure ghee and completely natural coconut blossom sugar. It has a low glycemic index and is supposed to be 'diabetic friendly'. It comes in a trendy cardboard box with

declarations like 100 percent natural, no chemicals, no preservatives.

Coconut Candy is perhaps especially good because it comes out of a slow business built on a whole ecosystem of love, care and respect for the environment. Farm Made Foods, based in Tamil Nadu, are primarily in the egg business.

The eggs are excellent and after having them for some months we connected with the company to get to know a thing or two about how the business runs and what inspires the people behind it. We were more convinced that we were onto something special. (See *Civil Society* August 2022.)

We learnt that chickens need a happy, stress-free atmosphere to produce truly nutritious eggs. It won't do to treat a hen as though she is an egg producing machine. Chickens need space to scratch around and generally hang out in the open instead of being cooped up as they invariably are in the poultry business. As a consequence of being cheerful, they produce fewer eggs. But if you are a slow business that is just fine.

Coconut trees are a natural part of such a gentle and harmonious setting. Coconut Candy is a byproduct that follows. Its unique taste is undoubtedly the result of it being made with traditional flourishes and ingredients. Like the eggs, it comes out of a slow lane and not a machine in an assembly line.

Coconut *laddoos* are also made, but we haven't tried them. We suggest you check out farmmadefoods.com.



CHIKKI Nothing beats a piece of *chikki* as a healthy sweet conclusion to a meal. It is easy to store and a small piece is all you need. Carry it with a packed lunch or nibble on it after a home meal. Whatever you do with *chikki* works.

Traditional *chikki* is made either with groundnuts or sesame seeds. Jaggery is common. But there are variations as well. For instance, we have come across coconut *chikki* which holds out the promise of being a certified entirely organic product. Produced in Gujarat and marketed from there, a small 100 gm pack comes for ₹84 and is available in stores.

Indyo Organic packages and markets organic peanut and sesame *chikki*. Each serving size is 100 gm. The packs carry certification stamps from Jaivik Bharat and India Organics, which essentially means it has been through some degree of evaluation.

The company says that it ensures 'natural inputs, ingredients and techniques' are used for its *chikki* and other food products instead of pesticides and chemical fertilizers. It believes in sustainable agriculture.

Chikkis are very much what they are: nuts or sesame in jaggery and ghee. If an organic version is available, it makes for a better choice. Either way, *chikki*, if eaten in moderation, is light, nutritious and tasty — and sweet.

MASALA JAGGERY It can be had after a meal as a digestive. Marketed as Mithaas by Bugyaal, it is iron-rich jaggery powder blended with black and white sesame seeds, ginger, cardamom, fennel and carom seeds.

Located in Uttarakhand, Bugyaal's story is that it wants to protect the heritage of the mountain state and make the goodness of the Himalayas accessible to people in cities.

Its mission is to create livelihoods for women artisans and farmers and give them the opportunity to be financially independent, especially so after the pandemic, which has thrown small rural households into disarray. As Bugyaal builds itself into a brand it expects the women it connects to be the ambassadors of their traditions.

Masala Jaggery is available in select stores but we suggest you check out bugyaalindia.com for many more products.

Healthy desserts based on traditional recipes exist in communities across the country. It is just a few of them that are making it to shop stores, packaged and ready to eat. Many more

are passed on within families. Civil Society Reviews will be looking for them and bringing them to our readers in the belief that even in these calorie-conscious times the right sweetness is needed. ■



JAGGERY BITES This one comes to us for the first time from Nature's Soul, a store in Defence Colony which is packed from ceiling to floor with organic products. We've tried Jaggery Bites and the quality seems excellent.

Each Jaggery Bite is a small square consisting of goji berry, mulberry, almond and coconut all made to merge together with jaggery. It is packed with nutrition. There is also plenty of roughage. No sugar is added.

Goji berry is counted among superfoods and provides Vitamins A and C. Mulberry and almond belong in the same league. The jaggery provides the healthy sweetness you are looking for. It is better than sugar.

Just one Jaggery Bite is as much as you are likely to need to satisfy that sweet tooth. We were okay with one. A second one could be filling, which makes it the perfect quick sweet after a meal.

