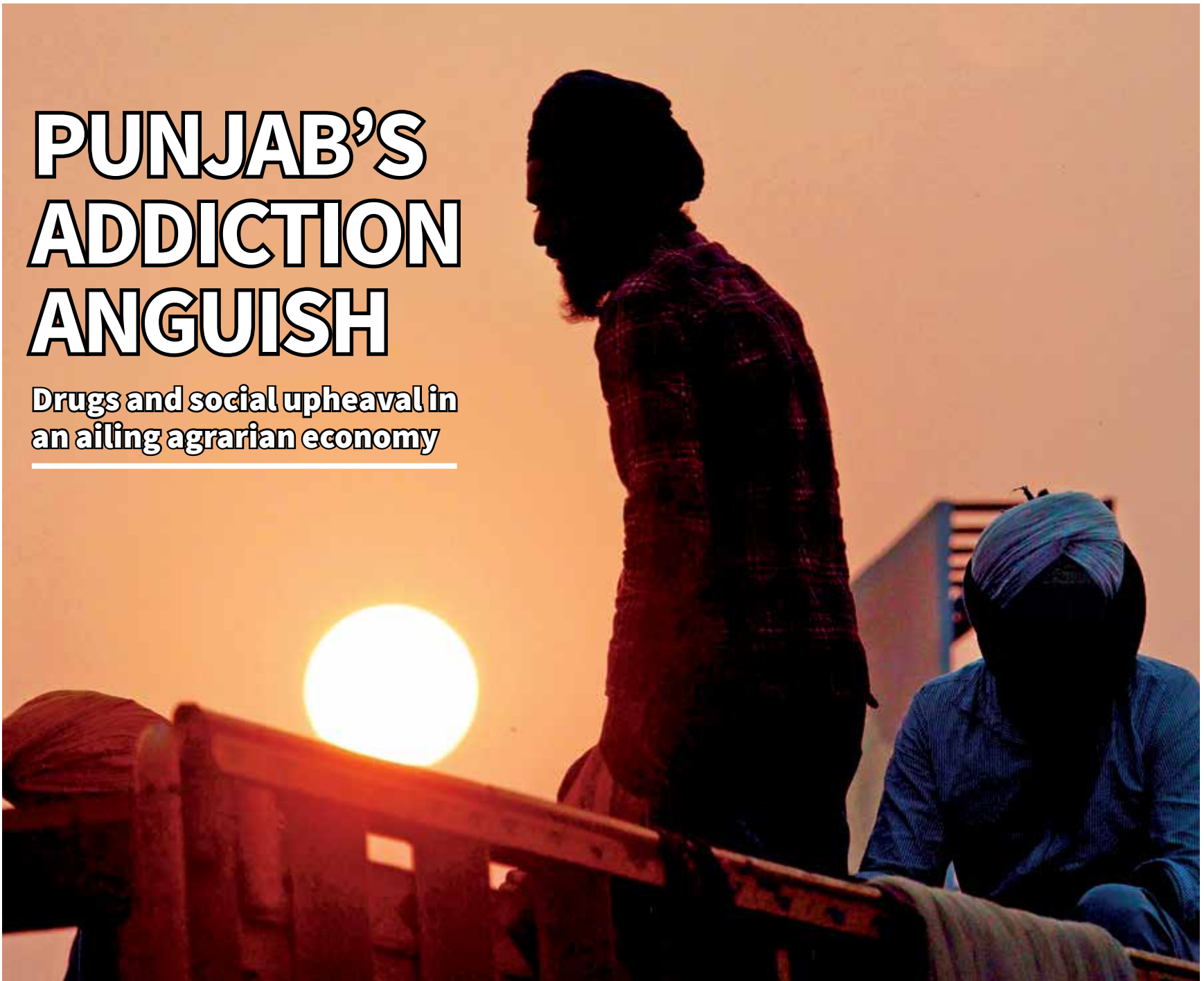


Civil Society

PUNJAB'S ADDICTION ANGUISH

Drugs and social upheaval in
an ailing agrarian economy



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IN CIVIL SOCIETY EVERYONE IS SOMEONE



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IN THE LIGHT

SAMITA RATHOR



LETTERS



Farm reforms

Your interview with Devinder Sharma on agricultural reforms was great. Which government is being talked about? The only one I know is snug in the endlessly greedy pockets of companies.

Kamal

Excellent interview. Most informative. Indeed revelatory.

Mani Shankar Aiyar

Riverfronts and rivers

I totally agree with the view expressed by Venkatesh Dutta in his column, 'Riverfronts kill rivers'. I have generally observed that in the name of development, politicians and some government agencies really spoil the surrounding environment. The flora and fauna are lost. Such changes are only for aesthetic reasons. While they may look good, in reality, in the long run, there is more devastation to

property and human life by way of floods. In most cases, the government does not involve local people in finding out how best any problem can be solved.

M.K. Suresh

Riverfront projects in India have become concrete-intensive initiatives which try to use concrete to reshape the rivers. These are not restoration projects. These projects do not include public consultations either. These are driven by consultants and architects, who do not envision the implications and various linkages of what is being done. The Musi river in Hyderabad is also under severe strain because of a riverfront project and the

encroachment that has resulted.

Dr Narasimha Reddy Donthi

Ahimsa Musings

In her column, 'Ahimsa Musings', Rajni Bakshi recalls how JP chose not to respond with violence when his supporters were fired upon in 1974. In Sanskrit, it is called *atmanangbiddhi*, which means understand or know yourself. When we understand ourselves, we understand others.

Tapas Chatterjee

Being alone

As one who is well in the throes of what Kiran Karnik in his column calls "the empty nest syndrome", I can only commend his piece for bringing the increasing problem

of India's ageing population to the fore, so long swept conveniently under the carpet of a 'youthful India'. The problem, as Mr Karnik points out through various statistics, is only going to get worse if not addressed urgently by relevant social engineering agencies.

One such is the rise of a new real estate that has been spurred by the emotionally dependent, financially independent elder who is feeling increasingly isolated. I refer to the burgeoning market of 'senior living' accommodation. Shedding the nomenclature of 'old age homes', they range from pretty expensive to very luxurious, feeding off the guilt of well-placed adult children who can now find a way of looking after their parents without sacrificing their careers whether in India or overseas; and of providing financially self-sufficient senior citizens a better, social option without them feeling obligated to live a life 'over the hills' that is lonely and boring.

Amit Kumar Bose

Srinagar facelift

Your story, 'Polo wow! But Central?', took me back to Central Market in Srinagar when it was a much loved destination for us as children. We loved the silver filigreed trinkets, *papier mache* and woodwork products at affordable prices apart from the embroidered shawls and *pherans*. The market had a charm. I was sad to see the state of the market the last time I visited Kashmir.

Anjoo

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COVER STORY

PUNJAB'S ADDICTION ANGUISH

The drug problem in Punjab has been well known but inadequately understood. An original and insightful book by Dr Anirudh Kala brings the many pieces of a complex jigsaw together.

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Narcotics and the Green Revolution

PUNJAB's problems have been in plain sight for a long time and it should be a reason for serious concern that precious little has been done to understand them, let alone make a meaningful effort to fix them.

Drugs and addiction top a long list of problems that have their roots in a neglected economy and a disintegrating social fabric. The promise of the Green Revolution has long ago given way to its deleterious effects.

Politicians of all denominations are of course culpable. But what about others? Journalists, professionals and academicians can't be said to have done enough.

Dr Anirudh Kala, a psychiatrist based in Chandigarh, has shown how it is possible to speak up with conviction and facts. He has done a book on addiction and by placing it on the canvas of Punjab done a great service by the troubled state.

Drawing on his practice of many years, Dr Kala delves deep into the reasons for the spread of drugs in Punjab and the hopelessness of the young. An important aspect of the book is why moralistic positions and policing don't serve to curb drug use. It is the deeper reasons that have to be addressed.

So impressed were we with *Most of What You Know About Addiction is Wrong* and the integrity of Dr Kala's voice that we decided to offer the book to our readers as a lengthy extract for our cover story.

The interview of the month is on palliative care. Far from the headlines, Dr Gayatri Palat has been helping an initiative in Telangana which has resulted in palliative care centres being set up as part of the government's health system in each of the 33 districts in the state. There is a model here for others to follow.

The cheetahs brought from Africa have been in the news and we have a detailed story on the goings-on in the Kuno National Park where they were introduced in an ambitious effort which now, it appears, is falling apart.

It seems we have become inured to young students dying by suicide in Kota in Rajasthan where they go to prepare for competitive examinations. Are the examinations too tough or are the conditions in Kota mind-numbing and oppressive? We have put together a list of deaths in the past six months and the picture is alarming.

On a happier note we have bird walks for children and how you can get Alphonso mango pulp round the year right from Ratnagiri. Take a look at our Living section with these offerings.

Mani Shankar Aiyar

<p>Publisher Umesh Anand</p> <p>Editor Rita Anand</p> <p>News Network Shree Padre, Saibal Chatterjee, Derek Almeida, Jehangir Rashid, Susheela Nair, Kavita Charanji</p> <p>Photographer Ashoke Chakraborty</p>	<p>Layout & Design Virender Chauhan</p> <p>Cartoonist Samita Rathor</p> <p>Write to Civil Society at: A-16 (West Side), 1st Floor, South Extension Part 2, New Delhi -110049. Phone: 011-46033825, 9811787772 Printed and published by Umesh Anand on behalf of Rita Anand, owner of the title, from A-53 D, First Floor,</p>	<p>Panchsheel Vihar, Malviya Nagar, New Delhi -110017. Printed at Samrat Offset Pvt. Ltd., B-88, Okhla Phase II, New Delhi -110020</p> <p>Postal Registration No. DL(S)-17/3255/2021-23. Registered to post without pre-payment U(SE)-10/2021-23 at Lodi Road HPO New Delhi - 110003 RNI No.: DELENG/2003/11607 Total no of pages: 32</p>	<p>Advisory Board</p> <p>R. A. MASHELKAR</p> <p>ARUNA ROY</p> <p>NASSER MUNJEE</p> <p>ARUN MAIRA</p> <p>DARSHAN SHANKAR</p> <p>HARIVANSH</p> <p>JUG SURAIYA</p> <p>UPENDRA KAUL</p>	<p>Get your copy of Civil Society</p> <p>Have Civil Society delivered to you or your friends. Write to us for current and back issues at response@civilsocietyonline.com.</p> <p>Also track us online, register and get newsletters</p> <p>www.civilsocietyonline.com</p>
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Dr Gayatri Palat on a unique initiative across Telangana

Photo: Civil Society/P. Anil Kumar



Dr Gayatri Palat: 'We monitor quality at the state and district levels. There is delivery and monitoring as well'

'Palliative care is integral to a caring health system'

Civil Society News

New Delhi

MEDICINES deal with diseases. But patients coping with pain or the loss of bodily functions need more rounded care to help them along. From administering morphine to providing compassion and empathy in periods of dark despair, palliative care is now being regarded as a specialty that cannot be ignored whether it is for cancer or strokes or crippling amputations and loss of bodily functions.

The challenge is to transform palliative care from being a boutique offering to integrating it with the main healthcare system.

The Telangana government has shown what is possible by opening palliative healthcare centres in each of the state's 33 districts and making them a part of the health budget. It has institutionalized palliative care in the MNJ Cancer Hospital in Hyderabad. Doctors and nurses have been trained in large numbers and oriented to palliative care. Postgraduate courses are now available.

Dr Gayatri Palat, an anaesthetist, helms the district programme in

addition to teaching palliative care at the postgraduate level. *Civil Society* spoke to her to find out how the programme has grown and matured since 2017 when it was started.

Q: You have been running palliative care centres for some time in Telangana. How extensive is the network of centres? For how long has this effort been on?

We work with the government of Telangana and we have established a palliative care programme in every district of Telangana. We have 33 districts and we have an in-patient palliative care centre in each district together with supportive home-care services, which includes the availability of opioid medications, like morphine.

Now we are at a stage where patients undergoing treatment in Hyderabad in a major cancer hospital go back to their districts, either after treatment or in between, and we can always refer them to a district centre. And they will continue to get care and support from a trained team of doctors and nurses in the district centre closest to their homes. It will include pain relief with oral morphine. There will be no need to

come here to Hyderabad for that. In this way we have provided universal access to palliative care in Telangana.

Q: Is it one centre per district?

Yes. It's a tertiary-level centre with in-patient quality care. And more work in the community by way of an extensive home-care programme. When patients are very sick, they move to the district hospital for in-patient care. But when they're better, they go back to their homes and are supported by the home-care programme.

ASHA workers and ANMs at the Primary Health Centres (PHC) have been given some basic training. They have been told that if a patient is in pain and needs palliative care they should inform the palliative care team at the district hospital. And so, they link with the district hospital. It's not that we have doctors specialized in palliative care in every PHC. Instead, the PHC doctors are trained in the basics of palliative care. And if they need help, they go to the secondary-level doctor. It's a kind of network that we have.

Q: And the palliative care centres are embedded in the state's healthcare system?

That is the beauty of this programme and what makes it a very sustainable model. I don't need to raise money to run the programme. It's within the government health system. The government has officially established palliative care. We monitor quality at the state and district levels. There is delivery and monitoring as well.

Q: There must be a huge demand for palliative care.

There is a huge demand. Now that we have established the system between 2017 and 2023, our focus is on quality. In the public healthcare system, ensuring quality can be a big challenge. There will be some attrition of doctors and nurses and we will have to replace them with trained people so that the standard of the programme is maintained.

