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Civil Society

GREAT MANGO, NO MARKET?

Why a GI tag is often not enough

ORIGINAL JOURNALISM

Great stories of change across India from a magazine built on trust

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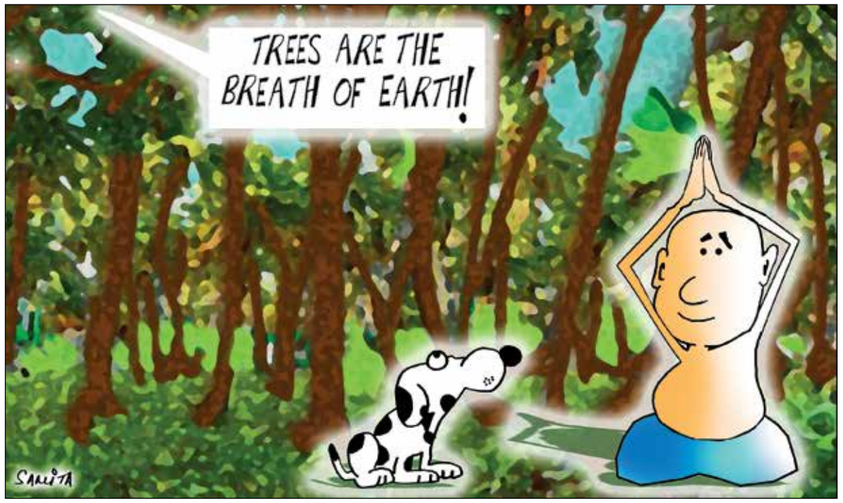
IN THE LIGHT

SAMITA RATHOR



LETTERS

SEWA on the border

I must compliment you for your amazing cover story, 'A living on the LOC'. No one would dream of intervening in a society that is almost cut off from city life and that too for women trapped in cultures that deny them access to education and jobs.

SEWA has demonstrated how economic opportunities for neglected societies can be generated. These results could be replicated by companies under their CSR activities. Unfortunately, most CSR activities are undertaken by companies with an eye on marketing their own products and services.

Macro-economic and top-down solutions do not always work. Solutions for poverty or job creation require a bottom-up approach. I know where Kupwara is situated. It is a terrorist-infested area near the LOC. It was humbling to learn that SEWA thought of reaching out to women in this area and helping them become entrepreneurs. I hope someone comes forward to help the women develop market linkages to sell their products and skills.

Shiban Bakshi

Your cover story brought back memories of the hurdles young adult female students faced in 2013 when they signed up to attend my music workshops at various colleges in Srinagar. It required a considerable amount of encouragement and effort to get any activity started especially in the performing arts. SEWA's work, together with the government, is exemplary. It has helped enhance economic empowerment and gender equations. Your article, anecdotal and detailed, has shown how it is possible for women to take charge of their lives despite all odds.

Deepak Castelino

A most heartwarming story on inclusivity and how well thought-out, tenacious and kind it should really be. Also, the fact that inclusivity cannot be achieved in a day but may take decades of failures and learnings to doggedly move on to attain a semblance of sustainability from organic growth. How each of the Kashmiri women discovered their inner power through the guiding spirit of their SEWA leaders is a story of involvement and then passion to remain self-reliant. What struck me the most was the sheer genius of the idea of empowering Kashmiri women to become breadwinners in their families and in the process, bring peace to the Valley!

With so much going for them by virtue of their hard work, these women will provide that bedrock for peace in the Valley — not just as a momentary phenomenon, but as a permanent feature. Could this be a model for the rest of the world to emulate in strife-torn regions like the Middle East, once again seeing the wanton loss of lives? I think so.

Amit Kumar Bose

Excellent social work which has helped women and their families live better lives.

Chandralekha Anand Sio

People's vote

Simultaneous elections to assemblies and to Parliament were being carried out until the third general election. There was no problem faced at that time. I'd like to ask Jagdeep Chhokar, why can't we have simultaneous elections now?

K. Gopal Rao

Lonely souls

Kiran Karnik's piece, 'Those left behind', makes some good points. But there has to be some data backing his piece. I am sure APU's State of Working India, etc. will have relevant data.

Ananda

Letters should be sent to response@civilsocietyonline.com

COVER STORY

SELLING THOSE LOVELY MANGOES

The panchayat of Kuttiattoor has a lot going for it, but it can't seem to manage to make its farmers rich. The lovely mango they grow should be a bestseller and yet it ends up unharvested on the trees. 18

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Farmers and markets

WHEN the Kuttiattoor mango was given geographical indicator status there was reason to celebrate. Its unique qualities had been documented and recognized. Commercial success seemed round the corner. But it hasn't happened that way. It is one thing to be recognized as unique and an altogether different challenge to carve out a place in the marketplace.

Farmers are the rightful owners of the biodiversity they nurture over generations. A banana here, a mango there, grains with special properties — these are the outcome of community traditions and practices. They are further defined by the soil, water and the plants and other organisms of an area.

Modern intellectual property laws recognize the rights over innovations by individuals and corporations. But they also provide for recognition of geographical indicators and community ownership. People collectively can be creators of something unique through a long process of innovation.

However, to help farmers assert their rights is the work of governments, which need to pass enabling domestic laws and rules. Farmers need handholding as well because the process is complex and requires going into legal and scientific details.

Dr C.R. Elsy, formerly of the Kerala Agricultural University, has been helping farmers get geographical indicator status for their produce. But it is not enough, as we have seen with the Kuttiattoor mango. The farmers haven't been able to get a viable commercial strategy together. Their incomes have been stagnant and their mango is not as widely admired and sought after as it deserves to be.

In this magazine we have been keenly interested in small hospitals and other healthcare initiatives in the voluntary sector. We see these as meeting the healthcare needs of people in remote areas where neither the government nor the private sector manages to go with optimum services.

It is important that small hospitals be made visible, assessed and supported. Dr Vijay Anand Ismavel, who has a long record in rural healthcare, suggests that small hospitals be judged on their potential for transformational impact. Small bits of funding at critical junctures can make all the difference between success and failure. A good effort that collapses for want of support leaves thousands of potential beneficiaries in the lurch.

Stray dogs are back in the news because of more unprovoked attacks on people. We ask once again if the problem has spiralled completely out of control. Are there so many stray dogs that their conflicts with humans have become inevitable and will keep increasing?

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VIJAY ANAND ISMAVEL ON A BETTER RATING SYSTEM

‘Make small hospitals visible, fund them for their potential’

Civil Society News
New Delhi

FAR from the limelight, several small hospitals meet the basic healthcare needs of people in remote areas. Often, the services they provide are really not so basic. Much-needed surgeries get performed. Diseases are diagnosed early and dealt with. Institutional deliveries happen. Awareness-building improves community-wide health parameters.

How can such efforts be supported so that they don’t peter out because of the great challenges they face?

Dr Vijay Anand Ismavel has partnered with volunteers of the Wharton Business School to devise a rating tool which seeks to give public-spirited initiatives in healthcare visibility so that they have a chance to qualify for funding and also attract volunteers.

Called the Transformational Impact Rating System, it allows small hospitals to be identified, objectively assessed and funded when they are most in need of support.

Dr Ismavel knows what it takes to be one of those doctors out there. He and Dr Anne Miriam, his wife, ran the Makunda Leprosy and General Hospital for 30 years at the trijunction of Tripura, Mizoram and Assam.

Under them the hospital went from being defunct to sustainable. But their journey was full of ups and downs before they succeeded. Even as they served growing numbers of patients, their hospital lacked basic infrastructure because funds weren’t available. For 14 years they went without power supply!

Dr Ismavel hopes the Transformational Impact Rating System, once adopted, will help small hospitals, like the one at Makunda, find support, especially at crucial junctures.

Edited excerpts from an interview with Dr Ismavel who is currently at the Christian Medical College in Vellore.

Q: Many rating tools exist and serve as guidance for donors. What was the need to have one more rating tool?
We saw the need partly because of our experience at Makunda and partly based on what I saw on a visit to Africa.

Small hospitals need visibility and the support they get should be available based on the transformational impact they can have. The world of philanthropy and volunteers is mostly subjective and based on word of mouth.

Small hospitals require support at crucial junctures in their journey. There has to be a better understanding of the role they are playing.

Q: Could you explain that a little further?
At Makunda, we needed just ₹10 lakh to improve the hospital infrastructure but couldn’t get it.

We really struggled through the early years. For the first 14 years from 1993 we lived without electricity. Just something like ₹10 lakh would have made life so much simpler. We got electricity only in 2007.

I was doing operations without a cautery machine, which is used to stop bleeding. So, I had to keep pressure on the wound and use stitches.

Similarly, my wife had her MD in anaesthesia, but we were working

Dr Vijay Anand Ismavel: ‘I was doing operations without a cautery machine’

without oxygen. We didn’t have an oxygen plant. The oxygen had to come from 12 hours away.

All these struggles, both in our personal life and professional life, made it a tough first 14 or 15 years. And not only for us, but for other people who worked with us.

We didn’t really need a lot of money. We just needed a little bit of money for things which would have made a major difference in the way we lived and worked. But the problem is nobody knew about us. We were invisible.

Like ours at Makunda, many small hospitals are located at places where they have the potential to make a transformational impact. But donors don’t know about them.

At Makunda we didn’t take our earned leave for 20 years. No one was willing to replace us — such were the conditions.

Q: What kind of money were you looking for in those early years?
The entire hospital’s budget in 1993 was about ₹10 lakh. The salary budget was a paltry ₹30,000 per month for the whole staff. We were getting just small bits of money.

There was an aid agency which said they would support all our expenses but on the condition that we would do only leprosy work. But we felt that leprosy was not a major problem in Assam. The real problem was mothers dying in childbirth and things like that.

Then in 2004 we started an English-medium school for the local people, in 2005 we started a branch hospital in Tripura and in 2006 we started a nursing school.

All these additions took up all the money. We didn’t have money for electrifying homes of the staff and things like that.

If we had received ₹10 lakh or some amount like that at that time we would have been able to have a generator in the hospital. And electrical lines to all the staff quarters. It would have made a huge difference.

The other problem was doctors and nurses did not want to come and join our hospital. When we would approach somebody, the first question would be where exactly is this hospital? And we didn’t have a good answer to that. And the second question would be how much money will you give? And again, we didn’t have a good answer to that either. And on top of that, if you said there’s no electricity then….

When I visited Africa in 2016 there was an Indian doctor trained at CMC Vellore similarly struggling and making improvisations. His life would have been made so much easier if he had had a little bit of money.

What I saw in Africa was the triggering factor in thinking of developing this transformational impact rating system.

Q: And what kind of surgeries were you yourself doing at Makunda?
We were doing very complicated surgeries because I was a paediatric surgeon. Way back then, I was the only paediatric surgeon for Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Meghalaya and the southern half of Assam. It was a very large area and we were getting patients from all over.

We operated on a lot of babies who did not have a connection between the mouth and the stomach. If they swallowed milk, it would all go into the lungs. When such babies are about five or six hours old you need to open the chest and disconnect the oesophagus and then reconnect it in the normal position. It’s a bit of a complicated operation. And after that, these babies cannot breathe for the next four or five days. But we didn’t have a ventilator. So, my wife would be ventilating these babies by hand for four or five days till they became alright. All of these babies recovered and we have met some of them who are 20 years old now.

Q: And your work was going unnoticed and there weren’t funds?
All we needed at that time was a little bit of a push. But this is the story of small hospitals: they don’t find support when they are most vulnerable. When they grow very strong and they’re able to become self-sufficient, that is when they become visible to donors. And people start funding them because they’re creating a lot of impact.

But they are at their most vulnerable at the time when they are not visible, when much may not be happening, but the potential for transformational impact is great.

