

Civil Society



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JOINING THE DOTS

THE MAGAZINE THAT GOES PLACES

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WHERE
ARE WE
BEING
READ?

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Civil Society

READ US. WE READ YOU.

Value of patience

COMPLEX problems need time to solve. Voluntary organizations in a hurry to deliver outcomes tend to end up nowhere. Our cover story on creating livelihoods for women in districts on the Line of Control in Kashmir reveals how much persistence is required. Before providing skills and work, there are social attitudes in multiple layers that have to be addressed. SEWA went into this project with decades of experience behind them. Yet for the first three years they could make no headway in the villages of Kupwara and Ganderbal districts. Results took another seven years.

SEWA's work in Kashmir is a great example of how voluntary organizations and the government can collaborate in the interests of development. It is the Union home ministry, much reviled for making life tough for NGOs, that has brought SEWA in and provided unstinted support. Undoubtedly this should lead to the realization that NGOs are required to deal with community issues. The government can't succeed on its own.

It is complicated working in conflict zones like Kashmir. SEWA's success is based on their long record of good work and maturity in approach. But they were also not averse to new learning and accepting where they were getting things wrong. The result has been a vibrant sisterhood of Kashmiri women. But, more importantly, it is sisterhood connected with the rest of India and in particular Gujarat, which is SEWA's base.

Helping women earn liberates them and improves their status. It transforms families and whole communities. The women of Kupwara and Ganderbal are already bringing about peace in their districts and promoting integration with the rest of India as being in Kashmir's interests. Politicians and security forces have not been able to achieve this.

A committee has been set up by the Central government to explore the possibility of one nation, one election. Is such a thing at all possible for a country as large as India with an enduring federal structure? Our opening interview is with Prof. Jagdeep Chhokar, who has closely examined this issue and has some forthright opinions on it.

We also bring you the findings of a landmark report on the birds of India put together through a wonderful collaboration among 30,000 birdwatchers. The message is that birds in general are under threat. And if you find increasingly that it is impossible to walk about freely in most Indian cities, there is good news — walkers' rights have become an issue in Pune. A PIL has been filed in the Bombay High Court and the Pune municipality has been held to account. Could this be the trigger for more cities?

Shankh Anand



COVER STORY

A SISTERHOOD IN KASHMIR

With skills and incomes, women have been given control of their lives in the districts of Kupwara on the Line of Control and Ganderbal in Kashmir. It is a growing sisterhood.

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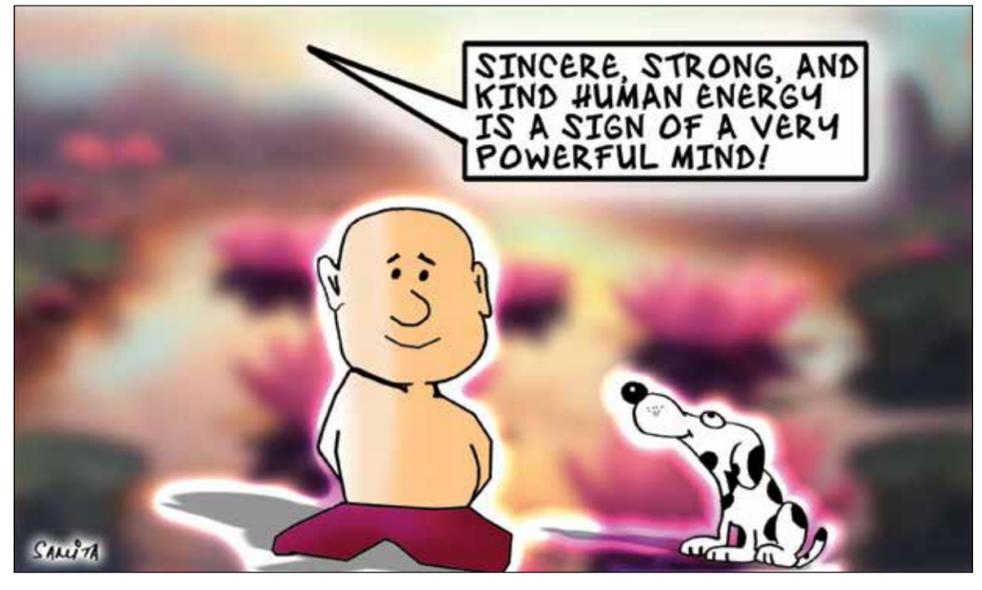
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IN THE LIGHT

SAMITA RATHOR



LETTERS



Tilonia saga

I read your interview with Bunker Roy, 'People without degrees can be engineers and health workers.' Bunker Roy has influenced hundreds of thousands of people and I am one of them. I want to thank him through your magazine.

Renuka Savasere

An amazing story with many lessons from Tilonia. During a road trip to Ajmer about 20 years ago, I stopped over at Tilonia. I was impressed with what was created there then. I still recall the internet kiosk in a *kutchra* structure and their garment store with traditional Rajsthani patchwork.

Sanjiv Kataria

I am a civil engineer working in the Water Resources Investigation & Development Department of the West Bengal government. I

am also a groundwater hydrologist. I want to be a part of this organization.

Subrata Halder

Loved this. Bunker Roy was a hero for us when we were in Pilani. The true spirit of rural NGOs was reflected by initial heroes like him and legendary environmentalists like Chandi Prasad Bhatt and Sunderlal Bahuguna.

Giridhar S.

Ladakh stories

Interest in folklore is slowly dying out among the younger generation. It is very important to revive it, as Tushar Sonkar is doing, to keep it alive and be able

to understand the past generations better. Folklore from different parts of the country and even the world should be introduced in schools to create interest in children, who are the next generation.

Chandralekha Anand Sio

Cheetah count

I'd go even further in the last line of your piece, 'Making a tally of cheetahs, dead and alive', by asking: Is the Kuno project about reintroducing the cheetah to India or a cheetah safari park with an endless supply coming from BRICS founder-friend South Africa?

Amit Kumar Bose

Ahimsa musings

I enjoyed reading Rajni Bakshi's column, 'Fight back with a kiss.' Nonviolence can indeed be a very powerful tool but the responses of the current regime are increasingly pushing honest and concerned protesters towards the use of violence. And movies like *Ungli* and *Jawan* are promoting peace to seek justice against the failure of governance.

Ravi Duggal

Rajni Bakshi's column, 'Raising the hand of peace', was a gentle and simultaneously powerful commentary.

Neelam Deo

Tram nostalgia

Your story, 'Kolkata to revive its trams but where are the drivers?' took me down memory lane. There was nothing to beat the daily tram ride from the Red Road-Mayo Road intersection which took me to school in Kidderpore in the early 1960s. The route took you all along the Maidan and then crossed the Kidderpore Bridge.

This track was arguably the most scenic and fast as well since the tram tracks were off the road for most of the distance and unimpeded by other vehicular traffic. I'm hopefully looking forward to catching Route 35 whenever it is restored. Good luck, Calcutta!

Ashok Wadhwa

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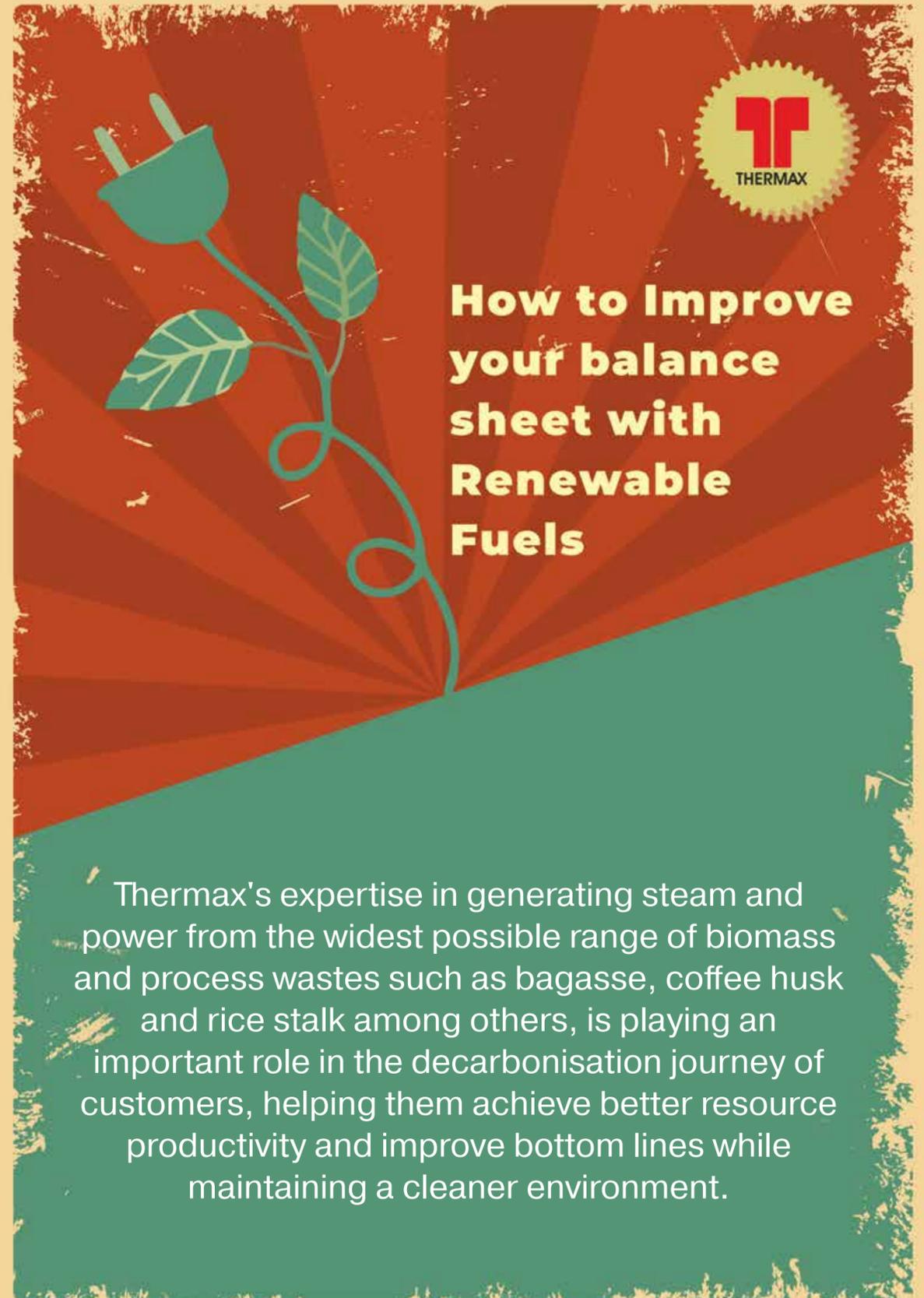
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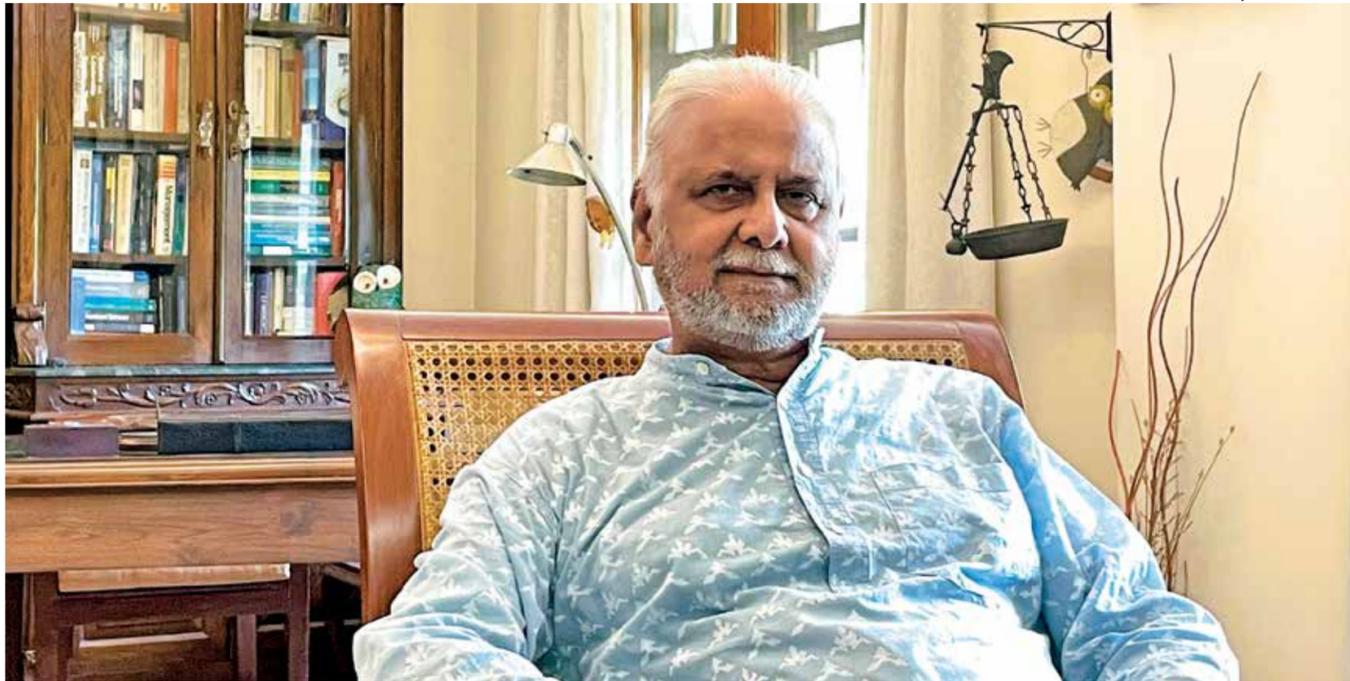
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JAGDEEP CHHOKAR: PUT 'ONE POLL' IDEA IN THE OPEN

Photo: Civil Society/Prashun Bhaumik



Prof. Chhokar: 'I would say we should be very sorry that we are looking for the cheapest possible democracy'

'Elections aren't the property of parties. Citizens have a stake'

Civil Society News
New Delhi

A committee under former President Ram Nath Kovind is setting out to examine the feasibility of holding elections to Parliament and the assemblies simultaneously every five years. It is being said that money and time will be saved if elections are held together, perhaps within a single timeframe if not on one day.