Secondly, we have to ensure that the programme is not just about patients with cancer. Even non-cancer patients who are terminally ill should have access to palliative care.

So, when you look at that spectrum of patients, it's a huge number. Our next focus will be to expand the scope of work to reach out to all those patients through capacity building of the health system and a massive awareness programme. You're right, if you look at the real numbers they are huge.

Q: And right now you are focused on cancer patients?

Right now, in the district centres, they're doing full-blown cancer. When they go to the community, the proportion changes. Universally, of the people who require palliative care, 30 percent will be patients with cancer, 70 percent are patients with non-cancer conditions. It is also so in our programme. When they go to the community, as in the villages, and they see patients who are bedridden and terminally ill, the proportion is almost similar. Cancer is only 30 percent, 70 percent is non-cancer. Among the non-cancer patients, the most common are neurological conditions — stroke, cardiovascular conditions, especially among the elderly. There's huge scope for expanding the access to care.

Q: What is a palliative care team?

Typically, when you see a patient with any serious illness, they have a physical need and also a lot of psychosocial and spiritual distress. When you talk about delivering palliative care to such patients, the need is not just physical, it's a huge need. The suffering is beyond physical. You need a multi-disciplinary team. It's not just about having a doctor. The doctor's role is, I would say, maybe 25 percent of what the suffering is about. You need doctors, nurses, counsellors and social workers to help with mental health issues. A physiotherapist is needed for rehabilitation.

Suppose you have a patient with tracheostomy. You need to live life with tracheostomy. You need an occupational therapist and a speech therapist. And then you need volunteers because when they go back to

their homes they need to live as normal a life as possible.

Q: You must now have a very large network of people. What would your pool of talent in palliative care be like?

If you look at the health workers trained — not in just some one-hour class, I'm talking about detailed training — the numbers are huge because in each of the 33 districts there are five nurses, one doctor, one physiotherapist. In addition, there is massive sensitization and training that has been undertaken at all levels of the healthcare system.

It'll easily be around 300 to 400 nurses who are working at any point of time in the state, doing just quality care full-time, not part-time. And maybe around 50 doctors working full-time in palliative care.

The state health minister, who is very dynamic, does a monthly review of our programme just like he reviews other programmes. He gives special importance to palliative care. He will do a face-to-face review, virtually, but it is very official and detailed.

Q: What kind of doctor would be in palliative care?

We don't have many specialists because it's an upcoming specialty. It was just recently that we started offering MD and DNB degrees in palliative medicine. Right now, what is happening is that either there is an MBBS doctor who undergoes more detailed training in palliative care, either a fellowship or certification course, or similarly an internal medicine or

'The beauty of the programme is that it is within the state's health system. It makes it sustainable. I don't need to raise money to run the programme. Palliative care has been officially established by the government.'

family medicine doctor who takes this up as a career. But I think the profile is going to change over the next few years because there are so many postgraduate students now who are going to pass out with a degree in palliative care.

Q: How long does it take to train a nurse or a doctor in palliative care? What do they need to learn?

Palliative care training is at three levels. The first level is palliative care approach. Every practising doctor should have this patient-centred approach of providing quality care. They should know how to talk to the patient, communicate with the patient, effectively discuss diagnosis problems. Every health worker should know that. The secondary-level training involves basic palliative care. It involves one month of training or a one-year fellowship where they practise basic palliative care. At a tertiary level you specialize in palliative medicine.

Q: And people are doing specialized degrees in palliative care?

I wear two hats here right now. Two years ago, I officially joined as a professor in the Department of Pain and Palliative Medicine, MNJ Cancer Hospital. I also work with the government of Telangana to establish the palliative care programme in the state.

In a voluntary capacity I work with the Pain Relief and Palliative Care Society. I am also associated with the Two Worlds Cancer Collaboration, a Canadian foundation, which has been helping our programme.

We have a formal department of pain and palliative medicine here in the MNJ Cancer Hospital. And we also started a postgraduate training programme in palliative medicine. We have postgraduate students who are getting trained in the new specialty since 2017.

Continued on page 8

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Q: Does a knowledge of palliative care enrich and sensitize the healthcare system? Does it make doctors and nurses better at what they do?

I think you have touched on a very important point there. The one thing they learn (apart from the medical skills) is the value of compassion and the care angle to it. That is what we try to instil in them. They see suffering from up close and we tell them how we can still help these people with compassion and empathy. And that is what they go back home with more than anything else. It percolates down the entire health system. Palliative care is integral to a caring health system.

Q: You know, we tend to see palliative care as something which is post-treatment. But surely palliative care should begin along with treatment. What is your experience in such a unique project?

In the districts they purely see patients who have done everything and are in their homes, languishing and suffering. That's the kind of patient they see there.

But what I see here in the MNJ Cancer Hospital is totally different. More than 60 to 70 percent of patients will come to my programme here in the department. They receive concurrent treatment, disease-oriented treatment. For both adults and children here, it is a well-integrated system that we have here.

'We are dealing with people who have life-limiting diseases. Most of the time in medicine we think of curing patients. But what when we can't cure? Doctors and nurses need cultural competency to help patients live the life they want.'

In my work with the Pain Relief and Palliative Care Society, we have been providing home-based care and hospice care in Hyderabad. We have 10 vans going to different parts of the city, taking care of patients in their homes. We also have an adult hospice with 20 beds and a children's hospice with 10 beds.

Our presence is here in the MNJ Cancer Hospital and in the neighbouring Nilofar Hospital, which is for children. Children born with little issues and having other serious illnesses while growing up are referred to us. And if they go back to the districts, we help these children through the public health system's programme. It is a beautiful collaborative effort with the government.

Q: How complex is your training of doctors in palliative care?

Good question. Most of the time, when we study medicine, we think of curing patients and making them all right. We never have any content on what if we can't fix the problem? What when we can't cure? This training is all about dealing with people with life-limiting or serious illnesses. And helping them live as normal a life as possible. We teach the doctors about management of various symptoms.

We teach the doctors about communication. How to talk to patients, how to discuss serious illnesses. We call it a serious illness conversation: discussing diagnosis, prognosis, end-of-life care issues, making advanced care plans. Doctors need to learn about mental health issues because we cannot refer patients to psychiatrists all the time.

Doctors and nurses need to acquire cultural competency so as to help patients live the life they wish to live. And then we also talk about spiritual care. More and more, modern medicine is talking about patient-centred care. And that is what is evolving in palliative care. ■

MAKING A TALLY OF CHEETAHS, DEAD AND ALIVE

Has the introduction of the African cats at Kuno begun falling apart?

Civil Society News

New Delhi

DEATHS of cheetahs in rapid succession at Kuno National Park in Madhya Pradesh suggest that the project for introducing the cats from Namibia and South Africa is running aground.

Five adult cheetahs and three cubs born in Kuno have so far died, practically one after the other. Four of the adults died in captivity and one was in the wild. Of the 20 cheetahs that arrived, 12 have been released into the wild after periods in captivity. Now four adult cheetahs remain in captivity and of them two or maybe three are believed to be unfit for the wild.

The project has been shrouded in secrecy after it was widely criticized by wildlife experts for being fanciful since India lacks the habitat for cheetahs. Any news that comes out of Kuno is in dribs and drabs.

The death of the fifth adult was at first attributed by technical experts involved with the project to a radio collar that the cheetah was wearing causing abrasion and leading to a fatal infection because of the rains as well as the hot and humid weather at Kuno. But shortly afterwards the government said the death was from natural causes and had nothing to do with the collar.

Many experts have questioned the viability of the cheetah project from the outset, saying that India has many other pressing wildlife concerns to be addressed. Moreover, Kuno was to be used for translocating the lions from Gir, a project which seems to have been shelved in spite of a standing order by the Supreme Court.

Now, with these deaths, the cheetah project management has come in for criticism for lacking purpose and planning. It is inexcusable that four cheetahs should have died while in captivity and monitored by CCTV cameras.

The fifth death in the wild is different. But if the purpose of the project is to have a free-ranging population of cheetahs in the wild it is not being served by obsessively monitoring them. Radio collars are used on animals for research purposes. But in Kuno, in addition to the collars, to track each cat there is a team of four and a vehicle doing 12-hour shifts 24x7.

Releasing cheetahs into the wild means allowing the cats to discover their new habitat, hunt, mate and carve out personal territory. But excessive monitoring and repeated intervention to "save" cheetahs is not allowing them to adapt to their surroundings.

The officially stated purpose of the project is to establish a free-ranging population of wild cheetahs to bring back a species that has gone extinct in India, to help save grasslands and other open natural ecosystems and then save critically endangered species like the great Indian bustard. The question now is whether these objectives are being achieved. Or if it has been turned into a project for captive breeding of cheetahs.

The action plan of the project says up to 50 percent of the cheetahs could die in the first year as they settle into their new habitat. The



Cheetahs in an enclosure while in captivity at Kuno

latest death in the wild could be accounted for in this fashion. But four other deaths have occurred in captivity, indicating inadequate management at Kuno.

When the cheetahs arrived, they were kept in quarantine in spaces that were 10m x 10m because animals in quarantine need to be confined to small spaces. Next, they were released into the hunting bomas which is a series of 10 or 11 enclosures, each of which on an average would be 600 sq m in size. Taken together, these enclosures would be about 6 sq km. All the enclosures are interconnected with gates so that the cheetahs can move between enclosures when required. But in total there was just 6 sq km available to them. Before they began being released into the wild, there were 20 adult cheetahs in this space.

"At one level, the deaths are very surprising because four of the deaths have happened in captivity. I and many of us thought the big challenge would be once the cheetahs were released. Because then they're on their own. They have to navigate a new landscape. Other predators, human beings, livestock, dogs, roads, open wells, you know — all of what India is about in the rural hinterland," says Ravi Chellam, wildlife biologist, CEO of the Metastring Foundation and Coordinator, Biodiversity Collaborative.

"The two things to note are that four of the deaths have been in captivity, not in a free-ranging situation, except for the most recent. And secondly, the period of captivity has been much longer than mentioned in the action plan," says Chellam.

"If you look at the action plan, they talk of one-month quarantine, which is an international standard. And four to maximum eight weeks in what they call the acclimatization enclosure or hunting boma. The

quarantine enclosure is really small. The first lot from Namibia came on September 17, 2022. Until mid-third week of March 2023, if I remember correctly, no cheetah had been released into the wild," explains Chellam.

"Even taking the upper limit of two months for acclimatization and one month in quarantine, by mid-December they should have been released. But the first cheetahs were released only in mid-March. And there have been subsequent releases in April, May, June and even in July," says Chellam.

"Of course, some of this involves cheetahs from South Africa, who came in mid-February. So, many of the South African cheetahs seem to have been released faster than the Namibian cheetahs," he adds.

On acclimatization, Chellam explains: "Four to six weeks is ideal. The action plan talks of up to eight weeks, beyond that was completely unjustified. The first Namibian cheetah was released in mid-March, which means 90 days or 12 weeks behind schedule."

"So, the first four adult cheetahs dying reflects, for me, lack of preparation, insufficient human resources, maybe even skills and competencies lacking. And poor planning and decision-making and a glaring lack of transparency and accountability."

Regarding interventions in the wild, Chellam says: "There is this great obsession with not allowing an animal to die. I keep repeating births and deaths are quite normal. What we need to guard against and look out for are the circumstances of the death and the cause of the death. They seem to have gotten into a frame of mind where they think animals in captivity are secure. The animals, once released, will face a whole lot of risks and threats, and that's what we need to focus on."

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Ravi Chellam

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“Pavan, I think, is the name of the male cheetah who’s been caught multiple times. Aasha is the female who has also been caught multiple times. So, in some sense, a potential situation where the animal could have got into conflict and could have died as a result has been averted by human intervention.

“There’s also another case where two pairs of males, that is, four cheetahs, got into a tussle. And one pair got the better of the other, quite badly injuring one of them. Again, the management intervened and captured the pair with the injured male so that he could be treated. If the interaction had been allowed to proceed without any intervention, we might have lost a cheetah in a free-ranging situation but this is natural. Males will fight. They’re trying to establish their territory and so on.”

THE DEATHS The deaths of four adult cheetahs who died in captivity point to poor project management. The reason given for Sasha’s death was that she had a pre-existing kidney problem. The question arises: why did India accept an animal with a disease? Also, how ethical was it to fly the ailing animal in a box across climatic zones and then place her in a completely unfamiliar habitat? Sasha had to transition from the southern hemisphere to the northern hemisphere. Did the Namibian authorities mislead India or was her condition not known at the time?

The second cheetah who died, Uday, was found moving around in a disoriented manner. But this does not explain the cause of the death. Could it be that he banged his head into a fence at one of the enclosures?

“There is still insufficient clarity, but at least it is in the public domain. A little detail that has caught the attention of people is the mention of cerebral haemorrhage. In South Africa there have been cases when cheetahs have accidentally, at high speed, banged against the fence of an enclosure. And as a result, suffered cerebral haemorrhage. So that could be a possibility, but we don’t know,” says Chellam.

The third death was of a female, Daksha. Two males were introduced to her in an attempt to get her to mate. As it transpired, she was not ready to mate. In the wild, she could have escaped the harrying males. But in the confines of the boma, she had to fight back, got injured and died.

The post-mortem of the fourth cheetah who died has revealed that the male was underweight and had pre-existing health conditions. Why would a cheetah in captivity be underweight is the question.