We wanted to create a sort of tool that would make such hospitals visible not by measuring impact because impact has not yet occurred, but visible because of various factors and their potential impact.

Q: What exactly is lacking in current rating systems?
Briefly, many of these will only rate you if you are above a certain turnover. Some of the larger rating agencies will only include hospitals whose turnover is more than $1 million a year. Others will only rate you if you fit into certain categories. Most of them are rating large hospitals which are already doing good work.

There is no rating system which will rate unknown hospitals, which are just starting up. They don’t attract the attention of philanthropists.

Q: Is it a problem that rating agencies decide who they will rate?
Yeah. So many of them don’t rate people who apply to them. They rate people who are invited. Not everybody can get rated by them.

And the other thing is some of these ratings are extremely complicated and you might have to hire people who will be paid to come and verify. It is not affordable for a small set-up.

Q: Are notions of sustainability a problem?
Yes. Just take the location of a hospital. Kerala already has excellent heath facilities. Putting money there will not make much of a change. But if you take some place in Bihar, where the maternal mortality is about 300, just starting a facility which can do Caesarean sections might bring maternal mortality down to 200 very easily and without much effort. There are risks and benefits the donor should consider.

Q: How would the kind of system you are proposing change the thinking of donors?
It basically looks at three sets of factors. The first set involves the impact in the community. Hospitals located in poor areas where there are no other hospitals nearby and government infrastructure is poor will have a bigger impact.

The second set of factors are best practices. Does the hospital have a good auditing system? Is there a management and governance mechanism which holds people accountable? The third group of factors is how the management takes care of people who work there, like human resource practices.

‘Donors tend to be subjective. Small hospitals lack visibility and don’t get support when they need it most. They should be assessed on their potential impact.’

When we did this study, we got about 120 factors from all the interviews and discussions. Those were narrowed down, I think, to about 74 factors which come under the categories I have mentioned.

Q: So, do you feel this kind of information would be enough to convince donors?
They would still want to do due diligence. This is a screening tool. It was devised for the whole world. Suppose someone wants to put money into a hospital working with leprosy patients in East Africa. They put in leprosy and East Africa as filters and get the names of 20 hospitals.

Q: How can you be sure that the information a hospital has provided for the rating is accurate?
What we thought of is that the first level of rating will be done through self-assessment. The hospital has a questionnaire into which they put in information and that generates the score. That is a casual level of rating.

And then when somebody actually visits the hospital, they confirm that what was reported was correct. Now it becomes a verified level of rating. For example, a donor is invited to rate the hospital and agrees with whatever the hospital has claimed. Or volunteers and staff endorse it. As time passes, more and more people will give their opinions. And then it will become a more accurate assessment.

Q: You have said that sometimes having volunteers supporting a hospital is more important than donations.
Volunteers and staff. Volunteers means they are unpaid, but there is also staff. The same rating can be used to attract staff who get a salary.

Q: Do volunteers work well? What draws them to small hospitals?
Makunda had a partnership with the Royal Tropical Institute in Amsterdam. We would get two to four residents who came to Makunda

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for six months to complete their MD in Global Health and Tropical Medicine.

Many of them were interviewed to understand what would motivate them to consider a hospital. And what would put them off.

They weren't interested in the money. They were looking for adventure and an exciting sort of place. Disparities bothered them — like some members of the staff being treated differently to others. A great motivation was to work in a poor country and to learn things they had never seen, perhaps only read about in books.

The hospital at Makunda

'At Makunda, we needed just ₹10 lakh to improve infrastructure at the hospital but couldn't get it. We really struggled through the early years. For the first 14 years from 1993 we lived without electricity.'

Q: This is what volunteers from the First World might want to find. But what you need are volunteers from within the country.

This tool is actually proof of principle. It is a sort of demonstrator. But it has to be modified according to its application. For example, we are developing a tool to bring post-graduate doctors into the mission hospital network in India. All the factors will be modified to suit India. Based on health indicators, you can choose which state and district you want to work in.

Q: Modified to suit what the volunteer or the funder is looking for?

You know, for example, the Government of India gives some financial support to certain not-for-profit institutions. In Tamil Nadu, the state government gives funding to not-for-profit schools to subsidize education for poor students. In Assam, we at Makunda receive some support from the government for the hospital. To make an objective choice of which hospitals to select, the government could use a tool like this. Otherwise, very often it could be subjective. ■

DEADLY STRAYS? OR DOCILE 'COMMUNITY DOGS'?

Civil Society News
New Delhi

A resident of Ganga Apartments in the south Delhi colony of Vasant Kunj was on her way down the stairs of her building, when a pack of stray dogs on the loose rushed at her. She lost her balance, fractured her leg and ended up at the AIIMS Trauma Centre where surgery was recommended. At the age of 56, this was the last thing she needed to happen to her.

A lawyer appeared in the Supreme Court with his arm in a bandage. The Chief Justice asked him what happened. He said he had been attacked by some dogs and severely bitten. The Chief Justice graciously asked if he could get the lawyer some medical assistance. This in a courtroom short of time for judicial matters.

At Lotus Boulevard, a gated community in Noida in the National Capital Region, a seven-month-old infant of a labourer was mauled to death by a pack of sterilized and vaccinated dogs which were being regularly fed by some residents of the housing colony. No one was held accountable. On the contrary, when the majority of residents had the dogs removed, animal activists brought them right back with the help of the police.

So, what is going on? Why are dogs making unprovoked attacks on people in different settings with such regularity? A lawyer showing up in court with his arm bandaged. An infant mauled to death in a condominium. A middle-aged woman off for a morning walk. And these are just a few incidents. The list is really too long to be recounted here and comes from all over the country — big cities and small towns alike.

The Animal Birth Control Rules or the ABC Rules as they have come to be known were recently amended to define strays as 'community dogs'. But what are 'community dogs' and why are they making unprovoked attacks on members of the community itself?

Under the ABC Rules, stray dogs have to be fed by resident welfare associations (RWAs) and located at the same spot even if they bite and kill. They are to be vaccinated and sterilized, for which they need to be taken away, but they have to be brought back.

With such conditions, residents are up in arms. They don't see aggressive strays, rapidly increasing in number, as 'community dogs'.

As the woman in Vasant Kunj, awaiting surgery on her broken leg, plaintively told reporters: "I do not hate dogs. They deserve care. But not at the cost of human lives. The children cannot play freely in parks inside the compound due to dogs. Residents also fear getting out at night."

"Dog lovers do not understand the pain we (victims of dog attacks) go through," she went on to add.

Nor have the courts been in any great hurry to find a workable solution. In fact, they don't seem to have been moved by the many deaths of children.

The original case was filed more than 20 years ago from Goa, questioning the ABC Rules. A paediatrician in Vasco received a patient, a young girl, whose nose had been bitten off by a stray dog.

There were other children who used to come to the paediatrician with dog bites. He and some public-spirited individuals finally filed a case seeking a serious solution to the problem of strays. The case lingers in the courts after two decades.

Animal rights activists, funded as they are, being NGOs, have the resources to give them a disproportionate say on the issue in comparison to ordinary folks.

Photo: Civil Society/Virender Chauhan

Strays outside a small hospital in west Delhi. An apprehensive patient looks on from within the gates

It appears this is how the term 'community dog' seems to have recently come up and been adopted as the definition of a stray. Our picture above shows stray dogs at the gates of a nursing home in west Delhi. A patient inside is fearful of coming out. The dogs hardly look like they have community ownership of any kind.

As neighbourhoods get overrun by packs of dogs there is growing anger among residents. When Vijay Goel, a senior BJP leader, called a meeting on the stray dogs problem in Delhi it was widely attended not just by people in Delhi, but by those who came from Mumbai and Pune as well.

"There was a time when there would be a stray dog or two in a lane and local people would look after them. That is not the situation now. In many instances it is getting difficult to go on morning walks and move about freely because of packs of aggressive dogs. It is wrong to put on to RWAs the responsibility of looking after these feral dogs," says Goel.

Cases have gone ding-dong between the high courts and Supreme Court but there has been no relief for victims.

Even as cases have gone ding-dong between the high courts and the Supreme Court and back, there has been little clarity and certainly no relief for victims of dog attacks. Children of poor families who have been mauled and killed have been completely forgotten in sharp contrast to the sympathy that a lawyer with his arm bandaged evoked in the Supreme Court.

Some of the episodes have been outright bizarre. For instance, in February this year a seven-year-old was mauled by sterilized dogs in a housing society in Pune. The municipality caught and removed 50 stray dogs from the premises.

"An activist, who does not live in the society, filed a case in the Bombay High Court to bring back all the stray dogs into the premises. The court ordered the release of the dogs inside the society citing the ABC rules of 2023," says Meghna Uniyal, who promotes an animal welfare philosophy, points out that matters have gone too far.

"At 2 am, without any intimation to the residents, a bus full of policemen accompanied a municipal van and dumped 20 stray dogs inside the premises. The dogs did not have any identification, collars or documents to show their vaccination status," she says.

Uniyal has been arguing for dogs to be taken off the streets and dealt with in pounds as they are in the rest of the world.

She says the definition 'community dog' has no basis because the ABC Rules can't be at variance with the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act.

The act in fact disallows animals being put on the street. If the dogs indeed belong to the community, they have to first be taken off the street. The community has also to be accountable for attacks and injuries.

Decades of confusion and dithering by the courts and governments have resulted in an exponential growth of dogs on the streets. The numbers run into millions. The chances now are remote that strays can be fed in designated places and sterilized for their numbers to be reduced. Adoption of millions of dogs is also impossible.

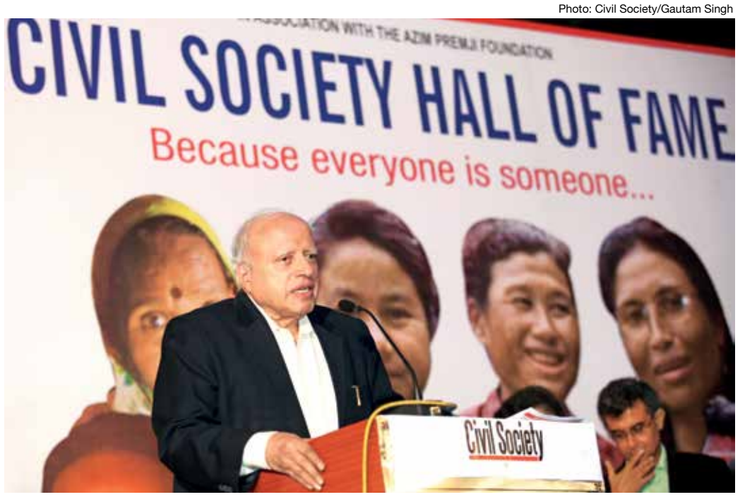
In the meantime, dogs on the street, whether vaccinated and sterilized or not, are a growing danger to innocent citizens and a reason for decline in the quality of life in Indian cities. ■

M.S. SWAMINATHAN

Scientist who rooted for farmers

RITA & UMESH ANAND

Photo: Civil Society/Gautam Singh



IT was over a phone call that Dr M.S. Swaminathan agreed to be chief guest at our first Civil Society Hall of Fame event, which was held in 2011.

For all his eminence, he had the capacity to be spontaneous and excited about a new idea. You could say we hardly knew each other at that point. Our only previous interaction with him had been a lengthy and incredibly valuable interview he had given us. He was also a subscriber to our magazine.

Having secured his acceptance, we wasted no time in sending off an email to formalize the invitation. But as the date of the event neared, and we were going crazy trying to get things organized, we received a phone call from Dr Swaminathan wondering if we could shift the time of the event around if not the date itself.