Jaggery Bites come in a tall bottle with a net weight of 500 gm for ₹650. There are many pieces in the bottle and chances are that they will last through the month unless you have a go at them every day.

WHERE ARE WE BEING READ?

Civil Society is going places...

Udupi, Koppal, Palakkad, Tenneru, Taleigao Plateau, Kothrud, Kutch, Porbandar, Chamoli, Lohit, Bhavnagar, Ahwa, Sonipat, Tiswadi, Amritsar, Dehradun, Sabarkantha, Valsad, Sirsa, Erode, Hamirpur, Aizwal, Kinnaur, Dhanbad, Dumka, Palamu, Shimla, Chamarajanagar, Haveri, Tezu, Bellare, Madikeri, Malappuram, Jhabua, Amravati, Kolhapur, Osmanabad, Bishnupur, Mysuru, Dimapur, Rajsamand, Mokokchung, Mayurbhanj, Bathinda, Barmer, Hoshiarpur, Jhalawar, Auraiya, Farrukhabad, Lakhimpur Kheri, Pratapgarh, Burdwan, Murshidabad, Pauri Garhwal, Cuddalore, Nungambakkam, Malda, Bharatpur, Sivaganga, Kancheepuram, Varanasi, Porvorim, Kanyakumari, Perambalur, Pudukkotai, Shahdol, Panjim, Thoraiakkam, Tiruvannamalai, New York, Bardez, Nalgonda, Domalguda, Changlang, London, Avittathur, Itanagar....

Civil Society

A cottage in Misty Woods

SUSHELA NAIR

IT was 3 pm when we zoomed into Misty Woods Resort in Kakkabe in Kodagu district of Karnataka. Set in the midst of 120 acres of coffee, cardamom, and pepper plantations, it is a private haven that caters to vacationers. Nestled within one of the most picturesque parts of the Western Ghats, these mountain ranges are known as Karadi Moole. Kakkabe was once the largest producer of honey, but its current attraction is its natural beauty.

We were taken to our cottages in a vehicle which later ferried us to the restaurant. Winding pathways lead to 40 cottages with names like Mansion House Cottage, Vernacular Cottage and Fairytale Cottage, sprinkled across the plantation property. The cottages are built aesthetically, using brick and wood, and have spacious rooms and large attached bathrooms. They have the feel and comfort of a luxury resort, the warmth of a home and are a step closer to the greens and browns of nature. But what sets the resort apart is the warmth and hospitality of its hosts, Viji John and his wife, Meena.

The cottages are enchanting, comprising a private balcony from where one can get an eyeful of the varying shades of this green landscape. You can sit for hours in the balcony sipping cups of steaming coffee in between nibbles of *samosas* and watch the clouds play hide-and-seek with the peaks. Or nurse a drink with your favourite book in hand, soaking in the heavenly aroma of the coffee plantation and withdraw from the maddening world.

Misty Woods is an excellent base from where to explore the delights of Coorg district. "The experiences here encompass a broad canvas — special species of birds, the drive up to the sights nearby, long invigorating walks across the plantation, nature trails, berry picking during the season, a dip in the rivulet, and a picnic by the stream. Or you can scale Kodagu's highest peak, Thadiyendamol, visit the holiest Kodava shrine — Iguthappa Temple — or the ancient Nalkunad Palace or trek to the scenic Kabbe Pass and Chelvara Falls," says Viji, managing director of Misty Woods.

Getting around the verdant property is itself a workout and can definitely whip up one's appetite. There are activities galore to keep you occupied — cycling, badminton, swimming, campfires and indoor games. You can stroll through the property and follow plantation trails. The best way to unwind in this glorious outdoors is to amble around leisurely. The view from every angle is spectacular.

As we went on a guided tour of the sprawling plantation, we stumbled upon a sparkling waterfall hurtling down the rocks, gushing



An eco-friendly cottage in Misty Woods



A breathtaking view of the Western Ghats

streams and rivulets all around and mossy nooks gurgling with crystal springs.

We were fortunate to be in Kodagu during the Kodava Hockey Festival in summer. We watched Kodavas battle with their sticks at this unique hockey tournament held on their home turf. With over 300 clans participating, the tournament is recognized as one of the largest field hockey tournaments in the world and finds mention in the *Limca Book of Records*.