Chellam points to poor management on the ground and lack of purpose. “Is this project about captive breeding of cheetahs, or is it about establishing a free-ranging population of wild cheetahs? Clearly, captive breeding cannot become a priority,” he says. ■

SOCIAL COMPACT REVIEW

Companies pledge better worker rights

But most have some way to go

Civil Society News
New Delhi

WHEN the sorry plight of industrial workers was in everyone’s face during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown, some public-spirited companies of the Pune belt came together to form the Social Compact.

These companies felt it wasn’t enough to merely provide assistance to workers amid the upheaval of the lockdown, but to address the deeper reasons for their plight.

It was important for employers to publicly pledge to implement at least the prevailing laws governing workers’ rights and benefits. Most big companies would be legally compliant, but perhaps their supply chains weren’t. And merely being compliant was not enough, it was important to go further so that a more just and equitable system could emerge.

At another level, managements needed to do much soul-searching and take the path to internal reform so that workers, in addition to their rights, were seen as co-creators of a company’s wealth. The Social Compact would be a medium for achieving such systemic change as well.

Three years after it was formed is perhaps a good time to revisit the Social Compact to see how it has fared. The first-movers set out to raise the bar for industry as a whole. But how many other companies have found merit in the initiative? For an economy-wide transformation, sufficient buy-ins are needed.

Unlike corporate social responsibility (CSR), the Social Compact goes to the core of business practices. It encourages managements to reorient themselves to include workers in decision-making and

recognize that they have capacities and social and economic aspirations that go beyond the terms of employment. It calls for affirmative action and inclusive policies.

The goal was to enrol 100 companies. We learn that 60 are in — a mix of medium and large companies. The majority of them, however, have a long way to go. If a basic wage is being paid, a living wage is not. Women are being hired but in insufficient numbers. Affirmative action is the key to inclusive workplaces yet most companies

aren’t formally pledged to it. Gender-sensitive facilities and women-friendly employment terms like maternity leave are lacking. The list goes on.

The Social Compact was created with the involvement of the Aajeevika Bureau, the Centre for Social Justice and Dasra — all voluntary organizations engaged in helping workers in the unorganized sector assert their rights in dealings with employers.

Since then, the Aajeevika Bureau has conceived and incubated the Work Fair and Free Foundation which engages with companies that join the Social Compact.

Divya Varma is co-founder and director, knowledge and policy, of the foundation.

Nisarg Joshi is an associate working directly with Social Compact companies.

“In the past three years we have reached 60-plus companies and their supply chains pan-India. And the kind of recommendations that we have been pursuing with these companies have kind of, you know, triggered changes or had an impact on 55,000 workers,” says Joshi. “And if you look at the overall size of the recommendations that we have made for the 60-plus companies, it would roughly cover about



Nisarg Joshi



Divya Varma



Workers at a safety meet

300,000 workers pan-India.”

Asked what pan-India exactly means, Joshi explains: “Companies have multi-locational sites and their supply chains are spread across the length and breadth of the country. Major companies in the manufacturing and construction sector who have joined us recently are working throughout India.”

“We’ll be doing site assessments for them at these different locations and then will also try and go deeper into their supply chains as well,” he adds.

NON-DISCLOSURE But the new managements coming in, it appears, are cautious in how they proceed under the Social Compact and prefer to feel their way through unfamiliar terrain.

A majority of companies has had the Work Fair and Free Foundation sign non-disclosure agreements, which means they can’t be named nor can their involvement with the Social Compact be discussed in the public domain.

This calibrated approach appears to be in sharp contrast to the passion with which the Social Compact was conceived and launched by already socially engaged companies like Thermax, Forbes Marshall, Bajaj Auto and Godrej.

The initial impetus came from these companies and it was the peer pressure that was applied that in the beginning brought in other companies, explains Varma.

Now companies come on board because of the value they see in their association with the Social Compact. Many of them have to come to terms with social compliances. They



At a worker facilitation centre run by the Aajeevika Bureau

also deal globally and worry about their image in relation to gender equality, fair wages and inclusive workplaces.

Says Varma: “It is a combination of things. At the start, I think the basic reason companies came was that a lot of these invitations were triggered by the existing champions and they are all part of, you know, one community of industrialists. This kind of peer pressure continues to act on the bigger companies that have newly joined. So that is one reason.”

“But the second, bigger, reason, I would say, is that they are competing globally, where ESG or Environment, Social and Governance frameworks are now in place,” Varma

explains. “The ‘S’ in that is something that many of them are looking for. Environmental mandates are clear, but ‘social’ is what a lot of them are grappling with. So, we are really pitching Social Compact as a channel which will allow companies to comply with the ESG mandate.”

“It is true that the first-movers were Pune-based companies and a lot of them were Parsi family-owned companies. But now I think we’ve moved beyond that ambit to cover more publicly-owned companies. Some are also multinationals,” says Varma.

“There are four or five big names that are publicly listed,” adds Joshi. “But nearly 60 percent of the companies are not publicly listed and are medium-scale companies.”

NEW MINDSETS With the change in the composition of companies, has the emphasis shifted to regulation?

“No, I am not saying it’s regulation-driven. I am saying this one factor helps us pitch to these companies,” explains Varma. “We find a lot of second-generation leaders in these businesses who have global exposure and understand that business has to be responsible.”

“It is to this mindset that we are appealing. Even in non-family owned and management-driven companies the managers come from leading business schools where some of the social consciousness is coming in,” she adds.

Social Compact addresses the needs of companies based on their immediate priorities and the systemic changes they could make.

“We focus on six main outcomes that range from wages and safety, access to entitlements, future of work, and then a gender lens is attached to all these outcomes as well,” says Varma.

“The company will first assess itself based on these six outcomes. We then conduct a site visit and show them what it is actually like on the shopfloor,” she says.

Recommendations follow together with help in framing an action plan for their implementation within the company and in its supply chain.

“We have broadly seen a lot of companies implementing these recommendations based on what their priority is at the moment. And then they also need some sort of support to actually bring in systemic changes.”

In the long run, the Social Compact is directed at a major transformation in how companies respond to worker needs. It is not easy and change has to come incrementally given the choices managements have to make. The important thing is that a process is in place and is already beginning to be effective. ■

In Ladakh, once upon a time

Stanzin Dothon
Phey, Ladakh

THERE were days when Ladakh remained completely cut off from the rest of the country for a minimum of six winter months. People would stay indoors for most of the time and had limited sources of entertainment. Families would spend time with one another and elders shared folklore with the children connecting them to their cultural heritage and imparting lessons on harmonious coexistence with nature.

With modernization penetrating the traditional societies of this ecologically sensitive region over several decades, the folklore have become fables. To preserve these stories, Tushar Sonkar, a 26-year-old student from the National Institute of Design, Andhra Pradesh (NID), embarked on an extraordinary mission called 'Enju'. His passionate objective is to revive forgotten folklore centered around the harmonious coexistence of humans and wildlife, engaging community members in preserving this rich cultural heritage. Using hand-made puppets, which are created by Ladakhi women, he is making efforts to keep the tradition alive.

THE INSPIRATION In the Ladakhi folklore tradition, the narrator opened his act with the sentence: *Yodh yode sani* or *Yodh yodh sugle ju* which roughly means "Once upon a time" to which the children would reply, *En Ju* as an affirmation to go ahead with the story. This helped the narrator keep checking if they were awake and listening. The storytelling would go on as long as the response was heard. If there was no response, it indicated that the children had fallen asleep. As a region that is home to many endangered species, Ladakh's folklore teaches the new generation about the importance of coexisting peacefully with the diverse and fragile ecosystems surrounding them. This intrigued Sonkar so much that when, in 2021, he volunteered with the Snow Leopard Conservancy India Trust (SLC-IT), a Leh-based organization and was assisting them in training village women to make toys of felt, he thought of bringing these handmade toys and the vanishing folklore together.

Dry needle felting or needle punching is a fibre art method where unique barbed needles are used to craft felted designs or sculptures. SLC-IT has been collaborating with women in



Ladakhis with handmade toys that are used for reviving folklore

these Himalayan villages near the habitat of the snow leopard to create handmade toys that provide them a sustainable source of livelihood.

"After developing toys that can be used as puppets, we conducted pilot tests with school teachers to train them in puppet storytelling. We collaborated with the nature club of the Moravian Mission School in Leh, where students prepared a play on waste management, incorporating popular characters from Ladakhi folk stories. Another intervention was with the local food festival in the Himalayan Institute of Archaeology and Allied Sciences Ladakh (HIAAS) where SLC-IT assisted them in preparing small performances for the children in the audience. The performance aimed to raise awareness about the importance of local food and highlighted how packaged food contributes to plastic waste generation and health issues," shared Sonkar.

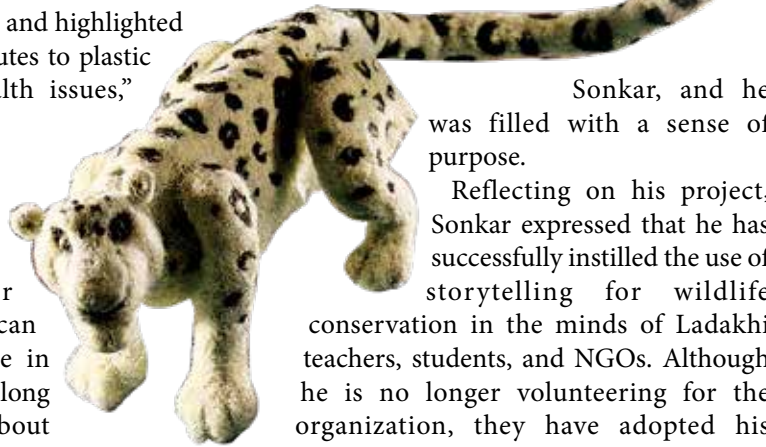
WHY PUPPETS Sonkar observed that puppets can be highly effective and engaging tools for entertainment, and they can also play a significant role in information retention for a long time. When folk stories about wildlife and ideal values are told to children using puppets representing locally found animals, a stronger emotional bond with nature develops within them. This emotional connection serves as a crucial catalyst, inspiring them to take their first step towards conservation.

While engaging closely with the women who create handmade toys, Sonkar saw that they were being used majorly for displays. He thought of using them as puppets for narrating the folklore and to build more interest and connection among the younger generation.

HOW IT BEGAN Sonkar's journey began in 2018 when he first visited Ladakh with the dream of encountering a snow leopard, locally

known as *shan*. During his stroll in Leh, he discovered the Snow Leopard Conservancy-India Trust and engaged in informative and heartwarming conversations with the organization's members. Although he didn't spot a snow leopard then, he was determined to return.

In 2021, Sonkar dedicated one and a half years to volunteering with the organization, passionately contributing to snow leopard conservation efforts. During this time, he had a thrilling experience when Dr Tsewang Namgial, the founder of the organization, invited him to experience a snow leopard sighting in a nearby village. This encounter left a lasting impact on



Sonkar, and he was filled with a sense of purpose.

Reflecting on his project, Sonkar expressed that he has successfully instilled the use of storytelling for wildlife conservation in the minds of Ladakhi teachers, students, and NGOs. Although he is no longer volunteering for the organization, they have adopted his storytelling method and continue to conduct workshops and storytelling sessions.

WHAT LIES AHEAD Sonkar aspires to explore local folk stories from around the world and examine their connections to wildlife, nature, and ecological well-being. He believes that folk stories play a vital role in connecting us to our roots and bear witness to our ancestors' lives. These tales not only depict the past but also provide valuable insights into how things have evolved. They highlight a simpler time when people lived in harmony with nature, serving as a medium for reflection and guiding us to make informed choices. ■

The writer is Charkha's Volunteer Trainer from Phey, Ladakh. Charkha Features

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THE KOTA CONUNDRUM

Amit Ukil
Kolkata

EVERYONE'S heard of suicides in Kota, an education hub in Rajasthan, where young students go to coaching centres to prepare for competitive exams. Every now and then a suicide pops up as a two-paragraph report in the newspapers. But just how many suicides have been happening?

Civil Society made a tally based on news items that have appeared and found that a shocking 16 suicides had happened between December and June this year. Even as we stopped counting news came in of another four suicides — all within 24 hours.

The students were either preparing for competitive exams like National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) or trying to cope with poor results. They were living in hostels with no apparent emotional support and dealing with pressure to perform. Chances are that they could have been saved, but in overburdened teaching shops they were alone and vulnerable.

A list of dates and names for six months is a cold reminder of much needed intervention.

JUNE 2023

June 15: Boy (21). Roshan from Samastipur, Bihar, two days after the NEET results were declared. This was his second attempt to crack the exam. He was found dead in his rented accommodation by his younger brother, who also studies in Kota.

June 12: Boy (17). Bhargav Keshav from Nandurbar in Maharashtra, preparing for IIT-JEE. He was a Class 11 student studying at a coaching centre in Kota. He hung himself from the ceiling fan in his hostel room when his parents, who were visiting him, went out to get breakfast.

MAY 2023

May 27: Girl (16). Sakshi Choudhary, a Class 11 student from Rajasthan taking coaching classes for NEET, hung herself from the ceiling fan at her uncle's residence at the Kota Thermal Power Plant complex. She left a suicide note, which did not hold anyone responsible. Her family members said mediocre results in the Class 10 board exams may have led her to take her life.

May 24: Boy (16). Aryan from Nalanda, Bihar, studying for NEET, hung himself from the ceiling fan in his room. When calls from relatives went unanswered, they notified the hostel manager, who called the police when he found the door locked from inside. The door was broken open and he was found hanging. After some letters to his girlfriend were found, it was plausibly an ended romance that may have led him to do this.