A terribly important official engagement involving some ministerial heavyweight had cropped up in his schedule. At first our hearts sank and then we responded in our own style, saying: "Dr Swaminathan, we can't change anything at this stage, you will have to choose between the minister and us."

He chose us, of course. He came to our event and stayed till the end. He engaged intensely and personally with each of the entrants to the Hall of Fame, who were from Meghalaya to Kerala to Rajasthan and elsewhere. He spoke illuminatingly about the importance of small efforts. He was generous and warm and went out of his way to make the Civil Society Hall of Fame in its inaugural avatar a success.

This is the Dr Swaminathan we knew in *Civil Society*. Even at the age of 80, he was sprightly and purposeful. Though an insider to influential circles in the country, he understood and respected those who belonged in the fringes — changemakers from afar, small farmers or a fledgling magazine like ours was then.

He was a scientist ahead of his time. Even as he helmed the Green Revolution to save India from hunger and external dependence, he cautioned against its downsides: pesticide dependence, groundwater overuse and escalating input costs.

His voluminous report on Indian agriculture has gathered dust under successive governments, including the current BJP regime. But the report remains today the most influential and insightful document on reforming and strengthening the rural economy.

When new farm laws were rushed through Parliament and bitterly opposed by farmers, it was Dr Swaminathan who was remembered for his suggestions on compensating farmers adequately and making farming more viable for small farmers instead of abandoning them to the manipulation of powerful market forces. Corporations weren't his answer to better farming. Empowering small farmers was, as also making farming sustainable and protecting biodiversity.

He was clear that the small farmer should be the focus of an agricultural/food policy. At the time the right to food bill was being drafted, he welcomed the shift to a rights-based approach but pointed out the mere handing out of foodgrains would not achieve much. A law would have to "look at the totality of what needs to be done".

He said to us in his interview: "So the first step in food security is to improve the productivity and prosperity of small-farm agriculture. Only then will small farmers have money to buy a balanced diet. We have three components of food security. First, availability of food in the market, which is a function of production and that means enhancing the productivity of small farms, dryland farms. Secondly, absorption of food in the body, which is a function of safe, clean drinking water, sanitation, primary health care. And thirdly, access to food, which is a function of purchasing power or jobs. With food inflation being high, money is important for food security. Food security therefore means availability, access and absorption. These three are critical."

He emphasized that it was important to compensate farmers adequately for what they produced. Unlike in Europe or America, 60 percent of Indians remained engaged in agriculture. They were producers and consumers too.

He saw the food security law as an opportunity for India to escape from the stigma of malnutrition, maternal deaths and low-weight babies.

What India would do in agriculture would be inextricably linked to its status as an economic power to reckon with.

"The future belongs to nations who have grains, not guns. Guns you can purchase, grains you cannot," he said.

Dr Swaminathan believed scientists needed to be among farmers in their fields. Higher food output could not be achieved by scientists alone. They needed to engage with and motivate farmers. He recalled there were farmers he worked with closely and on whose plots field trials were conducted for different varieties. But now those very fields were gone. "They have become shopping malls," he told us regretfully. ■

Riverfront makeover in Pune is underway with many concerns

Rina Mukherji
Pune

LIKE most Indian cities Pune has a dirty, stinky river flowing through it. So, when the Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) unveiled an ambitious Pune Riverfront Rejuvenation Project that promised to give the city a clean river and a pretty riverside, no objections were raised.

"The public was consulted, and everyone agreed to the project. But that was because they were not presented with the true picture. People were promised a clean, free-flowing river. Who would not welcome that?" says Sarang Yadwadkar, who is an architect and urban planner.

A closer look revealed that the project was faulty on many counts. Yadwadkar points out that the project is technically flawed. It will, in fact, throttle the river, flood the city during the monsoon and actually not clean up the river.


Sarang Yadwadkar

Inspired by Ahmedabad's Sabarmati Riverfront Project, the Pune Riverfront Rejuvenation Project will cost around ₹5,500 crore. The PMC, however, says the project, which was conceived in 2016, will improve river flow and tackle water pollution by setting up sewage treatment plants (STPs). Drainage and sewage works will be undertaken. Embankments will be built for flood protection and encroachments removed. Access to the river will be improved. Pedestrian and cycling pathways will be built along the riverfront promenade.

It is important to understand the topography and geography of Pune to comprehend the implications of this project. Five rivers flow into Pune — the Ramnadi, Devnadi, Mula, Mutha and Pawna. These combine to form a single river system, the Mula-Mutha.

The river bifurcates the city into two. During the Peshwa regime, the population of Pune was concentrated on just one bank of the river, around the Mula-Mutha confluence. Once bridges were built and a public transport system put in place, in the early decades of the last century, settlements arose on the other bank too.

Very soon, the city expanded on both sides of the river, and spilled beyond. The city's population increased manifold, heavily polluting the Mula-Mutha. Encroachments came up along both banks. Today, the riverbanks abound in solid waste and filth with little water in most parts of the river, except during the monsoon months. The river is filled with sewage outfalls.

Upstream, there are four dams on the Mutha, namely, Khadakvasla, Temghar, Panshet and Varasgaon, and one dam, the Mulshi Dam, on the Mula river. In addition, there is the Pawna Dam on the Pawna river, and the Kasarsai Dam on the Kasarsai *nullah* which flows into the Mula river. Water flows in from seven different catchments with a single outlet, making Pune very flood-prone. Encroachments, dams and pollution through untreated sewage have affected the flow of the river system, which the River Rejuvenation Project is intended to handle.

Environmentalists, along with Yadwadkar and Anu Aga, a former Rajya Sabha MP and industrialist, approached the National Green Tribunal (NGT), questioning the granting of an Environmental Clearance (EC) to the project. The challenge was upheld by the NGT, which called for an amended EC. But the PMC continued construction work, defying the NGT order. Yadwadkar and his team approached the NGT once again with an Execution Application. Unfortunately, the appeal was quashed, with the NGT maintaining that work could not be stopped since it would mean a big loss to the public exchequer. However, no new work orders were to be issued for the project.

Yadwadkar points out that the project's plans to contain floods is unsound. He says there are two aspects to be considered when looking at the flow of rivers: qualitative and quantitative. Qualitative refers to what flows in the river or how polluted the water is. Quantitative refers to the amount of water that flows in the river.

"The two are independent of each other," he explains. "To work out the flood level, you need to look at the peak flow from the dams, as well as the flow from the Free Catchment Area (FCA), which is the area between the dams and upstream of the city. You also need to consider the confluence effect, that is, the backflow when two rivers meet at their confluence. In Pune, there are three confluences: Mula-Ramnadi, Mula-Pawna and Mula-Mutha."


Earthmovers at work on the bank of the river


A 300-m model stretch of the riverfront

The effect of climate change has also not been factored in. Every city today witnesses heavy rain leading to waterlogging.

"In 2014, a study submitted by The Energy & Resources Institute (TERI) clearly stated that there would be a 37.5 percent increase in the annual rainfall in Pune Division, with a drop in the number of rainy days in the Sahyadris. This means there will be a much higher quantum of rain within a short span of time, resulting in reduced percolation and hence, heightened risk of flooding. All these factors affect the flood level. If you are going to disregard even one of these, your calculations will go completely wrong," he says.

The project pays scant attention to the blue and red lines of the river, which mark the highest flood level reached in 25 years, and 100 years, respectively, says Yadwadkar. In 2019, Pune witnessed a marathon bout of rain. The Ambil Odha, a tributary of the Mutha which rises in the Katraj hills within the city, overflowed and caused 25 deaths, along with widespread damage to houses and other property.

Yadwadkar also questions the building of embankments. Such construction will constrict the river and further impede its flow. "As per their own data, there will be a 1.53-metre rise in water level after completion of the project. A rise of 1.53 m amounts to five feet; this translates into submergence of several km of land. How is this going to check flooding?" he asks.

The Environmental Clearance, Yadwadkar points out, was given on the premise that no construction work was to be undertaken on the floodplains of the river. Instead, there is a lot of construction going on with the intention of putting up promenades, food plazas, cycling paths and flea markets. The embankments, too, will be on the floodplains of the river.

"The floodplains of the river are important. You cannot build there. A variety of plants and grasses grow there. The floodplains are a world of their own. Birds come for food. Dumping soil for artificial beautification will result in the irreversible loss of this biodiversity. The river will end up being a concrete coffin," he says.

Shiv Sena leader and former minister Aditya Thackeray, who is also a keen environmentalist, had criticized the riverfront project, warning of dire consequences. "Do we want to turn Pune into another Joshimath?" he had quipped on a recent visit to the site.

The project pays scant attention to the blue and red lines of the river, which mark the highest flood levels in 25 and 100 years.

However, neither Yadwadkar nor the environmentalists are against the removal of encroachments or cleaning of the river. "We have been demanding the removal of encroachments for the past 10 years," he said. They have also welcomed the building of sewage treatment plants (STPs) under the aegis of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), as part of river rejuvenation, despite their reservations on the quantum of clean-up that would be achieved.

Yadwadkar explains the maths. The total daily amount of water consumed by the city is 1,732 MLD which is supplied by the Water Resources Department. In addition, 310 MLD of groundwater is supplied through tankers. Out of this total amount of 2,042 MLD, 80 percent or 1,634 MLD is generated as sewage. At the moment, the existing STPs are capable of handling a mere 477 MLD at full capacity. The 11 new STPs to be set up under the JICA project are going to treat 396 MLD. Besides, two private STPs will treat another 132 MLD.

"But even if we assume that the sewage generated will remain at the present level, it leaves an untreated deficit of 629 MLD. Hence, the river will continue to be polluted by untreated raw sewage," he says.

What has especially irked environmentalists and Yadwadkar is the felling of trees for the project. "When they were getting their EC, they had declared that they would not remove a single tree. Now suddenly, they are going to remove thousands of trees, and transplant others. They talk of transplantation. What is their record of transplantation? How many transplanted trees have survived, to this day?"

The PMC has been talking of only removing "exotic species", a claim Yadwadkar dismisses. "And who are they to decide what are native, and what are exotic species?" he asks.

Yadwadkar, along with activist Pushkar Nadkarni, had approached the NGT on the issue, since the original Detailed Project Report (DPR) had stated that existing trees would be retained, with additional green areas being added to the riverfront under the project. As matters stand, according to an order passed in July 2023, the NGT has directed the PMC not to cut down any trees unless it has approval and environmental clearance from the Tree Authority of the Maharashtra government.

Every city wants a riverside free of encroachments, garbage, and pollution. But a river is a river. It must flow freely, with its floodplains and biodiversity intact. The PMC needs to involve environmentalists and urban planners and come up with a smart green plan which will make other cities sit up and take note. ■

Photos: Civil Society


The city has steadily encroached on the river

The worry lines deepen

Civil Society News
New Delhi

WHEN the shutters were recently downed on NewsClick in early morning raids by the Delhi police, there was surprise that such a high-voltage operation was needed against a fledgling website with a limited audience.

The founder of NewsClick, Prabir Purkayastha, was taken into custody along with the HR head, Amit Chakrabarty. But also among those picked up in the six am swoop for questioning were junior staff of NewsClick and journalists working as mere contributors and editorial consultants.

NewsClick has been accused of being part of a Chinese propaganda machine. Its main investor, an American, Neville Roy Singham, an IT millionaire and activist, has been cited in a *New York Times* story as helping China promote its image globally, a charge he denies.

Meanwhile, among journalists across the country, the worry lines have deepened. Protests by journalists were held in Delhi, Kolkata, Hyderabad and Mumbai to express concern over the raids on NewsClick. The government, they said, was using a heavy hand to send out a message, making it difficult for journalists to function. Newsrooms would become more fearful and sterile than they already are.