Just a hop, skip and jump from Misty Woods is the Nalkunad Palace, situated in Yavakapadi village in the heart of the Thadiyendamol range. It was constructed by Dodda Raja Veerendra, the king of Kodagu, in 1792. The palace, with 12 magnificent pillars and walls adorned with beautiful carvings, is associated with many a tale of yore. It is sometimes used as a starting point by trekkers.

Nalkunad Palace was the royal hunting lodge and summer home of the Kodava kings. A double-storeyed structure with a conical roof, the decrepit building has intricate wooden friezes and wall murals. The local Kapala tribals were brought here by the king from Kerala to look after the palace. Located three and a half kilometres from Kakkabe, the palace is quite

neglected, with just a caretaker to look after it.

For those who have a head for heights, Thadiyendamol is a trekkers' paradise. The trek to Thadiyendamol peak (5,729 ft), the tallest peak in Kodagu, offers an enchanting view of green-topped hills and lush valleys. It is the second highest peak in Karnataka after Mullaiyanagiri in the Baba Budan Range. Kakkabe, a small town 35 km from Madikere, gives access to the highest peak in Kodagu. Though most of the trek is gentle, the last stretch is a steep climb. From the peak you can view the distant Arabian Sea on a clear day and the spellbinding beauty of Kodagu all around. The ideal time for trekking is immediately after the monsoon, from September to December.

From the resort, we went to the nearby Padi Iguthappa, the most important temple in Kodagu. Worshipped as 'one who gives grain' (*iggu* is Kodava for grain, *thappa* means to give), Iguthappa is the real rain god. Such are his powers that he can fulfil any wish — an engineering degree, a child, or the girl/boy of your dreams! Thousands congregate here for the Kaliyarchi Festival in March when the god is taken on a procession to the top of Mallama Betta and reinstalled in the temple, followed by ceremonial dances. The official date of the harvest festival, Huthri, is also determined here. Another interesting festival is the Tula-bhara, when devotees place themselves on gigantic scales and donate an equivalent weight of grains to the temple. ■

FACT FILE

How to get to Kakkabe
Bengaluru: 260 km
Mangaluru: 170 km
Nearest railhead: Mysuru - 127 km
For bookings: Misty Woods - 99023 54089

Small producers and artisans need help to reach out to sell their wonderful products. They can't advertise and they don't know to access retail networks. *Civil Society* happily provides information about what they have on offer, their skills and how you can get to them.

MAHUA FOR HEALTH AND WEALTH

The versatile mahua tree is a gift from nature.

It yields wealth in many forms — as food, fodder, oil and medicine. It holds the soil together and is a home for birds and bees. No wonder it is revered by forest communities.

Making full use of mahua's many uses is Wunder Greens, a micro-enterprise which works in the Bundelkhand region of Uttar Pradesh. The tree is being systematically axed, mostly to provide fuel for making bricks. To conserve the tree and provide an income to local people, Wunder Greens has made a range of food and personal care products from flowers and oil.

Mahua Cacao Bites

is a nutrient-dense snack which contains natural sugars and minerals from mahua, plus flavanoids, antioxidants and tryptophan from cacao.

Another product, called murka, has its origin in traditional cuisine. It is made of mahua flowers and sesame seeds, and is rich in calcium, iron and omega acids. Wunder Greens also offers personal care products including cold-processed soaps, face oil, body lotion and salve — all containing mahua seed oil.

Contact: Ritu Singh
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 Email: sinh.ritu@gmail.com;
 instagram: <https://www.instagram.com>



A spoon of delectable ghee always uplifts the taste of Indian food. More so if it is made the traditional way from the milk of *desi* cows, slow-churned and filtered delicately to yield a smooth, aromatic ghee.

Organik Singh, a micro-enterprise started by Sandhya Singh and her son, Siddharth, claims to make such ghee from a 112-year-old recipe, developed by Draupadi Devi, Siddharth's great grandmother.

"Ours is an A2 Gir Cow Bilona Ghee," says Siddharth. "My grandmother used to make this in our village. It is our first product. Gir cow ghee is rich in Vitamins A, E, D and K, which boosts your body's defensive mechanism against viruses and infections. A2 is a special protein which is found in mother's milk."

