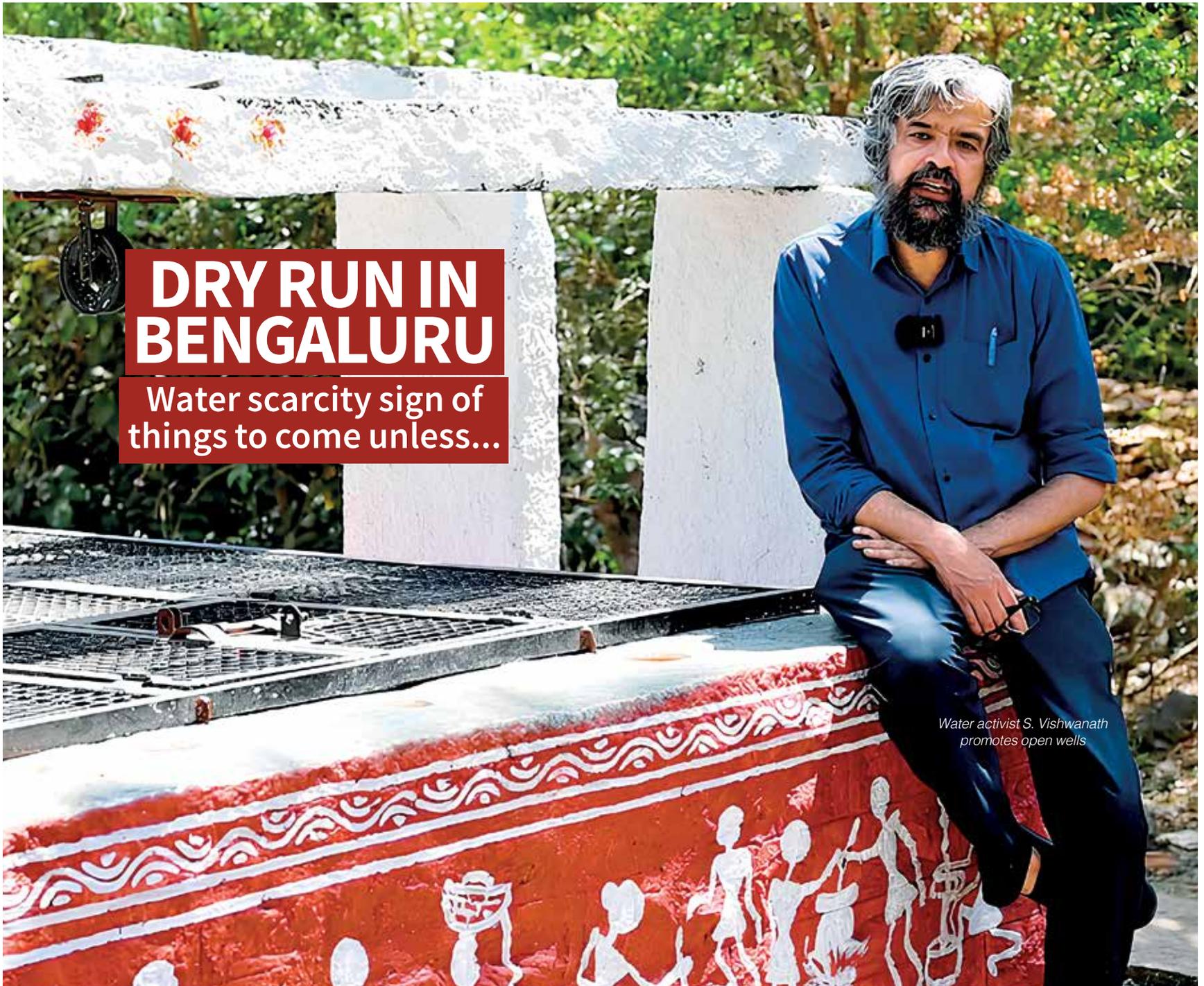


Civil Society



DRY RUN IN BENGALURU

Water scarcity sign of things to come unless...

Water activist S. Vishwanath promotes open wells

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COVER STORY

DRY RUN IN BENGALURU

Bengaluru has been experiencing a water crisis. Should India's leading high-tech city, which has plenty of prosperous firms and individuals, and plenty of rain and lakes, be waterless?

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Civil Society

READ US. WE READ YOU.

Our growing, dying cities

MUCH is made of how cities matter to the future of India. Not enough thought is given to whether cities have a future the way they are. Urbanization brings growth one way or the other and with the momentum that is set, the tendency is to keep rolling on. The result has been a bunch of complex problems which are by the day getting more difficult to resolve.

For cities to serve their purpose, they need financial resources and political power to devolve to local administrations. Currently both money and power are skewed against them. Cities are broke and their local leaders have no clout, coming way down in the pecking order of parties and governments.

To accommodate growing numbers of people, cities should be sustainable. Needed are water, clean air, public transport, waste management, robust and fair housing markets. You won't find these widely in India's urban story.

Above all, to succeed, cities must bear the hallmark of fraternity. They should offer inclusion and equality and the spaces where realizing one's dreams doesn't depend on who you are and where you come from. Right now, they are dominated by elites and it shows in the way systems run and who gets what. The poor may make more money in a city, but the underclass stays where it is. It is only the outliers who manage to find their way up the ladder.

Bengaluru's water crisis is an example of the intricate mess that looms over Indian cities. Why is it that in a city known for its billionaires and prosperous businesses a solution can't be found for something so basic as water? The wealthy meet their needs and easily secede from Indian realities. The political class shies away from confronting voters with the facts about consumption. The rising middle class has no civic values. The result is that though Bengaluru has water bodies and enough rain, it stares water scarcity in the face. For sustainability to work, many pieces of the jigsaw of governance have to be in place.

Stories of stray dogs attacking and killing children continue to shock us. They come in from all over the country with the latest being from Tughlak Lane in the heart of central Delhi. It is interesting that there is hardly a murmur when children from poor families are killed in dog attacks. This is another example of our elitist cities. Finally, a new column by Sumita Ghose called Craft Equity. We hope it creates more awareness about the great crafts that India has and the potential of rural folks to run their own enterprises.

Publisher
Umesh Anand

Editor
Rita Anand

News Network
Shree Padre, Saibal Chatterjee, Derek Almeida, Jehangir Rashid, Susheela Nair, Kavita Charanji

Photographer
Ashoke Chakrabarty

Layout & Design
Virender Chauhan

Cartoonist
Samita Rathor

Write to Civil Society at:
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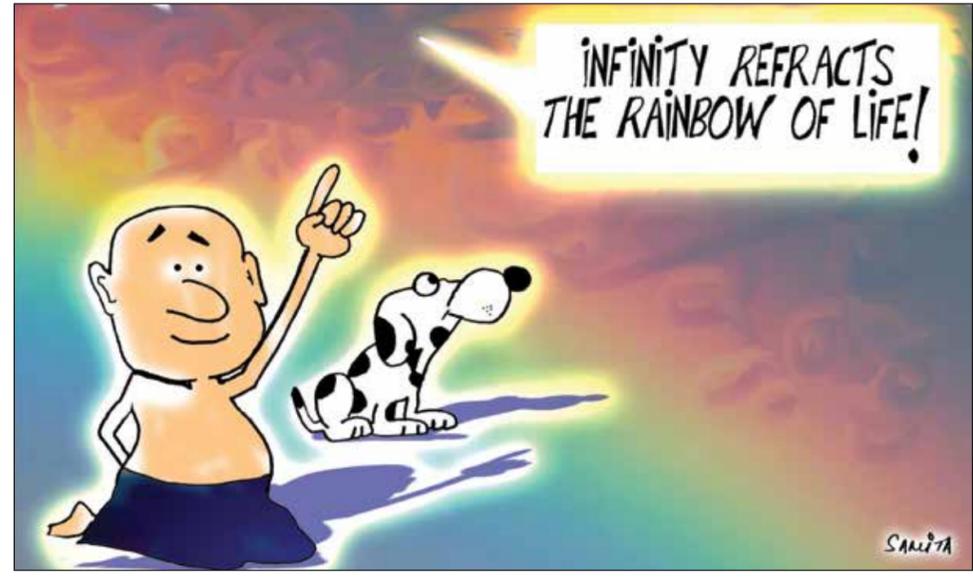
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IN THE LIGHT

SAMITA RATHOR



LETTERS



Money on trees

Your cover story, 'When jobs grow on coconut trees', was really intriguing. I never knew coconut harvesting could help earn a good living. No work is ever too big or too small. I am glad to see youngsters take pride in this kind of job too. Kudos to these friends of coconuts!

Akash Goyal

When I first read the headline, I was immediately drawn in. Loved the insights on these fascinating coconut harvesters!

Sangeeta Shyam

I believe we need more such stories. This is the heart of India, really. I was so glad to read a cover story on this.

Rajiv Jain

Hats off to these harvesters and their brilliant initiative. I hope more people take agriculture seriously. It is a shame to think that such jobs are considered below an educated person's dignity. But, as the article says,

things are changing now.

Jacob Jose

This is the first time I am reading about coconut harvesting on such a large and smooth scale. Wonderful work by these men and some women. The picture of the lady climbing the tree especially caught my eye. I am in awe of them.

Jyoti Bera

Women and rights

I read with interest your interview with Zakia Soman, 'UCC is right on polygamy, wrong on moral policing'. It is so sad that despite so many real efforts being made, nothing has been able to change ingrained patriarchy. It is appalling to see women being stripped of their rights in 21st century India. As a woman, I am constantly pained.

Komal Jain

If those in power can't make a difference, how are feminist groups supposed to? It is upsetting to see Muslims in powerful positions turning a blind eye to their less powerful counterparts. The cycle is vicious and endless. These efforts are inspiring and yet in vain.

Zeba Bashir

"I'm very clear that the Quran does not permit polygamy. Even when it is permitted, there are strict conditions and it is the context that is important. So, in today's context,

there is no justification whatsoever for polygamy." This quote is key to understanding the misconceptions that surround polygamy in Islam. I wish more people would understand.

Soham Kumar

This is such an important discourse. I really hope Muslim women can avail of the reforms they have so long been bereft of.

Latika

Injured workers

Kavita Charanji's story, 'Crushed hopes of women workers in the auto sector', was an immensely disturbing account. This is such an ironic contrast to the swanky cars we see on roads around us. If only companies could be held accountable. This country truly needs to wake up. I am glad to see it being written about.

Lokesh Jha

It is sad to see that industrial safety regulations are not being implemented in Indian manufacturing plants.

Deeply saddened to read this. It made me realise how ignorant and unaware we all are as a society.

Krishna M.

This is really infuriating. I wish companies would take more responsibility for workers in their supply chains. Thank you for writing about this.

Manik Pawar

Coffee and art

I have had the chance to visit Kolkata in the days we knew it as Calcutta and Subir Roy's article, 'Cartoonist serves coffee with art in Kolkata kiosk', took me down memory lane! It's a vibrant city with a soul. I am in awe of such talented and hardworking people. I would love to visit his kiosk when I get to go next.

Kritika Tiwari

How lovely it is to see artists like Shyama Prasad Dey get some recognition. He couldn't be earning as much as he should in an ideal world. But to not give up and use his creativity in his coffee kiosk this way is truly inspiring.

Udismita Sarma

I really felt like visiting Dey's stall after reading this piece. Kolkata never fails to amaze me. My mother grew up there and spoke of similar things she saw. No wonder the city is a haven for all art enthusiasts!

Sukriti Garg

I am constantly in awe of this city. What a lovely piece on a cartoonist using his art to make people smile. I am so intrigued. Thank you for showcasing this so beautifully! Loved the pictures. Really so very fascinating.

Kanchan Mehta

What fun it must be to visit Shyama Prasad Dey's kiosk. I will recommend it to a friend in Kolkata! India has so much talent. Proud to be part of this country.

Rakesh Arora

One of the most interesting articles I have read in a long while.

Kavish Mohsin

Kozhikode delights

Enjoyed reading Susheela Nair's beautiful article on all aspects of Kozhikode that a traveller should know, see and taste. It made me feel like spending a few days in the city this year.

Mohan Menon, Kochi

What a delightful place Kozhikode seems to be. I would love to visit, especially after reading about SM Street. The black *halwas* sound like a rare delicacy. I will definitely go there, the first chance I get.

Mahesh Kartik

A wonderful article. Both words and pictures were vivid and inviting and drew the reader to the lovely city of Kozhikode with its

multi-layered culture and history. The word limit must have been a constraint. Otherwise, there is more to talk about — the confluence of Hindustani, Western, Carnatic and ghazal traditions. Kozhikode is also the city of Babukka (M.S. Baburaj, credited for the renaissance of Malayalam film music). The Calicut beach is also a world by itself with its culinary and cultural flavours. Thank you for writing this piece.

Shyam

Susheela Nair missed only one aspect — the musical tradition of Kozhikode. Mohammed Rafi has more fans in Kozhikode than in the Hindi belt. Qawwali gatherings are very common here. The legendary M.S. Baburaj cannot be missed by any means. You can add that in your next article.

Sukumaran

Beautifully written article. Got to know so many places in Kozhikode through this story. It covered all aspects — history, art, literature, culinary details. Lovely indeed.

Parvathi Das

The article on Kozhikode was a visual journey and a treat. Really commendable.

Nalini Krishnan Kutty

There is a Parsi fire temple right in the middle of SM Street. It's closed to the public but I had the privilege of visiting it once. It's a green, silent, fragrant oasis and a contrast to the hustle and bustle of SM Street.

Mridula Muralidharan

NGOs and policy

Perhaps out of politeness Arun Maira in his piece, 'Institutions are in need of reboot to serve people', does not mention that new laws have been used to persecute those speaking from the points of view of the people left behind or even pushed out.

Raghubandan Maluste

Village spotlight

Professor Surinder Jodhka's article, 'The Indian village has been relegated to the margins', contained excellent insights.

Mallika Sarabhai

It is time to see the reality of villages. They are indeed progressive spaces in their own right. It is a shame that the voices

of farmers are being shunned this way.

Sudiksha S.

Teacher training

I read Dileep Ranjekar's article, 'Missing the bus in school education has been costly'. I feel that, besides working with government teachers, the Azim Premji Foundation should also assist grassroot organizations in training their workforce in pedagogy and classroom practices.

Himanshu Rai Sharma

Colours of success

Sumita Ghose's article, 'New-age company: artisans as co-owners, directors', outlines what creative vision and determination can do, plus the punishing hard work required. Sumita is a true pioneer. I wish the country had more people like her — it would transform India into the kind of country Gandhiji dreamed of.