One of the charges against NewsClick is that its coverage of the year-long farmers' agitation was critical of the new farm laws and not favourable to the government.

But this is a charge that could be levelled against a good many reporters and editors. What room did it leave for journalists merely going about their duties and presenting both sides of a story?

Said Manini Chatterjee, a senior journalist formerly of *The Telegraph*, about the protest at the Press Club of India in Delhi: "With less than a few hours' notice hundreds of journalists showed up. What the NewsClick raids have brought home to journalists is that we as a tribe must be more proactive and not just react to things."

"The raids are chilling and unprecedented. Earlier, well-known activists and journalists were targeted but in the case of NewsClick freelancers, ex-staffers, and even juniors were hauled up, questioned and harassed. This is nothing but state intimidation. A young girl living alone and working for the portal had seven cops land up at six in the morning and they grilled her for hours," says Chatterjee.

Says E.P. Unny, cartoonist for *The Indian Express*: "If the daybreak raid is for no good reason, it would connect to the midnight knock."

"I was a student during the Emergency and saw censorship as a reader. It taught us to read between the lines and look for signs of dissent. After some years when censored cartoons of Abu Abraham and R.K. Laxman got published, you wondered why some innocuous ones were stopped while trenchant ones got into print. While it lasted, censorship must have been a pain for cartoonists for its arbitrariness more than harshness," he says.

Devinder Sharma, who is known for his detailed work on the farm sector, asks: "Are new boundaries being drawn for journalists? I fail to see how the year-long farmers' protest in which hundreds of thousands participated can be seen as the handiwork of terrorists."

Photo: Civil Society/Prashun Bhaumik

The protest at the Press Club in Delhi: It was a spontaneous response

"The farmers sought withdrawal of the three farm laws and a framework for the minimum support price. What is wrong with that," says Sharma. "Journalists who merely highlighted the weaknesses in market reforms deserve to be applauded, not pulled up, surely."

Says Monideepa Banerjie in Kolkata: "In 30 years I have seen the best and the worst of times. I think journalism is going into a very black hole. One in which you are always censoring your tweets and comments and constantly looking over your shoulder. It is no way to be. Forget about being a journalist."

Hartosh Singh Bal, political editor of *The Caravan* magazine, says, "This is all just a pretext to go after a large number of journalists, especially some of the finest who have investigated and written about issues that have surely upset the government. Further, the taking away of laptops and phones of these journalists is dangerous, especially in view of the Bhima Koregaon case where evidence was planted in the devices."

"The media's biggest problem is the cheerleaders of the government who are not acting as journalists but as propagandists. Indian media has never been in such bad shape," he laments.

Delhi bureau chief of *The Hindu Business Line* Poornima Joshi points out that "The raids and arrests in the NewsClick matter have happened at a time of growing curbs and attacks on journalists and media organizations critical of the government. All these constitute a chilling effect on free speech. The most dangerous part of these raids is that there is an attempt to completely blur the lines between the routine practice of journalism that questions the government and that which falls under the issue of national security. Criticism of the government does not constitute an attack on India. But there seems to be a deliberate attempt to criminalize the practice of journalism itself."

Neena Vyas, a veteran journalist who has covered the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) for over 20 years, feels: "The government sounded the death knell of the media in the country several years ago. They have taken over the mainstream media and now attempts are being made to control the digital media."

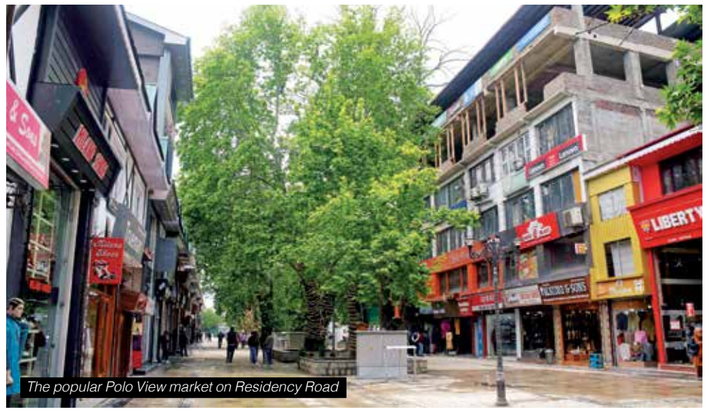
She says, "In the NewsClick case there seems to be not a single yuan of Chinese money that has come in. The point is, ahead of 2024 the government is trying to control the narrative of the digital media as more and more people depend on digital sources for news. We would never know of Manipur or even Kashmir if not for the digital platforms."

Says Rajni Bakshi, a journalist of many years standing who now focuses on *ahimsa* and conflict resolution: "The events of October 3rd morning give a bizarre twist to an old truth – the means are more important than the ends. In this case the means seem to be the end. The 'knock' does not become less ominous when it happens at 6 am rather than midnight."

"The authorities can collect information and ask questions where required. But collecting information looks like a secondary goal when law-abiding citizens — who would have responded to a simple phone call and answered questions — are made to deal with a surprise police presence in their living room," she says.

"Journalistic freedom is always an extension of our rights as citizens in a democracy. The knocks on that first Tuesday of October should worry every citizen of India — regardless of political affiliation," says Bakshi. ■

Murals being painted on homes in Magarmal Bagh



The popular Polo View market on Residency Road

SRINAGAR'S NEW LOOK

A photo feature by Bilal Bahadur

E-buses in Lal Chowk

Ghanta Ghar, Lal Chowk

Cycles for hire at Dal Gate

An installation on Gupkar Road

A pier for water sports on the Dal Lake

You can fund an artisan directly now

Prashun Bhaumik
New Delhi


Ashwin's workshop

A small loan and some nifty marketing helped Ashwin, a bamboo craftsman, become an entrepreneur with a turnover of ₹15 lakh to ₹20 lakh a year. In 2010, he and his wife had invested just ₹2,000 and started their own business called AGC Bamboo Hand Craft. His enterprise did well but he desperately needed money to upscale and build a sturdy workshop.

The 33-year-old Ashwin is from Khirmani, a small village of 91 families in Dang district of southern Gujarat. Mostly tribal, backward and poor, many villagers there depend on bamboo for a living.

The Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP) works with bamboo craftspeople in the district, helping them with training and finding markets for their products. To get Ashwin a loan, AKRSP contacted Rang De, India's only peer-to-peer lending platform, regulated by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). Rang De provides credit to artisans, farmers and other unbanked communities through social investing.

This means any individual can lend directly to an artisan or farmer or micro-entrepreneur in several states through the Rang De website. The borrowers are listed. There is a farmer who needs a loan to buy goats, a woman who wants to expand her dairy and another who wants money to equip her welding shop. As an investor you get a decent rate of interest and at the end of the loan period you can get your money back or you can reinvest.

Rang De checked out Ashwin's financial requirements and got social investors to lend him ₹50,000.

Ashwin crafts pen stands and decorative items from bamboo which he sells in Rajasthan and Surendranagar in Saurashtra district. He was getting orders from other states but he couldn't meet the demand since his workshop was very small. In 2021, he built a temporary shed in front of his house to accommodate his growing business. But, during the monsoon his leaky workshop became a liability. Still, he was able to generate a monthly income between ₹7,000 and ₹12,000.

AKRSP helped him construct a workshop after he got his loan. Ashwin now employs 15 workers, each earning a daily wage of ₹250. He wants to tap into e-commerce, expand his product range and invest in technology and machinery to improve quality.

"Rural and tribal areas have the potential to generate large-scale employment through providing rural products and services. Since 2016, AKRSP has supported more than 2,000 young men to successfully set up business ventures. Our partnership with Rang De is helping these first-generation entrepreneurs get loans at very affordable rates to start new ventures or expand existing businesses," says Vivek Singh of AKRSP.

Rang De provides credit access. Social investors support an artisan or fund of their choice beginning with ₹100.

Vijay *bhai* is another craftsman who benefitted from such a collaboration. For the past 10 years, he has been crafting bamboo handicrafts in Dang district. With the support of his family, he has turned his passion into a profitable business. Through a Rang De loan, Vijay was able to scale up his venture. His loan of ₹50,000 funded by 11 Rang De Social Investors helped him purchase hardware and raw materials.

In India, over 200 million livelihoods are directly or indirectly connected to artisan communities, predominantly tribal. A typical artisan's workshop has the potential to grow from a three-man operation to a unit employing 25 artisans over five years.

The AKRSP has been helping artisans and rural entrepreneurs in Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar get training, exposure and take their wares to exhibitions in cities such as Ahmedabad, Surat and Delhi, and establish crucial market linkages.

For credit AKRSP turns to Rang De. Ram N.K. and Smita Ram, who founded Rang De in 2008, say they were inspired by Muhammad Yunus, who pioneered microcredit and microfinance in Bangladesh and founded the Grameen Bank.

Rang De provides credit access at a low rate. The borrower has the flexibility to choose exactly when and how much they want to borrow. Social investors invest in an investee or fund of their choice starting with ₹100. Once a loan is fully funded through these investments, the funds are transferred directly to the investee's bank account. The investee repays the loan according to a repayment schedule, and the social investors receive these repayments in the form of Rang De credit in their dashboard.

This credit can be reinvested or withdrawn to the social investor's bank account. Rang De works with a network of impact partners or NGOs across the country that identifies individuals who need credit within the communities they work with.

These organizations identify communities engaged in sustainable livelihoods but who do not have access to institutional credit. They mentor these communities in effectively utilizing and repaying this credit, leading to an excellent repayment rate.

Loan repayment has been good, confirms Sukhada Chaudhury, vice president, communications, at Rang De. More than 90 percent of borrowers pay on time. She says that Rang De has given out 18,411 loans totalling more than ₹600 million from the time it was regulated by the RBI as a Non-Banking Financial Company (NBFC) in September 2019.

Rang De's loans make it easier for artisans to procure raw materials upfront and pay for transport and operating costs, helping them increase their earnings roughly from ₹10,000 a month to a net income of ₹7 lakh to ₹8 lakh per year. ■

FARM FRONTIERS

WHEN A GREAT MANGO LOOKS FOR A MARKET

Why a GI tag is often not enough

Shree Padre
Kasaragod

IN 2021, as the world struggled to shake off the Covid-19 pandemic, Kuttiattoor, a quiet village in Kerala, found itself basking in glory it hadn't entirely anticipated. An eponymous mango which Kuttiattoor had been lazily growing for the longest time had earned the village a Geographical Indicator (GI) tag.

For the record, the village was suddenly famous — nationally and globally too — because the Kuttiattoor mango had now placed it in a firmament of distinctive products like Scotch, Champagne, Basmati, Darjeeling tea and Florida oranges.

The Kuttiattoor mango takes its name from the village of Kuttiattoor. It also grows in the neighbouring village of Maniyoor and in villages in 23 panchayats nearby. The GI tag applies to all of them. The mango is not cultivated in orchards, but grows dispersed in homesteads, underscoring the community ownership that a GI recognizes.

The trees are tall and they fruit in such abundance that as much as 50 percent of a season's crop can go unharvested.

It is a wonderful mango — bright yellow, sweet, juicy and very fleshy. Even before the GI tag, it brought the village some degree of noticeability, being relished in adjoining districts and, at a stretch, in other parts of Kerala as well.

The GI status, however, put Kuttiattoor and its neighbours on an entirely different pedestal, providing recognition and opening up commercial possibilities local panchayat leaders couldn't even begin to imagine. The villages now had an opportubity to take a moonshot at serious prosperity. What if all those mangoes could be sold at a pretty premium?

The newly opened retail outlet on the road to the Kannur airport

But sadly, two years later, the villages are exactly where they were before the recognition was bestowed on them. The price of the mango hasn't gone up, the crop still goes to waste and attempts at creating value-added products like juice and jam have been slow.