How realistic is this proposition? And even if it were to be possible, what does it do to the functioning of democracy in the country? Does it undermine the very spirit of the Constitution which envisages a federal structure?

This is not the first time that the proposal is being floated. Arguments have gone back and forth. Among those who have made an important contribution to the exchange of views has been Prof. Jagdeep Chhokar, formerly of the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, and a founder of the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR). *Civil Society* spoke to Prof. Chhokar for a better understanding of an issue that has many long-term implications for Indian democracy.

Q: Since you have worked for a long time on electoral reforms, how do you see this demand for one nation, one poll? Is this the most important reform we should be dealing with?

I don't think this is either the most important reform, or a reform at all that we should be concerned with, at least at this point. You say that the government seems to have indicated that this is something that can't

wait. I am actually surprised at all this brouhaha because this thing was discussed almost to death from 2016 to about 2019.

In 2018, if I remember right, I wrote an issue paper for the Hindu Centre for Politics and Public Policy wherein I dealt with this issue at great length and in great depth. My impression was that this issue was kind of more or less gone, but it has been resurrected and resurrected as if this is the most important and burning issue in our country today, which surprises me at one level and doesn't surprise me at another level.

Q: How do you see the timing of its resurrection?

Well, it's the timing. I really don't know what is behind this timing, but I have said this before and say it again: nothing is going to come out of this. We have wasted two or three years of public time and public resources in discussing this issue, which is not going to see the light of day in the foreseeable future.

I was asked once, if all political parties were agreeable to doing this, what was the problem? My problem is that as a citizen, I have a stake in the electoral process. The electoral process is not the sole property of the political parties in the country. As a citizen, I have a say and I will not let it go by without challenge given the fact that they just require something like five or six Articles in the Constitution to be amended. Even if they were to be amended, I believe this is violative of the principle of federalism, which is part of the basic structure of the Constitution as enunciated in the Kesavananda Bharati judgment.

Of course, it is true that no less than the Vice President and a nominated Member of Parliament (MP) who was the former Chief Justice of India,

have both commented that the basic structure doctrine is not legal or tenable. The tenability of the basic structure doctrine was determined by the Supreme Court in a 13-judge bench judgment and a legal luminary, Fali Nariman, has written that it has been tested and debated more than once in the Supreme Court, and it is found to be constitutionally valid.

Now, unless that is actually put aside, one nation, one election cannot happen. Of course, we are in a situation where a leading member of the Prime Minister's Advisory Committee has written that we need a new Constitution. So, if we are thinking of a new Constitution, so be it. If we are thinking of dispensing with the basic structure doctrine, so be it. But let us first do that. We cannot assume, or, at least in my opinion, I cannot assume that the basic structure doctrine will be set aside and we can do one nation, one election.

Q: What is the process of consultation that needs to happen for a mega reform like this?

Well, number one, the so-called mega reform cannot be against the Constitution. Number two, if we want to talk about amending the Constitution, there is a process that the Constitution provides. It has to be brought into Parliament. Obviously, there are necessities such as pre-legislative consultation, which several members of civil society have been talking about for years on end, but nothing seems to have happened. A draft bill to amend the Constitution should be prepared. It should be put in the public domain for discussion for a reasonable length of time.

Such an important amendment bill should be in the public domain for something like six months for wider public discussion and debate. After that, and considering all the feedback that comes in, then that bill needs to be perhaps recast, perhaps not recast. That only time will tell. And then the bill arrived at should be introduced in Parliament in the normal way.

Members of Parliament must be given the bill several days ahead of time. They must have time to read the bill, to reflect on the bill, to discuss the bill with constituents, and so on. And then the bill should be back in Parliament for discussion. Only then we will see what happens depending on the composition of Parliament and the opinions of various Members of Parliament. I am open to this.

Parliament has the right to amend the Constitution, subject to the limitations placed on it by the basic structure doctrine. And Parliament is free to do that. Of course, the requirements are two-thirds majority ratification by states, etc. All will come into play in the normal course.

Q: In a sense you already have the beginnings of that public discourse. You have a committee which is headed by a former President who himself is a lawyer of some standing. You have a lawyer like Harish Salve on that committee and a whole lot of other people. Do you have problems with this committee?

No, I have no comment on this committee. But let me say that the process of wider discussion and debate has happened over a three-year period, at least from 2016 to 2019. That input should be available. It is in the public domain. NITI Aayog also put out a paper, I believe, to form a committee like this. I don't readily recall the terms of reference of the committee. But, if I remember right, its terms of reference are something to the effect of, you know, study this issue and make recommendations on how it can be done, which always gives the impression that this will be done.

In my humble or irreverent opinion, the issue has been discussed ad nauseam. There is no need for further discussion. Let the government bring out a bill to amend the Constitution. And let's discuss that rather than whether one nation, one election is needed or not.

Q: One of the points which are highlighted the most by proponents of this reform is that to save money and time on elections, have them all in one go. You know how expensive elections are?

I don't know. Ask people who fight elections. All I will say is that, in the 2019 election, there was an estimate by the Centre for Media Studies that the expenses were about ₹60,000 crore. If one looks at the details of the

report, it leaves out a whole lot of things. The accuracy and veracity of those estimates are open to interpretation.

The basic issue in election expenditure is not the money that is spent by the Election Commission or the Government of India to conduct the elections, including the cost of all the security forces that move around the country. The bulk of the expenditure in an election is done by political parties and candidates. And that is an amount which, at least to the best of my knowledge, nobody in the country knows. Because no political party and no candidate has ever given the true explanation of how much they have spent, and I say this with all responsibility.

In the 2009 Lok Sabha elections, we analyzed the election expenditure affidavits of 6,753 candidates, and only four said they had exceeded the limit and 30 said that they had spent about 90 percent of the limit. The rest said they spent only about 45 to 55 percent of the money. But this flies in the face of the fact that every political party and candidate, with some very minor exceptions, keeps demanding an increase in the expenditure limit. A former chief election commissioner had said at that time that if they are spending only 50 percent, then the limit should be reduced and not increased.

Number one: The expenditure on elections is done mostly by politicians and political parties and they have never complained about the election expenditure. Number two: Even if the cost of conducting elections is

'On the question of time, how long do elections take? Fifteen days, three weeks, one month, two months? I mean are polls some monster preventing the country from developing?'

very high, the question that arises is, are we looking for the cheapest possible democracy? Or are we looking for an effective and working democracy? Are elections considered to be a necessary evil that they have to be done with the least possible cost and as infrequently as possible? Well, then, why have elections at all?

I find this argument that having one nation, one election, whatever that means, will save money which can be used for development, extremely distasteful and hurtful. Is democracy something that has to be traded off against so-called development? And I'm deliberately saying so-called development because development has various definitions. What I consider development somebody may not consider development. And we may or may not have a national consensus on development, but do we want a functioning and effective democracy or not? If we do, then I would say we should be very sorry that we are looking for the cheapest possible democracy.

And on the question of time, how long do elections take? Fifteen days, three weeks, one month, two months? I mean, are elections some kind of monster which is preventing the country from developing? For heaven's sake, the country has gone to the moon despite elections.

Q: Do you think it is, if at all, feasible in a country as diverse and as large as ours?

Well, look, nothing is not feasible. Today, if we want to do something, we can do it. Technology exists and every wherewithal exists. But the question is, is it desirable?

When we say one nation, one election, what exactly does it mean? The nation has a national legislature called the Lok Sabha. And there is one election for that in five years. Yes, there is one election. One nation, one election.

There are 29 state legislatures and so there are 29 elections every five years. Twenty-nine elections don't happen every year. Every five years

Continued on page 8

Continued from page 7

there is one. A Lok Sabha election and one state assembly election in every state is what we have. How does this translate into an election happening every day?

Democracy has a cost. Democracy is about people's participation, people's commitment to the nation, people having a sense of ownership of the nation. It requires some investment. And that investment is the electoral process.

If we treat it as something which is a ritual, then it's alright. Let us be clear then that we are going through the ritual and let's not worry about it. We are used to it. We as a society, believe in a whole lot of rituals which have no meaning. If the intention is to reduce 29 elections, I just have to disagree, that's all.

Q: So, effectively, a measure like this strikes at the very spirit of democracy in a country like ours.

In my opinion, yes.

Q: We've seen in recent times laws being pushed through with almost no discussion. Even if the opposition were to be present, it might not have made a difference. Is a brutally strong majority a liability?

A brutally strong majority in and of itself is no problem. The problem arises when the brute majority is used to negate democratic functioning. Democratic functioning and the rules of business of our parliament require that bills ought to be given to members a certain number of days ahead of the time they are going to be presented in public. We don't do that. It is not a brute majority, it is the negation of democracy. Brute majority does not mean that you give a copy of the bill to members as they enter the Lok Sabha.

The minister then places it on the table, the Speaker introduces it and it is voted on in the next 20 to 25 minutes and then the copies are taken back. I mean, it has nothing to do with a brute majority. It has to do with the negation of democracy and I'm saying the words negation of democracy for the third time. Yes, in an effective functioning democracy, a strong opposition is extremely advisable and even necessary.

A strong opposition, irrespective of the numbers because a few effective opposition members may be more useful than a large number of ineffective members. But numbers do play a role.

A strong opposition is necessary, but it does not mean that a weak opposition means democratic norms and ethos should be given the go-by. Democratic norms and ethos have to be observed by the ruling party.

Q: But brute majorities tend to get carried away.

Well, all I'm saying is brute majorities are not advisable, but they are not a disease in itself if democratic ethos is practised.

Q: Where do you see this leading to and to what end?

I can't predict what will happen in the future, but my hunch is that this will be discussed at great length and it will come to nothing. The other thing I can say is that it depends on what the intention behind it is. It is not something that can be rammed through Parliament. If it is, it will be challenged in court.

But let me also go back to the brute majority question. Every time we have a rather strong government with a strong party, there is a tendency to be attracted by the possibility of perpetuating one's rule. That one may not necessarily be an individual desire, because individuals are finite. That one may well be a party.

Now, if you remember right, when Indira Gandhi was in a strong position, there was talk of similar — not necessarily one nation, one election — but a presidential form of government when Dev Kanta Barooah said Indira is India and India is Indira!

I feel very strongly that if this is a backdoor attempt or if it is an attempt to bring in a presidential system of government through the backdoor, it ain't going to fly. ■

Pune's footpaths have rules, a PIL seeks answers

Rina Mukherji
Pune

EVERY Indian city has broken roads and ramshackle footpaths occupied by vendors and squatters. In some instances, wealthy residents have extended their houses onto footpaths. There are also hazards like open manholes, rusted pipes, dangling wires and whatnot. Pedestrians contend with multiple hazards as they move about. But it need not be so if municipalities were to fulfil their responsibility of maintaining amenities and shared public spaces as they are supposed to under the Indian Constitution. Providing the right to walk safely is inherent in that responsibility.

Qaneez Sukhrani, a citizen-activist in Pune, has filed a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) in Bombay High Court seeking pedestrian rights from the Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC).

The PIL comes close on the heels of another petition filed to demand safe and usable roads in areas under the PMC's jurisdiction. The municipality has been told to file an affidavit in three weeks' time outlining all that it has done to improve its roads.

Both PILs are directed at the PMC. But the issues are really of national concern. They hold good for citizens and municipalities across the country.

Sukhrani points out about Pune, "The Metro Rail project is progressing in an unplanned manner to the extent that in several locations, the entire footpath has been dug up. In several locations the entry and exit staircases connecting Metro rail stations have consumed the entire footpath."

Footpaths are encroached upon by authorized or unauthorized vendors, hawkers, illegal food stalls, beggars and illegally parked vehicles. Entire footpaths are blocked due to unplanned digging for private or public civil work. These are never covered and restored to their original status.

In other instances, footpaths are covered with debris and garbage, making it impossible for pedestrians to walk. They are instead forced to walk on roads, dodging speeding vehicles, or travel by car even for short distances when they could very well walk.

Incidentally, the PMC was one of the first municipal bodies to accept the Urban Street Design Guidelines (USDG), which are in line with the recommendations of the Indian Roads Congress, and the Smart City Initiative.

As per the USDG, roads in the city ought to be designed as mobility corridors with preference for non-motorized transport, feeder roads, neighbourhood roads, and through traffic roads.

The guidelines go into great detail on the kind of footpaths cities must have. They say footpaths should be walkable, clean and safe for pedestrians. They should be free of encroachments, parking and utility obstructions and accessible to all users.

The adjoining landscaping must create a buffer space between pedestrians and vehicles and also provide shade. A good footpath



Qaneez Sukhrani



Footpaths are encroached upon by authorized or unauthorized vendors, hawkers, illegal food stalls, beggars and parked vehicles

design must provide a clear and unobstructed minimum walking zone of two metres horizontally, have a tough, anti-skid surface and provide clear visibility and visual continuity so as to get easily noticed by vehicular and pedestrian traffic.

The footpath should be above the carriageway, of uniform height and maximum 150 mm above road level, separated by the curb. It should slope gradually towards the stormwater drain to prevent accumulation of water. Suitable ramps ought to be provided at entry and exit. In case a raised footpath is not possible, railing or curb stone separators have to be provided to create a walkway segregated from the carriageway. If there are obstructions that cannot be removed, the footpath width has to be increased to ensure minimum clear width of the walking zone.

Ramps and steps at the entrances of houses and compound walls should be within the property premises without any encroachment on the footpath. The width of the footpath cannot be reduced to provide ramps or steps. The gate of the property should open inside without causing any obstruction.

The guidelines specify that the footpath level should never be lowered, to prevent motorists from using it for parking. The guidelines provide for a minimum two-metre-wide cycle zone at a 100-mm level above the carriageway and bollards for cycle tracks. Recommending asphalt or cement with coloured surface treatment for cycle tracks, it rules out the use of paver blocks.

Although the PMC has built good footpaths and streets with cycle tracks in a few parts of the city, one finds that in most of Pune the USDG are yet to be put in place, even seven years later. Roads remain incomplete owing to land acquisition issues.

Jutting manhole covers, potholes and open manholes make existing roads dangerous, and accidents are a daily occurrence.