May 12: Boy (17). Navlesh from Patna, studying in Class 12 and staying at a paying guest accommodation in Kota while preparing for NEET, hung himself. A suicide note suggested he was under stress after not performing well in the regular examinations.

May 10: Boy (15). Dhanesh Kumar Sharma from Bulandshahr, UP, another NEET aspirant, was found hanging in his hostel room. The Class 11 student had come to Kota just a month before. When calls went unanswered, his parents asked another boy to look him up. That boy and the hostel warden broke into the room and found him hanging.

May 8: Boy (22). Mohammed Nasid from Bengaluru, NEET aspirant, died by suicide. He jumped from the 10th floor of a building in Vigyan Nagar in Kota. He took the drastic step a day after he appeared for the exam. His roommate said he had been upset over his performance.

APRIL 2023

April 25: Girl (19). Rashi Jain from Madhya Pradesh, preparing for NEET, died by suicide in her hostel room days before she was to appear

in the exam on May 7. The warden informed the police when there was no response from inside her room hours after she was last seen.

FEBRUARY 2023

February 24: Boy (17). Abhishek Yadav from Badaun, UP, studying for NEET. In the suicide note recovered from his hostel room, he apologized to his parents, saying he was in trouble and was under pressure due to his studies. His father blamed the coaching institute and asked why the government was not taking measures when there were such frequent cases of suicide.

February 8: Girl (17). Krishna Vishnoi from Barmer in Rajasthan jumped to her death from her hostel building.



JANUARY 2023

January 29: Boy (20). Ishanshu Bhattacharya from Dhupguri in Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal died after falling from the sixth floor of his hostel building. (However, police said this case appeared to be more of an accident than a suicide.)

January 15: Boy (17). Ali Raja from Shahjahanpur, Uttar Pradesh, preparing for IIT-JEE, was found hanging. The police broke open the door of his room at the guest house in Mahaveer Nagar in Kota, where he was staying while preparing for the exam.

DECEMBER 2022

December 22: Boy (16). Aniket from Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh.

December 12: Boy (16). Ankush Anand from Bihar.

December 12: Boy (17). Ujjwal Kumar from Bihar.

December 12: Boy (18). Pranav Verma from Madhya Pradesh.

All four were preparing for NEET.

Young, promising youths harbouring high hopes of a successful career beeline it to this Rajasthan education hub from all over India every year after their Class 10 or Class 12 board examinations. Coaching centres in Kota have, over several years, created a name for churning out candidates who crack NEET and other competitive entrance examinations, giving them the key to admission in reputed institutions all over the country.

According to the National Medical Commission, which conducts the annual NEET, 2.87 million students registered for the examination this year (2023). After the results were declared, 1.14 million candidates had qualified. But there are just 104,333 MBBS seats available in various medical colleges (government and private) in the country as of today, which translates to 11 successful candidates competing for one medical seat.

Rajasthan government records reveal 15 student suicides in 2022. Since 2011, 121 students have taken their own lives. Lack of self-confidence, the pressure of parental expectations, stress, and, lastly, financial constraints being some of the main reasons. ■

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BOOK EXTRACT

Runaway addictions haunt society. Personal lives are destroyed and families stranded in midstride. The war on drugs has met with little success. Prohibition never works.



What then can be a more nuanced and meaningful response to the simple human urge of wanting to get a little high?

In Punjab, there was opium before heroin and robust social drinking before alcoholism. There were cohesive families before fragmented landholdings. The Green Revolution brought rapid change and then economic and environmental collapse. The young went easily from despair to drugs.

Dealing with addiction goes beyond policing society. Anirudh Kala's book, 'Most of What You Know About Addiction is Wrong', is a powerful narrative on addiction and how to engage with it. He is a senior psychiatrist based in Chandigarh.

We publish an extract and recommend Dr Kala's book as standard reading for policymakers.

PUNJAB'S ADDICTION ANGUISH

The following is an edited extract from 'Most of What You Know About Addiction is Wrong' by Anirudh Kala, published by Speaking Tiger

IT is a myth that the people of Punjab have latched on to drugs only in recent years from previously having been ascetically abstinent. An Indian publication in 1928 noted that the Northeastern states and Punjab have a higher proportion of people 'habitual' to opium than the rest of India. Punjabis have always had an inherently contradictory attitude towards intoxicants. A benign tolerance has existed in uncomfortable juxtaposition with the predominant religion Sikhism's censorious approach towards all intoxicants.

Although exact figures are available only for recent years, the tolerant attitude in Punjab towards alcohol and opium did not translate into large-scale runaway consumption. There are frequent references to *amlis* (addicts) and *postis* (people addicted to poppy husk) in early Punjabi literature and these are derogatory words. At the time of the Partition each village had a small number of people who took *post* or drank regularly. On the other hand, celebratory drinking was quite another thing and enjoyed social approval then as now.

As far as the typical profile of regular opium users in Punjab till the late 1980s is concerned, it was that of a well-functioning middle-aged farmer and the prevalence, as judged from anecdotal evidence, was moderate. Distinct from that was the specific and circumscribed common practice of giving farm workers opium husk during the backbreaking harvest season twice a year so that they would work tirelessly. This practice continues even now but to a lesser extent.

However, till the 1990s, psychiatrists saw very few cases of opioid addiction in the clinics because whatever people were doing was not considered addiction by society, by families and certainly not by them, although from all accounts it certainly was. Psychiatrists sensed, when patients were brought in for a psychiatric disorder which had nothing to do with opium addiction, that addiction was a problem. Routinely filled proforma of the detailed psychiatric history of every patient included questions about intake of intoxicants and fairly common opium use in men was an incidental finding. The proforma also included questions about family history of addiction, if any. And a good number of large rural extended families, which was the norm then, had at least one male member who had been taking opium regularly for years. But even if that person was sitting in the doctor's clinic along with the patient, the psychiatrist could not have told him apart. And nobody else could have either. Punjab was then a state with a good number of high-functioning opium addicts. This was hardly a secret since there was no stigma involved.

Out of the people who took intoxicants, the middle classes and the well-to-do in the villages took pure opium, which came in the form of a dark gum; the poor in the villages took poppy husk as a light, coarse powder, brownish in colour, which was bulky but if taken in sufficient quantity over the course of the day delivered the same amount of opium to the user. The city people drank and that was all there was to it. The vast majority of people, of course, then as now, neither drank nor took any other intoxicant.

In the late 1980s, psychiatrists in Punjab started to see patients of drug addiction in their clinics in significant numbers, a trickle at first, it soon



Dr Anirudh Kala



A rehabilitation session: Those showing up at clinics were young men addicted to synthetic opioids

became a continuous flow. But these were not the usual heavy drinkers in their forties with liver problems or the moderately rich middle-aged farmers taking opium or even the poorer farmhands addicted to the bulkier *bhukki*.

Something was changing and changing fast. For one, addicts were becoming younger. Frightfully younger. Drugs were changing too. Those who were showing up at clinics were young men addicted to synthetic opioids like capsules of Dextropropoxyphene, nicknamed 'proxy', which was then commonly used as a pain reliever by surgeons and orthopaedic doctors for their trauma and post-surgery patients. The young men who were misusing these would buy them over the counter from chemists who were happy to oblige. Chemists' shops had sprouted all over Punjab like mushrooms after a spell of rain and they were fully licensed by the government. They were of course required to sell these drugs only on prescription and keep a record, both of which they did not do.

When questioned by the press, the government pleaded a shortage of drug inspectors. Chemists' shops were located in the cities, small towns and even on the narrow link roads which criss-cross the whole state. Even in remote places where you could not find a mechanic for miles if your scooter broke down, you could find a licensed chemist's shop to buy enough capsules of proxy to keep you high for a month. Nobody has ever asked the Punjab government why thousands of licences for chemists' shops were given when it was clear that the only way those many shops could have stayed afloat was by selling habit-forming medicines over the counter.

Opiates have been justifiably used for thousands of years as a highly effective treatment for cough and diarrhoea. Codeine, a natural opiate and a component of opium, has been a legitimate component of popular

cough syrups like Corex for decades. Similarly, tablets of Diphenoxylate (brand name Lomotil), a synthetic opioid, has been used as an emergency drug to stop severe diarrhoea. All three drugs have an opium-like effect if taken in high doses. And the amounts ingested by these young men were very high. Two hundred tablets of Lomotil or forty capsules of Proxyvon, or ten bottles of hundred millilitre Corex syrup a day were the average intake by patients who were now coming to the clinics. And in many cases, instead of this OR that, it was this AND that.

That was the time when people setting out on morning walks started finding parks in the cities and towns of Punjab littered with empty bottles of cough syrup and used strips of proxy capsules, and the parents of young men began panicking at the sight of empty bottles found in the vicinity of their houses.

A notable feature of the case histories as recorded in psychiatric clinics at that time was the occupation of the young patients. It often went like this:

'What does he do?'
Parent: 'Nothing.'
'What was he doing earlier?'
'Nothing.'

If one probed further into the history of the patient the following would come to light: he was in school, an average enough student, a bit stubborn and quarrelsome but that profile fit in with the overall average at that age. He had then joined a college in a nearby town, either a degree course in humanities or more commonly a diploma in hospitality or in management. Bachelor in Business Administration (BBA) was a course commonly offered. Why? Because the parents were told this was a job-oriented course and at two lakh rupees, admission was cheap. And there

were chances of going abroad, as the father would report. And why would he need a job? The family had land, nobody in the family had taken up a job before. The boy did not want to do farming because over the previous three generations, three brothers had had nine grandsons — forget the daughters because they are not counted in Punjab or anywhere else for that matter in North India for the purpose over three generations.

A study conducted at the Medical College, Faridkot in central Punjab and published in the *Indian Journal of Psychiatry* reported that between 1994 and 1998, the use of opium decreased in Punjab by approximately 40% while the use of the cheap substitute, poppy husk, increased by 55%. Over and above this the use of pharmaceutical opiates like proxy, Corex and Lomotil by youngsters, which were even cheaper and easily available doubled (Sachdeva et al, 2002). This simple observation was fraught with significance for anybody who observed the field of drug addiction in Punjab because behind those ordinary figures lay the lengthening shadow of social and economic changes plaguing the state, a slippery slope that has not levelled off till today. A short sketch of opioid intake in Punjab would approximately go like this, with a lot of overlapping and sub-regional variations:

Before 1985: Natural opioids. Mostly opium but also opium husk, colloquially called *bhukki* or *dode* — the poor man's opium, cheap but bulkier quantities needed to be taken for same degree of effect. Supply of opium was from Afghanistan and Rajasthan and that of husk from Rajasthan where it was legally grown and available to people with addiction on permits.

1985-2000: The ratio starts changing in favour of cheaper husk and pharmaceutical opioids like Proxyvon, Corex and Lomotil.

2000-07: Pharmaceutical opioids predominate and also the demography of opioid addicts changes from men predominantly aged thirty to fifty years to younger men in their twenties.

2007-2012: Heroin, both the street form called smack and the pure form called *chitta*, becomes the predominant opioid addiction in Punjab, gradually phasing out pharmaceutical opioids as the government belatedly comes down hard on chemists.

Present: Heroin continues to be the most common opioid used by 80-90% of people with opioid addiction in Punjab.

The reason which drove this change from natural to semi-synthetic and synthetic opioids, not just in Punjab but eventually all over India and many other countries, lay in America and its so-called War on Drugs. This 'war' enforced total prohibition of all drugs including opioids across the world through international treaties sponsored by the West. The most visible and also the most harmful effect of prohibition is that it converts the intoxicants that are available to people from milder and bulkier to stronger and concentrated because the latter are less likely to be detected in transit and hence easier to smuggle.

That is why whenever and wherever there is prohibition of alcohol in the world, the only alcoholic beverages that are available are those with high alcohol content like whisky, gin and vodka. Smugglers find it difficult and riskier to smuggle in beer and beer drinkers are thus coaxed into drinking whisky or vodka available in the alleys, if they want to have that weekend drink. The conundrum of prohibition comes from the simple fact that it is easier to smuggle a van filled with whisky bottles than a truck full of beer bottles into a state with prohibition.

While the international treaties that India was signatory to ban the

production, trade and even use of all drugs obtained directly from any of the three plants, opium, cannabis and coca and their chemical analogues, Indian delegates to these UN conventions, to their credit, managed to salvage *bhang* from being banned, citing traditional and cultural reasons and the fact that *bhang* is commonly used during religious festivals. How *bhang* was exempted as a concession to countries like India is in itself interesting. Without mentioning *bhang*, the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, 1961, defined cannabis as follows:

'Cannabis means the flowering or fruiting tops of the cannabis plant (excluding the seeds and leaves when not accompanied by the tops) from which the resin has not been extracted.' Cannabis, thus defined, was what was banned by the UN convention. Since *bhang* is prepared from the leaves of the same plant, it was not banned, while *ganja* or marijuana, which is extracted from the flowering tops, was. As was *charas*, which comes from the resin.

This could have been a good way for India to promote a mild and internationally legal intoxicant, which could have been easily regulated and sold in government or private stores. Most Indian states, however, took the moral path and did not make use of the pragmatic concession which its experts had managed to extract from the international

community, to provide a mild, cheap, relatively safe, and some would even say, the safest intoxicant, to people.