How does a village, far removed from the wiles of the marketplace, pull off commercial deals and brand itself without funds and expertise? It is one thing to have a distinctive product and quite another to sell it.

For Kuttiattoor the challenge has been uphill. As a consequence, its name is hardly known. The anticipation that traders would arrive in droves to buy the mango has remained unfulfilled.

Kuttiattoor continues to be just another tiny village in Kerala's verdant landscape. It is both famous and unremarkable. You could pass through it without noticing its celebrated mango trees. Your eyes would glaze over the water bodies, paddy fields and hilly bits in the same way as towns and villages fly by in Kerala's linear topography.

Kannur airport, just 13 km away, has been Kuttiattoor's connection to the world at large with a good road providing easy access. But it doesn't seem to have made any serious difference to the village.

Kuttiattoor panchayat's 7,200 households, a population of some 30,000, seem largely content with growing rice, spices, some rubber and mining laterite soil for its rust-red stone. They don't seem to want to put in the effort to make a success of the mango.

HANDHOLDING The GI certification came with much handholding and guidance by the Kerala Agricultural University (KAU). Its intellectual property cell, led at the time by Dr C.R. Elsy, saw in the qualities of the mango and its dispersed cultivation by village households many of the factors needed for a GI certificate providing community ownership over the name.

But much before KAU stepped in, a story done by *Civil Society* on Kuttiattoor in 2015 drew the attention of Dr M.R. Dinesh, the then director of the Indian Institute of Horticultural Research (IIHR).

A mango scientist himself, he took keen interest and along with his team visited Kuttiattoor. Kannur's Krishi Vijnan Kendra (KVK) also got interested. A series of meetings was held under the leadership of the Kuttiattoor panchayat.

The IIHR team put forth very valid suggestions. It said Kuttiattoor's big advantage is that the mango is harvested much before other mango varieties hit the market. The season begins in February and winds down in June. It has a first-mover advantage, so to speak, and substantial business can be booked.

Also, it is a large mango — just four mangoes make up a kilo. Since it is the first mango of the season to be ready for harvest, it can also be used as pulp. Existing pulp factories can start processing the mangoes a month before time if they get adequate supplies from Kuttiattoor.

"If you address problems like fruit fly and anthracnose attacks, you can brand your fruits and market the best ones in stalls along the road," said the IIHR team.

The Kuttiattoor mango tastes like a regular mango, except that its flesh is not as firm as the Alphonso, Mallika or Neelam. Also, it doesn't have as much fibre as the other local varieties. But it is not inferior in taste to popular varieties.

PRODUCER COMPANY The panchayat listened keenly and by 2016 it set up the Kuttiattoor Mango Producers' Company, which serves as a farmer-producer organization (FPO).

For the first time, the farmers were getting down to business together. But if there was a change in spirit among them, much foundational work remained to be done. They would need to understand marketing and finance. An odd retail store or a processing unit putting out a few

A contractor with his day's harvest: The trees are tall and many growers find it easier to outsource the harvesting at a flat rate

products was not going to be enough.

For wider outreach, identity-building was required. A GI tag, as suggested by Dr Elsy, was really what they needed.

But a GI tag they were not going to get overnight. There were forms to be filled, scientific tests to be conducted and historical evidence to be provided.

Based on what she knew, Dr Elsy was fairly sure there was a good case for the mango, but she would have to build it by substantiating claims with facts. Nothing less would do.

Finally, when the GI application was filed it was based on the yellow colour of the Kuttiattoor mango, its sweetness, texture and nutritional values. Its uniqueness came from the water, soil and microclimate of the area in which it is grown.

"When I heard about this mango, I thought maybe because of the large number of trees in each household there is some connection between the soil and environment and the variety. Some farmers contacted me also at that time saying it was a specific variety and that some studies had been done by Indian Institute of Horticultural Research," recalls Dr Elsy about how her involvement began.

"I took permission from the university and gave a proposal to the State Department of Agriculture, which sanctioned the funds. We organized a meeting of farmers of that area as well as farmers from the nearby villages in Kannur district. It was a big meeting at which we discussed the possibility of GI registration," says Dr Elsy about the process of informing the farmers about what they were getting into.

"One of my students did some work on the specific characters of this particular variety. It is an example of how an academic programme can benefit people," she says.

Her students collected samples from multiple villages which were then tested at accredited laboratories. The information collected was used to make the application. They had to establish that this mango was special and, in being so, different to others.

It was documented that the mango was uniquely yellow when cut open. It was of medium sweetness. It wasn't as fibrous as other mangoes. And its nutritional values were on a par.

The Kuttiattoor mango also stood out for being poly-embryonic. From a seed came as many as 13 seedlings, which was a special characteristic. It also explained why the Kuttiattoor mango trees are fecund and provide a huge crop — much more than other mango trees.

How does a village pull off deals and brand itself without funds and expertise? It is one thing to have a distinctive product and quite another to sell it.

"Poly-embryonic usually means from one seed you can get six or seven. But we counted up to 13 seedlings from a single seed. Normally this doesn't happen. Some local varieties also have multiple seedlings. But I haven't seen any local variety with up to 13 seedlings from a single seed," says Dr Elsy.

Supported by documentation of the academic kind, the GI application went through. But the farmers now had to convert the GI status into better visibility and, deriving from that, bigger sales of the mango.

A long road remained ahead, but the opportunity too was huge. A dedicated census has not been done but according to one calculation, the villages of Kuttiattoor and Maniyoor that make up the Kuttiattoor panchayat produce about 5,000 tonnes of mangoes. Kuttiattoor village

alone has some 25,000 trees. A big, old tree is known to deliver 100 kg in a season.

V.O. Prabhakaran, chairman of the Kuttiattoor Mango Producers' Company, says: "If we calculate at the average consumer price of ₹40 per kg, the Kuttiattoor panchayat produces an impressive ₹16 crore to ₹20 crore worth of mangoes every year."

That should have made the 7,200 households of this panchayat rich, but it hasn't. The producer company also hasn't been able to fire the enthusiasm of local people. Of the 5,000 tonnes of mangoes estimated to be produced, last year the producer company was only able to procure and sell 20 tonnes.

The company lacks funds to invest in a building, equipment, marketing and outreach to growers so that it can be in a dominant position to increase the demand for the mango and the price that growers get.


V.O. Prabhakaran

"The local community's involvement is not up to the mark," complains Prabhakaran. "Our company has 515 shareholders. We have collected ₹3 lakh as share capital. If more members join and buy shares, it empowers us to increase our services. If our share capital can be increased to ₹15 lakh, we can get an equal matching grant from the government. But indications from our own people are far from encouraging."

In the absence of the company making its presence felt, middlemen continue to be in control, buying an entire tree for just ₹5,000 before the season begins and making a profit of ₹30,000 or ₹40,000 from it.


Dr P. Jayaraj

After receiving the GI status, the farmers had an opportunity to visit Delhi on a couple of occasions — first to receive the certification and again for a B2B event.

Both visits led to enquiries. One came from France for a large quantity of pulp and another from Turkey. Neither seems to have been formalized.

The farmers have a problem working their way through commercial arrangements. They aren't fully conversant with English and don't know how to pitch their mango.

Official patronage helps. But what they really need is savvy to deal with the world. Capital for infrastructure and marketing, and branding advice are required to make them more competitive.


Dr M.R. Dinesh

Under the guidance of the Kannur KVK, the small value-addition unit of the panchayat now produces 11 mango products. These include mango squash, mango ready-to-serve, jams from ripe and green mangoes, pickle, and amchur or mango powder.

The products are clearly aimed at a small local market. The export market is all about pulp and fresh fruit.

RETAIL STORE A few months ago, the farmers did make a smart move. With the promise of financial help from the Kuttiattoor panchayat, the producer company inaugurated its own shop at Chattukappara along the airport road. Only Kuttiattoor mangoes and value-added products are being sold. Customers have begun showing up.

The outlet remains open till 9 pm. Its maximum turnover is ₹20,000 per day. In fact, even during the monsoon, sales were ₹5,000 per day.

Indian Railways has allowed the farmers to set up a shop at the local railway station. With limited displays, this shop too brings in around ₹5,000 a day by way of sales.

But their stocks seem to be insufficient. "We have two tonnes of mango


The value addition centre produces jam, pickle, squash and a few other products


Raw mangoes go through a ripening chamber provided by the IIHR

The panchayat has no facility to store and grade the fruits. Despite demand, the fruits can't be preserved beyond the season. A spacious cold storage would have increased farmers' earnings.

pulp and a large quantity of pickle this year. We hope our products last till the next season," says Prabhakaran.

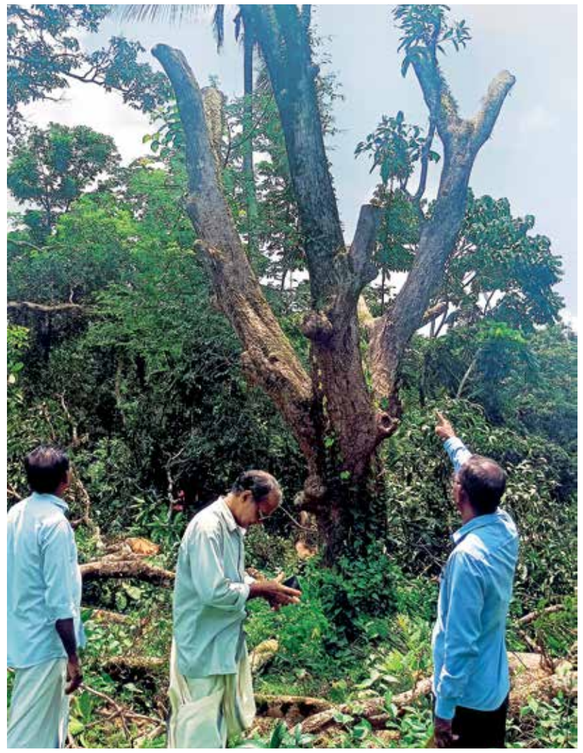
Production also fluctuates every year since it depends on climate and rainfall patterns. If there are showers during the flowering or fruiting season, mango production is adversely affected.

The company does supply fresh fruits, but to just six retail outlets. The mangoes are procured and naturally ripened using ripening chambers provided by the IIHR.

The company, however, doesn't have the funds to buy larger quantities of mangoes during the season to meet additional demand. The value-addition unit, till recently, was functioning only during the fruiting season. Twelve women work in the unit. This year the company hopes to run it through the year.

A project to manufacture a mango carbonated drink and mango ice-cream has been on the anvil for some time now. The Agriculture Infrastructure Fund and a few other agencies have sanctioned ₹59 lakh for this. The producer company has to just provide the building. But it doesn't have one.

The block panchayat has a building which it is willing to hand over to the gram panchayat. The problem is that this building lacks power supply


There are 20 trees that are being dwarfed in Kuttiattoor


A dwarfed mango tree in Maharashtra bears fruit again after two years


The Chengalikodan banana sells at a premium

and water. Since the logjam continues, the gram panchayat is still without a building to house a factory.

The lack of working capital is frustrating. Generally, farmer producer organizations are given financial assistance of ₹9 lakh to 11 lakh in the initial three years by the state's agricultural department. The Kuttiattoor producer company got only ₹3.25 lakh. It hasn't got any other financial help.

Even if they were to buy more mangoes, the panchayat has no facility to store and grade the fruits. Despite demand, the fruits can't be preserved beyond the season. A spacious cold storage would have increased farmers' earnings.