"The merger of 34 new villages into PMC limits has swollen the city's population to six million. We have 1,400 sq km of roads within the PMC and now face a scarcity of resources. We are trying our best," says Municipal Commissioner Vikas Dhakne. Regarding the PMC's response to the petitions filed, Dhakne declined to comment, "The

The guidelines state footpaths should be walkable, clean and safe for pedestrians. They should be free of squatters and all obstructions.

PILs will be taken care of by our legal department."

However, advocate Satya Muley, who has filed the petition on the pedestrians' right to usable footpaths on behalf of Sukhrani, questions the PMC's insistence on "scarcity of resources".

"The PMC has been showing an increase in its revenues, year after year. There is provision in the law to provide amenities, it is the intent that is lacking. Whenever a housing society comes up, 10 percent of the land becomes the property of the PMC, which is reserved for the provision of amenities. These include vendor zones, open markets, parks and the like. They are part of every development plan," says Muley.

He admits the PMC is struggling with an overcrowded city. But the constraints it complains about are of its own making, he says. "The corporation wants to divert the people to a mass transit system. But if you are building Metros and introducing e-buses, you ought to have the infrastructure to give people access. If footpaths exist, the people can easily walk up to the Metro station or bus-stand safely."

It is not possible for people to walk safely due to encroachments, open manholes and other obstacles. Walking itself becomes hazardous. People then turn to two-wheelers like scooters and motorbikes. "You do not need any resources to improve footpaths. It is a question of maintaining and administering your existing infrastructure. It is only in the case of building new footpaths that you need additional resources," Muley emphasizes.

"As per Schedule XII W of our Constitution, it is the duty of our urban local bodies to administer and plan our towns and cities. Planning is an essential function of the PMC. It is the absence of planning that leaves roads unfinished, and deprives us of bridges and footpaths to access public transport," he concludes.

Referring to roads being left unfinished, he asserts, "The PMC needs to step in and acquire the required land by force. There is provision in the law for the same. Why doesn't it do that?"

The Bombay High Court's decision on Pune will have implications for municipal governance all over. Could the PILs on footpaths and roads be the trigger for petitions in others cities? ■

Birds generally under threat, says landmark report after 3yrs

Prashun Bhaumik
New Delhi

THE common sparrow and the house crow were a part of the cityscape not so long ago but are hard to come by today. Apart from pigeons, one can hardly spot any bird species in most cities. Wonder why? The *State of India's Birds 2023* is a landmark report, recently released, that takes an extensive and exhaustive look at 942 species of birds and why most are in decline, some even faced with extinction.

The report is the result of a mammoth study undertaken in partnership with 13 premier institutions — six governmental and seven NGOs — and help from a large number of independent experts. Coming after three years (the first report was in 2020), this second edition has expanded its information base with contributions from more than 30,000 birdwatchers across the country and about 30 million field observations. In 2020, the report evaluated 867 species with the number going up to 942 of India's 1,200 bird species in the current report.

The report spells out that while there have been a few gains, it's the losses that are of great concern. In India, generalist species like the feral Rock Pigeon, Ashy Prinia, Asian Koel and Indian Peafowl are doing very well. Other common species like the Baya Weaver and Pied Bushchat are relatively stable. But the larger picture is grim: 60 percent of species show a long-term decline and 40 percent are declining currently.

A total of 178 species have been categorized as High Conservation Priority by the report. Of these, 94 species, including the Great White Pelican, Greater Flamingo and Indian Vulture, made the list based on both abundance trends and range. Another 45, including the White-bellied Heron, Brown-winged Kingfisher and Baer's Pochard, are very restricted. The last 39, including the Great Indian Bustard, Lesser Florican and Bengal Florican, were included based on a combination of their range and the IUCN Red List status.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature or IUCN Red List is a critical indicator of the health of the world's biodiversity. It is a powerful tool to inform conservation action and policy. It provides information about species' range, population size, habitat and ecology, use and trade, threats, and conservation actions that help inform conservation decisions. The Red List Index shows trends in overall extinction risk for species. Governments use the Index to track their progress towards targets for reducing biodiversity loss.

India has diverse natural habitats for birds—from tropical rainforests with hornbills and trogons to grasslands with bustards and floricans, to deserts, mangroves and rocky hills. The decline of grasslands is especially worrisome for birds.

Some 'specialists' are restricted to a narrow habitat, but many other birds have adapted to a wide variety of habitats created and shaped by humans, such as



Common Tern

plantations, agricultural fields, open fallow land, and even urban areas.

The Yellow-wattled Lapwing is an example that can live in a wide variety of 'open' habitats including agricultural and fallow land, lawns, and natural grassland. But the Indian Courser is more specialized and can live only in lightly grazed grasslands and adjacent fallow lands. Similarly, the White-bellied Woodpecker requires large trees, mostly found in the old-growth forests of the Western Ghats, but the Greater Flameback can survive even in old plantations.

The report has found that birds that can live in multiple habitats are doing well as a group and may require less conservation. Specialists, however, are more threatened. Grassland specialists have declined by more than 50 percent. Birds that are woodland specialists (forests or plantations) have also declined more than generalists, indicating a need to conserve natural forest habitats. Birds that specialize in any ecosystem (natural or human-made) have suffered steeper declines than those that can live in multiple ecosystems.

It also observes that birds that live in open habitats are acutely impacted. Open habitats in India have been severely compromised by the spread of invasive, drought-tolerant woody plants, as well as wind turbines and power lines. Of particular note is the Great Grey Shrike, which has suffered a worrisome long-term decline of more than 80 percent. The Rufous-tailed Lark and Common Kestrel are now categorized as species of High Priority. There are exceptions, though. Adaptable birds such as the Yellow-billed Babbler and Jerdon's Bushlark are doing well.

It also points out that the Indian vulture population's decline has been catastrophic. This is almost entirely attributable to inadvertent poisoning by anti-inflammatory drug diclofenac being administered to livestock. Surveys conducted by the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) show that the White-rumped Vulture has suffered the most, followed by the Indian Vulture and the Egyptian Vulture.

Vultures were among the most numerous birds that



Asian Koel (female)



Indian Peafowl

once dotted Indian skies. Then, without warning, the population of several species crashed to nearly zero in the late 1990s and early 2000s — among the most rapid declines of any vertebrate ever recorded.

The report warns that the three Great Indian Bustard species face imminent extinction. Bustards are disproportionately endangered due to their slow life-history traits and specialized ecological needs. While half of all bustards worldwide are threatened, the three species that breed in India — the Great Indian Bustard, Lesser Florican and Bengal Florican — face imminent extinction. Incidentally, the Lesser Florican has been declining faster than the Great Indian Bustard but has not received the same conservation attention.

They have all suffered because of hunting and widespread habitat loss, compounded by their slow growth and reproduction rates. The largest of them, the Great Indian Bustard, is classified as Critically Endangered in the IUCN Red List 2019.

Bustards are a group of iconic grassland birds. The Great Indian Bustard occupies semi-arid agro-grasslands of western India and the Deccan. The Lesser Florican inhabits semi-arid agro-grasslands, moving between its breeding grounds in northwest India and non-breeding grounds in the Deccan. Finally, the Bengal Florican is found in sub-humid tall grasslands of riverine floodplains in north India and the



White-bellied Blue Flycatcher



Plumbeous Redstart



Montagu Harrier

Brahmaputra plains. While half of all bustards worldwide are threatened, the three species that breed in India face imminent extinction.

Habitat loss and degradation constitute one of the major problems in key sites for shorebirds also. Crucial shorebird habitats like Pulicat Lake, the Gulf of Khambhat and the Gulf of Kachchh, Thane Creek and adjoining mudflats in Mumbai, and the Pallikaranai Marsh in Chennai are under threat of encroachment. Many wetlands, especially mudflats of avian importance on India's east coast, have been converted to shrimp farms and mangrove plantations. In many wintering sites, the illegal killing of shorebirds alongside other waterbirds is also reported.

Pollution is another major issue for wetland habitats, with high organic residues due to sewage and other pollutants reported in wetlands such as Odiyur, Mudhaliyarkuppam Lagoon and Pulicat Lake.

Raptors that specialize in either forests or open habitats are more threatened than those that are generalists. While adaptable raptors like the Oriental Honey Buzzard and the Black Kite are doing well, some groups such as harriers are in decline.

Raptors, or birds of prey, inspire awe in all of us. Some, such as falcons, are fearsome hunters and find a place in art and culture. Others live closely among us, like the Black Kite, which has adapted to feed on

Continued on page 12

Continued from page 11

discarded waste, or the Peregrine Falcon, which preys on pigeons that flourish around humans. Generalist raptors, such as the Shikra and the Brahminy Kite, however, are doing well.

According to the report, several birds of interest need immediate help. The iconic Sarus Crane, which is widely believed to pair for life, has rapidly declined over the long term and continues to do so. Similarly, the Forest Wagtail's numbers are reducing, though the causes of the decline are not understood. The Pied Kingfisher, Common Crane, Sirkeer Malkoha, Grey Wagtail and Spot-winged Starling have all shown a rapid decline in recent years.

Endemic birds seem to be declining more rapidly than others and Western Ghats endemic birds are most severely impacted, such as the White-bellied Blue Robin.

Climate change is a major reason pushing mountain species directly towards extinction. The report points out that the diverse terrestrial bird species is concentrated largely in tropical mountains, with each species adapted to a specific temperature range tied to altitude. The Himalayas and Western Ghats are particularly rich in bird diversity, with the latter being a hub for some unique birds. However, climate change is posing a threat to high-elevation bird species as favourable conditions shrink at mountain summits, potentially causing local extinctions.

With its loud and distinct song, the Asian Koel is part of folklore, poetry, and art in India. It is among the few birds whose song most Indians are likely to immediately recognize. The koel is known to exploit crows, laying eggs that are thought to partly resemble crow eggs. While crows accept koel chicks as their own, they are fiercely aggressive towards adult koels in the breeding season, chasing and sometimes even killing them. Asian Koels occupy a variety of habitats, wherever crows or mynas are found.

Now, for some good news! Our stunning national bird is one of the most rapidly increasing species in the country today, expanding into habitats where it has never lived previously. In the past 20 years, the Indian Peafowl has ventured into the high Himalayas and the rainforests of the Western Ghats. It's now found in every district in Kerala, a state where it was once extremely rare.

The good news of the increase in peafowl must be tempered by a recognition of increased reports of crop damage (and consequent retaliatory poisoning) in different parts of the country, and the speculation that rising peafowl populations may have negative impacts on snakes and other reptiles. While conservation tends to focus on rare and declining species, it is important to investigate the impacts of this peafowl boom on both people and ecosystems. The Rock Pigeon is the ultimate example of living in harmony with humans. All over the world, it has successfully adapted to live in human habitation, nest on human structures, and feed on whatever humans provide.

Habitat specialists — particularly specialists of grasslands and other open habitats, wetlands, and woodlands — are declining rapidly. In terms of diet, carnivores, insectivores, and granivores are declining more rapidly than omnivores or fruit- and nectar-eaters. Separately, migratory species appear to be under greater threat than non-migrants. And species endemic to the Western Ghats-Sri Lanka region are faring worse than others. The finding that a large number of common species are in trouble is cause for concern.

The report calls for policy and action to be aligned to highlight species of high conservation priority, address problems of neglected habitats, and promote research and monitoring to arrest such declines. ■



Osprey

A PARENTING APP IMPROVES CHILD HEALTH

Usha Rai
New Delhi

EARLY morning, parents of the largely migrant population of Kondli village in Mayur Vihar assembly block in east Delhi and adjoining areas set out for work. The waste mountain at Ghazipur is easily visible at Kondli and often the stench emanating is overpowering. This is one of Delhi's poorest areas.

Many mothers are undernourished and though they love their children, providing food and shelter for the family takes precedence over child care. But that is changing thanks to the Aga Khan Foundation's (AKF) concerted effort in training ASHAs (Accredited Social Health Activists) and designing a parenting app called Paalan 1000, that keeps reminding young mothers when and how to care for their babies with colourful pictures and audio recordings.

Fortunately, as Sanjay Kumar, who looks after the AKF programme, points out, over 90 percent of the families have android phones and with the assistance of the ASHAs, around 3,000 users have downloaded AKF's Paalan 1000 app.

Recognizing that the old lecture-based modules used in government settings were ineffective, AKF worked on an innovative approach for Early Childhood Development (ECD) training. The ECD module was designed as fun activities with standees displaying Vroom messages on parenting tips and a nurturing framework. Activity-based learning, local expressions, and language were used to encourage greater participation.

The Mother and Child Protection (MCP) card was utilized as a tool for group activities to enable understanding of the relationship between parenting tips and milestones in child growth. Special ECD training was given to 404 ASHAs and, where necessary, handholding was done. The home visits became more meaningful with the health workers identifying development delays and monitoring growth of newborns to two-year-olds.

The initiative began with a 'parent coaching in the first 1,000 days' campaign through hoardings, banners, posters, messages on e-rickshaws and on radio. Thirty-three health facilities and Anganwadi centres of East Delhi were identified for the project. Families were encouraged to have their babies at the Lal Bahadur Shastri Hospital in Khichripur, East Delhi, and a stimulating environment was created at the hospital for children coming for vaccination or paediatric OPD visits. A special room was allotted for breastfeeding mothers.

As the AKF intervention comes to a close at the end of the year with the Centre taking ownership of the parenting app, ASHAs proudly claim the exclusively breastfeeding percentage has risen from 49 percent to 87 percent.

Mannu, the ANM (Auxiliary Nurse Midwife) at the clean and inviting Mother and Child Welfare dispensary at Kondli, which sees a steady stream of mothers and infants for vaccination, weight and growth checks, says the first 1,000 days represent a crucial phase of rapid physical growth and accelerated mental development. Special

attention in that period constitutes a unique opportunity to establish lifelong health. Even in the womb, the baby relies entirely on the mother for nutrition, mental, physical, and emotional growth.

Mannu monitors the work of 10 ASHAs who service the area. Each ASHA has responsibility for a population of 10,000. The ASHAs have been trained so well that Mannu has not seen a single infant death in Kondli in the past three years. This is because great importance is accorded to the first 42 days after birth and the ASHA's accelerated home visits under Home Based Newborn Care (HBNC).