Bhaskar Ghose

Rangutra's story is the stuff of legends. It is so heart-warming to be listening to the people behind those awesome designs. Such stories inspire more people to connect heart and mind, principles and pockets. It is the kind of story women would be telling their children and grandchildren.

Sehjo Singh

Rangutra is a shining example of successful entrepreneurship within rural artisan communities. It represents a beautiful blend of passion, intention, and a deep appreciation for the timeless

artistry of rural artisans. Rangutra's journey is not only inspiring but also serves as a beacon of hope and aspiration for those of us dedicated to fostering the growth and prosperity of rural India through entrepreneurship.

Rashmi Saxena

What an amazing piece. Sumita Ghose is an inspiration for all of us. She has also mentored teams across the country who are doing stellar work. Congratulations.

Naveen Pereira

Several organizations start their journey with a similar attitude and approach but only a few like Rangutra are able to preserve, conserve, sustain and maintain the ethos, values, belief system, passion and compassion required for success. Rangutra is an exemplary example. It has suggested proven yardsticks on how community-oriented and owned organizations can thrive, make profits and impact all direct and indirect stakeholders. Every word penned down is so true.

Vineet Mani

Rangutra is a brilliant initiative. We need many more such founders. Love the brand.

Amita

20th anniversary

I am late — inordinately and unpardonably late — in reaching you, and your team. My congratulations and appreciation on completing 20 years of *Civil Society*.

It is not only because the anniversary issue was remarkably rich and thoughtful. Each issue — yes, each — over the years has

brought in new ideas, new people, new concerns, new dilemmas and new hope. It has been brave on your part, to say the least.

A country of this size, complexity, challenges and possibilities needed and deserved such a publication. That you have stood up and been counted merits recognition. Talking civil society is talking people and celebrating democracy and both are our great achievements. Our people — yes, ordinary people — are our biggest strength.

Bringing 970 million people to the polling booth in the next two months — and to be dead sure that date in June will undoubtedly usher in a peaceful transition of power — is very, very special. I hear some 70 countries are holding elections this year. But none of them has even remotely comparable numbers.

Being late in reaching you has its advantages too. It allows me to say things I would not have said in a congratulatory message. So, please find a little more space and attention for urban matters in the coming years. No urban versus rural. Both rural and urban. And that is because in the civil society space, at this juncture, we need more innovation and enterprise on urban matters. We, as people and the nation, have not measured the nature of the urban challenge adequately and I think it is not any less grave than the climate change challenge.

Kirtee Shah

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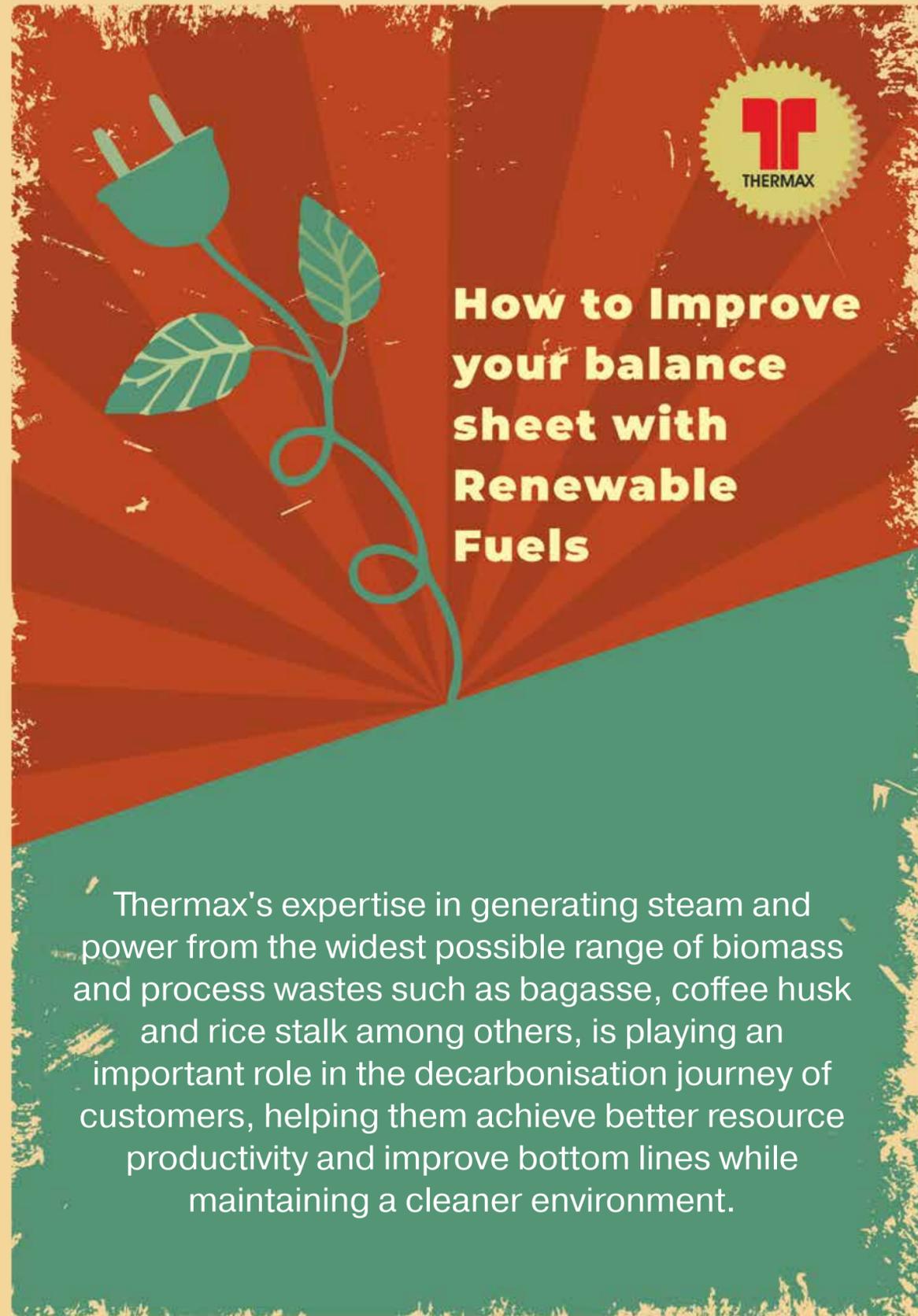
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LITIGANT PLEADS FOR LAW TO REMOVE STRAYS

Civil Society picture/Bilal Bahadur



Dogs scramble for scraps at a garbage bin. Life on the street is no fun

‘So-called activists only want to have dogs in the street’

Civil Society News
New Delhi

IN the last week of February, a two-year-old girl was killed by a pack of five street dogs in Tughlak Lane, in the heart of Lutyens’ Delhi. The high and mighty have their bungalows here and you might well ask what free-roaming, dangerous dogs were doing in such a neighbourhood in the Indian capital.

The attack was one of many that have been taking place in India’s cities where the stray dog population could be in millions. Such is the scale of the problem now that even a Tughlak Lane which should be free of such a hazard is affected.

At the root of the problem are elliptical rules sponsored by animal lovers. They promote the feeding of dogs in public spaces. The rules also prevent the removal of dogs on the streets even if they bite and kill.

Called the Animal Birth Control (ABC) Rules, they are supposed to bring down the population of strays through sterilization, but, in reality, the opposite has happened. The number has continued to rise, reaching what is now seen to be alarming proportions.

The little girl who was killed in Tughlak Lane was a washerman’s daughter. The record shows that the poor are more likely to be targets of such attacks. But the rich and middle class are being equally affected.

People out on walks carry sticks to protect themselves. Housing societies, where a few residents insist on feeding dogs, have become scenes of acrimonious battles.

Failing to get relief from the administration, which is bound by the rules, people have been approaching the courts. A bunch of cases is before the Supreme Court. But even so residents continue to turn to the high courts.

The original case, asking the Bombay High Court to intervene, was filed more than 20 years ago by a Goan paediatrician, Dr Menezes, who got together with friends to start PEST or People for the Elimination of Stray Troubles. The good doctor was motivated to act after a patient came to him with her nose bitten off. There is as yet no verdict in that case and several others that have been clubbed with it.

In the meantime, there have been more cases that have come before the lower judiciary and the high courts all over India. Frustration with the stray dog problem has been mounting.

Cobbling together petitions and finding lawyers is not easy. Courts also move slowly, testing the stamina of the average litigant. Well-funded NGOs are also tough to take on. They are well connected and have time and resources.

Nevertheless, the dog activists seem to be running into more opposition than they have in the past.

People are questioning whether dogs should be protected at the cost of human lives. The Kerala high court recently ruled that human lives should not be put at risk.

The ABC Rules are also seen as being out of line with the parent law on the prevention of cruelty to animals which says that animals should be got off the streets and put in shelters and where necessary euthanized.

To get a ringside view of what it is like to file a case and what the arguments against having dogs on the streets are evolving, we spoke to S. Muralidharan who has approached the Madras High Court and believes he is on strong ground.

Muralidharan’s case is that the rules are unconstitutional since they contradict the provisions of the parent act. He also argues that they are not in keeping with global best practices. Feeding dogs on streets turns them into ferocious packs, he says. Instead, they should be picked up as is done all over the world.

Muralidharan says Indian and foreign NGOs are soaking up foreign donations and working in concert with pharmaceutical companies producing anti-rabies vaccines.

Q: What prompted you to go to the Madras High Court on the issue of street dogs?

There are a couple of sides to this. I am an animal lover. I used to rescue pedigree dogs abandoned on the street, keep them in a shelter and give them for adoption. The dogs mainly had skin infections. The shelter was run purely on donations. There came a time when we couldn’t afford it and shut it down. Before that I used to volunteer with Blue Cross in Chennai where the conditions were horrible.

Q: For how long did you run your shelter?

We ran it from 2013 till 2022. There were two learnings in those nine years. One is, as long as you run a shelter, people will keep dumping dogs there. The dogs are essentially healthy and need love and care. The other thing is it was not sustainable running it on donations. The trustees had a meeting and decided to shut it down, but we at the same time decided to continue with our advocacy supporting street animals, pedigree and all kinds.

Q: Of course you see yourself as an animal lover.

Yes, I’m an animal lover. I was feeding stray dogs during the pandemic. Now that gave me the biggest learning. Because I realized that when you feed them every day, they get hooked on to you and they’re going to wait for you every day at a particular time, particular place till you arrive and feed them. The biggest learning was they become addicted and they become lazy and they stop fending for themselves. And they get into hunting in packs. Whether they see another cat or a smaller dog, you know, it could be a small child. One of them will go and just pull that small baby or a small kitten or another puppy. The rest of them will join it within a few seconds.

The other side of it is dogs are abused on the streets. It’s not that they’re

having a jolly good time. People abuse dogs and vehicles run them over. Street dogs actually have nothing. They eat from garbage bins and drink wastewater. In heavy rain or hot weather, they don’t have shelter.

Q: You’ve gone to the court specifically on the ABC Rules, 2023. You have said that they are not in the interests of human beings or dogs. Yes, that is correct.

Q: What are you seeking from the court?

There are some eight million dog bites happening across India every year. This amounts to ₹1,600 crore worth of vaccine being procured. It is

only the pharmaceutical companies and processed food companies that are gaining from having dogs on the streets. Dogs and humans are not benefitting.

The ABC Rules are forcing people to feed dogs. I’ll give a small example. A dog starts biting people. The normal reaction of people is to chase it and beat it up. So, this dog takes refuge in a housing society. From that moment, under the Rules, it becomes the responsibility of the RWA to feed the dog, sterilize the dog, and also vaccinate the dog. After that, there will be a bunch of people who will feed the dog. There will be those who will oppose the feeding. They will probably beat each other up. We have seen this happening in Mumbai and Delhi and many other places. To resolve the dispute a committee has to be constituted involving police and animal welfare officials.

The Rules are a cruel joke. They are absolutely bizarre. It is as if no one has anything else to do but feed street dogs.

They want you to feed the dog. Then they are expecting a dispute. Then they want you to solve the dispute. I mean, who has time for all this?

They have also come up with a new term ‘Community Animal’. Nowhere in the world is there such a term. Anything which is stray is a threat to human life. Something which is on the road, which is a threat to you, has to be taken away and that is the function of the local municipality or panchayat. Even the

Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act (PCAA) says animals have to be taken off the street and dogs are to be euthanized in a gas chamber or whatever as per the law. The PCAA is the parent act and rules framed under it cannot be contrary to its provision. That is why I have said that the ABC Rules are unconstitutional.

The ABC Rules also say that if a dog is found to be aggressive, chasing people or biting people, the dog should be taken away from that place, kept in an animal welfare organization, observed for 10 days to ensure it doesn’t have rabies. But if after 10 days, if it’s found okay, it will be released back in the same place. Undoubtedly, so that it can bite some more people!

How ridiculous is this? I have said to the court to take away these two rules. Please form rules that we impound all the animals. Because of the numbers it would have to be in a phased manner. It can’t happen

Continued on page 10



S. Muralidharan: ‘The ABC Rules are a cruel joke. They are absolutely bizarre’

‘There are some eight million dog bites across India every year. Only pharmaceutical companies are benefitting from dogs on the streets. Dogs and humans are not.’

Continued from page 9

overnight. In fact, the Tamil Nadu government has already allocated some ₹20 crore last year for animal welfare of which ₹10 crore has been wasted on NGOs who are pretending to be doing animal welfare. I say let's start impounding them in a phased manner.

Q: How many stray dogs are there in Tamil Nadu?

Tamil Nadu has the second highest dog bites in the country which is around 800,000, next to UP, which has something like one million a year. Nationally it is about eight million. Multiplied by ₹2,000 for the rabies injections it comes to ₹1,600 crore that goes straight to the pharmaceutical companies.

These pharmaceutical companies in turn fund these NGOs and they in turn will come to the street and protest saying that you can't take my dog away.

Q: But how many stray dogs do you think are there in Tamil Nadu?

If nationally there are about 60 million, Tamil Nadu would have eight to 10 percent of that. So, you are looking at about five million stray dogs.

Q: Would ₹20 crore be enough?

A good start, I would say. May not be enough overnight. If you're going to do all the dogs, then it's not going to be sufficient. But it's a good start.

Q: With such a large number of dogs, what is the solution you're offering the court?

I'm telling them, take them in and impound them in a phased manner.