"Although there is a producer company, it lacks essential infrastructure facilities. Decentralized procurement and grading are still a distant dream. If all this is possible, then a kilo of mangoes can be easily sold for ₹80 to ₹100 at the beginning of the season. During the peak season the price would go down to ₹40," says Dr P. Jayaraj, who heads the Kannur KVK.

The large size of the Kuttiattoor mango trees is a drawback. Climbing the trees and harvesting the entire crop is challenging. It requires expertise and charges can exceed ₹1,000 a day.

A scientific solution exists in dwarfing the trees. In Maharashtra's Konkan area, the Dr Balasaheb Sawant Konkan Krishi Vidyapeeth (BSKKV) at Dapoli has been dwarfing trees for a long time. It involves cutting the tree to a manageable height. Though the process looks simple, it requires care and expertise. The BSKKV has successfully 'dwarfed' thousands of Alphonso mango trees. It takes a couple of years for the trees to begin bearing fruit again. Future yields promise to be good, but the biggest advantage is that the mangoes can be harvested easily. By way of demonstration, 20 trees have been dwarfed in Kuttiattoor at a cost of ₹2,500 per tree.

"Farmers have shown an interest. There are some other advantages of dwarfing. Loranthus, a parasitic plant that grows on mango trees and affects production, gets destroyed. As we have cut only the trees selected


Dr C.R. Elsy

as best cultivars, we get a huge number of scions from which we could produce grafts," points out Dr Jayaraj.

Prabhakaran describes dwarfing as a turning point. He says: "Not only Kuttiattoor's farmers, but also those from nearby panchayats are contacting us. We want to carry out this 'shortening' of trees in their areas too. Once trees bear fruit again, even ordinary labourers can do the harvesting."

LIMITED POSSIBILITIES There is unmet demand at Kuttiattoor so the opportunity to do better exists. But Dr Elsy cautions that with GI tag products, the possibilities are always limited. Such products are circumscribed by their very uniqueness and volumes remain low. If bigger profits are to be made it is through a premium for which quality and identity are important.

Dr Elsy's IP cell at KAU has helped many groups of farmers get GI status for different natural products. But creating demand for the products is an altogether different proposition.

A success story is that of the Chengalikodan banana. Its uniqueness because of its red colour and the shape of its combs was already well known before it earned its GI status.

But GI recognition created a buzz and made it yet more famous, resulting in bigger demand beyond Kerala. Locally, it is the banana to offer at the Guruvayoor temple and on important religious occasions all kinds of fancy prices are paid for a comb.

There are limitations to how many Chengalikodan bananas can be grown in the same geographical area. But because it is admired and sought after better value is derived from the premium that gets charged.

This then is the opportunity that beckons the producers of the Kuttiattoor mango. It needs to build on its iconic identity. Greater volumes would be possible if 40 percent of the harvest were not allowed to go to waste. But better prices won't happen until buyers begin asking for the mango not just in Kerala but across India and the world. ■

INSIGHTS

OPINION | ANALYSIS | RESEARCH | IDEAS

Banga at the Bank

DELHI DARBAR

SANJAYA BARU

AJAY BANGA made headlines when he was named president of the World Bank by US President Joe Biden. Indian born and mostly educated in India, Banga began his professional career in India before becoming CEO of the American finance firm, Mastercard. Having earned his American credentials, he was green-flagged for the Bank position by the powers that be in Washington.

The World Bank website informs us that: "As the only World Bank Group shareholder that retains veto power over certain changes in the Bank's structure, the United States plays a unique role in influencing and shaping global development priorities."

Not surprisingly, therefore, the president of the World Bank has always been a United States national. For a brief while in 2019, a woman temporarily held the fort at the Bank when Kristalina Georgieva of Bulgarian nationality was placed in charge. But then she moved to the International Monetary Fund, taking forward a post-War understanding between the trans-Atlantic allies that the Bank would be led by an American and the Fund by a European.

Even though the Bank did have presidents born outside the US, the first one being German-born Ernest Stern, who only served as acting president in 1995, followed by Australian-born James Wolfensohn, who had a full term from 1995 to 2000, and Jim Yong Kim of South Korea, all of them had acquired US citizenship before being appointed head of the Bank. Indeed, that holds true for Banga as well. While the Indian media has made much of a muchness about Banga being a true '*desi*' since he was both educated in India and had worked in India before moving to the US, he soon acquired American citizenship.

The fact is that over three-quarters of a century after the end of the Second World War none of the security and economic institutions created by the victors of the War have been dismantled, nor have the trans-Atlantic powers let go of the leadership of these institutions. Be it the United Nations Security Council or the 'Bretton Woods Sisters' (Fund and Bank) or indeed the post-War military alliances, they are all still in place. But the Bank is an interesting example of how changes in the structure of the global economy and the Bank's own business have forced it to accommodate the interests of the so-called 'Global South'.

Banga is an American citizen but provides a connect with India and Asian borrowers

The Bank's initial business was mainly focused on post-War reconstruction in Europe. Which is why it was named the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development. Till the 1970s the Bank's major clients were European and East Asian countries. Major and powerful developing economies like India remained wary. Indira Gandhi's experience with the Fund and the Bank in the late 1960s, when she agreed to a devaluation of the rupee in the hope of securing a Bank loan which then did not materialize was a particularly bad episode that strained India's relations with Washington.

Well into the 2000s the US made sure that senior and trusted Americans, or US allies, retained the leadership of both the Fund and the Bank. The Bank's tallest leader was perhaps Robert McNamara, who earned ignominy for his role in the Vietnam war as US defence secretary and then atoned for it as head of the Bank, promoting development rather than war. McNamara served at the top of the Bank from 1968 to 1981.

A compelling reason for the US, the World Bank's largest and dominant shareholder with a veto power, to have picked the name of an Indian American could well be to provide a balance to China's rising profile through its two financial arms — the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the BRICS New Development Bank, of which China is the biggest shareholder. A more suitable and a more 'Indian' finance professional to head the World Bank could easily have been Montek Ahluwalia, Raghuram Rajan, K.V. Kamath or Deepak Parekh. All Indian passport holders. But of course the US would want a US national to head the bank. Banga has been a US citizen since 2007.

The interesting thing today about the World Bank's lending profile is that India is its biggest borrower. India's total borrowing from the Bank as of 2022 is estimated to be close to $40 billion. Indonesia at $20 billion comes next followed by Pakistan and Bangladesh with borrowings estimated to be at $18 billion each. Taken together, India and its three closest neighbours — Indonesia, Pakistan and Bangladesh — account for Bank borrowings of close to $100 billion. They are followed at a distance by countries in Africa, Latin America and Eastern Europe.

It was, therefore, a smart thing for the Bank's largest shareholder to do. Appoint someone with a connect to the region to be able to manage the portfolio. Who better than an Indian, that too a Sikh with US citizenship, to head the Bank. The memory of the World Bank as an American institution, or at least a trans-Atlantic one, is being slowly wiped out as people come to believe that it is a global institution run by globalized professionals. ■

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

The leisure economy

LOOKING AHEAD

KIRAN KARNIK

ARE you free? This oft-asked question is prone to multiple interpretations. Human rights activists will understand it in the context of larger freedoms; managers in offices will assume it means availability to speak, or to do something; others may have different answers, depending on context and questioner. To most, the colloquial understanding of the question has to do with the most common scarce resource: time.

Despite increasingly long workdays for many, the advent of technology in the workplace as well as the home should translate to a greater amount of free time. Why this is not already happening is a bit of a mystery. Yet, sooner rather than later, use of enabling technologies will save time and create more "free time". In fact, many worry that as machines take over, humans may have prosperity, but no work; the resulting idleness will have its own ramifications.

Increasing technology in the workplace and home is allowing people to enjoy more 'free time'

Desirable or not, that is a distant future. In the more immediate years (probably in this decade; certainly, in the next), we are unlikely to be completely idle, but will have more free time. This will be enhanced for gig workers (those working according to their desire and need), who can take time off whenever they want. This, along with growing incomes, will make leisure one of the biggest sectors of any economy. Today, advanced economies are marked by low agriculture-to-GDP and high services-to-GDP ratios. In a few years, their main identifier will be the proportion of leisure expenditure in the GDP.

Another major driver of the leisure economy will be rapidly aging populations. In India, we will have about 225 million elders — the 60-plus — in 10 years, growing to about 350 million in 2050. Having earned high incomes and amassed large savings, a large number of them — retired but, thanks to health-tech, yet in good health — will be enjoying almost full-time leisure, with their money and fitness enabling them to do practically whatever they please.

One can safely predict a booming leisure sector, feeding on a combination of growing disposable income with the young, their ability (thanks to increased gig work) to take a break when they want, heightened awareness to balance work and "life", elders with large savings and in good health, plus the wants created by marketing and peer pressure. Already, the choice of leisure activities has multiplied. Travel is an old favourite, but new destinations (especially abroad) are emerging. Curated and specialized journeys are also growing, including adventure trips, food tours, thematic circuits, village stays, safari and back-to-nature sojourns.

Also becoming popular are alternatives, earlier rare for Indians, such as cruises, single-women tours, staycations, and fitness or health holidays. Experiential breaks, like rural immersion trips, are also in demand. The extent and scale of travel for MICE (marketing, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions) is already large and seeing further growth. These large-group outings now fill up hotels and airline seats at all times of the year. Destination weddings (especially in tourist or exotic locations) do the same, though this is seasonal.

Looking ahead, one can see a boom in all these; and this is but one component of the leisure and culture industry. Movies have long been popular and — despite some prognostications — have survived, first television and now "OTT" or streaming channels. In fact, box-office collections are reaching record levels. Gaming — including for-stakes games — is gaining popularity in India (globally it rakes in greater revenue than the movie industry). On-ground, "live" events, which many thought were dying with the advent of new technologies, are not just surviving but attracting large crowds. Theatre and live performances — music, dance, even stand-up comedy — often attract audiences like a popular movie. While television offers a far better view of sports — with high-tech and drone-mounted cameras from multiple angles — many yet prefer to go in person. In either case, it is a lucrative cash-generator. The mind-boggling figures for buying broadcast rights for cricket is an indicator, as is the black-market rate for tickets of the India-Pakistan World Cup match. Economist Dr Madan Sabnavis estimates the World Cup-induced consumer spending to be a whopping ₹18,000 crore to ₹22,000 crore.

In this sector, new (often tech-enabled) possibilities and demand are in a mutually reinforcing upward spiral, fuelled by the combination of the factors mentioned. Leisure or free time is now also being used for learning music, dance, yoga, painting, cooking, and much else. Some learn languages, and a few (adults/elders) even go back to learning maths or physics! "Working out" and making time for it has become an almost compulsory leisure activity now amongst youth. A visible sign is the proliferation of gymnasia in every city of the country. Their fees are not trivial and gym owners — though not yet as popular a vocation as owning a restaurant — are laughing all the way to the bank. While exercise, including yoga, is generally considered part of the health and fitness sector, it is a free time or leisure activity.

In coming years, the big target for this sector will be the comparatively untapped and very rapidly expanding category of elders. While a very large and exponentially-growing number of them can afford expensive leisure time activities, a high proportion is poor, though destitution and abject poverty will (hopefully) end. It is for the family and community, with help from NGOs and government, to ensure that poor elders too enjoy their leisure time. Rich or poor, elders have a need for social interaction and emotional support: engaging use of their free time is an excellent way of doing this.

Many talk of attention as being the most important element in future, with companies competing intensely for consumer attention. However, for aeons, humans' biggest asset has been time: a limited, depleting, non-renewable resource. Leisure time is even scarcer, though it will increase in future. Remember this when next asked: Are you free? ■

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

A river has the right to life

LIVING RIVERS

VENKATESH DUTTA

DESPITE our professed love for rivers and water bodies, our actions have inflicted deeper injuries on their wholesome existence. The rights of rivers and the representation of their interests when they are threatened are often ignored. Rivers, as essential components of our ecosystems, face significant challenges and suffering due to rapid urbanization.