THE GREEN REVOLUTION

I met Narinder Kaur one August afternoon, when, despite the rain and the slush on the roads, her distraught husband brought her to my clinic on his motorcycle, all the way from their village located on the Doraha canal. She was in her early fifties and was having what appeared to be a panic attack. Her husband said she had never suffered from anything like this before. Her face was frozen with anxiety, her body so tremulous she had to be supported and she could not breathe easily. Talking clearly required effort

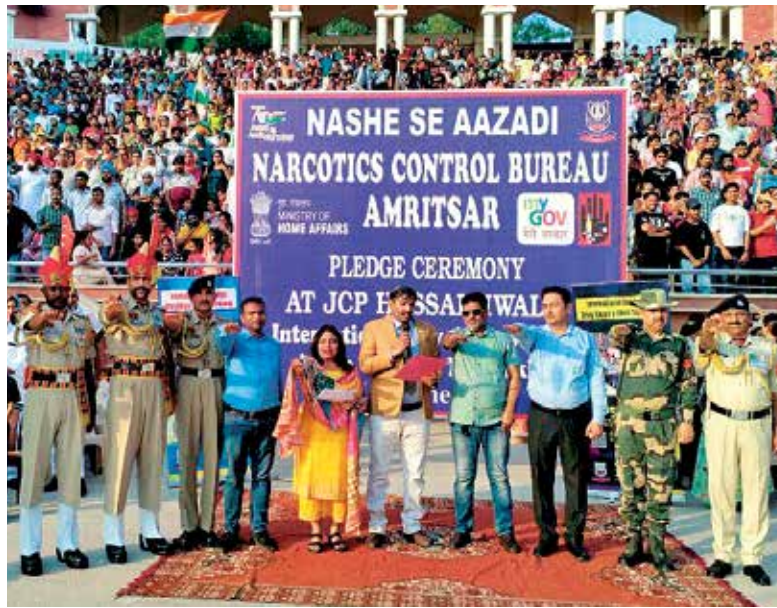
on her part.

Her husband had no idea what was happening; the village GP had told them it appeared to be a psychological problem and had sent them to me. After I sent the husband out of the room, gave her a glass of water, and an anti-anxiety tablet to keep under her tongue, she settled down quickly. When I asked her if something specific had triggered the attack, she fished out a tiny polythene pouch filled with a brownish white powder from her *kameez* (loose tunic) pocket.

To me, it became clear what had happened. Narinder was yet another mother in Punjab who had discovered street heroin while emptying her son's pockets before doing the laundry.

Mothers with young sons learnt from newspapers and television reports what a pouch of heroin looked like and prayed they would never have to see one in real life. She had not yet confided in her husband because he had unstable blood pressure and although she strongly suspected the white powder was what she feared, she was not completely sure yet. She told me later that there had been signs in her son's behaviour all along that she failed to recognize. After spending half a day in the clinic, Narinder went home symptom-free and the focus shifted to her son, Navjot, who was brought to the clinic the next morning.

Navjot, I was told, had initially refused to come. When his father confronted him with the pouch of heroin, he had shot back, 'So what? You drink half a bottle of liquor every day, don't you? I take this.' After the outburst he had clung to his mother, cried, and apologized to his



A public pledge in Amritsar: Mere policing hasn't worked

father and confessed he had started snorting smack six months back after he failed the IELTS examination. IELTS is the standard English examination those who want to go abroad on a study or immigration visa to English-speaking countries are required to take.

I had heard a lot about IELTS from my young patients, a good number of whom aspired to go to North America or the UK or Australia. In the past twenty years, on my way to work I have noticed that an IELTS coaching course is the most advertized product on the walls of the city, and this is true for the whole state of Punjab. The only large hoardings which have survived the economic slowdown are those of the IELTS coaching centres. It is difficult to find a young man/woman who does not want to go abroad for good. Narinder and her husband went on to reiterate before me what I had been hearing for years from other rural families.

Navjot's grandfather owned thirty acres of land and theirs was a relatively prosperous family in not just their own village but even in the surrounding villages too. Navjot's father had three brothers and each inherited seven and a half acres. His father and his elder brother farmed that land but, the holding being small, it was barely cost-effective. If Navjot wanted to do farming like every adult male in the family so far, he and his brother would have less than four acres each after their father passed away. Hence, the family's plan for him to get a college degree and go to Canada made sense. In Scarborough, Canada, Narinder's nephew was part owner of a petrol pump. Navjot could work at the pump till he got a better job. To pay for Navjot's college admission and the advance the travel agent demanded, one acre of land in the small town across the canal was mortgaged to an *arhtia*, a commission agent, whom the family sold their farm produce to twice a year.

But as of then, both the university degree and the visa seemed to be beyond reach. As Navjot told his parents, even though he did get ready and leave the house every morning on his motorcycle to go to the university there was really no university to go to. He had been suspended for six months after a fight with another student a while ago. He was intoxicated when he had picked the fight. He had kept the expulsion a secret from his parents. Even before that he had been irritable for months, sleeping late and waking up late, dressing sloppily which alone should have made the parents suspicious, since he had been a rather natty dresser before.

That was three years back. Navjot was in and out of heroin addiction for the next two years but after he got a job, he has been clean for over a year. He could not go to Canada because although he did get a degree eventually, that degree was not recognized in Canada. He now works as a salesman at a shopping mall that has sprung up outside the city. He commutes from his village forty-five minutes each way daily because his salary is not enough for him to rent a room in the city. But the job has certainly been a turning point. The mooring of a routine and socializing with friends from work, including a young woman from the neighbouring village he has been seeing, have been crucial in keeping him out of trouble so far. As the saying goes, 'the opposite of addiction is not sobriety but human connection'.

Equally vital is the treatment that has been continuing for three years although there were interruptions caused by relapses during the first two years. Navjot comes in for counselling and medication once in two weeks and makes it a point to say hello to me whenever he is here. He has even

referred other patients, young men like him, to me.

Narinder never had a second panic attack and has been the emotional bulwark for her son. This is the main reason things have not been as bad with Navjot as they often are with other young men in a similar situation. Relatively speaking, Navjot's is one of the feel-good stories. Most are not.

Any schoolboy will tell you that the capital of Punjab is Chandigarh but the truth is far more nuanced. Chandigarh is also the capital of the neighbouring state of Haryana while Chandigarh is neither in Punjab nor in Haryana, but a Union Territory governed by the central government. The capital of Punjab is outside Punjab! This freak arrangement has worked exceedingly well for the politicians and bureaucrats of Punjab. They get to live in a modern city as VIP guests without the headache of governing it. Chandigarh has some of the best colleges and the most advanced health care facilities in India, not to mention beautiful golf courses, a modern airport and three Shatabdi Expresses plying to Delhi in a day. Ironically, till 2011, Chandigarh had no rail connection to Punjab of which it is the capital. Unsurprisingly, hardly any senior politicians or senior officials of the Punjab government settle down in Punjab after retirement. Padma Bhushan Dr S.S. Johl is a rare exception. He is the most senior agricultural economist of the

country, a former vice-chancellor of Punjab Agricultural University and of Punjab University, former chairperson of the Agriculture Price Commission of India, director of the Central Board of Governors of the Reserve Bank of India, consultant to the World Bank and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN and the current chancellor of Punjab Central University.

Ninety-two-year-old Dr Johl talked to me on a winter morning, sitting in the sun-swept veranda of his modest house in Ludhiana. We discussed the golden days of farming in Punjab, what went wrong, the connections between the Green Revolution backtracking and addictions, and how it can all still be turned around.

The Green Revolution strategy succeeded in Punjab beyond the wildest expectations with production of grains increasing several times, especially of wheat and rice. A country plagued by chronic semi-famine became food surplus in a couple of years. The support by the central government by way of institutional mechanisms to ensure purchase of wheat and paddy at an assured minimum support price or MSP made all the difference. The system was both technology intensive and manpower intensive, the latter more so during harvesting season twice a year.

All of this happened because of the forward-looking entrepreneurial skills of Punjabis who were ready to take risks in trying out new methods. Another factor was the presence of a very large number of serving and retired army men in Punjab, which ensured a minimum educational qualification and a comfort level in handling machinery of varying degrees of complexity and a willingness to experiment with those.

These initiatives made the rural economy of Punjab a model of economic development and prosperity. Labels like 'granary of India' and 'India's bread basket' came in thick and fast. However, the new model was technology intensive and needed tractors, harvesters and other equipment. That required capital. Loans were available through banks owned by co-operative societies, but farmers were more comfortable with the *arhtias* with whom families had dealt for generations and who asked for very little paperwork. Soon, Punjab became the richest state in India with the highest per capita income in the country. The boom lasted for over three decades.



Young people joined new colleges whose degrees were not worth anything

Over successive generations, with the breaking up of large joint families even in villages, land holdings became smaller till the size of the farms stopped being cost-effective for technology-driven farming. The average farm size in Punjab at present is eight acres and only one-third of farms are over twenty acres. The water table went down every year mainly because paddy is a water-guzzling crop and while canals in the areas provided a basic level of irrigation, the large quantity of extra water required during sowing and transplanting of paddy had to be pumped out from the earth. Traditional tube-wells no longer worked because of the dip in the water table. This required the powerful submersible pumps to be sunk in deeper and deeper, which was costly and required credit. The electricity supply in rural areas was erratic and so diesel motors had to be used, making the process even costlier.

In their anxiety to maximize yield, farmers used more fertilizers which decreased the fertility of the soil and polluted the water over the years. Theoretically, industrial infrastructure is supposed to take over from an agricultural revolution after the latter has sustained a society for a fixed period. This is what happened in large parts of America, Europe and Asia and in many Indian states, including Punjab's neighbour, Haryana. The so-called Green Revolution on the scale of a revolution was not expected to last forever by any account. As predicted by experts, the gains plateaued in the early 1980s, started to decline in the '90s and by the first decade of the new millennium the party was over. In Punjab, unlike elsewhere in India and in the world, there was no industrial backup to buffer the decline. Since it is a border state, which had borne the brunt of two vicious wars with Pakistan in 1965 and 1971, Indian industrialists had mostly stayed away from investing here.

Whatever little industry was already there fled during the decade and a half of the violent, armed insurgency that gripped the state during the 1980s and the early '90s. To make matters worse, the central government offered tax benefits for starting new industries in the neighbouring state of Himachal Pradesh and as a result, many factories from Punjab shifted there.

Meanwhile, the small farmers became marginal and the marginal farmers became labourers in nearby grain markets or took on other jobs. These were early signs of a process of 'de-peasantisation' which continues today. My patient, Navjot, was just one among the hundreds of thousands who were extruded from farming and suffered terribly since the backup safety net of the industrial sector was missing.

Punjab by then had a large number of youngsters belonging to rural families, who either did not have a family farm to run or very often did not want to join their fathers in farming because it was too much hard work for too little money. Many of them joined these new colleges and so-called deemed universities located in glossy buildings. In many instances, families like Navjot's mortgaged or sold a piece of land to admit their sons or daughters to these courses. Many of these degrees are not worth the paper they are printed on because whatever is taught and learned is not skill-oriented and there is no match with what the job market requires. All that these teaching shops do is substitute a large number of under-educated, unemployed youth in Punjab with educated, unemployable youth at a considerable cost to families.

The state was like a rich man who had become a pauper overnight. The people of Punjab, particularly the villagers, collectively as well as individually faced a situation where the old norms of life were no longer possible. And society was still struggling to put in place new norms and social support, leaving individuals rudderless. It was not just about money; it was equally about normlessness.

In Punjab after the late '80s the unemployment rate among rural youth had reached 16 percent and that did not include the very large number of under-employed. Something had to give. Left with almost nothing to do, it would have been surprising if drug addiction had not peaked dangerously and acquired such a destructive form among the young men of that and successive generations. To make things even worse, unlike in animals, the relationship between social isolation and addiction is bi-directional in humans. Social isolation leads to addiction and addiction is highly stigmatizing and abhorrent to society. This leads to further social exclusion of these people, which worsens the chances of their breaking free of the grip of addiction, thus creating a vicious cycle.

Dr Johl sees a way out of this quagmire. He has formally submitted a blueprint (several times), to the government to pull the state out of the economic mess. It essentially involves taking medium-scale clean industry to villages and establishing 'farm service centres', which the farmer could approach for getting his farm tilled, harvested and the stubble taken out, at charges approved by the government.

'To be able to use technology every farmer does not have to own these machines,' Dr Johl insisted.

'Why does the government not act on the blueprint?' I asked.

'Because the bureaucrats think they know everything.'

'And the politicians?'

'No long-distance vision. They can only see as far as the next election,' he put it simply.

I asked him about the addiction situation in the rural heartland in the old days. He told me that he was

nineteen years old at the time of the Partition when he moved from a village in Lyallpur in Pakistan to Indian Punjab with his parents. At that time, opium cultivation was allowed in Punjab although a licence was required.

'We did not have any money. It was opium that saved us. We had two small fields, in one, we grew sugarcane and in the other opium. Our *baithak* (sitting room) used to be filled with sacks of opium husk, some of which the farm labourers consumed during harvest weeks, after which they worked tirelessly. The wastage of the husk was thrown away, which the donkeys belonging to the *kumhars* ate, and they worked non-stop too,' he said with a smile.