Q: After you impound them, what happens?

That's their job. I'm saying keep the human beings safe. Keep the wildlife safe. Keep me safe and my children safe. You take them away. Do whatever you want.

Q: In a way what you are saying is what the animal activists are saying — that it is the responsibility of the government to take care of stray dogs.

No, not at all. I am saying the government must take responsibility for dealing with the problem. But the so-called animal activists really want to keep the dogs on the streets and they want to fight for it. They are actually part of the problem.

If there's a law, they will not perpetuate dogs on the street. Can you do the same thing with a baby monkey or a ringneck parrot? You can't because there is a law. The Forest Department will come and sue you. They will fine you. Without a law, street dogs eventually become a tool for timepass. They're actually multiplying the mess, which is already created. Yes, dogs should be taken care of, but not on the streets. ■

UNDER THE HOOGHLY KOLKATA METRO MAKES HISTORY

Subir Roy
Kolkata

MID-March when the Kolkata Metro Rail's service — linking Howrah Maidan to city centre Esplanade and touching in between the massive Howrah Station — began, the mood at the stations and in the trains was positively festive. Commuters who had queued up from early morning to take the 7 am first train that would go under the Ganga through a tunnel cheered and clapped as the journey began.

Railway staff greeted those in the ticket queues with rose stems. A college girl kissed her ticket when she got it and ran to her friends for a group selfie. In contrast, a mother and her 10-year-old daughter were crestfallen when they were unable to board the train because it was jam-packed.

For all, it was a dream come true. A commute that in a crowded bus across the equally crowded Howrah Bridge, which opened in 1943, would take an hour or more sometimes would now be done in under 10 minutes. A youngster in his mid-twenties confessed that he and his friends had sometimes thought that the much touted country's first underwater rail link that they had been hearing about since their schooldays would never happen, what with construction work that dug up an important thoroughfare like the GT Road in Howrah going on and on.

On the second day of service, which was a Saturday, the rush was manageable with no more than ten minutes' waiting in queues to get tickets. This gave a chance to coolheadedly assess the new service for its merits and demerits.

A gentleman in his early sixties provided one perspective when he recalled his first visit to Calcutta (as it was then called) half a century ago with his father. Then the two had crossed the river by tram and gone on by bus to visit the zoo.

He reflected a popular sentiment when he declared he was struck by what Indian engineers had been able to achieve today. He was equally disappointed by the fact that this had been done without paying adequate attention to how smoothly commuters could interchange between Howrah's rail services and the Metro.

You have to walk what seemed like miles and cross a veritable battleground as construction work on one of the access points linking several floors below to the



Civil Society pictures/Ashoke Chakraborty

The real fun moment came when the train went under the river



Commuters record the ride



Metro staffers greeted commuters with roses

overground is still continuing.

Clearly, more escalators and lifts were needed. And what needed attention foremost was the signage, which is appalling. This is particularly so at the Esplanade station where those going on to the city from the Howrah line had to find their way to another line. Those who saved the day were Metro staff, quite a few of whom were around,

ready to direct confused commuters.

The weekend semi-holiday crowd which was not entirely made up of office-goers with little time to stop and answer reporters' queries, was enlivened by quite a few children who had been brought by parents to see this new big train that would go under the river! A mother and two children from another family had the time to pose for pictures.

The real fun moment came when the train went under the river. Beyond the train windows, the tunnel's darkness was banished by blue lights.

It brought forth bits of humour. One passenger urged others to notice how the hilsa fish jumped as the noisy train passed, another urged all to use the opportunity to fill up their pitchers with *ganga jal*.

Dipali Saha, a corporate executive turned social activist, who periodically used the London underground felt that the Kolkata Metro did not suffer in comparison. She particularly noted two improvements on the Kolkata Metro. There are far more escalators and, most importantly, washrooms for the public. And the Howrah Maidan station, she found, was particularly spacious with the exit she used not blocked by hawkers.

Her lone worry was that poor people will find the Metro a bit costly, compared to the bus or ferry fare. But well, she sighed, the Metro will, initially at least, be a goodie which only the middle class will be able to afford.

The Kolkata Metro may be the first in the country to go under a river but many others across the world have done so for long. London's Metropolitan Railway Service began crossing the Thames underwater in 1863 and similar services make underwater crossings in Paris and New York.

But for a country and its people a first is a first and the authorities had the tunnel walls lighted up so that people could get a feel of things, even though the underwater segment of the 4.8-km journey between Howrah Maidan and Esplanade traversed the 520 metres in under 50 seconds.

Kolkata became the first city in the country to get a metro rail in 1984 though it covered a mere 3.4-km stretch with five stations. Today it covers a 35.8-km stretch with 28 stations that include the gigantic Howrah Station and the Howrah Maidan terminus.

Much as it is a unique distinction to have the Metro go under the Ganga, Metro Railway Kolkata has been notoriously slow throughout its entire history in going forward.

Work on it began in 1972 and the first visible sign of this was the disheartening one of the iconic Maidan in the heart of the city being dug up and, on the face of it, leading to ruin along its eastern length as work under the 'cut and cover' method progressed.

Citizens who had turned sceptics ever since the city began declining from the early 1960s ruefully wondered whether this was the last straw. The feeling was: we don't know if and when we will get a metro rail and how useful it will be, but now the starkly visible sign is that it seems hell-bent on ruining the city's only green lung — the Maidan.

Today the scepticism is gone, buried under the Ganga and the Howrah station. In that sense the Howrah Maidan-Esplanade service is a symbol of a once great city, after a decline, having a rebirth. ■

Bringing back lost ecology in Punjab with mini forests

Rakesh Agrawal
Dehradun

VAST fields, trundling tractors and roads typify Punjab's rustic landscape. But there are signs that this topography is changing in small ways. Villages are planting mini forests on patches of idle land, breaking the monotony of miles of flat land. Punjab's forest cover is a mere 3.8 percent and attempts are being made to replace its lost green canopy.

"You know, our village was once fertile, with trees and ponds," says Sheshandeep Kaur, sarpanch of Manak Khanna village in Bathinda district. "The Green Revolution and industrialization made our land barren and dry. We are now trying to revive our past ecology."

Sheshandeep is just 28 years old and the second youngest sarpanch in Punjab. She's won two awards. For development of roads in her village she has got the Deen Dayal Upadhyay Panchayat Empowerment Award. And for regularly convening the gram sabha she has been given the Nanaji Deshmukh Rashtriya Gaurav Gram Sabha Award.

Sheshandeep has undertaken water harvesting, restored the local school and library, and her village has a solid waste project in place. She's now taking part in an initiative, Plant for Punjab, by Sunny Gurpreet Singh, an American of Punjabi descent. His ambition is to plant trees in thousands across the state by 2035. "Trees will restore my native state to its pre-Green Revolution glory again," explains Sunny, who launched the RoundGlass Foundation in 2014 to start a tree restoration revolution to improve people's well-being.

"We have planted trees in about 1,000 villages creating 900 mini forests. Plantation work has provided temporary employment to thousands of villagers," says Aditya Amit Gundh, head of the foundation's corporate communications department. Forests improve soil health, reduce erosion and recharge groundwater. "Native species like *kikar*, *beri*, *reru* and *phulai*, suited to the state's climate and soil, are being planted. Some of these are on the brink of extinction," says Gundh.

Manak Khanna village has a mini forest of 1,000 trees. Sheshandeep has mobilized MGNREGA funds to plant saplings on common land. Each worker gets paid ₹302 for an eight-hour work schedule.

Mini forests are popping up in villages like Kheri Bir Singh in Fatehgarh Sahib, Mamara in Faridkot, Sadhanpur in Derabassi, Sadowal in Baranala, Karyal in Moga and Chajli in Sangrur.

RoundGlass' methodology is to first identify sarpanches enthusiastic about raising forests. The sarpanch then identifies spaces ripe for plantation. "Priority is given to barren and unusable land, including land that may not be easily accessible. Once a patch is identified, it is prepared for plantation with local labour. The village council seeks MGNREGA funds from the district administration to pay workers. One worker is expected to plant 200 saplings under the Van Mitra scheme," says Vishal Chawla, a spokesperson for the Foundation. In the past they even converted land around crematoria into mini forests.

RoundGlass Foundation tracks and monitors progress and maintains a database of the mini forests it has helped create for three years. After that the village is expected to look after it.

In Sangrur district sarpanches like Gurbakshish Singh of Mander Khurd, Dharmindar Singh of Changal, Gurjeet Singh from Bari, Kiranjeet Kair of Chatha Sekhvan and Bahadur Singh from Bugran villages have joined the tree planting mission.

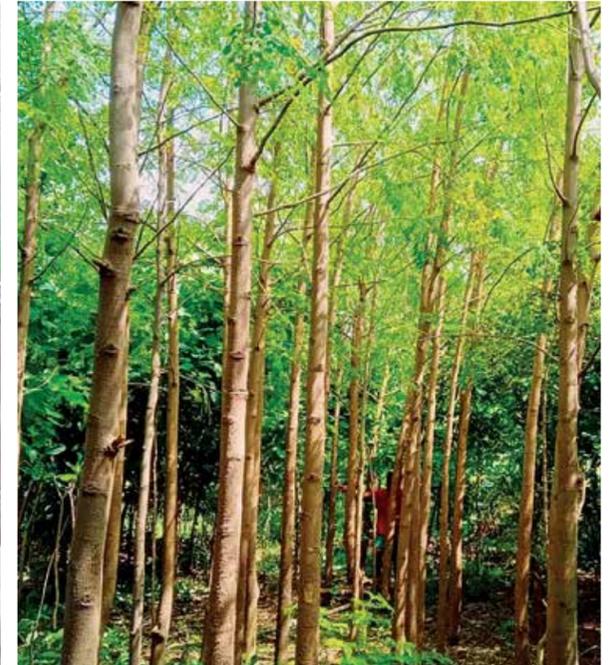
Apart from providing an income for 100 days to local workers, mini forests have other spin-offs. Children go there to play. Villagers spend time there and report reduced stress, better sleep and happiness. The number of birds has increased. Sparrows, owls and parrots are now commonly spotted nesting in the mini forests. Villagers say they hadn't spotted many of these birds for decades. Bees, butterflies and insects have made a comeback.

"We come here for bird watching or just to soak in the greenery. It's a very tranquil place," says Gurdeep Singh, a resident of Kaulsedi village in Sangrur district. He has planted 9,000 saplings on his 4.5 acres. "I also got a pond dug on my own for birds and small animals. Punjabis share a collective desire to create a beautiful environment in Punjab," he says.

Mostly deciduous trees which shed leaves have been planted. The leaves mix with the topsoil, creating mulch which improves microflora and overall soil health. The mini forests also act as germplasm conservation banks. Branch cuttings and fruit seeds are taken to raise new saplings in nurseries set up by the Foundation.



Sheshandeep Kaur, (fourth from left) sarpanch of Manak Khanna village, has won two awards for development



A typical mini forest



Sunny Gurpreet Singh's ambition is to plant trees across Punjab



Nurseries are providing employment to women

These mini forests have also provided employment to some deprived and dispossessed women. "After the tragic loss of my husband in a road accident, the responsibility of providing for my family fell on my shoulders. Earning a living became an immense challenge. However, in March 2023, I got a job in the village nursery managed by the RoundGlass Foundation. This has helped me send all three of my daughters to school," says Parmeet Kaur of Ghagga village in Patiala district. "In 2019, we successfully planted a mini forest. It is like an oxygen factory for our village. I'm proud to be part of this initiative."

Often, volunteers and local eco club members pitch in to plant saplings. Tree species are chosen depending on soil quality. "We grow our own saplings in our nurseries located across four clusters near Patiala, Bathinda and Maler Kotla," says Gunth.

Another important impact of the tree project has been the involvement of local farmers in reforestation. About 150 farmers reached out to the Foundation to create mini forests on their land. One farmer planted a mini forest on his seven acres.

Sunny Gurpreet Singh spent his early childhood in Punjab before migrating to the US. In 1996 he launched Edifecs, a healthcare technology company, which became a market leader in the US healthcare technology space. While building his company, he realized the importance of transforming the reaction based approach in the healthcare sector to one based on prevention and treatment.

With that in mind, Sunny launched his second company, RoundGlass, in 2014 to promote global "Wholistic Wellbeing" by empowering and enabling people to be healthier and happier.

"Our objective is to make Punjab a vibrant, healthier state by applying the principles of Wholistic Wellbeing," he explains. "We are doing this through our initiatives in sports and education for children, health and hygiene, sanitation, reforestation, women's empowerment, and by building self-reliant communities that live in harmony with nature."

"The people of Punjab are our biggest supporters and champions. We are grateful for their generosity of spirit. They understand and identify with our mission and willingly join our mission to transform Punjab," he says.

"They have identified the root cause of land in Punjab becoming toxic. Also, the Foundation has succeeded in involving farmers. Hopefully, our land will once again become green and fertile," says Dr Ruhee Dugg, deputy commissioner, Faridkot. ■

Samita's World

by SAMITA RATHOR



When women sign up as para-vets

Bharat Dogra
Tikamgarh

BHARTI Aharwar, a Dalit woman of Nadia village in Tikamgarh district, Madhya Pradesh, was finding it difficult to make ends meet. Her husband even went to Delhi in search of better earning opportunities but no stable solution had emerged.

So, when she learnt from an activist of Srijan, a social organization, visiting her village, about their plan to train a few women to become para-vets who could medically treat goats, Bharti decided not to miss this opportunity. She joined training sessions organized by the Goats Trust, a Lucknow-based organization, and learnt how to identify and treat common diseases afflicting goats and handle vaccination and nutrition.

While cows and buffaloes are the most familiar face of animal husbandry in India, for most rural poor households, goats are even more important. This reality came to light through surveys conducted in some villages of Tikamgarh district which showed that an overwhelming majority of small farmers and landless households kept goats.

The average size of herds appeared to be small, about five goats or so, but the goats were an insurance during difficult times. A healthy, well-grown goat could be sold for as much as ₹15,000 to 20,000.

While the milk yield from goats is small, it is quite high in nutritive value. The manure obtained from the excreta of goats is recognized by villagers as being very useful for the fertility of their farmland. What's more, goats cost very little to keep.

However, one problem goatkeepers often face in rural areas is disease. Diseases spread quickly in bigger herds. While the average herd size may be small, some villagers keep bigger herds of 50 to 100 goats. So protection from disease is important for those keeping goats, but medicines and vaccinations are not readily available in villages.