There is a big conceptual gap, and holistic provisions are missing so far as river rights are concerned. The various rules and guidelines to protect rivers from abuse primarily rely on a combination of Central and state laws. They are routinely cited in court proceedings with an attempt to ensure that the spirit of these isolated provisions is honoured.

There is a growing movement to establish legal rights for rivers and ecosystems in many countries, often granting them a form of legal personhood. The idea behind this is to attribute a clearly defined set of rules to save rivers from degradation and extinction.

While human rights are well-established and advocated by various organizations and activists, the rights of rivers and ecosystems have been a more recent topic of discussion. The biggest challenge is determining who or what represents the rights of rivers when they are under threat. Efforts to represent and protect the rights of rivers may involve creating legal frameworks, tools, organizations, and advocacy campaigns aimed at raising awareness about the ecological importance of rivers. In some legal systems and regions, there have been attempts to assign legal guardians or custodians to represent the interests of rivers and ecosystems. These guardians can then take legal action on behalf of the rivers when there are violations or threats to their well-being.

While we have the right to life as individuals or members of a species (Article 21 of the Indian Constitution), rivers themselves do not have rights in the traditional sense. There are many rules and legal provisions in our country that put forward a fascinating lens through which a rights-based approach towards river protection can be established. Many of these provisions are now cited in legal proceedings to deter wrong-doers.

There could be a set of eight rights explicitly defined for protection of rivers. These include:

- The right of rivers to the land of rivers (riparian lands, floodplains and vegetation buffer zone).
- The right of rivers to flow naturally (ecological flows).
- The right of rivers to flow without human-generated waste (quality and wholesomeness).
- The right of rivers to maintain their ecosystems (ecological integrity).
- The right of rivers to remain connected with their smaller tributaries and streams (stream connectivity).
- The right of rivers to maintain water bodies (lakes/ponds/other natural water sources) in their catchment (connectivity with water bodies).
- The right of rivers to have sufficient groundwater as base flows (floodplain aquifers).
- The right of rivers over all the streams, water sources and underground water to be considered as an integral part (family) of the river (basin integrity).

There is a growing movement to establish legal rights for rivers and ecosystems in many countries, often granting them a form of legal personhood.

Article 21 guarantees the fundamental right to life. It is believed that the right to life cannot be attained or guaranteed without also guaranteeing access to clean water sources such as rivers, ponds and lakes. In *M.C. Mehta vs. Union of India, AIR 1987 SC 1086* the Supreme Court treated the right to live in a pollution-free environment as a part of the fundamental right to life under Article 21. Article 48A is kept in mind whenever a matter regarding maintenance of a river or ecology is brought before the Court. It says that "the state shall endeavour to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard the forests and wildlife of the country".

Further, according to Article 51A (g), it shall be the duty of every citizen of India "to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers and wildlife, and to have compassion for living creatures". The Supreme Court in *Delhi Water Supply and Sewage v. State of Haryana, AIR 1996 SC 2992* said that "A river has to flow through some territory; and it would be a travesty of justice if the upper riparian States were to use its water for purposes like irrigation, denying the lower riparian States the benefit of using the water even for quenching the thirst of its residents."

Rivers flow meanderingly and dissipate inherent energy in their floodplains. To prevent illegal encroachment in their meandering/floodplain zone due to urbanization and unplanned settlement, the Uttar Pradesh government has made various guidelines. According to a March 2010 order by the chief secretary, the floodplain zone along rivers should be treated as a flood affected area in the master plan and no construction should be allowed in it, the land use of these areas should be kept green. Under the Uttar Pradesh (Regulation of Building Operations) Act, 1958, the UP Urban Planning and Development Act, 1973 and the Industrial Development Act, 1976, 'no objection' will not be provided for any kind of construction work on the floodplain, nor will the map be approved. To stop any type of illegal construction, effective action should be taken under the provisions of these Acts. According to the notification of the Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation dated October 7, 2016, Section 6(3), "No person shall construct any permanent or temporary structure for residential or commercial or industrial or any other purpose on the banks of the riverbank or in its active floodplains."

Despite the state and Central governments' efforts to codify river rights and establish legal frameworks for river protection, a clear-cut implementation mechanism is still missing. Also, the district-level committees have done little to enforce key judicial decisions related to protection of rivers, especially removal of encroachments. There are inherent difficulties in translating the rights due to lack of coherence between agencies.

By granting legal rights to rivers, it becomes possible to take legal action on behalf of the river or ecosystem when there are threats or harm caused by human activities. It signifies a shift in perspective from viewing rivers solely as a resource to be 'exploited' to acknowledging that they have 'intrinsic value' and deserve care and protection in their own right. This change in our approach can contribute to more sustainable and harmonious relationships with our rivers. Hopefully, some clear river rights may emerge in response to critical challenges our rivers are facing. ■

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

Two compelling symbols

AHIMSA MUSINGS

RAJNI BAKSHI

WE live in an age of many firsts. We are the first humans to have a 'Doomsday Clock' as well as an International Day of Nonviolence. What do we make of this contrast? Does the Doomsday Clock seem more real than The Knotted Gun outside the United Nations?

The Doomsday Clock is a symbolic way of keeping track of how close we are to a human-made global catastrophe. The clock came into being in 1947 as scientists were grappling with the implications of having invented nuclear weapons. Maintained since then by the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists, the clock is a way of estimating threats posed by unchecked scientific and technological advances.

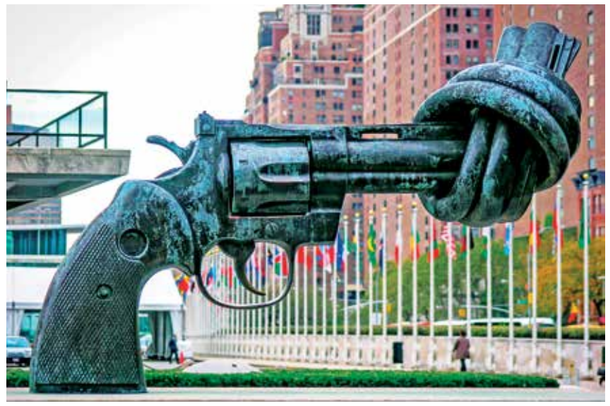
To start with, the clock only took into account the degree of risk of nuclear weapons being deployed. Now the clock also accounts for the dangers posed by climate change as well as developments in life sciences that could cause irreversible harm to humankind.

By contrast the United Nations' International Day of Nonviolence is premised on the hope that our species' finer traits can eventually lead us to forms of organization where both individuals and groups feel strong enough to be nonviolent. A UN General Assembly resolution passed in June 2007 chose Mahatma Gandhi's birthday as the International Day of Nonviolence.

In doing this all nations of the world, at least formally, accepted the universal relevance of the principle of nonviolence. It remains to be seen how many social and political leaders across the world actually accept Mahatma Gandhi's confident claim that nonviolence is "mightier than the mightiest weapon of destruction devised by the ingenuity of man".

The absurdity of violence had already been artistically expressed at the United Nations two decades earlier — in the form of a bronze sculpture called Nonviolence but better known as The Knotted Gun. This is a large sculpture of a Colt Python 357 Magnum revolver with its barrel tied in a knot. It was made by Carl Fredrik Reutersward in response to the murder of his friend, John Lennon. This was his way of honouring Lennon's advocacy of peace and nonviolence — most famously through the song "Imagine", which Lennon co-wrote with Yoko Ono and released in 1971.

The Knotted Gun, which is the centrepiece of the UN plaza, was also the artist's way of poking fun at violence. Reutersward knew that humour is a fine way to bring people together. So he deliberately set out "…to make my 'weapon' symbolically ridiculous and completely out of order".



The Knotted Gun outside the United Nations symbolizes the absurdity of violence

Nonviolent resistance is twice as successful as those that rely on violence because it attracts a larger and wider range of people.

However, for most people it is the Doomsday Clock which is a far more compelling symbol. The most obvious reason for this is that an imminent danger tends to be rivetting. By contrast, advances in nonviolence appear amorphous and cannot be 'clocked' in the way that impending doom can be.

For instance, when the Doomsday Clock was first conceptualized scientists evaluated the risks of nuclear weapons and came to the conclusion that humanity was just seven minutes away from midnight, the symbolic marker for a global catastrophe that would destroy life as we know it.

Since then, there were only two instances when the Doomsday Clock was more than 10 minutes from midnight. It stood at 12 minutes in 1963 when the United States and the Soviet Union signed the Partial Test Ban Treaty, limiting atmospheric nuclear testing. It stood at 14 minutes in 1995 following the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the ending of the Cold War. 1972 — 12 mins — SALT and ABM Treaty. 1991 — 17 mins — START I and fall of Soviet Union. 1995 — moved to 14 mins — NATO expanded east, fears of Russian reaction.

In the past three decades the situation has rapidly deteriorated as more countries have acquired nuclear weapons and efforts to address climate change have been too little too late. Given the tensions between the US and Russia, as well as the US and Iran, in 2020 the Doomsday Clock moved to less than two minutes from midnight. Currently, largely due to the threat of the conflict in Ukraine triggering a nuclear war, the clock stands at one and a half minutes to midnight.

While these geopolitical events are well known, few people are aware that in the same seven decades that the Doomsday Clock has been ticking away scores of nonviolent struggles have succeeded across the world.

A study titled "Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict" by Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan has shown that for over a century campaigns of nonviolent resistance have been twice as successful as those that relied on violence. One major reason for this is that the nonviolent campaigns are able to involve a much larger and wider range of people.

The problem is that these nonviolent forms of civic mobilization seem to exist in some different time and space realm — one that does not impinge on the realities that have brought the Doomsday Clock so close to the catastrophe marker.

Thus, many people tend to look wistfully upon The Knotted Gun outside the UN and see it only as symbolic of one dimension of human aspirations but not a real possibility. There is a not so obvious and insidious reason for this. We are conditioned to believe that violence is 'natural' whereas nonviolence is a learnt behaviour, a moral and ethical aspiration.

The good news is that this conditioning too has been amply challenged. More on that next time. ■

Rajni Bakshi is the founder of YouTube channel Ahimsa Conversations

The Northern Ridge is the smallest part of the urban forest in Delhi

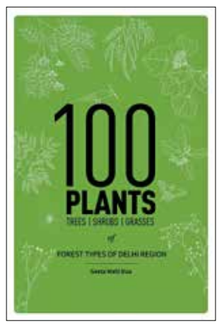
Some native landscaping

A 100-plant guide for Delhi

CIVIL SOCIETY REVIEWS

As cities expand, they desperately need greening to save them from being concrete jungles. But what kind of greening should it be? Decades of growing just about anything, often merely because it looks good or has been passed down over the years, has resulted in costly ecological confusions. Why should plants and trees that need a lot of water be growing in an arid zone, for instance?

With climate change now more visible than ever and the environmental footprint of a city cause for concern, it has become common to talk of planting native species that suit local conditions and are less demanding. But what are these plants and how can they be weaned back into an ecosystem from which they dropped?



Even for those with the best of intentions, it can be very confusing. Making a beginning is not easy, let alone the wholesale transition that cities seem to need. Kind handholding is in order, but for that angels are needed who will do the homework, point in the right directions and even be available for ongoing advice.

Geeta Wahi Dua is one such blessed intermediary who has put together a slim volume, *100 Plants*, which is about the trees, shrubs and grasses which belong to the different forest types of the Delhi region.