SEVEN VIDEOS When Kamini, 32, an IT professional and a working mother, got pregnant for the first time she turned to Manorama, the ASHA allotted to her area. She would come once a fortnight and ensure that she took calcium and iron supplements, more greens in her meals, and fruit. Her baby girl, Bhamini, is now a perky six-month-old and Kamini says the parenting app serves as a substitute for her mother and mother-in-law when they are not around. "It tells me what I should do for my baby and how I should care for her." Then, in an aside she admits that she has derived more information from the app than from her wise senior family members. Her husband, Kulbhushan, also turns to the app when Bhamini is under his watch.

There are seven videos about the first 1,000 days of a child's life. There is a vaccination reminder and for each month a different activity is provided for the child's development. To save children from TV addiction, the app tells parents not to watch TV, videos or their phone screens in the presence of the child until they are two years old. Born weighing 2.7 kg, Bhamini is now a healthy seven kg.

Once a month, Manorama visits 450 homes to help and advise pregnant and nursing mothers. She insists on freshly cooked meals for babies who are old enough to eat. Repeating a meal of dal/chawal over three days enables the child to recognize it and begin asking for it. Manorama has developed a special bond with Kamini, Bhamini and their family.

Uzma and her 19-month-old baby, Mahinoor Fatima's story is one of hope. A resident of Mulla Colony, Uzma is a graduate of Delhi University and was teaching computers to children when she got married to Bablu Khan who deals in jute bags. Her first child, Mariam, now five, was born at the Lal Bahadur Shastri hospital and she had no problems in bringing her up. When she became pregnant again she contacted Dharamveeri, the ASHA who had seen her through the first pregnancy.

PRE-TERM BABIES Uzma probably did not pay adequate attention to her health and nutrition and Mahinoor was born in the seventh month of pregnancy in December 2021. The baby weighed just 1,200 gm and was placed in the special newborn care unit of LBS Hospital for 24 days. Initially, she was too weak to suckle and was given formula milk. Uzma, with support from Dharamveeri, began breastfeeding her and with proper care and support Mahinoor's health improved slowly and she came home. Uzma does not have a smartphone and therefore cannot benefit from the parenting app. She does, however, have the MCP card and took all steps to ensure Mahinoor's well-being.

On her part, Dharamveeri went into fast gear after doing a one-month course on care of weak, pre-term babies. She held consultations with other ASHAs and helped Uzma nurture the child back to health. The kangaroo hug helped the baby immensely. For a year, for an hour every day, Uzma and the baby would be without clothes and Mahinoor would be held close, soaking in her mother's warmth and love. The



Local ASHA centres keep a record of the child's overall growth



Seven videos walk a mother through the first 1,000 days of her child's life

kangaroo hug or Kangaroo Mother Care (KMC) is a comparatively new feature that is being given importance in saving underweight and pre-term babies. By the end of her eighth month, Mahinoor was 5 kg 800 gm and speaking a few words. Slowly, her diet improved with *khichdi* (a smooth mix of rice and pulses), boiled eggs and mashed bananas. Today she sits with the family and eats everything, including meat, and wheels around on her bright yellow horse-shaped cycle. However, she has an aversion to fruit and Uzma is working on overcoming it.

With new awareness about the care of low-weight babies, ASHAs are encouraging young mothers to use the KMC or the kangaroo hug as nature's way of energizing such babies. In addition, frequent breastfeeding and consumption of iron folic acid (IFA) and calcium tablets by mothers is recommended post-delivery.

Under the Paalan 1000 Days project, fathers too are being encouraged to assist in care of the child. They are asked to sing and recite rhymes and play with colourful toys they bring for them. Parents who were too busy earning two square meals a day are finding time for their babies and enjoying it. ■

There are videos on the first 1,000 days of a child's life plus monthly reminders for vaccination and activities to help in child development.

Better food, more money on Bhil farms

BHARAT DOGRA

AMRITLAL, a farmer from Bhundri village in Anandpuri block of Banswara district, used to migrate every year in search of work until 10 years ago. A voluntary organization, Vaagdhara, prevailed upon him to devote his time and energy to reviving his ramshackle four-bigha farm which he had neglected for decades. Amritlal agreed to try out the suggestion. After all, the technology it was recommending was a very low-cost one. Following the advice, he planted fruit trees, and trees for fodder, fuel, and small timber to meet his other needs.

He also started making organic manure and pest repellants in improved ways on his farm, using cow dung and urine, saving on buying inputs from the market. He planted a range of crops and became almost self-reliant in meeting the food needs of his family and, in fact, improved his family's nutrition.

Today, Amritlal and his wife, Surta, do not need to migrate. In fact, they can afford to acquire more land on lease for cultivation. While there is a rich diversity of cereals, pulses, vegetables and fruits on their farm which brings in a steady income, they also have the option of selling bamboo and goats to meet any exigencies which might arise.

Amritlal has now become an effective messenger for the ideas of self-reliance and sustainable livelihoods. What he tells others is supported by evidence — his own field. He is the inspiration behind the planting of several thousand trees and for this he has received the Umedpur Lodh Environment Award.

About two decades ago, the only option for the Bhil tribals of Anandpuri block in Banswara district of Rajasthan was to migrate in search of work. Farming had become a loss-making enterprise. The costs of inputs had risen and if the weather played truant, they found it tough to pay off loans they had taken to begin cultivation.

Over the years, frequent migration led to their farms becoming more and more unkempt.

It was around this time that Vaagdhara, a voluntary organization, began working in the area. It understood that tribal communities

with meagre financial resources could not afford to incur high costs or take high risks.

Vaagdhara emphasized farming practices that avoided or minimized outside inputs, thereby reducing costs, and at the same time provided more healthy food by avoiding chemical pesticides and minimizing use of fertilizers. The challenge was whether they would be able to maintain yields.

Vaagdhara successfully achieved this through good soil and water conservation practices and by promoting mixed farming, helping farmers grow diverse vegetables and fruit trees, thereby contributing to health and nutrition.

Recalling those early days, Jayesh Joshi, founder and coordinator of Vaagdhara, says, "The more we searched and discussed, the



A sustainable livelihood enables Amritlal to stay with his family and not migrate for work

Bhils need to migrate in search of work but organic inputs, some examples show, seem to be making farming more worthwhile and healthier too.

more it appeared that we were getting back to the traditional wisdom of the tribal communities which had been eroded in the years when alien, expensive, chemical input-intensive technology was being imposed on them in the name of development. So, this was an important part, a re-learning of traditional wisdom. Another part was the introduction of new scientific practices which were in tune with the heritage of this region."

Vaagdhara also discovered that the knowledge and agricultural practices of the Bhil tribal communities could be used as climate change mitigation and adaptation measures. Lower costs and better environmental outcomes have meant that, over the years, the Bhils are less dependent on

exploitative labour migration.

In several villages, women have formed groups called Saksham Samooh to spread the word and encourage people to be self-reliant by opting for sustainable livelihoods.

In Nagli Sera village, Kanchan, who is also a facilitator for Vaagdhara, says migration has declined while farm-based livelihoods have improved. Kali Devi says that while practising organic farming on her seven bighas she has been able to purchase two buffaloes, an indicator of economic improvement. In the same village, Susheela says, while mentioning the diversity of crops grown by her on five bighas, that, leaving aside salt and edible oil, she is self-reliant in meeting all her family's food needs.

In Sundraav village, Usha and Ambalal say part of their 10-bigha farm is already organic. Ambalal says organic cultivation is the right path but as it is difficult to change over suddenly, he is moving gradually towards it. They also have two buffaloes and enough surplus milk to feed kittens and cats regularly. The traditional Halma system of the Bhils of helping one another during the peak harvesting or sowing season instead of hiring cash-paid farmhands is still working well in this village, Ambalal says.

For all these families, kitchen gardens which provide a lot of nutritious vegetables and fruits for home consumption, have been playing an important role in improving nutrition.

Women farmers such as Kanku Devi have been very active in protecting and preserving seeds, using and also reviving several traditional methods, contributing further to self-reliance.

To spread the message further, Vaagdhara recently undertook a march from Banswara to Jaipur, ending by meeting the chief minister and presenting a charter of demands.

To take forward the concept of self-reliance, *swaraj* groups have been formed in various villages and these together form a Janjati Vikas Manch or forum for development of tribal communities. Mansingh, who heads this, says that diversity of organically grown vegetables and fruits has made a remarkable contribution to improving nutrition without incurring cash expenditure.

Several millets grown here earlier such as *ragi*, *kaang*, *kutti*, *bati* and *kodra* are to be revived. Soil and water erosion are being checked. Alongside, government schemes like MGNREGA are consistently being made use of. In addition, social reform issues like checking wasteful ceremonial expenses have been taken up successfully. Micro-plans for several villages have also been prepared. ■

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Photos: Civil Society/Bilal Bahadur

Women have been trained in weaving, stitching, handicrafts, agriculture and horticulture

A LIVING ON THE LOC

How a SEWA sisterhood succeeds in Kashmir

Civil Society News

Kupwara/New Delhi

SHAHNAZA is a busy working woman who at 32 is in the prime of her life. Her day begins with sending her three daughters to school and putting her household chores on course. After that it is off to her job and there is time for little else till she is back home.

It is the kind of hectic routine that a young employed mother might have in any large Indian city. But what is different with Shahnaza is that she lives in Kupwara district on the Line of Control (LOC) with Pakistan in Kashmir. Her job is as a master weaver and the opportunities she has for a fulfilling life in these remote parts are hard-won and unique.

Till 10 years ago, it was not the kind of life she knew. Instead, she would be sequestered in her house, fearful of transgressing her father's wishes and unaware of the world at large. She hadn't even been to Srinagar, the capital of Jammu and Kashmir, just a few hours away.

Shahnaza's father earned ₹500 or so a day doing odd jobs — and that was in the months when the weather was okay. It was barely enough for the family — there were three daughters and a son — to have one meal.

Life was full of anxieties and fears. Kupwara has suffered from seething extremism and volatility. It can be deceptively sylvan and scenic and has traditionally attracted some degree of tourist attention. But it has been an impoverished district, lacking in infrastructure and employment possibilities. In winter everything shuts down.

The first possibilities of change for Shahnaza and other women like her

came in 2009 when SEWA, the iconic federation of women-led organizations in the informal sector, went to Kashmir at the urging of the Union home ministry to develop livelihoods for women in the border districts. Local prosperity, however meagre, engenders peace and stability. It gets people to focus on new horizons.

Founded on Gandhian values in 1972 by the late Ela Bhatt, SEWA or the Self-employed Women's Association, has successfully shown that economic empowerment of women not only brings them their rights and improves their status, but also, through more balanced gender equations, results in enduring social change.

Women with incomes have a greater say in households and shape family aspirations. More money also means more options — particularly getting an education and deferring marriage.

SEWA's experience has been all over India and abroad as well — Afghanistan, for instance. It has created a bank for women who are poor to access funds. It functions as a sisterhood which stands for inclusion, access and agency for all women irrespective of religion or caste. But could SEWA bolster Kashmiri women in border districts with its strategies for empowerment? Could it help them make the transition from their seemingly endless strife and tension to acquiring skills and stable livelihoods and purpose in life?

SKILLS, SUPPLY CHAINS It has taken all of 13 years of persistence by SEWA to build a sisterhood of Kashmiri women who take money home, see the potential in themselves and are a force for peace. The outcomes

have been transformational.

SEWA's mission in Kashmir hasn't been easy even with all the experience at its command. And it has been working in just two districts — Kupwara to begin with and then Ganderbal.

But 7,195 women have been trained in weaving, stitching, handicrafts, agriculture and horticulture. There are 1,225 who have been groomed into being master trainers — Shahnaza being one of them. Women have been taught how to service and fix solar lights. They have been exposed to computers. They make snacks and also package and sell them.

The women have set up horticulture supply chains with the result that 2,500 tonnes of apples are sold every season. In addition there are cherries, apricots, strawberries and saffron.

These women earn between ₹10,000 and ₹30,000 a month, which is a whole big change from their dire dependence on the men in their families. Collectively, they do an average of ₹2 crore worth of business a year. Their status within families and within the community at large has changed. They have become a part of decision-making.

Incomes have prompted more young women to study further. Apart from skills, they have learnt to run their businesses. They continue to get married off, but increasingly they exercise their own choices.

An important step has been the setting up of the Shehjar District Association in Kupwara to give the women a sense of organization. It was registered in 2016 and is owned and managed by the 3,500 women who are its members. It was initially financially supported by SEWA, but now the association is self-sustaining because the women market their products through it.

With the association has come the Shehjar Community Resource Centre, which now serves as the hub for training and economic activities. Women gravitate to the centre, set up with support from the Union home ministry and the ministry of textiles.

OUTRIGHT HOSTILITY The good work done in Kupwara is an example of how the government and social organizations can collaborate for development. SEWA and the current home ministry have a healthy partnership. Working in conflict zones is complex. It means dealing with deep-seated attitudes and outright hostility. A government can't hope to succeed alone.

It took a few years for SEWA to make some headway. It wasn't allowed to speak directly to the women. Men were the decision-makers. But getting the women to travel out of Kupwara was a game-changer. They had mostly never gone anywhere else before. They were chaperoned by men, but the trip opened their eyes and in their minds at least set them free. They saw Delhi, Ahmedabad, Pune, the sea coast. But above all they saw the successful model of enterprise that SEWA stood for. They came back wanting to be like other women who were working and earning for themselves.

Reema Nanavaty, director of SEWA, recalls the antagonism in the beginning when no one was willing to meet the SEWA team and the involvement of the government at that point, far from being an advantage, was a major hurdle.

Says Nanavaty: "When we first went to Kupwara we stayed with the BSF at a camp and went to the villages with BSF protection. Lo and behold, what hostility we faced! They said, 'Oh, so you all have come from Hindustan.' We said, 'Yes, we are from Hindustan. Where else are you from?' They were not even willing to see us as fellow sisters or anything of that sort."

"We were just thrown out from the villages, so much so that some of the men wanted to torch our vehicle. This happened in village after village. That made us realize that going with the BSF or with uniformed men was not going to work, if you wanted to really organize women. We came back again, tried for about a week, but we had to face the same hostility," she recalls.