That's why the concept of *pashu sakhis*, or rural women para-vets, has evolved in Tikamgarh district and drawn much attention. Enterprising women from the rural community are trained as vets to provide protection and treatment to goats.

Bharti's training gave her confidence. After training, she was ready, with her bag of medicines and smart new uniform, to go to various households where goats needed treatment. Her treatment was perceived to be quite successful and villagers soon acquired a new respect for the *pashu sakhi* (friend of animals). This recognition increased further when Bharti held health camps for goats for



Bharti Aharwar, a para-vet in Tikamgarh

vaccination and deworming.

Villagers soon realized the value of having a para-goat vet right in the village, whose treatment could be availed of whenever needed at very low cost.

With the help of a farmer-producer organization (FPO), it was possible for the village to arrange for the timely supply of not just medicines but also nutritious feed prepared by women members belonging to the FPO.

The Tikamgarh experiment to train 10 *pashu sakhis* has been so successful that in a short time the number of goat para-vets has risen to about 76.

Bharti also sells this feed to those interested in buying it, earning a modest commission in the process. Her main earnings, however, come from the treatment and vaccination she provides to goats for modest fees. With this income, Bharti has been able to arrange better education for her children.

Maya Ghosh, from Bijrawan village of Tikamgarh district, was one of the first *pashu sakhis* to emerge here. Maya is very happy she decided to take up this work. She saved her earnings and gifted a motorcycle to her husband. Her next target is to buy a scooty so that she can reach households in a nearby village whom she cannot reach now since she doesn't have transport.

Hira Devi is another *pashu sakhi*, in Kaanti village. She said that, initially, when she started attending to sick goats after her training, some villagers expressed doubts about her skills. To prove them wrong, she bought a very ill goat and nursed it back to health. After this she gained the acceptance and respect of villagers, and there has been no looking back for her.

The Tikamgarh experiment to train 10 *pashu sakhis* has been so successful that within a relatively short time, the number of goat para-vets in the district has risen to about 76. In addition, this successful effort has caught on in some neighbouring areas as well and spilled into adjoining states. Government officials have also expressed interest in taking the initiative forward. Government programmes for subsidized increase of goat-based livelihoods among weaker sections of rural communities already exist.

Rakesh Kumar, coordinator of Srijan's activities in Tikamgarh, says that the learning and skill development of *pashu sakhis* has surpassed expectations as the women quickly learnt many things which their trainers thought they would take more time to grasp. Srijan has also tried to help goatkeepers secure a better rate when selling goats.

Non-conventional uses of goats add to their value. While generally goats are sold for their meat, several families, particularly children and women, become very attached to goats. It is always a difficult time when the goat is sold, despite the cash that comes in. Some women and children say that they did not feel like eating when their goat was sold. One reason for this is that goats are very endearing animals, particularly the kids. Goats, especially kids, can be sold as pets in urban areas, where they can be kept in a corner of a lawn or other open space. ■

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The route to jobs in Bihar now is sport

Rinku Kumari
Muzaffarpur

YOUTH in Bihar's villages is being increasingly drawn to sports, lured by the prospect of promising careers, financial rewards and government job opportunities.

Cricket and football clubs have sprouted in remote rural areas alongside burgeoning sports competitions. The government is also actively promoting sports. Yet challenges remain. There is politics in sports associations, casteism, discrepancies in fund allocation, and delayed payments. All these tend to impede the progress of players to national and international tournaments.

Nitish, a dedicated cricketer from Arnia village in Vaishali district, speaks disappointedly about his years of toil as a bowler. Despite representing the All-India National University and participating in tournaments across states, Nitish says he's had to struggle.

"There have been positive changes in the state's sports environment," he emphasizes, "but increased attention needs to be paid towards economically weaker players." He recalls that in the early stages of his cricketing career he played at his own expense and had to contend with ill-equipped resources in schools and colleges.

An anonymous sports official associated with the Muzaffarpur sports union corroborates the existence of challenges such as politics, casteism, and fund mismanagement. Recent objections during the Ranji Trophy

exposed irregularities, including allegations of monetary transactions and biased player selections outside the Moin-ul-Haq Stadium. Discrimination and corruption within sports associations consistently sideline talented players from Bihar.

Another player described how, despite being the best bowler in his team, he was denied opportunities since he belonged to a backward caste. The dominance of a particular caste in sports associations also excludes socially backward players. The fear of repercussions makes players hesitant to openly oppose corruption in the sports system.

Despite the provision of sports equipment in government schools, the lack of facilities and playgrounds hampers students' participation, says Bajju Kumar Rajak, the

'Win medals abroad and get a job as DSP,' says CM Nitish Kumar with stadiums and sports buildings coming up.

principal of Rajkiya Kanya Madhya Vidyalaya.

In the 2000s, Bihar faced a shortage of sports resources after separating from Jharkhand. The archery centre moved to Jharkhand, and Bihar's only cricket stadium, the Moin-ul-Haq Stadium, fell into disrepair. In recent years, the state government has endeavoured to create a sports-friendly environment, with initiatives such as the Bihar State Sports Academy, an international cricket stadium, and the Bihar Sports University.

Under the Chief Minister's Sports Development Scheme, 211 outdoor stadiums have been constructed, and plans are

underway to build stadiums in all 534 blocks of the state. Construction of sports buildings along with gymnasiums has already been completed in 20 districts.

Recently, Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, while encouraging athletes, exhorted, "Win medals in international tournaments and get a job as DSP."

To promote sports and recognize outstanding athletes, the first list of direct appointments to government jobs under the 2023 rules was released.

The players who were selected included those from football, netball, kabaddi, athletics, weightlifting, taekwondo, wrestling, *pehlwani* and wushu.

Ravindran Shankaran (IPS), the director-general of the Bihar State Sports Authority, has said that sports academies will be opened in Bagaha, Chhapra, Siwan, Ara, Buxar, and Bhagalpur to unearth talent in rural areas.

There is also specific focus on incorporating technology in sports. An AstroTurf hockey field in Patna is being constructed. Harjot Kaur, the additional chief secretary of the Bihar Department of Art, Culture, and Youth Affairs, affirms the state government's commitment to providing facilities to motivate players.

Despite the government and sports department's claims and efforts, Bihar faces a prolonged journey to reach the sporting prowess of states like Manipur and Haryana-Punjab. Bihar boasts ample talent. The state needs to ensure transparency in the selection process to promote sports and enable players to reach international tournaments.

The liberation of sports associations from politics, casteism, and favouritism is imperative. Recognizing the importance of sports and players' talent, the reins of sports associations must be in the hands of those who have represented the state at the national level. ■

Rinku Kumari is a government schoolteacher.
Charkha Features

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Bringing lakes back to life is important

DRY RUN IN BENGALURU

Water crunch sign of things to come unless...

By Umesh Anand

RIGHT in the middle of February, when Bengaluru should have been celebrating salubrious weather and enjoying the warm glow of its technological and financial successes, the taps of a third of its population ran dry.

How is it that an emblem of modern India, a city advanced and sophisticated in multiple ways and burgeoning with activity, suddenly finds itself waterless?

Incredibly, that is exactly what has happened in Bengaluru. The city was fine one day and the next day it wasn't. Just like that and without warning, an estimated 4.5 million residents in the north and east of the city found they didn't have water to cook, wash their dishes or take a bath. They account for a third of Bengaluru's population of about 15 million.

These were people who were being supplied groundwater from aquifers under the Bellandur and Varthur lakes. But aquifers need to be recharged and both lakes have been kept dry for the past two years to be desilted. Diversionary channels have kept all flows including sewage and recycled water from getting to the lakes.

Water was supposed to arrive from the Cauvery river, but the project is delayed by two years. So, while parts of Bengaluru do get Cauvery water, these 4.5 million residents as yet do not.

In the meantime, the aquifers continued to be drawn on without replenishing them till the groundwater finally ran out and with it the supply to homes.

Shouldn't the city have been forewarned? Bengaluru doesn't monitor its use of groundwater. There has been no groundwater cell in the Bengaluru Water Supply and Sewerage Board and it doesn't have a single hydrogeologist, says S. Vishwanath, civil engineer and urban planner by profession and insightful water expert.

This is stunning considering that Bengaluru relies extensively on groundwater across the city. It is included in the municipal supply. Tankers commonly meet the needs of bulk users such as high-rise buildings and hotels.

Screeching headlines followed the recent crisis in Bengaluru. It is not the first time. For long, Bengaluru has been ranked among cities that will run out of water even as it flourishes.

Does it really need to be so? Bengaluru receives plenty of rain in a year, but doesn't do enough to catch it and put it to use. It has lakes in hundreds

which should be an insurance against shortage. However, the authorities and the citizenry have allowed them to be encroached on and sullied by the dumping of sewage in them.

For a modern city with a high-tech tag, Bengaluru also seems blissfully oblivious to the metrics of its own growth and prosperity. It has expanded in any which way and supply hasn't matched increases in population. There is no serious effort to rationalize the use of water. It doesn't get priced properly nor is recycling adequate.

There are efforts to do things better. For example, Vishwanath's Million Wells Programme seeks to make the city more sustainable through a proliferation of open wells. It remains a work in progress. Some bulk users have been harvesting rain, but it is not enough.

Bengaluru's story is really the story of every Indian city. Water tables are falling, usage is wasteful, pricing is out of whack and recycling is virtually non-existent. As urban populations boom, the future of Indian cities in resource terms is full of foreboding. Terrible things are either happening or on their way and, caught up in the exuberance of an emerging economy, nobody seems to want to be bothered.

To find out more about the current Bengaluru crisis, we spoke to Vishwanath at some length. We covered the Million Wells Programme in our November 2019 issue. But here is an edited version of our interview with him after the recent crisis broke.

Q: From time to time, a headline pops up that Bengaluru is going to run out of water. It is a headline again. What's happening?

It is a perfect storm. What has happened is that there was planned addition of 775 million litres per day to the city's water supply from the Cauvery river last year. The project, called the Cauvery Phase-5 project, was delayed due to Covid. In the meantime, the city administration started to desilt a lot of the lakes we have to make sure that rainwater comes in and that the lakes are improved. Diversion channels were created to prevent any flow into the lakes. The two largest lakes, Bellandur and Varthur, which are 364 hectares and 200 hectares in size, respectively, are as a result bone-dry. What this means is that there has been no recharge of the aquifers for the past two years at least. The aquifers have been constantly used without recharging and have emptied themselves out. That is why there's a crisis. It's not a crisis for those who are connected to the Cauvery water line. So, 1,470 million litres per day is reaching 1.1 million connections in Bengaluru. Roughly about 11 million people are getting Cauvery water. There's a bit of scarcity for them too, but it's not a crisis. But for those who are completely dependent on groundwater, through bore wells and tankers, it's a crisis.

Q: Aren't 1.1 million connections a relatively small number in a city as large as Bengaluru?

The calculation is 10 users per connection so that makes 11 million users.

Q: How many people would be left out right now?

That could be anybody's guess because we haven't had a census since 2011. The population of Bengaluru could be 14.5 million to 16 million, based on an extrapolation from 2011. A reasonable figure would be 14.5 million.

Q: There would be four million to five million people left out...

Yes, yes.

Q: Which parts of the city right now are actually in this bad zone?

The north and the east. The Cauvery line comes in from the southwest, so the areas in the southwest and the west are reasonably covered. The city centre is covered. The south is covered, the north is partially covered all the way to Yelahanka but that's where it's going towards the airport.

In the east, the Madhepura and the Whitefield IT sector area have been most impacted. That's the pocket where Bellandur and Varthur lakes have been desilted and have had no recharge potential.

Q: Couldn't this have been foreseen?

If we had kept tabs on the groundwater table very accurately with an adequate number of measuring stations, then we would have been able to predict it. The big challenge for our city is we don't have a groundwater plan. This despite the fact that there are four to five million people completely dependent on groundwater and another five million who are partially dependent on groundwater.

The Bengaluru Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) does not have a groundwater cell. It does not have a single hydrogeologist. It draws on groundwater authority folks only to identify points for drilling. But there is no groundwater management plan for recharging aquifers, finding out how much is being pumped out and what is the demand, determining water quality.

Prediction of this crisis would have only been possible if we had the groundwater cell or a groundwater department keeping a close tab.

Q: You mean about one-third of the city depends on groundwater, but you

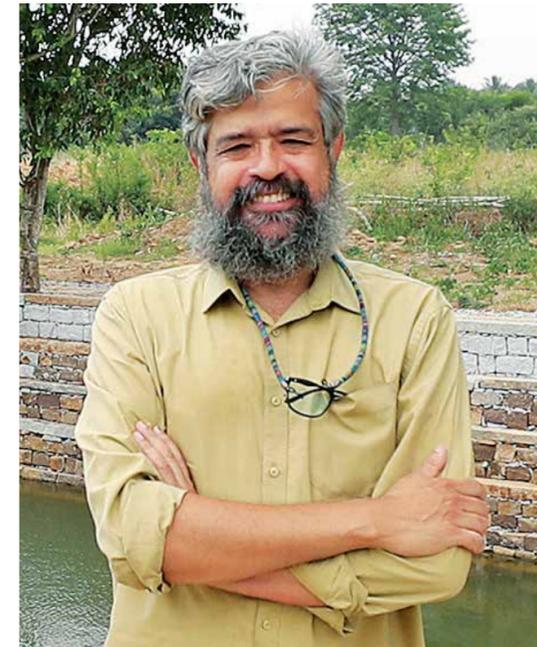
actually don't have any way of understanding how you're consuming that groundwater.

Absolutely. Even the number of bore wells is a guesstimate. One guesstimate says that it must be about 500,000 bore wells and we may be pumping out 600 million litres per day.

Guesstimates vary from 400 million litres to 600 million litres a day. That's a substantial amount of groundwater that's being pumped out.

Q: When aquifers run dry, they are not easy to revive.

Luckily for us, we are a hard rock terrain. Unlike the Indo-Gangetic plains where if you drive out water from the aquifer it, sort of, collapses on itself and loses its ability to be recharged. In hard rock terrain, the storage capacity is small, but the aquifer is capable of being recharged.



S. Vishwanath: 'No tabs were kept on the groundwater table'

'The Bengaluru Water Supply and Sewerage Board has neither a groundwater cell nor a hydrogeologist. There is no plan to recharge aquifers or to find out the required demand.'