To be precise, she has identified 60 trees, 24 shrubs and 16 grasses. Why just 100 plants, you might ask. It is because precision is required. Plants need to be identified, matched to soil types and understood for their functions. It is better to make a useful selection.

Wahi Dua's book primarily serves as a manual. Don't expect to spend time in bed reading the stories of plants and habitats. It is meant for landscape architects who know they should be going native but aren't sure how they can get started.

Wahi Dua is a landscape architect herself. She edits and runs *LA Journal*, which is for landscape architects, with her partner, Brij. They also do other interesting things like bringing out a series of green maps of Indian cities.

The need to focus on plants arose during online classes she was giving to young landscape architects. They wanted to use native species but were short on the basics and were seeking a guide.

Wahi Dua says: "The book is in response to an increasing awareness among development authorities and spatial designers about the role and significance of native plants in creating sustainable and experiential urban spaces."

"The plants have been selected on the basis of the diversity of the eco-zones to which they belong — riverside, plains, hills and lowlands. Also taken into account is their adaptability to urban contexts and visual attributes," she says.

Looked at this way, Delhi seems very different. We generally regard it as a city full of automobiles, congested housing and chaotic neighbourhood markets.

What has gone is its integration with nature. Plants are vital to this original identity. They represent soil quality and water resources. They are the sentinels of an entire ecosystem consisting of birds, animals, butterflies, bees, fungi and more. Cities that have decisively changed can't come back in their earlier avatars. But bringing back plants that restore some of those contexts can soften the blow of urbanization.

Reminding Delhi of its original topography, natural wealth and sustainability has been creatively tried before. The Sunder Nursery is a flourishing example of different agroclimatic zones being brought alive. So is the Aravali Biodiversity Park on the border of Delhi and Gurugram. Both seek to revive lost natural systems.

Geeta Wahi Dua

These are undoubtedly laudable efforts. Unfortunately, they haven't received as much recognition and replication as they deserve. They are also limited in their scope of influencing practice. The city continues to change this way and that.

Wahi Dua's book goes directly to practitioners who really do want to make a difference in their professional lives. It is primarily a manual that a landscape architect can refer to in real situations. Additionally, it broadens horizons and increases knowledge. But the real opportunity it taps into is in changing practice. This holds out the hope of making a difference cumulatively over time. For cities to change architects first need the values and then the knowledge that will make them better urban spaces for future generations.

Wahi Dua tells us that "Delhi's natural flora largely belongs to the Northern Tropical Dry Deciduous Forests and Northern Tropical Thorn Forests with some sub groups. These each have microhabitats of their own."

There are four regions consisting of the Kohi, which is the Aravali hills consisting of the southern, central and northern ridge. The Bangar, which is the central flatlands, the Dabar or the low-lying areas, and the Khadar, which is the riverside. The Yamuna has always played an important role in the ecology of Delhi.

The trees, shrubs and grasses are listed with their local names, botanical names, descriptions, how they improve the environment, ecological role, ethnobotanical uses and, of course, possible design functions.

For instance, at random, we know that the bargad is an evergreen with an elliptical canopy. It has smooth leaves with figs. It needs large open areas to grow. It works as a buffer against pollution and is drought tolerant. Birds and insects like it. Because of its size and need for space, its design uses are limited.

Or, among shrubs, take the kamini. It is an evergreen. It has dark green and glossy leaves on 'woody' branches with small white fragrant flowers which appear in clusters along with green berries. It has moisture-holding capacity. Its white flowers and their fragrance make it useful for ornamentation.

We don't know if *100 Plants* is adequate. It might be falling short in various ways. Its success will be decided by how effectively it will be used. Refinements will undoubtedly be made. But looking at cities afresh and enabling professionals like architects to shape their future better is a laudable objective. So, this is a beginning well made. ■

A large nursery of native plants at the Asola Bhatti Wildlife Sanctuary in Delhi

Along the Yamuna near Okhla in Delhi

Samita's World *by SAMITA RATHOR*

A whiff of coffeeology in Coorg

SUSHEELA NAIR

SNUGGLED in the midst of 300 acres of verdant coffee and spice plantations in a picturesque pastoral setting, Evolve Back Resort in Kodagu has catapulted Kodagu onto the national tourism map. The luxury brand has ventured into the holiday hospitality business in this region. Owned by the Ramapuram Group, which has been in the plantation business since 1921, the resort is renowned for its beauty, facilities and hospitality.

In keeping with its avowed philosophy of offering exquisite, true-to-the-land experiences, the resort allows guests to sample plantation life at its graceful best. This is made possible by the traditional-style accommodation, and the host of facilities that the resort offers. The wide choice of accommodation includes Kodava-style Ayenmanes with private pools and plantation cottages. An Ayurveda spa, a gym, a conference hall, an infinity pool and three restaurants — Peppercorn, Plantation Leaf and Granary — are also on offer.

Boating in a four-acre private lake, guided plantation tours, coracle rides, birdwatching, cycling, and visiting the resort's own school are some of the activities arranged for guests. We returned with memories of straight-from-the-heart service, pampering, privacy, tranquility and a multitude of enjoyable experiences firmly rooted in the natural environs and culture of the land.

At the Sidapur Museum of Coffee and Culture we experienced the thrill of making our own brew right from pulping, grading, roasting, grinding and cupping in. With the invigorating aroma of coffee in the air, we strolled around the museum and got a taste of how life was lived in the old days in Coorg. We found Coffeeology, a daily live session on the art and science of gourmet coffee, most interesting.

The museum offers different sections that showcase the story of the Ramapuram family, the history of coffee in Coorg, how coffee is cultivated globally and the art of brewing the perfect cup. It recreates a space evoking the rustic feel of a coffee plantation, with materials and objects used in the past and the present, reminiscent of eras gone by and ways of life that have been replaced with the onset of modernity.

Large, dented copper and brass vessels of unique shapes and sizes line the walls, each harbouring their unique stories. A few of the objects are from the Ramapuram family collection — a hand-operated coffee roaster and a typewriter that were very much in use on the Chikkana Halli Estate. The coffee grinder in the museum has had quite a journey. It belonged to a Kodava gentleman who ran a coffee house in Lahore before the Partition, after which it was transported to Bangalore and housed in Chinny's Café on Brigade Road for many years.

Photos: Civil Society/Susheela Nair

The Sidapur Museum of coffee where you can brew your own cup

The Granary restaurant which overlooks an infinity pool

Steeped in local lore and legend, the resort prides itself on locally inspired activities and initiatives which include school adoption, cultural shows by local artistes, providing them with a supplementary means of income, and schoolteachers' training which demonstrate that responsible tourism is not a one-way street. Right from the native and eco-friendly architecture to the locally inspired activities and interaction with ethnic communities, the entire experience is life-enriching.

In keeping with its eco-friendly ethos, concerted efforts are made to conserve water. The cornerstone of the resort's water conservation programme is the hotel's own sewage treatment plant (STP). The treated water is used for irrigation in the gardens at the resort's premises. The STP not only preserves the quality of fresh water resources, but reduces the amount of water used by the hotel. An extensive drip irrigation system allows the resort to use less water. A reverse osmosis plant installed in each cottage provides 100 percent safe drinking water while reducing the negative impact of over 50,000 plastic bottles every year. Other commendable water conservation programmes of the resort include rainwater harvesting and the ozonisation plant for the main swimming pool.

The resort's solid waste management efforts are noteworthy too. Apart from the segregation of degradable and biodegradable waste, plastic, glass, metal and paper are sent for recycling. STP sludge is used as fertilizer. The use of CFL lamps, electronic key tags, and installation of governors on diesel generator sets have helped in conservation of energy. A company-owned wind power generator offsets power consumption and supplies surplus power to the government.

No tree has been cut down during the construction and the enormous ficus tree next to the pool has been there since before its inception. The landscape is beautifully laid out with indigenous flowering shrubs and plants. It is difficult to find exotic flora in the resort. All the trees and plants are named and this makes for an enjoyable and informative walk. Steps have also been taken to minimize formal landscaping.

With green consciousness catching on, travellers are heading to resorts with excellent responsible tourism bona fides. Currently, local employment at the resort has been stepped up. The resort shows its concern for the community by organizing structured community development programmes. Cultural shows are carried out by the locals, providing them supplementary income. The indigenous guides and staff are the faces of the resort's claim to fame. These signature holidays which preserve the purity of nature and culture of the land have received due global recognition and prestigious awards. At the end of the stay, even a casual visitor will be converted into a sustainable tourism practitioner. ■

FACT FILE

Getting there: **Distance from Bengaluru — 230 km**
Distance from Mysuru — 100 km
Email: **coorg@evolveback.com**

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 Rangsutra shows how handcrafted wear can be chic too.

WHEN CRAFT IS A STYLE STATEMENT

RANGSUTRA's first store is in the midst of Saidulajab's byzantine lanes in Delhi, jostling with cafes, offices and homes. In a store devoted to style, craft and colour there's lots to browse. Try a gossamer sari with an embroidered blouse, or slip into a stylish kurta, or perhaps a dress. There is also a melange of home furnishing including bright cushions and cool *chikankari* curtains.

Rangsutra's Delhi store now has a sibling with a sunny ceiling in Bikaner called Abhivyakti. If you happen to be in the vicinity, stop by. It's just in front of the Urmul Dairy and Trust offices and ably supervised by manager Basanti.

So is Rangsutra on an expansion spree? "Our members have always wanted retail outlets," says Sumita Ghosh, founder and director of this unique company whose shareholders are rural artisans. Back in 2006, a thousand artisans, mostly women, put in ₹1,000 each and became angel investors of Rangsutra, India's only crafts company.

"We have expanded our outreach to include artisans from Uttar Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir, thus growing in strength to over 2,000 artisans, 80 percent of whom are women," says Ghosh.

Rangsutra links artisans to markets, and builds their skills so that their incomes increase. Traditional skills are helped to upscale with new designs, fabrics, machines and quality checks. Artisans are organized into clusters. In Kashmir there is the Noorari producer company in Srinagar and in Bandipora there is a weavers' cluster which is becoming famous for tweed and *kaani* weaving. In UP's Hardoi, Rangsutra works with *chikankari* artisans, helping with design and marketing.

"Fab India came in as an investor and took our handcrafted products to the market. We now have an enduring partnership with IKEA, thus enabling us to take Indian crafts to the world," says Ghosh.

A big believer in sustainability, Rangsutra encourages upcycling. It works with artisans of *ralli*, a traditional craft by which bits of leftover cloth are stitched together in geometric designs to make attractive quilts.

You'll find upcycled products at the Bikaner store and artisanal products made by those learning a new craft skill. There are garments with embroidery, applique, some with tie and dye prints and some with *bandhani* prints.

For Diwali two new collections are being introduced in stores and online. One is called Pardis and the other Kaanch. There's also an assortment of garments to choose for the man in your life.

Rangsutra is also helping to revive India's forgotten wool manufacturing tradition. It has two '*desi oon*' clusters. One in Rajasar in Bikaner and the other in Bandipora. For the winter, jackets and coats made with traditional wool in spiffy designs will debut online and at an exhibition being organized in Delhi and Gurgaon sometime in December or January. Wrap yourself, this winter, in the warmth of a garment from Rangsutra. ■

Contact: Rangsutra, 1st Floor, 317/276 Saidulajab, off Westend Marg (Near Champa Galli), Saket, New Delhi; +91 9773689673
In Bikaner: Devi Kund Sagar, Near Ridmalsar, Napasar Road, Bikaner – 334022; +91 8432019901
www.rangsutra.com

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.haqcrc.org | training@haqcrc.org
info@haqcrc.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
info@greenyatra.org
+91 99675 38049

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TATA STEEL FOUNDATION

TATA

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

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

More than 650 youths trained and the journey continues!

Reimagine