"So, 11 of us sat down and discussed our experiences. Even if we tried to meet the women in the villages, they were so suspicious they would come all together. But when we would return the next day, no woman

would be allowed to meet us."

They decided that there was a need to change their strategy. They began going to the villages on their own instead of being accompanied by the BSF men and a BSF vehicle. But they still made no headway.

"We had thought that having worked in Afghanistan, Kashmir, being part of India, wouldn't be that difficult for us," says Nanavaty.

"After about six months, we thought, Let's change the whole approach. Perhaps their hostility would melt away if we were able to take even a few women to SEWA so that they could see that what they think is Hindustan is not that bad. Also, the women of Hindustan are not that bad!"



Shahnaza, now a master weaver

'We were 25 girls. Till then I had not been outside Kupwara. For the first time I went to Srinagar. Then to Jammu. And Delhi and Ahmedabad. I was so happy. I felt like I had reached the moon.'

SEWA told the Union home ministry that they would really need a local base, a place to stay and work in Kupwara, so that they could at least talk to the women without the men getting in the way. The men had been refusing to allow SEWA people to meet the women.

The joint secretary in the home ministry introduced SEWA to a local organization called the HELP Foundation. They gave SEWA two of their local organizers in Kupwara. But once again they were men!

"I asked myself, again two men? How are we going to work? But I think the whole approach was very different. It was the men who would consult with the men in the villages and once the men agreed, then we would be allowed to go and speak to the women. Also, we had to cover our heads.



In solidarity: Women from Kupwara discover an empowering future in Ahmedabad

We had to do that. It took almost a year to really establish some kind of trust and faith in us," says Nanavaty.

BHARAT DARSHAN The government had a Bharat Darshan programme which SEWA decided to use to take groups of women to the SEWA units in Gujarat and also show them cities in other parts of India. The women would be accompanied by two or three men who would be brothers or fathers and one of the organizers of the HELP Foundation.

The first exposure visit, however, ended in failure because the women were welcomed at SEWA with *bindis* as is the tradition in Gujarat and the men saw this as an attempt to convert them.

"We brought them to SEWA on an exposure visit and thought this would now work. But after they went back the men said, 'You are taking them to Gujarat, you are going to convert the women.' In Gujarat we welcome guests with a *bindi*. That backfired. This was in 2011," says Nanavaty recalling how carefully they had to proceed.

The next trip was more successful. Better preparation was involved. Women from 12 to 15 villages of Kupwara were taken to Gujarat to show them how SEWA functioned and the impact its programmes had on reducing poverty. It was also decided to go beyond SEWA to show them factories in the rest of India.

"We exposed them to how SEWA organizes women in urban and rural areas, and the poverty there is. They saw that even though the women were poor, they were able to earn a livelihood, a decent livelihood," explains Nanavaty. "They saw how poor women had their own bank. They saw the literacy programme, the different livelihood programmes, and the outlook of the women began to change."

Bharat Darshan allows for two or three different locations. The Amul Dairy plant was shown to them as was the Bajaj Auto factory in Pune.

Recalls Nanavaty: "They wanted to see the beach. It was the first time

'They saw how women in worse situations had changed their lives. I think it triggered a spark in them, it was a turning point. It was clear they were ready to take charge of their lives.'

ever they had left their villages and sat in a train. And you know, when they went to the beach, they felt liberated. I mean, they wanted to take pictures and they wanted to dress differently. Each one had one or two cell phones. They would take pictures but not let their fathers or brothers who were chaperoning them come to know."

This trip was a turning point for both the women and SEWA. From the responses of the women, it was clear that they were ready to do something and perhaps even take charge of their lives.

"When they went to Rajasthan or Gujarat or Maharashtra they saw how women in worse situations than theirs had changed their lives around. And I think that triggered the spark in them," says Nanavaty.

It had taken all of three years to get this far, but the persistence had paid off. Once back in Kupwara after the tour, things began changing and SEWA found it had gained trust and access. The women, on their part, began talking within their families, sharing their experiences, particularly with their elders, both mothers and fathers, and, importantly, in-laws. They were now taking the lead.

Four moves had made a big difference. First was the involvement of the local NGO, the HELP Foundation. It provided a point of entry.

Photo: SEWA



Snacks and food products are a line of business



Stitching as a skill



Embroidery with local flourishes



Women own and manage the Shehjar Association

Second was the decision by SEWA to have its own premises in Kupwara where the SEWA team stayed. This was seen as proof of the organization's seriousness. Third was the exposure to the rest of India and the success stories that SEWA could showcase. Fourth was the enormous patience and empathy shown by Nanavaty and members of her team. Conflict zones are special, more so in the case of Kashmir.

"We rented a local place and they saw we are not a fly by night organization. We stayed there. We cooked there ourselves. We were there whenever they wanted us," says Nanavaty.

"We were close to this Rajwar forested area near the LOC. There would be strikes all of a sudden. You would hear firing and my colleagues would be really nervous. I had to be with them," she recalls.

"I had to reassure them that we were there all together. Whatever would happen would happen to all of us. I think that really made a big difference. Then we started going to the villages again."

FAMILY OPPOSITION Shahnaza tells us she had to fight hard to get her family's permission to go to Ahmedabad. Her father was particularly opposed to her going. And when she did go, he was livid when she returned.

"I pleaded with him that I had done nothing wrong. He even hit me. I told him how *Ela ben* and *Reema ben* had looked after us, like we were their own children," she says.

"We were 25 girls. Till then I had not been outside Kupwara. For the first time I went to Srinagar. Then to Jammu. And Delhi and Ahmedabad. I was so happy. I felt like I had reached the moon," she says.

"In Ahmedabad we saw how the women of SEWA worked. They depended on no one. They earned money and looked after their children. Their men also worked. We decided we should have a skilling centre, like the one in Ahmedabad, in Kupwara where at least 100 women could learn and find employment. So, we demanded such a centre from the



Exquisite local creations find markets through the SEWA network

senior people in SEWA. We were there for 12 days," she says.

"What impressed me most was how they earned their own money and how united they were. There were absolutely no religious divisions or bias. They worked together with love."

Shahnaza's example showcases how the initiative in Kupwara has discovered talent and leadership among the women of the district. She was not just a quick learner but had the capacity to become a master trainer.

"When the SEWA centre opened here, I took 12 girls with me to learn stitching, weaving and solar repairing. I learnt solar repairing in 15 days. I now do weaving and teach it too," she says.

From her first earnings Shahnaza bought gifts for her parents and siblings, finally winning over her father. Over time, she has supplemented her family's income. She says she makes at least ₹10,000 a month. Her sisters are now married and her brother is in the police force.

"The same people in my village who were against us joining SEWA today *salaam* us. We have an identity. We have also improved our village and resolved issues like water and introduced solar lighting," says Shahnaza.

Such personal testimonies are priceless. Plenty are to be found in Kupwara and Ganderbal. *Civil Society* spoke to Shahnaza first in Kupwara and then on Zoom from Gurugram. She is strikingly independent and spirited. She is her own person.

So also is Shameema Begum, who is president of the association. Her involvement with SEWA goes back to 2011. Shameema chose food processing as her line of business. She was also lucky to get the full support of her family.

"I took one month of training in food processing in Ahmedabad followed by advanced training in subsequent years. I have a small unit at my home and there I train some of the girls of my village," says Shameema.

She began by making pickles and apple jam and then forayed into the making of snacks and modern bakery items. She received training

in making doughnuts, chocolate cakes, chocolate dates, muffins and pastries.

"The food processing unit started its operations with *samosas*, *mathis* and other snacks. Now we do modern bakery items," said Shameema. She has trained others in her village in food processing and is also involved with the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM).

Shafia, 20, is one of the girls who connected with Shameema and was trained at the Shehjar centre. The small oven, she says, makes it difficult for them to meet market demands. A big oven is on its way and much awaited.

Nusrat, also 20, says that they are in touch with the people likely to place orders for modern bakery items. She exudes confidence that with the larger oven they would be able to meet bigger orders.

Shireen Begum is one of the master trainers at the handicrafts centre who says she has trained more than 150 girls.

In her forties, Shireen said that she got her own training at the centre itself and employment as a master trainer followed.

"We provide basic training to the girls at this centre and they are able to make various handmade items. Once they get the basic skills, they upgrade to the higher levels following which they make designer items like wall hangings, bags, mobile pouches, apparel and many more," says Shireen.

Girls like Shaheen Qayoom, Khalida, Tasleema, Safeena and Afsana work at the centre for a monthly wage, making handicrafts. Some time back they received an order from well-known designer Ritu Kumar.

It is a growing sisterhood that is in evidence. The young women cheerfully use *ben* with their names in Gujarati style — *ben* meaning sister. So it is that we meet Shahnaza *ben*, Shameema *ben* and Nusrat *ben* and so on in Kashmir. The circle with SEWA has been finally closed and with it has come the integration of these far-flung parts with the rest of India and the prosperity that it brings with it. ■

(With reporting by Jehangir Rashid)

INSIGHTS

OPINION | ANALYSIS | RESEARCH | IDEAS

People and summits



**DELHI
DARBAR**

SANJAYA BARU

A summit, by definition, is for summiteers. Sherpas are needed and so are all the camp staff. Ordinary people are expected to stay a safe distance and laud summiteers. And that has not just applied to real mountain climbers but to the metaphorical ones too. For ages, kings, queens and other heads of state and government have met far away from the madding crowds. Then arrived late 20th century populism. Under pressure from what are variously called civil society groups and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), governments and multilateral organizations began allowing 'people' to come a bit closer to the summiteers.

Some got carried away by this tokenism. They dried up the moat, opened up the gates and let the barbarians in! James David Wolfensohn, president of the World Bank (1995 to 2005) invited representatives of various NGOs onto the Bank staff, into his executive offices and even into Bank annual meetings. At the Fiftieth Annual Meetings of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, in 1995 in Madrid, representatives of Greenpeace, an international NGO, were raising slogans and unfurling banners even as the King of Spain was welcoming the gathering.

In 1999 the World Trade Organization's ministerial conference met in Seattle, US, and there things went out of control. Global civil society turned up in large numbers, over 40,000 according to some estimates, and there was mayhem on the streets. The media called it 'The Battle of Seattle'. People were protesting against globalization and its consequences. After the street battles of Seattle, countries and organizations hosting heads of state and government summits became a bit careful about the distance that needed to be maintained between people and summiteers.

The issue became even more challenging

with the increase in the incidence of terror attacks around the world, from Paris to Jakarta, New York to Mumbai. Yet, many countries used intelligent, non-intrusive, clever, tech-dependent methods to ensure the safety of summiteers while allowing civil society to exercise its freedom to gather and have its voice heard. There were exceptions. Authoritarian regimes could not only keep people away but could also ensure that the 'people' allowed to come anywhere close to summiteers were security cleared, or just security persons in plain clothes.

Grant it to the United States that even after the dastardly 9/11 terror attacks of 2001, it managed to ensure that heads of state and

fact, if anyone did disrupt normal life it was the NGOs and the protesters. One would expect that all democratic governments would go about doing their work while their citizens went about doing theirs. Getting people to stop working, getting them out of their workplaces and bazaars and markets and parks and streets and forcing them to stay home, while the Government, with a Big G, hosted a gathering of other Big Gs, is such an Indian thing to do. Well, that's what the Government of India did, hosting the Group of Twenty (G20) summit.

Worse, not only were people kept away, many were in fact just covered up. Hiding the reality of poverty at a summit where leaders waxed eloquent about the need to eliminate

the scourge of poverty, is the kind of hypocrisy that the Indian political class and bureaucracy have indulged in for ages. In New Delhi in September 2023 they practised it with aplomb.

Not only were the barbarians kept out of the gates, even the media were kept at a distance. Of course, one could argue that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has long regarded most of the media as barbarians. The physical distance between delegations to the G20 summit and the official media covering the summit was yet another symbol of the Modi government's view of the

media. Many journalists from around the world covering the summit have since returned to tell it all. No media group had it worse than the White House press corps that had to sit in a van that was part of President Joe Biden's motorcade, while POTUS was dining with the PM.

Members of the Modi government, the summit organizers, fellow travellers of the ruling establishment among the media and the think tank community are all complimenting themselves for the fantastic success of the New Delhi summit. And, why not. The summit was a success. It went off well, it was glitzy and well choreographed. Indian diplomacy pulled a rabbit out of the hat, getting consensus on the Delhi Declaration. So on and so forth. No one should belittle the outcome and the hard work of all those who made the summit a success. But why keep people covered up, locked up and out? ■

Sanjaya Baru is a writer and Distinguished Fellow at the United Service Institution of India



Battle of Seattle: Global civil society turned up in large numbers

The summit went off well, it was glitzy and well choreographed. Indian diplomacy got a consensus. But why keep people covered up and out?

government from around the world could gather at the United Nations every year with their security assured and at the same time the people of New York could go about their daily lives without too much hindrance.

From Seattle 1999 to New York post-2001, the US government did what any democratic government would do, hosted summit meetings of heads of government without disrupting the normal life of its citizens. In

India's diamond



LOOKING AHEAD

KIRAN KARNIK

THE headline may lead you to think that this is about the diamond jubilee last year of India's independence, or the forthcoming one of the Republic. This is not about either of these milestones, nor about the famous Kohinoor. It is about two other diamonds that, looking ahead, are likely to have a huge influence on the country and people.

The first diamond is the demographic profile by age, an issue we have noted in earlier editions of this column. The country, as a whole, has transitioned to a total fertility rate (TFR) of less than 2.1, which is the benchmark for the so-called replacement rate. It indicates a flattening of the rate-of-growth curve, with population increase now driven only by past momentum. Projections indicate that the population should stabilize in about two decades and begin to fall thereafter. At the start of the next century, by one estimate, the population may be at almost exactly what it was in the year 2000, namely, one billion.

As in most areas, the average tends to cloud other figures and facts. For example, the southern states will, within the course of a decade, begin to experience population decreases; but a few others (Bihar, for example) will see increasing numbers for some decades to come. This has socio-economic and political implications, some of which were discussed in earlier columns (e.g., "Demography-driven migration", *Civil Society*, June 2022). Yet, for an overall analysis, looking at the country as a whole provides many interesting insights.