The ghee is made by first turning milk into curd and then slowly churning it to separate the butter which is then boiled to convert it into ghee. Cows on Organik Singh's farm, near Aligarh, are free to graze and they can feed their calves too. The ghee is attractively packed in glass bottles. Organik Singh's ghee is certified organic. It contains no preservatives, additives or colour. "Our mission is to revive lost traditional practices and make sure the raw materials used are chemical-free," says Siddharth. His septuagenarian great grandmother is Organik Singh's best brand ambassador.

Contact: Siddharth Singh; Mobile: 8384061380
 Website: www.organiksingh.com

CASH FROM TRASH



Dress up your fridge with quirky magnets made of waste paper by children with disabilities. There are many faces to pick from: Baby Monkey, Mr Incredible, Spongebob, Finding Dory and more. Avacayam Foundation, an NGO in Delhi, calls itself an employment programme for people with all kinds of disabilities. Avacayam has a placement for you, no matter your disability.

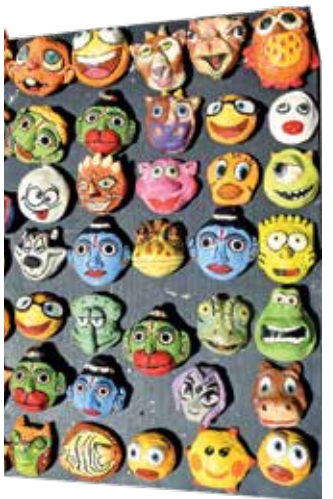
It all began when parents asked Madhumita Puri, founder of Avacayam, what their children would do after being educated. Who would employ them? That question got Puri to think and she introduced skill training in her foundation.

Flowers being dumped from temples into the Yamuna caught her eye. Today those flowers are recycled into *agarbattis* in a range of fragrances: citronella, jasmine, rose and more. The foundation got seriously involved in the circular economy, converting trash into cash. There are also recycled grow bags, laundry bags, recycled plastic bags and pouches. There are 'jhola' bags and bags made from old jeans. Also, coasters, stationery and doll bookmarks. Take your pick.

From plastic and paper to old clothes and furniture, Avacayam recycles it all. You can join in too. Collect your recyclable waste and give them a call.



Contact: Avacayam Foundation
 Mobile: 9650058713
 Website: www.avacayam.com




A DOLLOP OF ANCIENT GHEE



So you want to do your bit but don't know where to begin? Allow us to help you with a list especially curated for *Civil Society's* readers. These are groups we know to be doing good work. And they are across India. You can volunteer or donate or just spread the word about them.


GIVING PEACE A CHANCE

 History for Peace is a network of educators and members of civil society from across South Asia. History for Peace project, anchored in Kolkata, serves as a platform for discussion, debate and the exchange of ideas pertaining to teaching and learning of history for peace and mutual understanding. The objectives of the project are: exploring multi, inter-disciplinary and creative approaches with emphasis on the arts; developing and collating resources; addressing bias and prejudice; promoting initiatives and exchange of ideas across South Asia and teacher development.

History for Peace conducts an annual conference as well as shorter talks and workshops through the year. In these trying times the project is working towards inspiring teachers to look beyond textbooks and bring pertinent conversations into high school classrooms.

Your support will go a long way towards spreading their work across the country. To contribute please write to info@historyforpeace.pw

BASIC HEALTHCARE WHERE IT MATTERS

 What do people in remote and underserved locations do for primary healthcare services? Getting to a facility often means forgoing daily wages and travelling long distances. There are also cultural and linguistic divides.

But what if healthcare could be locally available, accessible and low-cost? Six AMRIT Clinics in south Rajasthan seek to achieve just this. Set up by Basic HealthCare Services, a non-profit, they are proof of the concept that small local facilities are effective.


AMRIT Clinics are located

within the community and run by empowering nurses and local health workers who are supervised by a physician. Telemedicine is also used. The doctor visits a clinic once a week but is available for consultation 24x7. Each clinic serves a population of 90,000.

Outreach services include antenatal care, postnatal care of mothers and newborns, follow-up of chronic patients, and community education. Social contracts with private hospitals enable referral care. Patients pay small user-fees for clinical services. You can donate to Basic Health Care Services or volunteer with them.