One of the quick things that I believe we should do is to make sure that tertiary treated wastewater is directed into the lakes during summer to fill them. Even now, if we feed the lakes with tertiary treated wastewater, the groundwater table will quickly revive within a matter of 20 days to 25 days.

Q: Is that going to be done?

One is pushing for that with the BWSSB. Luckily, the authorities are all listening and are in sync. But the Bellandur lake is being desilted under the orders of the National Green Tribunal. It is a legal hurdle that will have to be overcome because the lake hasn't been fully desilted. So are we allowed to fill tertiary treated wastewater now as an emergency measure or do we have to wait for another two to three years for the full desilting thing to happen is a question which is being discussed.

Q: Going forward, would Bengaluru continue to be dependent on groundwater for at least a third of the city? This scenario does not change.

Right, it doesn't. It doesn't because the city is fast expanding and the projects which bring the Cauvery water are lumpy. They'll bring water, 775,000,000 litres per day for a projected population, but that projected population is growing quickly. The next infrastructure project takes another 10 years to come. In that 10 years, the people added to the population will be dependent completely on groundwater.

Q: What was the population figure they were planning for?

They anticipated 14.5 million people by 2030. But that is the number of people we already have. When the Cauvery Phase-5 project is completed, hopefully in May or June, the water will be consumed immediately. The incremental growth in the population of the city will be demanding groundwater.

Q: Bengaluru gets a lot of rain. You have a 'million wells programme'. How many open wells have been dug?

So far, 250,000 recharge wells.

Q: Has there been any attempt by the government or residents' groups or, say, other well-meaning citizen groups to speed up this process? Water harvesting is obviously a solution.

There is. But here's the thing. What happens is if you're connected to the Cauvery water, you actually don't feel the problem of water shortage. While there's been a reluctance here to do it in the city centre, on the periphery there's been an interest. But on the periphery, the fact is that recharge wells have to be supplemented with lake water. On their own, recharge wells will not be able to do a sufficient job. There is definitely much more of an interest. The Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP), for example, is now taking up a 1,000 wells project in parts of Bengaluru. They want to make sure that every park has a recharge well. They're also putting in place a plan by which stormwater drains will have

recharge wells. The Metro is now interested in putting recharge wells all across its lines. There is interest, but the speed of execution and implementation needs to be much higher than it is now.

Q: How soon would you like to see a million wells come about?

Yesterday. But if we set ourselves a target, and if you make it mandatory for every citizen to do water harvesting, it should get done in a matter of three to four years.

Q: But individual harvesting doesn't solve the problem of recharging aquifers.

When there are large institutions like, for example, IIM in Bengaluru or the railway factory or campuses like the Indian Institute of Science, they benefit themselves because the groundwater mound that is created helps them. IIM itself reports that because they've done a lot of recharge wells their groundwater is stable.

Obviously, it can't happen at an individual level. It has to happen at a ward level or at a watershed level. But large institutions have a significantly higher role to play in making sure groundwater becomes stable for them.

Q: In effect, they are saving their water, raising their groundwater table level, using more of their water and less of the centralized supply?

Yes. The Rail Wheel factory, for example, draws about 300,000 litres from open wells, not deep bore wells. The difference is this, that a deep bore well would typically need a 10 hp pump. With an open well a 1 hp pump is enough so the energy consumption is much less and the carbon emissions as well are less.

Q: Has there been any change in the rainfall patterns in Bengaluru?

This has been the longest dry period we've ever had. It's been about 84 days since we have seen rain. Never in Bengaluru has there been this kind of a dry period. Not only a dry period, but with the temperature reaching 36°C. For Bengaluru, 36°C in February is something unheard of. And it is completely drying up the soil. Even when the next rain does come, the soil will be so thirsty that there will be nothing for the aquifers. The soil itself will drink up all the water.

Q: There is a change then in rainfall pattern and....

And the intensity of rainfall has increased whenever the rainfall occurs. Previously, we used to design all our rainwater systems for 60 mm per hour intensity. Now at points of time for about five minutes to 10 minutes, the rainfall is 240 mm per hour.

Q: Do your water harvesting systems then need to change?

Luckily for us, what we have mandated for Bengaluru is a 60 litres per square metre roof area, right? It is future-proofed to a large extent. But



Water harvesting and open wells are the solution



A recharge well at IIM Bengaluru



A small filter plant for treating water

we'll have to redesign our stormwater drains or rainwater gutters. Everything will have to be redesigned.

Q: How much effort is made in Bengaluru for controlling consumption?

Every connection is metered. Bengaluru is the only metropolis with 1.1 million connections where there's a bill sent every month based on volumetric consumption, and there's an increasing block tariff. There are three systems of tariffs: domestic, non-domestic and industrial. The industrial tariff is really high. It's ₹90 a kilolitre. The non-domestic is also very high. But the domestic sector is hugely subsidized. Therefore, there's no incentive to consume less for the domestic sector. There is no willingness to charge. No government wants to raise the tariff. The last tariff revision plea by the BWSSB has been pending for the past five years.

Q: As the population increases, what is the consumption pattern?

Because there's such scarcity in the system, we get water twice in a week or at best three times in a week. Typical consumption is 100 litres per capita per day. But in flats, typical consumption is 160 litres.

Q: Why does it go up in flats?

It's not clear why. I think apartments rely on a combination of Cauvery, bore wells and tankers. And they don't really pay attention to how much they're consuming. In a residential building you usually get only one source of water.

Q: And how often is the supply?

It's only in the morning hours for about four hours, twice in a week. I get water in my house on Tuesdays and Fridays. That's it.

Q: Bengaluru is supposed to be one of India's most advanced cities. How do you explain this failure to bring about change with regard to water?

Well, there is change and there's no change, but the thing with us in civil society and other places is we don't work a lot on institution building. The biggest institution, the BWSSB, needs to be capable in terms of human resources in all departments and financially be able to handle the problems of the city. Like I pointed out to you, it doesn't have a hydrogeologist, so groundwater doesn't exist for them. They need a specific cell for wastewater reuse. Right now they have a wastewater cell which is only looking at treatment to meet legal standards and then they don't know what to do with it, so they're releasing it, right? We need a well-rounded institution, which has the expertise and access to capital to invest in expansion and maintenance. The problems they face are very difficult and I am more and more sympathetic to them.

Locating sewage treatment plants is an example. There's nobody who wants sewage treatment plants within their area. Nobody wants it. So you run it in a stormwater drain and then the environmentalists jump on

you. And then some powerful minister wants a separate water line to his constituency. So, it's the institutional governance which is the key challenge. And then the second challenge is one of imagination.

Q: Some of the wealthiest people live in Bengaluru and they intervene in institutions all the time. Why not water?

I think that the richest people not intervening is a blessing in disguise because they're generally anti-democratic in their interventions.

Q: What about reuse?

We have a rule which says that if you have a set of 20 and above flats you have to have your own wastewater treatment plant and you have to recycle every drop of wastewater. We have something like 3,600 decentralized wastewater treatment plants, the single largest for any city that I know of. But these wastewater treatment plants have the difficulty of the apartment owners' association having to run them. The technology choice made by the builder is usually the cheapest technology choice. Then he hands it over to the apartment owners' association and runs away. These guys are then left with this baby to take care of, which is very, very difficult to take care of.

The city itself has started to decentralize its wastewater treatment plants. We have currently 34 wastewater treatment plants of the BWSSB and more are being built now. The plant size is 10 million to 20 million litres per day.

Q: What would you do with the water that comes out of a decentralized plant?

We link the plant to the local lake. Wastewater goes in through a constructed wetland and there's polishing of the water.

Q: And how difficult is it to make people use this water? Not necessarily drink it but use it.

Indirectly, you can. What you need to do is to just let it into the lake. It recharges, there's no problem at all. We have to use the psychology of people. This way we keep the ecology of the lake alive. We retain the livelihood of those who fish. And then we also use the water

functionally. That's what we have done in Devanagari.

Q: Bengaluru is a city of lakes and so on and so forth. Where do you stand in terms of the lakes?

It's a sad story. We have 210 lakes left, of which only 186 have water. But at least if we protect these 186 lakes, it would benefit us, especially the larger ones like Bellandur, Varthur, and Jakkur and Yelahanka here. But more important are the lakes on the periphery outside the city boundary, which are all getting encroached upon and construction debris is being dumped in them. They will be the future problem spots for groundwater depletion, and we're doing absolutely nothing about it. ■



As Bengaluru grows, demand outstrips supply



People scramble to get a share of water in a Bengaluru neighbourhood

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Have money, will spend



DELHI DARBAR

SANJAYA BARU

THE Ambani family's over-the-top partying at Jamnagar has been widely commented upon at home and abroad. Only the socially unaware were surprised by it. It was entirely in keeping not just with the in-your-face edifice, Antilia, that the family lives in on Mumbai's Altamount Road but also the general lifestyle of India's new billionaires. The only difference between the Ambani family party and the many hosted by other Indian billionaires is that the former staged their extravaganza in Jamnagar, Gujarat, Bharat. Most other billionaires have had their wedding parties in exotic places around the world, from Paris to Phuket.

Flying off to distant lands on chartered planes with family and friends has been in vogue for India's rich for some time now. It has been estimated that in recent years as much as one lakh crore rupees has been spent on what are dubbed 'destination weddings'. Aware of this growing proclivity of India's super-rich to stage their fancy wedding parties overseas, Prime Minister Narendra

Modi gave a call for *atmanirbharta* in ostentatiousness. *The Economic Times* said the Prime Minister's new slogan was 'Wed in India'—a 'Make in India Marriage' campaign aimed at saving foreign exchange and boosting nationalist pride among India's globalized rich.

But India's super rich have a problem. How can they spend all their income if it has to be spent at home in rupees? Moreover, what do they do with all the dollars stashed away overseas? Even if crores are spent on diamonds and fancy stones there are still millions waiting to be spent. After having displayed one set of diamonds at home how can they sport the same set again at home? Hosting parties around the world offers opportunities to display one's diamonds to different sets of guests. That also helps spend the dollars in foreign banks.

The super rich, like the Ambanis and the Adanis, are a minuscule minority within the

growing class of India's wealthy. Over the past decade there has been a significant increase in the new wealthy in different parts of the country. The top three centres of new wealth are Delhi-Gurugram-Noida, Mumbai-Navi Mumbai and Hyderabad-Cyberabad. But new wealth is now found in pockets across the country. Data on luxury motor vehicles sales in India shows New Delhi topping the charts, followed by Mumbai, Bengaluru, Chennai, Kolkata, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad, Pune, Ludhiana and Surat. India is now ranked as the fifth most important market for cars, after China (1), the US (2), Japan (3) and Germany (4).

New wealth is being generated in a range of economic activities with real estate being the most prominent. Next to real estate it would

churi gaadi", referring to the high-end Audi car with its logo that looks like four bangles. Drive on the edges of Hyderabad, Bengaluru, Pune or any other expanding urban space and one sees only high-end cars. The Hyderabad airport has a large poster reminding visitors that the city is home to the largest number of High Net Worth Individuals (HNIs). Most of them have made their millions in real estate.

This newly rich class is unabashedly ostentatious. It is they who travel overseas to stage wedding parties, who populate luxury cruise ships in the Pacific and the Mediterranean, and who buy BMWs and fancy motorcycles. This is the new 'spending class' whose basic household expenditure constitutes a decreasing share of income, leaving larger sums of disposable income that goes only partly into savings and increasingly into spending. This 'surplus income', as Bijapurkar defines the difference between income and what she calls 'routine' household expenditure (not including episodic expenditure on health or education) is estimated to be as high as 35 percent for the richest 20 percent of all households. It declines sharply to 13 percent for the next 20 percent of households and is down to zero for the middle 20 percent. The bottom 40 percent dissave to spend, with expenditure exceeding income.



The super-rich are unabashedly ostentatious

seem that wealth is being generated in globally connected businesses like information technology and related business. The rural rich have also emerged as an important segment in India's consumption story as analyst Rama Bijapurkar has noted in her new book, *Lilliput Land: How Small is Driving India's Mega Consumption Story* (Penguin Random House, India, 2024). The rural rich range from those living in proximity to expanding cities and benefitting from rising real estate values to rich farmers diversifying into profitable crops, commodities and related business. Their income is often not taxed, nor is the income from sale of agricultural land, which, on the edges of expanding urban centres, brings in large sums of disposable income.

When Gurugram was being built the Jat farmers selling their land to real estate firms were buying up what they referred to as "*char*

This data is, of course, for each of the five quintiles. But India's super-rich are less than one percent of the population and their incomes have been rising sharply, especially since demonetization in 2016 and the Covid lockdown in 2020. Bijapurkar's data on consumption in India shows clearly the nature of what has been described by economists as a 'K-shaped' growth process, with the share of the rich in national income rising while that of the poor is falling. The most striking data is the share of income of the richest and poorest quintiles in 2020-21 compared to 2015-16. In 2015-16 the share of the poorest 20 percent in total household income was 7.0 percent. This was down to 3.3 percent in 2020-21. The richest 20 percent improved their share from 44.9 percent in 2015-16 to 56.3 percent in 2020-21. That about sums up what Amrit Kaal is all about. ■

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

Innovation is the buzzword



LOOKING AHEAD

KIRAN KARNIK

INVENTION is the holy grail of researchers: to create something that does not exist and may not even have been imagined. Close behind is discovery: finding, for the first time, something that exists, but has not been known so far.

However, for the business world and pragmatic economists — concerned with revenues, profits, and GDP — these are long punts, with returns being both uncertain and probably a long way off. Also, others may benefit more than the original inventor, despite growing enforcement of intellectual property rights (IPRs) and patents. Therefore, in the arenas of business and economic development, invention's less glamorous cousin — innovation — is more important. After all, it is innovation — be it in the product, process, or business model — that enables the monetization of knowledge. Little wonder that innovation is now amongst the most popular buzzwords, in both business and governmental circles.

Yet, not all innovations pay off. Often, promising innovations, launched with fanfare and much publicised, come to nought. In the past few decades alone, one can think of the Simputer and the Tata Nano car, both Indian innovations. The former won global acclaim as a simple and low-cost computer that would take the world by storm and be of special significance for India and other developing countries. Yet, while it made some inroads in a few countries, it never really took off and practically died out in a couple of years. The Nano, with its many tech innovations and a promised sub-one lakh rupees price, was seen as revolutionizing the automobile market. It too was lauded globally and contributed to India's growing recognition as a hub for innovation and frugal engineering.