Already, better healthcare has considerably increased longevity. As a result, there are many more elders (60-plus years of age), and their number is expected to double in the next two decades. Combined with a decreasing birth rate, it makes elders the fastest-growing segment of the population. Their share in the overall population will increase from about 10 percent now to 20 percent by 2050. Of course, even then, there will be decreasing numbers in each age range above 60 years. Similarly, below 18 years, the number at each age will decrease. This will result in a big bulge in the working-age group of 18 to 60, resulting in the much-publicized demographic dividend (fewer dependants per working-age person). The result of these demographic changes will

shape-shift the standard developing-country pyramid of population-by-age to a diamond. This is India's first diamond.

The second diamond results from economic growth. It depicts the number of people at various levels of income. Here, too, the traditional shape in countries like India has been a tall pyramid, with a large number of poor people (a big base) and ever fewer people as you move up to higher income levels. The huge disparity between the low earners and the high makes for a tall pyramid. In a few countries — the Scandinavian ones, for example — where income inequality is low, it tends to be a very short pyramid.



Photo: Civil Society/Umesh Anand

Growing wants drive status-based consumption

Income distribution will resemble a tall diamond: Fewer at the bottom, a bulge in the middle class, growing numbers of the super-rich.

The success of India's poverty alleviation programmes has resulted in moving hundreds of millions to above-poverty incomes. As we project economic growth, it is clear that the future will see a big bulge in the lower middle class as people move out of poverty and begin to earn more. At the same time, income disparities continue: the growth in the number of billionaires, for example, is astounding. With fewer at the bottom (below the poverty line), a bulge in the middle class, and growing numbers (though low in percentage-of-

population terms) of super-rich, the income distribution will resemble a tall diamond.

Each of these two diamonds has important implications for India. One, for demography, can be summarized as "less Anganwadis, more (elder) age-care homes". Second, the need to convert maternity wards into geriatric ones. Another, as noted earlier, is the "demographic dividend". Fourth, to reap the demographic dividend and in the context of rapidly evolving technology, the essentiality of high-quality education, re-skilling, and up-skilling. In this, training for new skills is already a challenge; it requires an urgent and at-scale thrust on creating both training content and trainers (faculty). While there is a great deal of material already available online (much of it, free), its productive use will require selection and curation, as also guides and facilitators. The age-shift will also mean fewer schools and more colleges; fewer schoolteachers, and more professors. In a sense, less BEs and more PhDs.

The income diamond will, one hopes, transform back into a pyramid — but at a higher base level and, like the Scandinavian form, be a short pyramid indicative of lower income disparity between top and bottom levels. The expected progression of hundreds of millions from near-poverty to lower middle class, and the continued upward movement of those above will mean big shifts in demand patterns. This will be both accelerated and modified by the changing social mores. The so-called middle class of the 1950s and '60s (which, in comparative terms, was really the rich class) was, by and large, satisfied with what they had. The 1970s and '80s were times of transition. Post-1991, material aspirations exploded, triggered by global comparisons.

Today, growing wants drive status-based consumption, evidenced by the demand for top brands. One indicator is the number of high-end automobiles visible on the road. Even entry-level demand is now not for the low-cost models, but for slightly more expensive ones. In fact, marketing a car as "low-cost" makes it unsellable (as the Tata Nano discovered). In the next two decades, we are bound to see more such shifts in the demand and consumption pattern for a whole range of products. So too for services like education and healthcare. Thrift, economy, and value for money are rapidly being overtaken by status indicators based on price.

Clearly, the two diamonds are going to play a major role in the India of the future. The implications, policy choices and imperatives need to be carefully thought through. ■

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

Delhi's water footprint



LIVING RIVERS

VENKATESH DUTTA

MOST of the water consumed in Delhi is not of its own. Delhi's water reflects a strange mix of power, politics and money. The national capital is heavily dependent on external water sources to meet its ever-rising demand. At present, Delhi is grappling with a deficit of about 400 million gallons per day (MGD) of water in meeting its total estimated demand of 1,380 MGD. The national capital gets its water from the Yamuna, Ganga and Sutlej rivers.

To transport water from these rivers, an extensive system of canals, dams, reservoirs and pipe networks has been built. The cost of infrastructure including storage and the energy cost of pumping is huge, running into thousands of crores of rupees every year. This does not include the environmental cost of water transfer from these rivers — depriving these rivers of their ecological flows and the potential impact in terms of increasing disaster risks.

After flowing for around 400 km the Yamuna meanders through Delhi's eastern segment, flowing 54 km from Palla to Badarpur. The quantity of water is not always dependable and fluctuates throughout the year. There is no problem during the three monsoon months from July to September.

However, the water levels decline markedly during the summer months, from April to June. This decline is attributed to the sharp rise in demand for Yamuna water by other states, including Delhi, pursuant to a water-sharing agreement. Delhi's reliance on external surface water sources is primarily driven by the perennial issue of low water levels for the majority of the year in the Yamuna within the city's boundaries. This chronic problem is further aggravated by the substantial influx of untreated wastewater from two dozen drains and the subpar quality of the available water.

The first external water source is the Upper Ganga Canal (UGC), which originates from the Ganga in Haridwar. The UGC supplies over a quarter (26.3 percent) of Delhi's daily raw water requirement. This canal was built during British times primarily for irrigating the western regions of Uttar Pradesh. Now it serves as a vital source for meeting the

drinking water requirement of a large population. The canal comes closest to Delhi's eastern border at Muradnagar in UP, where infrastructure has been developed to transport canal water into Delhi.

This water undergoes treatment at Sonia Vihar and the Bhagirathi water treatment plants and is subsequently distributed to the southern, eastern, and northeastern parts of Delhi. Before the winter starts, the UP Irrigation Department temporarily closes the canal for routine maintenance, which includes clearing silt from the canal. This temporary closure inevitably results in a disruption of water supply to Delhi.



Delhi grapples with a deficit of 400 million gallons per day

External sources will meet Delhi's water needs for the next 50 years. You can bring water from anywhere if you have money and power.

The second external water source comprises two separate canals—the Western Yamuna Canal (WYC) and the Munak Canal coming from the neighbouring state of Haryana. The WYC commences at the Hathnikund barrage in Yamuna Nagar district of Haryana, drawing its water from the Yamuna river. The Hathnikund barrage was constructed between 1996 and 1999. It replaced the older Tajewala barrage three km downstream which was constructed in 1873.

The Munak Canal, a 102-km aqueduct also referred to as the carrier-lined channel, was constructed between 2003 and 2012 by the Haryana government on payment by Delhi. It is an offshoot of the WYC, originating at Munak regulator in Karnal district, situated northwest of Panipat. The Munak Canal

provides raw water to the Okhla, Bawana and Dwarka water treatment plants. Historically, there have been instances of insufficient water supply to Delhi by the Haryana government, as well as the unfortunate practice of local communities disposing of solid wastes into the canal water.

The third external water source is the Bhakra reservoir which provides 24 percent of Delhi's raw water and is located in Himachal Pradesh. This reservoir contains the water of the Sutlej river, which is distributed to various north Indian states and Union Territories, including Delhi, through an extensive network of canals. A specialized link canal has been established to

transport water from the Bhakra Canal to the Western Yamuna Canal. After the Bhakra reservoir water reaches Haryana via this canal system, it is further conveyed to Delhi through the WYC and the Munak Canal.

Three new dams are planned to augment Delhi's water supply. An MoU was signed in 1994 between the chief ministers of Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Delhi regarding allocation of Yamuna water. The Upper Yamuna River Board was created under the Ministry of Water Resources in 1995 to share water between

these co-basin states. The first project is the Renuka dam on the Giri river (about 250 km from Delhi), a tributary of the Yamuna in Sirmour district of Himachal Pradesh. The water will be channelled to Delhi via the Hathnikund barrage. Second, the Kisau dam on the Tons river, a tributary of the Yamuna, on the Himachal Pradesh-Uttarakhand border is proposed to meet Delhi's projected water demand. Thirdly, the Lakhwar dam project in Lohari on the Yamuna (75 km from Dehradun) will bring additional water to Delhi.

Apart from these major external sources, Delhi gets some water (about 8 percent) from its aquifers as groundwater. Many tube wells and Ranney wells are operational in various locations across Delhi, including the Palla floodplain area situated adjacent to the Yamuna.

All these external sources of water will be enough to meet Delhi's water requirements for the next 50 years. Perhaps Delhi will never be able to bear the full cost of water transfer, which includes the forgone losses to riverine ecosystems, and injury inflicted by the untreated sewage discharged back into the river. You can bring water from anywhere — if you have money and power. ■

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

Space for peace



**AHIMSA
MUSINGS**

RAJNI BAKSHI

ISRO's successful soft landing of Chandrayaan is a joyous moment that can inspire us to dwell on a big question. As humans venture farther out into space, what dimensions of our behaviour will be at the fore? Will it be our capacity to be greedy and violent or our capacity for cooperation and non-violence that goes 'spacewards'?

It has commonly been argued that human beings are not yet fit to venture out to space because we are still prone to petty disputes, wars and other insidious forms of violence. However, what lies beyond this subjective view?

Let's explore this at two levels. One relates to the ongoing efforts to prevent space from becoming an arena of an arms race. The other to see what science fiction and 'futures fiction' tell us about how people are imagining the challenge and promise ahead.

While non-violence is not the absence of violence, there is merit in understanding how efforts are being made to prevent violence in space.

In the 1980s Ronald Reagan, as president of the US, triggered anxiety globally by planning a 'Strategic Defense Initiative', which would put weapons in space. This project, nicknamed 'Star Wars', happened close on the heels of George Lucas's iconic film of the same name. Lucas' fictional universe was dominated by a tyrannical Galactic Empire which had invented a 'Death Star'— a weapon with a laser so powerful it could destroy an entire planet.

In real life the idea of weaponizing space is so obviously offensive that the first agreement between nations happened in 1967, two years before the Americans put a man on the moon. This agreement, called the Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies, was signed by the US, UK and the Soviet Union.

This treaty says that outer space is not subject to 'national appropriation' — either for use or

for occupation. It also prohibits the placing of nuclear weapons or any other weapons of mass destruction in orbit or on celestial bodies or in any other form in outer space.

But those who understand the fine print and monitor the developments in technology clearly feel that this treaty is inadequate. For example, the existing treaty leaves room for various kinds of weapons to be deployed in space. Thus, in December 2021 the United Nations General Assembly additionally adopted a resolution on 'Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space' by setting up norms, rules and principles of responsible behaviour.



Celebrations at ISRO's launching station as Chandrayaan lands on the moon



The Rover takes its first steps

This resolution reaffirms the applicability of international law, including the Charter of the United Nations, to activities in outer space. This allows all states to explore and use outer space without discrimination of any kind. But it also places responsibility on all states to "maintain outer space as a peaceful, safe, stable, secure and sustainable environment for the benefit of all..."

These are urgent concerns because now much of global infrastructure requires broadband which depends on satellites in

space. If indeed mining on the moon soon becomes viable there is a risk of bitter competition between nations and private companies causing violent conflicts. It is no surprise then that a large volume of science fiction tends to depict future dystopias with rampant violence.

And yet, it was the prolific science fiction writer, Isaac Asimov, who wrote way back in 1942: "Violence is the last refuge of the incompetent."

This idea was clearly evident in the *Star Trek* television series created by Gene Roddenberry in the mid-1960s. The fictional realm of *Star Trek* was created at the height of the Cold War.

In 1961 the Soviet Union had beaten the US by putting the first man in space. In 1962 the Cuban missile crisis brought the US and Soviet Union within a hair's breadth of a nuclear war.

Roddenberry's fictional world was based several centuries in the future, on the hopeful view that humans had finally learnt their lesson after surviving a third world war. The inter-galactic 'Federation', in which the *Star Trek* stories happen, is a world where there is no more racism, inequality and poverty. It is implied that this is what enabled humans to venture out into space and find other species — mostly in a spirit of

friendship.

Even in Lucas' *Star Wars* world the chief protagonists, the Jedi knights, are actually beings who are able to tap the power of spirit, known as 'the force', in ways that are more powerful than matter in the form of weapons.

Imagining a less violent, if not non-violent, future is an important first step to creating it. That is why strengthening and improving the UN treaties is important. Futures fiction that creates rich dramatic content without resorting to violence for excitement is important at another level.

How you view the future depends on your starting point.

If you see human beings as predominantly and unchangeably competitive and violent then even the most carefully drafted treaties, on how we should behave in space, will not save us from making a mess in outer space.