On a more serious note, he added, 'It was all legal. There was opium all around us, both in the fields and stacked in jute sacks in the house. None of our family members became addicts. Even farm workers who consumed it during harvest season did not become addicts. And now it is illegal and it costs a bomb. Taking it can mean going to jail and yet there are so many addicts. Doctor Sahib, availability of drugs has nothing to do with addiction. Rajasthan grows a whole lot of opium and we do not grow any. If it was availability, why are we addicts and they are not?' he asked. ■



Photo: Civil Society/Shrey Gupta

Small farmers became marginal and marginal farmers became labourers

'There was opium all around us. But none of our family members became addicts. Now it is illegal and it costs a bomb. Taking it can mean going to jail and yet there are so many addicts.'

Down the drain



DELHI DARBAR

SANJAYA BARU

DURING the year I was at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy in Singapore the then Lt Governor of Delhi, Tejinder Khanna, paid a visit to the country and dropped in at the school for a chat with the faculty. Noting the fact that Singapore was a city state and India was a subcontinental nation, Khanna turned to me and asked, "What is it that we can learn from Singapore?"

He may have expected a long lecture on stuff like law and order, governance, investment in education, and so on and so forth. I had reflected on this question many times during my stay in Singapore. It was a favourite question of Indian policymakers, public policy professionals and commentators in the media. So I was ready with an answer. It was brief and delivered in an instant. "Drainage," I said.

The Lt Governor smiled. Perhaps he thought I was mocking him or making light of his ponderous question. I was dead serious. There is much that one can learn from Singapore's example. In fact, in the year I was there, one of the students in the public policy programme was an officer of the Indian Police Service who was totally focused on studying how Singapore would respond to an amphibious terror attack like the one staged from the sea by Pakistani terrorists on Mumbai. There are other lessons too one can learn from Singapore.

However, having travelled to that country in the monsoon month of August 2008, what impressed me most on arrival was the very effective drainage system that had been built with an important strategic consideration in mind. Singapore is an island with very little domestic supply of potable water. It is dependent on neighbouring Malaysia for importing some of its requirements. In order to enhance national self-sufficiency in the availability of drinking water the Singapore government created an island-wide network of

rainwater harvesting systems with a drainage plan that ensured that as little as possible of rainwater would be lost to the ocean around and as much as possible would be collected and used.

Having lived in Hyderabad and then in New Delhi, I was all too familiar with the problem of urban flooding and waterlogging. Every year, the standard explanation trotted out would be that the drainage system was meant for a certain average annual rainfall and that during the monsoon weeks on a few days there would be excess rainfall and so it was an occasional problem. What this reply ignores is the entire history of public works in the subcontinent over millennia. Man-made water bodies were



Neglected drainage in Delhi. Much to learn from Singapore

created precisely to store this excess rainfall so that adequate groundwater would be available in dry months.

To the best of my knowledge, the only city that tried to focus on rainwater harvesting and insisted on adequate provision being made in all new buildings and localities is Chennai. Former Chief Minister J. Jayalalithaa was credited with taking personal interest in this. Perhaps Chennai was close enough to Singapore to be positively influenced by its experience. Urban rainwater harvesting is the only solution to the problem of excess rainfall. This requires proper and efficient drainage systems.

Building better drainage systems requires investment and that too by municipalities. A recent study of the financial health of Indian municipalities notes that few of them are financially self-reliant, and require state and central government funds even to carry out their regular activities. Prepared by a research

team at Munify Municipal Database (Munify.in) and published by the National Institute of Urban Affairs, the report, *Assessing the Financial Health of Indian Cities*, says, "Our analysis of twenty-five municipal corporations shows that on an average, own revenues constituted only 48% of the total revenues, indicating that local governments in India are not fiscally self-reliant."

Improving municipal finances is an important and necessary step. However, improving the quality and accountability of urban governance is equally important. When the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission was launched, the facility of providing financial support to state governments and municipal bodies was linked to governance reform. While the funds were happily dispensed and absorbed, few states have bothered to keep their side of the bargain with better municipal governance.

No city symbolizes this neglect better than Delhi which has an elected government of its own. Indeed, the July 2023 downpour also exposed very embarrassingly the shoddy preparation for the grand staging of the Group of Twenty (G20) summit. The Narendra Modi government has been advertising across the country and the world its hosting of the G20 summit. Yet, not only is the summit

venue still not ready, the parts that are ready have been flooded!

Apart from exposing inefficiency, the sorry state of Delhi's well-funded urban infrastructure also stands testimony to corruption. When newly built roads have potholes, don't blame the monsoon. Blame the contractor who built it and the politicians and officials who took their cuts, turning a blind eye to shoddy work.

New Delhi is India's most pampered city and the state government has no shortage of funds. The Arvind Kejriwal government has spent vast sums on building a fancy home for the chief minister, on promoting his personality through state-funded advertisements and so on. Yet, urban infrastructure construction and maintenance are below par. Despite Modi and Kejriwal being residents of the national capital, the metropolis is nowhere near being a shining example of urban governance. ■

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Diversity is strength



LOOKING AHEAD

KIRAN KARNIK

ON occasion, most recently in the US, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has spoken with pride about the diversity of India. It is, indeed, wide-ranging in all dimensions: from the geography, climate, flora and fauna to — most importantly — the people. In the last aspect, we are probably amongst the most diverse countries in the world, with diversity in every element that one can think of: be it ethnicity, race, religion, language, cuisine, culture, caste, couture, income, or education. It is this people diversity that the PM was alluding to, one presumes.

And it is this that needs to be recognized, showcased and celebrated. Through the variety of art forms, dress, and foods, as in so many other ways, this diversity not only enriches our culture but is, in fact, at the core of what constitutes “Indianness”. Be it Kashmiriyat or the Ganga-Jamuni *tehzeeb* in the North; or the composite intermingling of cultures in Kerala; or the international flavour of Goa (Indo-Portuguese) and Puducherry (Indo-French) — these and so many other cultures brought here over the centuries by traders, immigrants, and invaders make India a unique amalgam of plurality. Attribute this to India’s exceptional ability to learn, absorb, adapt, and integrate, thereby enriching and differentiating local cultures.

Those with a more pragmatic or materialistic mindset may note what this author has frequently written about: diversity is the foundation and catalyst for innovation, the new driver of economic growth. For, simply put, “being different” leads to diversity of thought and ideas, which is what spawns innovation. Today, if India is amongst the world leaders in start-ups and innovations, a great deal of this is due to the divergent thinking that springs from diversity. In tomorrow’s world, this is, indeed, India’s biggest asset.

By definition, uniformity is the antithesis of diversity. The latter also implies decentralization, quite the opposite of a hierarchical command and control structure. In this context, recent trends to control and centralize are worrisome.

In a country as diverse as India, a one-shoe-fits-all approach is unlikely to work and will certainly be sub-optimal. ‘One country, one xx’ is a nice aphorism, but one country, one solution is unlikely to solve our problems or lead us forward. Those who advocate this would do well to take to heart the PM’s emphasis on diversity.

It is noteworthy that the pluralism of India derives from the syncretic ethos that marks the country’s cultural evolution over centuries. This needs emphasis when one sees tendencies to create silos of separateness based on one or another of the streams that make for diversity. Caste-based ghettos, with Dalits banished to the periphery, have been common in villages. In certain urban areas one now sees religion-



Photo: Civil Society/Umesh Anand

India is one of the most diverse countries in the world

based and income-based ghettos. With intra-country rural to urban migration, region-based (i.e., language and culture differentiated) areas have come up. While these together reflect the diversity of the country, each also separates or isolates a defined group and thereby hinders the intermingling that has been an inherent element of Indian plurality.

Each person has multiple identities, based on birth, role, and choice. In India, recent decades have seen a resurgence of birth identities. There was a time when one dreamt of a country where identity by choice would dominate other identifiers, where religion, caste, or region would matter less than the by-choice identity. That you are a doctor would define you rather than the fact that you are from an ‘OBC’; that you are a cricketer will matter more than the fact that you were born a Christian.

Today, a few countries have erased the gender-based birth identity: you may have been born male, but can declare yourself (by choice) female or transgender. We are probably a long way from eradicating or allowing changes in birth identities. In India, you can

change your religion (another birth identity assumed to be immutable) — though that has become increasingly difficult in terms of the social cost. For many, there could also be an economic cost: reservation and quotas for admissions and jobs — available on a caste basis — may not be available to religious converts. These costs reinforce the need to retain and emphasize birth identities.

The dream was also that groups representing various diversities (including those that emanate from birth or parentage — caste, religion, language, etc.) would be treated equally and justly. The hope was that some of these divides would slowly fade away — or, at least, matter less — with education, greater interaction, and inter-marriage. Inter-caste and inter-religious marriages were encouraged and incentivized, in the hope that they would create greater understanding and a more harmonious society.

As eminent sociologist and thinker Dipankar Gupta has noted, an Indian marriage is far more than a union between two individuals; it is seen as a permanent bond linking their families. In this movie, it is not the bride and bridegroom who are hero-heroine: it is their families who are the principal protagonists. The expectation that education and modernization would change this and give greater agency to the youngsters has been belied. In fact,

arguably, things have got worse, with not only families, but *khap panchayats* or religious groups blocking undesirable marriages — defined as inter-caste, intra-*gotra*, and inter-religion. In many states, the bogey of ‘love jihad’ has led to laws that deeply constrain inter-religious marriages. What a change in a few decades!

Some of this will emphasize or sustain diversity, but in a divisive and corrosive manner. Pluralism, syncretism, compassion, individual empowerment, and agency are being shown the door. This is hardly the kind of diversity that has long been the core of Indianness. Nor is it the kind that will lead to innovation, invention, or greater soft power: things that could be India’s strong suits in an increasingly competitive world.

As we look ahead, enlightened self-interest demands a return to the true meaning of our diversity and making it what it is meant to be: positive, cohesive, common-yet-different, mutually respected differences that are a cohesive force for good. ■

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

Highways vs rivers



LIVING RIVERS

VENKATESH DUTTA

WHEN highways get built, they traverse many water bodies which feed rivers and streams and may in fact be more important than roads for the prosperity and well-being of a region, especially in drought-prone areas.

Highways of course play a crucial role in facilitating transportation and fostering economic activities, but their adverse effect on freshwater systems should be taken into account at the time of planning and design. Not doing so has negative consequences that cannot be reversed.

Earth has an extensive network of man-made roads, spanning an impressive 63.69 million kilometres. It is projected that several million more kilometres will be added to this network by 2050. Among countries with the largest road networks, India stands second only to the United States.

Recently, I travelled to Lakhimpur Kheri to survey the wetlands that serve as the origin of the 760-km Sai river — a tributary of the Gomti. The source wetland is called Panai Jhabar. I was disappointed to see the whole wetland fragmented into parts due to the construction of the highway that connects Shahjahanpur and Lakhimpur. Consequently, the wetland has significantly diminished in size, primarily due to the loss of crucial watersheds that used to feed the Sai.

Similarly, in Lucknow, Kisan Path — a circular road circumferencing the entire district — is being made. Our researchers were trying to restore the 28-km Kukrail river in Lucknow. It is a very important drainage system of the city. Now the problem is how to connect the upper reaches with the lower stretch of the river as the carriageway width of Kisan Path has blocked the drainage near the origin of the river. The natural flow of water has been intercepted by the road. As a result, upstream villages are at a higher risk of flooding during the rainy season, while downstream portions of the river may dry up as the flow gets cut off. Many new infrastructure projects are adding to the water woes of the city.

The periodic floods in Gurugram during rains can be attributed to the severe disruption of the natural drainage system caused by the

construction of roads and permanent concrete structures on the wetlands. The city has experienced the disappearance of several water bodies. This has resulted in the impairment of the city’s ability to effectively manage and channel excess water, exacerbating the flooding situation during rainy periods. Some water bodies and their channels were also impacted by the 60-km DND-Faridabad-Ballabgarh bypass-KMP Interchange section of NH 148NA.

In a Public Interest Litigation (PIL), it was alleged that the contractors hired by the Tamil Nadu Road Development Corporation (TNRDC) for the Old Mahabalipuram Road (OMR) Phase II project were causing destruction to the Kalleri and Padur lake pond, located near Chennai. In response to this issue,



A highway cuts through a water body

The natural drainage system that existed before construction of a road is often not taken into account by planners.

Madras High Court provided valuable advice to the Tamil Nadu government, urging it not to encroach upon water bodies and pathways under the pretext of development projects.

When the construction of roads and highways reduces wetland areas, it leads to siltation and reduction in groundwater recharge. If there is to be any change in the drainage pattern after the construction of a highway, details of changes should be delineated. Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) has been established as a mandatory step to obtain environmental clearance for highway projects. However, the natural drainage system that exists prior to road construction is often

overlooked by the planners. Consequently, vital aspects of the pre-existing drainage system, which play a significant role in maintaining the ecological balance, are not thoroughly studied and considered in the decision-making process. This oversight can lead to adverse consequences on the environment and surrounding ecosystems.

Generally, a culvert, syphon or bridge is constructed on a rivulet or river. But in the rush to construct highways, and to cut the cost, such structures are not always made. This results in loss of streams as well as flooding. When a road is planned to pass through a floodplain of a river, it is crucial to provide detailed information regarding micro drainage, flood passages, and the frequency of floods in the area. Understanding the micro drainage

patterns helps identify natural water flow paths and ensure that the road construction does not disrupt them.

During road construction, it is crucial to ensure proper drainage of accumulated water. When a road is built on natural terrain, it intercepts the natural waterways, necessitating the implementation of measures to divert the water to lower stretches without disrupting the existing streams. Designing effective drainage systems is paramount, and it is essential to ensure that the inlets of drains are sufficiently large to facilitate the smooth flow of water. Thorough study of drainage catchment areas and

existing drainage systems should be conducted as a preliminary step in highway planning. Additionally, aqueducts, culverts, and other cross-drainage structures have to be constructed wherever necessary to accommodate and facilitate the passage of rivulets or streams that intersect the highway’s path. These measures collectively contribute to proper water management and the preservation of natural water flow patterns during road construction.