However, like the Simputer, it was a flop in the marketplace. Many post-facto explanations are offered. The Simputer was probably perceived as unattractive between two competing products: the less capable but more flexible and cheaper mobile, on the one hand,

and a more expensive but more capable PC. In the case of the Nano, it may have been poor marketing strategy to position it as a low-cost car at a time when many moved up from a more economical scooter or motorbike to a car only because of the status and prestige of ownership. "Low-cost" positioning diluted this.

Other innovations that were short-lived include the electric typewriter, the electronic typewriter, and the pager. Each one seemed such a necessary product and a great innovation, but each was overtaken quickly by better technology and a newer product.

Some innovations last a little longer: think of VHS and videotape or audio cassettes; a few are displaced, but are re-born: vinyl records are now back in fashion, as are analogue wrist watches. Most others have short half-lives, and some are even still-born. All innovations have



Innovative robots will make life easier and homes even smarter

to face the tough test of a highly competitive marketplace, with consumers who are unforgiving, very demanding, and value-for-money driven. Product inadequacies are quickly exposed, and wrong marketing can mean an implosion. Any innovation is also continuously threatened by new technologies that may give rise to further innovations and competing products.

On the other hand, companies that do not innovate and try to merely incrementally improve their successful products do well in the short to medium term, but come up against life-threatening challenges when faced with a disruptive innovation by a newcomer. Think Xerox and Kodak: examples of outstanding companies that, paradoxically, failed because of their success. Each had a great product but did not innovate in time. We may well see the same story with incumbent internal-combustion-engine auto makers and a new generation of innovative electric vehicles

(think GM/Ford vs. Tesla/BYD).

As one looks ahead, what might be the innovations on the horizon? The rear-view mirror, hindsight, gives us 6/6 vision; the future, though, is uncertain — and the way ahead as unclear as looking through a January fog in Delhi.

Predicting innovations is an oxymoron: the essence of disruptive innovation is that it is something that could not have been predicted. Yet, abstracting a problem or need to its basic level may help to indicate some possibilities. Thus, the innovation of a missed call emerged from a need to be able to send a message instantaneously at near-zero cost. Mobile telephony has its roots in the requirement to communicate and converse with anyone anywhere. The microwave oven has its origins in the necessity of cooking or re-heating food quickly. The slide-rule and its successors — calculators and computers — have their genesis in the need to do complex calculations in the shortest possible time. While there are hardly any truly generalizable features, one can broadly infer that successful innovations are those that save time, energy, effort, or cost, and those that make tasks — and life, in general — easier.

Based on these thoughts, one might predict an innovation in transport through a vehicle that combines a car and a drone; one that can use the road or fly through the skies. Innovations in implants are certain: wearable health monitors will become implants,

with data being transmitted to a phone or computer — one's own or that of a hospital/doctor. Brain implants are here already with Musk's Neuralink: their versatility will be unleashed through a variety of new applications. Information and, by extension, education will — as this writer had predicted some years ago — be implanted (as a chip in the brain) soon after birth; it will be constantly and automatically updated. Cameras and sensors for getting data from various bodily organs will be in a capsule that can be swallowed like a tablet. Innovative robots and gadgets for household help will go beyond the robotic vacuum cleaners and today's kitchen gadgets, making life easier and homes even smarter.

Imagination will be the limiting factor in sparking new innovations. Readers can add their own wish list. ■

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

Cruising on troubled waters



LIVING RIVERS

VENKATESH DUTTA

THE world's longest river cruise, Ganga Vilas, that was flagged off in 2023, covers five states in India and Bangladesh and spans 27 river systems which are part of the Ganga basin. The luxurious cruise, like a floating hotel, is expensive — costing ₹50-55 lakh per person. Obviously, it is beyond the reach of an average Indian. Some smaller cruises between Varanasi and Kolkata began in 2009. Before the advent of the railways, this waterway served as India's principal transport artery. In the late 18th century, an estimated 30,000 boats plied the waters between Dhaka and Benaras, transporting merchandise along this vital trade route.

Rivers have been a lifeline not only for trade and commerce, but also for cultural exchange — contributing to bustling riverine activity. Many heritage and sacred sites are along riverbanks, and with efficient navigation both traders and pilgrims from various parts of India used to travel along the rivers.

The navigation on the Ganga and its tributaries dates back thousands of years. The river was a vital artery for trade and transportation in ancient times. Civilizations such as the Indus Valley Civilization and the Vedic civilization flourished along its banks. Historical texts and archaeological findings suggest that boats were used for transportation and trade along the river as early as 2000 BCE.

During the ancient period, especially under the rule of the Maurya and Gupta Empires, river trade flourished along the major Ganga towns. Merchants used the river to transport spices, textiles, timber and other commodities between cities and regions. Several important trade routes developed along the river, connecting the Gangetic plains with the rest of India.

In 1602, Dutch merchants established the Dutch East India Company, marking the beginning of Dutch factories and ships in the lower delta. By the mid-17th century, the Dutch had emerged as the primary exporters of various textiles to Europe and Japan, and they established factories along the Ganga in Bengal and Bihar. In his memoir, Babur

mentions several instances of travelling on or crossing rivers, including the Ganga, during his military campaigns and journeys across the country. Akbar brought his army to Bengal by boat during the mid-16th century. The Mughal rulers further enhanced navigation on the Ganga between the 16th and 18th centuries. They invested in improving waterways and infrastructure along its banks. They constructed several *ghats* and established river ports to facilitate trade and commerce.

During British rule, between the 18th and 20th centuries, the Ganga continued to be a vital artery for transportation and trade in northern India. Major James Rennell, a British geographer, played a key role in mapping



Ganga Vilas is the world's longest river cruise

India's waterways during the 18th century. He became the first Surveyor General of Bengal in 1764, a position he held for more than a decade. Rennell's maps not only depicted the course of the Ganga and its tributaries but also provided valuable information about the surrounding topography, geography, and settlements. The British constructed several canals, barrages, and navigation locks to improve navigation along the river and its tributaries. The Ganga became an integral part of British India's economy, facilitating transportation of goods and raw materials between different parts of India.

The mid-19th century is often considered a significant period for navigation on the Ganga in India, referred to as the 'Golden Age' of river

navigation (see *Slowly Down the Ganges* by Eric Newby). The introduction of steam-powered boats revolutionized river transportation. Steamboats were faster and more reliable than traditional sailboats or oar-powered vessels, allowing for quicker and more efficient movement of goods and passengers along the Ganga. Private steamboat companies with passengers were sailing on the Ganga from Howrah to Garhmukteshwar, touching major towns of Patna, Allahabad, Varanasi and Kanpur.

Prospects of navigation on the Ganga with movement of bulk cargo, containers, and passengers are being explored once again, though it has faced several challenges due to

lack of sufficient water and navigable depth. A moving boat needs enough water so that it does not hit the riverbed. Today, there is reduced flow downstream of Haridwar. The Upper Ganga Canal diverts most of the water from the river, with very little water flowing downstream. Many bridges and rail tracks criss-cross the river, making the movement of large ships difficult. The Bhimgoda Barrage in Haridwar, the Middle Ganga Barrage in Bijnor, and the Lower Ganga Barrage in Narora collectively divert nearly 85 percent of the river's flow during the lean season. This extensive abstraction significantly diminishes the volume of water in the river until it receives replenishment from the Ramganga, Gomti and Yamuna tributaries.

The minimum navigable water depth should be from 1.5 to 2.5 metres. Along several stretches of the river, this depth is not maintained especially during the lean season. Obviously, one would want to make a deep channel within the river by dredging out something

akin to a canal over which boats can safely travel. However, dredging a river which has a high sediment load and which often changes its course is not easy. It also disturbs the riverine ecosystems.

The National Waterway-1 (NW-1), which is also known as the Ganga-Bhagirathi-Hooghly River System, is being developed to facilitate commercial navigation and trade along the Ganga and its tributaries. It would cover a distance of about 1,620 km, from Haldia to Allahabad, making it the longest national waterway in India. But with diminishing flow and over-extraction through canals, navigation could be caught in troubled waters. ■

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

Growing the rural start-up



**CRAFT
EQUITY**

SUMITA GHOSE

STARTING an independent for-profit social enterprise in rural India is not just a venture — it's a courageous step towards bringing about meaningful social change, reducing inequality, and ensuring inclusive development and growth. Inclusion of rural women with their innate intelligence, knowledge and wisdom is key to building resilient creative enterprises in the handloom and handicraft sector. Inspired by the legacy of visionaries like Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi, and Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, many brave souls have embarked on this journey, driven by a vision of a better future.

Yet, venturing into this realm requires more than just vision — it demands unwavering commitment and action, walking the talk, and being the change you wish to see. One cannot tread this path alone. Collaboration with like-minded individuals who share the same vision is paramount, and collective action needs to be based on mutual trust.

The first hurdle arises in raising funds. Traditional banks may hesitate to lend, and angel investors seek commitment from promoters. Asking economically disadvantaged individuals to invest when they have little to spare requires trust, vision, and readiness for a long-haul journey. And thinking out of the box!

I recall a meeting with rural women in Dheerdan village of Loonkaransar block in Bikaner, way back in the early 1990s. Twenty-five of the poorest women in the village had to decide who among them would be entitled to loans for the coming sowing season — the *kharif* crops of *bajra*, *moth* and *gawar*. The previous year had been a drought year, and the women farmers had no seed left over for sowing. The women had been saving very small amounts each month, as part of their Self-Help Group (SHG). This savings was to be matched by funds given by the URMUL Trust, the local voluntary organization. Almost all families owned land, but this land yielded little due to scarce rainfall in the desert.

Despite the obvious risks, everyone put in their faith and their hard work to plough and

till the land, in the hope of a decent harvest year after year. This year was no different.

But resources were scarce and the women had to choose 20 from amongst themselves who would receive the loan. The decision was made without too much disagreement, as the women knew who were the most needy amongst them. Lacha Bai was one of the lucky recipients, but to everyone's surprise she declined the loan. Her hesitation was due to the uncertainty of the monsoons, and her ability to repay the loan. She had recently lost her husband and had four young children to raise.

The women rallied around her — offering to donate part of their seeds (the 'in kind' loan they would receive) to her so that she had seeds to plant. And one woman whose family owned a camel offered it to her for ploughing the land.



The strength of a collective is surprising

Their solution? If the rains were good and she got a good harvest she would return the seed loan given to her; if the harvest was poor, she could consider the seeds as a gift! It was a simple solution, based on mutual trust and understanding, and it is doubtful whether any bank would come up with this solution. Farm loan waivers are rarely granted and if declared are around election time!

The strength of a collective enterprise is in its numbers, and putting in whatever resources and skills entrepreneurs have to start up and get going. Rangсутra too began in a similar way with 1,000 artisans, 800 of them women, putting in ₹1,000 each, in 2006 — taking the first step in co-creating a company to craft their own enterprise.

Along with raising funds, building relationships is key — not just transactional exchanges, but genuine, long-term partnerships with one another, with funders, with suppliers and buyers.

Despite the efforts of social entrepreneurs and the noble intentions of the government and private sector, numerous gaps in the ecosystem

hinder rural social enterprises' growth:

Despite government schemes, obtaining adequate financing remains a challenge due to perceived risks and bureaucratic hurdles. These are the gaps that exist:

Capacity building support: Existing programmes often fail to meet the specific needs of social enterprises which require tailored training and mentorship. There are initiatives by the private sector in mentorship and training, but these cater mostly to the English-speaking entrepreneur.

Rural infrastructure: Safe, secure workspaces in villages are rare, hindering productivity and artisan growth. Collaborative efforts, like village craft production centres, built by the government, and the community are possible, but require agency and advocacy by village women.

Limited market access: Social enterprises struggle to access markets, especially marginalized or remote communities, hampering growth opportunities. Very few social enterprises have deep pockets to compete with the high marketing budgets that large companies have. Additionally, handcrafted products struggle to compete with machine-made copies of virtually all our traditional craft techniques.

Regulatory hurdles: Complex registration processes and bureaucratic red tape hinder progress, necessitating streamlined regulations. Some progress has been made here to enable women's SHGs to conduct businesses, but these are not sufficient and most producer-owned companies struggle with legal compliances.

Fragmented ecosystem: Lack of coordination among stakeholders results in duplicated efforts, undermining overall effectiveness.

Limited awareness and recognition: Social entrepreneurship remains misunderstood, necessitating concerted efforts to raise awareness among the public and policymakers.

Infrastructure and technology gaps: Many rural enterprises lack essential infrastructure and technology, impeding scalability and innovation.

Addressing these gaps demands collaborative efforts by government, civil society, and the private sector. Each of us can contribute by making conscious consumer choices, supporting hand-crafted products made creatively, ethically, sustainably, and under fair working conditions. Your purchase has a voice in shaping a better tomorrow. ■

Sumita Ghose is founder-director of Rangсутra Crafts

Kannada's new films go places

SAIBAL CHATTERJEE

NATIONWIDE interest in Kannada cinema has never been higher. Thanks to the success of *Kantara*, the two chapters of *KGF* and *777 Charlie*, there is renewed buzz around films from the southern state that hitherto lagged behind cinema in Tamil, Telugu and Malayalam in terms of reach and impact.

The spectacular numbers that *KGF* and *Kantara* registered at the box-office have dramatically altered the distribution-exhibition scenario for films from Karnataka. But with the mainstream biggies going all guns blazing, more personal films — happily, there is no dearth of them — are struggling to find takers. It is a crippling anomaly.

Karnataka's most acclaimed filmmaker, Girish Kasaravalli, 73, has made only two films in the past 12 years or so, with his last work, *Illiralar Allige Hogalaare* (2020), not making it to the multiplexes. His previous film, *Koormavataara*, travelled to festivals across the world in 2011-12. He says: "There is no release outlet any more for my kind of cinema."

The world, of course, continues to celebrate Kasaravalli's seminal debut film, *Ghatashraddha* (1977), which was adapted from a novella by U.R. Ananthamurthy and remains a landmark in the annals of Indian cinema. The World Cinema Project of Martin Scorsese's World Cinema Foundation, George Lucas' Hobson/Lucas Family Foundation and Shivendra Singh Dungarpur's Mumbai-based Film Heritage Foundation have joined hands to restore the classic film in time for its 50th anniversary.

That apart, Kasaravalli's legacy continues, directly and indirectly, in the work of a crop of young filmmakers trying to navigate a rapidly changing market. They soldier on, fully aware of how big the challenge of securing theatrical release for small films is. These films have been lauded at festivals and have received glowing notices from critics. The encomiums haven't, however, translated into commensurate monetary returns.