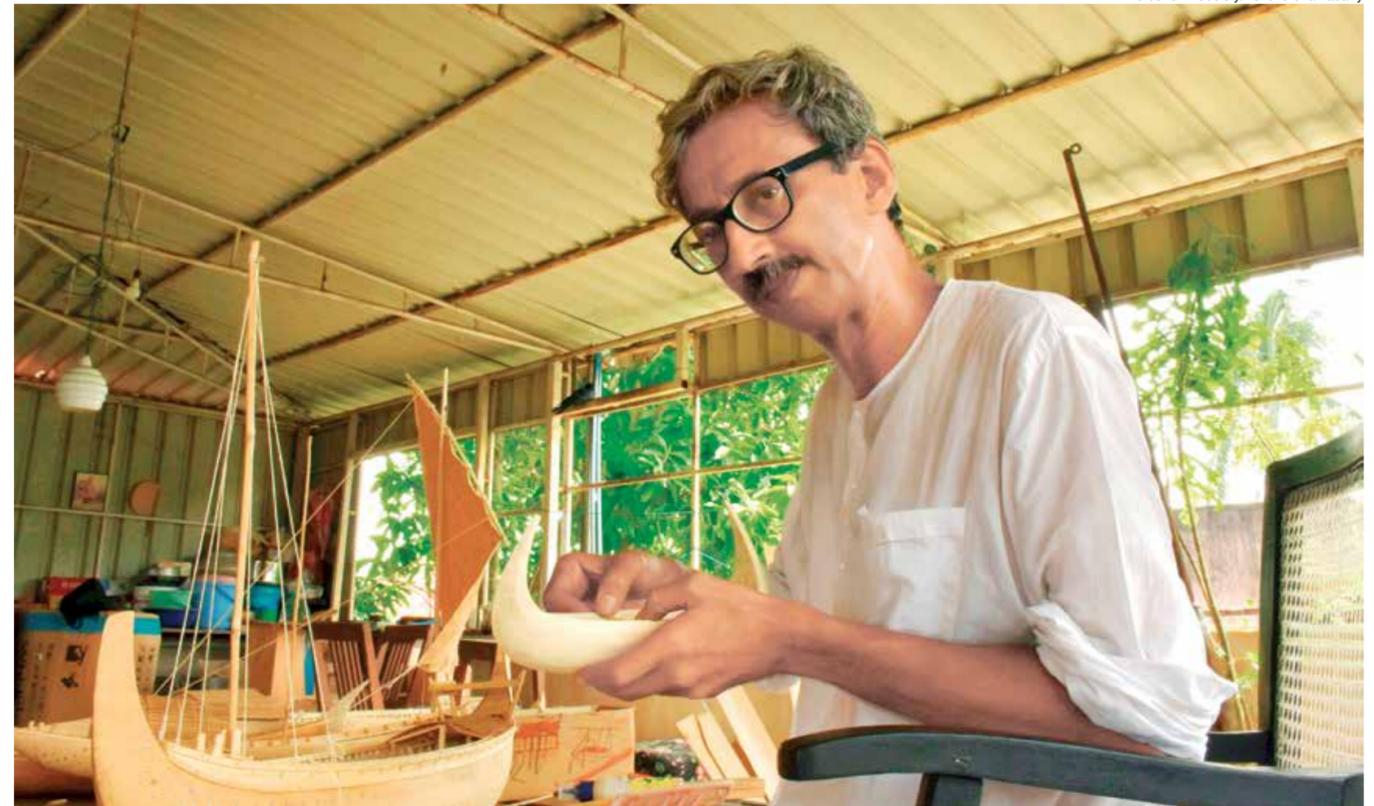
If you see human beings, collectively, evolving to higher levels of consciousness and thus growing in compassion — or at least a more refined sense of self-preservation — then indeed even the sky is not the limit. ■

Rajni Bakshi is the founder of YouTube channel Ahimsa Conversations

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Photos: Civil Society/Ashoke Chakrabarty



Swarup Bhattacharyya studies and builds boats to chronicle human evolution

The saga of Bengal's boats

Going with the drift over the years

SUBIR ROY

EVERY river has its own distinctive current, wave pattern, wind and tides. And rivers mean boats which predate the wheel, says anthropologist Swarup Bhattacharyya who has spent the better part of his academic life pursuing the saga of the boats of Bengal. If you wish to study the evolution of man in society in geographies where rivers predominate, a highly rewarding way would be to study the evolution of its boats which used the winds and the tides and the brawn of boatmen to get around the world long before mechanical boats arrived.

Riverine "Bengal", as it was called before it was divided, resides in the delta that comes at the end of the north Indian rivers before they meet the sea. Its life is intricately linked with the boats that it has been using since prehistoric

times to negotiate the rivers that criss-cross it.

Historically, migration of people was not possible without boats and once they came they enabled barter trade which was conducted through the exchange of surpluses. This happened long before money was invented. Bengal's boats evolved so early and robustly that they have featured prominently in the narratives of medieval times. An early sketch book has a chapter on the "boats of Bengal". Within Bengal boats have featured prominently in the terracotta panels that are found across the region.

Tamralipta, a port city in ancient India, was located on the coast of the Bay of Bengal. It has left behind an earthen toy boat which is similar looking to the boats excavated in Harappa. Thus, boats in a way linked and made India one from early civilizational times. But this chain of historical evidence was broken during

British times when there was a gap in records. Coming up to the present, there are records of at least 50 types of boats currently in use in West Bengal. Bangladesh has records of 176 boat types.

Explaining why he finds the study of the boats of Bengal so engrossing, Bhattacharyya (51) says, "Bengal is heaven for those pursuing maritime ethnography." He is a PhD scholar in the department of anthropology of the West Bengal State University. He is also associated with the Nehru Museum at IIT, Kharagpur and has worked as a senior research fellow with the Anthropological Survey of India.

The journey began, symbolically via boats if you like, with joining the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) project on boat typology and fishing communities of West Bengal and the Andamans to document the

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boats of Bengal. With this background, curating India's first boat museum, work on which began a decade ago, naturally fell upon his shoulders.

Bhattacharyya makes wooden models of boats — some tiny and others a little larger. In 2006 he had an exhibition in Delhi. But it was in 2017 that he began crafting models on a regular basis. Then came the pandemic when he found all the time to focus on his passion.

It takes between 20 and 30 days to make a model and Bhattacharyya now has a personal collection of 20 such model boats. He would dearly like to have a permanent exhibition if he could find the financial support. But going forward he might also sell the models a piece at a time.

Among international authors, he mentions Sean McGrail who has written *Boats of the World* and *Boats of South Asia* which seek answers to the question as to why a particular type of boat came up in a particular region and then travelled to others. The South Asia book in particular covers different styles of boat making unlikely to be found outside the subcontinent. It also documents an array of traditional boats used in the subcontinent today for fishing and other coastal river tasks.

Today the 'Patia' boat is available only along a 15-km stretch of the Bengal-Odisha coast. But there is a relief of the Patia in the *bhogamandap* of the Jagannath temple in Puri. The Victoria and Albert Museum in London has a three-dimensional sculpture of

the Patia boat which belongs to the 11th century. In the Indian Museum in Kolkata there is a 12th-century Patia relief which was found in Bhubaneswar. Clearly, boats connected Bengal and Odisha long before highways, railways and aeroplanes.

The Patia in use today is of course not the same as in early times. It has added a few planks over the past 800 years! This is a fine example of how boats have evolved, capturing the progress of human knowledge and the result of human ingenuity taking key articles of use forward. This work took Bhattacharyya to Balagarh village near Kolkata on the bank of the Hooghly. He learnt a lot from this famous centre of boat-making and home to many of the fishermen of the Tiyor Rajbangshi caste.

In the process of his research Bhattacharyya has found evidence of how boats have entered the human consciousness in Bengal. Today a child in Bengal will draw a boat on his own, but a child in Punjab will likely not; this is

despite the fact that few children today manage to take a boat ride. His consciousness about boats comes from the illustrated material which is given to him by his elders with encouragement to draw what he likes. Where does the inspiration for the illustrations come from? It has been found that in the art colleges of West Bengal students will typically draw landscapes with boats in them.

How ingrained boats have become in the consciousness of the Bengali can be found from the fact that they share a platform with the other Bengali obsession, football. The Mohun Bagan club symbol is a boat. Things have been taken to an altogether different plane with the ruling Awami League of Bangladesh adopting the boat as its symbol. So the boat has been on an unending and uninterrupted journey in the Bengali consciousness from prehistoric times till today.

If boats hold hands with football and politics,



Bhattacharyya's collection of his handmade boats

then the creative arts cannot be far behind. The works of prominent Bengali litterateurs like Rabindranath Tagore, Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay and Bankim Chandra Chatterjee feature boats. A good example is Chatterjee's novel *Debi Chaudhurani*. More recently, we have Manik Bandyopadhyay's *Padma Nadir Majhi* and Samaresh Basu's *Ganga*. Particularly noteworthy is the role that boats and boat journeys played in the life of Tagore. He had his own boats and one was named *Padma*, after the great river in Bangladesh, in which he travelled and stayed while looking after his *zamindari* in Shilaidaha. The boat was made by craftsmen from Dhaka for his grandfather, Prince Dwarkanath. Tagore did a lot of his writing while aboard the *Padma*.

Musical traditions like the Bhatiali and Sari all grew out of the lives of boatmen. Bhatiali songs are essentially love songs sung by boatmen in their loneliness when away from home. The Sari is a rhythmic song sung

together by boatmen while rowing so as to make the task both endurable and enjoyable. As they rowed they created the music which the music directors of today use, not the other way around.

How did this great boating tradition evolve? The craft and skill of boat making was transmitted through the *guru-shishya parampara* system by master craftsmen to their apprentices. The key element that every youngster had to learn was the way to coordinate what the eye saw and the hands crafted through the metamorphosis that took place in the brain. Having picked up what the guru handed down, the apprentice chewed on it in his mind and innovated, then passed it on to the next generation. This is how the craft and, if you like, art evolved.

It is noteworthy that in this transmission of knowledge through generations, nothing was written down. The two occupations of boat making and fishing were originally carried out by the Chandal caste which is now called Nama Sudra. It belongs to the currently listed Scheduled Castes. The Chandals were in fact among the original inhabitants of Bengal. They traditionally had no formal education and skills were handed down by execution and observation. Although the Chandals formed a particular caste, people from any social group could join and become a part of the tradition.

In recent times there has been a large number of Muslims among Bengal's boat people. Importantly, Brahmins have had nothing to do with

boat making or sailing and the recording and transmission of the attendant knowledge. Thus such a powerful and distinctive tradition has been preserved and transmitted by people deemed to be illiterate and of lower caste!

But such people have as powerful and enduring emotions as any others. A boatman gets emotionally connected to his boat. He believes he is bringing into this world a beautiful daughter who will one day go to some other home after marriage. She is also a symbol of fertility as she starts her journey in the water and helps earn a productive living.

The boatman's life has even earned him a place in the Bengali almanac. There is an auspicious day for starting to make a boat, *Nouka Gathon*, a day for handing over the boat to the client, *Nouka Chalon*, and finally the day the boat becomes water-borne, *Nouka Jatra*. Bhattacharyya is on a long and engrossing journey in the wake of the boat which is far from over. ■

CAUSE & EFFECT

Col Gill brings back a forest

UMESH ANAND

TREES disappear in twos and threes. Entire forests vanish. Public land gets encroached on. Human wastes and chemicals get dumped in water bodies.

What can you do about such ugly transgressions even as they sully your life? Precious little, you might say. Cleaning up after others isn't easy. There is no joy in getting cumbersome governments to act. Holding offenders to account can get messy.

Move on and let it happen would be the cautious response. But not so with Lt Col Jasjit Singh, 67, who is retired from the Army, has farming interests and lives in Ludhiana, Punjab's overgrown and underserved commercial hub.

He has through doughty efforts for the past three years been successful in getting the government to begin greening both banks of the Buddha Dariya, which is infamous as Punjab's most polluted river.

At his urging 18 acres have been reclaimed from encroachers downstream and 7,000 trees have been planted. Another 24 acres have been reclaimed upstream. The reclaimed banks have been fenced.

If Col Gill's efforts are carried through, as many as 300 acres could be greened over time. The trees that have been planted are young. But as they grow, they are well on their way to being the 'newest forest in Punjab', as Col Gill excitedly puts it. The planting of the trees, all local species, has been done by the forest department.

The Buddha Dariya flows through Ludhiana and then joins the Sutlej. The busy and teeming city dumps all its wastes into the Buddha Dariya, reducing its status from a small river to the equivalent of a drain. Sewage, dairy wastes and dung, chemicals from dyeing units and whatnot go into its waters.

Treatment of noxious effluents takes place mostly in name. A grandiose project by the previous Congress government has involved huge sums of public money but with poor detailing it has been a non-starter.

A small band of citizens, of which Col Gill is a part, have been trying to get dairies to shift and mills and dyeing units to be more responsible but, as expected, entrenched interests have been unmoved.

The Buddha Dariya carries its pollution downstream and poisons the water that people downstream need for agriculture and personal consumption. On the journey down, its banks have been grabbed, mostly by farmers extending their reach and thereby weakening the capacity of the river to regenerate itself through environmentally friendly trees and grasses. In addition, dredging of the river by the

government results in plastics and wastes being fished out and dumped along its course.

Realizing that changing the situation within Ludhiana's municipal limits was full of its own challenges, Col Gill began exploring opportunities for freeing up the banks of the river outside municipal limits and greening them — turning them into 'forests', if you wish.

Clearly this was a big project which he couldn't possibly do in his own capacity or by involving well-meaning citizens. It needed the government to act. Land had to be taken back from encroachers and the planting of trees on a large scale involves not just costs but also manpower and expertise.

Col Gill was a member of the State Taskforce on the Buddha Dariya

Rejuvenation. At a virtual meeting, being during the pandemic, in 2021 he suggested the planting of trees and vetiver grass on 34 km on both sides of the river outside municipal limits. This together came to 68 km. The idea was that the greenery would stabilize the banks which were eroding during the rains.

It would also be compensation for the trees that had been cut down for the widening of the national highways linking Ludhiana with Ferozepur and Chandigarh as well as a bypass.

Col Gill also suggested the demarcation of what was Buddha Dariya land using GPS and 2015 records. This was needed because the basin of the river had been steadily shrinking.

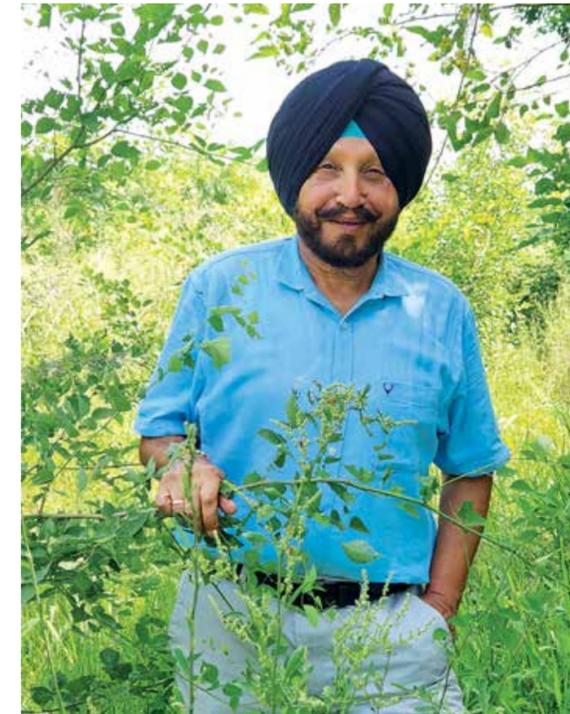
Both proposals went through. But implementation was still a long way off. A ₹2.46 crore contract was awarded for planting 17,000 trees, but it fizzled out. Demarcation of the river and getting encroachers to withdraw was caught up in wrangles

in the government, as one could well imagine.