Indeed, the alignment of a road plays a crucial role in addressing drainage issues. Surveys and investigations, particularly hydrological surveys, are of utmost importance in the design of highways. These surveys involve assessing factors such as rainfall patterns, estimating run-off, gathering information on high flood events, and acquiring knowledge about the presence of wetlands and streams in the region. We must minimize the impact of the road on the natural water flow and ecosystems. ■

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

A laughing matter



**AHIMSA
MUSINGS**

RAJNI BAKSHI

Massachusetts, Amherst.

These four dimensions of non-violent action are: dialogue facilitation, power breaking, utopian enactment and normative regulation. The end goal is to effectively challenge dominant discourses and spark discussion in ways that have less chance of becoming aggressive. Evoking laughter does precisely that.

In the past few years, peace and non-violence scholars have documented how this is working on the ground in various countries.

“Laughing on the Way to Social Change: Humour and Nonviolent Action Theory” is the title of an article published by *Peace & Change*, a peer-reviewed academic journal on peace studies published by Wiley-Blackwell for the Peace History Society. In it, scholar Majken Sørensen analyzes three examples from



The power of the prank

Humour is a powerful method of resistance in dictatorships and democracies alike. A joke serves to upend the status quo.

20th-century Sweden of how humour helped to deepen the non-violent approach. Sørensen demonstrates that humour is found to have a particular ability to break the power of dominant discourses and strengthen the “ongoing discursive guerrilla war” that the activists are waging.

No *Laughing Matter? The Potential of Political Humour as a Means of Nonviolent Resistance: A Case Study of Syria* by Sonja Noderer traces the evolution of the forms and functions of humorous production in the history of Syria. Noderer, who teaches social sciences at the University of Duisburg-Essen in Germany, found that despite the escalation and looming

failure of the Syrian uprising, humour remained an important means of non-violent resistance.

This is because the grip of authoritarian regimes usually depends on projecting their power as being unshakeable. They also depend on fear to stay in control. By contrast, “humour is fundamentally about disruptions. The point of a joke is to break with the expected; to upend the status quo. And for governments who rely on unquestioned authority, the disruptive nature of humour poses a unique threat. It’s assertive but not violent, earnest but not serious,” write Adam Gallagher and Anthony Navone of the US Peace Institute.

In an article titled ‘Not Just a Punchline: Humour and Nonviolent Action — How Comedy Can Provide Relief and Promote Resistance in Authoritarian Environments’

Gallagher and Navone explain how humour pushes back on fear. “Laughter can embolden protests by relieving the immense pressure that comes with challenging their leaders’ projected authority.”

It is not that jokes topple regimes but they do dent the image of invulnerability. This may have been the main reason behind the success of Bassem Youssef, a surgeon turned comic who became a YouTube star in Egypt at the height of the Arab Spring protests in 2011.

Years later, in a book titled *Revolution for Dummies: Laughing Through the Arab Spring*, Youssef wrote that what he was hearing in response to his comic commentary was not laughter, it was catharsis: “They watched us because they saw hope in the show — hope to challenge long-standing taboos and authority...”

Perhaps the most powerful reasoning on why laughter and non-violence are inextricably intertwined is provided by the Serbian peace activist, Srdja Popovic. ‘Laughtivism’, as Popovic calls it, is vital because democracy is simply too serious a matter to be left to politicians or parties. Popovic’s book on his experiences in the struggle against autocratic rule in Serbia is titled *Pranksters vs. Autocrats*. He closes with the advice: “... grassroots campaigning is more effective when it’s fun. Oligarchs, just like autocrats, are weakened when they become objects of derision.”

The ultimate challenge, of course, is how to convert derision into shared laughter, when we laugh with, not at, our ‘opponents’. But that is another story! ■

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

LIVING

FOOD | TRAVEL | REVIEWS | PRODUCTS | GIVING



Observing birds creates emotional bonds with nature

The joy of going birding

Early Bird takes children on walks

USHA MAHADEVAN

BIRDS make the world go round. But where in the hurly-burly of cities should some joyous birdwatching begin? Try your balcony or the tree across the street or the neighbourhood park. Birds wait to be discovered everywhere.

Better still, check out Varsha Sridhar’s Early Bird, which is part of the Mysuru-based Nature Conservation Foundation. They are on a mission to connect people, particularly children, to nature through birds.

Merely observing birds creates emotional bonds with the environment. It enriches the way people understand and respect their surroundings. In India it is easy enough to get connected because 13 percent of the world’s species of birds are to be found here in diverse habitats.

It is the magic of the moment that becomes

memorable and revealing. Watching birds in flight and hearing their calls can be unforgettable experiences and intimations of the intricacies of the natural world.

Early Bird aims to dispel the common misconception that birding must take place in faraway jungles or dense forests and requires expensive equipment. “The notion that wildlife exists solely in jungles is false. In reality, wildlife is all around us, and we are inherently connected to it,” says Sridhar.

Myths, songs and folklore further make birds a part of everyday life. These links may be weakening, but so deep do they run that bringing them back may be simpler than it seems. “We are dedicated to nurturing and reviving this connection, particularly through our work with children, as they can take it forward in the future,” says Sridhar.

For the past year, Early Bird has been organizing monthly bird walks exclusively for

children in Bengaluru. Various public bird walks are being held by different groups in various cities but none of them caters specifically to children.

When an opportunity arose for Early Bird to collaborate with the Rainmatter Foundation, the initiative was expanded to other cities. Tier 2 cities were chosen rather than large metropolises to hold the bird walks for children.

Early Bird reached out to its network of nature and bird educators to lead these sessions in Agartala, Dehradun, Panaji, Mysuru and Tirupati on June 10, 2023. During these walks, age-appropriate activities designed for children between nine and 13 years were conducted.

The walks followed a thematic approach such as bird habitat or behaviour. Typically, a walk begins with an introduction to the gathering and the itinerary, followed by about 45 minutes of birdwatching. The walks end with a session

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where children can express and share their observations, insights and newly acquired knowledge. While the walks are usually free, a nominal fee is charged for the materials provided such as field and spotting scopes.

POSITIVE RESPONSE The response to the walks in all cities was positive, with children thoroughly enjoying the experience and expressing a desire for more frequent walks. They were seconded by their parents.

In Agartala, the walk was organized in collaboration with the Wild Tripura Foundation and was led by Dipak Sinha at the MBB College campus. The lush surroundings and abundant water bodies provided a picturesque backdrop for the event. The walk, divided into groups, allowed children to observe diverse bird species and learn about their habitats, behaviour and feeding patterns.

A captivating birdwatching session was held at Carambolim lake, Panaji, known for its rich birdlife and biodiversity. The walk was organized in collaboration with Arannya Environment Research Organization. Using field scopes, the children were able to spot a variety of birds, including pied kingfishers, painted storks, oriental darters and more. A bonus was five crocodiles in the vicinity.

The walk in Mysuru's Kukkarahalli lake was an exploration of bird behaviour and habitat. It was led by Kiran Bagade of the Dharitri Collective. Observed here were nesting activities as well as a territorial fight between a coot and a spot-billed duck. Brahminy kites were seen soaring and little grebes preening. The feeding behaviour of bronze-winged jacanas was observed. The walk involved the categorization of bird behaviour into feeding, breeding and protection, along with a habitat memory game.

In Dehradun, the bird walk was organized at Gandhi Park, where young participants had the opportunity to observe hornbills through a spotting scope. Children were introduced to the essential elements of a bird's life: food, water and shelter. The walk was in collaboration with the Nature Science Initiative and was led by Raman Kumar.

The walk in Tirupati's Regional Science Centre was held in collaboration with the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER), Tirupati and was led by Raja Sekhar Bandi. This was an action-packed walk. A rat snake was mobbed by squirrels and babblers on a tree. A shikra hunted a rufous treepie and flew away with it, while

the parents chased after it. Two hours flew by.

EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS While birdwatching and bird photography as popular hobbies have grown rapidly, there is relatively little material for children on the subject. Early Bird has developed a variety of educational materials which can be used in the field, at home or in the classroom.

They include posters on common birds, a set of flash cards featuring 40 common species of India, and foldable pocket guides on familiar birds of different regions of the country. These are available in various Indian languages. Instructional videos have been prepared for facilitators, teachers, parents and children on effective use of the flashcards as learning aids.

The Early Bird website has several free downloadable birds-related activities and games for beginners. The interactive posters in



In Agartala, children gather round

eight Indian languages displaying common birds with their calls and descriptions can be accessed on the website. In an attempt to leverage the vast number of amateur birdwatchers in the country, the organization reaches out to enthusiasts who are interested in being bird and nature educators.

Early Bird has conducted more than 15 half-day workshops called "How to be a Birding Buddy" which are meant for educators, parents and individuals working with children. In these workshops, the skills needed for taking birds to children, as well as the material (print and digital) required are provided. Several workshops have also been conducted specifically for schoolteachers, some of them in collaboration with other organizations such as the Azim Premji Foundation, Agastya Foundation and Aakanksha Foundation.

Several webinars have been conducted on various bird-related topics, two online quizzes have been held for young birders, and talks given by scientists and bird enthusiasts. These webinars were conducted not only in English but also in Hindi, Kannada, Tamil and Telugu.

The organization is working towards creating a Young Birders' Network to help enthusiastic young avian watchers develop their passion for understanding birds. ■

In Wayanad for the rains and more

SUSHEELA NAIR

RECLINING in the balcony of my glamp, a diaphanous igloo-like structure, in Mount Xanadu Resort, I watched a green expanse come into focus as the mist cleared to reveal hills, dales and lakes in the distance. There was nothing around to disturb the quietude in this paradise except the pitter-patter of rain and twittering birdcall.

Sipping steaming filter coffee over nibbles, I watched the rain interspersed with occasional thunder and lightning. The serenity was so soothing that I hardly felt like venturing out. But I had to — to attend Splash 2023, the biannual Monsoon Tourism Fest, touted as the second largest tourism event in what is truly God's Own Country: Kerala.

"This mega event is special this year as it is happening after a three-year pandemic break," said Vancheeswaran, president, Wayanad Tourism Organization (WTO), and event coordinator, Splash 2023.

Apart from rain lovers and hundreds of tourists, 700 stakeholders from the tourism fraternity descended on Wayanad to participate in the business-to-business (B2B) meet organized by the WTO in association with the Kerala Tourism and District Tourism Promotion Council.

When I first visited Wayanad in the late 1990s, it had only a handful of resorts and hotels. It has metamorphosed into an incredible destination with boutique resorts, homestays and hotels at every twist and turn.

"In 2019, when WTO introduced Wayanad Splash, the concept of rediscovering Kerala in the rains took root. This unique festival celebrates rain tourism, making the most dormant period of the year more marketable," says Shylesh, secretary, WTO, and coordinator.

"Currently, through its aggressive marketing, the WTO, a consortium of hotels, homestays and hospitality partners, has elevated the region into one of India's most preferred destinations. It all started with the biannual Splash festival during the monsoon when Wayanad beckoned tourists to explore the green vistas and experience the thrills of agrarian sports," adds Shylesh.

When the monsoon breaks in Wayanad, it does so mightily and you might feel you are better-off in your hotel room. But the rains last from June to October, with the curtains of water thinning or thickening, and with mist-shrouded landscapes and teardrops of water on foliage up close to behold, Wayanad has an allure and charm of its own.

On days when the showers are light, one can take long, utterly invigorating walks across the

coffee and spice plantations with an umbrella or drive to the sights or explore forested areas.

WTO arranges local experiences like farm-related activities with competitions in crab-catching, paddy transplantation, tree climbing and archery. Visitors can also experience the thrills and spills of mud football, off-roading over mountainous tracks, bamboo rafting, mountain biking, commando walking, tug-o-war and monsoon trekking.

Visits can be arranged to stunning resorts in the lap of nature. Often, the drive to a mountain retreat is as incredible as the place itself. Local outdoor outfit Muddy Boots organizes kayaking, river crossing, hiking and cycling.

Wayanad leaves indelible images of verdant vistas in your mind: A century-old temple perched on a hillock, vast forest tracts, rushing rivulets and charming waterfalls like Soochipara and Meenmuttery. Also unforgettable are the lush hillsides carpeted with tea, coffee, cardamom and pepper plantations and the wildlife sightings in the Muthanga and Tholpetty national parks.

The verdant scenery, abundance of flora and fauna, and thick sprinkling of palms and areca groves make Wayanad a magical natural playground. For the adventurous, there are hills for trekking, for the religious there are sacred shrines. Those with an interest in history can explore the prehistoric Edakkal Caves, formed out of a strange disposition of three massive boulders on the crest of Ambukuthimala, a hill near Sultan Bathery.

This landlocked district is now a favoured destination for techies and tourists from Bengaluru because of its proximity to the city and strategic location at the trijunction of Kozhikode, Coorg and the Nilgiris.

Wayanad's district headquarters is called Kalpetta. Unlike Kerala's other district headquarters, it is not named after the district. In local parlance, Wayanad means paddy country, but there is hardly any trace of paddy here!

For the laidback, the ideal activity is a boat ride in the Pookote lake full of lotus blooms near Lakkidi or in the picturesque Banasura lake. For a whiff of raw adventure, try bamboo rafting or climb Chembra Peak, the tallest in this region with a heart-shaped lake. You will have, at 2,100m above sea level, a mesmerizing view of the landscape.