The euphoria generated by Prithvi Konanur's *Pinkie Elli* and *Hadimelentu*, Natesh Hegde's

LIVING

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Koli Esru is about an impoverished woman striving to provide her daughter a taste of chicken curry



Sumanth Bhat, director of *Mithya*



Champa Shetty, director of *Koli Esru*

Champa Shetty's *Koli Esru* bagged best film in Bengaluru. Aryar's *Shivamma* won the New Currents Prize at Busan.

Pedro, Jaishankar Aryar's *Shivamma*, Champa Shetty's *Koli Esru* and Sumanth Bhat's *Mithya*, each film a testimony to the potential of the directors, might tempt observers to conclude that independent Kannada cinema is in the midst of a creative efflorescence. It undeniably is but the filmmakers driving it are acutely aware of the hurdles that lie in their path.

Champa Shetty's sophomore venture, *Koli Esru* (Chicken Curry), bagged the best film prize in the Indian Competition section at the Bengaluru International Film Festival (BIFF) in 2023. The actress and voice artiste-turned-filmmaker credits the festival with providing a

platform to and celebrating independent filmmakers like her.

Her debut film, *Ammachi Yemba Nenapu*, made in 2018, in what is an exception rather than the rule, is streaming on Amazon Prime Video. *Koli Esru* is about a poverty-stricken mother who will go to any lengths to provide her 10-year-old daughter the taste of chicken curry.

Jaishankar Aryar's debut film *Shivamma* won the New Currents Prize at the 2022 Busan International Film Festival. The software engineer-turned-filmmaker still retains his corporate job. For him to achieve the sort of financial security that would let him devote all his time to cinema, he would have to come up with a film for an audience wider than the one that *Shivamma* is likely to garner.

"I made *Shivamma*," says Jaishankar, "to satisfy my creative urges. I gave three years to the film — one year at the NFDC Film Bazaar, one for international festivals and one for Indian festivals. Since I wasn't from a film background, I did not know better. But now I know that I cannot afford to spend three years

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A still from Shivamma



A scene from Mithya, a touching coming-of-age film



A still from Pinki Elli

on my next film.”

So, Jaishankar is “writing a film for a theatrical audience so that I can release it as soon as I am done”. That, he says, is how he would want his career to proceed — one film for himself followed by one for the audience. “I want to strike a balance,” he adds.

Shivamma, produced by *Kantara* writer-director-actor Rishab Shetty, is due for release in April. Natesh Hegde’s much-lauded *Pedro*, also produced by Rishab Shetty, premiered at Busan in 2021 and is now scheduled for

For new directors getting a film off the ground may be easier today, but selling it is a huge challenge.

theatrical release. “It is not easy for films that do not cater to the masses to find their way around in the domestic theatrical circuit,” says Hegde, whose next film, *Vagachipani* (Tiger’s Pond), is currently in post.

Produced by Rishab Shetty, who is himself working on a highly anticipated sequel to *Kantara*, *Vagachipani* is expected to surface at an international festival later this year.

“Getting an independent film off the ground may be easier today, but selling it is a huge challenge,” says Prithvi Konanur, director of *Pinki Elli* and *Hadineleentu*. He feels that predominantly market-driven filmmaking has distorted the ecosystem to such an extent that films that eschew popular ingredients run into a wall when it comes to distribution, be it in the theatres or on a streaming platform.

Talking about the release of *Pinki Elli* last year, Konanur minces no words: “It did very poorly.... People are not motivated enough to visit cinemas. They wait for the OTT release.



Jaishankar Aryar, director of Shivamma



Prithvi Konanur, director of Pinki Elli



Natesh Hegde, director of Pedro

But OTT platforms do not acquire a film unless it does a successful theatrical run.”

Critics may talk up their films and festivals might embrace them, but Karnataka’s independent filmmakers have to contend with apathy all around. “I don’t know what I’m going to make next,” says Konanur. “I have numerous scripts in my computer. But there are so many question marks to reckon with.”

Significant rays of hope emanate from the growing number of self-taught filmmakers who aren’t backing off in the face of daunting odds. Utsav Gonwar has found support from multilingual movie actor Prakash Raj, who came on board as the presenter of his debut film *Photo*, released in Karnataka theatres on March 15.

With no marquee names and crowd-pleasing

elements, *Photo* did not have people scrambling for tickets but it was another small Kannada film powered by honesty and authenticity. It returns to the dark days of the Covid-19 pandemic and its impact on migrant labourers as a fallout of the government’s knee-jerk reactions.

The film centres on a 10-year-old village boy (from Raichur, the director’s hometown) who dreams of being photographed in front of the Vidhana Soudha. His mother sends him to Bengaluru with her husband, a construction worker. Father and son are stranded in the big city when the outbreak hits. They decide to make it back to their village by whatever means possible. It is a journey fraught with risk.

With unshowy and empathetic touches that pack a wallop, *Photo* highlights the tragedies that befell impoverished migrant labourers during the nationwide lockdown. It views the sorry spectacle through the eyes of a boy but unflinchingly drives home the inequalities that beset India.

Another boy, 11 years old, is at the centre of Sumanth Bhat’s *Mithya*, a touching coming-of-age tale that plays out in the shadow of a tragedy. The film has been produced by Paramvah Pictures, a banner owned by actor-filmmaker Rakshit Shetty, who, with a few others, is spearheading a commercial resurgence of Kannada cinema while bankrolling independent films.

“Children,” says Bhat, an information technology man who owned and ran a design firm in his native Udupi before he became a filmmaker, “are extremely mature. Adults do not grasp how the mind of a child works, but children do understand what is going on around them.”

These young filmmakers are telling stories that matter, stories about real places and marginalized people. The trend merits our attention no matter how bleak the commercial prospects of these films might seem at the current juncture. It is a battle definitely worth fighting even though the current boom is not without its share of looming threats. ■

FIRST PERSON

When a *vaidya* comes home

JYOTI PANDE LAVAKARE

Civil Society picture/Sukanya Sharma



Dr A.R. Ramdas reads the pulse of a patient

RECENTLY, I had the opportunity of organizing a one-off outpatient consultation event in Delhi for an Ayurvedic hospital based near Coimbatore. I thought facilitating the healing journey of other suffering souls would be a good gesture. So, I co-opted Dr A.R. Ramdas, my *vaidya* from Vaidyagrama, the healing village in Thirumalayampalayam that I’ve been going to for the past three years, to agree to see a few patients. And thus, I began on another journey of learning.

Dr Ramdas had been chosen to mentor students of the Rashtriya Ayurveda Vidyapeeth (RAV), an autonomous organization under the Ministry of AYUSH, Government of India. He was going to be in Delhi for an RAV convocation.

At first, I informed a few friends who I knew were going through health issues and were open to trying Ayurveda about Dr Ramdas’s availability for consultation. Then, I decided to also share this information with my neighbourhood Resident Welfare Association (RWA) group.

Within six hours, I received 23 responses. Realizing that Dr Ramdas wouldn’t be able to fit in so many patients after his seminar ended on both days, I persuaded him to stay an extra day. As soon as he agreed, I shared a Calendly online invitation with the

interested parties. The slots filled up fast.

Very quickly, I realized a few things: First, that people don’t have the patience to read and their ability to follow instructions is poor. They don’t like filling forms, however short, or documenting medical issues. And many still don’t like making digital payments.

More importantly, I realized that even highly educated, intelligent people have all sorts of notions about Ayurveda, ranging from blind belief to extreme scepticism.

Scepticism is okay even if it is extreme so long as it is accompanied by an open and receptive mind. It was those at the blind belief end of the spectrum I was more concerned with. There was, for example, a lady who declined to share any of her medical details because she was sure that all the Ayurvedic doctor had to do was to feel her pulse to be able to divine everything that was wrong with her.

“A *vaidyaji* has been coming to my house for years, since my childhood. Don’t worry, I don’t need to share any details with your *vaidya*. He will simply feel my pulse and understand everything,” she said to me when I asked her to fill in her basic medical details in a form.

When I tried to impress upon her the

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importance of giving her medical background to the doctor, she told me half-playfully and half-patronizingly that I didn't know how Ayurveda works.

From an initial phone conversation with her, I had understood she was bedridden. Although I didn't know the reason — neurological, physiological, orthopaedic or other ailments — I felt that the more information she shared with the *vaidya*, the better he would be able to diagnose and treat her. To not divulge health information to the person treating you seemed to me just plain wrong. *Vaidyas* are doctors, not magicians.

In her case I would be driving Dr Ramdas to her home. It was close by, but the consultation would take double the time it would for patients who were coming to the makeshift OPD in my home. *Vaidyas* need as much information as any other doctor, even though the nature of that information may be different, and they rely more on intuition, experience and knowledge than blood reports and diagnostic tests.

But it wasn't just her. And it wasn't just the issue of full disclosure. What was troubling was the superficial understanding of this ancient science of healing that people seemed to be afflicted with — an understanding seen through the lens of Western medicine, its definitions and protocols than of Ayurveda itself.

Unlike conventional Western medicine, Ayurveda doesn't treat human bodies homogeneously, with standard medicines for standard diseases or symptoms. That's why this sudden burst of people self-prescribing *ashwagandha* to reduce stress and anxiety, *brahmi* for memory, triphala for laxative purgation, *guggulu* for cholesterol management and *chyanprash* for building immunity can end up in harm for themselves. Thinking it safe, people probably self-prescribe Ayurvedic medicines more than any other medicines in India — and then blame Ayurveda, not themselves, when things go wrong. Ayurvedic medicines are safe only under the supervision of a trained *vaidya*.

As Dr Ramkumar Kutty, one of the founders of Vaidyagrama, says, differentiating between cure and healing, "Ayurveda is not about a temporary suppression of a problem. It is about healing, about the body-mind complex, creating a paradigm shift that allows the natural intelligence of the human body to act."

Healing, according to Ayurveda, is internal, a continuous process that doesn't stop when you leave Vaidyagrama or any Ayurvedic hospital after *panchakarma* treatment. The treatment just kickstarts the process by removing imbalances and rebalancing the

doshas that are responsible for that ailment.

However, the patient has to continue the discipline of Vaidyagrama even after leaving. Deriving from the *Charakha Samhita*, Ayurveda's foundational compendium, Vaidyagrama believes, "Health is a state of bio-physical and physiological well-being, and a contented state of consciousness, senses and mind." Over the weeks of my first admission at Vaidyagrama, it had become very clear to me that the *vaidyas* there believed that disease is a spiritual experience and fear its biggest lock.

Not everyone understands this when they seek Ayurvedic treatment, especially for chronic issues. When people ask for *panchakarma*, they usually anticipate oil massages in scented rooms on soft white towels sprinkled with frangipani flowers. This is what advertising visuals at luxury hotel spas have led them to expect.



Meals at Vaidyagrama: food is medicine

Authentic *panchakarma* is a messier business. It includes *vasti* (medicated and herbal enemas), *vamana* (therapeutic emesis inducing vomiting), *virechana* (therapeutic purgation), *nasya* (nasal medication) and *rakta-moksha* (blood-letting). These are cleansing treatments that aim to remove toxins from the body to allow it to rebalance and heal. You can't expect massages or some *gulikas* and *kashayams* (pills and potions) to magically heal ailments. Lifestyle changes are needed.

Over the past six years of closer contact with this unique system of healing I have learnt so much more — not just by experience but also by reading and through intense periods of oral communication at my annual retreats at Vaidyagrama. Intimate daily afternoon sessions with different *vaidyas* with just a dozen or so patients taught me much beyond these basics.

In an age of instant gratification people expect immediate relief from pills, potions and surgeries; an ancient healing system that goes to the root of the problem and tries to heal and ease, seems to be becoming popularly misunderstood. More people may be developing an appetite for Ayurvedic treatments, but should they be settling for a quick-fix type of 'McAyurveda' rather than the real thing? ■

Khajuraho: Love and life in the temple city

SUSHEELA NAIR

As we passed tree-lined avenues and green-dotted rocky outcrops on our way to the venue of the 50th edition of the Khajuraho Dance Festival, little did we know what awaited us. A magnificent Kathak Kumbh with 1,484 *kathak* dancers swaying to the rhythm of Raja Basant — a performance that entered the *Guinness Book of World Records*.

We were at the offbeat locale of the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Khajuraho, a historical town in Madhya Pradesh. Built within an amazingly short span of 100 years, between the ninth and 11th centuries, by the rulers of the Chandela dynasty, only 22 of the original 85 temples have survived the ravages of time.

We discovered a bewildering wealth of detail in the ornate carvings in these temples. On every inch of these temples there are carved figurines posing, dancing, indulging in daily activities like admiring themselves in mirrors, combing their hair, gossiping and making love. But it is definitely the unusual poses immortalising the ecstasy of passion and the fervent beauty of love that have made Khajuraho's temples unique and famous!

Within this Indo-Aryan architectural brilliance, gods and goddesses, warriors and musicians encapsulate history and mythology. But the highlight is the theme of women and erotica engraved on sandstone, a celebration of women and a myriad of moods and facets.

The temples mark the culmination of the Central Indian style of architecture. Here the Nagara style of architecture is discernible in all its glory. The temples are compact and lofty, sans an enclosure wall, and are erected on a high platform-terrace which elevates the structure from its environs, and provides an open promenade, around which one can walk. We found an amazing exuberance of decorative details and sculptural wealth, largely on doorways, pillars, and ceilings. These sculptures embody the nuances of intellectual and sensual rapture.

The temples are spread out amongst three geographical groups — the Western, Eastern and Southern. In the Western group the temples are laid out in two rows. The Lakshmana



Chitragupta, a temple dedicated to Lord Surya



Kathak dancers perform to the rhythm of Raja Basant

Civil Society picture/Susheela Nair

Civil Society picture/Susheela Nair

Civil Society picture/Susheela Nair



The walls of temples in Khajuraho are famous for their intricate carvings

temple, the Matangeswara and the Varaha form one complex, with the Vishwanatha and Nandi temples a little farther off, while the Chitragupta, Devi Jagadamba and Kandariya-Mahadeva temples form the other.

Ambling around the temple complex in the fenced-in parkland of the Western group, we found the temples towering over well-kept lawns, brightened by vivid patches of bougainvillea. We began our heritage sojourn with the Lakshmana Temple, the oldest and best preserved of the group of temples. The intact platform, with friezes of *apsaras*, erotic scenes, ceremonial processions, martial scenes, cameos of the daily rhythm of life, scenes of domestic bliss and a moving pageant of hunting and battle scenes take one's breath away. The Lakshmana Temple sports the stylised arch called *makaratorana*, which is the most appealing of all the sculptural decorations.