Col Gill persisted. Finally, the planting of trees was handed over to the forest department instead of the drainage department, as it rightly should have been in the first place. The demarcation work and removal of encroachers got its real boost when a new deputy commissioner, Surbi Malik, took over. She too took ownership of the proposal and drove it as only a determined local official can.

The whole process of demarcating the Buddha Dariya's boundaries to get rid of encroachers and the going back to revenue records has many spinoffs. For instance, upstream there is a possibility of getting some 200 cusecs of clean water which can significantly dilute the pollution in the river. Similarly downstream, a branch of the river has 32 km which can be freed up from encroachers for greening.

What drives efforts like Col Gill's is difficult to tell. But they provide optimism that it is possible to get out of a difficult hole. A cause well pursued can have effect. ■



Col Gill: As the trees grow, Punjab will have a new forest

Keilpodh: A festival of arms

SUSHEELA NAIR

COME September and the Kodavas look forward to Keilpodh, or the festival of arms, a celebration peculiar to Kodagu. The festivities and fun mark the completion of the transplantation of crops and salutes the hard work behind it.

The Kodavas have always maintained an intimate relationship with their weapons. They have evolved their own unique lifestyle where customs and habits emphasize strong family ties and a sense of tradition. They are the only tribes that can own a gun without a licence. A gun plays an important role in the life of a Kodava. After the birth of a child, a single shot is fired into the air to share the news with their neighbours; at the time of death two shots are fired. During weddings they use a large Kodava knife to cut the banana stalk with a single strike. There was mostly forest land where they lived and hunting used to be their favourite pastime. This festival reflects both their martial and agrarian character.

On Keilpodh, guns, knives, swords, bows and arrows and hunting implements are cleaned, polished, smeared with sandalwood paste and kept in the special *puja* room. They decorate the weapons with flowers, pray and make offerings to the Kodava deities, the river deity, Kaveriamma, the chief preceptor, Mahaguru Iguthappa, and the supreme ancestor, Guru Karana, and seek the well-being of their crops and strength to protect them from wild animals. Hanging prayer lamps, called *thookbolcha* in the Kodava language, are lit and *thokke* poor flowers (*Gloriosa superba*) are placed on the nozzles of guns.

After lunch the male family members, dressed in their traditional *kupiyas*, gather in the *puja* room where the Yajmana or the principal male picks up a gun and offers it to the eldest man in the group, signifying the commencement of the festival. The men pay obeisance to the Yajmana, pick up their guns and proceed outside to partake in the contest. Coconuts are tied to the top of the highest tree in the compound and everyone takes turns at showing their prowess with guns, by attempting to split the coconut open with one shot. In days of yore, at the break of dawn on Keilpodh, the Kodavas would set out with loaded rifles to hunt wild boar.

The Kodava men don the ceremonial attire which is one of the most distinctive in India. The men make a magnificent picture in their traditional *kupiya chales*. The *kupiya* is a long, half-sleeved cotton robe which reaches below the knee, worn with a long-sleeved white shirt underneath and secured around the waist with



The Ummathat dance



Arms and the ceremonial dress

an elaborate maroon and gold sash known as *chale*. The *peechekathi*, a silver dagger inlaid with gold and silver with an ornate handle and sheathed in an ornamental scabbard, is tucked into the sash and fastened to the back by a delicate silver chain.

LIQUOR AND FOOD Food and alcohol are an essential part of the festivities. It is the time for the Kodavas to feast after undergoing the hard labour of ploughing, sowing and transplanting of rice. Lunch is a veritable banquet. The Kodavas being non-vegetarian, preparations of pork, chicken and mutton predominate while homemade wine flows.

Kodagu is also famed for its ethnic cuisine, made from locally abundant ingredients such as coconut, mushrooms, bamboo shoot, banana and rice and seasoned with ginger,

chilli, pepper, cardamom and the native *kachumpuli* (the distinctly-flavoured thick, local vinegar). The legendary *pandi* (pork) curry and *kadambuttu* (steamed rice dumplings) combo is a hot favourite. Many dishes reflect a combination of meat and wine. Rice is an integral part of the menu and rice noodles topped with a pungent curry is a very popular dish.

Vegetarians can try the local mushroom curry, redolent with the flavour of freshly picked wild mushrooms. There's also a curry made with tender bamboo shoots that's simply divine on its own or eaten with the local *akki roti* (rice rotis). We relished the other dishes like *paaputt* plain cake, and *nooputt* (string hoppers) noodles along with meat dishes like *pandi* curry, *koli* (chicken) and *yerachi* (meat) curries and also desserts like *akki payasa* (rice pudding).

In the evening, we witnessed the Ummathat dance which is the only female dance form of Kodagu. It was a treat to watch the graceful Kodava women in their colourful saris dance in a circling pattern to a lilting tune. The Coorg sari is worn with the pleats secured at the back like a fan and the end of the sari drawn under the left arm and fastened over the right with a pretty brooch or pin. The married women are identified by their *vastra*, a trailing georgette scarf covering their heads and tied at the nape of the neck, with the two ends draped elegantly over the shoulders.

Equally impressive was the *bolak-aat* which is performed by Kodava men to the resonant beat of drums. Earlier, the festivities involved gathering in the local *mandh* (open ground) where physical contests, and sports including marksmanship, and various folk dances were conducted. Currently, most of these gatherings and contests are held in the Kodava Samajam in various places. ■

Photos: Civil Society/Susheela Nair

Small producers find it difficult to sell their wonderful products. Consumers lose out because so much good stuff just doesn't reach them. *Civil Society* happily makes the connection so that everyone benefits. Here is how you can pick up some traditional rice and, better still, gift it.

A GIFT OF RICE

FROM Onam to Pongal is the festive season when we meet and greet friends and families. We agonize over the right gift. Will it be this or that? A sari or a shirt? A tablet? Chocolates, maybe?

Instead of picking from a medley of typical stuff, opt for an unusual gift — a box of wondrous rice varieties, brimming with health and organic goodness. After all, the aroma and satiety which a plate of rice offers is still unmatched.

Choose from an assortment of beautifully packed gift boxes thoughtfully curated by Sempulam Sustainable Solutions, which works with small farmers who cultivate long forgotten rice varieties organically.

India once had millions of extraordinary varieties of rice which could survive drought and floods. Rice, it is said, originated in India. But over the years older rice strains have been ousted by a handful of varieties aggressively promoted by commercial interests. Reviving some of them has been a delicate and tough task for Sempulam and the Centre for Indian Knowledge Systems (CIKS).

The good news is that you now have a choice. You can look beyond Basmati and Sonamasuri and pick and choose the rice best suited to your health profile. Here is an array of interesting options on offer.

The Pride of Tamil Nadu Rice Gift Box has 38 sample varieties, each weighing 100 gm and unique to one of the 38 districts in the state. It costs ₹1,800. The box is emblematic of the rich biodiversity of Tamil Nadu and its hardworking farmers. The festival of Pongal in Tamil Nadu coincides with the harvesting season of rice. It is a celebration of rice, the state's staple food.

If you are a rice connoisseur, opt for the Luxury Collection Gift Box for ₹675. Rich in flavour, it comprises six varieties, each with a distinct taste. Kitchili Samba is an easily digestible and high energy rice. Kuzhiyadichan is calcium-rich and ideal for porridge and sweet Pongal, and Kulakar is a low glycemic variety which can be converted into *idlis* and is excellent for diabetics.

Or savour the fragrance of rice with the Aromatic Collection Rice Gift Box. It has six varieties with delicate flavours and is high in nutrition and medicinal value. Try a forbidden rice from the fields of Manipur. Sample a rare variety grown only in a single district in Kerala. Experience an aromatic rice that was enjoyed by the Buddha himself, and

carried by monks to remind them of the Enlightened One. For just ₹800.

The box includes the famed Kalanamak, a mineral-rich variety from the Gorakhpur region. Mullan Kaima is an aromatic variety, infused with Vitamin A and minerals, from the Wayanad region of Kerala. Chakhao Poireiton is an aromatic, exotic black sticky rice from Manipur, rich in antioxidants, anthocyanins and fibre. There is the famous Gobindobhog, a protein- and fibre-rich variety with aroma from West Bengal.

Also available is the Women's Special Gift Box for ₹750. It contains the deliciously aromatic Seeraga Samba Raw Rice, known to have a calming effect. It's high in iron and calcium. The other boiled rice, Sivappu Kuruvikar, is an iron-rich variety. Also included are protein-rich amaranth seeds, that keep your bones healthy and prevent osteoporosis. And there are Salem Samba Rice Flakes along with a pack of organic jaggery.

Boost your resistance to illness with the Immunity Collection Rice Gift Box. It has six traditional varieties. Navara is high in iron and calcium, and builds immunity against respiratory disorders. Kattu Yanam has potassium, iron, calcium, magnesium, zinc and phosphorus. Soorankuruvai too has calcium, potassium, iron, magnesium and zinc and is well suited for diabetic patients. There is also Kaivara Samba, Kalanamak and Karuppu Kowni.

Also included is The Red Rice Collection, for ₹675, which has six red rice varieties with medicinal and nutritive properties that cleanse the blood, improve metabolism and fight aging: Kuzhiyadichan is rich in antioxidants and calcium. Kullakar has iron and zinc. Mappillai

Samba is a low glycemic index variety. Poovan Samba is protein-rich. Iravai Pandi has a high content of calcium, phosphorus and minerals.

The Mother and Child Collection contains a set of delicious, nutritious and easy to digest rice varieties ideally suited for children, young mothers, and mothers-to-be. It is priced at ₹675.

The Anudhinam Rice Box has 30 rice varieties, each with its own distinct aroma, taste, vitamin index, antioxidant properties, immunity builders, low glycemic index and much more. This collection, which costs ₹1,199, comes from the Northeast, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. All the packs are hygienically vacuum packed and meet food safety standards. ■

Contact: +91 99 6262 9925
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VOLUNTEER & DONATE

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.

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

FIGHT ALL FORMS OF DISABILITY

 Prabhat works for the welfare and rehabilitation of people with disabilities and people with mental illness. It provides access to cost-effective care and therapy. Along with vocational training it organizes job fairs to help people with disabilities find employment. Prabhat has been working for the last seven years to provide a support system for people with disabilities. Prabhat also organizes awareness programmes to fight stigmatisation of mental health for parents, teachers, students, community leaders and local government

representatives on mental health and disability. Their Abdul Kalam Project is a school on wheels for children with disabilities for skills and activities.

They are currently working on establishing a day care and residential centre in Panchkula, Haryana. You can donate to Prabhat or help them with their job fairs, awareness drives and vocational activities.

www.prabhatngo.com | opasija1940@
gmail.com | +91 94631 25184

HELPING HAND FOR ALL DISTRESS

 Samarpan Foundation, a charitable non-profit entity, provides support and assistance of any kind wherever there is a humanitarian, ecological, environmental or animal welfare need. Samarpan Foundation runs mobile medical clinics in the Sundarbans for 250 patients of all ages with various medical conditions. It provides emergency medical relief and specialized medical care, including an eye clinic. The foundation runs a women's centre in Guwahati which helps migrant families from Bihar, Bengal and Manipur. They also have two children's homes in Delhi.

You can donate to specific projects run by Samarpan or donate to the foundation. You can also volunteer for their projects in Delhi, Bengaluru, Guwahati, Mumbai, Goa and the Sundarbans. www.samarpanfoundation.org
volunteer@samarpanfoundation.org
donate@samarpanfoundation.org

ENSURE THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN

 HAQ works for the recognition, promotion and protection of the rights of children. The non-profit organizes campaigns against child trafficking, child labour, violence and abuse to actively engage in

public education and advocacy on children's rights.

HAQ also seeks to serve as a resource and support base for individuals and groups dealing with children. They provide training and capacity building for law enforcement agencies and other institutions that come into contact with children on a regular basis.

HAQ supports children in conflict with the law by providing legal aid and counselling to victims of child abuse.

HAQ also undertakes research to mainstream children's concerns into developmental planning and action. They release a Child Rights Index and special reports on child soldiers and children in mining in India. Donate to HAQ to help their efforts. You can also volunteer or intern with them.

www.haqrc.org | training@haqrc.org
info@haqrc.org | Phone: +91-11-26677412

HELP THE YOUNG LEARN AND EARN

 Deepalaya was started in 1979 to educate underprivileged girl children. It also works for low-income women and youth. Deepalaya has projects in Delhi, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Telangana.

Deepalaya's Vocational Training & Skill Development Centres (VTCs) provide hands-on skills that enable youngsters to get jobs. Their project, Sambhav, helps people with disabilities access therapies, education and skilling. Project Parivartan supports students studying in government schools in Punjab.

You can volunteer or intern with Deepalaya. You can also donate books to their libraries. Sponsor a child's education with ₹12,000 a year.

Do support their Drive Against Winters by donating ₹1,100 for a

set of woollens or ₹1,400 for blankets and jackets.

www.deepalaya.org | support@deepalaya.org | 011-28520347

TACKLE ACCESS TO BASIC SERVICES

 Founded in 1972, Apnalaya started as a day care centre for children of migrant labour at Nariman Point in Mumbai. Apnalaya now helps the urban poor access healthcare, education, livelihoods and civic entitlements through advocacy with the government.

Apnalaya trained residents of Shivaji Nagar in Mumbai to work with urban local bodies on civic issues like lack of access to drinking water.

www.apnalaya.org | admin@apnalaya.org
+91-22-23539752 / 9833041074

GIFT A TREE AND HELP SAVE THE EARTH

 A pollution-free and green Earth is what everyone wants. But it takes spirited citizens to make it happen. Green Yatra, a Mumbai-based NGO, has set a target to plant 100 million trees by 2025 under their Pedh Lagao campaign. You can support them by gifting a tree to a loved one for their birthday or anniversary.

Green Yatra's Go Green Kids visits schools and sensitizes students on environmental issues. Students are taken on a clean-up drive or to build a birdhouse or plant trees in school premises. Green Yatra partners with companies like McDonald's and Oracle and systematically manages their waste. Since 2012 they have saved 8,000 tonnes of garbage from going to a landfill and 27,000 tonnes of greenhouse gases from being emitted.

You can volunteer your time or support them with a donation.

www.greenyatra.org
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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.

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