Visit them online at bhs.org.in or call +918003696391

BANISH DRUGS AND COUNSEL ADDICTS

 With many years of experience SPYM (Society for Promotion of Youth and Masses) provides services in substance use, de-addiction and prevention. They started their first Drug Treatment Centre in 1985. Since 2010, SPYM has also been the largest shelter management organization in Delhi, taking in homeless children, women, men and senior citizens on a daily basis. They run 65 shelters in the city along with drug de-addiction centres for juveniles, adults and the homeless. SPYM works as the Technical Support Unit of National AIDS Control Organization. You can volunteer with SPYM or donate to them.

<https://spym.org> | info@spym.org
011-41003872

EMPOWER WOMEN, FIGHT FOR CHILD RIGHTS


 Based in Ahmedabad, the Friends Care Foundation's forte is empowerment of women and child rights. The foundation supports orphanages, education, the elderly, as well as relief and

medical programmes.

They raise funds for patients in V.S. Hospital and Civil Hospital in Ahmedabad. Friends Care Foundation also organizes distribution drives for ration kits, footwear, clothes, sanitary pads and food. They are currently running a fundraiser to aid widows in Ahmedabad and for their Covid relief programmes. You can volunteer for one of their projects for women, children, or for medical access. You can also donate to their efforts.

www.friendscarefoundation.org
care@friendscarefoundation.org
+91-7600999977


PITCH IN FOR BETTER COMMUNITY HEALTH

 Nada India Foundation works to end drug addiction and prevent non-communicable diseases (NCDs). Its aim is to enhance community health and well-being. Set up in 1999, Nada runs the Nada NCD Prevention Network which consists of grassroots organizations working on NCD prevention and risk factors. Nada India organizes workshops on social work intervention for the prevention and control of NCDs. They help rehabilitate people with addiction issues in Delhi-NCR through various events, workshops and also marathons. They also work on skill-building and sensitization.

Nada India undertakes research as well. They have researched the efficacy of auricular acupuncture as well as issues such as child rights, substance abuse, and adolescent health. You can donate to their efforts or volunteer with them.

<https://www.nadaindia.info>
nadaindia@gmail.com | +91 - 9810594544

BRIDGING GAPS IN BENGAL'S VILLAGES

 AHEAD (Addressing Hunger, Empowerment And Development) is engaged in


sustainable rural development. The NGO, founded in 2008 and based in Kolkata, works in 12 out of 18 districts in West Bengal and in one district each in Jharkhand and Odisha.

AHEAD partners panchayats and zilla parishads and engages village communities in implementing its programmes. It also helps local village institutions to provide last-mile support to government programmes. AHEAD trains villagers in growing food and improving nutrition through farming in homesteads or on fallow land. It also offers training in farm-based livelihoods.

AHEAD has an after-school programme which teaches students how to create community-based livelihoods. Teachers are also trained in using creative means to enliven textbook-based learning. You can donate or volunteer with AHEAD.

<http://www.aheadinitiatives.in>
ahead@aheadinitiatives.in
+91-033-40670369

SUPPORT A CHILD IN NEED OF HELP

 Ray of Hope was set up as a social service organization in Hyderabad by eight engineers from the IITs and IIMs. They aid and support Pocharam village in Telangana and have helped 200 orphaned children with housing, schooling, medical and recreational facilities. They also work with visually-impaired children to facilitate their education.

Through their Child Sponsorship Initiative Scheme, an individual or group can support a child financially to pay for tuition, housing, hearing aids and speech therapy. Or well-wishers can spread the word. They have plans to build a school in Pocharam village.

You can donate to their efforts or sponsor a child through their sponsorship initiative.

<http://rayofhope.in/>



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TATA STEEL FOUNDATION

Skilling programmes at the **Foundation**, are poised to **Reimagine** and unlock potential

Our journey of partnering the nation's aim to build a technically skilled youth base, is now in its 10th year. Our Industrial Technical Institutes of Tamar (from 2012) and Jagannathpur (from 2017) have ushered a rigor in this vocation among rural youth and in particular, girls from tribal belt in Jharkhand. The need is strong, and so is the appetite to create more bases (the third at Chandil, from 2022), to provide many more trained hands for a resurgent India.

**More than 650 youths
trained and the
journey continues!**