Facing the large Lakshmana Temple is a small shrine of Varaha, a reincarnation of Vishnu. The sandstone image of Varaha, 1.5 metres high and intricately carved with figures from the Hindu pantheon, and the ceiling embellished with an exquisitely designed lotus

flower in relief left us spellbound. A pedestal under the boar depicts the serpent, Sheshnaga, in a devotional posture and also the feet of the broken figure of the earth goddess. The Matangeswara Temple, adjacent to Lakshmana, outside the fenced enclosure, is the one most frequented by the local populace. The object of veneration here is the enormous 2.5-metre *lingam* installed in the sanctum.

Just a hop away is the Vishwanath Temple, similar to the five-part design structure of the larger Kandariya-Mahadeva Temple. The steps leading to the temple on the northern side are flanked by lions and on the southern side by elephants. We saw a profusion of carvings on the exteriors — from traditional images of women writing letters, fondling babies, and playing music to well-endowed women depicted in the most sensuous postures. There is an impressive three-headed image of Brahma enshrined in this temple. Also remarkable is the large image of Shiva's vehicle, Nandi the bull, overlooking the temple on a square pavilion from the other end of the common platform.

From there, we moved to Kandariya-

Mahadeva. Spearheading the sky is a grand 31-metre-high *shikhara* decorated with an ascending series of 84 subsidiary spires, a highly imaginative recreation of the rising peaks of the Himalayas, the abode of the gods. We lost track of time at this temple, admiring the lavishly carved 872 statues, most of them a metre tall. It is the most splendid of the temples in Khajuraho, with depictions of alluring women, musicians playing different instruments, lovers in fond embrace, huge crocodiles, winged gods, goddesses and sensual ecstasy at its height. The excellently executed entrance arch, ceilings and pillars are unforgettable.

Mahadeva is a small, largely ruined, temple standing on the same platform as the Kandariya-Mahadeva and Devi Jagadamba. Although small and insignificant compared with the mighty neighbours, it houses one of Khajuraho's finest sculptures — a *sardula*

figure caressing a lion. Devi Jagadamba, one of the most erotic temples in Khajuraho, houses the famed *mithuna* images, and sensuously carved figures.

At Chitragupta Temple, the fourth temple at the back of the enclosure, is an imposing deity of Surya, the sun god, riding his chariot with its seven horses, while on the central niche in the south façade is an 11-headed statue of Vishnu. It has some fine sculptures portraying royal processions, elephant fights, hunting scenes and group dances, reflecting the lavish lifestyle of the Chandela kings and their courts. The Chaunsath Yogini temple, the only granite temple in the complex, is dedicated to Kali.

We were unable to see the Eastern group, largely devoted to three Jain temples, and the Southern group comprising the Duladeo and Chaturbhujia temples as it became time to go to the Dance Festival. ■

FACT FILE

Getting there: There are direct flights from Delhi to Khajuraho.

Where to stay: Plenty of choices, one is Hotel Chandela - 095890 00500.

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.

SPREAD QUALITY EDUCATION

 Team Everest is one of India's biggest youth-run NGOs, based in Chennai. Founded by Karthee Vidya, the organization's vision is to inspire everyone to volunteer in helping provide quality education to those who need it most. Some initiatives include the I Am Change scholarship that has funded the graduation of 850 students who were either orphans or living with single parents.

First Penguin Club is a 100-hour skill development training programme that provides problem-solving, public speaking and other work skills. Another initiative, called Speak Out, enhances spoken English through phone conversations.

Team Everest encourages volunteers to join them, regardless of age or amount of time you have to spare. Team Everest has thousands of volunteering opportunities round the year to choose from.

They have separate programmes for adult and child volunteers. Interestingly, the minimum age to become a volunteer with the team is just three years!

<https://www.teameverest.ngo/>
info@teameverest.ngo | +91 89399 12365

ASSIST MENTAL HEALTH REHABILITATION

 Ashadeep was founded by Mukul and Anjana Goswami who personally experienced the difficulties of ensuring care and treatment for a family member with schizophrenia.

They founded Ashadeep to facilitate post-clinical rehabilitation of individuals with schizophrenia. Based in Guwahati, the organization runs a day rehabilitation centre where special education, life skills and vocational training are carried out.

They also have rehabilitation

homes for patients who are homeless and an outdoor psychiatric clinic that offers free mental health consultation by trained professionals for those who can't otherwise afford it. You can help by sponsoring an intellectually disabled child, or funding a one-time meal. Or you can donate, raise funds for them or help in their awareness drives.

<https://www.ashadeepindia.org/>
societyashadeep@yahoo.com
0361 245 6837

A SUCCESSFUL ORPHANAGE

 When P.R. Subramanyam was working as a counsellor for street children, the idea of establishing an orphanage took root in his mind. The beginnings of Cherish, a Hyderabad-based organization, were humble — with just two children who had lost their parents to suicide. Today, under the care of this orphanage, more than 200 children have been integrated into society, 60 have graduated, and 10 are now happily married and settled in their new homes.

You can help by sponsoring a day's meal, donating groceries, or funding their orphanage building project. Other ways to support include paying a visit to the orphanage and helping with funds for birthday celebrations that Cherish holds for all its children.

<https://www.cherish-foundation.org/>
cherish@live.in | +91 98497 70988

PRIMARY HEALTHCARE CLINICS IN MUMBAI

 Founded by IIT graduate, Swasth, a non-profit based in Mumbai, works for health through analysis, service and training with harmony. It offers three key services which include sustained well-being, comprehensive primary healthcare and health coach training. It runs Swasth India Medical Centre, a network of more than 20 charitable

healthcare clinics in Mumbai. Swasth also conducts regular workshops on themes such as mindfulness, meditation and a blend of neuroscience and yoga. At the end of such workshops, participants donate any amount of their choice. Founded in 2009, Swasth has had a total of 1.5 million healthcare interactions over the years. You can join a workshop or donate to their cause via their website.

<https://www.swasth.org/>
info@swasth.org | +91 9594547374

HELP THE FAMILIES OF PATIENTS

 Rahul Verma founded Uday Foundation after his son, Arjunuday, was born with multiple congenital defects. The couple's journey of coping emotionally and physically with the needs of their child inspired him to begin a non-profit that would help underprivileged families living near government hospitals while undergoing treatment. Uday Foundation distributes monthly dry ration kits and nutritious meals to them. It also supplies medicines, blankets, clothes and other basic necessities to patients and their caregivers.

You can help by donating such essential items in good condition or money. The foundation partners companies too. You can also donate or sponsor a meal in memory of a deceased loved one and honour them by doing charity. You can donate unused and unexpired surplus medicines to the foundation as well.

www.udayfoundation.org
info@udayfoundation.org | +9196671 84351

BUILD CONFIDENCE IN CHILD ABUSE VICTIMS

 RAHI (Recovering and Healing from Incest) Foundation works for women survivors of child sexual abuse and incest. Founded in 1996 by Anuja Gupta, the non-profit is based in New Delhi.

It has two programmes to sensitise about and highlight this issue. The Adolescents for Sexual Abuse Prevention (ASAP) educates teachers, adolescent students and parents on how to prevent and handle abuse. More such programmes are run at college level as well.

The Firebird programme organizes healing workshops for survivors and helps them with skill building. RAHI believes that if survivors speak up, sexual abuse can be prevented. You can contribute by donating money online or in kind.

RAHI welcomes office supplies, services, equipment and space to conduct its workshops and events.

www.rahifoundation.org
info@rahifoundation.org | 011 41607055

SPREAD THE JOY OF LOVE

 Snehalaya or 'home of love' offers support to women and children who have been victims of trafficking and sexual abuse and to members of the LGBT community who are affected by AIDS.

Snehalaya is based in Ahmednagar. It runs several rehabilitation centres: A children's home, an adoption centre for abandoned infants called Snehankur, a women's shelter, Snehadhar, and a biofarm for HIV affected families named Himmatgram. It provides healthcare services under its Manoyatri initiative which takes in homeless individuals with mental illness. The non-profit runs a 30-bed hospital called Caring Friends and a community health centre. It has an outreach programme for sex workers as well. Education is another area Snehalaya focuses on. Balbhavan is their school for underprivileged children. They have an agricultural training centre as well. Snehalaya welcomes donations. You can also be a volunteer.

<https://www.snehalaya.org/>
info@snehalaya.org | +91 0241 2778353

Small producers and artisans need help to reach out to sell their wonderful products. *Civil Society* happily provides information about what they have on offer and how you can get to them. Here are some fascinating products from the Dastkar Mela.

METALWARE IN MANY SHAPES AND COLOURS



CHINAR Valley Arts is a home décor enterprise founded by 30 artisans, some of whom have disabilities. Their products include hand-painted steel jugs, enamelware bowls, teapots, cutlery and trinket boxes. Stainless steel glasses with attractive nature-based designs are one of their best-selling creations. Also available are quaint letter racks as well as traditional coaster sets made from *papier mâché*.

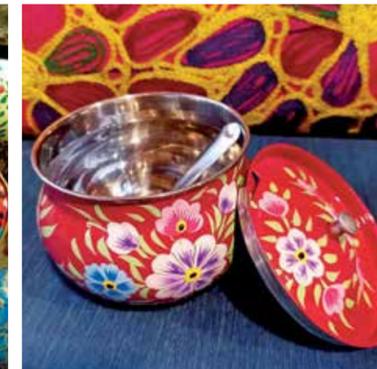
Other useful gifts are their upcycled vibrant bottles and flasks to carry on the go, which are their speciality. There are also chain-stitch embroidered stoles. Chinar Valley's range of colourful handicrafts can be found at their permanent shop in Nature Bazaar and on Instagram. Orders should be placed at least a week prior to your desired delivery date, within India. Chinar Valley Arts ships worldwide.

Contact: Saqib Khan: +917006758733

Email: chinarvalleyarts@outlook.com

Instagram: @chinarvalleyarts

Store: Shop No. 35, Nature Bazaar, Andheria Modh, New Delhi



NEEDLE WORK FROM KASHMIR

ZAHIDA Amin founded Naie Kiran as a livelihood programme for women at a time when militancy was at its peak in Baramulla district of Kashmir. She engaged local women in traditional hand printing and embroidery to help them become economically self-sufficient.

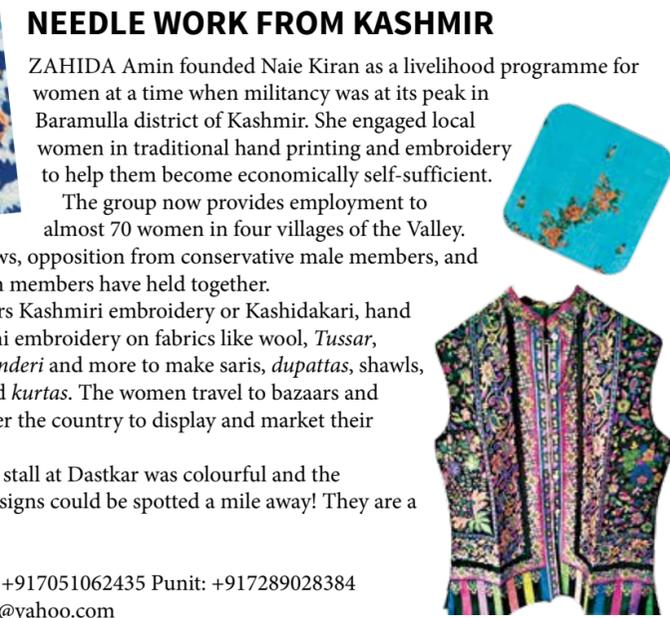
The group now provides employment to almost 70 women in four villages of the Valley.

Despite curfews, opposition from conservative male members, and violence, the team members have held together.

Naie Kiran offers Kashmiri embroidery or Kashidakari, hand printing and Sozni embroidery on fabrics like wool, *Tussar*, *Maheshwari*, *Chanderi* and more to make saris, *dupattas*, shawls, stoles, *phirans* and *kurtas*. The women travel to bazaars and exhibitions all over the country to display and market their creations.

The Naie Kiran stall at Dastkar was colourful and the distinct *phiran* designs could be spotted a mile away! They are a phone call away.

Contact: Zahida: +917051062435 Punit: +917289028384
Email: amizahida@yahoo.com



PRODUCTS



FROM KUTCH TO PARIS

VANKAR Hitesh Dayalal is an acclaimed weaver from Bhujodi village in Kutch. He sets up shop regularly at the Dastkar bazaar where he sells colourful and intricately designed stoles, dupattas, saris and shawls. "Our village has more than 300 skilled weavers. In fact, we have received 11 national awards for our work," he says, proudly. The Kutch technique incorporates weaving with embroidery and ornamental elements.

Bhujodi is Dayalal's maternal village, where he shifted with his mother after his father passed away. Inspired by his uncle, he began learning the Kutch technique of weaving and even enrolled in an artisans' design school.

Dayalal is best known for his innovative ways of incorporating contemporary elements into traditional Kutch weaving. In July 2023, he participated in an event in Paris to showcase his products. He has partnered established fashion designers to design clothes that have been launched at fashion shows in Mumbai. You can enquire about his products by giving him a call or connecting with him on WhatsApp.

Contact: Vankar Hitesh Dayalal: +919978255091
Email: hiteshvankar1212@gmail.com



SARIS AND MORE AT LIVING LOOMS



LIVING Looms of India is an initiative by ACCESS, a national livelihoods support organization that works with the government, NGOs and the corporate sector to revive and promote traditional handicrafts.

Products on offer include saris — *Baluchari, Kota Doria, Maheshwari* and *ikat* — as well as cotton and silk dupattas, stoles, kurtis and kurta-pyjama sets. You can also buy home décor products such as elegant bed linen, cushion covers, table runners, napkins and curtains.

The key objective is to give weavers and artisans an opportunity to hone their skills, develop a competitive edge and ensure they get value for their work. It is a community-led enterprise that enables customers to buy directly from the weavers. You can shop on their website or visit their store in Hauz Khas Village, New Delhi.

Contact: WhatsApp: +918955680274
Email: livingloomsofindia21@gmail.com
Website: www.livingloomsofindia.com
Store: 22, Ground floor, Hauz Khas Village, New Delhi



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TATA STEEL FOUNDATION

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

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

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