Tucked away in the woods, 900 Kandi (in local parlance it is known as Thollayirum Kandi) is named after the 900-acre sprawling estate that existed previously in this area. Off-road rides and treks, waterfall expeditions, campfires, hiking, birdwatching and biking are offered in this green wonderland. If you want to enjoy the thrill of walking on glass, head to the Glass Bridge to have a bird's eye view of the luxuriant forest.

Sultan Bathery, the hilly eastern gateway to Wayanad, is an ideal base to visit the Edakkal



The backwaters of the Banasura Dam



Ziplining through the tea plantations in Pozhuthana, Wayanad

Caves, Jain temple and Muthanga Wildlife Sanctuary. It was once known as Ganapathivattam, or the circle of Lord Ganapathi. The Sree Maha Ganapati temple is the only reminder of its past. Its name changed after Tipu Sultan marched in with his troops and used the 13th century Jain temple here as an ammunition dump. Over a period of time, Sultan Battery became Sultan Bathery. We had a peek at the Jain temple at Puthangadi, with its exquisite carvings.

The prehistoric Edakkal Caves, formed out of three massive boulders on the crest of Ambukuthimala, are about 10 km from Sultan Bathery. Edakkal means 'the stone in between' in Malayalam. You can spend endless hours trying to decipher the ancient carvings. Some

of the pictorial wall inscriptions flaunt human figures with quaint headgear, images of a tribal king, a queen, an elephant, deer, swastika forms and symbols.

The Heritage Museum at Ambalavayil, showcasing artifacts of various tribes, has a collection of stone carvings, hunting traps, musical instruments, ornaments, terracotta figurines and pottery relating to the Megalithic Age. Some of the unique exhibits are engravings on stone slabs in the Vattezhuthus script and soft stone idols of tribal gods called Herostones.

For the spiritually inclined, there are hoary shrines like Thirunelly, Kottiyoor and Valiyookavu. From Kalpetta, one can explore the rest of the district's highlights around Sultan Bathery, Mananthavady, Lakkidi and Vythiri.

The sylvan environs of Kalpetta abound in sparkling waterfalls like Meenmuttery, Kanthampara, and Soochipara which can be explored via jungle paths. A winding road past tea plantations followed by a trek through dense forest and rugged terrain took us to Soochipara Falls, also known as Sentinel Rock Falls or 'needle rocks' in Malayalam. The name is reflective of the sharp spikes of rock on which the water falls. It is exhilarating to watch it cascading down the hard granite rocks with a soaring spray engulfing you. Close by are the Kanthampara Falls and tucked in the dense forests are the ferocious Meenmuttery Falls.

Equally enchanting are the Kuruvu Dweep, a 950-acre maze of uninhabited islets and evergreen forests 16 km from Mananthavady, on the Kabini. Thickly-wooded, it is home to a variety of birds, butterflies, herbs and orchids, and is a bird sanctuary. Close to Mananthavady town is the tomb of Veera Pazhassi Raja, marking the place where he was cremated. Known as the Lion of Kerala, the raja fought a guerilla war against the British for nearly nine years by organizing the natives and the tribals.

Lakkidi, atop Thamrasseri Ghat at the district's western border, acts like a gateway to Wayanad. Stop by the unusual Chain Tree to pay your respects to Karinthandan, a young tribal killed by a British engineer after the youth told him about a secret route across the once treacherous pass. When Karinthandan's spirit started haunting travellers, his soul was pacified and chained to a large ficus that came to be known as Chain Tree. ■

FACT FILE

Getting there: The nearest airport and railhead are at Kozhikode. Take the Tamarassery Ghat Pass to Lakkidi, Vythiri and Kalpetta. There are private and government buses from Bengaluru to Kozhikode. **Stay:** Xanadu Mount Resort, Taj Wayanad, Vythiri Resort. There is accommodation to suit every budget.

For Alphonso year round get the pulp and stash it away

CIVIL SOCIETY REVIEWS

IF YOU can't stop eating the delicious mangoes that are available at this time of the year, chances are that you are also experiencing high stress over what you will do when the season is over.

Worry not. We are pleased to introduce you to kupalwadi.com from where you can stock up on canned organic Alphonso mango pulp that can keep you slurping year round.

A tin of pulp with a net weight of 850 gm comes for ₹650 and shipping is free all over India.

This is not the first time we are writing about mango pulp. Many small enterprises are into packaging the goodness of Western Ghats fruits, as pulp and juice.

But the majority of them do not have a nationwide marketing effort. So, you can pick up as much as you want when you are there. But getting it home delivered is another thing.

Kupalwadi was in fact started as an e-commerce website in 2016 to supply fresh, organically grown Alphonso mangoes from the Ratnagiri and Devgad region in the Konkan. They also sourced Kesar mangoes from Junagad in Gujarat.

But supplying fresh mangoes around the country was a formidable task. Supply chains



Mangoes get shipped from Ratnagiri, but they are perishable. The canned pulp below is one way out



didn't measure up and storage was a problem. Mangoes, being perishable, didn't last beyond the season.

Then came the idea of pulping the fruit and canning it scientifically so that it would have a different kind of shelf life and be available to mango lovers the year round.

Kupalwadi's pitch is that the Alphonso mangoes it pulps are organic and GI tagged for orchards in the Konkan region of Maharashtra.

The mangoes are handpicked, naturally ripened, and washed before pulp is extracted, using a pulp extractor. The pulp is then boiled at 90°C to 95°C to make it safe for consumption and to ensure it keeps.

During the process, the pulp is stirred continuously to gain uniformly thick consistency. Then the pulp is filled into sterile food-grade tin containers. The production is

done in small batches to ensure the same texture, thickness, quality and taste.

There is an assurance of quality with the containers being further heated in boiling water for an hour to ensure there is no leakage. Only those containers that meet all the quality parameters are approved for consumption.

The entire fruit processing unit is 100 percent vegan, we are told. There is no exposure to dairy, peanuts, soy, wheat, eggs, fish or meat.

Apart from being organic, we are given the assurance that no additions are made by way of preservatives, artificial flavours, essence or thickeners.

What uses can mango pulp be put to? It can be eaten as pulp on its own and is delicious. We've tried it. Mango cake can be made with it. We've done that too. It can be used to top a vanilla ice-cream. Or blended into a lassi. We recommend that too. ■

Order your mangoes online at www.kupalwadi.com or call Team Kupalwadi at +917208839186

Samita's World

by SAMITA RATHOR



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.

HEMP, THE PROTEIN SUPERSTAR



Hemp or *cannabis sativa* is a tall plant with deep roots that has been serving humanity since time immemorial. Hempire, a micro-enterprise, is cashing in on the plant's many benefits by packaging hemp seed oil, hemp protein and hemp hearts for interested consumers.

Hemp seeds are high in protein. "Hemp seeds are a whole food that's vegan, and free of gluten, sugar, trans-fats or cholesterol," says Aditya Bhalla, founder of Hempire. "These little seeds are one of the highest sources of complete protein in any plant-based food, containing all 20 amino acids and ideal for vegans."

Hemp oil, extracted from hemp seeds, is a versatile essential oil with a perfect balance of Omega-3 and Omega-6 essential fatty acids. Layer it over your salad or pasta or include it in a pesto sauce. Or apply it on your skin. It makes an excellent moisturizer.

Hemp hearts are seeds that have had their shells removed. You can eat them plain or as a condiment. "Our Organic Hemp Seed Hearts are 33 percent digestible pure protein, rich in Vitamin E, magnesium, apart from essential fatty acids," says Bhalla. Sprinkle over your fruit, yogurt or cereal or grind with your morning smoothie.

Contact: Aditya Bhalla at +9178380 34884
info@hempire.life
<https://hempire.life/>



BE STYLISH IN HEMP



Hemp is a recent addition to natural fabric. It is light, breathable and tear-resistant. The Himalayan Hemp Company in Kwarali village on the Almora-Nainital National Highway manufactures and exports hemp-based products, including T-shirts, trousers, womenswear, bags, purses, hats, caps, shoes, eye masks, towels, bedsheets, curtains, and more.

Uttarakhand was the first state in India to legalize industrial hemp. Small farmers had abandoned hemp cultivation since they found it to be unviable. The Himalayan Hemp Company, founded by Narendra Chauhan, a social entrepreneur, is helping farmers earn an income by cultivating hemp and making products out of it.

The company, which is committed to fair trade practices, has trained men and women in marketing, manufacturing hemp clothing, distribution, and quality control. It has empowered local artisans by helping them upgrade their skills and design capabilities. The company undertakes work on contract. It offers custom designs, digital printing, dyeing options and embroidery services to a chain of small businesses.

Himalayan Hemp Company claims to prioritize safe working conditions, uses no child labour, no chemicals and provides fair wages, including maternity leave. "By treating our employees with respect and dignity, we not only produce high-quality garments, we also empower the individuals who craft them," says Chauhan.


Contact: Narendra Chauhan
+9174097 50138
contact@hempindia.net
www.HimalayanHempCompany.com



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.

SCHOOL WITH A DIFFERENCE


 Diksha is a school started to cater to the children of construction labour working in its neighbourhood of Palam Vihar in Gurugram. As parents go from site to site, children lose out on an education.

Diksha tried to fill a gap. Over time it has begun serving other low-income families as well. On any morning, neatly turned out children can be seen cycling and walking to the school.

The school doesn't stop at classroom teaching and books. It provides opportunities to learn folk art, dance, drama and sports. It teaches children to be responsible citizens. A child gets a uniform, books, a midday meal and health checkups.

www.dikshaschoolindia.org
dikshaschoolindia@gmail.com | 9818068141

GETTING AHEAD IN VILLAGES

 If you want to contribute to rural development, check out AHEAD Initiatives in West Bengal. It stands for Addressing Hunger, Empowerment and Development and has been based in Kolkata since 2008.


It is out in the villages that AHEAD is deeply engaged on issues of food security, sustainable development and primary education.

AHEAD's big contribution is in working with panchayats and zilla parishads to implement its own programmes and by providing last-mile solutions to implement the government's programmes.

So, if helping the government's local institutions deliver is of interest to you, AHEAD is the place to go to for some interesting volunteering opportunities. Or you could become a donor.

ahead@aheadininitatives.in
[Abeer Chakravarty +919830998875](tel:+919830998875)

RICE LOVER? GROW A DYING VARIETY


 Did you know that there are nearly 100 indigenous varieties of rice in Tamil Nadu, all with their own nutritional properties? Some varieties are pest and drought resistant, others provide energy and stamina, and still others are given to pregnant women for nutrition.

The Centre for Indian Knowledge Systems is working to conserve the biodiversity of rice. It plants each variety of rice every year, and in more than one part of Tamil Nadu so that no variety is lost in calamities.

You could do your bit with just ₹15,000 by adopting a variety at one location and ₹30,000 at two locations.

www.nammanellu.com | 9940008356
ciksbalu@gmail.com

HELP ON THE STREET

 People addicted to drugs and alcohol, HIV patients who have been dumped by their families and homeless men and women need help to get off the street.

Reaching out to them in Goa is the Street Providence Trust. It runs six shelter homes and provides food, medicines, clothes and hospitalization, if necessary. Several such people have been reunited with their families, which is essential because the support of relatives is what they really need.


Excess food from restaurants is collected and stored in 38 freezers across Goa.

The poor in villages are given access to these freezers. Volunteers warm the food and serve it. Breakfast is available free outside four government hospitals in Goa.

There is also a programme called Meals on Wheels which takes food to the poor.

streetprovidencegoa.com | streetprovidence70@gmail.com | +918380097564

BE A DOCTOR TO THE POOREST

 Swasthya Swaraj believes in promoting self-reliance in health. It tries to ensure access to health services for the poorest communities in remote tribal areas. They advocate community-based research on unique health problems in tribal pockets and find solutions for them. The non-profit's Comprehensive Community Health Programme is active in 79 villages in 10 panchayats of Odisha, and covers 4,000 people. It works in Thuamul Rampur block of Kalahandi district, one of the most deprived regions in India.

The non-profit runs two health centres which provide 24/7 emergency services, including deliveries, surgical procedures and OPD services. They specifically work on malaria prevention through training, creating awareness, screening and indoor residual spraying.

Swasthya Swaraj appoints nurses from the local population for community engagement. It also offers a Tribal Health Fellowship for young doctors. You can donate to help their efforts or volunteer with them.

swasthyaswaraj@gmail.com | info@aahwahan.com | 06670 295476 | 7326874618

SAVE FORESTS IN WESTERN GHATS


 What does it take to conserve an acre of forest? Well, a contribution of just ₹5,000 from you could go a very long way when used by the Applied Environmental Research Foundation (AERF). It has been working in the Western Ghats since 1994 to conserve biodiversity. Since then it has reached out to poor owners of private forests in the Western Ghats and compensated them for not cutting their trees. In this way 5,000 acres have been secured till 2028.

AERF is also into promoting

traditional forest conservation practices like maintaining sacred groves and helping communities harvest non-timber forest produce from which they can earn.


www.aerfindia.org | 020-25431870, 020-65235281 | info@aerfindia.org

BANISH DRUGS AND COUNSEL ADDICTS

 With many years of experience SPYM (Society for Promotion of Youth and Masses) provides services in substance use deaddiction 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.

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

Civil Society

EVERYONE IS SOMEONE

The magazine that goes places Now make your connections

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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!**

